

Jin-me Yoon

Hauntings of self and migration.

by Lyn Richards

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Jin-me Yoon, "Long View" series (detail), 2017, six chromogenic prints, 33" x 55.5" each (collection of the artist)

Jin-me Yoon has that troublesome habit of artists and children: asking questions that point to contradictions and self-deceptions in our treasured beliefs about ourselves. She leads us through a forensic process of deconstructing cultural myths, asking apparently innocuous questions with humility, curiosity and, sometimes, cheeky humour.

The Korean-born Vancouver artist's first retrospective, *Here Elsewhere Other Hauntings*, on view at the Kamloops Art Gallery in the B.C. Interior until July 2, includes her first major work, *Souvenirs of the Self*. Originally created as a set of six tourist-style postcards, it is also mounted here as nearly life-size photographic prints.

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Jin-me Yoon, "Souvenirs of the Self," 2019 (1991), inkjet prints on laminated polyester (collection of the artist, photo by SITE Photography)

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Jin-me Yoon, "Souvenirs of the Self," 2019 (1991), a project of six postcards (collection of the Kamloops Arts Gallery, photo by SITE Photography)



Yoon's stiff, awkward poses in front of iconic Banff landmarks query the terms of inclusion in Canada's vaunted multicultural society for a visibly non-white immigrant like herself. When she lifts a corner of the flag draping our cultural institutions and national economic drivers, we glimpse a dark underbelly to national identity, one where tourism and national parks are entangled with colonial assumptions of *terra nullius* and the exclusionary potential of nationalism.



Installation view of “Jin-me Yoon: Here Elsewhere Other Hauntings” at the Kamloops Art Gallery, 2022 (photo by SITE Photography)

As It Is Becoming reflects the traumatic familial history that sensitizes Yoon to these concerns. Angled screens scattered across the gallery floor lead us dizzily through Yoon’s performances, crawling through the streets of Seoul and Beppu, Japan, under a huge, inverted video high on the wall that foregrounds her unnerving vulnerability. Her bandaged hands and palpable exhaustion profoundly express the Korean experience under Japanese occupation, which was soon followed by the Korean War, further eroding safety and dividing families. Yoon’s quiet embodiment of suffering offers a cool contrast to the gratuitous self-display of some contemporary performance artists. Her work deflects attention from herself as an individual; she becomes an anonymous pointer directing our gaze to the locales of pain, perhaps less to indict than to show where healing is needed.

Is Yoon’s intention always apparent to viewers? Perhaps not. But Yoon is clear that her approach is not documentary; she creates poetic associations like glances caught in peripheral vision, deliberately left open and unresolved. Without her statements, the works are opaque. Juxtaposed images without inherent connection may provoke viewers to construct their own narratives. Perhaps this is the best way to view her works: in the lyrical, associative flow through which they are created, without straining after meaning. Her statements are necessary, however, to tether the stories we invent to the social and moral questions that have driven her practice over the last three decades.



Jin-me Yoon, “Dreaming Birds Know No Borders,” 2021, single-channel video, colour and sound, 7:22 min. (collection of the artist, photo by SITE Photography)

Yoon’s focus on social justice issues and lens-based performative strategies evokes West Coast conceptualism, yet her work often stands and sings in beauty. Notably, her single-channel video *Dreaming Birds Know No Borders* counterposes dreamy, disintegrating images of birds in the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea with sharp, mundane images of contemporary observers looking towards the zone, crosscut with a young man absorbed in traditional dance on a beach. The purposeful grace of his crane dance carries all the spirit that is absent in the aimless, mechanical rushing back-and-forth of dozens of soldiers spilling out of a sandpile on a beach in *Testing Ground* – a comic image that carves close to tragic reality. Yoon’s gentle humour is also apparent in her mischievous winks at the work of a varied lot of other artists, including Alex Colville, John Baldessari and Bruce Nauman, that are scattered throughout her oeuvre.

Here Elsewhere Other Hauntings has the chief virtue of a good retrospective: the 10 works selected by the curator, Anne-Marie St-Jean Aubre, for the Musée d’art de Joliette in Quebec, reveal the evolution of the artist through her work. Representative rather than comprehensive, this three-decade survey of one of Canada’s most eminent photographic artists – just announced as the **winner** of this year’s Scotiabank Photography Award – confirms that Yoon has dedicated her career to asking difficult questions. But Yoon doesn’t want to provide answers: she prefers that we query the problematic assumptions contained in received ideas, and consider how we may address these to heal ourselves, our society and our world. ■

Jin-me Yoon, *Here Elsewhere Other Hauntings*, at the Kamloops Art Gallery from April 23 to July 2, 2022.

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Lyn Richards

Lyn Richards earned a BFA from Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, B.C., after a career as a clinical psychologist. Her art explores environmental and social justice issues in various media and large-scale installations.

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