

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2013

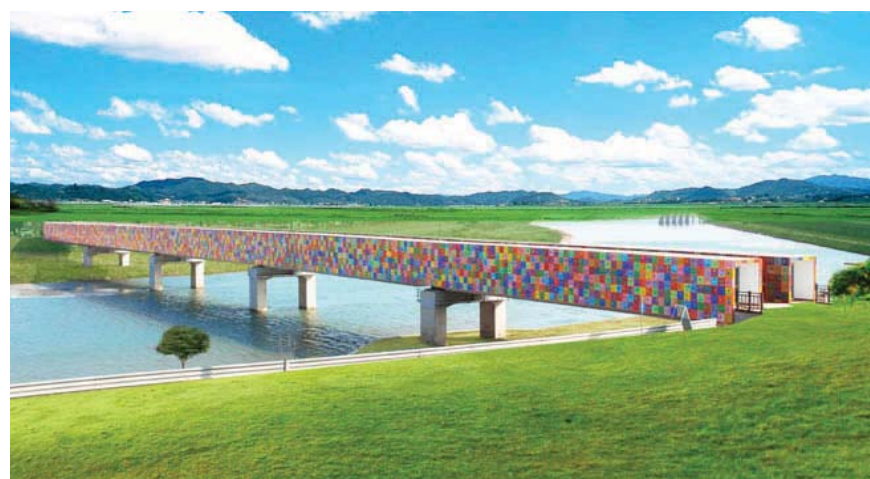
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05

ARTIST TALK LOUNGE

The Dream Believer, Ik-Joong Kang



The bridge of dream

Photo by Jeong yul lee

The New York-based artist, Ik-Joong Kang, 53, recently was the creator and architect of "The Bridge of Dream," at the 2013 Suncheon Garden Expo in South Korea. The exhibition closed on October 20 after a six-month run, drawing over 4 million visitors. Now the Bridge is a permanent installation. At the Expo, under the theme of "Garden of the Earth," the 175 foot long covered bridge was the world's first art museum above the water. It connects the east and west of Suncheon city, 415 kilometers south of Seoul.

Mr. Kang designed the interior of the bridge with approximately 145,000 children's drawings (each 3x3 inches) titled "My Dream" from children in 16 countries, and the exterior wall with his own paintings (50x50 cm) of poems titled "Things I Know," written by the artist in the Hangeul, Korean alphabet. The bridge was inspired by Korean traditional house architecture.

As an homage to Nam June Paik, the late Korean-born American video artist, who was a mentor to Mr. Kang, the bridge included a window with a television monitor.

Mr. Kang is well known for his paintings of Korean moon jars, Hangeul calligraphy, 3x3 inch paintings and mosaic style installations. He won a Special Merit Award at the 1997 Venice Biennale. His public artwork, "Happy World," is installed at the Main Street subway station in Flushing, Queens. Recently I visited his studio in a penthouse in Chinatown where he works and lives with his wife, Margaret Lee and a son, Keeho. His dog, Hudson Kang, perfectly named as 'kang' means 'river' in Korean, is walking around him and the visitor briskly. Hudson is a jindo dog, a breed of hunting dog originally from Jindo Island in Korea.

Q: How did you conceive "The Bridge of Dream"?



Photo by Sukie Park

A: I thought building a bridge connecting east and west of Suncheon will make my dream come true of building a bridge over the Imjin River crossing between North and South Korea. Like the way John A. Roebling built a smaller suspension bridge over the Ohio River before he made his masterpiece, the Brooklyn Bridge. I have dreamed of building a bridge over the Imjin River, which has been separating two countries for more than half a century.

Q: Hangeul and moon jar became your signature.

A: When a consonant meets a vowel, it makes a single sound. I think the structure of Hangeul contains peace and harmony. In a way, Hangeul is the key promise of the connection of two Koreas and healing the world. Just like a moon jar is made by attaching top and bottom forms in the fire. Children's dreams fill the bridge, and anyone who walks on the bridge will be sent to

the future. This is the bridge of past, present and future.

Q: How did you come up with the idea of 3x3 inch painting?

A: I came to New York in 1984 and I was an impoverished art student at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, working 12 hours a day at a Korean grocery store in Manhattan and also as a watchman at a flea market in Far Rockaway, Queens. As a way to utilize time on the long subway rides, I made miniature drawings which fit easily into my pockets and into the palm of my hand. I recorded my immediate responses in a foreign city, and the subway train became my mobile studio.

Q: What could you become, if not an artist?

A: Probably, I must have been a chef. I cook breakfast and dinner every day!

Q: What is the role of an artist today?

A: "Contemporary art should connect peo

ple and heal. An artist should awake sleeping souls.

Q: What is next?

A: These days I'm working on the project of 'Samramansang' (which means all things in nature, in Korean). Samramansang is everything around me and within me. It includes the things I never imagined. Samramansang is like a bowl of Bibimbap. We throw everything together to make it better. In spring I'm going to show a mural titled 'Things I Know' at the Queens Museum of Art. It will be made of 30,000 drawings from children in New York. Also, I'll be showing my recent works themed 'Buncheong' at the Kang Collection gallery in New York in March 2014.