



The Deoksugung Project Exhibition

Through December 2nd, National Art Museum, Deoksugung Palace

The Deoksugung Project is a unique exhibition of nine wondrous artworks installed throughout the Deoksugung palace grounds. Several contemporary Korean artists from fields as diverse as music, dance, visual arts, and design have created works that reflect their interpretation of *Deoksugung*. As one tranquilly strolls from the palatial garden to the historical buildings, participation is encouraged in various activities while the illuminating narratives and significance of Deoksugung are contemplated.

At Hamnyeongjeon, known as the sleeping quarters of King Gojong, one is invited to watch an intriguing video of a male performer who uses his body movements to convey the king's intense inner conflicts, anxieties and sorrows. During his reign, King Gojong helplessly witnessed the demise of his empire as well as the deaths of his two beloved queens.

In King Gojong's private chambers, Deokhongjeon, an exhibit of forty gold chrome-coated chairs is arranged in a disorderly fashion, yet providing a comfortable resting place to unwind. A soothing music piece encompasses the entire room, helping ease the mind while interpreting this remarkable space of deformation yet creativity.

To rest and contemplate the palace grounds, head to the benches surrounding a scattered pile of crystal bricks. While the sides of the bricks reflect the beautiful leaves of the nearby trees and sky, viewing them from the top clearly depicts the earthy grounds of the palace.

Upon entering the Seogeodang building, a feminine ambiance can be sensed. The rooms display furniture and objects used

by the women in the past. A folding wall of colorfully-painted birds adorns a room that neatly showcases a large mother-of-pearl jewelry box, soft cushions, small cozy chairs, and wooden tables with fragile-looking tea-cups. The essence of Joseon femininity is further evoked through the presence of two decorative mirrors, an enormous wardrobe, and a dazzling sculpture of an eye-catching teardrop.

Designed by artist Yeesoogyung, this single three-dimensional teardrop consists of thousands of LED light bulbs that create triangular patterns on the surface. Paradoxically, due to the refraction of the lights, it is not possible to clearly see the teardrop. For Yeesoogyung, this brilliant yet unrecognizable sculpture represents the fates of countless women who lived in the palace.

For those who are fluent in reading Korean, sitting on the comfy cushioned benches at Junghwajeon Haenggak, the corridor building, may provide further insight. The musician Sung Kiwan highlights this area with recorded readings of selected classic novels of the Joseon dynasty, which express palace life through humor and drama.

On selected evenings, the main throne hall of Deoksugung, Junghwajeon, hosts an entertaining laser show. The video images projected onto the facade of Junghwajeon aim to visually render historical events, providing an account of the honors and disgraces endured by the Daehan Empire.

After journeying through these exhibits, head to the National Museum of Art located at the rear of the palace grounds. The museum is currently hosting a detailed exhibition about the Deoksugung Project itself with descriptive explanations of the artworks. One is also invited to reflect upon the sorrows and beauties of Deoksugung Palace while being entertained by captivating videos of dance performances and monodramas.

Deoksugung Project will run until Dec. 2, 2012. Entrance W1,000 for Deoksugung Palace, W2,000 for National Art Museum. www.moca.go.kr 02-2188-6000.

WORDS BY RAJNESH SHARMA

TOP Ha Jihoon, Deokhongjeon *Jari*, National Museum of Contemporary Art Korea, Commission, 2012 (Sound: Sung Kiwan)

BOTTOM Lyu Jaeha, Junghwajeon, Time, Museum of Contemporary Art Korea, Commission, 2012

