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New York Today: From North Korea to New York

By JONATHAN WOLFE OCT. 19, 2017

New Yorkers can see the work of North Korean artists this week.

The exhibition, “Commodity and Ideology, Part II,” recently opened at the Church Center for the United Nations in Midtown Manhattan and features photographs from North Korean, South Korean and Chinese artists.

The project began this summer when the Korea Art Forum invited three North Korean artists — Song-Gwang Hong, Myong-Un Kim and Ryong Kim — to the United States.

The U.S. visas for the artists, who were staying in Beijing at the time, never arrived, said Doug Hostetter, the director of the Mennonite Central Committee’s United Nations Office, which co-sponsored the event as a way to support peace-building through the arts.

So the forum made the best of the situation and asked the three North Koreans to take photographs of cityscapes and museums in Beijing. They also asked a South Korean artist, Zaun Lee, to shoot similar spaces in London and Athens and a Chinese artist, Shen Yang, to snap the same in New York.

“The North Koreans were very interested in children, monuments, and statues of powerful people,” Mr. Hostetter said.



Song Gwang Hong. A photograph of a photograph of a child drawing a child at the National Museum of China, Beijing, 2017.

The Chinese and South Korean artists expressed broader interests, Mr. Hostetter added. “They were more interested in architecture and ordinary people in the street.”

For last Thursday’s opening, diplomats from North Korea, South Korea and the United States were invited to attend.

To Mr. Hostetter’s surprise, representatives from both North and South Korea made appearances.

“But they declined our offer to introduce them to each other,” he said.

Still, Mr. Hostetter said, he has hope that the two sides will eventually meet.

“We’ll be trying again at the closing.”