

‘The Days Were Snowy but Warm’ by Oh Myung Hee

At Palazzo Mora (Venice) from April 2022

Diplomatic World: *The [European Cultural Centre](#) is hosting an exhibition of your works and installations in the framework of [Venice Biennale 2022](#). Why did you go for this project, or rather what inspired you to partake? How does this exhibition fit in your vision of your artistic path?*

OMH: My works are about human memories. At some point, as I grew older, I discovered my interest in the trajectory of human life and the joy in expressing it in my formative language. So on my canvas, both temporality and historicity came to naturally intersect. This ultimately led me to take part in the Venice Biennale organized by ECC, which showed its interest in nostalgia that exudes in my work. The work embodies the genuine memories of my ancestors, but I wanted to present this work at the Venice Biennale because it also talks about a theme that is inherent in all human beings, that speaks to everyone in the world. I am very excited to showcase my work to many cultural and artistic figures on the global stage and European art circles. I believe that my experience in Venice will allow me to take on a new challenge in my path as an artist.

Diplomatic World: *The themes behind your art are personal yet also convey general societal messages such as the emancipation of women from very rigid patriarchal societies such as Korea. Do tell us a bit about the story behind the inspiration to this exhibition?*

OMH: I have always believed that artists are those who are looking for clues to their creations within themselves and expand their horizon to neighbouring communities and the world. My father-in-law's old photo album, which I came across by chance, inspired me as he had always exhibited an exceptional interest in human life and memory. In the photo album, a picture of my grandfather, together with his “main wife (*bon-cheo*)” and the “second wife (*cheop*)” clearly shows how patriarchal Korean society was at that time, and I wanted to bring to life the memories of these old women who had to live with pain in this male-centred society. Moreover, the group photos represent the vivid accounts of everyday lives of Koreans and the history of Asian culture that endured harsh times.

Diplomatic World: *The emancipation of women, pulchritude and societal changes are constants of your œuvre; how does the artistic process of making your works emancipate you as an individual?*

OMH: I have been painting scarves twirling on the canvas since I was young, for more than 30 years. It is indeed a world of the feminine, placing women at the core. A scarf, twirling freely by the wind, up in the sky, across the field of wildflowers, is a self-portrait, my true self, who is free from all restraints and prejudice. This helped me to establish my creative universe, and I feel saved and emancipated within as I paint the utterly free existence in nature. That scarf at times becomes a bird or a butterfly, crossing time and space.

Diplomatic World: In an iconic picture of your exhibition, and the one that reflects upon its title, you bring Marilyn Monroe's visit to Korea in 1954 to the fore, as a contrast to the patriarchal dominated images of Korean women, even of your own ancestors. What stands behind this scene?

OMH: The solo exhibition at ECC-Venice Biennale will bring the past and present together and the memories and reality into contact. The Far East meets the West. Marilyn Monroe, a world-famous American star who visited Korea to boost the morale of the US troops in the wake of the Korean War, brought warmth to the Korean society, which at the time had been frozen as hard as the February's cold weather in Korea. By placing in contrast, Marilyn Monroe, the icon of pop culture on one hand, and the traditional Korean women, these typical devoted mothers upholding the conservative values while persevering and taking care of their families on the other, the painting tries to depict the encounter between the traditional Korean society and the modern Western society through the same tree.

Diplomatic World: Back in 2017 you were exhibited at the prestigious [Saatchi Gallery](#) in London. Your show back then at Saatchi was titled 'A Journey of Transformation', who do you connect it to 'The Days Were Snowy But Warm'?

OMH: Having majored in Oriental painting at an art high school, art college, and graduate school and studying Japanese painting in Japan, I have always pursued a journey, exploring to expand and evolve my creative style and techniques, using not only oriental painting techniques but also Japanese colour painting techniques, gilt, western materials and working on two-dimensional paintings using traditional mother-of-pearl and lacquer of the East and three-dimensional works, videos, and multimedia. My artistic journey has always been about seeking constant changes and memories. Hence, the scarf from 'A Journey of Transformation' at Saatchi Gallery in London has now flown all the way to 'The Days Were Snowy But Warm'.

About the artist

Professor (h.c.) [Oh Myung Hee](#) is active at the College of Art & Design, Suwon University and serves as Associate researcher at Tokyo University of the Arts (TUA).

She graduated from Sejong University & Seoul Arts High School. OMH embarked on her artistic journey back in 1995, and has hitherto been hosted by a plethora of galleries, cultural institutions, art fairs and museums in her native Korea, but likewise in China, Japan and Western Europe.

'The Days Were Snowy But Warm' is partnered with SAMSUNG The Frame, and sponsored by [Korea Foundation](#) and [NvirWorld](#). It takes place in the framework of the Personal Structures project chaired by the European Cultural Centre held at Palazzo Mora, and opens to the public on 23 April 2022 to the public for a duration of six months.

The show is curated by Tatiana Palinkasev and Éva McGaw.