

Ode to working women



A scene from Im Heung-soon's Silver Lion-winning documentary "Factory Complex," which is on display at the "All the World's Futures" exhibit at the 56th Venice Biennale 2015. / Courtesy of Arts Council Korea

Im wins Silver Lion at Venice Biennale

By Kwon Mee-yoo

Korean artist Im Heung-soon won the Silver Lion at the 56th Venice Biennale 2015 for his documentary film "Factory Complex," Saturday. This is the highest award ever received by an individual Korean artist at the world's oldest and most influential contemporary art event.

Im proved Korea's ever-growing presence on the contemporary art scene, along with the Korea pavilion winning the Golden Lion for Best National Participation the 14th International Architecture Exhibition of Venice Biennale in 2014.

Im was invited to showcase his work at the "All the World's Futures," the main international exhibition curated by Okwui Enwezor of the biennial art festival, along with two other Korean artists Kim A-young and Nam Hwa-yeon.

The 46-year-old artist presented a feature-length, 95-minute documentary "Factory Complex," which revolves around working women and female labor issues in Asia, including Korea, Vietnam and Cambodia.

Im majored in painting, but then began producing unique work

combining art and film. The "Factory Complex" took some four years to prepare, shoot and edit.

Im introduced his work as a "dedication for all female laborers who sacrificed themselves for family just like his mother and sister."

Im's mother was an assistant at a sewing factory for some 40 years and his younger sister worked as a clerk at clothing and department stores for a long time. The artist took inspiration from these working women in his family and portrayed them in a unique way by juxtaposing interviews and experimental images.

The documentary premiered at last year's Busan International Film Festival in the Wide Angle Documentary Competition and won the Seoul Independent Film Festival the same year. "Factory Complex" became the first Korean full length film to be invited to the Venice Biennale as well.

The jury said Im produced "a moving video that probes the nature of precarity in relation to the conditions of labor for women across Asia."

"Factory Complex takes the form of a documentary but with a direct, lightly mediated, encounter with his subjects and their working conditions," the international jury said in a statement.

"I extend my gratitude to women who live by principles in their work and life," Im said after receiving the Silver Lion, according to the Arts Council Korea.

The artist added that he does not make a distinction between fine art and film. "Art doesn't have to only be in museums and I will continue to merge art and film, standing on the border of the two," he said.

The Silver Lion for a promising young artist is generally awarded to those who are younger than 35 and Im's win came as a pleasant surprise.

This is the first time for a Korean artist who did not participate as a part of the national pavilion to win the Silver Lion. Previous awards given to Korean artists at the Venice Biennale includes Jheon Socheon's Menzione d'Honore Award in 1995, Kang Ik-joong's Special Merit Award in 1997 and Lee Bul's Special Citation Award in 1999, all of whom were represented at the Korea Pavilion.

The Golden Lion for Best National Participation went to Armenia, while American artist Adrian Piper won the Golden Lion for the Best Artist in the International Exhibition at the 56th Venice Biennale.

The Venice Biennale 2015 runs through Nov. 22 and features 89 national pavilions as well as the main exhibit "All the World's Futures" with 136 artists from 53 countries.



Im Heung-Soon holds his Silver Lion at the award ceremony of the 56th Biennale of Arts in Venice, Italy, Saturday.
/ AP-Yonhap