

Amerikorean  
by  
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“Amerikorean” is a project that utilizes imagery to elucidate the struggles of an immigrant from South Korea attempting to adjust and define a sense of identity in the United States. The image-making process represents an examination of American cultural, political, and social standards, and contains emotions, thoughts and humor to initiate and promote a productive discussion about the complex subject of immigration. This is a timely topic in the current American political climate. As an immigrant who struggles with communication, my intent is also to share with my viewers the emotional and social distress associated with communication barriers encountered daily through imagery, which is often easier than with words. The main purpose of this study is to define my dual identities as an immigrant: Korean and American, foreign and native, adjusted and never adjusting. The attempt is to provide a voice to all of those who, define themselves as foreign or an “other” in American society.



Amerikorean

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the School of Art and Design

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

by

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May, 2020

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## DEDICATION

Myself

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## INTRODUCTION

I am starting the document with a confession: I am an immigrant. I have a green card, also known as a permanent resident card. This small piece of plastic gives me the legal right granted by the United States government to reside in this country. However, I continue to retain a sense of being an “other” that leads me to question my right to enjoy and to live in this country. There are two main ideas that I have examined to address this sense of “otherness.” One is to react to the sense of alienation by focusing and elevating my Korean roots while rejecting anything seen as “American,” while the other is to utilize images that exist in a realm beyond verbal and language barriers and cultural differences. The image-making process has led me to vacillate between these two approaches.

I create images to avoid speaking, writing, and reading in English. While I attempt to deal with my sense of “otherness” in a civilized manner, the negative feelings do not go away and continue to perpetuate my gripes. I approach these ideas as a focus to my creative practices, where I see myself as an immigrant rather than strictly Korean. With this approach, I analyze what it means to be an immigrant in this country and the dissatisfaction that I must protest.

By recording my trials and experiences as an immigrant in two-dimensional space, my dual identities emerge. My split identities: Korean and American, foreign and native, adjusted and never adjusting, provide a voice to all of those who, in one aspect or another, define themselves as foreign in American society.

## TWO WAYS OF DEALING WITH THE SENSE OF “OTHERNESS”



Plate 1. Youngjae Kim "NK NUKE3" Lithography 22x30" 2018

The *NK NUKE* series was a way to reassure myself that I was still Korean regardless of external influences. When there is a crisis in my home nation, it is my civic duty and right to voice my opinion; I intend to demonstrate this duty and right as a citizen of the nation of South Korea. My interest in the subject of immigration and fear for my family's safety in South Korea motivated a group of prints. *NK NUKE* is a series created to express my stress and concern for tensions between North and South Korea.

"NK NUKE3" (Plate 1), is a portrayal of the North Korean nuclear threat in 2018. This is an early attempt to make images centered on my birth nation of South Korea, with direct influences by Korean national media. In this piece, I direct the American viewers to current Korean events without

allowing for American influences. This approach speaks to my earlier inclination to focus and elevate all that is seen as being Korean and a rejection of all that is seen as being American.

My new approach is the idea of accepting my sense of “otherness.” It is a thought which would be more transparent and readable to Americans. This is meant to portray who I am in the most honest form possible, which is an immigrant, a cultural abomination, accepting self-hate and all my “complaints.” I have abandoned my primary identity as a Korean and have rejected the ideal identity as an American, rather portraying the sense of “otherness” like immigrants, or also referred to as the “the others in America.”

## MATERIALS & METHOD

My interests and exploration in art are centered around printmaking. The definition of printmaking, according to the web page of Metropolitan Museum of Art is “an artistic process based on



Figure 1. Daumier "Gargantua" Lithography 1831

“Gargantua” (Figure 1) portrays King Louis Philippe as a greedy man devouring food and money from the poor.

Artists such as Goya (1746-1828) and Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945) are well known for creating political art that represented the social condition of their time. Goya created an 8”x6” aquatint print series that depicts war without glory or purpose. German expressionists such as Otto Dix and George Grosz used

the principle of transferring images from a matrix onto another surface, most often paper or fabric.”<sup>1</sup> The medium is inherently about the process of making multiple images. These advantages made printmaking an ideal medium for artists such as Honoré Daumier (1808-1879) and James Gillray (1756-1815) to create caricatures that satirize social and political issues. Daumier’s lithograph



Figure 2. James Gillray "Plumb-Pudding in Danger" Hand-colored etching 1805

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/curatorial-departments/drawings-and-prints/materials-and-techniques/printmaking>

printmaking methods to communicate political issues during World War I. During World War II, German expressionists were all threatened by the Nazi regime. Printmaking continues to be used as a medium to convey political messages. Artists like Sue Coe do just that.



*Figure 3. Sue Coe "Sue Draws in a Slaughterhouse" 2011*

Coe's work focuses on animal-rights, sweat shops, prisons, AIDS, and war (Figure 3). Her work— as she calls "records"<sup>2</sup> are published in newspapers, magazines and books are comments on political events and social injustices.

These printmakers recorded the social and political issues of their time. The difference between my critiques of social and political issues and their work is the intention, authority, and the weight of the subject. Their direct approach to the political and social issues often leads to counter-arguments, as Sue

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<sup>2</sup> Singer, Jasmine. "Sue Coe Art of the Animal." YouTube, commentary by Sue Coe, 15 Dec. 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8HziV6wtoA>.

Coe says, "I realize that a big problem with art is that the artist is too much into what the artist wants to say. There has to be a balance."<sup>3</sup> I find the balance by filtering the image through humor. Printmaking is not the only fine art medium that can speak about political and social issues, but it has a significant advantage that painting, and sculpture do not: it is inexpensive to create and disseminate.

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<sup>3</sup> Heller, Steven. "Sue Coe: Eyewitness." *Eye Magazine* 21.6 Summer 1996: 32-41. Also available via Web at <http://www.eyemagazine.com/feature/article/sue-coe-eyewitness>. Dec. 20, 2013.

## √LITHOGRAPHY

I use drawing to express my thoughts where words and voices make no sense to me. This makes drawing an important method of communication and integral to my printmaking process.

Naturally, I seek to improve upon existing methods of drawing and printmaking as a method of communication, therefore an upgrade in my printmaking technique was required to be more effective. I began to focus on the message and cancel out fundamental printmaking techniques to simplify and streamline the printmaking process; removing steps that impede the delivery of the message.

The following is my formula for a simplified lithography technique, I hereby refer to as "√Lithography." To explain my method of creating prints, I have a list of rules:

1. The work needs to be hand-drawn. This is due to the nature of my complaints: Only I can speak about my experiences.
2. The work is in black and white or achromatic grey images.
3. The work should be editionable without destroying the original drawing.
4. The portability and affordability of images is important.

"√Lithography" is a drawing on velvet toned drawing film, a transparent plastic sheet that is textured to mimic the surface of traditional limestone. The drawing is executed on the film using a specific type of pencil, then exposed to a pre-sensitized aluminum plate to make a photo-positive of the drawing and create the matrix. A printing press is used to print the image from the plate. These photosensitive aluminum plates offer an efficient application of reproducing the hand drawing and has helped develop a set of rules that dictate the process. "√Lithography" is a balance of traditional and commercial processes that allow the use of hand-drawn images that communicate my ideas with the direct and simplified methods of printmaking to disseminate the images.



The streamlined printmaking technique, “Lithography” is heavily focused on the drawing and the message rather than the act of printing. The drawings function as self-portraiture regardless of content. They depict a cultural mixture and the dichotomy of my split identity, Korean and American. I am bound by western fine art education and therefore use ideals like linear perspective and chiaroscuro—use of

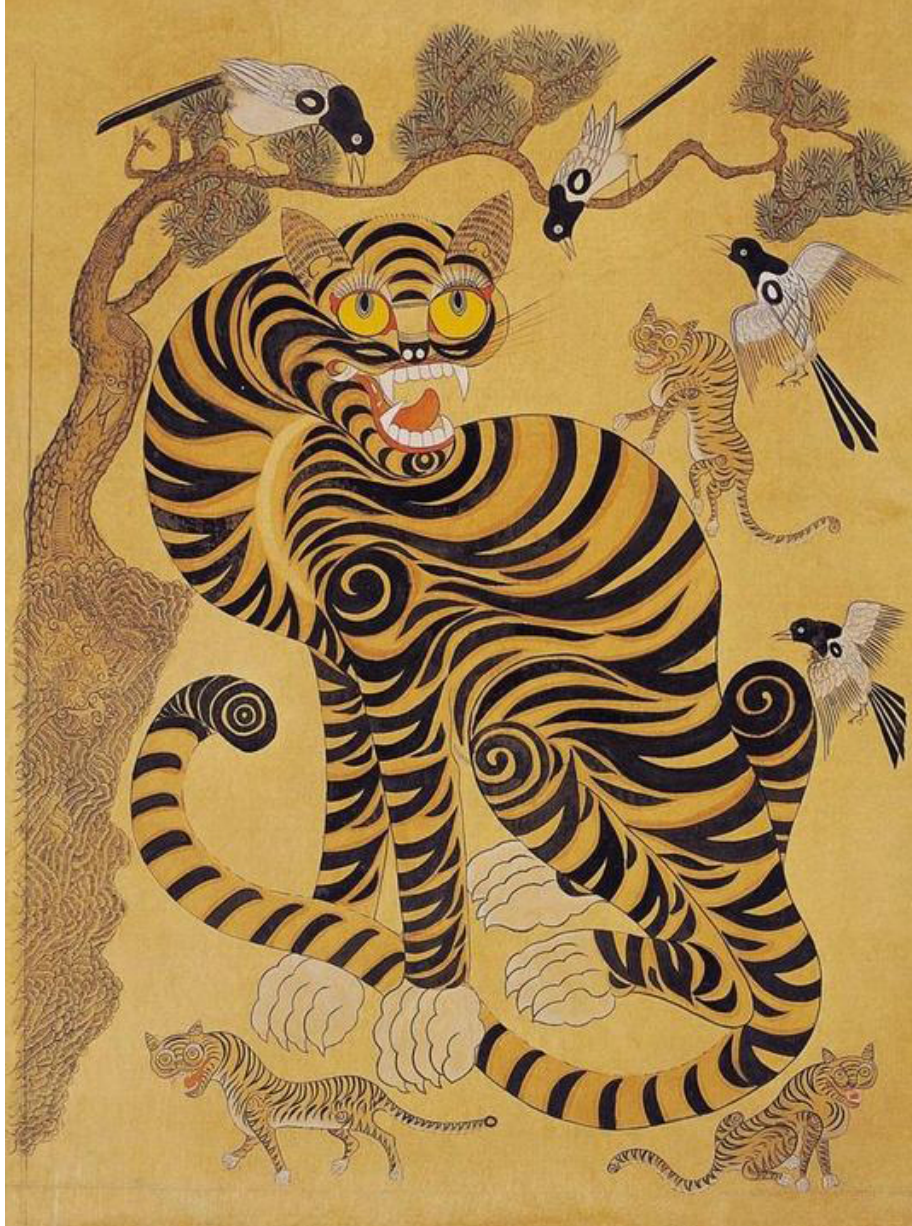


Figure 4. Unknown artist "Example of Minhwa" Joseon dynasty

strong contrasts between light and dark—which are logical approaches to create illusions. I manipulate the westernized space by combining the ideas of Korean folk paintings, “Minhwa.” (Figure 4), which portrays people’s practical lives in a playful manner by self-taught artists. The paintings are celebrated for

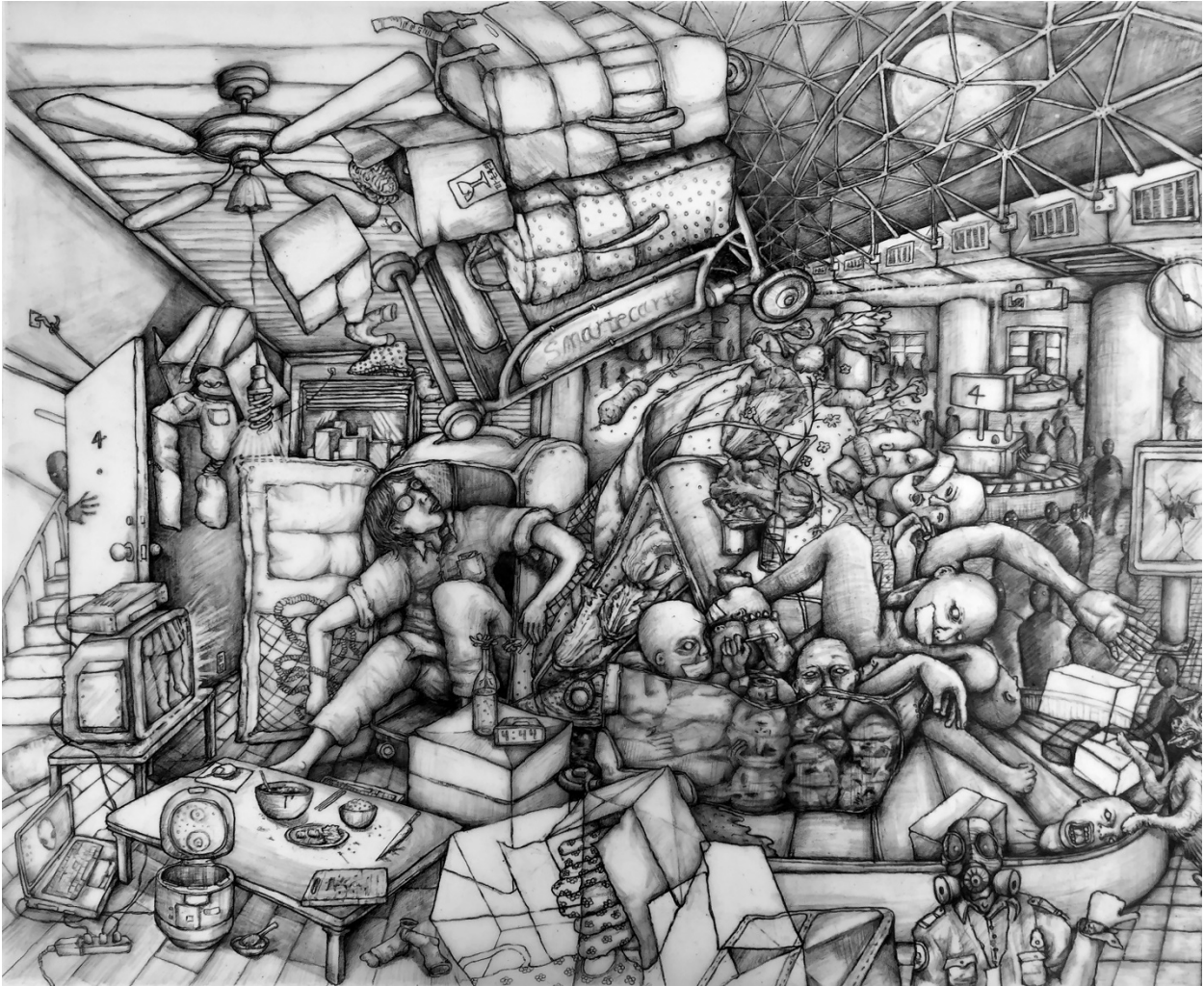
the artists' mind and spirit rather than their technique or training. My attempt at combining the western method of creating the illusion of three-dimensional space and sense of value that comes from Korean culture is exploited to create my visual language.

## **BODY OF WORK PART ONE**

### **NECESSITIES OF LIFE**

The *Necessities of Life* series came from struggling throughout my academic journey. The content of the work highlights my cultural difference by metaphorically setting a cultural boundary. Starting with this series of work, I chose to acknowledge my immediate and current social status as an immigrant. To document my transition from Korea to America, this series depicts the three necessities of life: shelter, clothing, and food.

## Shelter



*Plate 2. Youngjae Kim "Shelter" Lithography 22x30" 2019*

The first image in the series entitled "Shelter" (Plate 2), takes place in San Francisco where I began my high school education by myself. During this time, I found adjusting to the customs of a new educational system difficult, mostly due to the language differences. In the image, there are many dismembered heads and body parts. The heads are gagged, their mouths are covered, indicating that I am unable to speak. The large quantity of heads in the suitcase suggests that I was confused about which role to take on during this time. The self-portrait inside the other suitcase and unpacked boxes demonstrate that I had only recently arrived in this foreign country. The self-portrait looking back to the right side of the composition examines the San Francisco airport ceiling, representing a figure that is uneasy and to

express the lack of adjustment to the new environment. The number four off in the distance near the baggage claim is symbolic, representing death in Korean and Japanese culture. Relevant numbers are used repeatedly throughout my work as a device to represent my emotion at that time, obvious symbols to a person who knows about Asian culture, less obvious to one who does not, making this a code of sorts. This intentionally expresses that I was only communicating and able to accept people of my own culture at the time. Much of the series takes place in nighttime scenes, representing the time change between the United States and South Korea.

## Clothing

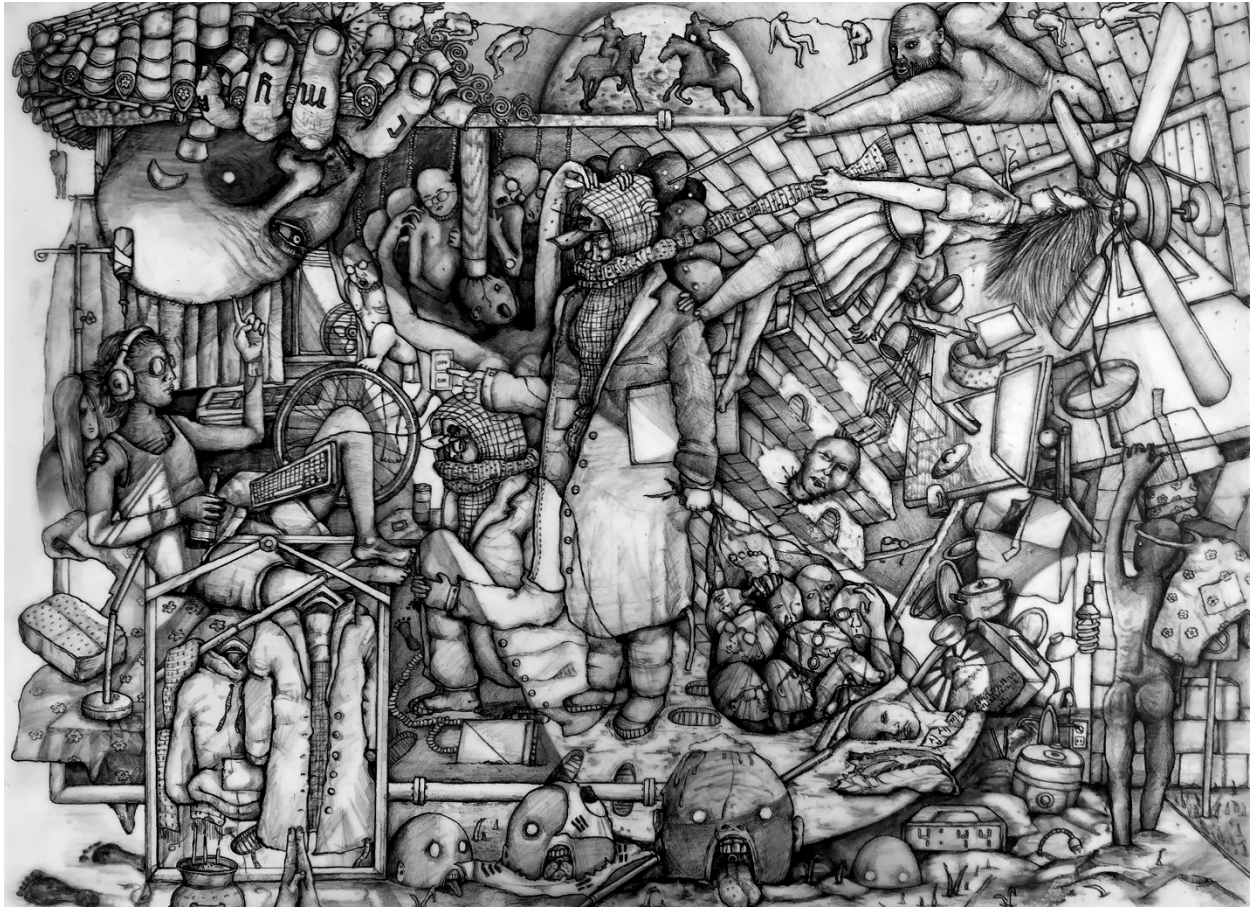


Plate 3. Youngjae Kim "Clothing" Lithography 22x30"2019

The second piece of the *Necessities of Life* explores “Clothing” (Plate 3) as a symbol of possessions that are often stored in the place you live. The types of clothes also represent the climate describing the transition between my undergraduate education to graduate education. The transition resulted in moving state to state, an experience of re-establishing the *Necessities of Life*. The idea of clothing is used to express the feeling of not having an actual home. Changes in clothing due to different climates in the US demonstrated the distances I have traveled. The silhouette of medieval Mongolian horse riders in the moon symbolizes a nomadic lifestyle. At the top left and top right side of the composition, the two male figures are my former and current professors. One with the eye beaming the searchlight is my current professor, who is recruiting graduate students. The self-portrait figures exist both in the center and left side of the picture plane. The figure in the middle is a self-portrait, which

portrays me in the past wearing winter clothing needed in South Dakota's everlasting winter, where I attended undergraduate school. The self-portrait on the left side is my present form, wearing fewer clothes in North Carolina's warmer weather. The pose was borrowed from the painting "The Death of Socrates" by Jaques-Louis David. I found it compelling that Socrates willingly took poison to kill himself rather than fleeing. This is an empathetic scene while pursuing higher enlightenment in a political and unorganized system under the Trump administration hostile to immigrants. The beam of light divides the composition into two diagonally. The top half of the composition depicts a female figure representing my past relationship to express sadness and bitterness caused by my nomadic lifestyle. This demonstration of emotion may seem naïve; however, unrefined emotions that are raw and uncalculated, may bring sincerity.

## Food



Plate 4. Youngjae Kim "Food" Lithography 22x30" 2019

In the composition representing “Food” (Plate 4), I confront the reality of living as a Korean in a predominantly white and black population in graduate school. This image does not focus solely on my Korean culture nor assimilating into American culture, rather this image speaks to my current life situation. The scene takes place in my current room with slight modifications. The content of this image, like all the series, comes from personal experience. Due to the fragrant ingredients used in Korean cuisine, my neighbors often have strong reactions to my cooking. The entire composition is centered around a large frying pan, if the pan flips during the cooking process, the entire composition would get destroyed. There are nude figures wearing gas masks entering the image through the door, I refer to as “shadow people,” which appear throughout my other series of work and represent one view that I have of



American people. The shadow people are putting out the cooking flame to maintain the composition before the frying pan gets flipped. The only two female characters in the scene are again referencing my past relationship, the only person with whom I could enjoy Korean cooking; the food constantly reminds me of her ghostly existence. The Korean cooking makes me feel solitude and sorrow, therefore an elixir for oblivion is needed – alcohol. The inclusion of beer cans in this piece and the fragmented nature of the image symbolizes the disintegration of memories that occurred with the alcohol that was consumed.

In summary, the *Necessities of Life* series, utilizes imagery of shelter, clothing, and food to reflect on my nomadic experiences of moving from South Korea to the United States and living in several different states while pursuing an education. The series points out the various challenges of the life of an immigrant; however, it does not describe the essence and source of the differences that define the immigrant. This series led me on a journey to answer those questions. In the second series of work, capture the essence of the immigrant by utilizing the term “invasive species.”

## INVASIVE SPECIES

An invasive species is something non-native that is introduced to an environment, which then spreads. The spread is believed to cause damage to that environment and has a negative effect on human beings. With dramatic flair, the term invasive species can apply to current immigrants of the United States. As an immigrant from South Korea, I consider myself a member of an invasive species. This term ‘invasive species’ is branded on immigrant group by non-immigrants. A group only becomes an invasive species if others perceive and label them as such.

Generally, invasive species arrive in their new environments by accident, for instance, a foreign land or body of water through human error. The individuals within the species do not understand their new and strange environment. They continue to live as they did in their native environment, prior to their “invasion” of the new location. They are considered invasive due to the disruption of the new ecosystem where they live and thrive. According to the National Wildlife Federation, “human health and economies are also at risk from invasive species. The impacts of invasive species on our natural ecosystems and economy cost billions of dollars each year.”<sup>4</sup> This dry and serious description of invasive species surely could be applied to immigrants as well, in our current political climate.

Currently, the view of immigrants in America is not positive; some Americans complain that immigrants are taking their jobs. They protest things they believe are affected by immigration, such as affirmative action, a policy where a set number of people are accepted into schools, businesses or employment due to their ethnicity rather than by merit or performance. Even with limited knowledge and understanding of its own history and culture, the general American public recognizes that its nation’s foundation is based on immigrants and the wealth of experience and skills that they brought to this land. The Europeans that arrived in America centuries ago were the first generation of invasive species.

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<sup>4</sup> “Invasive Species.” *National Wildlife Federation*, [www.nwf.org/Educational-Resources/Wildlife-Guide/Threats-to-Wildlife/Invasive-Species](http://www.nwf.org/Educational-Resources/Wildlife-Guide/Threats-to-Wildlife/Invasive-Species).

So, the question arises, who belongs in the category of native species and who belongs in the category of invasive species? The distinction may seem arbitrary when we reflect upon the fact that most of the American population or their recent ancestors were immigrants. Many Koreans or half Koreans who were born in the United States and are rightfully American citizens, that identify more as American than Korean. In which category should they belong? Are they a native species or invasive species? This question is difficult to answer as an immigrant, because only individuals who qualify as native species can define others as the 'invasive.' It is questionable to categorize the European descendants as a native species in America, given that there were Native Americans living in this country long before the Europeans arrived. Can Europeans be likened to the European Starling, one of the common invasive animal species in America? No matter how many generations they breed, offspring will never be categorized as a native species if they thrive and unintentionally contribute to the disruption of the ecosystem.

For this series of works, I have chosen four species, typically classified as 'invasive' in America which all originate in East Asia. These four species symbolically describe my life as an immigrant in America: Snakehead Fish, Asian Carp, Korean Chipmunk, and Kudzu. A self-portrait is added to each scene to relay the story sequentially. All scenes use a different and well-known Greek myth to narrate and serve as a premise for each story. The use of Greek mythology does not imply that the work is designed for that Western audience, but rather it utilizes tools familiar to the western audience to communicate what this audience perceives as an 'other.' Similarly, this document is written in English, but designed to empower unspoken immigrant voices who do not speak or write the language.

Snakehead Fish



Plate 5. Youngjae Kim "Snakehead Fish" Lithography 15x22" 2019

The first print in the series is called “Snakehead Fish” (Plate 5) and depicts me arriving in the United States of America. The Greek myth used in this image is the “Fall of Icarus.” Icarus flew too close to the sun, melted his wings and fell back to earth. In a similar way as I seek opportunities in the United States, I may miss the pitfalls and dangers just as Icarus did. I depict myself as falling to the bottom of a well. The setting of the bottom of the well is culturally significant. In East Asia there is a saying that “A frog lives in the well,” meaning that the frog who lives inside the well cannot comprehend the bigger world beyond. It is the same for human beings living in a three-dimensional world that cannot understand or feel beyond this world. As an immigrant, although I did not fall from the sky as Icarus did, I became stuck in the well. Hopes for a new existence in fact turned out to be a time of incomprehension and isolation represented by the Snakehead fish, an invasive species. The perspective in this piece is twisted and impossible, and it directs the viewer’s eye through both the falling and landing. In the top third of the image, are four pipes providing the well with liquid, the type of liquid is unknown and serves to foreshadow the next image in the series.

Asian Carp



Plate 6. Youngjae Kim "Asian Carp" Lithography 15x22" 2019

“Asian Carp” (Plate 6) is the second print of the *Invasive Species* series. As the story continues sequentially, the positive scenario from the first image is partially included in the second. I have emerged from the sand at the bottom of the well and am now better positioned at the junction of a sewer from where I look down at my reflection in the water. The Greek myth referred to here is that of Narcissus and I have directly borrowed from Caravaggio’s painting “Narcissus” (1599) The sewer is chosen for the story of the “Asian Carp” to transition the narrative of the *Invasive Species* to the next image of the series, which is a city street and therefore the exit sign from the well and the steps are emphasized and illuminated.

My story of immigration is also influenced by the psychologist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and her book *On Death and Dying*.<sup>5</sup> Kubler-Ross explains five different emotional phases of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. I use four phases of emotional change in the series, *Invasive Species* including incomprehension, isolation, insensibility and rejection. The previous print in the series “Snakehead Fish” references the ‘Fall of Icarus’ and depicts the phase of incomprehension. This print, “Asian Carp,” references, ‘Narcissus’ and represents isolation. The figure is a self-portrait falling in love with its reflection, while an Asian Carp surfaces from the water. This is to symbolize the reflection of myself, doubling as a self-identification as an invasive species. In this image, the undescriptive heavily shaded figures in the composition symbolize the American people, intentionally absent of ethnic characteristics as I do not attempt to depict the typical Americans due to the heterogeneity of the population. These figures I call ‘shadow people’ and symbolize the general American populace in my later images. Their presence in this scene is to emphasize the relationship between Americans and myself. They convey the isolation phase can never be completely overcome and remind the viewer of the differences between immigrants and natives.

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<sup>5</sup> Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth. *On Death And Dying*. New York: Collier Books/Macmillan 1970, c1969.

Korean Chipmunk



Plate 7. Youngjae Kim "Korean Chipmunk" Lithography 15x22" 2019



In the third print of the *Invasive Species* series, the “Korean Chipmunk,” (Plate 7) shows the shadow people more obviously representing the American populace. Here, Pandora’s box is used to release the invasive species depicted by the Korean Chipmunk. ‘Insensibility,’ the third phase of emotional change, is explored in this image. The self-portrait figure rises from the sewer and makes himself known to the public. The traffic signs with imperial measurements, and the style of crosswalk lights provide clues that this is a typical American city street. The cigarette smoking in a public place indicates indifference to public health, a significant difference in cultural values and, showing insensibility to self and others. Pandora’s box is shaped like a suitcase, indicating that this box has traveled from a distant land, it is the box of an immigrant. As in the Greek myth, the box should not have been opened and once opened could not be shut again. As such, foreign customs escape from the box, contaminating ideas into the new American environment, diluting and diminishing the American shadow people. The Korean culture spread over the land, represented by the chipmunks and the pine tree mimics the oriental painting style. As white blood cells attack the disease in the body, the invasion of a foreign culture does not go unnoticed.

**Kudzu**



*Plate 8. Youngjae Kim "Kudzu" Lithography 15x22" 2019*

The Korean chipmunk carries us into the final image of the *Invasive Species* series, “Kudzu” (Plate 8). The scene takes place inside a city silhouette from the previous print. The cultural invasion cannot go unpunished. The central masculine figure represents the all-powerful and righteous American, ‘Captain America’ from the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) reaching towards me. The mythologic reference here is that of Apollo and Daphne. As Captain America reaches for me, I become kudzu, just as Daphne became a tree. The setting is intended to evoke a sense of the MCU 2012 Avengers movie, where Captain America successfully defends New York City from invaders. The rundown city with broken vehicles adds to the apocalyptic feeling and a cliché figure tweeting the battle scene hovers above. My permanent resident card, commonly known as a ‘green card’ has on it an “A - Number” where my Alien registration number is recorded. This is how I felt connected to Marvel’s superhero movie about aliens. The final scene of the movie indicates that the American way will always prevail. Even though the image shows an attempt at rejecting this assimilation, in the end, the whitewashing will be complete, and the self-portrait figure will become one of the shadow people.

This series of images poses two questions:

First, if immigrants are an invasive species to the continent of America, how far should this category be extended to describe the general population, and should it include all individuals that have arrived since the time of colonization?

Second, is the disturbance of the ecosystem by an invasive species part of the natural settling process?

If the first question is affirmative and contains greater truth, most of the people living on this continent are an invasive species. If, however the second question is affirmative and more accurate, then I, as an immigrant, am simply undergoing the metamorphosis to becoming an American.

## DISCUSSION

In the series of *Necessities of Life*, I talked about how and when I arrive in the USA, and where I have been since. In the series of *Invasive Species*, I discussed what and who I am in this country. These two series of prints explore the question of who, what, how, where and, when I am an immigrant.

My circumstances are not so bad. I have the opportunity to live in the United States, which means I am able to work and study. I can speak freely and I am unbound by South Korea's obligatory military service that most Korean men suffer. I am still young and still have all my limbs and able to do anything I want. Opportunity is endless in the world's greatest nation.

It is undeniable that the current version of myself has more luck than many others. However, complaining about a situation is an evaluation. With my own experience as a new generation immigrants and especially an Asian, the sense of "otherness" has many factors, such as lack of normalcy in family, culture, and language. Although it is not fair to speak for all the immigrants in this country, it is an attempt to put myself in a showcase to demonstrate my deprivation and, sense of "otherness," and a list of gripes and complaints about being an immigrant.

Living here and always considered as being from there, is a sort of suffering. If I must suffer as an immigrant both physically and psychologically, then I must know why I suffer in this purgatory.

"Why" and "purgatory" are the two keywords for the next series, the *Seven Deadly Sins*.

## BODY OF WORK PART TWO

### SEVEN DEADLY SINS

In the late sixth century Pope Gregory the Great reconsidered the worst sins of man to establish the “seven deadly sins.” These sins include greed, pride, sloth, wrath, gluttony, lust, and envy. It is a well-known subject from Dante’s “Inferno,” through different hells in his literary journey. These have been visually narrated by several artists, before I created this series of prints.

Working in a series allows me to contemplate aspects of an idea. The seven different panels in my “seven deadly sins” series indicate different layers of hell, as it did for Danté. The series is created to find “why.” *Seven Deadly Sins* follows the same physical and dimensional format as the *Invasive Species* as well as technical attributes. Considerations for developing an over-all visual language became increasingly important, resulting in the series sharing many symbols and signifiers with the same the meanings. One significant example of this is the depiction of the “shadow people.” Borrowing the attributes describing a journey through the seven layers of hell, the seven hells change abruptly and the composition from each panel has little correlation. In Dante’s story, he finds historical figures in each hell, such as Cleopatra in the inferno of lust. Similarly, I drew people I know who I think represent the particular sin. The order of the series is not necessarily following Dante’s “Inferno,” or each prescribed layer of hell Pope Gregory the Great specified. However, each depiction of the particular sin contains specific and different complaints regarding each sin.

In these seven series of work, I play the role of Dante, and America is his infernos. The series is a paradoxical hell depicting how the character masters all the sins to become more American.

Pride



Plate 9. Youngjae Kim "Pride" Lithography 15x22" 2019

“Pride” (Plate 9) shows the demolition of the Statue of Liberty; its original form has been a façade and through this destruction, its true form is revealed. The true form is a monstrosity which represents the current direction regarding the immigration laws. The Statue of Liberty has been a symbol of immigration, opportunity, and a better future. In recent years, the leaders of this nation changed that agenda. Not all Americans follow this ideology, which is represented by two figures at the bottom right of the composition: the left figure is me dressed as a spiritual leader comforting the other figure. The spiritual leader figure reappears throughout the series. The second figure who has more defined features is a friend of mine, who is an American. In this series of work, I included people I know just as Dante finds important people in hell. My friend’s role in this print is to represent Americans who didn’t approve of this nation’s current leaders and their direction.

Wrath



Plate 10. Youngjae Kim "Wrath" Lithography 15x22" 2019



“Wrath” (Plate 10) is a panel in the *Seven Deadly Sins* series that is controversial due to its provocative and violent imagery. However, it is needed to express this sin. “Wrath” conveys the idea of becoming irate and blind. The scene forces my complaints on the viewer through its disturbing imagery. The scene takes place in a spiritual location, which is borrowed from inside of a gothic church.

This piece was the starting point that I decided to portray myself as a seeker of truth, a pathfinder to this journey of the inferno. The messages about immigrant life and the sense of “otherness” have similarities with religion. The messages or critique began with good intentions. The focus intended to express social and political discomforts immigrants are subjected to in their experiences of migration and ever after. These issues develop from a one-sided point of view that can become radical and ultimately evolve into racism. The notion of being American is cultural, but also very similar, in many ways to a religion. By combining religious characteristics and attire, I intend to compare the two. The hatred of one evokes the wrath of another.

The intentions of exploring representations of “wrath” as an expression of hatred towards immigrant generated imagery provokes images that represent other types of hatred, such as misogyny. It was not the intent to compare these two forms of hatred and bias; those against immigrants and those against women, but the reading of imagery evoked a controversial response by my peers due to its provocative and perhaps violent imagery. An unintended correlation, but expressed depiction of unwanted violence to another person.

Greed



Plate 11. Youngjae Kim "Greed" Lithography 15x22" 2019

“The discipline of colleges and universities is in general contrived, not for the benefit of the students, but for the interest, or more properly speaking, for the ease of the masters. There is no art which one government sooner learns of another than that of draining money from the pockets of the people.”  
By Adam Smith.<sup>6</sup>

The perception of greed is often reserved for those who want everything or businesses that are simply out to make as much money as possible disregarding the betterment of humanity. There are institutions that become greedy, despite their initial idealistic intentions. The print “Greed” (Plate 11) portrays academia in the United States, which seems to have developed into a system that regards its best interest above all else, despite the idealism that education should be about advancing society. In 1620, Francis Bacon published a scientific manifesto arguing that “knowledge is power.”<sup>7</sup> Education is the most reliable means to get the required qualifications in the world. “Greed” is about this tension of idealism and self-interest. A South Korean researcher, Jang Yu-Seung at Dankook University, posted a column that parallels the concerns explored in this print.<sup>8</sup> He argues that there are three things in this world that are really businesses setup to profit and entice greed, but pretend that they are not: marriage, religion, and academia. The principle of a business is to produce a profit. Jang points out these three societal institutions are easily offended when one points out that the institutions are really businesses with a profit motive. The reason for this argument is that these three institutions only prosper when their idealism is above the motives of a business. Business has implications in our society and culture and being greedy, therefore it is not necessarily pessimistic. All human action relates to economic attributes, and without the economic attributes, regardless of the cause, the society cannot be materialized. In academia, the cause should be about education and research. However, education cannot be effective without concern for economics in the United States. Much of the intention and aspiration of education is directly related to the budget and funding models they create to do so. This becomes problematic when materialization of education and the ability to serve the cause are reversed to finances. As a result, in many situations

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<sup>6</sup> The Wealth of Nations, Book V, Chapter I, Part III, Article II, p. 764, para. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Rodríguez García, J.M. *Scientia Potestas Est – Knowledge is Power: Francis Bacon to Michel Foucault*. Neohelicon 28, 109–121 (2001).

<sup>8</sup> Jang, Yu-seung. “대학은 장사다.” 교수신문, 6 Apr. 2015, [www.kyosu.net/news/articleView.html?idxno=30735](http://www.kyosu.net/news/articleView.html?idxno=30735).

education becomes a product to sell. The slogan that academia provides a “better future” becomes empty rhetoric.

I came to the United States as an idealist, seeking a better education. I endured the consequences as an immigrant for my own greedy intentions. The consequences and costs, literally and figuratively, are heavier for immigrants and aliens. However, I must endure the greed by allowing it to disassemble me into smaller parts, place me into the factory of education as I move through the system on a conveyor belt to achieve the goal of being educated. The assimilation is the cost and I have paid the price. I see this as a layer of hell, by being a system of “greed.”

Gluttony



Plate 12. Youngjae Kim "Gluttony" Lithography 15x22" 2019

“Gluttony” (Plate 12) portrays the territorial imperative between different generations of immigrants. “Gluttony” is composed of two sections, one being the inside of the Great Wall and the other the outside that has a security checkpoint. The US Congress building is perched on top of the great wall to represent the parallels of China’s secure territorial boundary and both the physical and assumed borders of America. One of the current political agendas of the American leadership is to complete a wall on the southern border, which seems to relate to the “Great Wall of China,” built to keep unwanted people outside of the mainland. The outside of the wall depicted at the bottom part of the composition shows different situations of immigration that cascade within the image to depict a person that has a permanent resident card in the United States, a person with a non-immigrant work visa such as a D-2 and lastly, one who has nothing. I have permanent residency status, which is why I am holding the shiny card on the bottom right of the image, performing a dance. My Korean co-worker in the studio on left has a temporary D-2 visa and will require him to leave after he finishes school, which will result in him serving in the South Korean military service when he returns home to South Korea. Beyond the depicted examples of visas, the composition is also complimented by dozens of people who have no right to enter the country despite their despair and will die by the fall from the wall. This is represented by the pile of bodies in the center of the print.

Figures that have made it inside of the wall are immigrants who have landed. They are older people I know, my professors that work in North Carolina; one identifies as a Palestinian Arab Israeli and the other, as a Canadian. They are immigrants. The depiction of my professors is to demonstrate and overemphasize the power dynamic, through a vertical relationship between professors and students. The professors are the main characters in this inferno of gluttony, where they devour newer generations of immigrants, including myself and my Korean coworker. This scene is borrowed from Goya’s painting “Saturn Devouring His Son.” This painting represents corruption in humanity, violence in war, and conflict between younger and older generations. Goya’s work and its background of Greek mythology also signifies a father-son relationship, or in this case, the relationship between masters and pupils.

In the gluttonous American society, where immigrants are now being rejected from the country due to the new national agenda, the parental immigrants such as my professors are assimilated to the American culture and society. Despite the dichotomy and although they function as symbols, they to began as immigrants in the United States, but now prosper and appear to be sympathizers to this system. One day, I may become one of them when my generation changes from younger to older. Presently I am in the position of being a pupil and source of their prosperity, a son being devoured by Saturn.

Envy

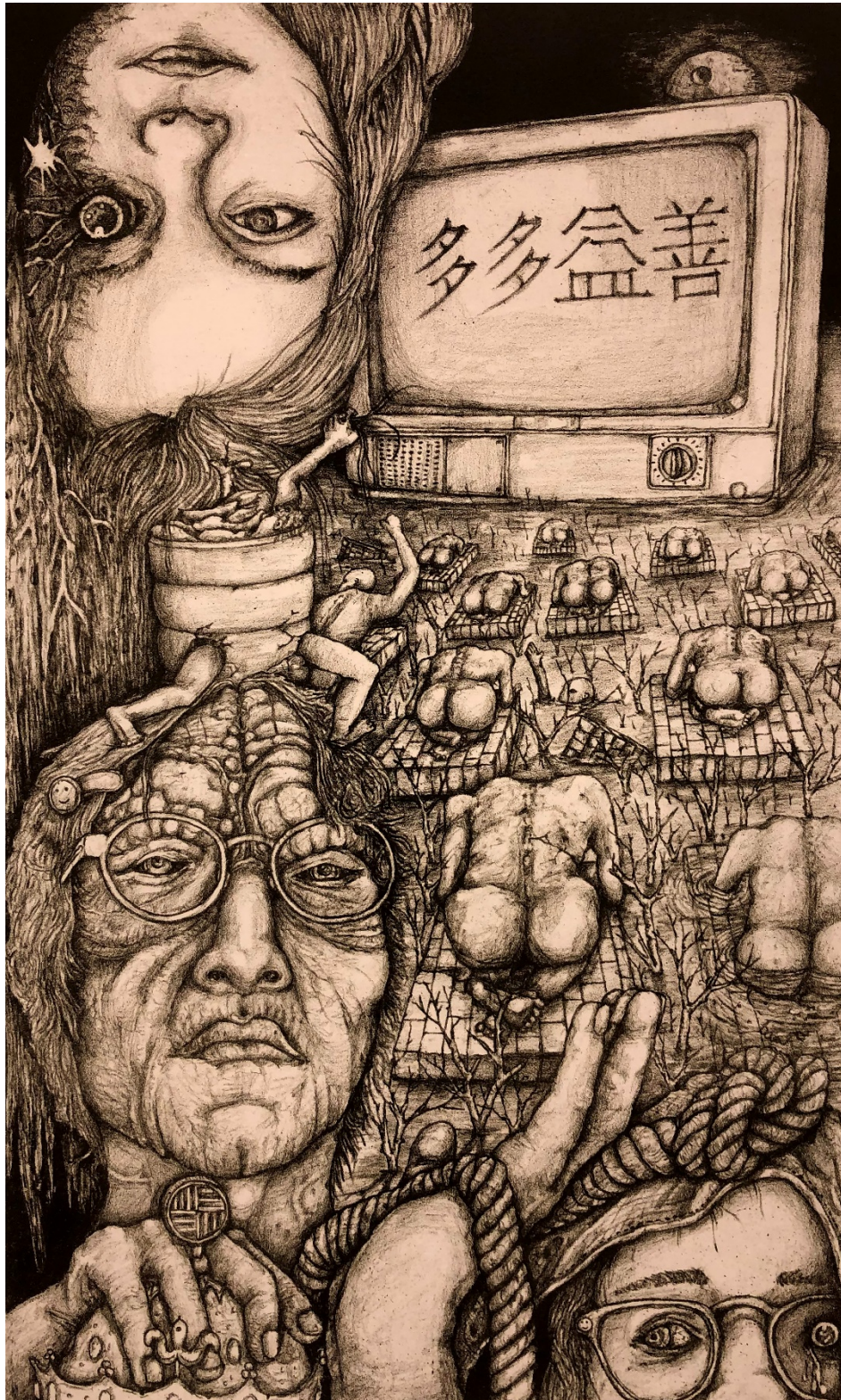


Plate 13. Youngjae Kim "Envy" Lithography 15x22" 2019



There are several types and sources of envy. “Envy” (Plate 13) depicts the notion that jealousy is a form of envy, as is a more in-depth level of envy, desire and greed. The three faces within this composition are intended to be confrontational and serve as a representation of myself and the people I have met. The figures bowing towards television seeking a deeper meaning of envy provoked by social and political motivations. The television screen on the top portion of the image displays the Chinese characters, 多多益善, which translates to “the more, the better.” This is also a reference to the working title from a Korean performance artist Nam June Paik. His piece titled “The More the Better” is about an increasing quantity of technologies. This opens new realms of communication, leading to our society being more understanding and sympathetic to each other. We become more aware of the belongings of others as well as the peril they suffer. We find ourselves needing more and having more.

There is another artist whose work is referenced to create this print, Kim Young Won. Kim is a sculptor who is warning about media and technology. In his work “Bowling people,” he argues that mass media leads society to become and depend on materialism.

In 2020, media is even more portable and affordable than ever before. As Nam June Paik foreshadows with the use of 1003 monitors that made up “The More, the Better,” media has become a new realm of communication. This has truly affected the human mind.

Clinical social psychologists from the article “The interplay between Facebook use, social comparison, envy, and depression” by Helmut Appel, Alexander L Gerlach, and Jan Crusius say this in relationship to that: “In their Facebook profiles, users communicate abundant social comparison information conveying mainly positive self-portrayals. Thereby, social networking sites like Facebook provide a fertile ground for envy. This has been proposed as a mechanism for the potential negative effects of Facebook use on well-being and depression.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Appel, H., Gerlach, A. L., & Crusius, J. (2016). The interplay between Facebook use, social comparison, envy, and depression. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 9, 44–49.

Current media has a comprehensive function as a double-edged sword that can give a sense of belonging to those who may not belong.

The form of envy changes over time and is represented here by two different artists who I admire. The two artists have seen advancing technology and media differently. Paik saw technology as connecting people and yet, with the same sense, Kim saw the human connection having side effects in the form of envy. As an immigrant to this country, I have access to modern technologies, however it does not reduce the sense of being an “other” in our society and the resulting envy I experience which includes envy of ethnicity, culture and close proximity to family. The online connection continues to remind me that I am the “other” in this nation and indicates I may not be part of American society.

Sloth



*Plate 14. Youngjae Kim "Sloth" Lithography 15x15" 2019*

The image of “Sloth” (Plate 14) is nothing but a Quick Response (QR) code. The idea to utilize a QR code instead of a drawn image was conceived of during the execution of the piece for “Envy,” inspired by Nam June Paik’s idea that media can direct viewers to the realm of communication. The QR code depicted in “Sloth” directs people to my webpage. The relative use of the QR code is reliant on convenience and use of technology to make things easier. It has become so easy to access the work online that I myself can be lazy. I am also offering the would-be gallery-goers the opportunity to view my entire exhibition online without going to the gallery, enabling the laziness of the viewer. In this way we all participate in the inaction of the sin of “Sloth.” And further, I am a sloth by not including a hand-drawn, time-consuming labor-intensive qualities that could describe the other works in this series.

Lust



Plate 15. Youngjae Kim "Lust" Lithography 15x22" 2019

Lust can be identified as a strong desire for something and someone. However, I approached the term superficially as an animalistic behavior and sensation. “Lust” (Plate 15) is a combination of hand-drawn material and the continuation of the QR code idea. The original intent of the QR code is to direct people to an American pornography website. The QR code occupies the majority of the image, while the bottom section is hand-drawn to be more suggestive and offer clues to the content of the QR code. Because my thesis exhibition takes place in a state-funded university gallery, I had concerns about how appropriate this choice would be. Therefore, I elected to link my QR code to a dating website for this venue. Despite the QR code guiding the viewers to a PG version of my original idea, the essential concept stays the same.

In summary, the *Seven Deadly Sins* portrays many aspects of being an immigrant in America. The series is an attempt to address, confront and question my sense of “otherness” as a Korean living in the United States. This is investigated by seven different fundamental layers of hell paralleling Dante’s inferno. Although there are various ways to offer a depiction of “others” such as different skin color and appearance, it seems the sins are universal and offer ways an immigrant must navigate a new nation. Much of this is being self-conscious, rather than a social critique. My complaints are based mostly on the dissatisfaction of society, not necessarily criticizing society as a whole. Through this process of drawing and contemplating issues related to being an immigrant, I conclude that some of the seven deadly sins already exist during the time of exile from South Korea as I am already contaminated by American culture and feel a connection with American society. There is concern that American society has superiority over me. It is equivalent to a form of castration that removes the concerns and values to propagate my former society. This whole process of social critique could be a self-fulfilling prophecy as an immigrant.

## BODY OF WORK PART THREE

### LARGE AND SMALL

This section discusses ephemeral art versus archival prints and which has more value. The section will discuss the exhibition of the work in terms of the existence of high and low art and applicability to my work.

I am unsure of the origin of my obsession with efficiency within the art-making process, but my justification for the preoccupation comes from South Korean's "Ppalli-Ppalli culture," which translates to 'fast' or 'hurry' in English. According to BBC, it identifies this "Ppalli-Ppalli sub-culture" as an "unstoppable taste for haste."<sup>10</sup> The BBC introduces Korean's routine speediness with ridiculous examples including 'intensive language classes promising near-immediate results,' 'superhigh speed-dating events,' 'South Korean food delivery services' and 'high-speed internet.' South Korean's rushing culture is to achieve economic progress and industrialization in a very short period of time.

With this understanding being a foundation, a faster method of printmaking and "√ Lithography" was needed; here is where "Ultimate Printmaking" begins. It is the antithesis of traditional printmaking, yet still in a branch of the "√ Lithography."

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<sup>10</sup> Crawford, Matt C. "Travel - South Korea's Unstoppable Taste for Haste." BBC, BBC, 8 July 2018, [www.bbc.com/travel/story/20180708-south-koreas-unstoppable-taste-for-haste](http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20180708-south-koreas-unstoppable-taste-for-haste).

## INSTALLATION “ULTIMATE PRINTMAKING”



*Plate 16. Youngjae Kim "Ultimate Printmaking" Installation shot 8x24' 2020*

“Ultimate Printmaking” (Plate 16-20) utilizes a printing facility such as FedEx to create inexpensive and large images. “Ultimate Printmaking” is an illegitimate child from “√ Lithography.” To describe this method, one more rule is needed from the chapter of “√ Lithography.”

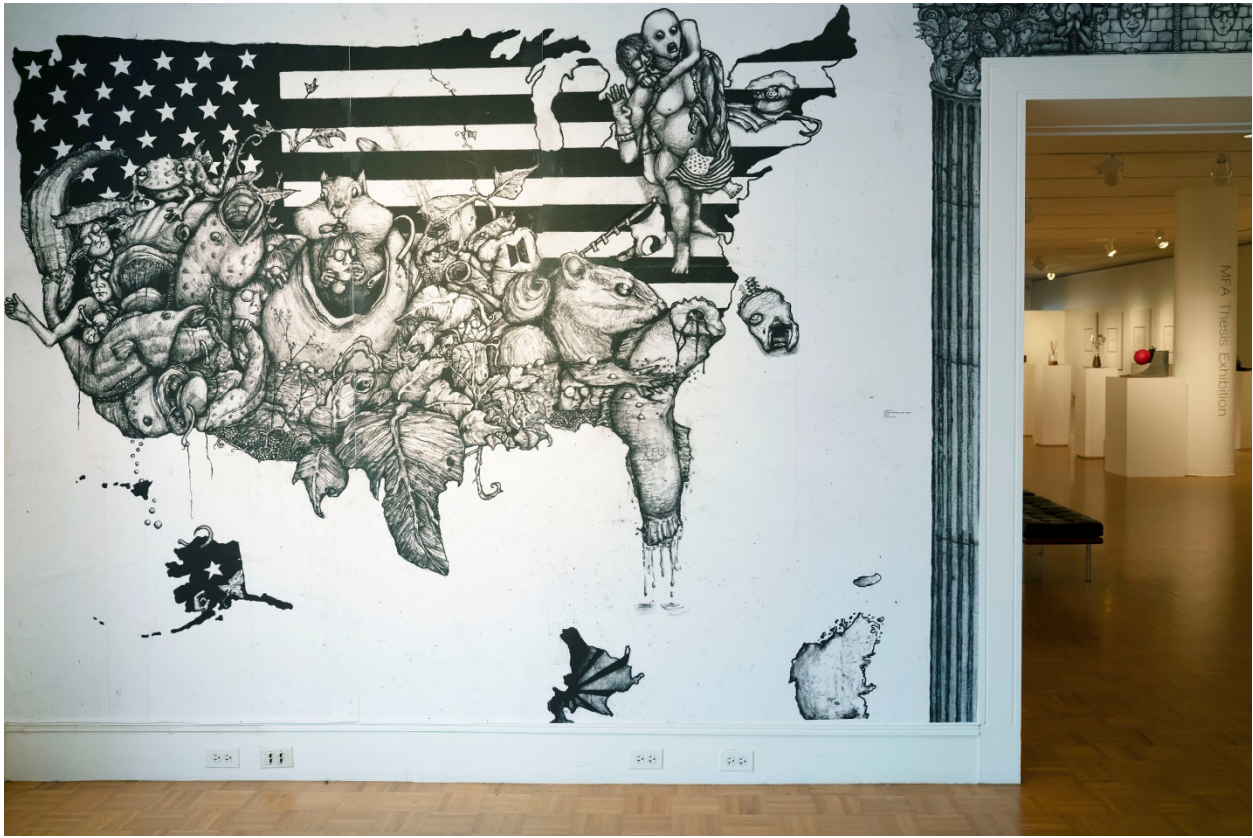
Once again, the rules apply:

1. The work needs to be hand-drawn. This is due to the nature of my complaints: Only I can speak about my experiences.
2. The work is in black and white or achromatic grey images.
3. The work should be editionable without destroying the original drawings.
4. The portability and affordability of images are important.

And the additional rule



5. The work need not be printed by the creator.



*Plate 17. Youngjae Kim "Ultimate Printmaking" Installation shot 8x24' 2020*

To explain its process, the velvet toned drawings are scanned and adjusted digitally and printed by facilities with an inkjet printer. This digitalization of the work is necessary to create infinite multiples. Information that is written in digital format does not require physical labor to print. Of course, someone must push the button to print the work, but I am not the one who is doing it.



*Plate 18. Youngjae Kim "Ultimate Printmaking" Installation shot 8x24' 2020*

In the practice of image-making in general, it is possible that the images transcend language. Through images, the expressions and emotions of the maker maybe conveyed without language. If that is true, regardless of the value implied by the printing process, archived editioned prints vs inkjet copies on cheap paper, the message should be identical.

“Ultimate Printmaking” enables me to obtain oversized images—technically limitless by tiling together—without drawing at that scale. Drawing the gigantic images by hand and traditionally printing them gives one sense of accomplishment and increases the commercial value of that work. However, the digital work is more economical and less time-consuming. With a complete exemption of the economic value of the work, the message remains the same.



Plate 19. Youngjae Kim "Ultimate Printmaking" Installation shot 8x24' 2020

By taking advantage of “Ultimate Printmaking” this allows me to decorate and dominate a space with copies of my drawings. Combined with traditional Japanese adhesive “Jin Shofu”<sup>11</sup> I was able to make the “Ultimate Printmaking” into an installation. The installation focuses on the message, and its concept comes from the weight of that message.

The Installation is a rebirth of my *Invasive Species* series. The original drawings are scanned and adjusted in Photoshop and printed by FedEx Office Print Center workers. The advantage of this method is

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.washiarts.com/tools/jin-shofu>

that the scale is limitless by tiling the images, and is cost-effective. Furthermore, it can be made in an edition due to its xerography system, useful in spreading information quickly and cheaply with a large impact. The disadvantage of this method would be that a single reproduction is worthless in terms of resale.



Plate 20. Youngjae Kim "Ultimate Printmaking" Installation shot 8x24' 2020

The work offers the viewer a complete sensation of my imitation world by scaling up the scene and by overwhelming the space. It is a gesture of abolishing the limitation from both as an immigrant and maker. If the work does represent the maker's voice, then this would be a voice of domination which contains emotion whereas, the same pieces of *Invasive Species* that are framed and following the academic status quo, speaks the neutral tone of its voice.

The "Ultimate Printmaking" allow for the re-consideration and reconfiguration of the images and context previously drawn in this series to elaborate and explore the compositions unified and together as an environment. This transforms the space into a print – the Ultimate Print – the space, environment and

even the structure of the pre-gallery space the images are presented in become the substrate for my influences and narratives.

## DOCUMENTATION OF IMMIGRANT LIFE



Plate 21. Youngjae Kim "Documentation of Immigrant Life" 8x10" 2020

The *Documentation of Immigrant Life* series (Plate 21-65) contains forty-four (44) images collected together in a portfolio box. The majority of the prints are two and a half by four inches, and are created utilizing photolithography, similar to “ $\sqrt$  Lithography,” but smaller in scale. The concept of the prints is the documentation of daily life as an immigrant in America. As demonstrated in the *Seven Deadly Sins* series I am already contaminated by American culture. However, that does not mean I am fully American. I remain an immigrant from South Korea, a cultural mixture.

Every day is an act of confusion due to the cultural duality. To see the entire flow of time, one needs to see comprehensively and keep a journal. As in a private journal, the contents of this series are highly personal. The chosen contents are not to be shared with others, and its meaning is coded. If the installation of the other work demonstrates a momentary voice of domination, this series of work represents whispering the message. There are not many clues for the viewer. The common concept in these representations is divided into two major emotions; one where I feel the sense of “otherness” and the second where I feel contaminated within American society.

The first goal of this series is to find common issues of past emotions. The second goal is to create a series of work that offers viewers a sensation of traditional sentiment of printmaking.

Below are the contents of the series work *Documentation of Immigrant Life*

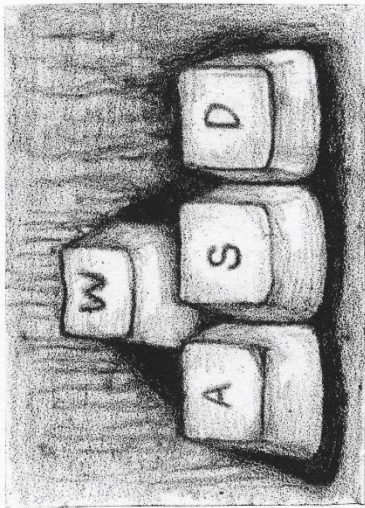


Plate 22. Youngjae Kim "Addiction 1"  
8x10" 2020

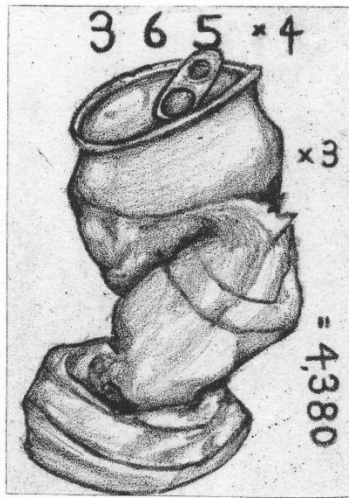


Plate 23. Youngjae Kim "Addiction 2"  
8x10" 2020



Plate 24. Youngjae Kim "Addiction 3"  
8x10" 2020



Plate 25. Youngjae Kim "Addiction 4"  
8x10" 2020

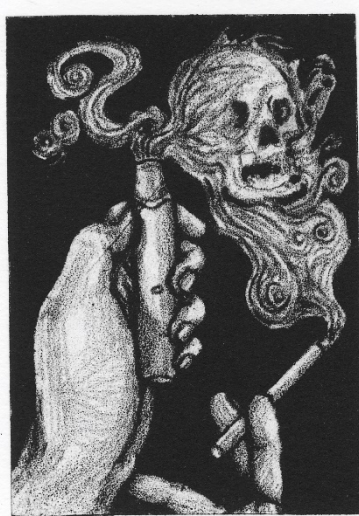


Plate 26. Youngjae Kim "Addiction 5"  
8x10" 2020

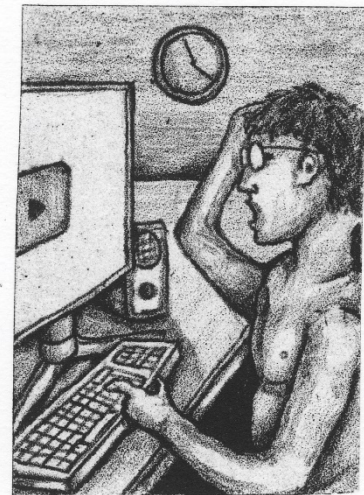


Plate 27. Youngjae Kim "Addiction 6"  
8x10" 2020

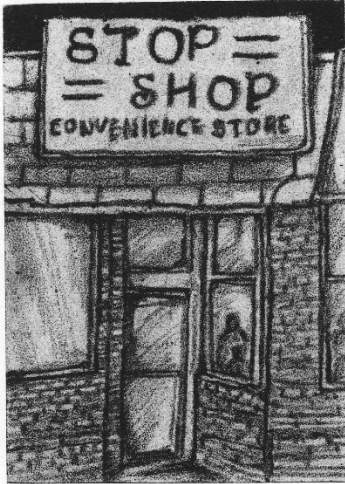


Plate 28. Youngjae Kim "Addiction 7"  
8x10" 2020



Plate 29. Youngjae Kim "Friend 2"  
8x10" 2020



Plate 30. Youngjae Kim "Friend 3"  
8x10" 2020

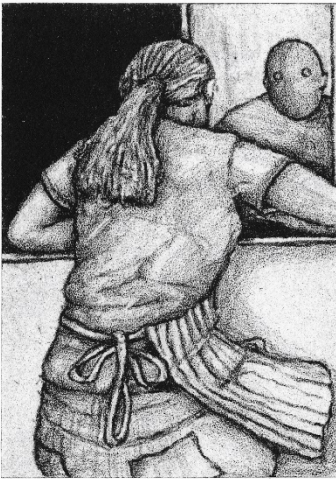


Plate 31. Youngjae Kim "Friend 4"  
8x10" 2020



Plate 32. Youngjae Kim "Friend (?) 1"  
8x10" 2020



Plate 33. Youngjae Kim "MB1"  
8x10" 2020

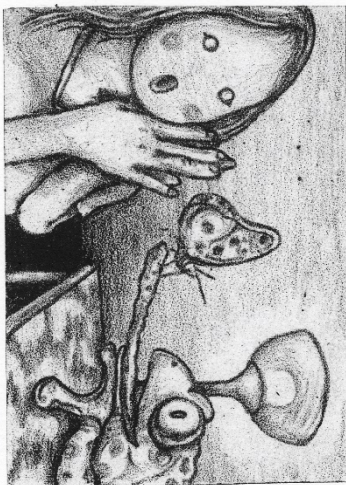


Plate 34. Youngjae Kim "MB 2"  
8x10" 2020



Plate 35. Youngjae Kim "MB 3"  
8x10" 2020



Plate 36. Youngjae Kim "MB 4"  
8x10" 2020





Plate 37. Youngjae Kim "MB 5"  
8x10" 2020



Plate 38. Youngjae Kim "Pet 1"  
8x10" 202022



Plate 39. Youngjae Kim "Pet 2"  
8x10" 2020

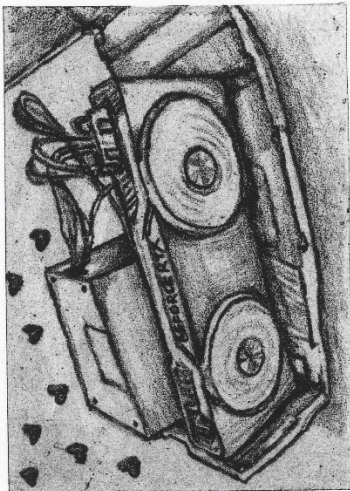


Plate 40. Youngjae Kim "Pet 3"  
8x10" 2020



Plate 41. Youngjae Kim "Pet 4"  
8x10" 2020

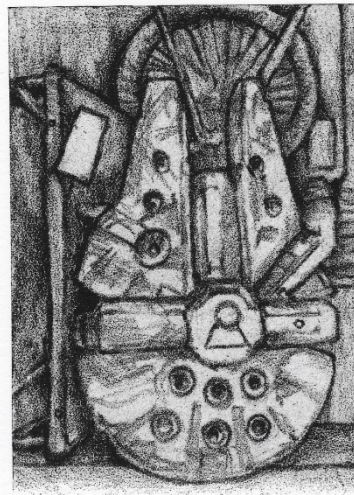


Plate 42. Youngjae Kim "Pet 5"  
8x10" 2020

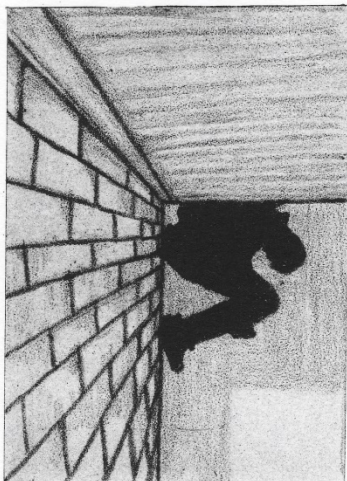


Plate 43. Youngjae Kim  
"Sometimes 1" 8x10" 2020



Plate 44. Youngjae Kim  
"Sometimes 2" 8x10" 2020



Plate 45. Youngjae Kim  
"Sometimes 3" 8x10" 2020



Plate 46. Youngjae Kim  
"Sometimes 4" 8x10" 2020



Plate 47. Youngjae Kim  
"Sometimes 5" 8x10" 2020

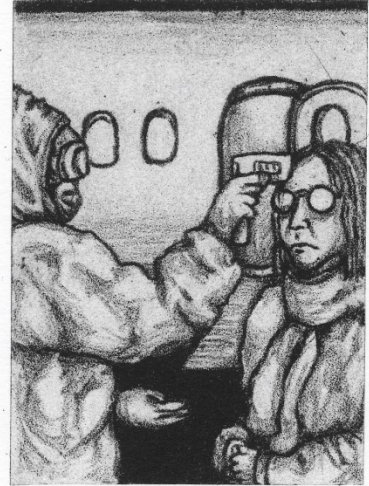


Plate 48. Youngjae Kim  
"Sometimes 6" 8x10" 2020

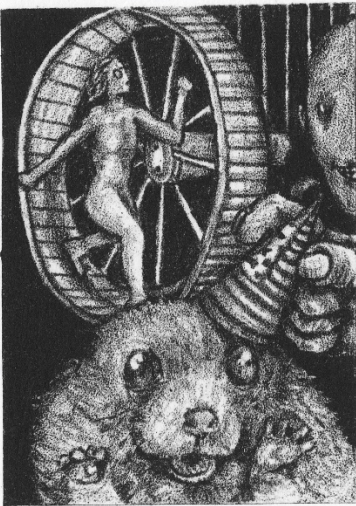


Plate 49. Youngjae Kim  
"Sometimes 7" 8x10" 2020



Plate 50. Youngjae Kim  
"Sometimes 8" 8x10" 2020

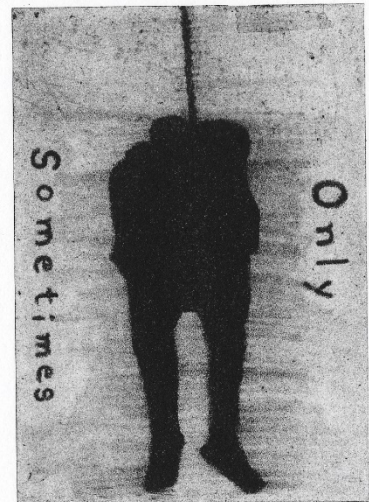


Plate 51. Youngjae Kim  
"Sometimes 9" 8x10" 2020



Plate 52. Youngjae Kim "???" 1"  
8x10" 2020



Plate 53. Youngjae Kim "???" 2"  
8x10" 2020



Plate 54. Youngjae Kim  
"Immigrant 1" 8x10" 2020



Plate 55. Youngjae Kim  
"Immigrant 2" 8x10" 2020



Plate 56. Youngjae Kim  
"Immigrant 3" 8x10" 2020



Plate 57. Youngjae Kim  
"Immigrant 4" 8x10" 2020



Plate 58. Youngjae Kim  
"Immigrant 5" 8x10" 2020



Plate 59. Youngjae Kim  
"Immigrant 6" 8x10" 2020



Plate 60. Youngjae Kim  
"Immigrant 7" 8x10" 2020



Plate 61. Youngjae Kim  
"Brett 1" 8x10" 2020



Plate 62. Youngjae Kim "Brett 2"  
8x10" 2020



Plate 63. Youngjae Kim "Brett 3"  
8x10" 2020



*Plate 64. Youngjae Kim "Brett 4" 8x10" 2020*



*Plate 65. Youngjae Kim "Brett 5" 8x10" 2020*

## CONCLUSION

Amerikorean began with the nihilist and escapist behavior of an immigrant in America. My visual exploration focuses on the fundamental traits and self-experience of being an immigrant in the United States. The intent is to demonstrate an examination of American cultural, political, and social standards through emotions, thoughts and humor to initiate and promote a productive discussion about the complex subject of immigration. With the introspective examples of being an immigrant combined with pessimistic and humorous visual language, I hope for a conversation that fosters an understanding that is empathetic towards those who migrate to this nation.

The images contemplate issues related to immigration through visual means rather than with text, so I can avoid speaking, writing, and reading in English. There is a difference between “I cannot” and “I will not”; my avoidance of English is more towards the latter. It is a protest due to my analysis of about being an immigrant in this country. This act of avoidance creates complaints and that can only be conveyed through my drawings.

Through the complaints or more correctly, by recording my hardship as an immigrant in two-dimensional space, my dual identities emerge. My split identities—Korean and American, foreign and native, adjusted and never adjusting provide a voice to all of those who, in one aspect or another, define themselves as foreign, aliens or “others” in American society.

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