

Park Chan-Kyong & Sean Snyder

Brinkmanship



PARK CHAN-KYONG,
Three Cemeteries,
2009–10, three
photographs, text,
audio, 81.3 x 135.9 cm
each. Courtesy the artist
and PKM Gallery, Seoul.

The term “brinkmanship” was coined during the Cold War to describe the militaristic and political manipulation of a dangerous situation in order to gain an eventual advantage. “Brinkmanship” at REDCAT, featuring video and photographic works by Park Chan-Kyong and Sean Snyder, explored the tensions at the border of North and South Korea and the remnants of Cold War politics. Park, born in 1965 in Seoul, and Snyder, born in 1972 in the United States, first met in 2002, when they participated in the Gwangju Biennale. Friendship and a common interest in North Korea served as impetus for this exhibition.

The show opened with two newly commissioned works. Park’s *Three Cemeteries* (2009–10) is a stark photographic triptych of three South Korean grave sites in varying degrees of dignity near the dividing line of the 151 mile-long, 2.5 mile-wide Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). They range from neatly lined tombstones for those separated from their North Korean homes due to the 1948 partition, to an unmarked pit for Korean sex workers based in US military camps. Headphones under each photograph filtered in ambient, environmental sounds recorded from the three deserted sites, transporting the viewer beyond the terse captions and austere documentary presentation.

Based in Tokyo and Kiev, Snyder throughout his career has focused on Cold War politics as well as the formation and presentation of information and its repercussions—a difficult and convoluted topic when applied to the restrictive, ideologically driven media of North Korea. *Smoke in Mirrors* (2009–10) is a re-edited video compilation of 2009 newscasts acquired by Snyder from the website of the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), Pyongyang’s mouthpiece. Snyder noticed the agency’s propensity to portray the outside world as a horrific place, and the artist’s

piece is made up of a series of choppy spliced scenes of natural disasters and scientists carrying out bizarre lab experiments. Watching this project take shape, Park noted that he had never seen these broadcasts as KCNA’s website is banned in South Korea, an irony that plays perfectly into Snyder’s exposure of political maneuvering in the dissemination of information.

Other works from Snyder’s oeuvre were included to further elucidate his critique of information-gathering and its accompanying politics. *Casio, Seiko, Sheraton, Toyota, Mars* (2004–05) is a 13-minute film of moving and still images concerning the tools of war and their representation. Snyder’s voiceover provides a litany of facts—that Casio, for example, is the typical terrorist’s time-telling device, and that Panasonic is the video camera of choice on the battlefield—that ultimately accuse the brands of complicity in the US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Park’s work focuses on the divide between the two Koreas and tends to infuse the partition with an unlikely nostalgia and wistfulness. The two-channel video *Power Passage* (2004–10) features clips of popular American films loosely based on the Space Race between the US and the former USSR beginning in the late 1950s and culminating with the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project of 1975—the first joint space flight by the Americans and Soviets and an important step in the advancement of international cooperation during the Cold War. An adjacent monitor showed footage from within the interior of the controversial infiltration tunnels (underground passageways at the DMZ that each side claims the other dug) first discovered in 1975, the same year as the cooperative space flight.

Regarding such measures towards reconciliation, Park conveyed his dismay in a 2008 conversation with Clara Kim, co-curator of the show with Doryun Chong of New York’s Museum of Modern Art, stating that in a time when China and Taiwan have announced direct flights and the Berlin Wall has fallen, Korea remains deeply divided. *Power Passage*’s pairing of a wartime activity and its eventual step toward alliance encapsulates Park’s vexed optimism for a Hollywood happy ending in Korea. ● **Jennifer Li**

SEAN SNYDER,
A Revisionist Model of Solidarity, 2004–05,
multimedia installation,
dimensions variable.
Courtesy Galerie Neu,
Berlin, Galerie Chantal
Crousel, Paris, and
Lisson Gallery, London.

