

SYDNEY
NATIONAL ART SCHOOL GALLERY
Tell Me Tell Me

AUSTRALIAN AND KOREAN ART 1976–2011

Right

HAEGUE YANG

Mourning Architectural Caution
2009

Light sculpture, clothing rack on casters with four metal arms, light bulbs, cable, fabric, knitting yarn, fringe, cord, rope, socks, paint grid, metal rings, metal chain, plastic funnel, stainless steel steamer insert, hook.

Installation view at National Art School Gallery, Sydney, 2011.

Collection of Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art.

Courtesy the artist and Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney.

Highlighting historical and ongoing connections between Australia and Korea with works from the collections of Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) and the National Museum of Contemporary Art (NMOCA) in Seoul, "Tell Me Tell Me: Australian and Korean Art 1976–2011" was jointly conceived by curators Glenn Barkley of the MCA and Inhye Kim of the NMOCA.

The exhibition found a clear starting point in 1976: it was the year of a significant trip to Sydney by the Fluxus artists Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman, and that year's Biennale of Sydney famously included a cutting-edge group of Korean artists. "Tell Me Tell Me" explored the lineage of so-called post-object conceptual art created in both countries over the past four decades. This comprehensive exhibition featured works by senior practitioners, such as Cypriot-Australian performance artist Stelarc and Korean artist Lee Ufan, alongside more recent works by a younger generation that includes Indigenous Australian Brook Andrew and Korean Jooyeon Park.

One of the subtexts of "Tell Me Tell Me" was an attempt to identify, retrace and establish links within the Asia-Pacific region, a goal first envisioned by the 1976 Sydney Biennale curator Tom McCullough with his notion of an Asia-Pacific art circuit made up of Australia/New Zealand, Japan/Korea and California. This

"internationalization" of art was a key dynamic in the 1976 biennale and a driving force in bringing Paik and Moorman to Australia. Such a desire to extend and engage beyond geographic borders—the hallmark of contemporary art today—was manifested in this exhibition, which also celebrated 2011 as the official Australia-Korea Year of Friendship.

In terms of works on display, rather than subtext, "Tell Me Tell Me" focused on the relationship between the object and the circumstances of its conception. This was perhaps best exemplified by Lee Ufan's painting *From a Line* (1974), and echoed in Australian Robert MacPherson's painting series, *Scale From the Tool* (1976–77). In both works, the act of laying down a brushstroke speaks as much about the mark made on the canvas as the gesture itself—both painting and performance.

More recently, London-based Korean artist Chosil Kil took a similar approach in *The Breathtaking* (2009), a large, round, sealed glass vessel evocative of an organic minimalist form. The vessel contains the exhalations of 25 female shamans, gathered by Kil on a trek to Mount Gyeryong, a sacred site in Korea. In this work, the artist makes visible the intangibility of breath, suspending it in time.

The exhibition's installation strategies did not rely on medium-specific or chronological ordering, favoring more associative groupings. Older works sat next to newer ones, so that connections could be made not only across Korean and Australian artists but also across generations and mediums.

The austerity of a singular line, etched electronically on the screen of a video monitor in Paik's seminal *Zen for TV* (1963), is echoed playfully in Stuart Ringholt's sculpture *Electric Arrow* (2008), which features a single arrow plugged into a live electrical wall socket. The "assemblage" strategy of splicing several different parcels of footage in Kim Beom's video *Untitled (News)* (2002) resonates obliquely with Louise Weaver's sculptural "assemblage" of various quirky objects in *no small wonder* (2005), and equally with the idiosyncratic collection of household objects and illuminated lightbulbs draped together causally over a mobile frame in Haegue Yang's *Mourning Architectural Caution* (2009).

This jostling of works suggests the fluidity across mediums as being one of the markers of the post-object age, highlighting also the significance of video and performative vocabularies in post-1960s practice. "Tell Me Tell Me" provided a rich and lucid introduction to the complicated lineage of conceptual art, encouraging fresh interest in a radical approach to contemporary art practice.

JOHN DI STEFANO

