**GIMINO**

**Gimino is his artist’s name. His real name is Kim Inho.**

**He is an illustrator, a graphic designer, a creator and a painter.**

**I would even add to that list: a cartoonist, a satirist who inclines towards contestation.**

While I was looking for a designer for an invitation to an exhibition, I discovered a true artist.

I joined him in his study at the ‘Creative Incubation Center’ of Seoul City, settled in a brand new tower of DMC (Digital Media City). Together with 45 other designers, he is an artist in residence here. He has been here since 2010 and he is to leave late this year.

Gimino is soft minded, shy like a tall child. Still, he stands out for his height. Of course, he is very forthcoming, somewhat timid, probably because he finds it difficult to communicate in English.

The shelves of his workshop display a nice sample of his creations – items you can find in souvenir shops in museums like magnets, note books, clocks, etc.

I am particularly appealed by two of his creations.

On the one hand his series of robotic insects. They are characters, miniature sculptures, made of parts from our PCs, USB sticks, condensers, semiconductors, etc. These funny creatures usually pop up in animation films.

On the other hand, his paintings, mainly small size pictures (45 x 45) and others. He generally uses acrylic paint and the main character is covered with transparent epoxy resin in order to highlight it and make it more vivid. At times, he adds a small robotic creature to the picture. In this way, it becomes very lively, dynamic and relevant.

His paintings have soft yet powerful colors. Their composition is poetic, somewhat naïve because they are illustrative. Moreover, they are very expressive and even more dissident than his miniature sculptures. Obviously, being an illustrator, he remains a drawer. The simplicity of the character drawing makes the whole thing fresh and straightforward. Besides, the sketch and the humor make it easy to understand the painter’s stance.

Some paintings make us smile, others leave unanswered questions as we do not know Koreans well enough.

**Gimino and Folon – shared engagements**

If you look carefully at Gimino’s work, you cannot but parallel it with that of the Belgian artist Jean-Michel Folon (1934-2005). The ‘clear line’, the brand mark of the Belgian comics and occasionally the colors are common features of both artists, as well as their political engagement. Folon is in the aftermath of the student revolt of 1968 when the establishment was challenged, imagination was supposed to take power. He is a militant of the great causes of that time. Thus, he illustrates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for Amnesty International. He backs the first advocates of the environment and pays tribute to kidnapped children through his sculpture ‘The Messenger’. Like Gimino, Folon creates products out of other product pieces. No doubt he would have enjoyed meeting his Korean colleague.

**What does Gimino seek through this huge work?**

Look at the creator’s works again. It is not so difficult to find his steadfast emphasis on ‘education’ incorporated into his works. The title of the exhibition, ‘The Unmoldable Class,’ itself betrays something about the intent of the creator. All these works say something about what their creator thinks of education. Of course, his concern with education is necessarily informed by the Korean society, in which he was born and has grown. The Korean society is especially rigid, as it is centered on the Confucian values of hierarchy and order that tend to be reinforced by the military culture. Education is an indispensable keyword to understanding this society. Korean schools are not places where the individuality and dignity of every student are respected and embraced, but rather are public organizations that force growing children to conform to the thinking and system of the established generations. Students are taught to shun free thinking and individuality, while forced to accept blind patriotism and nationalism. The creator wishes to say something about the current reality of Korean education that continues to manufacture a human being in the same mold after another.

**Let us listen to what he has to tell us:**

I don’t know exactly when education in Korea has begun to take the wrong path. The only thing I am sure of is that I was at school when I realized it started to get wrong.

I still remember some striking scenes at school.

While they had no clue yet about life at school, children aged 8 or 9 had to shout i.a.

‘Down with the communists!’

‘Girls wearing short skirts are bad girls’

 ‘Boys have to have a short haircut’

‘You should not go out after midnight’

At first, I thought that all these regulations belonged to all Korean men’s commitments and were part of their education. But later I realized that all these regulations were extremely severe restrictions.

Most Korean citizens are casualties of this narrow-minded, dictatorial education system. I am one of those casualties.

I wish future generations to enjoy an educational environment based on truth and freedom.

In short, education is a closed fortress. It frames the borders of my canvass.

The main character is usually a rabbit called TOMINO (i.e. Toggi-Gimino, Toggi meaning rabbit). Not only am I fond of this animal, but I also like his two facets.

The rabbit seems to be close to all other animals. However it sometimes manages to ostracize itself because of its overly simple, naïve side. This aspect reflects the attitude of Korean students – unassuming, silent, unasserted.

The Tomino series on which I have been working for some time stage a rabbit and its carrot. Tomino is a rabbit that is interested in all that is going on in the world. He mentions it only through its carrot because it is its only belonging. Through my work and Tomino I want to show in a humorous way that Korean students live in a place where personal freedom of expression is choked.

Of course you may be puzzled by Gimino, this grown-up who keeps pondering on the torments of his childhood. But you can only be moved by what he has to say. And his dry humor is captivating.

Gimino is entertained by his own painting. He really enjoys it.

He denounces the establishment and wants us to react. Obviously, he wants things to change.

Gimino’s two daughters went to school in English in Malaysia when they were 13 to 16 years old. Only their mother was with them. This is the best illustration of his critical attitude towards the Korean education system.

‘A colourful day’, an old series of paintings, is a good example of what he wants to denounce in the education system of Korea. Fortunately, this is now prohibited by law. On the left hand side, it shows a big sized teacher striking a pupil. From the latter’s perspective, the teacher is huge. In turn, from the teacher’s perspective, the pupil has the size of a fly.

I would like to conclude with an open remark.

Gimino’s accusations could apply to other systems.

‘Lingering Imagery’ stages a student involved in higher education in such a way that he ignores the essence of life.

Should the uncomfortable smile that this picture arises not be taken as a victory?

**Short Biography**

Gimino was born in Seoul in 1964.

1990 degree from Hongkik University: graphic art / visual design

After his studies he worked as animation cartoonist for Cartooners Korea

1990: silver medal “Illustration Award” from the City of Seoul

1996: gold Award for an illustration from Neenah Paper, USA.

1992 to 2002: Art director at Cardland.

Designed Festivals organization, in among others with the Seoul Art Center.