

Busan Biennale

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Busan Biennale

By Melissa Lam

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WITH THE FIRST BREATH OF CRISP AUTUMN AIR THIS YEAR, ART PROFESSIONALS HAVE HEADED EAST TOWARDS THE GARGANTUAN REVELRY AND MERRYMAKING FESTIVITIES OF EXHIBITIONS IN ASIA. LONG DISTANCE TRAVELING PLANS THAT HAD ONCE ONLY INCLUDED EUROPE HAVE NECESSARILY TURNED THEIR DIRECTIONS EASTWARD.

The simultaneous timing of Biennales, Triennials, Art Fairs in Busan, Gwangju, Yokohama, Shanghai, and Guangzhou and Singapore, have led critics to remark upon their art appointment book to a compass veering towards Asia. It was a loud and happy convention centre meeting of artists, curators, dealers that one kept running into in an exuberant disorganized manner. The Busan Biennale in Korea was particularly ambitious in its scope of 3 joint exhibitions –A permanent sculpture garden, large-scale Museum show, and a Sea Art installation by Busan beach. The largesse of the 3 joint exhibitions encompassed a team of 9 curators, 5 directors and over 100 artists. Canadian Artists had a strong showing in Busan with some of the highlights including artists: Bruce La Bruce (Toronto), Kelly Richardson (Ontario), and Terence Koh (Vancouver). Bruce La Bruce, a controversial filmmaker, showed twenty film stills from his explicit agit pop film 'The Raspberry Reich.' Described by one critic as 'pornopoliticalpalooza' the film stills echo the use of 'terrorist chic' showing signifiers of macho-radicalism freshly imprinted on top of anal penetration



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and homosexual pornography. LaBruce's work creates a layering of Capitalist political slogans on top of unacceptable and deeply disturbing counter-culture, provoking uneasiness and discomfort. His multi-disciplinary work consistently challenges the way queer culture is depicted and celebrated in main-stream media. Kelly Richardson's video installation was featured in the Sea Art exhibition and consisted of a single channel video projection of shattered stars gently descending onto a serene natural landscape. Richardson's scene of natural beauty disturbed by the anticlimactic dropping of fiery supernovas lead us to wonder whether the Apocalypse will not be ushered in with a roar but with a gentle whimper. Her consistently original and innovative work involving photoconceptualism and nature spring not only from a long history of Canadian Landscape Art, but more specifically, derive from challenging the Vancouver School of Jeff Wall, Roy Arden and Stan Douglas. Terence Koh's *Mein Tod Mein Tod* had a symbolic showing outside the Busan museum with a sparsely attended performance of a wedding cake disintegrating in the rain. Koh is especially well-known for re-appropriating image from

the Internet, magazines, and other artists in the service of a personal exploration that evokes contemporary issues and emotions. Among them, he is interested in the moment of seduction and the mixing of pain and pleasure in desire. Koh's Busan based work featured a life-sized white marble tombstone, rendered as an entirely edible cake accompanied by a funerary ritual with two boys, chanting and dressed in white. The tombstone of flour and icing sugar evokes a cloying saccharine element to the sacred; the edible nature of the object re-emphasizes the emptiness of the rituals and feelings traditionally associated with death. The theme of the Biennale 'Expenditure' was interestingly explored in these 3 works: LaBruce's work combining the release of capitalist slogans and the expelling of body fluids in a neon signifier, Richardson's excess matter of the universe raining down onto the sky, and Koh's concept of death as digestive consumption. Despite the dizzying excess of artworks and organizers, the Busan Biennale was a very enjoyable and worthwhile event to attend, the work of these three artists being good examples of the wide range of installations on display. □

- 1-Terence Koh
Mein Tod, Mein Tod (2005)
Courtesy of Asia Song Society and the Artist
- 2-Bruce LaBruce
The Arrogance of the Strong Will Be Met by the Violence of the Weak, 2005
Courtesy Peres Project and the artist