

Medina Bazarġali

ALMATY

In an independent, post-Soviet Kazakhstan, the discourse around decolonization has resonated in many artistic practices. Almaty-

based multidisciplinary artist Medina Bazarġali, alongside her collaborator Kokonja, are among the artists who take this subject as the basis for their explorations. Presented at Hong Kong's Centre for Heritage, Arts and Textiles (CHAT), their installation *will there be freedom then? (erkindik bola ma eken sol kezde?)* (2023) comprises a tent made of handmade felt tufted by the artists. Inside a continuously altered soundscape, music programmed using an algorithm plays alongside a live video of guests rendered as shadows with metrics such as gender, race, and anxiety level displayed on screen, reflecting the constructs inherited from colonial powers.

Technology has featured heavily in the artist's practice. To Bazarġali, mathematics and software coding are a universal language—one that is free from historical and national identities. In an earlier video work, *Alienation of History* (2019), Bazarġali explores linguistic displacement. The video shows the constitution of Alash Orda, an independent Kazakh nation-state that existed from 1917–20, being typed in a shell script as the words, one by one, are all autocorrected to their Russian counterparts, depicting the displacement of the Kazakh language and history under the Soviet regime. In the two-channel video installation *Aitys* (2023), shown at Kunstraum Kreuzberg in Berlin, the artist seeks to reclaim the sociopolitical connotations of the eponymous oral tradition of improvised singing, a practice native to Kazakhstan that was forcibly depoliticized during the period of Soviet imperialism. In the videos two performers—known as *akyns*—compose *aitys* that propose different methods to decolonize Kazakhstan, while playing the *dombra*, a traditional two-stringed instrument.

Bazarġali is measured with the use of technology in her practice. "Digitalization can be a form of colonization," the artist stated, referring to traditions and customs that cannot be captured or adapted digitally. Their usage of a traditional artisanal Kazakh material such as felt is simultaneously a rejection of colonial histories and capitalist mass-production. As technology evolves, it will be interesting to see how Bazarġali's decolonial artistic practices develops too.

TIFFANY LUK



MEDINA BAZARĠALI, *will there be freedom then? (erkindik bola ma eken sol kezde?)*, 2023, multimedia installation with hand tufted felt and computer algorithm, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist.

Kyung-Me

NEW YORK

Kyung-Me captivates viewers with scenes of elaborate interior architecture rendered in a dense net of crosshatches.

The eight gothic pen-and-ink charcoal works in Kyung-Me's most recent suite of works, *Sister* (2022), exhibited at New York's Bureau gallery, feature two confined worlds—the monastery of a nun and the *okiya* (lodging house) of a geisha. With one-point perspective, each 1.2-meter-long work meticulously illustrates the isolated inner worlds of these groups of women with strict compositional symmetry and architectural framing. Such rigidity hints at the constraints of these women's lives, at the heart of which lies obsessive perfection. The countless repetition of Kyung-Me's marks and the melancholic shades of charcoal on the surface evoke the strictures of living in such confined quarters.



KYUNG-ME, *The Marriage*, 2022, ink and charcoal on paper, 81.3 × 121.9 cm. Courtesy the artist.

A sharp contrast from her recent works, Kyung-Me's messy and colorful graphic novel *Bad Korean* (2014) depicts the artist raw with desire and despair. With its overt sexuality and open emotions, the book details the artist's pain through broken translations of Korean phrases that caption each image. *Bad Korean* is about imperfection and the pain of not meeting impossible standards. Although Kyung-Me's style evolved toward more meticulous black-and-white illustrations, her concerns have remained the same, as women wrestle with expectations of perfection that come from a life of living for others.

The ink-on-silk painting *A Long Divorce* (2015) demonstrates Kyung-Me's abiding interest in traditional Japanese art through an aerial perspective of crowded, tatami-floored rooms filled with long-haired kimono-clad figures. The broad brushstrokes seen here differ from more recent series like *Papillion de Nuit i-vii* (2019), which marked a major step toward the refinement of her current style. These works—depicting interiors that mix Japanese and modernist design—make use of mise en abyme and one-point perspective to infuse a sense of gothic horror and to build a sense of mystery about the largely unseen protagonists. These themes and techniques lead to *The Organ* (2022), perhaps the pinnacle of the *Sister* series in its technically and physically demanding line work, evoking a mood that demonstrates the inner conflict between the desire for perfection and transcendence.

GRACE JEFFERD