

## **Soyoun Kim conversation with Margot Morales Tanjutco**

on MAV Facebook and YouTube Live, 10/12/2020

**Margot:** How did you find trying to be creative during the pandemic?

**Soyoun:** Generally, my creative practice is motivated by current events happening around me so I tried to engage with the pandemic impact on people, especially with an Asian-Australian perspective. Even though most of my works are self-performing images, facilitating the medium of photography and video, I felt limited in exploring and testing different methodologies and mediums during the lockdown. I think, it was more like a psychological impediment. It took a while but this limitation turned my attention to domestic setting and materials more than ever.

**M:** Could you speak about your process for putting *Mask* together?

**S:** Before Melbourne became serious with the virus and the obligation of wearing a mask, I heard from my family in South Korea about how the Korean government was managing the situation, especially with a mask and hand sanitizer. At that time, I was researching about the relationship between cultural perceptions and people's ethnical appearance based on violent incidents on Asian people with the blame of spreading the virus. And thought, a mask can be all kinds of masks: a mask to protect from any harmful element in the air like the virus or toxic gas; a face mask for a carnival or performance in a ceremony such as a Venetian mask and Korean 'Hahoe Mask (하회탈)'; and a beauty mask pack that Korea made popular across Asia for fairer and younger skin. This fair, whiter skin is the concept of beauty within European skin colour. This is where Eurocentric supremacy is based throughout colonial histories. Changing a person's skin colour does not change that person. Changing a person's appearance by disguising with a mask, wearing a make-up or operating a plastic surgery, does not change the fact who that person is.

Through the project, *Mask*, I tried question why a skin colour or a physical appearance is a matter in our society and wanted to celebrate the beauty of diversity and unique individuality. So in the photographic series of *Mask*, I used beige colour background to evoke the notion of skin colour. We often differentiate from non-European people, saying 'coloured-people'. It sounds like a word-playing but it sounds not right for me. Europeans' skin can be described as a pale beige with pink something. It means that their skins have colours. Our skin colours can not be described as simply black and white and they are more complicated and complex. In my opinion, all humans are coloured-people with their unique beautiful skin colours. This appearance matter is explored within ID card portrait format in the work of *Taking an ID photo*. I was following the rule of Australian passport ID photo except the background colour, which its blackness implies the invisibility of true identity. The rule doesn't say that a person should not wear make-up or dye hairs. Another ID photos were taken with Instant films and the analogue medium format camera in *Instant ID photo poster* series. The character of instantaneity and analogue medium indicate no manipulation of images. Does it mean that those portraits represent true identity? My doubt is explored through ambiguous portraits, by pulling off emulsion sheets from the Instant films before they fully develop. And the mock-up of installing

those photos as posters suggests the fact that Asians and Asian-Australians are treated as criminals charged with responsibility for the virus.

**M:** How did your relationship with visible Asian-ness shift throughout the pandemic, and even now? Were you scared, anxious, did you wish to be invisible?

**S:** First, I thought it was ridiculous when I heard about those violent incidents. And then, I thought it was not unusual events because racism has been present everyday whether people aware of it or not. And my life as an Asian-Australian would remain the same as before the pandemic. This kind of positive mind-set gradually turned into anxiety accompanying my concern for the immunocompromised condition so I tried not to go out myself for a while. But this pandemic stimulated and brought forward conversations about how we live together and being an artist became a merit as I could speak out loud about ongoing racism concern through creative works. And it's great to be clearly visible through the exposure, like this MAV Mapping. So now, I want to be more visible as who I am and want to hear more loud voices from the like-minded people and creatives.

**M:** Let's talk about the masks you wear in life. What are your favourite masks and what masks do you wear begrudgingly?

**S:** I'd like to wear masks that try to tell that we are all equal human beings regardless ethnicity, gender and class. I'd like to wear masks that can reciprocate each other's perspectives. I wear my own masks that express myself as who I am as a Korean-Australian.

**M:** Has a mask ever turned into or infiltrated one of your selves?

**S:** It is an interesting question. I often think about Frantz Kafka's novel, 'The Metamorphosis' and David Lynch's film, 'Lost Highway':

Which is the true identity of the insect turned male protagonist, human with intellectual brain or an insect in physical form?

:Which is the true identity of the protagonist with a changed into another person's body?

I'd like to leave these questions as the answer.