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03.23.2010

**Reconstructing Childhood Ideals (video)**

by Philippa P.B. Hughes



I recently visited a contemporary exhibit curated by [Jeong-ok Jeon](#) at KORUS House called "Desirable Fairy Tales: Between Fantasy and Reality." Part of the Korean Embassy, KORUS House hosts lectures and art exhibits about Korean culture to promote friendship and understanding between the Republic of Korea and the United States. Jeong-ok told me that it was unusual though for KORUS to showcase a contemporary art exhibit much less one that included non-Korean artists. I absolutely loved this exhibit and was thrilled to find yet another fantastic art venue in DC with an exceptionally well-curated exhibit. It maybe awhile though before we see another contemporary art exhibit at KORUS. However, keep your eyes open for more exhibits curated by Jeong-ok Jeon. She's very impressive!

Desirable Fairy Tales explores the reconstructed childhood fairy tales we make up for ourselves as adults. It reveals the "absurdity of socially-accepted behaviors" that are rooted in childish "ideals." In this video, Jeong-ok explains how artists Mina Cheon and Gilbert Trent create work around paper dolls that deal with "geopolitical, autobiographical, cross-cultural" issues.

Cheon's paper dolls depict idealized concepts of beauty in Korea in the 1970s based on Western dress. Jeong-ok says she played with these dolls as a little girl and her mother wore Korean dresses at home because she thought they represented ideal beauty. But these images did not at all represent the reality of life in Korea in the 1970s (or any time period!).

Gilbert Trent explores "his own identity in the context of race, sex, and gender, which are general devices to categorize human beings." Humans naturally want to categorize each other and these classifications can be upended depending on the choices we make, like the clothes we choose to wear. Trent revisits his childhood memories in which he was drawn to toys and clothes that were considered girlish. One thing that struck me was his interest in the Buddhist idea that we choose everything in our life including our health and disabilities, parents and children, skin color, and even sexual preference.

*The exhibit will be up only until Thursday, March 25 at KORUS House, which is located at 2370 Massachusetts Avenue, NW. The hours are Monday through Friday from 9AM to 12PM and 2PM to 5PM.*

Friday, May 7, 2010

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