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# East/West dialogue of the spirit

**F**LEETING erotic sensibilities draw us into a close experience of the large paintings by Hoon Kwak, a Korean artist now exhibiting at the Macquarie Galleries in the city.

Though born in Korea, Kwak has lived and worked in California for many years, so his work combines a consciousness of Korean and American influences in a fusion of identities reminiscent of much art here in Australia.

This is the last show ever to be held by Macquarie Galleries in the city before its move to Rushcutters Bay at Christmas, and is said to be the first in Sydney by a prominent Korean artist.

Korea recently hosted its first show of work by an Australian artist, Sydney Ball, which was a sell-out. Kwak is exhibiting here as part of a cultural exchange.

The two artists have never met, yet there is a resemblance in their treatment of calligraphic, totemic forms. Both



GALLERIES

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emphasise the textured, expressive, painted surfaces which points to their mutual but independent influence from the New York school.

Ball's work is dramatic and positive, Kwak's paintings are more suggestive and tentative, presenting the mystery rather than the materiality of cultural exchange. The constant oscillation between ideas, between yin and yang, forms the subject matter of these paintings, rather than the object references themselves.

The letter "x" is the dominating object but this resonates between signifying a Jasper Johns painterly letter, a flower, a propeller, a number 8, a distorted letter "k", or, by rearranging the parts, it becomes a diamond.

Is this a negation, a multiplication, a personal signature puzzle? It's not one of these but all of them.

The interdependence of object and space, material and spiritual, is described not so much by a positive presentation of the other, or the negative, but by a fragmentation of everything on the painted surface, fractured yet united by a common atmospheric energy.

Lines and shapes almost, but not quite meet, titillating our awareness of the sensuality of the gap — the charged space of change.

Painted, scraped, written and stuck, the forms float on an infinitely delicate rice-paper support, which is laminated on to more substantial paper. This makes

the surface marvellously luminous, but it also sets up a dialogue, in the medium itself, between the East and the West.

The spiritual and material are also suggested through the fragility of one and the solidity of the other. It represents a dismantling of difference, between the cultures, perhaps, of Korea and the US.

Kites, propellers and tornadoes — located in the barest suggestion of a traditional seascape, point to the movement of cross fertilisation. Boundaries are dissolving, economies and cultures are superimposed one on the other and Kwak's multiple references invite meditation on this pan-internationalism.

Another interesting show, at the Tin Sheds Gallery, focuses on the dismantling of socially created sexual and spatial boundaries. Fiona Gunn and Sue Pedley have strategically placed piers, mirrors and supports to merge their installations with the structure of the gallery.

This invites a consciousness of the nature of an architectural space which parallels, in their inquiry, the nature of the space between genders.

Influenced by the French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray, Gunn's beautifully constructed work is not concerned with presenting binary oppositions but with prompting an awareness of difference through destabilising, rather than destroying, traditional notions of gender.

Gunn has always been interested in the form of a cupboard, symbolic of woman's body as useful container, and full of dark mystery. In this exhibition, the cupboards have been made to her height, furthering the connection with woman physically.

The parts of an all-glass cupboard with rounded doors have been carefully laid out, in plan form, on the floor. One panel has a small mirror within the glass and a light bulb hangs low over it.

The effect is that the view constructs the cupboard mentally and, so doing, ponders the significance of the act of construction, and the space created.

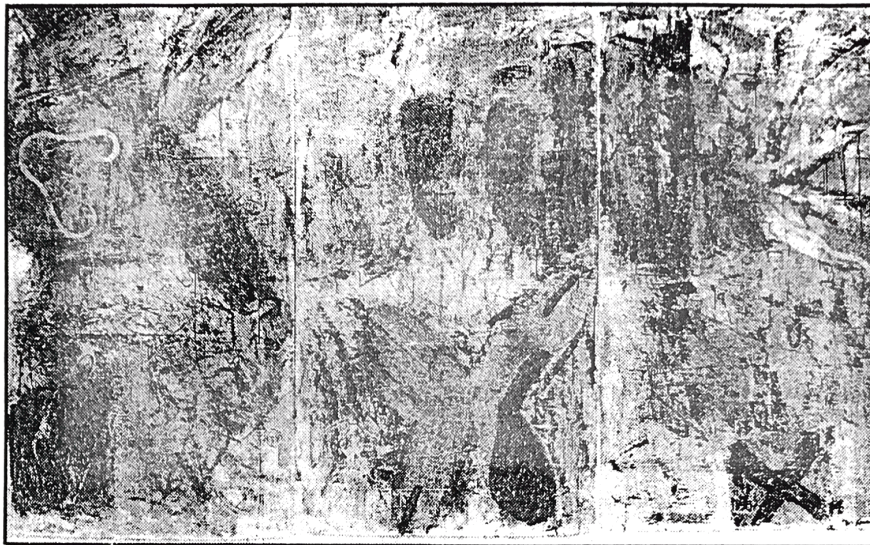
The wholeness of the cupboard is disrupted, as is the mythic quality of its symbolism as representative of the otherness of woman to man.

In another work, a backless wooden cupboard with the same dimensions as the glass one is held together with closely layered glass shelves. The doors are open; if they shut, the cupboard could fall outwards shattering the shelves.

It is the space within which keeps the cupboard together rather than the reverse, and the intention is to jolt us into revising accepted notions of space and relationships.

The openness of the cupboard is related to stability rather than vulnerability, just as an openness to the construction of the feminine is related to a new female strength.

The glass shelves have a sharp aggressive edge and, being so closely stacked, negate the usefulness of the cupboard (or the traditional female



*Chi*, a mixed media triptych on laminated paper, by Hoon Kwak at the Macquarie Galleries.

space). They can only gather dust, which would appeal to the artist who is acutely aware of the sculptural quality of detail.

The cupboards relate across the room to Sue Pedley's installation, which is also created around the definition of woman and space but this time informed by Pedley's involvement in wind technology at the Powerhouse museum.

This part of the room has been constructed as an internal comb with timbers hanging from the rafters, seemingly part of the gallery structure, but only masquerading as supporting piers, since they don't touch the ground and can move with the wind. Again this

destabilises the accepted notion of stable social structures.

Pedley is interested in marks that don't last, the movement of hair across the skin or arms in the air. Her central piece is a wind-drawing machine. The elliptical drawing surface of creamy woollen felt was measured by the arc of the artist's reach.

Woman, rather than the Vitruvian man, is making connections here between the body, and drawn and constructed forms. The metal drawing "arm" of this beast-like machine is driven by a wind vane on the roof of the gallery.

Woman and nature are connected

again but this time woman is part of technology of mechanical drawing rather than metaphorically connect with the power of nature.

Pedley is attempting to make firm links between drawing and sculpture. Drawing is only there in the motion of "arm" against the felt surface; the machine isn't lasting, yet it is a vital part of visual experience and sculptural production

The fragility of this concept supported by the fragility of the surrounding architectural installation and its resonance with the deconstruction of traditional notions of social relationships.