

# FROM IDEAS TO REALISATION

## MIMI JOUNG *artist in residence*

Intimately connected to the year's end is the artist's residency at St David's Oriel y Parc Landscape Gallery. Korean artist Mimi Jung's stint as resident artist concludes in December, with an exhibition of her work there. In this issue, we profile the work of this internationally acclaimed artist and investigate how she has been influenced by Pembrokeshire during her time here.



Artist Mimi Jung  
Image © Heather Bennett

Mimi Jung currently holds a residency at Oriel y Parc Landscape Gallery, St Davids. She emanates a commitment to communicate her belief in the importance of art in 'rethinking the history of objects in a culture'. Her slender frame thrums with energy and her eyes seek the knowledge that she is being clearly understood.

Mimi trained initially in ceramics at the University of Won Kwang, South Korea, following this first degree (BA) with time in Canada working alongside a ceramicist there and then completing her studies with a stint at Guildhall University (HND) and an MA at the Royal College of Art, London. She has exhibited widely in the UK, Belgium, Canada and South Korea and has held residencies in Latvia, France, Canada and the UK.

When asked what made her first want to be an artist she explained that it had happened gradually. Her mother, a deeply religious woman

who visited church daily at 4.30 in the morning, did not see art as a profession. She wanted Mimi to be an art professor, which would lead to financial security. As Mimi travelled widely, she came to feel that this was not her pathway. She describes how a visit to the National Gallery in London found her emotionally – even tearfully – linked to the world through the paintings she saw. She 'felt at home', thinking: 'Maybe I am supposed to be here'. She became as devoted to her work as her mother was to her religion, and believes she has inherited this determined characteristic from her.

Mimi is a long way from home and the important influences there. Right now, when North and South Korea face conflict with one another, she feels 'goose bumps' as she listens to the news broadcasts. She has family there, and is concerned for their safety. She talks of her father who she feels, with his manual creativity and dexterity, could have been a great artist and of her three sisters and her brother. She sees the importance of travel for she knows that she sees the culture of the countries she visits with different eyes to those born there, and part of her work as an artist is to reflect this



Mute-Noon series: *Hot Glass*

© Mimi Jung

# PROFILE

by HEATHER BENNETT *photographer*

back to the country she is in. Conversely, on her return home she brings a changed view of Korean culture. She has become artist as commentator, observer and historian, reflecting the important cycle of roots and change.

Mimi's influences are not the more obvious ones; her tenderness is stirred by the work of everyday artists who will never be famous. Their work speaks to her, and she sees how hard they try. Their desire, like hers, is to earn neither fame nor wealth. Their world is not one of the cult of the personality; it is more about process and a seeking to explore and expose what was and is relevant in the history of a culture, and communicate this to the viewer. Hands and heart work together, and the resulting pieces are not dictated by societal pressures to be successful but are a genuine creative stream of connectivity. A deeply real, living process.

Process is all important to Mimi. She talks of how her years of learning have meant she can work in many materials – her hands instinctively seek the relevant texture that is central to the character of the piece of work she is creating. Her thorough technical background means that she can move



*Imperial Bone China SBD*

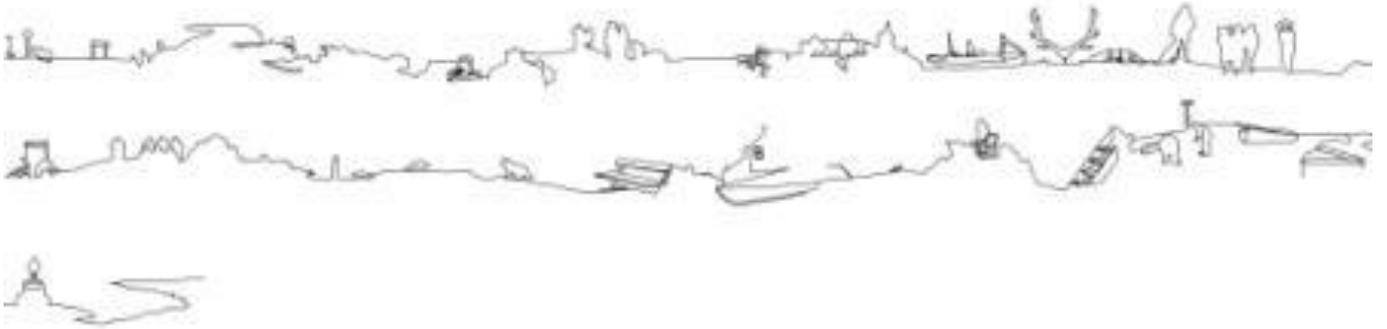
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surely from the representational to the abstract without fear. She tells how students sometimes want to bypass this thorough acquaintance with the qualities of materials, shapes and colours, and explains that only by knowing how to make an initial shape can this then be taken into free-form abstraction. Following this path an artist is fully aware of the capabilities of their materials, and is not distracted from creating by a failure of elasticity or by unrealistic expectations. This knowledge of a diversity of materials is freedom itself, allowing works to exist on the extreme edge of fragility and bring to reality the often extensive research necessary to connect initial ideas to a physical reality. It allows transformation to take place. It creates relationships between hand and heart, between concept and realisation, and between artist and viewer.

Asked what brings frustration to this process, Mimi pauses to think. Externally, the stressor is time – contemporary life, particularly in bustling cities like London, makes it difficult to focus on what is important. Distraction is the foe in a daily battle both at times of research and when in the process of creation. Internally, she finds it frustratingly difficult to decide how she is seen to portray herself. The breadth of her technical ability could find her judged either artist or craftsperson as she moves between both fields. She frequently asks herself: 'As a creator, is this exactly where I belong?' Her body winds with tension as she talks, and there is a sense that this inner dialogue provides part of the energy which informs her exploration of the relationship between history, the mundane objects which define it and the use of these in unexpected ways in order to ask cultures to rethink the importance they hold both previously and now.

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Take Landscape With You – 3

© Mimi Joung

'Gateshead Plates' is a body of work which illustrates this perfectly. Mimi explains that in the 1800s British porcelain was known in many countries as 'white gold', and was regarded even in China as being of exceedingly high quality. Arriving in the UK Mimi, expected these objects to have the same importance for British culture. Her residency at Sunderland University led to an exploration of Newcastle's charity shops, where she was shocked to find beautiful old plates 'cheaper than at IKEA'. She collected them for very little. Her thought process led to questions about how this could happen – this disregard of beauty in design and workmanship in the culture that created it. How could something which was a piece of art in itself no longer be seen as such? Using water jets, she cut shapes of cutlery from the plates and arranged these using brass hooks at a major art fair in London – here once more they were seen as 'Art'. They had, within Mimi's process, completed the cycle from valued art object to discarded 'junk' and back to valued art. Part of the importance of her work is that it seeks to use art itself to challenge human value systems and rebalance them.



On a residency on the Island of Hoy, Mimi took over 300 photographs in the landscape: of details, of people and of often unnoticed areas. She worked with these, turning them first into individual outlines using a computer programme and then joining them together to form a long, new and different landscape holding all of these elements. This is now being made into a 23-metre piece of embroidered fabric, exploring the changes in the landscape and thus our perceptions of what landscape is. She asks us to think again and differently – not to make assumptions.

Gateshead Plates

© Mimi Joung

Residencies have been an important part of this artist's journey. The one at Oriol y Parc has been the first one for her working alone, and has allowed her a period of intense focus. Mimi speaks of it as the best experience she has ever had. People are generous here, it is beautiful and the light is wonderful. It has been a time of high spirits and a rebuilding of confidence which was sapped by the impermanence of big cities – here she does not have to struggle to be herself and her work grows daily.

To see more of Mimi's work and learn more of her life and achievements visit her website at [www.mimijoung.com](http://www.mimijoung.com)

Following her residency, Mimi will give a concluding talk at Oriol y Parc Landscape Gallery, St Davids on Tuesday 18 January 2011 at 3.00 pm. For details, please contact Oriol y Parc on 00 44 (0)1437 720392 or log on to [www.oriolyparc.co.uk](http://www.oriolyparc.co.uk).