Little is known in Europe about the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or North Korea. The picture produced by our media of that country at the Eastern end of the Eurasian continent is limited to news about famine, human rights violations and a highly militarized state that defies attempts by the USA and its allies to prevent it from possessing nuclear weapons. The Western perception of North Korea is supplemented by images of a monolithic political system that has had only two top leaders since its creation in 1948, by goose-stepping soldiers on Kim II Sung square, faceless masses in gymnastics performances, and recently by the accusations over the sinking of a warship of the North Korean navy in 2010.

Interruption Remarks

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The MAK Vienna has organized a rare exhibition of North Korean art entitled “Flowers for Kim Il Sung,” which is on display from May 19 to September 5, 2010. The paintings on display were selected as the result of a long process involving the Korean Art Gallery in Pyongyang and the MAK Vienna. Hence, the selection reflects the Korean Art Gallery’s ideas of how their country should be presented to the world. Naturally, this image is biased and incomplete. It provides a glimpse of a few but not all aspects of life in North Korea, and it emphasizes its positive sides. The exhibition is important. It is a mere beginning—not more, but also nothing less. It needs to be complemented by other exhibitions, by performances, by encounters, by discussions—open and controversial. Feelings will get hurt, emotions will run high. Yet, such a painful process is necessary if we want to escape the trap of propaganda, no matter where it may originate. We would like to contribute to this process of deepening and broadening our knowledge with the international symposium entitled “Exploring North Korean Arts.” It will take place at the MAK in Vienna from September 3 to 4, 2010 and is being organized by the Chair of East Asian Economy and Society at the University of Vienna. Twelve academic experts from eight Western countries will come together to discuss various aspects of the arts in North Korea. They will provide contextual knowledge as well as deep insights into specialized topics, as well as answer questions from the audience.

The symposium is organized around three core themes. The first is an introduction to North Korean art, including its function, its reception, and its connection to other spheres of society. We will next discuss the question of exhibiting North Korean art, before moving to a few examples of North Korean art ranging from traditional brush painting to music, stamps, mosaics and illustrations in children’s books. This is an academic event; we will focus on facts and their scientific analysis. Even so, there are no taboo topics. Neither those who expect unconstrained condemnation, nor those who hope for unlimited praise, will be pleased. We want to trigger new debates and to enrich existing ones. Many questions will be left open. Many answers will be regarded as unsatisfactory.

Our goal during the symposium is not to provide the one and only correct and coherent picture of North Korea. Diversity of opinion is a core and cherished characteristic of our society. Still, opinion requires information in order to develop and to become qualified. Building on what the MAK exhibition has started, we have invited experts with years of experience and deep knowledge. They will add hard facts to the otherwise very soft and blurred image of North Korea. One thing is clear, however: that this will be just the beginning of a long journey.

Rüdiger Frank
Professor of East Asian Economy and Society
University of Vienna
ruediger.frank@univie.ac.at
This paper will expand on some themes first voiced in “North Korea as Communist Chic,” our review of David Heather’s book *North Korean Posters* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2008) published in *Print Quarterly* Vol. XXVI No. 4, December 2009, pp. 429-31. Our topic is the various ways in which North Korean art and culture are projected, perceived, appropriated and responded to beyond the DPRK’s borders. We conceive of this as both an empirical stocktaking and an analytical exercise. The former is hard to demarcate, since the phenomena are scattered and diverse. But examples and case studies are likely to include:

- Collecting DPRK art: issues of originality and authenticity; communist chic
- Re/presenting DPRK art: political and other controversies
- Keepers of the flame: what is at stake in rival claims to ‘represent’ the DPRK in the West
- Military made concrete: DPRK-built statuary in Africa, especially the Dakar controversy
- Andreas Gursky’s photographic take on the Arirang mass games
- Recent indie films: The Red Chapel (Denmark), The Juche Idea (Jim Finn). Yodok Story
- The parodic riposte: Sun Mu, Jonathan Barnbrook.

As this far-from-exhaustive list suggests, both genres and issues are wide-ranging. We posit shifting milieux of diverse actors, within and beyond the DPRK, each trading in meanings in a bid to achieve a range of goals: aesthetic, political, intellectual, commercial et al. We ask: How do these varied projects intersect? What price truth or beauty? What falls through the cracks? Above all, to quote Franklin (1985)’s always-fundamental question: “who’s zoomin’ who?”

De Ceuster, Koen

**The genius of the North Korean artist in theory and practice**

Sept. 3, 2010, 2:30 p.m.

Misunderstandings are rife when it comes to appreciate North Korean art production, which is often subsumed under the misnomer of totalitarian art. This is in no small measure a consequence of limited access to North Korea and its art circles. An additional reason for the misrepresentation of the North Korean art world is the application of Western concepts that are not necessarily appropriate in describing North Korea’s reality. This can best be described by looking at how, from Kim Jong Il down, the genius of the artist is highlighted in art-theoretical writings, and how this is reflected in the way artists—in this specific case Chosŏnhwa painters—are trained and function.

Brian Myers

**The “Strong and Prosperous Country” campaign in North Korea**

Sept. 3, 2010, 2:50 p.m.

Launched in 1998, the campaign urging North Koreans to join in building a “Strong and Prosperous Country” has grown in urgency of late. The official media would have the masses believe that this ambitious goal will be fulfilled by the year 2012, in time for the 100th anniversary of Kim Il Sung’s birth. Through an analysis of the relevant propaganda as it is expressed through journalism, literature and the visual arts, Myers argues that the campaign reflects neither a re-orientation towards Stalinist materialism nor a movement towards Chinese or Vietnamese style reforms. Rather, the envisioned “Strong and Prosperous Country” is in keeping with the ruling “military-first” policy, according to which economic growth is needed primarily to strengthen the state’s defences. Myers’s greater point is that North Korea’s official culture (including the various artefacts on display in Vienna) is an underutilized source of insight into the regime’s worldview and behaviour.
Jane E. Hoare

The people's art galleries? Posters and monuments in the DPRK

Sept. 3, 2010, 5:00 p.m.

I am not an art historian nor a student of the arts except in the most amiable of ways−I am not even sure that I can engage in that great let-out “I know what I like.” My tastes are eclectic and catholic. I have written one book and a few articles that were concerned with the architecture of embassies, and a paper on the building of the Anglican Cathedral in Seoul. But being in the DPRK made me think about many things that might not previously have struck me, and the use/misuse/lack of art was one of them. I first visited the DPRK for a week in May 1998, as part of an EU humanitarian visit. Apart from Pyongyang, I made various day trips along the west coast, and spent four days visiting Hamhung, Wonsan and the Kumsong mountains. We were carefully minded, but there was no attempt to stop us from taking photographs. While digitizing those photographs recently, I was struck by the general absence of anything beyond the grand monuments of Pyongyang. In the rest of the country is bereft of it.

Of those museums which collect Asian art, including that of the Korean peninsula, few have ventured into the world of North Korean art. As the nation’s informal title suggests (the name should really be the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea), this is art which was produced around the time of the Korean War, as well as since that war’s conclusion in 1953. The regime which has run the country since then has been a totalitarian state, and as such has kept close control over output exists to benefit the state, and must be instantly understandable to the populace. It is partly because of the status of the art output of North Korea that museums tend to “shops,” or arts and crafts centers.

If you were to draw a line from Sinuiju to Kungsan, where the light water reactors were being constructed by KEDO, I visited all the major cities below that line, many villages, a number of factories and collective farms, schools, and more orphanages and hospitals than I could remember. I went to party offices, local government offices and factories, such as they were. And of art, I saw precious little. Occasion-
the entire period from right after liberation to the present.

Towards the end of the colonial period, Korea’s tongyonghwa did closely resemble Japanese Nihonga in all technical aspects. This is especially true for the first half of the 1940s, the period of the Pacific War, when the arts on the peninsula were instrumentalized as war tools, and what is it today? The discussion of such basic questions involves, perhaps surprising to some, historical as well as highly political issues—and this is not just limited to brush painting in the North. During the colonial period (1910–1945) the term tongyonghwa was introduced, meaning as much as Eastern-style painting, which late-colonial Europe usually called Oriental painting. While Japan took the liberty of calling its own modernized version of brush painting Japanese-style nihonga (as this is what Europe usually means), its colonies Taiwan and Korea were deprived of terms which referred to their national identities.

On the theoretical front, the complex relationship of such developments to modernity and international modernism within the context of nationalism, politics, and cultural preservation will be discussed. We will question the conventional wisdom of viewing modern Korean art, both in the North and in the South, as subaltern modernism, a remake of Western art movements (be it Soviet socialist realism or the latest trends from New York), or as an unfinished modernization project. Essential pieces of the Korean modernity puzzle do not quite fit Western constructs and are therefore simply abandoned in mainstream art-historical writing from and about Korea. The causes for such a dilemma seem to lead us to the Western concept of modernity itself, which is constructed against the concept of tradition and idealized as such as a social construct. It implies that modernity (as a social concept) came to seem to lead us to the Western concept of modernity itself, which is constructed against the concept of tradition and idealized as such as a social construct. It implies that modernity (as a social concept) came as a dual revolution, political and industrial-technical, with the arts being part of both.

Even the equation “modernism equals democracy” is at hand, since it was at least propagated after World War II as part of the campaign to establish abstract art as an expression of political freedom (vs. socialist realist in Eastern Europe). It thereby obscures the history of modernism in Korea and elsewhere in Asia and challenges realities in both Korean nations. The treatment of main periods of DPRK art production is based on two fieldwork excursions to North Korea, as well as interviews with scholars attached to the musical instrument collective and with performers at the Pyongyang Music and Dance University.

Kchosonhwa, the North Korean state ideology of “self-reliance,” demands a blend of the international and the local. Hence, since the 1960s, a musical instrument collective has revised and developed traditional instruments, creating hybrids known as Kaeryang Akki (“improved” instruments). While some instruments were considered too closely allied to the aristocracy and were abandoned, others have incorporated much of their Western instrumental counterparts; keywork on flutes and oboes allows an increase from pentatonic to chromatic sound-worlds, silk strings have been replaced with nylon on zithers, and the Haegum two-stringed fiddle has gained two strings and multiplied into four types to match the string section of a Western orchestra. These “improved” instruments are considered to retain old sound timbres, and are most commonly found in music based on folk traditions or in scenes portraying life in old Korea in revolutionary operas and people’s operas. The paper explores the ideological rhetoric, and the application of terms such as socialist realism in mainstream literature are perfect examples for this possible theoretical, almost—but-not-quite, is-modern-or-what dilemma. We will check our toolbox, see what can be done to make a little more sense of chosonhwa, and show how it all connects.

Towards the end of the colonial period, Korea’s tongyonghwa did closely resemble Japanese Nihonga in all technical aspects. This is especially true for the first half of the 1940s, the period of the Pacific War, when the arts on the peninsula were instrumentalized as war propaganda tools by the Japanese authorities. In this paper I examine the sixty years of North Korean postage stamp issuing policy between 1946 and 2006. North Korean philatelic image and policy are examined in order to determine what light philatelic policy and output sheds on issues like a) North Korea’s incorporation of postage stamps into its propaganda machine, particularly with respect to the origins and nature of the Kim Il Sung cult and its imagery, b) visual representations of North Korea’s construction of a new, North Korean historical meta-narrative, c) North Korea’s attempts to project certain foreign policy initiatives and national(ist) images abroad, and d) North Korea’s cooption of philatelic marketing to earn foreign currency. The paper tries to demonstrate and document how, over time, North Korea has succeeded in adapting “monumental” art to the sanitized confines of postal paper, all in the service of state propaganda and hard currency earnings.

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With over four decades of history, the mosaic murals of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are amenable to many but not all types of art-historical analysis. Access is the issue. Lack of access to commission records, production sites and the primary audience limits what can be said about the creation and reception of these works of art. This paper therefore falls back on one of the most traditional approaches to art history: visual analysis informed by social history. The reinforcement of nationalist rhetoric is achieved through the invocation of Kim Il Sung's central role in the liberation struggle, the celebration of North Korean soldiers' (and children's) sacrifices for the nation, the promotion of hatred toward the perpetrators of the conflict (the United States and South Korea) and scorn for their South Korean puppet army, and the bitter recollection of the Japanese colonial period—all these themes are used to emphasize the significance of the Korean War as an anti-colonial struggle. The illustrations that accompany the children's books' texts are central to understanding how the narrative works to inculcate nationalism.

I contextualize the visual illustrations through a comparative perspective using a fascist aesthetic that exists as a cultural ideology which is not necessarily framed by political fascism. I consider the depictions of aesthetic violence, stoic beauty and the sacrifices of North Korean soldiers and children in order to try and understand what role such images play in instilling the child reader/viewer with a bonding experience that leads to empowerment and contributes to the rebirth and regeneration of the North Korean nation.

Dahra Zur
Art and war: the Korean War in children's picture books of the DPRK
Sept. 4, 2010, 5:10 p.m.

My presentation examines North Korean children's books published from the postwar period to the early 1980s. I show how text and illustrations work together to participate in the nation-building narrative. The visual analysis contributes to the understanding of the role of the Korean War within the framework of the Cold War. I compare and contrast the portrayal of the war in the novels and picture books with those of the West. The emphasis on political and military history is replaced by a focus on the role of the Korean women and the Korean War within the framework of the Cold War. The visual analysis contributes to the understanding of the role of the Korean War within the framework of the Cold War. The emphasis on political and military history is replaced by a focus on the role of the Korean women and the political legacy of the war within the Cold War framework.

Aidan Foster-Carter
Korea and war: the Korean War in children's picture books
Sept. 4, 2010, 4:50 p.m.

Koen De Ceuster lectures in modern and contemporary Korean history at Leiden University, the Netherlands. He is an expert on contemporary Korean art and culture, and his work is largely informed by his experience in Korea. He has written extensively on Korean art and culture, and his work has been published in a number of journals and books.

De Ceuster has also been involved in the international art world, and has worked with a number of galleries and museums. He has given lectures and presentations on Korean art and culture at a number of universities and conferences, and has contributed to a number of publications on the subject. In addition to his work as a scholar, he is also involved in the promotion of Korean art and culture through the arts.

Biographies

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Sonja Häußler is a Professor of East Asian Economy and Society at the University of Vienna. She is an expert on contemporary Korean art and culture, and has written extensively on the subject. She has also worked with a number of galleries and museums, and has given lectures and presentations on Korean art and culture at a number of universities and conferences. In addition to her work as a scholar, she is also involved in the promotion of Korean art and culture through the arts.
Kate Hext completed her PhD on Walter Pater in 2009 at Exeter University, where she is organizing a conference entitled Rehearsing the Light: Literature & Philosophy, 1850–1910, to take place in September 2010. She is UK book reviews editor for the new journal Victorionographies, and has lectured widely in the field of aestheticism, most recently in Hong Kong. Her interests also extend to Henry James, T S Eliot, modernism, the Hollywood musical and running.

James E. Hoare has a PhD in Japanese history from the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, and has joined the Research Analysts of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1969. He worked mainly on China and Korea, and was posted to the British Embassy Seoul (1981–95) and Beijing (1988–91). T S Eliot, modernism, the Hollywood musical and running. His research interests include 1) Korean historical linguistics, 2) Korean language pedagogy, and 3) history of language, writing and literary culture in the “Sinographic cosmopolis,” with a specific focus on medieval Korea and the interplay of cosmopolitan and vernacular in other regions of the Sinographic cultural sphere. His contribution to this conference is offered in compensation for all the time and money he wasted collecting stamps in his youth. Web: http://www.asia.ubc.ca/people/faculty/rongxiao.html Email: rongxiao@interchange.ubc.ca

Keith Howard is Professor and Associate Dean, Research, at Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney and Professor of Music at SOAS, University of London. He has written and edited 16 books on Korean Studies and Art History at the Korea Yearbook, coeditors of the published by Brill. His research interests include 1) Korean historical linguistics, 2) Korean language pedagogy, and 3) history of language, writing and literary culture in the “Sinographic cosmopolis,” with a specific focus on medieval Korea and the interplay of cosmopolitan and vernacular in other regions of the Sinographic cultural sphere. His contribution to this conference is offered in compensation for all the time and money he wasted collecting stamps in his youth. Web: http://www.asia.ubc.ca/people/faculty/rongxiao.html Email: rongxiao@interchange.ubc.ca

Brian R. Myers was born in the US, educated in South Africa and Germany, and is now living in South Korea. He specializes in the research of North Korea's official culture, a subject on which he has written for the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal and other newspapers. Myers's books include Han Sonya and North Korean Literature (East Asia Series, 1994). The Chinese strategy of Forging the Kyrgyz Manas: Intangible Cultural Prop. He is also a contributing editor of the American magazine The Atlantic, for which he writes literary criticism. Web: http://www.asia.ubc.ca/people/faculty/rongxiao.html Email: rongxiao@interchange.ubc.ca

Jane Portal studied Chinese at Cambridge and went on to spend a year at Beijing University as one of the first foreign students to be allowed to attend courses in Chinese archaeology there in 1979–80. She was subsequently employed as a curator at the British Museum for 21 years, during which time she took a second degree in Korean at SOAS London, studying for a year in Seoul. She provided the permanent Korea Foundation Gallery at the British Museum, which opened in 2000, and subsequently visited North Korea twice in 2001 and 2002. She was then given overall responsibility for the Korean linguistic thought in Korea, Korean language and nationalism, and Korean language ideologies. 4) Korean language pedagogy, and 5) history of language, writing and literary culture in the “Sinographic cosmopolis,” with a specific focus on medieval Korea and the interplay of cosmopolitan and vernacular in other regions of the Sinographic cultural sphere. His contribution to this conference is offered in compensation for all the time and money he wasted collecting stamps in his youth. Web: http://www.asia.ubc.ca/people/faculty/rongxiao.html Email: rongxiao@interchange.ubc.ca

Dafna Zur is a graduate student at the University of Columbia, where she is completing her dissertation on the participation of children's literature in developing the nation-building discourses in Korea from 1920 until 1950. Her interests lie broadly with the childhood literature of North and South Korea. Her work on the depictions of the Korean War in North and South Korean children's literature has been published by International Research in Children's Literature (December 2006) and the Korea Yearbook 2010 (forthcoming). Web: http://www.asia.ubc.ca/people/faculty/rongxiao.html Email: rongxiao@interchange.ubc.ca
Panel 1: Introducing North Korean Art

2:00–2:10 p.m. Rüdiger Frank, Introduction
2:10–2:30 p.m. Aidan Foster-Carter and Kate Hext, DPRK arts and culture: function and reception
2:30–2:50 p.m. Koen De Ceuster, The genius of the North Korean artist in theory and practice
2:50–3:10 p.m. Brian Myers, The Strong and Prosperous Country Campaign in narrative and visual propaganda
3:10–3:40 p.m. Coffee break
3:40–3:50 p.m. Discussant: Frank Hoffmann
3:50–4:30 p.m. Q&A
4:30–5:00 p.m. Coffee break

Panel 2: Exhibiting North Korean Art

5:00–5:20 p.m. James Hoare, The People’s Art Galleries: posters and monuments in the DPRK
5:20–5:40 p.m. Jane Portal, On the challenges of forming a museum collection of North Korean art
5:40–6:00 p.m. Coffee break
6:00–6:10 p.m. Discussant: Marsha Haufler
6:10–6:40 p.m. Q&A

Panel 3: Examples of North Korean Art (1)

2:00–2:20 p.m. Frank Hoffmann, Props and pops: delineating North Korean brush painting
2:20–2:40 p.m. Keith Howard, Redefining Koreanness: North Korean musicology and “improved” Korean instruments
2:40–3:00 p.m. Ross King, “Monuments writ small”: the politics of North Korean philatelic imagery
3:00–3:30 p.m. Coffee break
3:30–3:40 p.m. Discussant: Sonja Häußler
3:40–4:20 p.m. Q&A
4:20–4:50 p.m. Coffee break

Panel 4: Examples of North Korean Art (2)

4:50–5:10 p.m. Marsha Haufler, Mosaics in North Korea
5:10–5:30 p.m. Dafna Zur, Art and war: the Korean War in children’s picture books of the DPRK
5:30–5:50 p.m. Coffee break
5:50–6:00 p.m. Discussant: Brian Myers
6:00–6:30 p.m. Q&A