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Near No Man's Land, a Quest for Unity and Peace

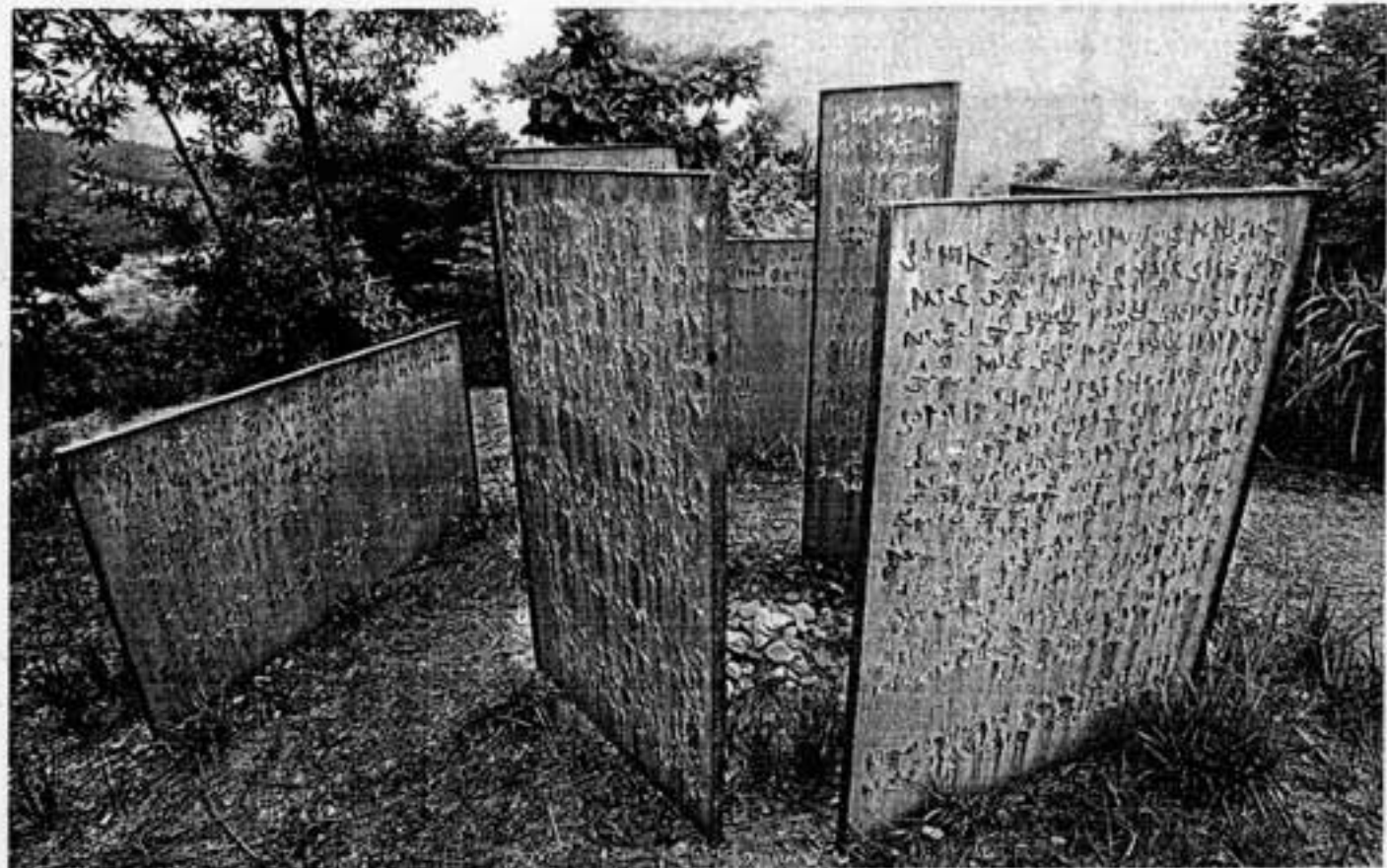
By STEPHEN ZACKS

HEYRI ART VALLEY, South Korea — The hill above Heyri Art Valley, an artists' village under construction about four miles south of the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea, is still marked by trenches from the 1950-53 Korean War. In one of these, the Korean artist Cho Duck Hyun has placed resin model heads that suggest the remains of South Korean soldiers excavated from the hillside. Nearby, a trail of Korean characters in rusted steel traces its way to the top of the hill, where steel panels with cut-out characters — all part of a sculpture by Lim Ok Sang — form a poem dedicated to a South Korean spy who was sent to the North in the 1970's and never returned. The themes of war and partition, here on the world's most fortified border, find further elaboration inside Heyri Art Valley's Jung Han Sook Memorial Hall, where two Swedish artists have installed the mock embassy of Elgaland-Vargaland. This is a mythical country made up of the frontiers of the world's divided territories. The flag is white with a red zigzag, and the artists offer passports and ministerial positions to anyone who applies.

The installations are part of "DMZ-2005," a monthlong exhibition of works by 20 Korean and 20 foreign artists that opened on June 25 to observe the 55th anniversary of the start of the Korean War. Organized by DMZ-Korea, a nonprofit group founded by Yu Yeon Kim, a New York based South Korean curator, and financed primarily by the government of Kyonggi Province, the artworks explore the ramifications of borders and division around the world, with special attention to Korea.

"I wanted to have artists from around the world come and see the location to discuss and question this boundary," Ms. Kim said. "I'm interested in artists having a conversation to rethink and renew the focus on these areas, politically and culturally, from different perspectives."

The Kyonggi authorities supported the exhibition as part of a larger effort to spur development in this region and encourage better inter-Korean relations, in keeping with the South's "Sunshine Policy" of engagement with the North. "The DMZ is the result and symbol of confrontation, conflict, division of the country and war," said the province's governor, Sohn Hak Kyu, in an interview after the exhibition's opening cere-



Installations in South Korea: a sculpture with a poem dedicated to a missing spy; resin model heads, right, honor dead soldiers.

mony. "But we want to change this area of the country into a symbol of peace, reconciliation and unity."

One participating artist, Kang Hong Goo, commented on the unlikelihood of an exhibition at this site. "Fifteen years ago no one would have dreamed of this place," said Mr. Kang, whose black-and-white panoramas of a film set recreating Seoul during the 1910-45 Japanese occupation recall an earlier period of trauma in Korean history. "It's too close to the DMZ. Sometimes I think Koreans have a 'fear of war' syndrome."

The limitations of South Korea's reconciliation with the North are reflected in Ham Yang Ah's video of Mount Kumgang, a tourist retreat in the North built by South Korea's Hyundai Group. The conglomerate's inter-Korean business division, Hyundai Asan, sponsored Ms. Ham's trip to the resort, where she shot video of her nighttime journey to the village from a horse-drawn carriage. The video, titled "Tourism in Communism," conveys the claustrophobia of this enclave totally isolated from ordinary life in the North.

The intense surveillance along the demilitarized zone forms a backdrop for the "Evidence Locker" project



Photographs by Lee Young Ho

devised by the American artist Jill Magid in collaboration with the police of Liverpool, England. Everyday for a month last year, Ms. Magid telephoned the city's video surveyors and asked them to record her at various sites and help guide her through the center of town with her eyes closed. She then had the tapes released to her as "evidence" and edited them for an installation that dramatizes the prevalence of video surveillance in many urban centers around the world while diffusing its threatening associations and turning it into a tool of intimacy.

At the observatory atop nearby Mount Odu, where visitors can look across the demilitarized zone into North Korea, the South Korean artist Ahn Sung Keum has hung a large balloon bearing a new flag she created for the two Koreas. The flag shows a united Korea filled with 3,000 flowers — the number symbolizing the length of the Korean Peninsula in traditional measurements. In clear weather, the observatory can be seen from the North, and the balloon was meant to be visible to North Koreans. The exhibition, however, fell squarely within the rainy season.