

Profile: Young Na Kim

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Korean designer Young Na Kim, who has been making waves with her vibrant graphic style and visual language, will be making her maiden trip to Melbourne to share her experience in the design and publishing industry at the Melbourne Art Book Fair.

Young has had various accolades under her belt.

She was part of the Werkplaats Typografie programme in the Netherlands in 2006 as a Hongik University graduate and launched her own studio two years later.

Young also initiated her own magazine project, *umool umool*, conceptualised and designed for internationally-recognised *GRAPHIC* magazine, and participated in numerous exhibitions worldwide, including Graphic Design Worlds at Milan Triennale Museum in 2011 and Millennium Magazines at MoMA in 2012.

And to top that all off, last year, she was in New York as an artist-in-residence at [Doosan Gallery](#) for six months.

We caught up with Young ahead of her arrival in Melbourne to learn more about her, her craft and what 'design' means to her.



The Showroom

Give us a quick background about yourself. Has design always been an ambition for you?

When I was a child I enjoyed painting and drawing. I think I might have wanted to become a painter. And maybe it was that vision that I studied product design. My step into the design industry is through product design. Long story, short: I was in the engineering / science faculty in university. I enjoyed creating things but the course focused a lot more on the science behind the products and the markets for them. And the style, designs and so on are based on that science and markets the product is targeting. So back then, I didn't understand why designers were needed because everything was based off statistics and research. And because I was asking that question to myself, I gradually got interested in the graphic design field and its flexibility and opportunities for collaborations with so many different people in various fields. And so I studied and worked as a graphic designer.

What are your ethos as a designer?

To work for myself. I know this sounds bad but because some designers think that design should fit something and should work for other people. That it should serve something. It is true. It should do all of that but I think, in the end, you should be happy with what you create. Sometimes, that requires negotiations with the clients or other people. That process can be challenging but it can be interesting and new ideas can be generated. But if you, as a designer, just do what others tell you to, when your heart isn't in it, it won't turn out well; it won't be successful and your clients will not be happy with the result either.





Graphic magazine cover

You've designed for magazines, run exhibition spaces for emerging designers, run your own studio, produce your own solo exhibitions, curate exhibitions for others... how do you do it all?

I don't know, actually. What I do know is that I cannot call myself an artist or a curator. Those professional terms do not apply to my background. For me, everything I do is based on graphic design. So when I curate a show, or when someone approaches me to curate a show, that show will be very different from someone in the fine arts field. I do everything in the viewpoint of a graphic designer. And sometimes that is effective.

But not having the curation experience from an arts field can be difficult, can't it?

Right now the only thing that I am having trouble with is dealing with the space and installations. I'm learning and it's interesting when you have to take into consideration the space and experience of the exhibition. The other challenge would be working with the production teams. It's a challenge because I would have to articulate and explain my work. I have to use terms and explanations I'm not used to. It's different and I'm learning and getting used to it. So yeah, I'm not purely a curator or purely a designer. I'm a mix of everything and people know that.



Choice Specimen

Give us a peek into the design scene in Korea.

This is what I plan to talk about at the Melbourne Art Book Fair. In Korea, so many things have happened to affect the scene here. The political, economic and cultural situations have affected designers. So previously, design graduates would join the big agencies right after school but the opportunities to work there lessened year on year because of the economic climate. So there's not much work, not much money for work. And if there was work it wasn't work that excited designers. So the young designers decided that it was not worth struggling for a big company and started their own stuff. There's a huge variety of studios here in Korea – all of which are doing their own unique things. There are designers here who run bookshops and their studios in the same place, or have a print shop and a studio space and so on and so forth. So they start something that they like – whether a cafe or a store – and run their studios in that same space so as to connect back to graphic design. It's impressive and very interesting to witness this and maybe this trend may have already taken place in Europe or elsewhere but it's new here. So there's a lot of small mixed business studios mushrooming all over Korea and each with their unique characteristics.

