

## DMZ- The forbidden garden and the responses of artists

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Inter-Korean tensions are now r more heightened than ever, just as if we were walking on the thin ice. The regime in the North keeps making threatening remarks about nuclear tests and missile launches. This only confirms the notion in the international society that Korea is a volatile region where South and North are at loggerheads. The only divided country in the world, Korea remains precarious in the state of armistice. Korea is a country with a demarcation line. It is a country divided by the line called the "demilitarized zone (DMZ)," which stretches 155 miles (248km) from Gimpo to Gosung; in other words, a country where the DMZ is a reality; a country where an enormous amount of money is appropriated for defense spending so that we can point guns at each other; and a country on the brink of war because of this demarcation line. How could you ignore such a harsh reality? The most significant issue in this era of overcoming the division is unification. However, the term "unification" seems to be slowly receding as thoughts of war prevail. The mood of reconciliation engendered by the sunshine policy of former presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun started to disappear when Lee Myung-bak was sworn in as president, resulting in the high tension of war that exists today. It is absolutely tragic. What would be right for artists to do in such situation?

Gail Art Museum has opportunely invited outstanding artists to a special exhibition titled <DMZ-The Forbidden Garden>. The DMZ is considered by today's artists: how should it be interpreted and what kind of messages should be given to the audience? Of course, any theme provokes different views and interpretations depending on artists. Therefore, artists can work in their own way by maintaining their identity. The problem is that only a few artists work on the theme of the DMZ, the biggest issue confronting a divided country. Most artists are turning away from this harsh reality although they are living in the divided country. The artistic climate where realistic art weakly settled down is nothing more than our "glorious tradition". The voice of the artists who brought the reality of division into their artworks is few in number, but it makes us really listen. The nine participating artists of this special exhibition are: Kang Yong Suk, Ko Jung Nam, Kim Yong Tae, Kim Tae Eun, Yoo Yeun Bok, Son Ki Hwan, Song Chang, Lee Bann and Hwang Se Jun. The range is wide and includes an oil painter who paints in a realistic style, a photographer and videographer. Through their artworks, we may understand the acute reality of a divided country in the language of formative arts.

Lee Bann is a painter who brought the issue of DMZ up in the context of artwork as he was an early participant in the art campaign related to the DMZ. His active involvement has been seen in exhibitions and symposiums that drew the participation and attention of many people. His achievements were recorded and published in the form of a thick compilation. For the artist Lee Ban, the issue of overcoming division derives from his father's defection to North Korea. Given the intense anticommunism that prevailed in the South,

it is hard to imagine how harsh was the criticism and denunciation that remaining family members experienced. In such a cold reality, the painter chose the issue of division as a basis of his art. His artwork <A Service for the Unification of Water and Earth from Mt. Halla and Mt. Baekdu> (1990) depicts the creation of the earth and water of Mr. Halla and Baekdu. Such results were combined with [The Past, Present and Future of DMZ] (1997), which played a great role in imprinting the term "DMZ" in the art world. His works are considered as pertaining to social issues and he has painted murals in Dorasan station. Lee painted the murals between 2005 and 2007 as an expression of his wish to overcome the division. However, the wall paintings were demolished by the station authority without consultation the artist. Lee filed a lawsuit claiming that it was a national violence and the issue of Dorasan station gained public attention. The implications regarding this case were not insignificant for a number of reasons. It raised several issues ranging from the ownership and copyright of artworks to the social function of art and also raised the larger issue of inter-Korean division and the will for unification, giving us an opportunity to look back on our reality through his works.

Kim Yong Tae was an activist who was actively engaged in grassroots arts activities in the 1980s. He was able to build the foundation of the grassroots movement as a member of "Reality and Remarks". The period of the military dictatorship in the 1980s was when a group of artists had to "uprise". Kim designed his work while visiting military camp towns including Dongducheon that contains painful memories about the division with the members of "Reality and Remarks". What he found in the town was the photos of Korean women and US forces together, which was a shock itself to him. Kim collected the photos in question by visiting all photo studios around the town and linked them to the exhibition. The photos were living evidence of the division. His major work of the photos titled <DMZ> (1989) was completed in the form of a collage. This is the work of photographs displaying photos from the camp town in the shape of the letters "DMZ". Although it is considered as the most representative work of the artist, Kim discarded all relevant photos out of shame. He said, "I worked on the collage based on my decision to bring the photos of the scene as an object but later I was ashamed. I felt like 'I should not have used these photos' and threw all of them away. The remaining photos are copied versions. Since the images were necessarily made during the division, I, as an artist, felt guilty about those in the photos, their brothers, and sisters." (refer to [Beyond the Politics - Reality and Remarks 30 years]) At last, an era has ended. Though Kim's representative work, <DMZ> remains in a copied form, the fact that DMZ in the map is not a copy but a reality still makes us tense.

Song Chang seems to be a painter who has kept the reality of division in his heart for his entire life. His lifework was recently compiled into a thick art book titled [Post Division - Paintings of Song Chang] (2012), showing the true value of his world of painting. The art pieces in the book show that most of them are the formation of scenes relevant to the division. The artworks in early 1980s show

that Song was creating a detailed impression of division and solidifying his place as a painter. His works became mature as they symbolized scenes of the division over time. The oil painting <Spring of DMZ> (2011) depicted the inside of a ruined building of the Labor Party. The rectangular building structure depicts the darkness of the hollow windows and dark and damp ruins make us reminiscence about the past. Light and darkness divided by the window gives an odd resonance in contrast of the light and darkness of the division. <Black Tears> (2009) is a description of a bird sitting on a red-colored wire fence across a chilly field. It is scenery where the land is divided and where only birds can freely cross and it is as if the bird on the wire fence is shedding black tears. <Saeteomin, "North Korean Defectors"> (2011) is a collection of people who are intertwined in the shape of the Korean peninsula or in the shape of the trunk of old trees. It is not depicting individuals in a realistic style, but reflects the situation at the time and the despair and pains of people who are in a tangled shape. The victims of our sad history, North Korean defectors, are struggling in their new environment. It is a stunning representation of the division. Song Chang is a painter who works in many ways using the theme of division. His artworks are expressed realistically or abstractly, but the forms do not matter much. What matters is the will to overcome the division and the artworks to inspire such a will.

Yoo Yeun Bok is an engraving artist. His artwork <DMZ> demonstrates the letter "DMZ" in the form of footprints on a green field. Something is heavily stamping on the peaceful field. What is it? In another work <MINE>, the letter "MINE" was engraved on the unicolor background in the shape of red stars. Does that mean that if I repressively declare "this is my land", then it's mine? How long will the land be the object of contest to settle the question of ownership? In this regard, the scene of the division has to be "winter". <Scenery or Division - Freeze> is interpreted as an achromatic winter scene that doesn't even allow colors. That may be the idea behind the poem by Lee Sang-hwa in the colonial period "Does Spring Come to the Deprived Field?"

The works of Son Ki Hwan are about facing each other. Who are facing each other? One screen shows Obama and Kim Jong-un looking through a telescope. South and North in confrontation and the DMZ in between are shown through the telescope from the artist's own perspective. With South and North in confrontation, the telescope is also a symbolic gadget. The introduction to Son Ki Hwan's world of art will be given in the artists' notes.

"I want to depict the nature of the DMZ from a new perspective, losing of the images of topographical tragedy. In addition, I convey the intrinsic question on art such as what to see, what is to be seen, and an artists' perspective through the substantive landscape of the DMZ. I also want to invert the popular concept of the DMZ and satirize it. I have expressed symbolically the critical situation where the leaders of the two Koreas and the U.S.A. see what they want to see in the end, instead of what is presented to them. The

leaders of the two Koreas are trapped in tense recognition and perspective of political enemies and allies since Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule which planted the seed of the current division. I described that the leaders of the North and the U.S.A. have a negative understanding of each other due to anti-American sentiment by the North and the imperialistic desires of the U.S.A. The artist wants to retrace such a paradoxical situation where the U.S.A. and the North face each other equipped with intense strain. Furthermore, I want to provide a momentum where the current division evolves into a new symbol of peace in the world, and emerges as a land of hope and possibility. The signified is revealed in all landscapes of my works as an underlying trauma. Portrayed are the GP number printed using a stencil on a peaceful landscape of the Han River side, the gate number of the GOP from my duty and a panoramic landscape from a bunker. As satirist art, the vague image of the DMZ is expressed as anti-tank defense constructed in yellow color and a strangely-shaped gold nugget constructed in partially golden, black and red colors. Though it is a reality, the DMZ is depicted as a surreal landscape and an oblivion that everyone recognizes, but yet no one wants to recognize."

Hwang Se Jun's <Lookout> depicts the back of a young man looking through a telescope and his daughter next to him. In the dreary scene, what is the young man looking at through the telescope across the line? <War Movie> depicts images of the division by splitting the screen up and down and right and left. The demarcation line is at the center of the screen and is surrounded by the helmet on the left and military boots on the right. Helmets have holes like bullet marks and military boots are old and worn. It symbolically implies the wounds of war. <Hwangsangsun, "Fantasy Train"> depicts images of the division through the building of the Labor Party, balloons dropping leaflets on North Korea, lookouts and dugouts like mosaics on the right and left long screen. This is also the formation of a scene representing division. Hwang said,

"The objects and sceneries in DMZ are "still objects" of the war, division and the armistice agreement (not peace agreement). The guard posts, signs on mines, helmets for underground tunnel tours, displayed articles left behind the "red guerillas", tanks used in war, lamps in the underground tunnels, direction boards and special items for sale at the shopping center underneath the lookouts, soldiers inside the center, guides and sales clerks. They are the still objects as miniatures made in the same mold. It is said that both hot and cold wars are ended, which means that the mold is gone, and it still seems that the castings are dreaming for the new mold.

The combination of the terms "tourism for security" and "war memorial" is a form of comedy. Of course, it is fortunate to see this as comedy. The transformation from war education (remember drilling at school) to security field trips to tourism is a small sign that tells us that the history goes toward peace and such terms and behavior mentioned above become comedic in such a history. However, tourism can be changed back to field trips and to war education again. Then, the combination may be disciplinary terms rather than comedy.

In DMZ, there are both hopes for a peaceful era without the wordplays like "tourism for security" or "war memorial" and the fears for an era where such terms gain their powers as a national policy away from the comical side."

Kang Yong Suk's photography can be summarized as <Monument to Korean War>. The Korean peninsula is full of memorial artworks to the war spread across the country befitting a country that survived the war. Such war memorials not only serve as symbols to mourn the war victims but also to console the survivors. Among Kang's works, the photo of the war memorial in the Chuncheon district, Samcheundong, Chuncheon city emphasizes the cannon gun barrels. The other artwork about the war memorial to Thai veterans in Yeoncheon-gun, Gyeonggi province contrasts a soldier walking under a structure and two people, one in a military uniform and the other in civilian clothes, standing on the structure side by side. In a strange comparison of the war from the past to today, the photography approaches as a visual data of anti-communism. Kang said,

"There are a lot of memorial facilities and war memorials around us. With war memorials, the death of the sacrificed soldiers for the country serves as symbolic signs to unite people's memory and to point out future directions. This is often applied by the ideology for raising awareness of history and maintaining the political system. The war memorials established since the Korean War have made people despair of war to overcome pain and shame by emphasizing the brave and glorious death of the soldiers and their sacrifices for the country; and forced them to rearm under the strident anti-communism by stressing the atrocities of North Korean communists. The war memorials so far have been static, authoritarian and declaratory. However, they are losing their meaning in terms of their institutional foundation or ideological characters. Now, understanding about war memorials should go beyond the notion that they are built to commemorate battle scenes or the dead war veterans. They should not suggest any detailed solutions or directions on past issues to the appreciator, but should encourage them to examine on their own attitudes."

The artworks by Ko Jung Nam are a series featuring azaleas. The artist wants to tell the "too much sad stories" through azaleas. The story about a cuckoo that cried so bitterly that it spit out blood that became a red azalea is very touching. Azalea is a flower that blooms anywhere in the Korean peninsula; and a flower that heralds the start of the spring. Azaleas have a lot of different meanings. Go presents photographs depicting scenes of a divided country by placing the tank barriers in the demarcation line and azaleas in parallel.

"Blooming without fanfare in a mountain valley in early spring / dropping helplessly by the rain overnight.../ In a lonely bloom on the hillside of cold wind / Azalea in pale pink, the leader of the spring... a flower never blooms in bright red like crape myrtles / a poor flower scattering in a strong rainstorm... (Park Pal-yang, 1930, "Too much sad stories")"

Kim Tae Eun's video art is completed with <House of Freedom> or <Panmunjom> as a stage. This is created by the joint security area and demarcation line. The artist tells the reality of the division by filming the scenes. It may be easy to understand the scenes of division since it is a film.

<DMZ - Forbidden Garden> by Gail Art Museum emerged as a venue to reflect the imagination and realistic viewpoints of artists in artworks despite being forbidden to enter that military zone. In the face of today's reality, the artists are hoping to forbid the use of the word "forbidden" for the sake of the future of the country. As inter-Korean tensions escalate, this special exhibition may provide significant insights to audiences. It will be an exhibition that should draw the attention away from 'Gangnam Style' as it alerts us to the harsh reality of the country in opposition to itself.