

Oh Yoon

- 1946 Born in Busan.
 1965 Entered Seoul National University (Sculpture Department).
 1969 Participated in the declaration of 'The First Manifesto of Hyunsil-dongin,' written by Kim Chi-ha and revised by Kim Yoon-soo.
 1970 Graduated from Seoul National University.
 1972 Taught at Dongseong Middle School.
 1976 Made the cover images and illustrations for the books published by Cheongnyeongsa.
 1977 Taught at Sunhwa Arts High School.
 1979 Established 'Hyunsil and Baleon'.
 1980-86 Participated in the exhibition of 'Hyunsil and Baleon'.
 1981 *11 New Figurative Artists*, Lotte Art Gallery.
Contemporary Art Workshop Exhibition, Dongdeok Art Gallery.
 A panel discussion whose theme was 'The presentation and its Ideology,' Academy House.
 1982 *The Print Works of 19 Painters and Sculptors*, Seoul Museum.
 1983 *Print Works of Hyunsil and Baleon*, Hanmadang Gallery.
 1984 Made graphic images for about 10 collections of poems under the contract with Pulbit Publishing Co.
 Made 6 graphic illustrations for Kim Chi-ha's book entitled 'Meal' Bundo Publishing Co.
The 2nd Zeitgeist, Maek Gallery in Busan, Yeejo Gallery in Masan, and Soo Gallery in Daegu.
 1985 *22 Artists in their 40s*, Grimmadang Min.
Print Works in the Period of Minjoong, Hanmadang Gallery.
Spring Print Works, The Third Museum.
 Made graphic illustrations for Kim Chi-ha's *The Song of the Sailor in the Southern Land and 5 Enemies*.
 Produced *Great Desires for The Unification for The Song of Our People, The Song of Unification* written by Baek Ki-wan.
 1986 *Print Works of Oh Yoon*, Grimmadang Min
 Published the book of his print works entitled 'The Song of Knives'.
Print Works of Oh Yoon, Kongkan Gallery, Busan.
 Died.
JAALA (Japan-Asia-Africa-Latin America), Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Japan.
Print Works of Oh Yoon, Maekhyang Gallery, Daegu & A Commemorative Lecture given by Kim Yoon-soo and Yoo Hong-joon.
 1986 *Minjoong: Political Art from Korea, A Space*, Toronto, Canada.
 1987 *Minjoong Art: The New Political Art in Korea*, Minor Injury, Brooklyn, New York.
 1988 *Min Joong Art, Artists Space*, Manhattan, New York.
 1994 *15 Years of Minjoong Art: 1980-1994*, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea
 1996 *Oh Yoon, A Man in Our Town and in the World—In commemoration of the 10th anniversary of his death*, Hakgojae.
Realism and Society in the 1980s, Gana Art Center.
 2001 *Oh Yoon: A Retrospective*, Gallery Artside.
 2005 *The Battle of Visions*, Kunsthalle Darmstadt, Germany.
60 Years of Contemporary Korean Art V: Drawings, Growrich Gallery.
 2006 *Oh Yoon: Dokkaebi with Mirth—In commemoration of the 20th anniversary of his death*, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea



Self-portrait | 1974 | woodblock, Hemp Cloth | 17.8×13.2cm

Exhibition Period : September 22, 2006
 ~ November 5, 2006

Exhibition Venue : Gallery 2

Gallery Talk : Every Fri., Sat., Sun. 1p.m. & 3p.m.

Family program : Every Sat. 2~4p.m.

Elementary students 4 to 6 grades
 Children's Museum

Panel Discussion : The Life and Art of Oh Yoon
 October 19 / Small Auditorium

Discussion (13:30 ~ 16:30) :

Kim Chi-ha(Poet)
 Sung Wan-kyung(Professor·Inha University)
 Lee Seong-min(Critic)
 Hariu Ichiro(Art Critic·Japan)
 Cho In-soo(Professor·The Korean National University of Arts)

Moderator : Kang Soo-jung(Assistant Curator·NMCA)

Question & Answer (16:40 ~ 17:30)

Dokkaebi with Mirth : Oh Yoon

In commemoration of the 20th anniversary
 of his death



Great Desires for The Unification | 1985 | Oil on Canvas | 349×138cm

Dokkaebi with Mirth : Oh Yoon



Masked Dance II | C.1970 | Oil on Canvas | 38x45cm

Oh Yoon (1946-1986) is a representative artist of Minjoong Art (the realist art movement of the 1980) who was critical of the then social realities, and upheld and developed the folk artistic tradition of Korea. For his short lifetime, he recorded the stories of ordinary people who built society while suffering from the realities of life in his graphic works through his own artistic vocabulary. Organized in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of his death, this exhibition features 139 woodblock prints (91 Original prints and 48 posthumous editions, 13 oil paintings, 20 sculptures, the other materials such as drawings, boards, and notebooks, and the articles left by him so that one can experience the art and life of Oh Yoon.

Methodologically, he not only rendered reality but also appropriated traditional and popular icons and approached the public through woodblock prints which were easily combined with mass media. It is thus natural under the then circumstance that he utilized woodblock print to approach the minds of people while conveying the sentiments of people observed through his awareness of reality. The strong contrast between black and white of graphic works was suitable for the expression of the reformative atmosphere of the society of that time, and especially for Oh the medium of woodblock print possessed qualities that corresponded to the view of people toward their harsh life: the physicality and honesty of the processes of carving, scooping out, and imprinting, the sharpness of the lines made with knives, and the life forces of ingeniousness and perseverance.

The works of Oh Yoon can be separately examined in accordance with several different themes.

Firstly, there is his *Land series*. These works are related to the studies Oh made with his interest in the early Mexican national and social realism. The theme is a mother holding her child, that is, motherhood. The outer angle has strong sharpness and the inner angle is expressed as if it were ripped off. The contrast between those angles manifests motherly warmth and combative attitude of a mother who is struggling to protect her child under the harsh social conditions. This theme is extended to employ other members of a family in *Father and Where The Wind Is Blowing*. The images of mother and child and of father and son were the



Land V | 1983 | Woodblock, Paper | 41.5x35.5cm
Seoul Museum of Art Collection

most powerful themes that could appeal to the minds of viewers while demonstrating the ordinary scenes of daily life. The theme of this series was the one that Oh devoted himself for a long period of time as his numerous sketches and studies exemplify.

Secondly, there are works such as *Labor In The Down* where appear laborers and farmers of the infrastructure of society as they strongly manifest Oh's critical viewpoint toward reality. In this work, the faces of laborers and farmers are distorted by the hardship of their lives, and the sight of their neck bended and their back fatigued from their labor reveal the limitation and pain in reality. Nevertheless, he did not depict the pitiable condition of reality in a straightforward way. As *Mugwort* and *A Note of A Female Worker* whose themes are female laborers demonstrate, he strived to convey the thoughts, sentiments, and inner minds of the people in the disastrous conditions. In addition, he aimed not at direct indictment but at the formation of a certain emotional empathy by making viewers to concentrate through the bodies hardened by labor in *Fatigue* and the desolate feeling emanating from those who were leaving their hometown in *Leaving Their Home town*. In these images, symbolic lines or signs are emphasized while every mediate painterly element is excluded. Also, there is no background. As such, his way of treating space in a picture plane is explicit and spontaneous, and sometimes is very successful in articulating a defiant image. This clearly shows his prominent artistic creativity while considering that Minjoong Art was richly furnished with loose description without poetic density.



Labor In The Dawn | 1984
Woodblock, Paper | 27.4x17.9cm

Thirdly, his *Marketing series* is consisted of several oil and mixed media paintings that rendered his critical view of capitalism through humor and satires. *Marketing I : Hell* is a satirical work that depicts by use of the form of a Buddhist painting the social condition of that time and where are contrasted the bright colors of Buddhist painting and the scene



Marketing I : Hell | 1980 | Mixed Media on Canvas | 131x162cm

of hell rendered through detailed lines. The figures being punished in hell represent people living in reality. The young maids in *You Are 12 Years Old*, *You Are A Lady* reappear in *Marketing II : Put on your make-up*. The phrase, 'Make yourself beautiful. You Are 12 Years Old, You Are A Lady' articulates his sarcasm of the advertisement aesthetics of capitalism that incites and idealizes the consumption desire of young girls already exposed to social labor. Oh asserted that artistic imagination is connected to the 'expansion of the world'.

And this assertion bestows a certain persuasiveness upon the fourth group of works that convey the transcendental 'bitterness' from the realist perspective that is critical of reality. Especially, despite its unfinished state, the significance of *Vindictive Spirits* in the form of a scroll lies in the fact that it is the panoramic depiction of the tragic aspects of modern Korean history and the 'bitterness' of *minjoong*, besides its thematic aspect that it dealt directly with the Korean War. In this work, Oh questions who were the true protagonists in modern Korean history through the marching vengeful ghosts. Oh's artistic sensibility is detected in both the use of obscure colors and the materialization of 'ki (energy)'. In *Map of Four Types with Eight Sides* is caricatured the hypocrisy of a politician, and in *Flower with Eight Leaves* the bitterness of *minjoong*, represented as vindictive ghosts, is imprinted on every petal. In *Map of The Four Biological Styles* he categorized four predispositions of human beings as to satirize the selfishness of the ruling classes. The factors of 'disposition' and 'bitterness' are also related to the concept of 'ki'. Yet, we should not ignore that his use of the concept of 'ki' was for the realistic depiction of a figure.

Fifthly, he intended to liberate 'bitterness' through 'mirth'. Having been interested in traditional subject matters and the interpretation of them from his early artistic career, Oh accomplished the form of traditional beauty through woodblocks and attained the natural dynamism. In *ARARIYO* the resolution of bitterness is perceived in unkempt hair and loosened breast-ties. Also he was successful in visualizing the transcendental that is invisible such as sound and 'ki'. There is the power of the sound of a drum that is torn off in *Drum Dance*, and in *Dance II* one can the mirth of the figures dancing in light steps with their heels. And *Sword* emits a clear and righteous energy that severs the irrationality of reality with a powerful single swing. This is also connected to the 'ki' exuding from the head of *Dokkaebi In A Broad Daylight*. *Dokkaebi* in the tradition of Korea is a friendly being that vents one's anger by defeating evil spirits. Oh expressed through the use of jocularity and sarcasm his wish for the goblin-like measures against the conflicts of society. These rightful goblins in

Dokkaebi are playing in mirth. They are liberating this world through 'mirth' as in *Great Desires For The Unification*, in which Oh rendered the aspiration for the unification of North and South, and *No Sowing in The Spring, No Harvesting In The Fall*.

Oh intended to expose reality through the life and sentiments of ordinary people. If arts should provide people with the meaning of life and a viewer should be able to discover in an artwork something in him or her or at least something similar to what is in his or her mind, the typicality of the daily life of those anonymous ordinary people appearing in Oh's work soon becomes familiar empathy so as to enable us to concentrate on them. Through this, he probably aimed to advance towards the 'expanded world' by transcending the simple elimination of the problems of reality. And that was the world of which the realist Oh Yoon of the 1980s dreamed.

Why is Oh's work looked at again today? It is not because he spoke loudly his confident thoughts on social conditions but because he delivers what we can empathize with in this world where we are living. He is standing in front of us like a *Dokkaebi* beyond the time of the 1980s. And he wants to play mirthfully together with us.



Drum Dance | 1985 | Woodblock, Paper | 31.6x25.5cm



The Song of Sword | 1985
Woodblock, Cotton Cloth, Color
32.2x25.5cm



A Black Bird | 1980 | Woodblock, Paper, Color | 17x15cm



Dokkaebi | 1985 | Woodblock, Cotton Cloth, Color | 91x218cm