



TRANSCENDING BORDERS

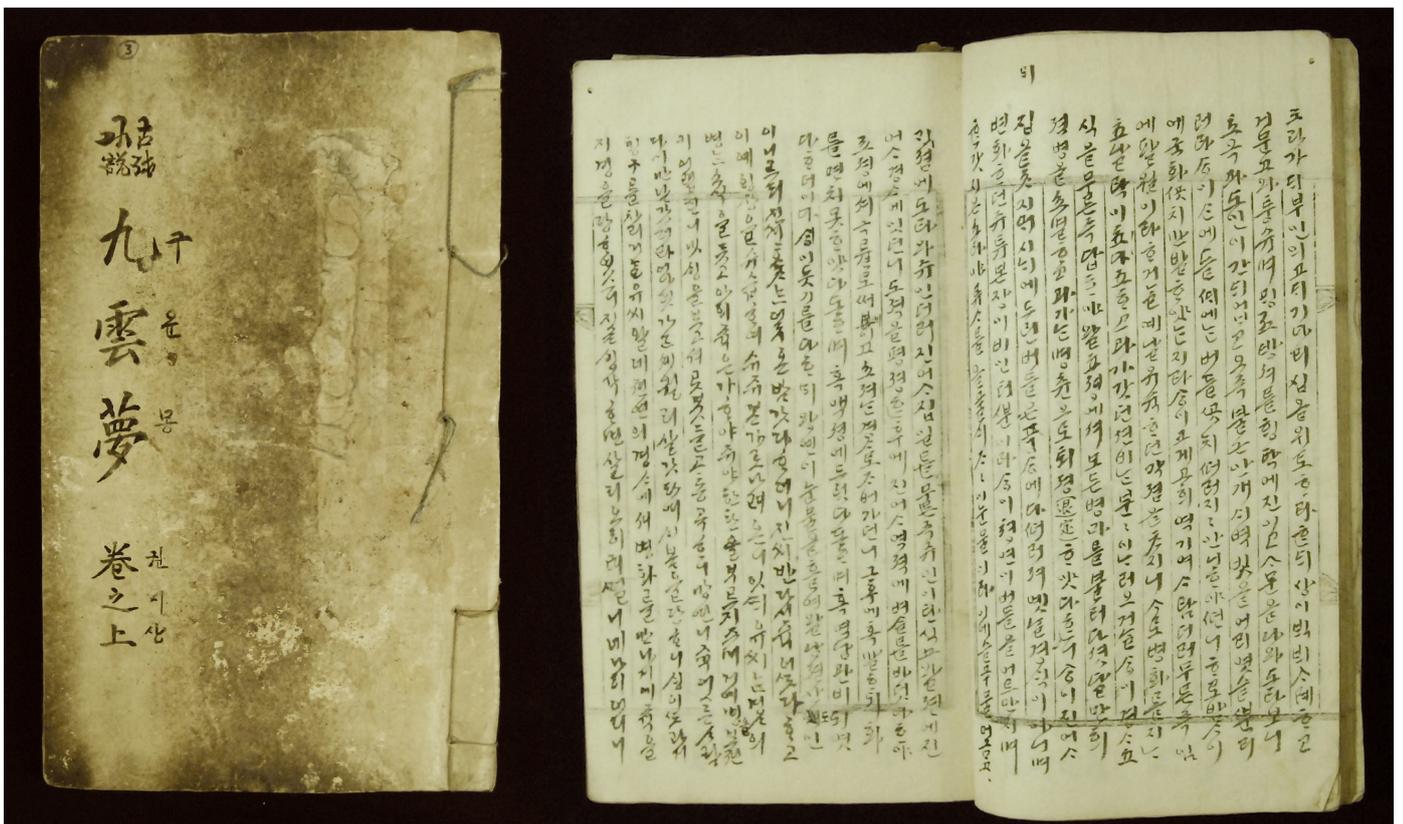
LAWRENCE WILSON ART GALLERY
3 MAY - 12 JULY 2014



Shaman Painting, second half of the 20th century, South Korea, ink and colours on coarse silk backed with paper, 79 x 49 cm, P Bridge Collection, Berndt Museum [WU5216]



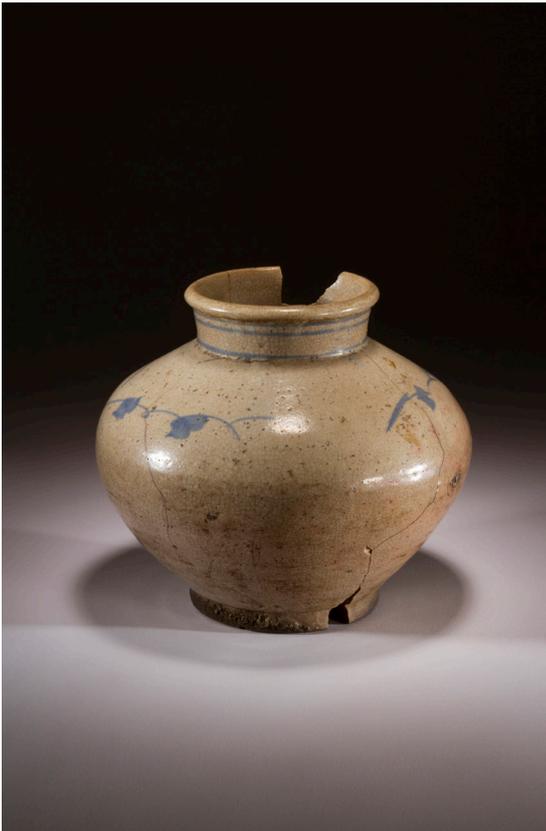
Shaman Painting, second half of the 20th century, South Korea, ink and colours on coarse silk backed with paper, 126 x 93 cm, P Bridge Collection, Berndt Museum [WU5218]



Kim Manjung [1637 - 1692], *Nine Cloud Dream (Kunmong)*, c. 1920 edition, handwritten, ink on paper, 34.6 x 20.7 x 2 cm, P Bridge Collection, Berndt Museum [WU5220]



Korean Ceramics, various sizes, P Bridge Collection, Berndt Museum



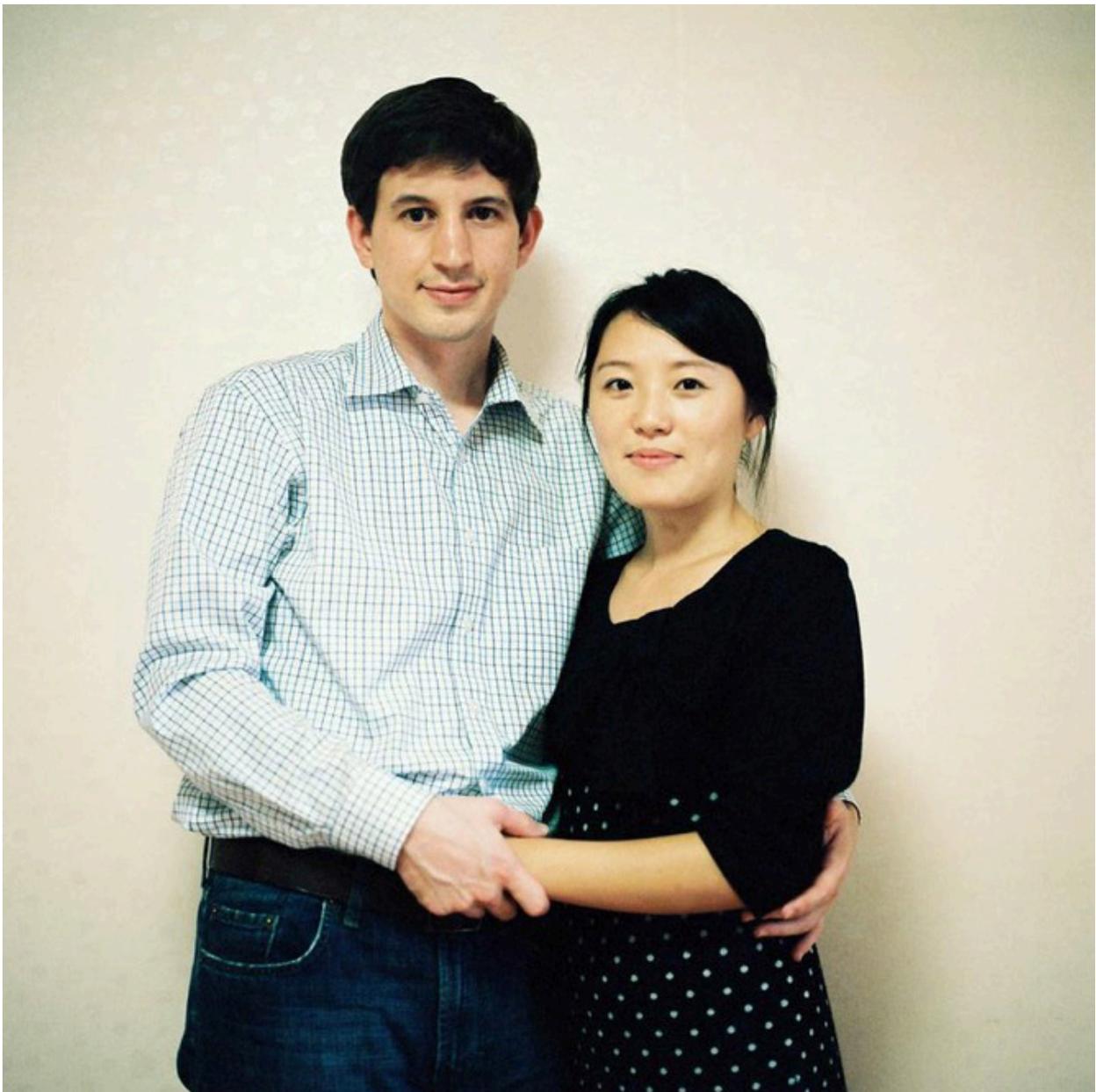
Blue and white jar, Choseon Dynasty (1392 – 1910), 16 x 18 x 18 cm, P Bridge Collection, Berndt Museum [WU5277]



Jar, Unified Silla Dynasty (668 – 935), 21 x 11.5 x 11.5 cm each, P Bridge Collection, Berndt Museum [WU5234]



Long-necked jar, Unified Silla Dynasty (668 – 935), 15 x 18.5 x 14.5 cm, P Bridge Collection, Berndt Museum [WU5236]



Pilar Mata Dupont, *Jeongsim and Caleb*, 2013, photographic print, diptych, each 40 x 40 cm, © the artist



Soohyang Lee, *Three Sisters, Blue Mountains*, 1987, black ink and soft colours on Korean painting paper, 48.5 x 84 cm, © the artist

HE DID WHAT HE SAID A LOT OF KOREANS DO: THE HELL

Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, *The Slickest Little Korean Scumbag Down Under, Part 1: The Taxi Driver* (stills), 2012 -2014, original text and music sound track, HD QuickTime movie, 8 min 29 sec, © the artist

TRANSCENDING BORDERS: SOUTH KOREA IN FOCUS

Rather than explore binary opposites that are so contested now within cultural studies, *Transcending Borders* sets out to discover the osmotic movement across and beyond the culturally constructed imaginary lines of traditional and contemporary. Each piece featured in the exhibition is imbued with meaning; none is fixed in a static social or cultural position but extends back and forward through time, space and memory. *Transcending Borders* expresses fluidity, movement and the adaptability of cultural identity within varying contexts, informed through art and object.

As The University of Western Australia seeks to build a strong cross-cultural relationship with Western Australia's third largest trading partner, South Korea, as evidenced with the recent launch of a new Bachelor of Arts major program in Korean Studies at UWA, Korea's multifarious and culturally distinct cultural heritage and contemporary arts were an obvious choice for the central theme of *Transcending Borders*. The exhibition foci are strengthened by a donation of significant Korean material, originally made to the Berndt Museum by Peter Bridge in 1982. A total of 101 pieces constituted the donation, each of which was collected in Seoul in the 1970s. This was at a time when the West showed little interest in the art and traditions of Korea. It was also when Korea was in the midst of a period of rapid industrialisation.

A collection of 34 ceramic vessels, encompasses over a thousand years of Korean history dating from the Unified Silla Dynasty (668 – 935) through the Goryeo Dynasty (918 – 1392) to the Choseon Dynasty (1392 – 1910). The collection physically and symbolically expresses popular trends, habits and technologies of the time when they were manufactured and used including their transcendence from utilitarian items to burial goods. In ceramics, unlike in the high arts that were produced by the ruling yangban literati, we can see the artisans class's expression of aesthetic and form, giving voice to an otherwise unheard social group. Each of the vessels thus embodies a collective memory but, as time has elapsed, the context surrounding the object has changed, affecting the significance of the piece. In a contemporary context, these pieces are yet again going through another transformation as the cultural and stylistic value of Korean ceramics is now of great interest to scholars, art historians and the wider society. Where such items are stored, such as at UWA's Berndt Museum, adds a noteworthy layer to their qualitative life.

Similar to the layers of memory that float metaphysically around inanimate objects such as the ceramic vessels, contemporary artist Kyoung Eun Kang, taps into an unseen layer of memory and affect in her video work, *Islands*. Kang is a South Korean artist living in America and, in an effort to help her adapt into her new environment and soothe her longing for home and family, her mother sent river stones from Korea to Kang in New York. In the performance, Kang laboriously walks on American land using the Korean stones symbolically connecting her to her homeland and highlighting her contemporary life in America, transcending both cultures.

Traditional ink painter, Soohyang Lee, paints scenes of her North Korean hometown as a method of recreating childhood memories which enables her to visit physically unreachable places through the medium of art. Lee moved to Sydney around 30 years ago from South Korea, having escaped there from North Korea under tragic circumstances in the time between Korean independence from Japan in 1945 and the Korean War (1950-1953). As Lee skillfully paints Australian landscapes using traditional Korean Southern School ink techniques, she transcends time and space through expressing admiration for the beauty of nature, her gratitude to a greater God and her connection with her adopted home of Sydney.

WITH IT AND HE CONVINCED SOME AUSSIE IMMIGRATED -- HE WAS A GOLF PRO. MAYBE TO AUSTRALIA. GOLF IS A VITAL ECONOMIC SECTOR AND THERE'S A SHORTAGE OF PROS.

A series of syncretic Shaman paintings depicting elements of Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism are included in this exhibition to highlight the fluidity and adaptation of religious traditions in Korea. The use of these paintings as iconographic aids in temples, shrines and places of worship dates back to the Silla Dynasty. The paintings as portable ephemera would have originally been burnt after the death of the Shaman who owned them. The paintings have been dated as mid twentieth century but their cultural significance is no less despite their recent creation. The definition of 'traditional' (often signalled as a binary of contemporary or modern) becomes blurred because while these works thread back in functional time, they are designed and painted by contemporary hands for contemporary audiences and contemporary religious uses.

The fluidity of belonging, the adoption of new environments, new religions, new methods of artistic and literary expression are explored in the work of Young-hae Chang – Heavy Industries, a collective of Web Artists based in Seoul who combine text and jazz to create Flash pieces for the internet. The format and delivery mode of their work is as important as the content which critiques generic book packaging and governmental bans on internet content deemed inappropriate. *The Slickest Little Korean Scumbag Down Under, Part 1: The Taxi Driver*, as the name suggests is a story of a Korean immigrant's life in Australia. Rich in humour, the well-timed text that flashes on the screen both pokes fun at the immigrant's struggles while critiquing the society that drives individuals to live seemingly meaningless lives.

During the late Choseon Dynasty, reading fiction for pleasure became increasingly popular. The Korean literati wrote and read in Chinese while the indigenous and phonetic *hangeul* script was widely used by women in particular, but also by educated commoners and artisans. One of the popular texts of the time was the romantic fiction novel *Kuunmong – Nine Cloud Dream*, a story of a man who travels back in time to sixth century China. The copy included in *Transcending Borders* is from the early 20th century and interestingly is hand written in *hangeul* and well-worn leading to speculation that this copy may have been intended for an increasing female readership. It might also have been a volume produced for rental purposes – a kind of a paid library system that operated in the turn of the twentieth century Korea when purchasing books was deemed too expensive.

Studying a real-life romance story, Western Australian artist Pilar Mata Dupont's photograph *Jeongsim and Caleb* portrays an unlikely relationship between a North Korean woman and an American man, a romance that may have been viewed as unconventional or even impossible in the past because of the long-standing political and ideological differences and strife between the US and North Korea. Mata Dupont's intimate diptych introduces text to add to the significance of the work and to describe the context in which the work was produced. In a sense this work ties together many of the themes embedded in *Transcending Borders*.

By delving into physical and metaphysical terrain and venturing beyond real and imagined borders, this exhibition testifies to the possibilities of transcendence through art, where new meaning and greater understanding can be found in the most unexpected contexts. It has been a privilege to have had the opportunity to work on such a thought provoking exhibition that reveals so much about past, present and enduring Korean cultural life.

Kelly Rowe
Curator



Kyoung Eun Kang, *Islands* (still), 2009, single channel HD video, colour, sound, 10 min 33 sec, © the artist

LIST OF WORKS

CONTEMPORARY WORKS

Soohyang Lee, *Three Sisters, Blue Mountains*, 1987, black ink and soft colours on Korean painting paper, 48.5 x 84 cm, on loan from Lee Joo-yong

Soohyang Lee, *The Beebong Waterfalls, Mount Diamond (Mount Kumgang)*, 2002, black ink and soft colours on Korean painting paper, 135 x 40 cm, on loan from the artist

Pilar Mata Dupont, *Jeongsim and Caleb*, 2013, photographic print and printed text, diptych, each 40 x 40 cm, on loan from the artist

Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, *The Slickest Little Korean Scumbag Down Under, Part 1: The Taxi Driver*, 2012 -2014, original text and music sound track, HD QuickTime movie, 1920 x 1080 px, 8 min 29 sec, on loan from the artists

Kyoung Eun Kang, *Islands*, 2009, single channel HD video, color, sound, 10 min 33 sec, on loan from the artist

P BRIDGE COLLECTION

Shaman Painting, second half of the 20th century, South Korea, ink and colours on coarse silk backed with paper, 93 x 53.5 cm, P Bridge Collection, Berndt Museum [WU5213]

Shaman Painting, second half of the 20th century, South Korea, ink and colours on coarse silk backed with paper, 78.5 x 49 cm, P Bridge Collection, Berndt Museum [WU5214]

Shaman Painting, second half of the 20th century, South Korea, ink and colours on coarse silk backed with paper, 79 x 49 cm, P Bridge Collection, Berndt Museum [WU5216]

Shaman Painting, second half of the 20th century, South Korea, ink and colours on coarse silk backed with paper, 92 x 54.5 cm, P Bridge Collection, Berndt Museum [WU5217]

Shaman Painting, second half of the 20th century, South Korea, ink and colours on coarse silk backed with paper, 126 x 93 cm, P Bridge Collection, Berndt Museum [WU5218]

Kim Manjung (1637 – 1692), *Nine Cloud Dream (Kunmong)*, c. 1920 edition, handwritten, ink on paper, 34.6 x 20.7 x 2 cm, P Bridge Collection, Berndt Museum [WU5220]

6 ceramic vessels, Unified Silla Dynasty (668 – 935), sizes variable, P Bridge Collection, Berndt Museum [WU5232, 5230, 5231, 5234, 5236 and 5241]

16 ceramic vessels, Goryeo Dynasty (918 – 1392), sizes variable, P Bridge Collection, Berndt Museum [WU5233, 5243, 5249, 5248, 5250, 5255, 5254, 5251, 5252, 5261, 5256, 5259, 5262, 5260, 5263 and 5287]

12 ceramic vessels, Choseon Dynasty (1392 – 1910), sizes variable, P Bridge Collection, Berndt Museum [WU5284, 5282, 5286, 5283, 5288, 5272, 5271, 5276, 5275, 5277, 5270 and 5274]

CAMPUS PARTNER: TRANSCENDING BORDERS
Asian Studies, School of Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts, UWA

Asian Studies combines the insights of politics, anthropology, history, cultural studies and language studies in the context of analysing East Asian societies and cultures. From 2014, UWA offers a new BA major in Korean Studies, which is an interdisciplinary area of research and critical analysis on cultures, societies, philosophical thought and language of the Korean peninsula and its diaspora. We are delighted to work with Associate Professor of Korean Studies, Jo Elfvig-Hwang, who has generously shared her specialised knowledge in the development of *Transcending Borders* and in the associated public programs.

TRANSCENDING BORDERS
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Kelly Rowe, Curator of *Transcending Borders*, would like to thank the artists for their generosity and Professor Jo Elfvig-Hwang for her dedication to this project. Thanks also to Ted Snell, Director, Cultural Precinct; Sandy Toussaint, Associate Director, Berndt Museum; Juno Do from the Korean Cultural Office, Sydney; the continually supportive Berndt Museum team and the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery team. A special thank you to Peter Bridge for his generous donations to the Berndt Museum.

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