

# 'Collective Behaviour' goes through looking-glass

By Jon Dunbar  
jdunbar@koreatimes.co.kr

Humans surround ourselves with various types of images in every stage of our lives. Often we mirror the images we see in our own behaviors and beliefs, and sometimes the images stare back. A unique dance performance developed through intercontinental collaboration between Denmark and Korea will gaze into the mirror for four shows next week.

"Collective Behaviour," sponsored by Arts Council Korea and the Danish Arts Foundation, brings together the locally based art duo Kimchi and Chips (Mimi Son and Elliot Woods), with Danish choreographer Simone Wieroe in a 45-minute exploration of the images created through a mirror.

"There are so many different types of images... selfies, billboards, paintings, sketches, five-second adverts, X-rays, passport photos, graphs, poems, etc.," said Elliot Woods, co-founder of Paju-based art studio, Kimchi and Chips. "A mirror is one type of image, and something interesting about the mirror is that it not just adjusts our mental self, but a mirror is where we also adjust our physical self — that is the main reason we use a mirror."

The collaboration traces its origins back to Denmark in 2018, when Wieroe and Tim Panduro of the Danish progressive and melodic techno act MERCY, saw a presentation given by Kimchi and Chips' Mimi Son.

"...told [Tim] I had to meet this woman before we could leave,"



A preview image of the "Collective Behaviour" performance

Courtesy of Kimchi and Chips

Wieroe told The Korea Times. "We met, exchanged contacts and continued to have a dialogue online where we shared our artistic work."

That initial contact led to further meetings and workshops, and they secured funding to stage "Collective Behaviour" in time for the 60th anniversary of Korea-Denmark diplomatic ties celebrated in 2019.

"We were thinking about the way in which people mirror each other, and the way that mirroring is filtered and amplified by new social platforms, and our idea of the modern world," Woods said, adding that Son was too busy with rehearsals to participate in the interview. "It is now

normal to see new sets of behaviors emerging and spreading online, and right now this is happening in a very image-centric way, where images are more trusted and affecting than words. "To me, mirrors and mirroring have many meanings and depths both practically and figuratively. Mirroring as a concept is something I work with continuously in my choreographic practice and something I have always been fascinated by," Wieroe said.

The idea and conceptual frame for the performance was introduced by Son, and from there, they all developed it further through workshops in Copenhagen and Seoul. Wieroe's

job was to develop a choreographic narrative and physical vocabulary for the performance.

"Collective Behaviour" premiered in Copenhagen in December 2019, and plans were made to bring the show to Korea next.

"2020 had its own ideas which didn't involve us, and since then, we've been looking for the right time to bring the team together again," Woods said. "We're finally confident now at the start of 2022 that we can show the project safely and with the right impact to the audience."

"To me, the pandemic has really shown how important it is to stay connected, to keep internation-

al exchanges happening and to not close in on ourselves or only focus on what is near," Wieroe added. "Yes, it has been challenging in many ways, but I am not attracted to 'easy' when it comes to art — it has to be the right connection in a collaboration and one has to make the choices that are best for the work — even though that means you sometimes have to travel far or do a lot of extra work to make the ambition come to life."

Finally, "Collective Behaviour" will be staged in four performances on Jan. 21 and 22, starting each day at 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. in Mary Hall of Sogang University.

The performance features three dancers - Boram Jun, Woosang Jeon and Yunjoo Song — performing within a dark maze of mirrors with grace and precision. The choreography was created concurrently with the music, done by MERCY featuring virtuoso cellist Josefine Opsahl, and videography by Panduro. Project producer is Lee Soyoung.

"The audience will encounter a hyper level of reality that can only be seen in real life, whilst also reflecting on our relationship between reality and self-imagination," Woods said. "We want to excite the audience with images, and then use that excitement to give the audience a place of reflection on themselves and their relationship to others."

Additionally, audience members will be able to walk away with a piece of the performance, in the form of a non-fungible token (NFT) available exclusively for sale at the event. It functions on Klaytn, Kakaos' global public blockchain, and uses proof of stake protocols which are 1,000 times more eco-friendly than older blockchains such as in Ethereum and Bitcoin.

"We've been working in the digital art space for over 10 years, and have been flirting with NFTs for just over a year," Woods said. "NFTs offer a new model of art patronage using cryptocurrencies, and we want to see how this new ecosystem can be used to fund art that happens in meatspace."

Visit kimchiandchips.com or simonewieroe.com for more information about the artists, or linktr.ee/collectivebehaviour to book tickets for one of the performances.

## FOREIGN LINE

### Comedy open mic in Sin-yongsan

Dark de Gary Comedy Club is hosting an open mic this Friday at Fantastic Theater near Sin-yongsan Station on Seoul Metro Line 4. Doors open at 7 p.m. and the show starts at 7:30 p.m. Food and alcohol are not allowed inside due to social distancing measures. Entry is free, but donations are appreciated. Visit fb.com/darkde-gary for more information.

jdunbar@koreatimes.co.kr

### Studio HBC hosts gigs this weekend

The Studio HBC is continuing to be one of the more proactive live music promoters in Seoul. This Friday at 7 p.m. classic rock band Jabroni headlines with punk band Vanmal opening. Saturday features Bad Lamb, Batu, TRAP and punk band 18 Fevers, starting early at 4 p.m. so there's more time for fun. Visit fb.com/thestudioHBC for more information.

jdunbar@koreatimes.co.kr

### Webinar discusses Imjin War's effects

Hyek Hweon Kang, an assistant professor of East Asian Languages and Cultures at Washington University in St. Louis, will give a talk on technology, innovation and the early modern crafts-cape in Korea in the aftermath of the 1592-98 Imjin War.

The talk will be held Thursday night on Zoom, starting at 11 p.m. (KST). This research is part of the "Aftermath of the East Asian War of 1592-1598" project, funded by the European Research Council and run from the Autonomous University of Barcelona. Visit after-math.uab.cat for more information.

jdunbar@koreatimes.co.kr

# Off the beaten path in Gyeongju, remains of Silla

By Steven L. Shields  
royalasiatickorea@gmail.com

Just as autumn 2021 was descending on Korea, I went to Gyeongju before the colors had begun to change. The allure of the ancient capital of the peninsula, back when it was under the name of the Silla Kingdom (57 BCE-935 CE), garners my affection.

The friend I was traveling with asked me how many times I had visited the city. He recounted the few times he had been there (there are often school trips). I tried to count my visits to the magnificent place, beginning with my first time in 1976. A couple of years ago, I went there three times. Over the past 45 years, I suppose I have been there 20 or 30 times. I lost count.

My visits would start in the morning of the first full day at Seokguram, the grotto high on the mountain facing the East Sea, then to Bulguksa Temple, and finally into the flatland of the city with the National Museum and so forth. Each visit has typically followed the same pattern, adding a few spots here and there, dropping some lesser-known places. In recent years, Woljeong Bridge has been added to the sights. The night views at Anapji are obligatory, but they now call it Donggung (East Palace), and the pond is Wolji.

My friend and I had last visited Gyeongju a couple of years ago, so we decided to go to places that we had not seen before this trip. We did not go up to Seokguram on our previous visit, so we needed to go there. We also did the night tour of Anapji. We took a long walk around Woljeong Bridge at night, viewing it from every angle and then walking across the bridge to return to the car. Though some have criticized the reconstruction design, the brilliant colors and the sheer size of the structure are impressive.

I had never been to before but wanted to visit the "Five Tombs" compound. The rarely visited



Tomb of King Hyeokgeose in autumn 2021

Courtesy of Steven L. Shields



Gyeongju's Joseon-era city wall in autumn 2021

Courtesy of Steven L. Shields



Myeonghwal Fortress in autumn 2021

tomb complex cannot compete with the city's excavated "Heavenly Horse" tomb. There, Tumuli Park is quite grand in scale, but only a few residents of the tombs are known. Historians have no idea who was buried in the "Heavenly Horse" tomb, just that it yielded some of the most magnificent artifacts of all the tombs excavated over the years.

The "Five Tombs" are in the far southwest of the ancient city but have substantial historical significance. Of the five tomb mounds, the most prominent is said to enclose the remains of Park Hyeokgeose, the legendary founding king of Silla. Legend says he was born from a gourd-shaped egg. Versions of the story talk about the simul-

taneous rising of the sun and the moon, a white horse, bright lights and a volcano. He is believed to be the progenitor of all the "Park" clans of Korea (of which there are more than 300). Said to have been born in 69 BCE and died 4 CE at age 73, Hyeokgeose became king at age 12 or 13. The name Hyeokgeose was an honorific, meaning "bright world." Historical facts from more than 2,000 years ago are a bit more challenging to verify, but his name is well-known.

As the capital city, Gyeongju was well-fortified from ancient times. Remains of several Silla-era fortresses can still be found in the surrounding mountain passes. One such fortress near the tomb of King Jinseong is Myeonghwal For-

ress. It was one of the four primary fortresses protecting the capital. From history, we know Japanese troops attacked the fortress about 400 CE, so it had to have been built before that. Archaeologists uncovered a monument in 1988 that recorded a 551 CE reconstruction of the fortress. Earthen walls and unheun stones made up the fortress' six kilometer circumference. There have been no attempts at reconstructing the entire fortress in modern times, but remnants have been stabilized. No other historical artifacts are available at the site.

The Joseon-era Gyeongju Eupseong has been partially restored. Gyeongju's history does not end with the rise of the Goryeo

Kingdom in the 900s. The town continued to be populated by people from all levels of society. Thus, it should be no surprise that the town was fortified during the Goryeo times and again in the mid-Joseon era following the Japanese invasions of the late 16th century. In the Joseon era, the city lay north of Tumuli Park. During the Japanese occupation of the early 20th century, the gates and walls were pulled down. The restored eastern gate and some of the ramparts make for a short but pleasant hike in the heart of the modern city. The government plans to restore the entirety of the walls and gates within the next decade.

One of the many temple sites that holds a special place is Bunhwang Temple. Close to the famous Hwangryong Temple (Golden Dragon Temple, which has been under archaeological study for years), all that remains of the historical Bunhwang Temple is the stone brick pagoda. The small prayer hall on the grounds dates from the Joseon era. The small temple site, set among lovely trees, is off the trail for most tourists these days, so it retains a bit of peaceful quietude compared with busier sites.

In years past, Royal Asiatic Society (RAS) Korea made regular tours to Gyeongju. Recently, before the pandemic, a two-yearly team of students from MIT came to Korea, and RAS Korea's local experts would escort them for a three-day visit. Nowadays, getting from Seoul to Gyeongju is easy with the rapid rail service, and the city government provides free shuttle buses and multilingual documents for visitors. No matter who you are or how you get there, Gyeongju is a must-see place for all visitors to Korea.

Rev. Steven L. Shields is president of the Royal Asiatic Society Korea (www.raskk.com) and columnist for The Korea Times. Visit raskk.com for more information about the society.