

HEARTWORK

Peace Mask Project

Deepening Trust
Among Youth
in East Asia



Kyoto Journal interviews Kya Kim of the **Peace Mask Project**



Kya Kim (left) with Kazue Ouchi, the first model from Japan for Peace Mask East Asia.

Peace Mask Project, spearheaded by Korean artist Myong Hee Kim, who has resided in Kyoto for over 30 years, has created thousands of hand-made paper Peace Masks since the year 2000. Each mask represents a unique individual yet, when displayed along with other masks, also symbolizes the importance of the harmony that can be found *within* diversity. Peace Mask Project's main goals are to build intercultural cooperation, assist in transforming conflict, and ultimately work towards more sustainable visions of peace.

Peace Mask East Asia is the current project, which aims to empower and encourage youth in Korea, Japan, and China, to be leaders for peace, at a time when tensions are rising in the region. *Kyoto Journal* interviewed the project's Communications Director Kya Kim, whose passion is Media for Peacebuilding, and has worked for organizations like Avaaz, Peace Boat Japan, Transcend Media Service (Austria), Women's Feature Service and *Kyoto Journal*.

KYOTO JOURNAL: What were the origins of this project?

KYA KIM: The Peace Mask Project began as Japan-Korea Life Mask 2002, to celebrate Japan and Korea's shared hosting of the 2002 World Cup Soccer games. More importantly, the project aimed to create bridges of understanding and friendship

among the people of Japan and Korea. From January 2000 to December 2002, talks, workshops and exhibitions were held at 27 diverse sites in the two countries—from large cities to small towns, in city halls, university campuses, peace museums, newspaper offices, etc. The final exhibitions, held in Yokohama, Japan and in Seoul, South Korea, featured 1,580 masks and included talks, music, and dance performances.

How has it evolved since that time?

Through Japan-Korea Life Mask 2002, we recognized the value of bringing people of different cultures together to work on a shared art project. We became aware that the masks assembled together as wall murals were a silent and powerful symbol of a deep collective statement for mutual understanding and acceptance. With this realization the Peace Mask Project was born. It continues to evolve as we are now including peace statements by models, conflict transformation training, and intercultural dialogue.

Where have you conducted Peace Mask Project events?

Since its inception, we have held workshops and exhibitions in many countries. Some of our memorable projects include a workshop at the Institute for Reverential Ecology in Santa Barbara, California, the Asia Pacific Peace Research Association Conference in Siem Reap, Cambodia, the University of Delhi in New Delhi, India, the CONTACT Peacebuilding

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Japanese violinist Kiyoshi Okayama and Korean cellist Sung Won Yang after a duet performed at the closing exhibition of Japan-Korea Life Mask 2002, in Seoul, South Korea



Founding Artist Myong Hee Kim with a visitor to the Final Exhibition of Japan-Korea Life Mask 2002 in Yokohama, Japan.

Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont (USA), the First World Conference for Early Childhood Education for Peace (Albacete, Spain) and Joururi-ji Temple (a National Treasure) in Kyoto Prefecture, Japan. In addition, we completed a successful “Korean Democracy Series” at various locations throughout Korea, focusing on movements for democracy such as the “Cheju Rebellion,” the “Kwangju Uprising” and the “Busan Democratic Movement.” Other workshops created Peace Masks of well-known Korean authors. We’ve also been invited to exhibit Peace Masks at various museums, conferences, and public events over the years.

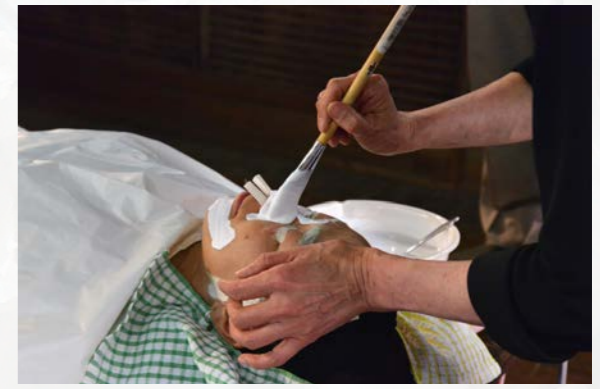
What is the process in making a Peace Mask?

The mask-making process itself is a platform for personal meditation, a moment of self-reflection. The model lies on a bed, usually surrounded by their friends, families, and often strangers. Myong Hee Kim (or an assistant) applies cream on the face and inserts two straws for the model to breathe before applying the plaster.

In that vulnerable position, the model offers themselves to the process with trust, and in that darkness they come face to face with their inner self. After about ten minutes, as the plaster sets, the mold is removed and the cream is wiped off. When the mold has hardened completely, a Peace Mask is made from it using high quality traditional hand-made papers from Japan and Korea. That very personal moment is preserved for posterity—a mask that will travel on, taking the model’s message of



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peace and delivering it to people they may never meet in person.

After the model has washed off their face, they are asked to share a “peace message,” and to describe their experience on paper or by video. These messages and portrait photographs, are displayed along with the masks, at both local and final exhibitions.

What is the role of “trust,” in a project like this?

Satish Kumar, world-renowned eco-philosopher and editor of *Resurgence* magazine, said after participating in a workshop, “When having my Peace Mask created, I have to let go of fear. These are the things we need to learn in order to have peace within and in order to create peace in the world.” This is one of the essential features of the Peace Mask Project. A polarized world creates insecurity and fear. Tensions rise as individuals and groups protect what they perceive as theirs. Enemies and alliances form where they did not exist before, violence occurs, and revenge is taken. This cycle of violence can only be broken with trust. Trust is the courageous act of being the first to put down the weapon (literal or metaphorical). The Peace Mask Project itself is an act of trust, from the idealism that inspires the effort, to the individual act of being a Peace Mask model, to the support and participation of hundreds of individuals in a collective effort to advance into a sane, healthy and sustainable future.



Please describe your current project, Peace Mask East Asia.

Peace Mask East Asia was born out of a need for community-led initiatives for peace between the people of Korea, Japan, and China, at a time when tensions are rising in the region. The causes of these tensions are multi-faceted and complex, with divisions threatening to take precedence over great commonalities. The goal of this project is to celebrate our commonalities and transform these tensions through the actions of individuals, families and communities, thus paving a new road for future generations.

This project is focused specifically on the youth in the region because they will lead us into our shared future. An increasingly globalized world is simultaneously promising and challenging, in terms of peacebuilding. Youth today have a better under-

standing of the importance of intercultural cooperation and tolerance. However, inexperience with the direct realities of war makes many privileged young people unskilled in recognizing and transforming deeply-rooted conflicts. We believe that young individuals everywhere hope for a future that is free from war. Peace Mask Project shares this view and our current effort encourages the development and empowerment of youth in the skills of conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

Your project is quite interesting in that it does not focus upon the painful negatives of the past, but rather on the hopeful potential of the unwritten future. Is there a particular reason why you took this approach? Conversely, if there *is* a component to your project whereby past history is discussed, could you elaborate on it?

We believe that the future must be built on an appreciation for and understanding of the past. We cannot know where we are going without knowing where we come from. Simultaneously, we understand the dangers of old traumas and assumptions in sabotaging our peaceful evolution. Therefore, while we do focus on the positive potential of the future, Peace Mask Project also facilitates the process of looking carefully at our past, especially in relation between polarized groups, in order to begin the process of healing. Sometimes this is done in dialogue with experienced mediators or through conflict transformation trainings. Sometimes this

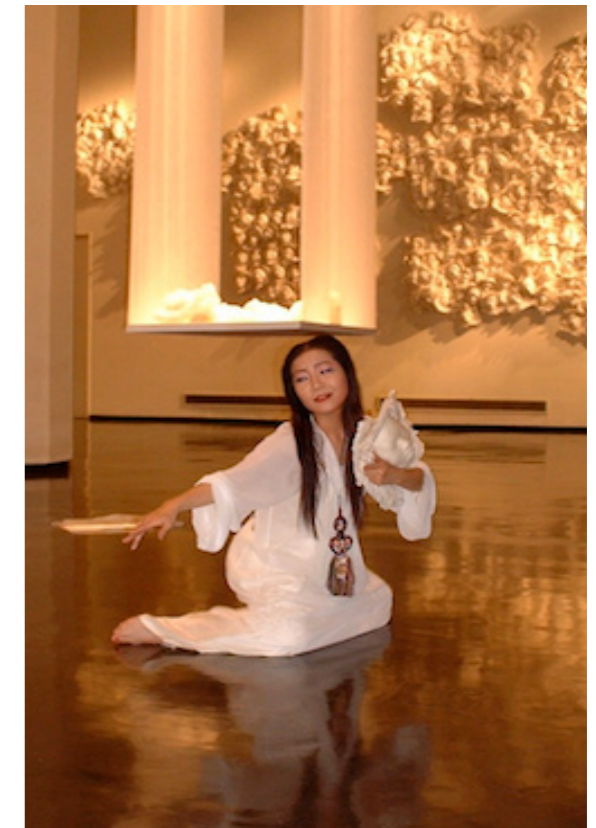
happens naturally and personally through the symbolism of the Peace Mask and within the community that grows around it.

What are your main goals or objectives in East Asia?

The basic goal is to make 1,000 masks. This will include 333 from each of the three countries (Japan, China and Korea), with the 1,000th representing a youth of the future. Our launching exhibition will take place this September at the 8th International Conference of Museums for Peace at the No Gun Ri Peace Park and Museum in Korea where we hope to complete and exhibit 33 initial masks (11 from each country).

The longer-term goal is to use the Peace Mask Project as a platform for empowering youth to become effective peacebuilders. We plan to give young people in the three countries a place to meet and share with one another, but also to be trained in practical skills as interns or as participants in an international nonprofit, nongovernmental organization. We hope they will gain the experience and tools necessary to become leaders of a better world. Our plan is to offer Conflict Transformation and Media for Peacebuilding workshops in various locations during this project and beyond.

(Top to bottom) Okayama Prefectural Museum 2004; Performance in Yokohama 2002; Aboard Peace Boat Japan's North-South Korea Peace Voyage 2001.





(Top to bottom) Asia Pacific Peace Research Association Conference, Siem Reap, Cambodia 2003; Community Workshop at *Mainichi Newspaper* Office, Osaka, Japan, 2001; Talk and Workshop at Delhi University, New Delhi, India 2005.

Your project seems both unique and cutting-edge. Was there a specific inspiration that resulted in its creation?

Although a deeper understanding of diversity has made great headway over the past twenty years, critical tensions continue to exist, not only in Asia but also in other regions. The moment has evolved into a question of how to transform conflict into opportunity. We believe this transformation has already begun amongst the best of our youth. This includes the youth of East Asia, who are now experiencing intercultural tensions and the potential of open conflict. They need encouragement, progressive mentorship and forums for them to express their visions. If this is not provided and fostered by our societies, an opportunity will be lost to misunderstanding and fear. This is what has inspired and will sustain our current efforts.

The growing tensions in East Asia may be considered a political issue. Why have you decided to describe the Peace Mask Project as non-political?

We believe there is a place for political expression, and individually, members of the Peace Mask Project have their varied personal opinions. However, the role of this project is not to advocate for any political position, which can often be divisive. The role of our project is to facilitate sharing. Again, the core symbolism of the Peace Mask is harmony in diversity. We believe that everyone has the right to express their truth, and that we can all grow by

sharing our differences *along* with our commonalities. Peacebuilding goes beyond the political, to the interpersonal and especially personal. Peace Mask Project is a space for reflection, sharing, and relationship-building. We remain non-political so that we may effectively facilitate the exploration of common ground between otherwise polarized groups.

What are the main barriers to achieving your goals?

The Peace Mask Project is organized and carried out by a group of individuals dedicated to its mission. Our main barrier is in finding the support we need to be able to realize Peace Mask East Asia, our most challenging endeavor thus far. This current effort, like all past projects, cannot be realized without the financial, moral, and logistical support of individuals and groups throughout the region and the wider world.

Some people feel that “peace” is a utopian concept that ignores the more difficult challenges of our time, what are your thoughts on this?

Peace is far from utopian because it is “not merely a distant goal that we seek, but a means by which we reach that goal,” as the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. said. This quote resonates because we understand that awareness, skill, and compassion are required to uproot violence and injustice, not only in society but also within ourselves. The idea that peace is easily attainable (whether by waving a magic



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wand or dropping a bomb) is what could be called “utopian,” or “naïve.” Instead, peace sometimes takes generations to build and can easily be taken away. The reality of our current complex global dilemma is that peace seems to have been taken for granted, and in some cases forgotten.

Specifically, how does Peace Mask Project build community and intercultural bridges?

The Peace Mask Project would not be possible without the participation of hundreds of volunteers, models, and supporters. We build community by being community-led. Wherever we hold a workshop, people come together to help in making the masks and organizing exhibitions. The Peace Mask Project itself becomes a forum for individuals to consider and discuss peace, and to meet others whom they might otherwise not have had the opportunity to meet. When possible, we organize events that will facilitate dialogue between polarized groups, in a safe and positive setting.

How are you currently financially supported?

In the past, we have been supported by NGOs like Daum Society in Korea, organizations like the Japan-Korea Friendship Association, museums including the Okayama Prefectural Museum, and universities such as The School for International Training in Vermont, USA. Foundations like The Anzai Peace Foundation have been very supportive, as well as countless individuals. Currently, we are in

the process of becoming an NPO in Japan and are initiating a campaign for supporters to our new project. We particularly welcome financial support from individuals, civic and peace organizations, museums, and socially responsible foundations.

How can people get involved to help you?

First, by visiting our website and our Facebook page, or by contacting us directly at

peacemaskproject@gmail.com.

The website offers a variety of ways in which individuals can assist Peace Mask East Asia. At this stage in the project we would especially appreciate being put in touch with foundations or organizations that might aid our efforts. We look upon this as a truly collective effort and our goals cannot be reached without the help of many others. We invite people to join us, in any capacity.



www.peacemask.org

