

Craft review Kerry-Anne Cousins

Beautiful bridge between lands

Geum sok: Objects and jewellery by Daehoon Kang and Jungmee Do. Beaver Galleries. Ends May 27.

Having just returned from Japan, and a brief visit to Korea, it is a special pleasure to see this exhibition by two Korean artists who now live and work in Melbourne.

Daehoon Kang and Jungmee Do had their initial training at Korean art institutions. They came to Australia for further study, and for several years travelled between the two countries to study and teach. They settled more or less permanently in Australia in 1997. Although the artists are husband and wife, and both work with metal, they follow their own career paths. Both have an art practice that is inventive but honours Korean and Western traditions. Daehoon and Jungmee create innovative and exciting work that is a seemingly fluid poetic fusion of Eastern and Western aesthetics.

In creating his objects and jewellery, Daehoon is more driven by an interest in form than adornment. Each surface is hammered and raised by hand, so it bears subtle, textured imprints that gather and reflect light. His small works in the *Condiment* series are based on Korean condiment pots. Condiments, such as kimchi and fermented soybean paste, are traditionally kept outside Korean houses in large earthenware containers.

Daehoon's jewel-size silver pots play with containment and emptiness. Interconnecting bowls in different-coloured metals contrast through shape, texture and colour. Yet his work is not without its whimsical side, as in the freeform vessels *White Night*, in sterling silver, and *Nocturne*, in silver and black chrome plating. These works have a playfulness in their shapes that suggest, in passing, vessels like teapots or vases. Although Daehoon's real

interest lies in creating larger objects, his jewellery is beautifully conceived and crafted. His rings are very unusual. Each one consists of one or two gold-domed "buds" enclosing a gemstone ringed with tiny gold granules like stamens. His elegant and beautiful silver bangles are especially desirable. Their free-flowing organic forms enclose the arm in circles of deep, lustrous silver.

Jungmee has both metal objects and jewellery in the

Glittering: (From far left) Daehoon Kang, *Condiment pendant*; Jungmee Do, *Reflection*; Jungmee Do, *Rocks with blossom brooch*; Daehoon Kang's *Nocturne*.

exhibition. As with Daehoon, her work demonstrates a command of the traditional processes of metal work. These processes, such as hammering, hand-raising and etching, are generic to the craft, but Jungmee also incorporates age-old Korean techniques such as *iybsa*, a method of inlaying metal. The technique of *iybsa* is seen to full effect in two small works, *Containers Objects I and II*. These containers are exquisite examples of the artist's meticulous craftsmanship. Inlaid with metal strips in the *iybsa* style, their intricate detailing provides a lively play of dark and light across their surfaces.

Jungmee's work is rich in symbolism. She incorporates motifs from Korean culture, such as flowers, carp, clouds and bamboo, which symbolise happiness, blessings and long life, as well as Australian animal motifs.

Brooches are carefully assembled from metal shapes in contrasting colour, brilliance and texture. Jungmee is influenced by Korean wrapping cloths called *pojagi* (or *bojagi*) and includes patchwork

versions. The running stitches used as decoration are suggested by metal stitches in many of her works. She also uses subtle etching to allude to patterns found in Korean textiles. The layers of metal in gold, silver and steel provide contrasting colours and textures in the folded and cut shapes of each brooch. The result is a shimmering and deep rich-glowing sculpture.

Several necklaces made by Jungmee in the exhibition are elegant and sophisticated. Their links and pendant clusters are

fashioned from a variety of different shapes in contrasting coloured metals of silver, steel and gold. The *Moon* necklace is particularly beautiful, with each of its half-moon shapes in dull gold contrasting with its black surround. Two sculptural works, *Reflection* and *Wish bowl*, are stunning. In *Reflection*, cut-out shapes of flowers and other motifs, inlaid with gold and silver, spill out like a cornucopia of treasures from a cylindrical copper-coloured base. Among them is a golden carp set among small flowers. Pearls like

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bubbles of water add to this jewel-like, opulent and pleasingly extravagant ensemble. In the top part of the sculpture, two tiny silver cups (similar to the surprise found in Faberge eggs) pull out to become conical vases.

Wish bowl is a large shallow bowl covered with a delicate fretwork of jewel-like flowers and other motifs, including a kangaroo. The motifs are embellished with gold and silver metal work.

The interior surface of the basin is gold, which shines through this fretwork with a warm golden glow. I have never seen anything quite like it. The work has its genesis in traditional metal-working and is a reminder of how gold was used in the past, not only to enhance the preciousness of a work, but also as a source of light.

Jungmee said, during an interview, that travelling between Australia and Korea made her see each country more clearly.

Wish bowl has grown out of this vision.

It is a signature work – a small masterpiece showcasing her skill as an artist and expressing, in a romantic and poetic way, the fusion between two different cultures.

