

## HYUNGKOO LEE: THE HOMO SPECIES

Commissioner: Soyeon Ahn

Artist: Hyungkoo Lee

**Korean Pavilion** is pleased to present **HYUNGKOO LEE: THE HOMO SPECIES**, the first solo exhibition in its history. As one of the most promising artists in Korea, Hyungkoo Lee has been exploring his interest in human body based on his own personal experiences connected to contemporary cultural discourse as well as native cultural identity.

Born and raised in Korea, Hyungkoo Lee experienced 'undersized Asian male complex' while he was studying in the US. An Asian man, having internalized the notion of male-superiority, is doomed to be frustrated when he comes face-to-face with his 'bigger and stronger' Caucasian counterpart. Lee started to create *The Objectuals* series from 1999 with humble materials such as water-filled PET bottles and shooter glasses to visually enlarge parts of his body. Especially the *Helmets*, an on going series, combines his interest in physiognomy with optical instruments to exaggerate and distort facial features. These objects, which might be called 'self-satisfaction devices', function as pseudo-medical instruments for plastic surgery as well as psychological therapy to heal the artist's mental complex.

Hyungkoo Lee extends his concerns to fictitious bodies of cartoon characters by inventing their fossil bones in a quasi-archaeological way. 'Exploring hypothetical anatomical possibilities of the beings without existential evidence', Lee turns fiction into history through his anatomical studies and imaginations. The resulted *Animatus* series, attributed to the tradition of Pop Art, can be seen as the epitome of simulation in providing plausible physical references and zoological nomenclatures to fictional characters. And the familiar Hollywood cartoon figures (e.g. Tom and Jerry) caught at a critical moment create dramatic scenes in the palaeontological fossil skeletons.

The idea of bringing out the virtuality to reality might be in part a comment on today's blurred distinction between the two, but it also points to an interesting way of overcoming the sense of cultural inferiority by introducing an inverted chronology that replaces present by the past. It achieves historical quasi-legitimacy by producing the origins and realities of what are neither original nor real, thus creating the illusion of history. There is a unique sense of optimism and sincerity, if not without irony, in this proposal of 'the fakes of the fakes'.

Acknowledging the cultural complex of South Korea as an economic center and cultural periphery at once, Hyungkoo Lee challenges the very psychological entanglement through smart manipulation of the reality compelling 'global standards' with a wonderful tightrope feat between acceptance and rejection, identification and differentiation. Zanily but keenly, he appropriates art as subversive means to deconstruct the actual reality and reconstruct other possible ones.

Hyungkoo Lee, born in Pohang in 1969 lives and works in Seoul, Korea. He received his BFA from Hong-ik Univ., Seoul, Korea, and MFA from Yale Univ., New Haven, USA. Recent exhibitions include *Animatus*, Arario Gallery, Cheonan, Korea (2006), *The Objectuals*, Sungkok Art Museum, Seoul, Korea (2004), *ALLLOOKSAME?/TUTTTUGUALE? ArtChinaKoreaJapanArt*, Fondazione Sandretto re Rebaudengo, Turin, Italy (2006), *Give Me Shelter*, Union Gallery, London, UK (2006), *ArtSpectrum*, Leeum, Seoul, Korea (2006), and etc. He has received The Joan Mitchell Foundation Award (2002).

A fully illustrated catalogue, with the texts by Soyeon Ahn (Commissioner of Korean Pavilion), Joël Egloff (Novelist) and Jae Chun Choe (EcoScientist) will accompany the exhibition.

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