“Heaven or Hell?”

Exhibition Concept

Aehee Shin was born in Oklahoma, USA, in 1986. When she was five years old, her family returned to South Korea, and lived in Seoul for a while. She came back to America in 2006, and attained Illustration BFA in Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). Since she graduated in 2010, she worked as a freelance illustrator in Korea, and her first book *Red String* was published on September, 2011. Recently, she is attending MFA Illustration Practice Program in MICA. She has a passionate interest in making unique characters and refreshing stories, sharing messages of
love, relationship, and hope.

[Introductory Panel]

“Heaven or Hell?”

When you think of North Korea, what topics pop up in your mind? You may be thinking of wars, nuclear explosion, the Communist party, the country’s notorious ex-leader Kim Jong-Il and his successor Kim Jong-Eun who are the enemies of many nations. Most people nowadays do not know the harsh reality of common civilians’ lives in North Korea, merely focusing on the mischievous aspects of the nation through public media, such as belligerent acts of its reclusive dictators.

North Korea was established under communist system aiming for a Utopia in which everyone gets equal share. Brainwashed with this ideology, North Korean people are deceived to believe that their dictator can rescue them from severe starvation and exploitation. However, under the harsh and strict authoritarian system of North Korean government, North Korean people are struggling to survive day to day without having their human rights and dignity. The reality of common North Korean lives involves no joy, but despair and suffering.

[Expectation]

Illustration is a great tool revealing a true picture of life and culture. Illustration also encourages people with a powerful touching message. I expect people to face with the harsh reality of North Korean life and consider urgent need of reunification of Korean peninsula through these illustrated images and pictures. I wish this exhibition to motivate viewers to have an interest in the miserable conditions of North Korean people and help them to recover their human rights.

[Thematic Section 1]

Starvation and Death

Currently, countless North Koreans are dying of hunger every day. The infant mortality in North Korea is about 500 deaths per 1,000 live births, and millions of North Korean people lose their
lives every year due to intense starvation. For the last two decades, North Korea has grappled with food crisis as the result of a dysfunctional government and its erratic leader. The UN’s World Food Programme says North Korea faces its worst food shortage in a decade, with six million people at risk. Now, starvation becomes the most serious problem in North Korea, and it is the most significant reason that North Korean people flee to South Korea or China.

Testimonial statements

“I went up to see what they were looking at, and then I saw it was the body of an old man with a piece of cloth placed over his face. I asked if he had fallen down because he was sick, but the people shook their heads and said, No, he was just too hungry and died for lack of something to eat.” (Lee Sun Ok, 63)

“People are very poor again, they are going to the mountains to get grasses and weeds to make into soup. Some people have to eat manure when they cannot get any rice or corn. I don’t know what they are saying, but what I do know is that there is a real shortage of food in North Korea. People who cannot go out to find food, or grow food or do some business to earn money, are already starving to death. When elderly people miss a meal they get tired or they get sick. They gradually become too weak to get food for themselves for the next meal and then they die. This is common. I have seen this myself.” (Kim Yeong, 68)
[Individual extended labels]

1.
꽃제비

하늘의 햇빛을 비추는 날, 꽃가루가 떨어지는 날.

자신의 꿈을 꾸며 나무나무 땅끝에 조화를 이루는 모습은 얼마나 아름다운가.

수업 후, 친구들과 함께 가던 중 땅굴을 놓치고 만났다.

"그래, 그분이 그분이, 땅굴로 들어가야지!"

"어디로 들어가나?"

"당일 마치고 바로 달리셔야 해.

"그럼, 빨리 달래야 해야겠네."

하지만, 그분의 뜻을 실천해 보고 싶었다.

그래서, 땅굴로 들어가 두구두구 땅굴을 만들었다.

"어디서 땅굴 만들었어?"

"그분이 말하길, 이 땅굴을 만들면 자유로운 삶을 살 수 있다고 하셨다."

"자유로운 삶을?"

"그분이 말하기, 그분이 말하기, 그분이 말하기..."
Kojebi tells a poignant story about North Korean children who, in the country of socialist system, are starved to death and go begging for food. Wishing to eat white unglutinous rice and beef soup everyday, the children (Kojebis) try to flee to South Korea through China.
2. Malnourished children scavenge for acorns, seaweed, grass, bark of tree, and trash. Those poor children in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea are called Kojebi originated from ‘кочевье’, which means ‘wanderer’ in Russian. They have no parents to take care of them. They are exposed to danger of extreme cold and crackdown by North Korean government. Under the suppression of North Korean government, innocent Kojebis are arrested and whisked off to the prison camp on the charge of being main culprit of social crime. In the prison, most of children are beaten and starved to death.

3.
Drawings by a North Korean child:
A North Korean child who fled to South Korea drew disastrous situations in North Korea.

Top: A woman holds a piece of dismembered body. Water is boiling in a caldron for the human flesh.

Middle: In the mountains, a mother strips a bark off a tree for her family to survive by eating the boiled bark.

Bottom: “Don’t die, mom.. I will not clamor for food anymore.” Two children are desperately crying and stopping their mom from jumping into the brook.
Human flesh is being sold on the black market in North Korea, because of severe famines. A 54-year-old North Korean refugee named Lee had two grandsons, aged 11 and 8, who were sacrificed for the survival of other North Koreans. They disappeared at a noodle restaurant near the black market. After Mr. Lee reported the problem to the police department, the police searched the noodle restaurant and found human hands and feet in a pot of kimchi, Korean pickles, and human bones in a garbage pit in the backyard. The female owner of the noodle restaurant confessed that she had served noodle to the children and had invited them to stand by a stove to get warm. When they fell asleep, she killed them with an axe.
Artist: Nick Martin
Title: starving North Korean children
Medium: lithograph on paper
2010

This series of portraits expresses anguish of North Korean children with rough black and white background and obscure shapes. Their eyes are looking down blankly being delirious and about to black out like living corpses.

6. Movie Night!
Winter Butterfly (2011)
directed by Kyu-min, Kim
90(min)

Winter Butterfly is based on a real story directed by a North Korean defector. By reconstructing the real story in 1998, this movie portrays the reality of North Koreans struggling with starvation. It is the story about mother and son falling into tragedies of starvation.

[Thematic Sections 2]

Inhumane Torture in Northern Prison Camp

“The prisoners there did not know the meaning of human rights. They were living lives worse than dogs’ lives.” One of the North Korean defectors

North Korea has six huge prison camps. Essentially, these prison camps are built to maintain the power of the North Korean government. Approximately 150,000 North Korean people are impounded in every prison camp on charges of various reasons such as desecrating the great general Kim Jong-Il’s portrait picture, listening to the South Korean radio, converting to Christianity, and attempting to defect to other countries. Prisoners are treated inhumanly, being forced to work at least twelve hours a day and fed with food made of soil. Sometimes they reach the starvation limit that they often prey on rats and snakes. Even when one makes a minor mistake, he/she can get punished with an inconceivable and humiliating torture, and even shot to death in some cases. In fact, a number of dead bodies are loaded into a truck and are moved out
from the camp everyday. The human rights and freedom in North Korea are significantly oppressed.

Testimonial drawings by an anonymous North Korean defector (Forum with North Korean defectors)

1. It is 9:05 PM. North Korean government officials call prisoners together to watch a pregnant woman imitate the motion of the clock with her arms and legs.

2.
Forced Abortion

The scene of a female defector, who got pregnant in China, being forced to have a miscarriage. Two prisoners are jumping on a see-saw placed on the woman’s stomach, under the threat of the guard.

3.

A kernel of corn inside bovine dung

A security guard is beating a hunger-stricken prisoner who is trying to pick a kernel of corn inside bovine dung.

4.

What the hell are you eating!

A security guard is forcing him to vomit a kernel of corn inside of bovine dung by making him stand on his hands.
5. Political prisoner camp

At the camp, almost no supplies are provided to the prisoners. Therefore, the prisoners are compelled to make supplies with diverse materials that can be found in prison. The waist belts are made with car tires and metal wires, the socks are made with pork skin wrapped around with a straw rope, and the shoes are made with car tires stilted with metal wires. For the winter season, the sole of shoes are made with splinted tree branches or rat fur.

6. Martial Arts practice

In the garrison, North Korean officials harshly beat up political prisoners. The prisoners are unable to speak out with blood vomits and broken rib bones. They were crying in a fury.
7. **Forced Abortion**

After finding out that the political prisoner is pregnant, a group of North Korean military force split the belly of the prisoner, take out the baby out of her body and trample it on the ground.

8. **Political prisoner camp**

In the culture where elders are respected and honored, the political prisoners must bow down to the children of the prison inspector. The prisoners call these children “sir” or “ma’am.”
Mouse meat, the only available meat

The camp do not provide meat to the prisoners, thus prisoners chase to catch mice in the prison. This is the reason why prisoners die with epidemic hemorrhagic fever every year.

10.

When some of political prisoners are engaged in construction for guard, they are starved to death so they eat up pigs’ food for three months.

11.
Two daughters of the political prisoners are devoured by guardian dogs. Those dogs are appraised(???) for these acts.

12.

A North Korean citizen crossed Dooman River in order to escape to China, and eventually got arrested by a Chinese official. He was sent back to North Korea, and was punished with a metal wire pierced into his nose and beaten down with stones thrown by other prisoners.

Testimonial drawings by Shin Dong-hyuk

Shin Dong-hyuk is a North Korean defector living in South Korea currently. He is known as only person who succeeded in escaping from a ‘total-control zone’ grade internment camp in North Korea. This group of illustrations depict the testimony of his life in Kwan-li-so No. 14 Kae-chon.
1. A finger lost to a sewing machine

Dong-Hyuk Shin, who used to work in a textile factory within the Gaechon(#14) political prison camp, got his finger cut off by a base of a sewing machine that was dropped on it as a punishment.

2. Torture by fire

In his age of 14, Dong-Hyuk was tortured by fire in secret prison when he was imprisoned for over 6 months because his mother and brother had failed in escaping from the camp.
Public execution

His mother and brother were planning to escape. Debased and dehumanised, he informed the guards of their plans. No matter; he is being tortured to find out how much more he knew; he is being tortured for the pleasure of the torturers. Later, with all of the other inmates, he was forced to watch his mother hanged and his brother shot. This kind of public execution opens twice a year in order to increase tension and fear of prisoners.

[Thematic Section 3]

Prostitution of North Korean Women

“There wasn’t enough to eat in North Korea... My two children starved to death. I don’t have any choice but to work here as a prostitute.”
A North Korean woman who crossed the border to China (http://news.sky.com/home/world-news/article/15150156)

Prostitution is a survival strategy for many young women in North Korea, which is also a major market economy of the nation. Pyongyang has restaurants that are to be transformed into houses of prostitution during the late nighttime. Prostitution is not illegal since these establishments of prostitution are frequented by judiciary officials and high-class people who have control of the government. On the daily basis, North Korean women are trained to serve those wealthy or
powerful men providing sexual service in return for their payments. Prostitution of North Korean people in China is also common. Thousands of North Korean people flee to China every year to survive by taking suicidal risk. If they are caught by Chinese police, they are shipped back to North Korean government that leads them to face imprisonment, and perhaps death. Thus, North Korean women in China are often compelled to live like slaves or prostitutes in order to satisfy Chinese men’s desires.

Under this political circumstance, North Korean refugees in China are situated in vulnerable position as illegal immigrants -- especially women who quickly become commodities in China’s human trafficking or prostitution market.

North Korean women in Chinese brothel

[Individual extended labels]

**North Korean Artist, Sun-Moo**

Sun-Moo lived in North Korea over 30 years and fled to South Korea in 2002 in search of freedom and a new life. Currently, he works as an artist in South Korea.

He brings up his own memories and experiences, and expresses them with his autobiographical methodology(background).

**Portraits of North Korean Women by Sun-Moo**

Sun-Moo painted a glamorous young woman taking off a North Korean flag like a scene of strip show. The other painting portrays a westernized North Korean woman with modern woman’s scanty raiment, but she still wears a red scarf symbolizing communism. Both women in these paintings gaze at viewers seductively through the canvas.
These figures do not only represent the positive concept of their minds free from oppressed political system, but also negative concept that North Korean women are regarded as sex objects in the patriarchal society of dictatorship.

1. Artist: Sun Moo  
   Title: Take off  
   Medium: oil paint on canvas  
   Size: 72.7x60.6cm  
   2007

2. Artist: Sun Moo
3. Forced sexual abusement in the prison camp
Hyo-Jin, Kwon

In an interrogation room, a North Korean sheriff forces her to have sexual relationships with him. This sexual harassment frequently happens to new female prisoners.

4. Is it Chinese or Korean?
Hyo-Jin, Kwon

Prison Camp sheriffs investigate North Korean women refugees sent back to North Korea by
Chinese government. The sheriff jabs hard a pregnant refugee’s stomach with a thick stick, asking the origin of the thing inside of her womb.

North Korean woman was forced to return to North Korea from China. She is beaten and kicked by the North Korean officials in the interrogation room.

[Thematic Section 4]

**Happy Smiling faces in Mannerism**

North Korean children are given absolutely no choice but to apply themselves to worshiping the State and their ‘great general-father’ Kim Jung-il. In the presence of people in authority, they show a kind of disciplined behavior, such as bowing and smiling when meeting others, sitting upright in a chair, and walking like soldiers. North Koreans also betray themselves in their formal, ritualistic manner of speaking, learned in nursery school. All of these characteristics of typical North Koreans have been practiced since an early age; become inbred, and contribute to the impression that North Korean children are robots, all acting alike.

*Chu’ che philosophy
“We have nothing to envy in the world.”

Their attitudes derive from their acceptance of Chu’ che philosophy, basically a ‘mind over matter’ view of the world in which all things are possible if people work hard enough to achieve them. This Chu’ che philosophy promotes both the individual’s worth and North Korea’s own national superiority in such slogans as “We have nothing to envy in the world.” This philosophy generates a supportive effect on developing self-confident and self-assured happiness in North Korean children. In fact, the mission of the Young Pioneers is to prepare children mentally,
morally, and physically to be Communist builders of the Chu’ che (self-reliant) type.

Every New Year, a number of events take place in North Korea. Inviting important people in the communist party, young North Korean students show their performance, titled “We have nothing to envy in the world”, in a big auditorium. The title is widely used as propaganda for North Korea’s Chu’ che Ideology. With hundreds of North Korean children dying of starvation, they have to tie the red scarves around their necks with pride and make smiles as bright as possible for their great general. It is a country without envy, but full of artificial smiles arousing fake happiness. However, Sun-Moo remembers that the country gives off the smell of blood in reality.

1.

Sun Moo

*We have nothing to envy in the world*

oil paint on canvas

116.8x91.0cm

2007

In this poster-like painting, a girl is standing in front of a red curtain on stage and smiling innocently. Underneath, the slogan says “We have nothing to envy in the world” representing a
main theme of Chu’ che ideology.
The contrast between the dark background and the bright color of the girl’s figure produces
an uncomfortable feeling. Even this image gives a fearful feeling that she is trapped by the dark
shadow behind her, which tilts its body to look at the girl.

The child’s make-up covers her starved face to disguise her as a healthy-looking child. Her eyes
are totally in black void with no future and no hope. Children’s faces never lie but reflect the
reality even though the Communist party tries to manipulate the fact.
2.

Sun Moo

We have nothing to envy in the world

oil paint on canvas

650×194cm

2007

A group of students wearing same school uniforms and red items stand in a continuous row like mass products. Holding their palms up and opening their mouths wide, they are worshipping their great general and the world surrounding them.

3.

Sun Moo

Really like

oil on canvas
The slogan on the bottom says, “We really like.” North Korean children are brainwashed with this word and not able to perceive what could be the real happiness of their life.

4.

North Korean children spend much of their time at practice with an almost religious fervor. They take it for granted that they must do it for their great leader Kim Jong Il, who has given them uniforms and the tools of learning. However, this impoverished country has very few of its material resources. Therefore, North Korean children remain devoted to refining their skills by any means they can.
North Korean children play guitars and show off extraordinary talents. Their faces are even more overwhelming with awkward smiles of the children. There are no emotions in the performance, but forced education trains children as products of the nation.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSedE5sU3uc

Movie Night!
Documentary: Inside Undercover In North Korea (2009)
National Geographic
47:30(min)

Join National Geographic’s Lisa Ling as she captures a rare look inside North Korea - something few Americans have ever been able to do. Posing as an undercover medical coordinator and closely guarded throughout her trip, Lisa moves inside the most isolated nation in the world, encountering a society completely dominated by government and dictatorship. Glimpse life inside North Korea as you’ve never seen before with personal accounts and powerful footage. Witness first-hand efforts by humanitarians and the challenges they face from the rogue regime.

Exhibition in A Public space

These images will be exhibited in an open gallery space of Cheonggye-cheon, A number of people will stop to see the exhibition as they walk along the stream.
They are all non-profit organizations and their ultimate vision stretches to the peaceful reunification of Korean Peninsula. By revealing and teaching the serious reality of North Korea, these organizations motivate South Korean people to cooperate in the process of the peaceful reunification.

The purpose of those foundations matches with my theme of this exhibition. They can provide funds for this exhibition as a collaborate event. In addition, a box will be placed in the exhibition for fundraising to further activities of those foundations.

For the reception I will invite specific audiences and speakers like:

secretary general of Citizen’s Alliance for North Korean Human Rights_ Pastor Peter, Jung
representative of KUNION_ Sung-wook, Kim
professor of Dong-a University_ Young-moo, Kang,
North Korean defectors and artists who participate in the exhibition

Song-Byuk
Sun-Moo
Hyo-Jin, Kwon
Dong-Hyuk, Shin
etc.

Events & Fundraising

Letters from America to be broadcast into North Korea
(when it is exhibited in inner harbor or metro station in America)

These letters expressing our hopes and dreams for the people of North Korea are a powerful way to introduce to the North Koreans to what Americans are really like. Please send a message from you to North Koreans (you only need to include your first name and city and state). The letter will be read, translated, and broadcast into North Korea by the defectors run radio station, Free North Korea Radio. Please send your letters via email to skswm@aol.com, and note in subject
area “Letters from America”.

*A table will be placed in the exhibition for people to participate in writing the letter.

**Rescue of Trafficked North Korean Women and Children**

[www.318partnersofnk.org]
318 Partners Mission has been helping to rescue NK refugees from China into the free world, like South Korea.
The collected money will be sent to the non-profit organization.

**Movie Night! (on weekend)**

Documentary: Inside Undercover In North Korea (2009), National Geographic, 47:30(min)

Winter Butterfly (2011) directed by Kyu-min, Kim, 90(min)

**[Citation]**


"Imagine These Were YOUR Children." *Flatrock*.  


