

# CU Boulder art professor to travel to South Korea to install exhibit at DMZ Museum

Exhibit, "Liminal Space," will feature 117 works by 47 artists

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Posted: 06/15/2018 06:19:19 PM MDT

Updated: 06/16/2018 09:50:27 PM MDT



Joo Yeon Woo created two pieces of complementary art using images of her

maternal grandparents, who were separated during the Korean War and never reunited. The works will be displayed as part of an exhibit at the DMX Museum in South Korea, June 22 through Dec. 22. (*Courtesy Images / Daily Camera*)

A University of Colorado art professor is taking an exhibit to the Korean Demilitarized Zone next week to foster a dialogue about the decades of conflict between North Korea and South Korea and the nuclear threat there.

In 1996, George Rivera founded the [Artnauts](#), a collective that addresses social issues through art. Since then, he has planned exhibits around the world in what he calls "places of contention." He brings work by the Artnauts artists with him, and their exhibits are designed to spark conversations, reawaken memories about what has happened there and, hopefully, provoke social change, he said.



Next week, he will travel to the [DMZ Museum](#) with works by 47 artists that address the theme "Liminal Space" — or the space between. Rivera and co-curator Joo Yeon Woo, an assistant professor at the University of South Florida, have worked since last year to put together the exhibit. They first met when Woo taught at CU, and she later joined the Artnauts in 2008.

"George and I felt that this is very important timing, and a moment to discuss the importance of peace and human beings in the rapidly changing political landscape of the Korean Peninsula," Woo said in an email, noting that this year marks the 65th anniversary of the Korean Armistice Agreement.

Rivera and Woo started work on the exhibit long before this past week's summit in Singapore between President Donald Trump and North Korea's

Kim Jong Un. However, Rivera said, the summit adds significance to their work there.

"It just so happened that history was on our side," Rivera said. "The timing was just right. It's very apropos."

### **'The exhibitions show we care'**

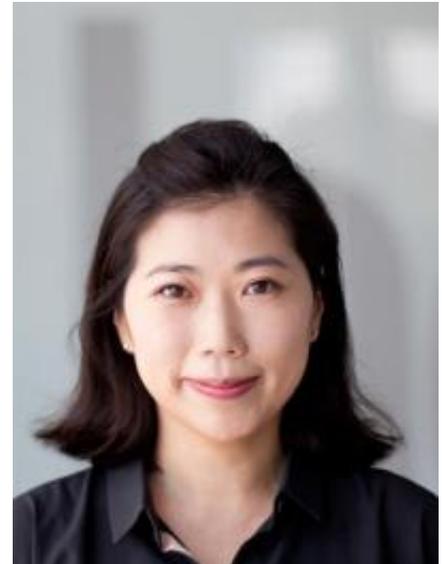
On Tuesday, Rivera will board a plane bound for South Korea, with all of the artwork for the exhibit stored above him in an overhead compartment. During a past trip, he checked his suitcase and the airline lost it, pieces of art lost with it. Now, he carries the art in a small, navy blue suitcase that he can keep with him at all times.

The pieces he commissions are to be two-dimensional and no bigger than 8.5 by 11 inches so that they fit neatly in the suitcase. This time, he'll carry 117 pieces to South Korea.

"The exhibitions show we care and that we're concerned about what's happening to them," Rivera said. "We represent the best of America when we go on these exhibitions because we go there with art that tries to address the inhumanity of human beings and that tries to bring out the best in human beings. We're like ambassadors of the United States — art ambassadors."

He added that this will be the first time the DMZ Museum has shown an American exhibit.

Each Artnauts artist who participated created a diptych: two pieces of artwork that complement one another. The pieces are meant to hang together



but not touch, further representing the border between North Korea and South Korea. Their works include paintings, drawings, photographs, digital works and fabric works.

The exhibit will also include portraits of the artists overlaid with English and Korean phrases about how they perceive the DMZ, as well as works that Rivera's CU students created during spring semester classes.

Rivera and Woo each created artwork for the exhibit, and they sought out Yong Soon Min, an accomplished Korean-American artist to create work, too.

Woo created a diptych using photographs of her maternal grandparents, who were separated on either side of the DMZ.

"Painful memories have (accumulated) for decades," Woo said in an email. "There are so many families that share stories of missing or separated family members on both sides of the DMZ in the Korean Peninsula. My family is one of them.

"My grandfather was a government engineer who was working at the Central Government Complex in Seoul. He stayed behind in the city where North Korean troops were entering to take care of the government work while his family left for his hometown in the south. My grandmother believed (she would) see him soon but was not able to see her husband again. No one knows what happened to him when he was evacuating or if he was even be able to evacuate on time. The 25-year-old wife waited for him for 62 years, until she passed away. ... This exhibition is very meaningful to me, because I share my personal story through my art in public."

Rivera created a digital work that incorporates both the theme and Aztec imagery that he chose in a nod to his Mexican-American heritage. The exhibit will run June 22-Dec. 22.

Rivera said all Artnauts exhibitions — including this one — embody a quote attributed to the German philosopher Herbert Marcuse: "Art cannot change the world, but it can contribute to changing the consciousness and drives of the men and women who could change the world."

"I internalize that philosophy completely with our exhibitions," Rivera said.

"The whole idea is that when any audience member sees the work, they will be moved by the piece, and that issue will be brought into their social consciousness. They will be so moved by that piece that they will go talk about it to their friends and other people, and then act upon that issue in whatever way they can from their individual positions in society."

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