

PEOPLE

[INTERVIEW] Film Director, IM Heung-soon

by KIM Su-yeon / 05.27.2015

“The social participation aspect of art is an important issue to me”



On May 10th, film director IM Heung-soon received the Silver Lion at the 56th International Venice Art Biennale for his documentary **Factory Complex**, which is the first award for any Korean filmmaker at the yearly event. As it shifts between art and film, **Factory Complex** gazes at the lives of Korean and Asian female laborers. We met with filmmaker **IM Heung-soon** who made this documentary for all working people to whom work is their life, their fears and happiness.

You received an important award at the largest art fair in the world. Can you share any thoughts on this?

To be honest, I never saw this coming. The moment I heard the award announcement, the faces of all the interviewees who participated in the making of **Factory Complex** passed through my mind.

Where did you get your inspirations for your documentary **Factory Complex?**

I usually get inspirations for my works from personal experiences, from what my body remembers. Both of my parents were laborers, and I guess I've been influenced by things that happened throughout my life. Especially, for the past 40 year, my mother worked as an assistant seamstress at a sewing factory, like the female workers in my film. My sister-in-law was an insurance planner, and my younger sister used to work as a sales clerk at a department store clothing and food section when she was young. As I observed the women close to me, I started thinking of the fundamental message I explored in this film. I specifically started to think of this subject matter when I moved into the Seoul Art Space Geumcheon's Resident Artist Studio in 2010. This space, built on the former Guro Industrial Complex reminded me of the female workers of those times, and this naturally led me to contemplate the issues of Korean female workers and on a broader scale, the issues of working as a female laborer in Asia.

The title, 'Factory Complex' which has a Korean title meaning 'the factory complex of comfort' is quite impressive

The female workers of the Guro Industrial Complex in the past who went by the derogative nickname, 'gongsunee(roughly translated as factory girl)' gave great comfort to others by dedicating their lives to their families and their country through their hard work at factories. Now, after many years have passed, I decided to give the film this Korean title because I wanted to express words of comfort to them by saying 'thank you'.

I heard you interviewed a total of 65 workers for this film. It must have been challenging to persuade them to be interviewed?

There were quite a number of people reluctant to rehash painful memories of the past. I once had to wait for almost 6 months to have an interviewee agree to be interviewed. But this was a rare case, and I ended up interviewing people who wanted to share their views on the labor movement and the true meaning of labor. They helped me a lot on the film. In the case of overseas workers, I was able to conduct interviews with the help of the Cambodian Labor Union.



If there is one most memorable interviewee to you, who would that be?

Among the number of people who participated in interviews, I would say it is Mr. LEE who told the story of the textile company Dong-Il Corporation, where there was a nude demonstration while he was serving as union leader at the time. I kept composed and silently listened to him during the interview, but on my way home alone, I couldn't help from crying. 2-3 hours may have passed since the interview ended, but I was suddenly overwhelmed by some kind of emotion. It wasn't the facts that he told that had me tear up, but his eyes, the way he spoke, his gestures, and the space I interviewed him in all flashing through my mind, moved me in a complex way.

Your first feature documentary, Jeju Prayer has an elderly woman who lost her family during the April 3rd Jeju Uprising as the main protagonist. The starting point for Factory Complex is your mother who has been working at a sewing factory for the past 40 years. It seems that women are the main source of the subject matters of your works

It wasn't like that from the start. At first, I was interested in stories of the past that were forgotten

or untold rather than subjects on women. I guess as an author, I've been influenced by the environment that surrounded me because it was mostly women who listened to my stories. Naturally, I started to pay keen attention to the people supporting me, and as I did, they resulted in my works.

Your works are characteristic in the way they focus on the social participation of art

I've been investing much thought on how art can contribute to society in a practical way. And this contemplation led me to public art, and since I started to work on video workshops with immigrant workers and rented apartment residents during early 2000, I've continued to make films. The social participation aspect of art is an important issue to me.

Your next film is said to be the feature-length realization of your short film Reincarnation. What kind of film is this?

It's a 14-minute 2-channel experimental short dealing with an elderly woman who experienced the Korean, Vietnamese, Iranian and Iraqi wars. I started this project because I wanted to relate the wars in Asia from a woman's point-of-view.

Are there any other projects apart from Reincarnation you have in mind for development?

I am preparing another Jeju story with a different approach from **Jeju Prayer**. This project won't deal with the past, but the present day Jeju.

Photo by LEE Yong-shin



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