

# *Beyond Tradition:* *Contemporary Reflections in East Asia*

Curated by Joo Yeon Woo and Hyewon Yi

Keiko Fukazawa • Hyegyung Kim • Jung S Kim • Seong Youn Koo  
Zhi Lin • Enrico Isamu Ōyama • Yooah Park • Xin Song • Joo Yeon Woo

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The Carolyn M. Wilson Gallery of the University of South Florida is pleased to announce *Beyond Tradition: Contemporary Reflections in East Asia*, a group exhibition by nine Contemporary East Asian artists who interpret traditional Asian art and craft methods innovatively. The exhibition presents works in a wide range of media, from Chinese paper-cutting to digital projection mapping. Addressing issues inherent in traditional methods, these artists explore unique ways to challenge established East Asian iconographies, often blending their efforts with other cultural contexts, personal and collective identities, neglected histories, and politics.

*Beyond Tradition* reconsiders the established Asian techniques and styles that have taken a back seat to Contemporary East Asian art. Due in part to their being viewed as antithetical to Modernism., traditional Asian art has struggled against the influx of new technology and the dominance of Western techniques as many avant-garde artists in East Asia adopt radically new forms and media. Nonetheless, traditional art still thrives in East Asia, particularly in Mainland China, where ink painters and calligraphers, and even some Western-style experimental painters, incorporate traditional images, materials, and techniques into their work. For some Asian artists living in the West, including those participating in this exhibition, Asian traditional methods have become strategies by which they express their Eastern identities. In *Beyond Tradition*, practitioners from China, Japan, and South Korea present work that hybridizes traditional Asian art techniques with fresh approaches.

**Keiko Fukazawa** (b. 1955 Japan; lives in Pasadena, CA) considers global and local cultures through her ceramic works. Born and educated in Japan, she left the rigidly gendered studio practices of her homeland for California in 1984, intrigued by the California Clay movement. Fukazawa, who now teaches at Pasadena City College, embraces a Californian outlook of cultural hybridity that says “anything goes!” Her recent residency in Jingdezhen, China (the Porcelain Capital boasts a 2,000 year history of some of the finest porcelain ware in the world) gave the artist new perspectives. For this exhibition, three ceramic works are presented, two of which re-contextualize images of Chairman Mao, with particular reference to his treacherous 1956 “Hundred Flowers Campaign” that induced Chinese intellectuals to offer criticisms of the Communist state only to be punished for doing so. The third work, *Chinese Still Life #1* (2013), is a cluster of colorful earthenware cast in various commercial plastic bottles: through keen observation, Fukazawa gives us her ironic take on Chinese consumerism by turning these disposables into objets d’art.

**Hyegyung Kim** (b. 1974, South Korea; lives in Kimpo, S. Korea) presents *Media Bowha (A Treasure)* (2015–present), a New Media installation that utilizes projection-mapping techniques reflecting her long-held interest in the relationship between East Asian art history and New Media. A custom-made white porcelain vase decorated with crystals rests on a traditional Korean wooden chest while projected moving images depict motifs commonly found in traditional East Asian landscape paintings: a butterfly flutters away, a Bong-Hwang (a mythical sacred bird) flaps its wings, and a cherry tree blossoms against the abstract patterns of traditional roofs alternately appearing and vanishing. Music and sound designed by Hyun Il Cho add a magical effect, as do beams of white light: the flickering moving images make the furniture “come to life.” Kim, who earned an MFA in Digital Media Design from Hong-ik University, Seoul, is a doctoral candidate in Visual and Multimedia Design at Hang-Yang University. She also teaches media art at several colleges in South Korea.

**Jung S Kim** (b. 1969, South Korea; lives in New Jersey) offers *Circle II* (2010–11), a series of photographic self-portraits in which she masquerades as characters from Korean folk tales by deploying period hair styles, make-up, and props against Korean folk painting backdrops. Growing up with a Buddhist shaman aunt in a household filled with shamanistic and Buddhist sculptures and ritual paintings left a lasting impression on Kim. Her photographs of three-dimensional figures against their flattened background produce a hybrid world of childhood fantasies and memories in an effort to overcome personal traumatic experiences. Kim studied photography at Chung-Ang University, South Korea, and came to the U.S. in 2001.

**Seong Youn Koo** (b. 1970, South Korea, lives in Seoul, Korea)’s two large photographic works are from her series, *Candy*. Koo’s motifs are based on traditional Korean peony folk paintings that symbolize wealth and prosperity; they often decorate banquet halls or hang on newlyweds’ bedroom walls. Koo created her illusionistic bouquets from hundreds of candies, thus conveying banality and artificiality: the melting sweetness of the candies parallels the transience of peonies lives. Koo’s set-up photographic work appropriates the look of Korean folk paintings while harkening back to the tradition of seventeenth century Dutch *vanitas* still life genre paintings that warn of the transience and vanity of earthly achievement and personal pleasure.

**Zhi Lin** (b. China; lives in Seattle) presents the video “*Chinaman’s Chance*” on *Promontory Summit: Golden Spike Celebration, 12:30PM. 10<sup>th</sup> May 1869* (2014). It is a challenge to the well-known 1869 historical photograph by Andrew Joseph Russell that commemorates the completion of the first U.S. trans-continental railway by depicting officials shaking hands and toasting with champagne while the laborers who built the line gather in the background. Lin imagined himself as one of the migrant workers who were excluded from the celebration, thus disrupting the privileged perspective of the patriarchal historical narrative with an alternative reading of the event. Most of the 23,000 Chinese workers’ names were never recorded, as the Central Pacific Railroad Company made bulk payments to gangs of twenty to thirty men. Lin discovered some workers’ names from payroll records and inscribed them in red on pieces of railway bed gravel, mimicking of the calligraphy carved and painted on mountainside stones in China. Lin’s reconstruction of events conveys a mournful tone as his screen goes blank between segments of looped video (white is the color of funerals in China), memorializing the nameless laborers, some of whom perished during the building of the railroad. Lin studied at the China Academy of Arts in Hangzhou, China, and was further educated in the U.K. and the U.S. He is Professor of Painting and Drawing at the University of Washington.

**Enrico Isamu Ōyama** (b. 1983, Japan; lives in New York) presents a group of works for which he coined the term *FFIGURATI*, a portmanteau of *graffiti* and *figùrati* (‘figure it out yourself’ in Italian). Ōyama’s often large-scale pieces combine various media, from sumi ink to aerosol and latex paints on unstretched canvas, panels, and bare walls. In some *FFIGURATI*, he creates repetitive swirls in what he calls ‘Live Painting’; in others, he employs deliberate hard-edged interlocking angles that he calls ‘Quick Turn Structure’. Ōyama encountered the visual language of ‘Aerosol Writing’ in Italy around 2000, a practice that was to become a principal influence over his signature style in the Tokyo underground art scene of the mid-2000s. The son of an Italian father and a Japanese mother, Ōyama was born and grew up in Tokyo; he visited Italy often, where he lived for a year in his teens. He moved to New York in 2012. The elements of Ōyama’s mixed cultural background and life experiences are embedded in his artistic practice, albeit not always in obvious ways.

**Yooah Park** (b. 1961, South Korea; lives in New York) presents five paintings on paper that employ traditional Korean coloring techniques. The labor-intensive preparation of the paper requires fifteen to twenty applications of a mixture of animal glue and water. Once the paper preparation is completed, the coloring is done by applying a mixture of dry pigment, animal glue, and water, thus the mixing of colors is done directly on the final surface rather than a palette. For this exhibition, Park presents several paintings from her series *Music Box* (2013). Her subjects are drawn from her personal life, as she relies on photographic snapshots that capture posed or unguarded moments of married couples (two paintings depict the artist with her estranged former husband). The faces are covered in white, obscuring the subjects’ identities, thus encouraging viewers to focus instead on the subjects’ body language and surroundings. Park studied traditional Korean Painting at Ewha Women’s University, Seoul, South Korea. She immigrated to the U.S. in 1998.

**Xin Song** (b. 1970, China; lives in New York) is rare in the eclectic Contemporary art world in that she embraces traditional Chinese paper-cutting as her medium, long considered a folk art chiefly used in decorating windows and doors, and displayed on festive occasions such as weddings and childbirths. Song, who immigrated to New York in 2000, studied traditional Chinese arts and crafts at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. Since moving to the U.S., she has devised her own twist on the art form by using magazine pages, thus blending the Eastern tradition with Western paper collage. For this exhibition, Song will install *Message from Nature-Fog Forest*: a set of black-and-white cutouts hangs from the ceiling against a wall display in red, yellow, and white paper. The interplay of movement and shadow in this unique formal innovation creates moments of beauty and repose that contrast sharply with the heavier media employed by most major Chinese contemporary artists. In addition, *Message from Nature – Ocean Life*, installed on the wall, features dynamic water currents and sea creatures that bring our attention to oceans at risk of pollution and a disrupted ecosystem impacted by climate change.

**Joo Yeon Woo** (b. 1977, South Korea; lives in Tampa, FL), assistant professor of School of Art and Art History at the University of South Florida, and a co-curator of this exhibition, presents several embossed works on paper. Entitled “*Gyopo Portraits*,” the subjects of this project are Korean immigrants (*gyopo* is the term for ethnic Korean living outside Korea) she found through Korean language newspapers in the U.S. The project stemmed from Woo’s observations while visiting Korean heritage language schools where she met many Korean immigrants who struggle to assimilate while maintaining their native identities. The portraits of these individuals, depicted in pressed relief on white paper, appear as ghost images, subtly and delicately emerging from the abstract white space. An eerie sense of the void surrounds the subjects—the result of Woo’s laborious embossing technique—conveying the issues of the Korean diaspora, as many immigrants often feel their voices are not heard and their presence unseen. Woo’s disciplined technique and refined simplicity of white on white harks back to the Korean aesthetic established during the Confucian Joseon Dynasty in which purity and austerity tamped down opulent colors.

#### For Information:

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#### Gallery Hours:

Mondays – Thursdays: 11am – 3pm

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