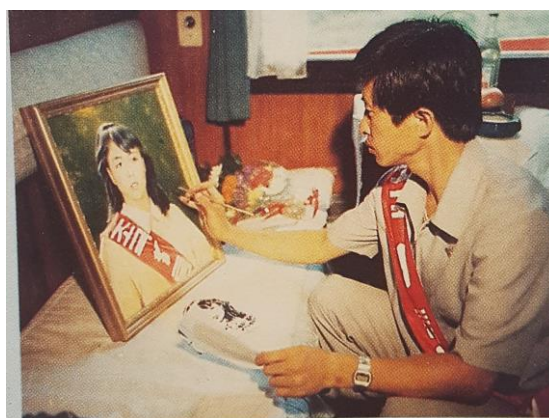


The Banner Years: Art, Spectacle, and Politics in the Inter-Korea Marches for Reunification of the Early 1990s

Dr. Douglas Gabriel

In both North and South Korea, the early 1990s was characterized by profound optimism. After near-constant confrontations between South Korean student activists and government authorities throughout the 1980s, democracy had ostensibly been won, with 1992 seeing the first civilian elected president in thirty years. North Korea, meanwhile, entered the 1990s on the heels of the perceived success of the Thirteenth World Festival of Youth and Students in 1989, a marquee event that was meant to rival the magnitude of the 1988 Seoul Olympics. Amidst this celebratory atmosphere, the dream of reunification seemed more possible than ever, and the urgency of realizing a united Korean peninsula was especially pronounced with 1990 marking forty-five years since the division of the country in 1945. In this talk I examine a series of marches for reunification, which entailed citizens from each side of the DMZ symbolically parading across the peninsula and meeting at the 38th parallel. Although initially supported by both the North and South Korean governments, these marches were beset by lingering Cold War anxieties, and differing views of how inter-Korean solidarity should be expressed through mass demonstrations. Using the inter-Korean marches as a case study, I argue that attention to high politics and ideology reveals only a portion of the dynamics that have driven reunification efforts at discrete historical junctures. Understanding the role played by art, performance, and other visual spectacles is crucial to any effort at recuperating and learning from historic approaches to inter-Korean engagement.



Douglas Gabriel is a 2021–22 Getty/ACLS Postdoctoral Fellow in the History of Art, and a visiting researcher at Seoul National University Asia Center (SNUAC). After receiving his Ph.D. in art history from Northwestern University in 2019, he held postdoctoral fellowships at Harvard University and the George Washington University. His primary book project explores connections between the work of state-sponsored artists in North Korea, and artists associated with the South Korean *minjung* (People's) democratization movement during the late Cold War period. He has published articles on North and South Korean visual culture in *Art Journal*, the *Journal of Korean Studies*, and *Situations: Cultural Studies in the Asian Context*.

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