

Japan's first grant towards Socially Engaged Art

Kawamura Arts and Cultural Foundation Socially Engaged Art Support Grant

The joint project between the artist and North Korea defectors in Japan

“Morning Dew” by Soni Kum won the grant!

Special grant will be awarded to Pavel Ruzyak



photo by Park Jong-ho

Kawamura Arts and Cultural Foundation (Chairman: Yoshihisa Kawamura) launched Japan's first support grant towards Socially Engaged Art in 2017. For the first edition, Akira Takayama (PortB) was selected as its grantee with the project New Tokyo School Excursion Project. We are pleased to announce the grantee of the second edition, selected among 20 international applicants (9 overseas and 11 domestic) following the open call and screening.

■2019 Grantee Project

Applicant: Soni Kum

Project: Morning Dew

Grant Amount: up to 4 million JPY

■2019 Special Grantee

Applicant: Pavel Ruzyak

Project: Japan–Community Film Editing Project

Grant Amount: 500,000 JPY

■About the project “Morning Dew”

This project is a collaborative art project with North Korean defectors living in Japan, former North Korean Japanese wives, and artists based in Japan.

There are currently about 200 North Korean defectors living in Japan. Many of them are former Korean residents in post-war Japan. During Japanese colonialism, many Koreans immigrated to Japan.

They were living under the condition of severe poverty.

Discrimination against Koreans were almost unbearable to many, since 1959, they started to immigrate to North Korea.

They are called “returner” as they were considered to return to their fatherland.

However many of them were from Southern part of Korea and they immigrated to a totally unfamiliar territory.

Total over 90,000 “returners” immigrated to North Korea and the immigration plan was ended in 1984.

The “returners” were forced to live a hard life in North Korea, in the middle of the poverty of the reconstruction from the Korean War. Many “returners” were sent to concentration camps and to rural areas, forced to live severe life.

Many were already sacrificed.

The North Korean defectors living in Japan are obliged to hide the fact that they are from North Korea.

It is because they would experience difficulties in everyday life otherwise.

Under such circumstances, artists individually will go to meet them. We will conduct workshops.

Through the experiences of making artworks together, listening to the stories, and recording the testimonies, the artists will receive inspiration and deepen the connections with them. We will exhibit the work of each artist, defector or Japanese wife in the end of the project. Through the form of exhibitions and symposiums, we intend to generate a new kind of discussion and discourse of socially engaged art in Japan.

The title Morning Dew is the name of the South Korean song that I learned for the first time in North Korean school.

Morning Dew symbolizes regeneration of something pure and beautiful after going through dark night of the soul.

Soni Kum

■About Soni Kum

Soni Kum is an interdisciplinary artist who was born and raised in Tokyo, Japan as a third generation Korean.

She received a M.F.A. from California Institute of the Arts in the United States in 2005 and Doctor in Fine Arts from Tokyo University of Arts in 2011. Her work has been exhibited at numerous art spaces and film festivals around the world.

After working for activist art projects with North Korean migrants in South Korea for several years, she begun to explore the theme of ritual in her performance/ installation works. She has taught in several universities in South Korea for 4 years since 2011 and received Excellent Lecturer Award from Yonsei University



■About Socially Engaged Art Support Grant

Kawamura Arts and Cultural Foundation was founded on February 15th, 2017, aiming to building a better society by enhancing people' s creativity and imagination with cultural art. The foundation will support activities of artists with remarkable talent, and aspires to further facilitate the creativeness and innovation of cultural art by ascending and developing cultural art that have been fostered so far.

Kawamura Arts and Cultural Foundation started a new grant supporting projects categorized as Socially Engaged Art. Now at a time where the world is facing drastic changes, one of the major issues in contemporary art is how it displays creativity through relationship with the society. Many artists decide to take the path of proactively interposing themselves into communities and exerting their artistic abilities in the society.

Our foundation will accept one art project per year, and implement financial support for Socially Engaged Art projects that commit to the community and society; implement activities together with communities and residents; and aim to build and demonstrate models of a better society.

This grant is the first occasion to subsidize Socially Engaged Art in Japan. Open to all age ranges and nationalities, the foundation proactively welcomes applications from around the globe and intends to announce its activities worldwide.

■Comments from the juries



Yuji Akimoto (Director, The University Art Museum, Tokyo University of the Arts)

This year was the second edition of Japan' s very first grant towards Socially Engaged Art. There were many proposals that featured current social issues from a unique point of view as an artist, such as environmental issues, economic disparity, immigration issues, and more others. Among them, selected this year was the project by Soni Kum, which would attempt to intervene with art into the current situation between the Korean Peninsula and Japan—to an area that has long been placed into a politically and historically difficulty position. Pavel Ruzyak was selected as the special grantee. We highly look forward to the outcome of these two projects.



Yasuyo Kudo (Administrative Director, ART & SOCIETY RESEACH CENTER)

The projects we received for the second edition included proposals that surpassed boundaries of varied expressions, and all proposals were highly interesting and made the final screening become a difficult and time-consuming process. Various ideas from young to established artists with accumulated careers were suggested, which all coped with social issues with art in their unique ways. When considering the point of view as an SEA project, however, there were some weakness found in insights towards the featured social issues, or ways of involvement of participants who would share the experience, or lack of an overall social impact. As expected, approaches from artists had a large variety, while a number of projects had a closed/concealed impression towards the art industry, while several other domestic artists featured festive and convivial impressions of art. Among them, selected this year was the project by Soni Kum in which would highlight the North Korean defectors who currently live in Japan in silence. I felt this project symbolizes the direction of this SEA support grant. The special grantee given to Pavel Ruzyak was selected to encourage and support the steady efforts towards his research based video project. We are happy that this selection had become a positive first step towards an improvement from the last edition, in hope to support artists from overseas.



Kenji Kubota (Independent Curator)

The screening of the second edition of the Socially Engaged Art Support Grant were filled with active discussions among the juries, as there were many proposals with content ideas, even though the numbers went below the previous edition. Among them, the project proposed by Soni Kum was dynamically ambitious and confronted a highly sensitive social issue that would require detailed research and sincere negotiations to realize, and would bring profound significance to the society if the project would proceed as proposed. Following New Tokyo School Excursion Project by Akira Takayama (PortB) from the first edition, it certainly was a great fruitage that we could select a project that is unique to the standing point of Socially Engaged Art. We highly look forward to seeing the outcome of Soni Kum' s project.



Tadasu Takamine (Artist / Associate Professor of Akita University of Art)

Two projects were selected this year. Soni Kum' s Morning Dew is probably a project that requires high risk, and would not come to reality without the sincere dedication by the artist. However, that exactly was why it was selected. Firstly, we felt there were possibilities of realization, and also could feel her sincere dedication, when we saw the names in the list of corporations. We highly look forward to seeing how this project would unfold and come into action. (As a small note, the juries were concerned that Kawamura Arts and Cultural Foundation may express anxiety upon this selection, however, this concern was cased aside by their comment that it would "not be a problem.") Pavel Ruzyak' s proposal came along with a short trailer, which showed a foreigner video artist sneaking inside a Japanese high school and blending into its society as though they were classmates. It simply made us want to see what would come next.



Mouri Yoshitaka (Professor of Tokyo University of the Arts, Graduate School of Global Arts)

For the second edition of the support grant open call, we selected two projects that appear to be highly challenging. Soni Kum' s project would feature North Korean defectors who are currently silently living in Japan in the strained relations between Japan and the Korean Peninsula, and is an ambitious project that would question the essential issue of "how can imaginations of art work towards politics?" The proposal by Pavel Ruzyak from Czech Republic attempts to document the scenes in Japan since the Great East Japan Earthquake in the format of a video. While they are both "unknown" projects by rather young artists, we' d like to leave high expectations to their possibilities because they are "unknown."