

Checkpoint

Border Views from Korea

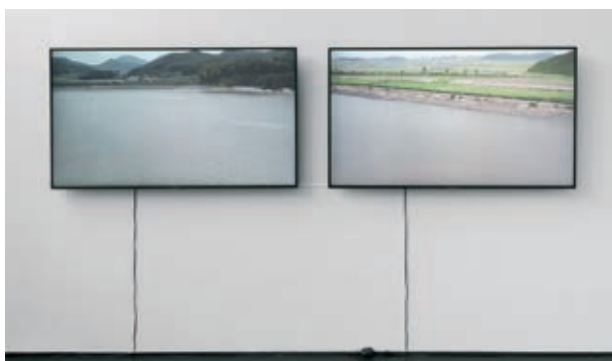
May 21 – September 18, 2022

The division between North and South Korea, the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between the two states, and the prospect of a possible common future: Based on these three thematic complexes, the exhibition *Checkpoint. Border Views from Korea* brings together artworks by Korean and non-Korean artists from the fields of painting, sculpture, installation, photography, and video. They deal with the politically and culturally complex situation and offer insights into life experiences with visible and invisible borders.



Kyungah Ham, *What you see is the unseen / Chandeliers for Five Cities BC 02-04 and BC 02-05*, 2014 – 2016

The large-format embroideries by **Kyungah Ham** (b. 1966) were inspired by a North Korean flyer that the Seoul-born artist found by chance in front of her house. The visually impressive, often multi-part works were made by North Korean seamstresses, with whom Ham established contact through intermediaries. They worked secretly over a period of several years on the individual tableaus, which feature, among other things, chandeliers against a black background. A closer look at the material details of the exhibited works provides an idea of the circumstances under which the embroideries were meticulously realized: Censorship, fear, and smuggling were part of the work process to realize the images, since the everyday life of North Koreans, strictly regulated by the government, stands in clear contrast to the liberal-democratic and highly digitalized world of their South Korean neighbors.



Mischa Leinkauf, *Northern Limit Line (North Korea, South Korea)*, 2019

The two-channel video work *Northern Limit Line (North Korea, South Korea)* by **Mischa Leinkauf** (b. 1977) visualizes the border crossing between North and South Korea from a bird's eye view. The video was created in 2019 with the help of a drone flying over the Han River. Before flowing into the sea, the body of water runs through the border area between the two countries, also known, from a South Korean perspective, as the Northern Limit Line. The border between the two Korean nations is one of the best guarded areas in the world. Nevertheless, with his video work, Mischa Leinkauf managed to cross it with the drone and to question the human-made border between North and South Korea.

Lee Bul's (b. 1964) sculpture *Aubade V* consists, among other things, of the steel remains of a demolished guard post of the DMZ. Different flickering light signals emanate from the work, but their possible meaning can only be deciphered to a limited extent. These are messages transmitted in Morse code as well as in the International Signal Code. Such codes are used, for example, in the context of military operations to protect against enemy interception maneuvers. The title *Aubade* (a morning song) refers, among other things, to forms of medieval lyric poetry and the secret togetherness of two (loving) people as well as their parting in the morning.

Aernout Mik (b. 1962) first learned about the so-called Ice Cream Hill in 2012, when he took part in a tourist DMZ tour during a trip to South Korea. Ice Cream Hill is actually called Sapseelbong Peak. The approximately 219-meter highland received its "nickname" from American soldiers because its shape, which has been altered by bomb impacts, is reminiscent of melting ice cream. In Aernout Mik's two-channel video installation *Ice Cream Hill*, Sapseelbong Peak becomes the setting for two groups of young people who meet on the hill to eat and have a good time together. When one person puts on an army uniform, the mood changes visibly. The situation between the now rival youths gradually comes to a head, threatening to escalate. *Ice Cream Hill* resembles a role-playing game in which the boundaries between play and seriousness, truth and fiction merge.



Aernout Mik, *Ice Cream Hill*, 2014 – 2015



Noh Suntag, *Red-House I* #BFK036, 2005

The photographs of mass events taken by **Noh Suntag** (b. 1971) in North Korea as part of the so-called Arirang Festival—choreographies staged and regulated by the North Korean state with up to 100,000 participants, which primarily serve to pay homage to the former North Korean rulers Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il and are intended to express state conformity—only appear perfectly executed at first glance. On closer inspection, subtle, individual deviations in the poses and movements of the dancers become apparent, leading to minor disruptions in the elaborately choreographed image of the masses.



Tobias Rehberger, *Duplex House*, 2017 (ongoing)

The *Duplex House* conceived by **Tobias Rehberger** (b. 1966) recapitulates the history of the two Korean nations: While the entrance area of the miniature model stands for the common past, the separate rooms of the first floor embody the present division. The top floor, however, sketches a future version in which Korea is reunited in the hope that North and South Koreans will be able to live peacefully under one roof in the not-too-distant future.



Heinkuhn Oh, *A soldier standing on the water*, July 2011, 2011

For his *Middlemen* series, **Heinkuhn Oh** (b. 1963) photographed South Korean soldiers. What at first seems like a stereotypical depiction of purported military masculinity—characterized by strictness, determination, and a patriotic sense of duty—turns out upon closer inspection to be the exact opposite. The artist succeeds in subtly expressing photographically the suppressed fears, worries, and doubts about military service in the faces and postures of the young soldiers.



Sojung Jun, *Early Arrival of Future*, 2015

Sojung Jun's (b. 1982) *Early Arrival of Future* documents a process of conversations and joint exercises between the North Korean defector and pianist Cheol-woong Kim and the South Korean pianist Eun-kyung Uhm. In an attempt to overcome a seventy-year rift, both pianists sit in front of their instruments and talk about North and South Korean music, traveling back in time to their childhood. At the end of this process, the two pianists perform together. Their joint piece, *Sinabro*, is a melodic variation of traditional Korean folk songs, the harmonic arrangement of which can also be understood as a metaphor for the desired harmony between North and South Korea.



Minouk Lim, *It's a Name I Gave Myself*, 2018

To commemorate the thirty-third anniversary of the Korean War and thirty years after the armistice agreement between North and South Korea, a South Korean television station planned the program *Finding Separated Families*—with the aim of finding those families who had lost each other in the war. *It's a Name I Gave Myself* by **Minouk Lim** (b. 1968) shows the reunion of family members who were separated from each other and lost sight of each other at a young age.



Jane Jin Kaisen, *Sweeping the Forest Floor*, 2020

For the video work *Sweeping the Forest Floor*, **Jane Jin Kaisen** (b. 1980) attached a camera to a mine detector and tracked the device as it searched for landmines in a forest area within the Civilian Control Line. The Civilian Control Line is a military controlled buffer zone, which lies 5-20 km from the southern border of the DMZ. Mine experts estimate that between 1.1 and 1.2 million landmines have been laid in South Korea by the South Korean military and U.S. troops alone.

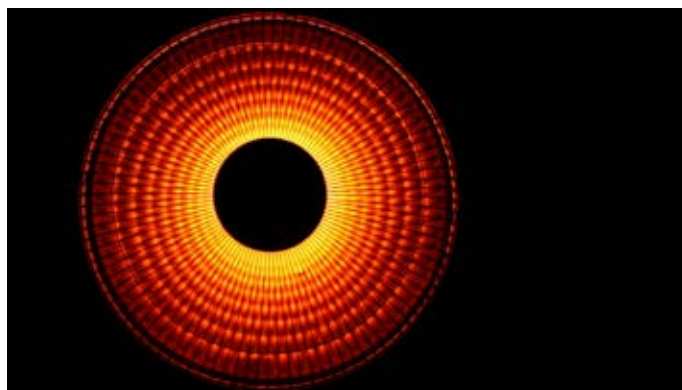
During a trip to the 38th parallel of Korea, **Jeewi Lee** (b. 1987) realized the work *INZISION (Incision)*, which consists of imprints of five selected trees from the South Korean border area. Using a traditional Asian printing process known as *takbon* printing, which uses ink to transfer patterns, reliefs, and shapes onto paper, Lee immortalized the imprints of the tree trunks on Korean hanji paper. The trees Lee selected existed before the division of Korea in 1945 and, according to the artist, are contemporary witnesses that serve as reminders of the horrors and traumas of the Korean War and the division of Korea.

In order to view the imprints more closely, visitors cannot avoid crossing the floor installation titled *FRAKTUR (Fracture)*, which consists of gray and white pebbles and divides the space diagonally into two halves, similar to a demarcation line. As the viewers walk across it, the stones inevitably intermingle, so that the original sharply drawn dividing line gradually dissolves. While *INZISION (Incision)* primarily focuses on the past and present of the two divided Korean states, *FRAKTUR (Fracture)* can be interpreted as a hopeful vision of the future of a reunited Korea.



Adrián Villar Rojas, *El momento más hermoso de la Guerra (The Most Beautiful Moment of War)*, 2017

In 2014, **Adrián Villar Rojas** (b. 1980) spent a month working on a film project in the small village of Yangji-ri in the Civilian Control Line. After the liberation of Korea in 1945, Yangji-ri was initially under communist leadership for several years. It eventually became part of South Korea after the Armistice Agreement in 1953. In the 1970s, the South Korean government began recruiting people to be resettled in Yangji-ri for the purpose of political propaganda against the North. Aware of the unique political and environmental conditions of the region, Villar Rojas invited the villagers to participate in a hybrid cinematic-theatrical experiment in which they themselves would become actors, and the entire village would become the backdrop. The result is *El momento más hermoso de la guerra* (The Most Beautiful Moment of War), a film in which the boundary between reality and fiction dissolves, and history and imagination are intricately linked.



Chan Sook Choi, *Artificial Sun*, 2017

The video installation *60 Ho* by **Chan Sook Choi** (b. 1977) highlights the personal narratives of women who settled in one of the 112 villages in the Civilian Control Line in the far north of South Korea. After the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, these villages, including Yangji-ri, were established for land development and propaganda purposes against North Korea. The title *60 Ho* refers to the people who are reduced to a mere number in this place. In *Artificial Sun*, heat fans can be seen, providing a warmth that exceeds that of the sun to the lives of the settlers in Yangji-ri—a place that is damp and cold even in summer.



Daejin Choi, *Last Chance*, 2021

The painting *Last Chance* by **Daejin Choi** (b. 1974) has a historical reference point. With the words "ONE KOREA" on his waistband, the Japanese-born North Korean boxer Hong Changsu (Masamori Tokuyama) faced the South Korean Cho Inju in the ring. The boxing match, held in Osaka in 2000, also marked—in addition to Hong's world title win—the first time a champion title was awarded to a North Korean boxer. This victor, who took South Korean citizenship in 2007, insisted that there was no 38th parallel in the ring. The dynamic painting depicts this encounter and the reinterpretation of the boxing match as reconciliation and connection.



Park Chan-kyong, *Sets*, 2005

Sets by **Park Chan-kyong** (b. 1965) is a slide-based work combining photographs of film sets in North and South Korea. Shots of sets at a film studio in South Korea, the North Korean Art Film Studio, and a set at a South Korean army base where military operations are simulated can be seen. Park also combines found footage in the approximately thirteen-minute short film *Flying*. It is footage of the Korean War and the flight that the South Korean President Kim Dae-jung took on his way to a summit meeting with the North Korean leader Kim Jong-il. The film offers a powerful illustration of the division of Korea and the changes that have taken place there over time.



Woosung Lee, *How are you doing? I'm doing well here*, 2021

In the summer of 2021, the painter **Woosung Lee** (b. 1983) traveled to Aegi Peak, a 154-meter-high hill in Gimpo, South Korea. Like Sapseelbong Peak, Aegi Peak was the site of fierce battles during the Korean War. For the work *How are you doing? I'm doing well here*, Lee painted a landscape on a pink fabric based on a scene which, due to dense clouds, he could only make out with a telescopic lens during his visit to Aegi Peak, looking down on North Korea.

The painting *Embrace* by **Min Jung-Ki** (b. 1949) depicts a scene in which two people meet in an intimate embrace at a cut barbed wire fence in the border area between North and South Korea. The painting has a strong metaphoric character and symbolizes the desire for the reunification of the two Korean states.



YOUNG-HAE CHANG HEAVY INDUSTRIES, *OUR DMZ*, 2022

With the video work *OUR DMZ*, the web art group **YOUNG-HAE CHANG HEAVY INDUSTRIES** (founded in 1999) addresses Ethiopia's complex involvement in the Korean War. With the beginning of the Cold War, Ethiopia took a frontline position as one of the most important allies of the United States and sent troop support to the South during the Korean War. The narrator in the video is Sunny Kim—an animated avatar—who is a fictional tour guide on the "DMZ ECO-FRIENDLY WELL-BEING BUS TOURS."

Haegue Yang's (b. 1971) sound installation *Genuine Cloning* consists of two different components. On the one hand, it is the soundtrack of a Korean summit meeting from 2018. Due to the long distance between the recording device and the speaker, however, not much more than birdsong can be heard. This chirping is played back between chapters of a spoken narrative, which is the second part of the work. The voice of the artist can be heard, but it is copied or cloned by artificial intelligence. The narration deals with natural phenomena, but also with structures of states, which are understood as systems of order in the world constructed by humans.

The wall-sized work by **Haegue Yang** titled *DMZ Un-Do* is a digitally generated collage. Pollen grains, barbed wire, robotic bees, solar cells, fans, lightning, and the graphic representation of a Lorenz attractor (a differential equation formulated by the meteorologist Edward N. Lorenz in 1963 to mathematically fathom the so-called butterfly effect) condense into a visually powerful and energy-charged landscape. The scene, in turn, refers to the border area of the DMZ, thematizing the tense relationship between a military prohibited zone and a retreat for nature.

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