

## Im Heung-soon

### *Staging the singularity of memory*

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Opening: 1st December from 7:30 PM

àngels barcelona is pleased to present for the first time in a gallery the work of Im Heung-soon (b. 1969), the Korean artist who obtained the Silver Lion for Promising Young Artist during the last edition of the Venice Biennale with his work *Factory Complex* (2014-15).



*Staging the singularity of memory*, the first solo show of the artist in Europe, presents *Factory Complex* (2014-15) (95 min) and *Reincarnation* (2015) (23 min 34 sec), by which he explores the impact of Korea's modernisation in its social fabric as well as the burden of grief left on women who have survived the trauma of war in recent history.

Given his experience and understanding of the lower working class's life and social conditions in South Korea, IM's earlier works as *Seongnam Project* (1998-99), *Basement My Love* (2000) and *Memento* (2003), as well as his participation in the collective *Mixrice* (2002-05), have focused on issues regarding industrial immigrant labourers as social minorities within a rapacious neo-liberal society. In his projects, the artist uses a great variety of media, including drawing, photography, short video, urban research and community-based public art projects.

*Jeju Prayer* (2012), Im's previous long story film, already delves into the trauma caused by the massacre that took place on March 1948 at Jeju Island, the southernmost island of Korea, during the time the country was under the US military power and in which more than 30.000 people were murdered. In the works presented on this occasion, he focuses, with thoughtful and poetic moving images, on the precariousness and trauma suffered by women not only after South Korea's economical development but also after recent wars.

The two works shown at *Staging the singularity of memory* resuscitate the historical trauma that has been repeated in the asymmetric temporality of Korea, showing a certain distortion of space and time within the politics of mourning and melancholia, as well as honouring and the lives of those who have vanished namelessly behind the curtain of the experiences of capitalism, nationalism, anticommunism and colonialism; but also invoking subjects such as the functioning of human relations in a highly hierarchical and patriarchal society.

Opening in a Cambodian sweatshop, which is run by a Korean conglomerate, *Factory Complex* examines the plight of the underpaid and overworked female labourers in Korea, where Im Heung-soon interviews employees in various industries. Through the talking heads, the artist examines the similar conditions they all face and the constant degradation they are subjected to on a daily basis. This work inherits the realities of history and politics from the traditional Korean independent documentary, while drawing on photographic documents, newspaper photos, video footage and several forms of re-enactment to take an imaginary approach to the traumas of the manual workers who worked in different kinds of factories and to establish the distance between the past and the present as a principle of constructing an alternative history. In *Factory Complex*, the viewer feels the power of the camera that vividly captures not simply the faces and voices of the workers but also their affective forces.

On the other hand, the two-channel video installation *Reincarnation* – presented for the first time at this 2015's Sharjah Biennial – takes inspiration from a little known history of the Korean diaspora: that of a group of women who emigrated to Iran after the Vietnam War. These women were the designated entertainers – known as the “foxhole circuit” – for South Korean soldiers during the Vietnam War and during the 70s, they emigrated to Tehran in the search of prosperity.

Through the two distinct channels of the installation, Im explores the traumatic memories of those Vietnamese and Iranian women who were victims of the Vietnam and the Iran-Iraq wars, respectively, and who experienced the loss of family members and witnessed the merciless destruction of their surroundings. In this way, *Reincarnation* adds another layer in the artist's larger project of addressing the painfully entrenched psychic and emotional scars left behind by processes of growth and the necessary internal suppression of trauma that occurs in the aftermath of warfare. Therefore, and contrary to one's expectations of a rebirth, the work serves to rekindle the unacknowledged suffering of these women. Im's treatment of grief juxtaposes two distinctly opposed ways of expressing remorse that reinforces the depth of the women's experiences: while the Iranian mothers' seemingly excessive, vocalisation of trauma is manifested through the imagined return of their sons, the quiet stoicism of the aged Vietnamese women echoes their suppression of sorrow.

In essence Im's works delve into the debris concealed and distorted by history, whilst capturing different subjects in a momentary and fragmentary manner, through irony, reflected by coincidental moments, and allowing different voices and poetically generated images that overlap past and present. Im thus reveals the uncanny symptoms of that feeling of *in-betweenness*, of that *third space* referred by Homi K Bhabha<sup>1</sup> manifested through the materialities and epiphanies that emerge from the blurred boundaries between dislocated times and realities.

<sup>1</sup> The concept of 'third space' was first developed in depth by Bhabha (1994) as a metaphor for the space in which cultures met. It is a space in which colonial authority is challenged and hybrid identities are created. This space is not a cohesive one; Bhabha stresses that it is a site of tension, of competing powers and of insurmountable differences. The non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space - a third space - where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences. (Bhabha, 1994:218)

## BIO

**IM Heung-soon** (b. 1969) is a visual artist and film director based in Seoul, Korea. Since his early works on his working-class family, he has explored the lives of people who are marginalized in social, political, capitalist, and national contexts. His political yet emotional works are embodied through different visual mediums such as photography, installations, cinema and public art and community art.

His first feature film, *Jeju Prayer* (2012, produced by Kim Min-kyung), which explores the painful lasting legacy of Jeju Uprising on March 1948, has been shown at various domestic and international film festivals. His second feature film, *Factory Complex*, premiered at the Wide Angle Feature Documentary section of 2014 Busan International Film Festival. He won the Silver Lion at the 56<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale 2015 for *Factory Complex*.

Im is also the co-director of BANDAL Doc Pictures with Kim Min-kyung, with whom he has developed *Reincarnation* (2015), his third feature project, which has been shown at MoMA PS1 (2015), New York, and at the Sharjah Biennial (2015). Recently, his work has also been exhibited at the Tate Modern, London (2015), Pori Art Museum, Pori, Finland (2015), the National Art Centre in Tokyo (2015), the Museums of Sonoma County in Santa Rosa (2014), Moonji Cultural Institute 'Saii' in Seoul (2013) and Nam June Paik Art Centre in Yongin (2011), among others. His publications include *Housewife* (2011) and *This War* (2009).

His latest work, *Next Life* (2015), was exhibited at the National Art Centre Tokyo and he is currently finalizing *Bukhansan*, a video work that deals with a migrant woman from North Korea.