

Impressions from a Random Adventure, behind the Kimchi Curtain First Annual Book Arts Fair, Seoul Korea 2004

Six weeks before the event Judith Hoffberg forwarded an email regarding the First Annual Seoul Artists' Book Fair. It was an invitation to apply for a free booth in an international book fair that promised thousands of viewers, a strong emerging interest in artist made books and collecting. We were also warned that there would be many cameras. The book Fair was to be sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Korean Publishers Association and I am sure more.

Call it impulsive, call it crazy but I emailed back with some questions and the organizer, Narae Kim, was quite nice and efficient. A catalog was to be made and much interest was still promised. His type of event, known to book artists as a way to sell work, connect with other collectors, curators and book artists was all new to me. A babe in book land so to speak.

The ride from the airport at dusk revealed rice paddies only miles away from blocky high-rise buildings. I saw the Han River which twisting through Seoul just as the sun's reflections began to leisurely slide off of the water.

At the terminal I was met by Janet, Kyoungwon Shin, she was warm, welcoming and took me straight out to my first meal in Seoul. It was a great traditional Korean Barbeque, lots of garlic lots of chili. She has been working as Narae Kim's assistant and translator for the catalogue.

The COEX Convention Center is big, really big with a shopping mall below that could beat anything we know in the U.S. All types of published media including electronic media were represented. There was one hall devoted to kiddie literature- lots of noise and music.

The main hall where the Artists Book Fair was situated was a road of booths at a far end but not away from the action. We had a lot of action of our own. This was a beautifully thought through and well-represented fair of book artists and arts.

There was a fine performance by Marshall Weber and Maria Yoon as an opening ceremony. Their piece consisted of butoh-like gestures and readings from various New York artists works. Guest lecturer Diane Fogwell, Australian National University School of Arts and accomplished artist lectured on the state of book arts in Australia and D.E. Lawrence of the Brooklyn Museum of Art spoke about the museum's collection of artists books and its history. There was an elegant reception for all of the fair participants at the

end of the first day, including food, wine, music and speeches.

And then there were the visitors with their cameras. I don't think I saw anyone without a camera, usually digital and if not a camera then there was one in his or her phone. It was quite an unsettling feeling at first. There were so many people it was so busy from 10 am to 6pm! There were volunteers to give us a break from our booths for lunch and a few volunteer translators. The art had to speak for itself. People were generally quite respectful and I found it interesting how many schools and families came. Parents would bend down with their children and point out things to look at. I loved seeing that.

Present were 20 Korean Artists' booths, and 20 Overseas Artists' booths. Among some standout work by Korean artists was by Narae Kim who actually organized the event from start to finish. She has an elegant piece that records memories of London on transparent papers, cut and hand sewn. This work twists and turns like a graceful snake with a long reptilian body. Jungmun Park of the Book Arts Academy showed a charming book called "How to Put an Elephant in a Refrigerator" with images and a cartoon-like actual 3-D elephant in a refrigerator. There was a lot of work of high quality that used masterful printmaking techniques, handmade paper, drawing or found objects as well as traditional and contemporary bookbinding techniques. There was even a claybook collective. Many of the artists had been educated in English speaking countries and utilized that English as an important component of their work.

Collectives of Korean artists who have studied art and book arts in colleges such as Camberwell in England, Universities in Korea, America and private studios in Seoul such as Book Arts Academy and Bookpress, there were also collectives for children's arts like Children's Making Book School and a wonderful booth was Baeille Artists' Book (KABA the Association for the Blind Artist.) Book craft seemed to represent a more sculptural interpretation of book beautifully.

The Overseas Artists, as we were referred to, included some really stellar artists in many varieties of book form. There was a grand showing of artists who produced printed editions of books in a variety of subject and purpose. Metta-Sofie Ambeck from Denmark specializes in hand-cut illustrations and typography; the work was skillful, delicate and able to address images not thought of as delicate like robots. Ryoko Adachi from Japan created work that was conceptual and needed time to really enjoy. Pressed flowers, traditional Japanese poetry, German language and Braille in a series. The most colorful and one of the busiest booths was Redfox Publishing. Francis Van Maele produces hand

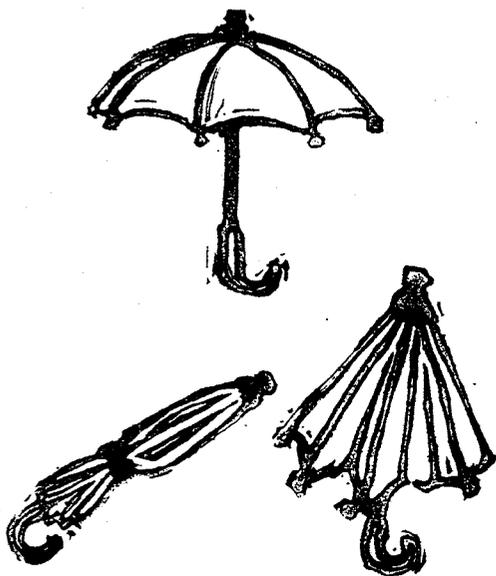
printed limited editions of his own. As an aside, I just found out that he will have a solo show in Korea in 2005 as will Robin Ami Silverberg. Among the many artists were a few booksellers, Antiquus an online based bookseller of western and rare books and Galerie Druck & Buch in Germany.

I saw how all subjects and materials transcend and connect with artists of other countries. In my participation in this First Annual Book Fair I see how we are not only crossing borders physically but also dissolving the idea of a border.

"The seashore is an edge, perhaps the only true edge in a world whose borders are otherwise mostly political fictions, and it defies the usual idea of borders by being unfixed, fluctuant, and infinitely permeable...."

(Opening lines from **Unraveling the Ripple**, images and concept by Helen Douglas, essay by Rebecca Solnit)

– Melinda Smith Altshuler



ArtPEOPLE

AWARDS

Bruce Nauman was named a winner of a \$135,000 Praemium Imperiale award for sculpture. Other winners of the awards given annually by the Japan Arts Association to recognize lifetime achievement in arts categories not recognized by the Nobel Prizes, were **Georg Baselitz** of Germany of painting, **Oscar Niemeyer** of Brazil for architecture, among others.

Nam June Paik was chosen as the 45th recipient of the Edward MacDowell Medal, awarded annually for outstanding contributions to the arts. The award, putting the Korean-born Paik in the company of past recipients like Edward Hopper, Joan Didion, Merce Cunningham and Leonard Bernstein, was presented to him in a public ceremony on the colony's grounds in Peterborough, NH on 22 August

The American Academy of Arts and Letters presented **Chuck Close** with a Gold Medal for graphic design; and **Hans Hollein** for architecture, among others

Mona Hatoum, the British-Palestinian artist, received the University of Copenhagen's Sonning Prize on 23 April, which the University awards biennially to a person considered to have "significantly contributed to the advancement of European civilization." Some previous winners were Albert Schweitzer in 1959, Bertrand Russell, Niels Bohr, Simone de Beauvoir and Mary Robinson.

Istvan Kantor, Hungarian-born artist who was banned in the 1980s from several museums in the United States and Canada for splattering gallery walls with his own blood, is one of seven winners of Canada's 2004 Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts. The jury described Kantor's work in music, video, and robotics as the "cutting and critical edge of contemporary art." The \$15,000 (U.S. \$12,000) award is one of the country's prestigious.

DECEASED

Syd Hoff, veteran cartoonist for the New Yorker and creator of such indelible children's books as "Danny and the Dinosaur" and "Sammy the Seal," has died at the age of 91.

Yang Shen-sum, 92, a Chinese artist who was a master of the Lingnan school of painting, died during a visit to Hong Kong. He had lived in Canada since 1988. He was known for his bird, animal and landscape paintings in the southern Chinese style known as Lingnan, which combines traditional techniques with Japanese and Western realist approaches.

Henry Ries, a Berlin-born photographer who fled Hitler and returned to take evocative pictures of postwar Germany, most memorably his images of the Berlin airlift in 1948 and 1949, died in May at the age of 86. His most famous photograph shows an incoming airplane over Tempelhof, the Berlin airport, showing the image of children on a hillside watching a plane gliding in. At the