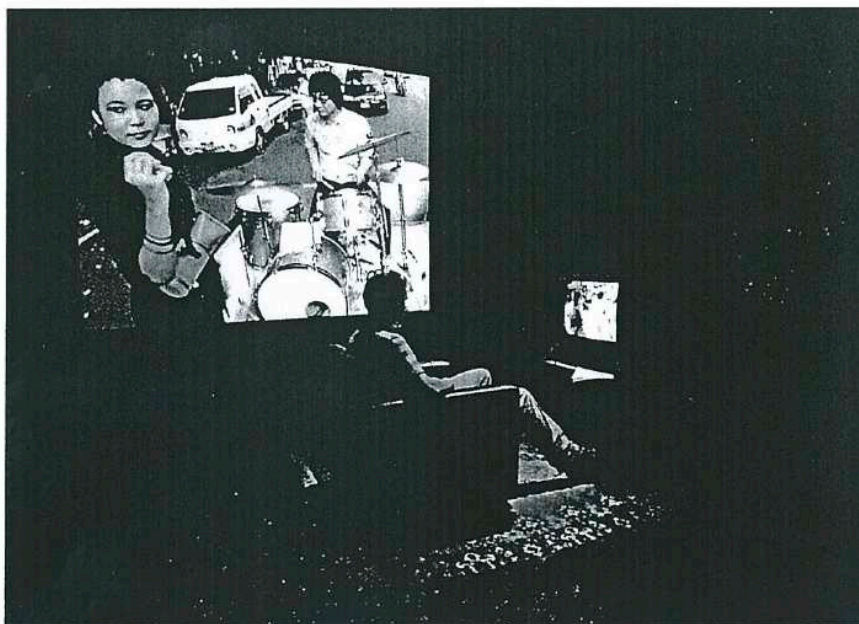


# EXHIBITIONS



MINOUK LIM — *New Town Ghost* (2005) Video installation, TV monitor, projector, headphones, armchair, Persian rug. Courtesy Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth.

## NEW PLYMOUTH

### "Activating Korea: Tides of Collective Action"

GOVETT-BREWSTER ART GALLERY

JOHN DI STEFANO

A common perception about much contemporary art is that it is apolitical and aloof from real-life events, at risk of irrelevance. "Activating Korea: Tides of Collective Action," an exhibition of works by contemporary South Korean artists co-curated by Mercedes Vicente of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery and Beck Jee-sook of the ARKO Art Center in Seoul, Korea, challenged this notion. The works in this exhibition might be described as "consciousness art," a term coined by former Whitney Museum curator Lawrence Rinder to describe work that has a firm grounding in social engagement. "Activating Korea" focused on 12 artists and art collectives who employ varied strategies ranging from meditative reflections on power, politics and history, to works that act as catalysts for social change.

Either directly or indirectly, the charged modern history of South Korea—a country that is officially still at war and caught in a stalemate with its northern neighbor—

permeated the works, exposing the artists' profound sense of, and sensitivity to, their own national identity. Both the more established and younger artists assert a sense of agency by focusing their works firmly within the specific circumstances of the local as a means of countering the homogenizing forces of globalization.

Minouk Lim's powerful video work, *New Town Ghost* (2005), is a response to gentrifying activities taking place in her neighborhood in Seoul. It depicts Lim standing in the back of a flatbed truck accompanied by a drummer, as she speaks through a megaphone and the truck circles around a contested redevelopment area. Lim's battle cries against the economic forces that are causing the disappearance of an entire community are subtitled in English but not printed in any accompanying text, leaving the viewer no choice but to keep watching in order to understand her message. By mixing performative and interventionist strategies, Lim creates a dynamic work that is at once a rumination on the past and a call to action.

Other artists reflected upon similar issues by interfacing with their New Zealand host community. Although the collective Mixrice was unable to travel to New Zealand for the exhibition and therefore unable to work on-site with immigrant communities as is customary for them, they nevertheless directly engaged

the general public in New Plymouth through their poster and banner project, which poses the question "Where is Asia?" six times. The question is printed in languages reflecting South East Asian immigrant groups found in both South Korea and New Zealand—Burmese, Nepalese and Bangladeshi—with Korean, English and Maori for context. Seen throughout the city, *Where is Asia?* (2007), peppers daily life with challenging assumptions about demographic homogeneity and literally makes otherness visible through foreign characters—far from an irrelevant or apolitical statement. ■