



YEON JIN KIM DISJOINTED FABLES

August 27–September 29, 2019

 **ALBRIGHT**
Freedman Gallery



Top: Image still from *Ghost in the Yellow House*, 2018 single-channel video 20:01 minutes
Bottom: Image still from *Monster Me*, 2019 single-channel video 13:21 minutes

Yeon Jin Kim often layers memories with subtle disconcerting states of humor. Her work consists of a variety of mediums, but utilizing unusual materials in traditional techniques is a thread that carries throughout her oeuvre. The exhibition at Albright College's Freedman Gallery, *Disjointed Fables* is a small survey of Kim's multidisciplinary practice, highlighting her textiles, cut-paper works, animated drawings, short-films and includes some film sets, providing the exhibition viewers insight to her process as well as practice.

Two short films are included in the exhibit: a horror-comedy *Monster Me*, steeped in a narrative surrounding a creature born from a geyser in Yellowstone National Park, and *Ghost in the Yellow House* another unsettling account that is based off the lived experience of her cousin. *Ghost in*

the Yellow House was an official selection at the South Europe International Film Festival in Spain, Glendale International Film Festival in California, and New Filmmakers in New York. *Monster Me* was an official selection at the Philadelphia Asian American Film Festival and Veritas Film Festival in Pennsylvania and received an honorable mention at the London-Worldwide Comedy Short Festival.

Kim states, "The creation of otherworldly realms and unusual situations can often shed light on our real lives more effectively than a direct consideration of them might. The distance created and the skewed perspective that results can provide the opportunity to view the familiar in new ways. In my work, regardless of how fantastical the setting or events, the underlying thematics always refer back to contemporary life."



Jogakbo #3, 2019 68 x 60" hand sewn drug bags, detail image

In *Disjointed Fables*, Kim invites viewers into an exploration of Korean traditions and social-political histories through two new bodies of work never previously exhibited. The *Jogakbo* series employs drug paraphernalia sewn into quilted textiles, and a textbook project using books taken from her elementary education under the rule of a dictator.

Now living in New York, Kim has a greater understanding and appreciation of the Korean aesthetics and traditions that she was immersed in as a child. Although in grade school she was presented with the Western ideals of beauty which stemmed from a colonized past, she states she was always drawn to the beauty of Korean pottery and textiles even though the societal norms declared them less interesting.

Kim was inspired to work on the *Jogakbo* series by her aunt who owned a traditional garment store and gifted Kim's mother a *Jogakbo* when the artist was just a child. Recalling her amazement with how her aunt transformed scraps of fabric into something with astonishing color, composition, and elegance, she was moved to start a *Jogakbo* of her own.

Jogakbos are used as attractive ways to present modest gifts more beautifully. Kim describes

this as "a poor people's art form." These remarkable fabrics were produced for families to present themselves in the best light possible. When the families of the elite presented their gifts with the finest silks available, families with lower economic status could still have a riveting presentation. The slightly irregular geometric patterning, and the materials used to enhance the transparency, bring to mind stained glass windows or Piet Mondrian's abstractions. However, Kim states that her aesthetics are greatly influenced by the 18th and 19th century Joseon Dynasty.

Another series in the exhibit utilizes textbooks that were used for home economics classes in Kim's early education. These classes were only for girls, who were taught domestic skills such as sewing and cooking. Kim resented taking these classes purely based on her gender, but she truly enjoyed the sewing.



Home Economics For Girls, 2019 8.25 x 5.5" Korean textbook published in 1980 burnt by a magnifying glass and sun

Kim states, “when I was about nine or ten, I used to go to a swimming class and had to take a bus by myself. I discovered a protest poster on the bus that read ‘Overthrow the Dictator Jeon Doo Hwan’s Government’ and ‘Murderer Jeon Doo Hwan to Prison.’ I was shocked because I had been taught, and thoroughly believed, that President Jeon Doo Hwan was our savior from the monstrous communists in North Korea. Without him, my country, South Korea would fall into the hands of the evil North Koreans who would take away our freedoms and private property. We would then be sent to labor camps and be tortured. This was all written in my school textbook. I could not understand why people would want him to go to prison.

When I got home, I asked my mother, ‘Is our President Jeon a murderer?’ Then, I saw the terror on her face. She turned pale, and with a shivering voice, asked: “where did you hear that?” I told her I saw it on the bus and asked her why people wanted to get rid of him. I also asked her if he really killed anybody.

My mother did not answer my questions, but she told me never to tell anyone what I had seen. She said that if I said anything about the experience, something really horrible would

happen to the family. She said it in such a fright that I never said anything about it to anyone until I went to college years later.

Jeon, who became president through a military coup, eventually received a life prison sentence in 1996 for organizing the Massacre of Gwangju in 1980, killing 606 people and arresting 1,394 more, many of whom received either death sentences or life in prison.

In 1997, the supreme court reduced Jeon’s sentence to 20 years, fined him 220 billion Korean won, which is roughly equivalent to 340 million current U.S. dollars, for Leading an Insurrection, Conspiracy to Commit Insurrection, Taking Part in an Insurrection, Illegal Troop Movement Orders, Dereliction of Duty During Martial Law, Murder of Superior Officers, Attempted Murder of Superior Officers, Murder of Subordinate Troops, Leading a Rebellion, Conspiracy to Commit Rebellion, Taking Part in a Rebellion, and Murder for the Purpose of Rebellion, as well as assorted crimes relating to bribery.

He ended up paying less than half of the fine, saying he only had 290,000 won in his bank account, which is equivalent to less than 280 U.S. dollars. He is still alive and well today, playing golf.”

The Freedman Gallery at Albright College, named after former Albright trustee and alumna Doris Chanin Freedman, is located on the ground floor of the Center for the Arts. Since its inception, the gallery focuses primarily on contemporary, living, American artists and hosts approximately twelve exhibitions each year rotating in the Main Gallery, Project Space, and Foyer Gallery. Freedman Gallery is located at 13th & Bern Streets, Reading, Pennsylvania 19612. Gallery Hours are Tuesday-Friday 9 a.m.-5 p.m. and Sunday 1-4 p.m. The gallery is closed on Mondays, holidays, breaks and summer.

Founded in 1856, Albright College is a diverse community of learners cultivating integrity, curiosity, connection and resilience. The college's flexible curriculum encourages students to combine and cross majors to create individualized academic programs. Close faculty mentorship and numerous experiential learning options create opportunities for Albright graduates to exceed their own expectations. Located in Reading, Pennsylvania, Albright enrolls more than 1,600 full-time undergraduates and 700 adult learners and graduate students.

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Text written by Alana J. Coates, Curator of Collections & Exhibitions,
Freedman Gallery and Artist Yeon Jin Kim.

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Cover image: *Jogakbo #2* 2019, hand-sewn plastic bags 36 x 48" image courtesy of artist