

Hanji Translated

Hanji Translated is a transnational exhibition that aims to uniquely connect 13 exceptional contemporary artists from India, Korea and the United States, who work with *hanji* in their fine art practice. The concept of translation presents itself in two ways - paper transformed from one material form to another and paper used as a mode for translating life experiences.

The exhibition will focus on the versatility of *hanji* as a medium for art and will examine concepts relating to transcultural communication and issues relating to history, identity, migration and memory. Illustrated presentations titled *Hanji Conversations* at InKo Centre on **10 January 2019**, precedes the inauguration of the exhibition at Lalit Kala Akademi on **11 January 2019**.

Curator Nirmal Raja, outlines the conceptual framework and the particular focus of the installations that will be showcased at Lalit Kala Akademi Regional Centre, Chennai, from **11-20 January 2019**.

My job as a curator and artist is to make dialogue possible and visible - across cultural and political boundaries. My goal is to parse and reveal what is common among us and also to celebrate the richness of difference when it presents itself. In this, I am aligned with the mission of the InKo Centre.

The theme of "translation" is used in this exhibition to make connections between art that comes from three different countries - India, South Korea, and the United States.

Paper as Medium

One of the definitions of the word translation is "a change to a different substance, form, or appearance". The transformation from bark to paper is the ultimate representation of change that is constant in our lives. Immense labor and time is invested in this transformation as can be seen in Aimee Lee's informational video on the making of *hanji* (Korean paper). The artists in this exhibition have immersed themselves in papermaking and incorporate *hanji* extensively into their work. They push and test the material possibilities of *hanji* in

innovative ways. Christiane Grauert uses laser cutting technology to translate her sketches onto *hanji* while creating a most delicate suspension of portraits and shadows that test its fibers as material. Julie Von Der Vellen finds her labor-intensive process of weaving painted and stained *hanji* paper cathartic an evocative way to process and express fluid and ephemeral life experiences. In Marna Brauner's hands, *hanji* is transformed into fabric. Folded, sewn and embellished, her work is complex and multi dimensional. Soo Song Ryun's vessel shaped objects become containers of contemplation. My own work *Metamorphosis* speaks of the transformation of bark to paper and in an ironic twist I transform paper back to its original form of bark... In this work, paper-mache *hanji* holds the memory of its original form and the process of its creation. My other work *Blurred Boundaries* extends the conversation of fiber to connect it with a larger understanding of matter and the universe, with fiber-like patterns that express notions of inter connectivity and commonality of our complex global existence.

Nirmal Raja



Julie VonDerVellen



Marna Brauner



Paper as Message

The making of art can be understood as the translation of experiences percolating, transforming, digesting, and revealing.

As material translations permeate the exhibition, fiber becomes a common denominator between paper, body, fabric, and matter. Contemplations on the body and its inherent transience are expressed in Ravikumar Kashi's *Skin Torso*. Mulberry fibers are separated and manipulated into a skin-like garment bringing together notions of protective skin and the fibers of our body. Rina Yoon's *Earth body* similarly connects the tensile strength of *hanji* filaments to the muscles and tissue of the human body. The corporeal human body as a garment that is transient is visualized in the work of these two artists.

With artists hailing from three different countries in this exhibition, it is only natural that a major part of the work is about global movement, migration and the diaspora. Rina Yoon and Aimee Lee are Korean American artists who have introduced many people to *hanji* and Korean culture. I myself am an

Ravikumar Kashi



Aimee Lee



Shormii Chowdhury



Indian American who is constantly attempting to bring my dual worlds together. Artists Ravikumar Kashi, Sudipta Das, and Shormii Chowdhury have all done residencies in Korea and incorporated *hanji* into their practice. Artists in this exhibition have traveled to Korea, India and other places across the globe. In fact, photographs from travels become sources for a major portion of Marna Brauner's practice. Memories of travel are printed and reassembled much like a prism refracting light. Themes of displacement, migration and the trials and tribulations that come with this are expressed in Sudipta Das' work using the Korean doll making technique of *dakoji* and also in her intricate paintings on *hanji* which become whole worlds unto themselves. Shormii Chowdhury's work seeks to express the desperation to retain fast fading memories and the fragmentation that

is engendered in the condition of living between places. In a way the fibers of *hanji* are what bind these artists together in a fast moving and fragmented world.

Contemporary urban life, cities and rivers are common themes in the work of Kwon Inkyung, Jessica Meuninck-Ganger, and Christiane Grauert. All of them express a fluid notion of place. Kwon Inkyung's painted collage works are about the relationship of memory and place. Jessica Meuninck-Ganger's work has a similar sense of remaking or reimagining of space. Details of buildings and places are repeated, rearranged and remapped to create a visual journey that she invites the viewer to join. *In Bound East* maps the Milwaukee River and brings it to Chennai. The scale of the work is so large that the viewer is forced to walk with her in order to truly see the work. Christiane Grauert literally expands and collapses space by using the form of pop-up structures books. Her *B block S* series depict high-rise buildings that through their collapsible form speak of the precariousness of human population growth.

Cultural nuances and history are present throughout the exhibition but in particular in Lim Soo Sik's work. Lim Soo Sik draws on an age-old tradition from the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910) in which hand painted screens depict books and curiosities as a statement of intellectual interest. These screens called *chaekgeori* or *chaekgado* became conveyors of cultural values during that period. Lim Soo Sik's works are contemporary versions of *chaekgoeri* depicting bookshelves that become portraits of the owners' contemporary life. Marna Brauner's work shares a sense of piecing together. Photographs of walls from her extensive travel across the globe are rearranged and sewn together as tessellated collages. In a way, these cultural samplings become conveyors of cultural values across the globe. Aimee Lee's flock of woven paper ducks refer to the cultural artifacts of ducks in

Korean culture. Most often made of wood, but sometimes made with paper, ducks are popular symbols of marital fidelity and lifelong companionship. Lee's versions are made with naturally dyed *hanji*, twisted and woven in the style of *jiseung* basket weaving. While referencing their roots in tradition, these works can be seen as whimsical interpretations of ducks found in nature. Along with Lim Soo Sik's library and Marna Brauner's Grimoire, this collection of artworks is a dialogue with history and culture. Ravikumar Kashi's book objects not only draw upon inter-personal relationships and introspective trajectories but also India's historical hero - Mahatma Gandhi. His work *Everything He Touched* is a commentary on

our fixation of memorializing prominent figures but forgetting their ideals.

The Medium is the Message

This term, first coined by media studies scholar Marshall McLuhan, can be applied to how this exhibition can be experienced. *Hanji* has historically been used for functional purposes such as building material, furniture applications, utensils, and garments etc, but through fine art practice, *hanji* has also been translated into a medium of expression. The works in this exhibition could not have been made without the unique range of material possibilities of *hanji*. The medium and the message are one.

- Nirmal Raja, Curator, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, U.S.A.

Participating artists: Marna Brauner, Shormii Chowdhury, Sudipta Das, Christiane Grauert, Ravikumar Kashi, Kwon Inkyung, Aimee Lee, Jessica M. Ganger, Nirmal Raja, Song Soo Ryun, Lim Soo Sik, Julie VonDerVellen, Rina Yoon.

Curator: Ms Nirmal Raja, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA.

Assistant Curator: Ms Chelsea Holton, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA.

Kwon Inkyung



Rina Yoon



Jessica M. Ganger



Song Soo Ryun



Sudipta Das



Hanji Conversations - Presentations by artists:

Thursday, 10 January 2019 | 2 pm to 5 pm

at InKo Centre,

18, Adyar Club Gate Road, Chennai.

Hanji Translated - Exhibition Inauguration:

Friday, 11 January 2019 | 7.00 pm

at Lalit Kala Akademi Regional Centre,

4, Greams Road, Thousand Lights, Chennai.

The exhibition will remain open until 20 January 2019 (except Sundays) from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

For further information, please contact InKo Centre - T: 044 24361224; E: enquiries@inkocentre.org