

Ethan Cohen Gallery Presents

MINA CHEON aka KIM IL SOON
UMMA : MASS GAMES – Motherly Love North Korea

Curator, Nadim Samman

October 20 - December 10, 2017

Just as the Korean peninsula is split, so is its contemporary artistic consciousness. Mina Cheon is a South Korean artist who collaborates with her North Korean alter-ego KIM IL SOON (a Socialist Realist painter, naval commander, farmer, scholar, teacher, mother, and human being). In this, the latest of Cheon's grapplings with the Korean schizo-imaginary, the topics of art, motherhood, games and hope come together in a reflection upon (cult)ure, love, and education.

Ethan Cohen Gallery presents Mina Cheon's solo exhibition *UMMA : MASS GAMES – Motherly Love North Korea*, curated by Nadim Samman, and sending art to North Korea.

The recent war of words between North Korean and US leaders has only hardened the people's attitudes to demagogue Father figures. With this exhibition, Cheon establishes the personality cult of UMMA ('mommy' in Korean), whose maternal love is deployed as the only acceptable solution for global peace and Korean unification. Whereas South Korea's modernity was pushed forward by a *chima baram* (skirt wind), UMMA's matriarchal strength is offered as a catalyst for developing North Korea. In this exhibition, Cheon (in the guise of her alter ego Kilm Il Soon, the 'Umma of Unification') sends motherly love and education to her children in the Hermit Kingdom and the USA. In addition, she debuts artworks resulting from a series of dissident dreams.

For **UMMA : MASS GAMES**, Cheon has worked with underground networks to send hundreds of USB drives containing performance lectures on contemporary art history into North Korea – arguably the first such artistic 're-programming' engagement with the nation to date. All ten lessons will be on display at Ethan Cohen Gallery on Notel media players (devices commonly used in North Korea for watching foreign video content, such as K-pop, drama, and Korean Wave Cinema). The ***Art History Lessons by Professor Kim (2017)*** endeavor to be relatable for North Korean and American audiences – borrowing from children's TV show formats while showcasing today's contemporary artists and critical perspectives. Carrying the vital messages "The world loves you, North Korea" and "Both art and lives matter," lesson topics include Art & Life; Art & Food; Art, Money & Power; Abstract Art & Dreams; Feminism, Are We Equal?; Art, Lives Matter & Social Justice; Remix & Appropriation Art; Art & Technology; Art & Silence; and Art & Environment.

The Mass Games (*Arirang*) are the paramount North Korean spectacle, deployed for nationalistic propagandist purposes and presented to the world. But are they any fun? In this exhibition, Umma supervises her own games, convened by love for her children: The show includes group-performance imagery in the form of ***Happy North Korean Children (2014)*** prints. Furthermore, an installation entitled ***Happy Land Games (2017)***, incorporating oversized wooden versions of the toys normally given away inside packets of South Korean Choco·Pie candy – depicting fairground rides from a mythical park called Happy Land. The Choco·Pie is the most desired smuggled confectionary in North Korea, a single pie trading (on the black market) for the equivalent of three bowls of rice. Visitors to Ethan Cohen Gallery are invited to assemble and play with Umma's ***Happy Land***. The themes of games, happiness, and imaginary society in these works are in dialogue with North Korea's international self-presentation – invoking the DPRK's 2011 Global Index of Happiness Research claim that it is 'the second happiest nation in the world next to Big China.'

This exhibition also showcases an insight into Socialist Realist painter Kim Il Soon's cosmopolitan subconscious. It is only in her dreams that she truly contemplates liberation. These dreams have resulted in two painting series (entitled, respectively, *Hot Pink Drip* and *Yves Klein Blue Dip*), which incorporate digital manipulation and abstract painterly gestures in conjunction with realist propaganda styles. Titles and topics include: *Umma*, *Unicorn*, and *Unification*, as well as a series of Professor Kim and Umma in her full virtuoso presentation rising above the clouds and fogs of the Baekdusan Mountain, in *Umma Rises: Towards Global Peace*. Other works include portraits of Umma in North Korea, *Missiles Good Bye* and *Hello Brave New World*.

In **UMMA : MASS GAMES**, the contradictions, fractures and paradoxes of the Korean imaginary are on full display. With the Kim Il Soon artist-complex (a locus of various attributes: scholar/educator, state-artist, dissident dreamer and mother/umma), Cheon explores overlapping political and personal dramas of identification and acceptance. Simultaneously, she exorcizes Fatherly sins through the cult of the great UMMA, her motherly love, and her *serious play*. No image of this love is too grand. Nothing too small: Leading up to the opening of her exhibition during NYC Asia Contemporary Art Week, Umma (dressed in traditional Korean garb and on her knees) will perform the cleaning of gallery floors and offering kimchi. **On Friday, October 13th (6PM), she will be cleaning the floors of Ethan Cohen Gallery as a prequel performance to the UMMA exhibit.**

The exhibition catalog will include a curatorial essay by Nadim Samman, who contributed ideological engineering and 'right-thinking,' staging the provocation of the exhibition from the heavens to the undergrounds of North Korea, where Umma rises and descends. Other writers include fellow-traveler philosopher Laurence A. Rickels who has taken down the Official Psychoanalytic History of Umma and Korea, by interpreting Kim Il Soon's dreams, unlocking her "*andere Schauplatz*" where she unleashes a desire for Unification.

***"From Kim Il Soon to Professor Kim (whose scholastic pursuits are wide and unbound), our UMMA demonstrates militant efficiency; outstanding and seasoned ability of leadership; a thoroughgoing and indomitable spirit; the power of keen observation; clear analysis and extraordinary perspicacity with regard to all things and phenomena. UMMA's love for the people is allied with a serious faculty for creative thinking, regarding every problem with an innovative eye. She shows courage and ambition while advancing vigorously along the road. She holds fast to the banner with a firm grasp; with strength, daring, energy and originality. Of course, it is my distinct honor to join with her program - and to offer my dedicated enthusiasm for proper implementation."* (Curator Nadim Samman)**

Mina Cheon (PhD, MFA) is a Korean-American global new media artist, scholar, and educator who divides her time between Korea and the United States. Cheon has exhibited her political pop art known as "Polipop" internationally and draws inspiration from global media and popular culture to produce work that intersects politics and pop art in subversive and provocative ways. In particular, Cheon has worked on North Korean awareness and global peace projects since 2004 and appeared to the world as a North Korean artist KIM IL SOON since 2013. While she creates work that range in medium from new media, video, installation, performance, and public projects to traditional media of painting and sculptures, the content of the work is in historic alignment to appropriation art and global activism art. She has exhibited her work and/or in the collection of the Sungkok Art Museum, Seoul Olympic Museum, American University Museum, Smith College Museum of Art, Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland Art Place, Insa Art Space Korean Arts Council, C.Grimaldis Gallery, Lance Fung Gallery, Trunk Gallery, and represented by Ethan Cohen Gallery. She is also currently a Full-time Professor at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA).
<http://www.minacheon.com>

Nadim Samman is a curator and art historian whose PhD research focused on underground Soviet conceptualism. In 2017, he was Co-Curator of the 1st Antarctic Biennale (the first artistic festival in the world's southernmost continent). In 2016, he was Curator of the 5th Moscow International Biennale for Young Art. In 2015, he curated the Cycle Art & Music Festival in Reykjavik, Iceland, and in 2012, he Co-curated 4th Marrakech Biennale. Samman is currently engaged as a Curator of the Aurora public art festival in Dallas (2018). He has published in newspapers, magazines, and journals worldwide, and in 2016 was named among the '20 Most Influential Young Curators in Europe' by *Artsy*. <http://nadimsamman.com>

The Ethan Cohen Gallery was founded in 1987 as Art Waves/Ethan Cohen in SoHo, New York City. A groundbreaker in the field of contemporary Chinese art, it was the first gallery to present the Chinese Avant Garde of the 80s to the United States. It introduced the works of now celebrated artists, such as Ai Weiwei, Xu Bing, Gu Wenda, Wang Keping and Qiu Zhijie. Ethan Cohen today represents a diverse global mix of art, including contemporary American, African, Iranian, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Russian, Pakistani and Thai, with a continuing focus on emerging as well as established artists, and has two locations, gallery in Chelsea and The Kube in Beacon, New York. <https://www.ecfa.com>



Umma Rises: Towards Global Peace, Yves Klein Blue Dip painting, on archival digital print on canvas, 30 x 40 inches, 2017.



UMMA in North Korea, "Missiles Good Bye," Yves Klein Blue Dip painting, on archival digital print on canvas, 40 x 30 inches, 2017.



UMMA in North Korea, "Hello Brave New World," Yves Klein Blue Dip painting, on archival digital print on canvas, 40 x 30 inches, 2017.



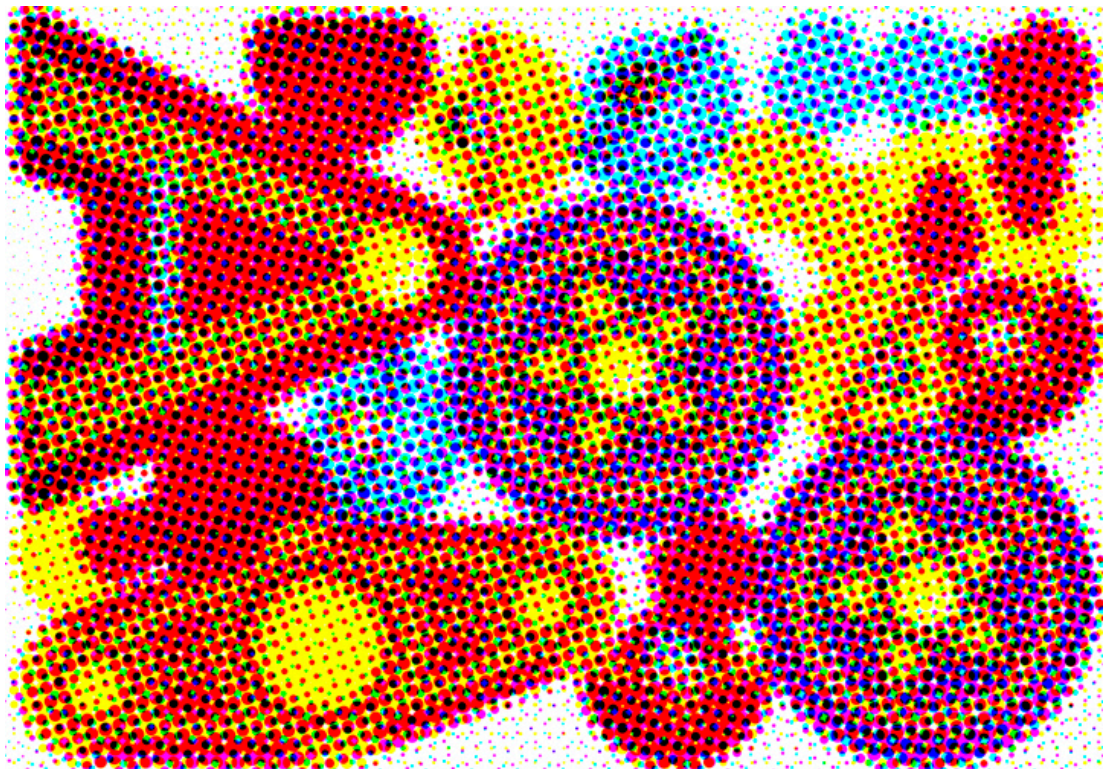
Mass Games: Flagging Unification, Yves Klein Blue Dip painting, on archival digital print on canvas, 40 x 30 inches, 2017.



Art History Lessons by Professor Kim, Art History Lesson 1 What is Art What is Life, Part 1 (To be an Artist) Marcel Duchamp, Fountain, 1917, video stills, 08:12 mins.



Umma, Unification, Unicorn, North Korean Dream Paintings, Yves Klein Blue Dip, acrylic and digital print on canvas, 48 x 36 inches, 2017.



Happy Land Games, 6 types of toy assembly for installation, dFAB digital print vinyl on wood and punched out by C+C Router, 4 x 6 feet each. Requires audience participation to creatively assemble life-size toy sculptures as interactive installation.

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[Exhibition Website](#)