

**Queer/Feminist/Praxis:
Intersections of Performance, Film, and Photography
in Korea and the Korean Diaspora**

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Project Statement

While South Korean LGBTQ+ activists, scholars, and artists have transformed both the discourse and the everyday praxis of queer living over the past decades, the academic response to the ground-breaking changes have been underwhelming. In anticipation of more fruitful conversations in the near future, “Queer/Feminist/Praxis” aims to unite the current scholarship and cultural productions reflecting the on-going transformation of the field. This will be achieved through the proposed conference by engaging with histories of queer art, visual culture, and activism that have been undermined by the homophobic and anti-feminist politics of South Korea’s militarized culture.

“Queer/Feminist/Praxis” will bring together scholars, artists, and activists to explore the intersections of queer/feminist theory and performance, film, and photography in South Korea and the Korean diaspora. The two-day multi-media, interdisciplinary conference, organized by myself and my collaborator in Performance Studies, Yeong Ran Kim, will be held at the Rhode Island School of Design on April 10-11, 2020. The conference will focus on Korean and diasporic cultural productions involving queer subjectivity, while exploring the feminist discourses of queer subjectivity and its representations. Scholars of Korean culture and the diaspora will be among the participants; events include a performance by a Korean artist, and screenings of award-winning works by, respectively, a Korean artist and a film maker. The contributors’ research and artwork will not only examine the marginalization of queer subjects,

but, more pointedly, offer queer feminist critiques on the hetero-masculinist-nationalist narratives on which the “official” history of Korean visual culture and performance is founded.

This conference will be the first major interdisciplinary event in the New England region that brings together artists, scholars, and students to explore the intersections of Korean/diasporic arts, activism, and queer living. Furthermore, despite the significant number of Korean and Korean American students in the student body, such a conference is new in scope to RISD. In addition to RISD faculty and students, we hope to attract faculty and students from Brown University, University of Rhode Island, Providence College, and the greater Boston area. Hence, programs such as the film screenings and performance will be open to public, while graduate seminars will be held with participating artists in RISD’s Global Arts and Cultures Program and Department of Film, Animation, Video.

The conference also honors past local events--such as a 2018 Brown University workshop on public health and queer experience--and continues to engage diverse communities interested in the topics at hand. The organizers envision Queer/Feminist/Praxis as cultivating new scholarly collaborations and strengthen existing ones. We intend to continue working together on a special volume of a journal and an artistic zine that will recapture the intersections of multi-media works and scholarships explored in the conference. We thereby hope to continue sharing desires and ideas for on-going collaborations, between institutions of the East and West Coasts, and South Korea and North America.

The conference is especially timely considering the recent visibility of queer arts and queer feminism in South Korea. Grounded in the two decades-long history of national LGBTQ+ activism, queer artists have begun to openly critique the militarized hetero-masculine culture of South Korea. While exploring the intersections between activism and art-making, these queer

artists redefine minoritarian aesthetics for a mode of “being-with” across differences, and ultimately, to envision a new futurity. Centering historical and contemporary perspectives on the collectivity/solidarity of queer living and art-making, participants in the conference will respond to the homophobic and anti-feminist pushback against the new visibility by exploring the explosive potential that awaits when the praxis of diversity is enabled and celebrated.

Despite our funding limitations, the invited participants have expressed their enthusiasm in the event and proposed presentations that stand at the forefront of contemporary art, film making, and cultural studies bridging scholarship and artistic practices on the topic. The conference will hold two scholarly panels, focusing on: queer/feminist methodologies; intersections of feminist critique and queer cultural productions in South Korea; and queer activism and arts in Korean American communities. In addition, a keynote will be given by the Korean artist-researcher, siren eun young jung, the recipient of the Korea Artists Prize 2018 and one of three artists featured at the Korea Pavilion of the 2019 Venice Biennale. The conference will screen an edition of her film documenting her decade-long ethnographic research on the theater genre *yösöng kukkük*, *A Performing by Flash, Afterimage, and Noise* (2019); she describes the work as “pictur[ing] an ‘impossible’ genealogy that is transferred and expanded through the practice of today’s queer performers.”¹ Korean performance artist whose current performative works explore notions of masculinity and Asian queerness, will perform and participate in roundtable discussions. Roundtable discussions will be moderated by Avishek Ganguly, a member of the RISD faculty specializing in performance and film studies, and Samuel Perry, Associate Professor of East Asian Studies at Brown University.*

¹ siren eun young jung, “History Has Failed Us, But No Matter,” *Korean Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale*. <http://www.korean-pavilion.or.kr/19pavilion/artist1.html>

As the conference invites scholars and artists from across the United States and South Korea, support for covering their travel and housing expenses is the major component of the budget. I have raised \$4,000 from the Division of Liberal Arts' Research Collaboration and Event Grant, and have applied to the Cho Fund (for Asia-related events) and Turner Fund (for performance-related events). However, even if these funds do contribute to the conference costs, we will still need about \$5,000 for participants' travel and lodging. AAS-NEAC support will be critical for covering such expenses.

Indeed, by providing opportunities for meeting artists, film makers, and scholars who have been at the forefront of paving the way for queer/feminist/praxis in South Korea and the United States, funding these participants is critical to the conference goal of fostering collaborations between scholars and artists, and inspiring the young artists and performers of RISD and beyond, especially those seeking queer representations in the fields.