

# AHL Foundation

## Archive of Korean Artists in America (AKAA) Interview

- Interviewee: Dr. Mina Cheon
- Interviewer: Dr. Leslie King Hammond
- April 25, 2022 / via Zoom Meeting
- Recorded by Dr. Mina Cheon, and Transcribed by JooHee Kim (AKAA Research Fellow 2021–2022)
- 1 Video file
- This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity
- Open for research use

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An Intimate Conversation between Dr. Mina Cheon and Dr. Leslie King Hammond

*Bridging and Legacies: transnational, transhistorical, transgenerational sisterhood and dialog, storytelling, multicultural narratives.*

Theme: Practicing artists, educators, administrators, teaching and scholarship, and career paths that merge and intersect between women of different races, cultures, and heritage.

Focus: “MICA, DEIG, and *BEYOND!*” How we met, collaborate, converse, and continue...

DEIG at MICA: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Globalization

April 25, 2022

Dr. Mina Cheon (MC): I wanted to ask you, what can you tell me about this project? Like when is it happening? When will we see it? Maybe we could do it together.

Dr. Leslie King Hammond (LKH): Let me just give you a rough plan because you weren't there at the beginning when all of this happened, and it just sort of morphed out of space, but it was also a kind of coming together. As my nieces, nephews, and son said, “this is all the stuff you've been doing all your life and torturing us with.”

You know, who else opens up the dishwasher? And there are bones and shells in the dishwasher, and people want to know why. And my son goes, it's an art thing. Just leave it. Just don't ask, just, you know, leave it.

What happened was that originally, two colleagues of mine in New York, Lola West, a writer, and Deborah Willis, the photographer and a MacArthur Fellow, I call them fellows, were approached by FX Disney to be historical consultants for the project of *Kindred*, which was designed to be a six-series episode of the narrative that Octavia E. Butler created, which is centered on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Butler went to Talbot County and actually sat in the archives and researched the foundational elements for this story that she was writing, which was to occur in the 1970s, but as a time travel story.

So, it comes from the principal character, Dana, who is transported through a portal. Back 200 years to the plantation of her descendant, black and white. And one of the rationales for this is that she must work to keep them alive through their own life circumstances so that her lineage can come forward.

That alone is a very fascinating story to read. And I think that you're looking at a story of a book for the curriculum at MICA. I know that in the past, there have been several faculty members who have used *Kindred* as one of the books because it is a Maryland-centered recreation of what could have happened if this were really a thing to become. The story and the whole idea of time travel and Octavia E. Butler and her fascination with science fiction. It came out of the continuation of the Afrofuturist movement, which really began back in the 1950s and was really centered within the musical jazz idiom, and a major proponent of it was

a jazz musician and improvisational performance artist, and musician Sun Ra, who coined the phrase spaces, the place.

And in part of that rationale, the question was, for minorities at the point of the history of this nation, where are we in the future of the nation, of the world, of the globe? So, aesthetics was born out of that, which tested the realm of how we see the future and who's in the future? What is the future about? How are we going to re-address the issues of reparations and deal with 400 years of atrocities, not only to Africans but to the indigenous Americans who were summarily displaced and eradicated as the Euro-Americans moved into made conquests on this land? What happened with the Asian communities that came in? Japan through the Pacific Rim on the West Coast; what happened to those communities? How were they dealt with, mitigated, and channeled? All of these questions become part of this issue of Futurism in a different way from when futurism in the European aesthetic concept developed.

Because this was grounded in a humanist quest for when we become human. The reason these abuses occurred is that the pseudo-scientific beliefs that were conjured at the time, tried to create everyone who was not of European or [its] orientation; they weren't human, they were more akin to animals. And so, it was okay. There was an okay-ness about abusive behaviors and to relegate them as subhuman and not American. When, in fact, this entire country is fostered by immigrants, voluntarily and involuntarily. So, you see the conundrums that, but also too, you see the opportunity to create out of these enigmas in these paradoxes.

Imaginative, creative work that has been coming forth. You have Ta-Nehisi Coates and Octavia E. Butler sort of laid that foundation down. When my colleagues found out about this epic Disney production, they said, no, no, no, we don't do this. This is not, this is not what, No. Call Leslie in Maryland. Leslie's at MICA.

MC: Yeah, that makes so much sense. So, it's The Global Africa Project extended and further shared through popular culture and for the general audience. How wonderful! When is this coming out? Because it's being produced, apparently.

LKH: They are shooting. The plan is to complete the shoots in July. Then it goes into post-production. So, the question is, how do they want to present it? Do they want to present it in that cycle of time, depending on post-production when we're between two holidays, Thanksgiving and Christmas, or are they going to launch it at the beginning of the new year?

MC: So maybe I need to do a serious pivot and bring this up with the Forum Faculty and Advisory Committee for implementing the Common Read for the First Year Experience (FYE) at MICA and reroute it to be *Kindred*. What had I proposed on the side, because there is all this conversation, and I apologize for saying, what could possibly be an easier read?

I don't mean that it needs to be easier for anyone's convenience. I meant what would be the better fit with incoming first year students and faculty being able to own and use. And I did think of Octavia E. Butler and the Sci-fi novel, *Parable of the Sower*.

LKH: Yeah.

MC: And I thought of that mostly because we are trying to support Ecosystems, Sustainability, and Justice (ESJ) as a major, and we have Fellows track in the first year. One of the things that we have is two Fellows tracks: one in Creative Entrepreneurship and one in

ESJ. And one of the goals is to really kind of help integrate these Fellows track and offer it further to the general first year students.

Anyway, I thought of that, but if *Kindred* is coming... I think the idea was because we are trying to match the author or who can speak about this book in the Forum Lecture Series about the Common Read. And I love the idea of starting here because my conversation with you has been, uh, an ongoing conversation. A President's Advisory, the BI+POC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) Advisory Council, came up with a reading list. So a couple of years after discussing it, we have the faculty members who are still looking at it.

And I think what I have learned recently is that last semester, some of them were like, 'well, we don't feel like we have the expertise to teach it in the right way.' We could understand that some faculty were afraid of doing the wrong thing or saying it wrong. I heard more recently that a part of that scare was that for the faculty's implicit bias to come out, they would be in trouble with the institution. So that's real; they were afraid that their (or others') implicit bias would come out even with all good intentions. Acknowledging implicit bias is a good start and a beginning way of addressing it.

I try to re-message this idea of the Common Read. It's not meant for expertise; it's for everybody to share *as a gift*. It's something that we all share and learn from. How do we make this into something that becomes a conversation piece, like everyone in the main building, even for Officer Sir Lawrence Green to receive a copy. It's to bring our community together with something in common.

Because of the visual aspect [of your project on the *Kindred*], everyone who was afraid of a possible first year Common Read as Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me* and its relationship to translate into a creative project, we already have your creative project to look towards as the visual connection (of the Disney film).

So, I will really pivot quite immediately with your permission to see if we could; we haven't bought the books yet.

LKH: Absolutely. I mean, the other thing is, is that when you're bringing in new students and they're coming into a newer environment, whether or not they were born or raised in Maryland or whatever, this is an excellent way to orient them to the history and the historical brevity of this moment, because this is FX Disney project, and it's going to blow up.

This is going global. There's no doubt that this was going global. And this is going to touch on a lot of countries that also have similar or parallel histories.

MC: This is very important because some of us have the English Language Learners (ELL) program, and Elizabeth Wagenheim (Coordinator) was also concerned about how international students would engage and be prepared to discuss race and racism in the United States. Some of them are coming in with strong nationalistic identities, but how do they understand it and translate that and experience it in the United States and its ethical positioning to it.

So, because of the accessibility of the project you're working on, it could be a profound merger of these worlds and different cultures that brings a phenomenal access point. So, I will do whatever I can to make this, you know, a part of the Forum curriculum in FYE.

LKH: This is a win-win!

MC: Last night, I had this dream where I was trying to clean up the bathroom because I had two guests from Korea, and my daughter Sasha's hairbrush had all her hair in it, and then it got stuck in my mouth, and I was taking it out of my mouth. And then, of course, I was writing my dream log and searching online about the analysis of the dream, and it says, be careful with what you say. Then I read further, and it said something like there would be an unexpected surprise. So I wondered what that would be, and now I think this is it. I thank you so much.

LKH: Yeah. The thing you should know is that the Reginald F. Lewis Museum is planning an exhibition on this.

MC: Oh, so perfect. When is that opening? Because that could be a supplementing field trip for first year students as well.

LKH: It's going to be opening in 2023. Okay. Around the same time.

MC: This is perfect. We could shuttle students with MICA shuttle services.

LKH: Yeah, the exhibition is going to be called "Stitch by Stitch, the Making of *Kindred*."

This show is from heaven because this is the way the story is written so readable. International students will not have a problem because of the dialogue and the relationships. Still, they will understand where some of the tensions and where some of the conundrums of American culture have come from through the use of this story because we can leverage it in so many ways.

MC: Yeah. And it's Sci-fi; it's about time travel. I'm sure there is also an audiobook on top of electronic copies of the book. In the curriculum, we will try to work with the museum and make sure that the students all see that on top of anything else. It's just perfect.

Once again, *you* are a gift. I wanted to say a couple of things that you said about this project, about immigrants, whether they come to the United States by will or un-wilfully.

LKH: or in flight.

MC: or in flight, as refugees. They are the makeup of the United States of America, for sure. There is still this very harsh suspicion and xenophobia that exists against immigrants.

And with the pandemic, the enormous amount of Asian hate crimes. It has brought what was implicit in the past, the racism that exists even among Asian minorities. It brought it to the forefront; the allyship of all BI+POC people has become like a time where we can no longer ignore it.

My tribute to you is that this is our working title, "an intimate conversation between us." It's about bridging, and, it's about legacies, storytelling, it's about our conversation of transnational, transhistorical, transgenerational, sisterhood, and dialogue. And I wanted to be in a conversation that continues. I'm at a place where this is so important, and we are

practicing artists. We're educators. Now I'm also an administrator as you have been. Teaching, scholarship, creativity, and career paths intersect and emerge. At the same time, we are women of different races, cultures, and heritage.

My tribute to you goes back 25 years.

LKH: Well, who knew we would be bonded at the hip!

MC: 25 years. I've known you longer than my spouse and my children. You are one of the first people I met in Baltimore in 1997 because you were the Dean of Graduate Studies. And I came to the United States with my two ginormous immigrant bags, Tuba Öztekin Köymen (graduate student from Turkey), and I ended up having the same dorm room.

And I got full support for an apartment and room to myself that has allowed me to grow during my years as a graduate student at MICA, beginning with your support. And so that's like from the beginning you were there. And then I think the most important thing, you know, beyond that was that you gave me visibility. You supported me and gave me visibility as a Korean woman. You said I was a woman of color. You were the first person who ever said that to me. You included me in luncheons and meetings for women of color at MICA. And I was able to align myself to a home and be mentored because when I look around at our administrator, a scholar and artist, who is a woman of color, there are not many. And I'm like, it's only Leslie.

Dr. Leslie King Hammond has been there from the beginning. And, you know, you helped put me into so many different art conferences related to art, design, and interculturalism. And, you gave me a voice; you helped me understand how racism exists in Asia. You gave me the language to deconstruct that. You picked me as "One to Watch" (in 2011 for ArtTable: Advancing Leadership of Women in the Arts); you allowed me to do a keynote address "On Racism" during MLK, Jr. Day and Unity Week at MICA in 2010.

We did "The Shaman" panel (2010) together. It goes on – the College Art Association (CAA) "Global Art Histories/Multiple Modernities: Institutional Power and Ethics of Diversity in Art Education and Art World" (2011), and that was a national panel. I was able to do all these things as you brought me up. You lifted me. And then I think the most important thing I learned from you is humanity, how to listen, support, and be present by watching you. I really would like our conversations to continue.

LKH: Like our conversations are not ever going to continue?

MC: Haha. This is so unique. Yeah. So this is the beginning of possibly being able to work further in collaboration. Maybe it's the administrative leadership piece or something where I feel like I'm taking what I learn and making room for more collaboration. What can I do in my leadership as an Asian woman? And I am responding to 25 years of how you have, you know, supported me, cultivated me, lifted me, brought me visibility and representation. I am a woman of color, and back then, it was a new opening because being a Korean in the United States means you're a woman of color.

If you're in Korea, you're just Korean. Korea is always in some kind of critical conflict or something within the neighboring Asian nations; however, in relation to the West, everything is always related to the Western ideological occupation. But through the 25 years, my kids are



grown up; and I'm here thinking, okay, what are my next 25 years in Baltimore at MICA? I'm committed.

LKH: This is a critical moment for you and me because you now get to see the possibilities of how to bring all of this to the fore, to create the institutional foundation that it needs to become in this 21st century, where we are in the midst of a relentless crisis of all kinds from the pandemic, which is health, to the social justice, to the environment, to issues of sustainability.

Now, *Kindred* is also an excellent exercise because it taught this crew, camera crew, and film crew, the whole, all about; I've had to go back and think about what do you do in a time where you had to, there was no Walmart, there was no Amazon, there was no Target. There was no Giant, Safeway; you name it.

Everything had to come from scratch. It had to be made. So, whatever was made, every element of it had to be used. Nothing could be wasted. They could not afford it. They had to grow their own food and the crops that they were going to market to sustain a plantation. In the meantime, they're having these horrific relationships between human beings and supposedly designated non-human beings.

There are enormous lessons to teach. You can build curricular dynamics. Do you understand that the students can take back to their own orientation and ethnicities and find those historical lines of parallelism? That brings us all together and very ironically recapitulates.

It's just like, you're in this damn hamster wheel. Well, wow. You mean I'm in Thailand, and this is a variation on a theme of America, oh my God. These are human issues that people have been grappling with ever since we walked this planet, and it would not take care of this planet.

What other planets are we going to go to? How to live, I mean, Darwin has already said, you know, survival of the fittest. What does that mean? If you don't adapt, if you don't submit to change, you will not thrive, period. So how do we prepare this generation of artists to understand the layered complexities of this so that they can address the needs that are going to be unusual, different, unique, and require specific kinds of abstract thinking to solve these problems or find a path and opening?

In this case, let's time travel back to an era where you did not have all of these luxuries, conveniences, and entertainment, and figure out how you survived and what was happening so that when you come back to your present time, you have a fresher look, a fresher understanding of what these dynamic relationships should be about.

MC: Yeah. There's one human race but colonial racism constructed racial ideology of superiority and power structures between races. I think the colonial era has passed. We're talking centuries passed, and we're at a point where students need to understand that if we want to survive if we're going to exist, the anti-racist work is the first step and urgent (we are already so delayed and late). You've got to undo racism, dismantle racial superiority and privilege and power. The timeline for the Common Read rollout we've been talking about in the committee was if we gave it to the students over the summer because there is the Orientation period and Canvas online classrooms, they'll have access to the book and some curricular things to think about ahead of time.

So, we get the green light and work with the Office of Culture and Identity (OCI) and the Office of DEI; we will try to scaffold the workshops for faculty for the first semester, wintertime, make sure everybody did read it, and then have it be the curricular kind of backbone for the second semester, which is the perfect time because, you know, that's about the time with the exhibition and Disney film series release.

LKH: Perfect time. Use the summer to transitionalize them so that when we get into having all these conversations, it won't be this overarching shock to their system because they will know that there are tensions. There are reasons that these things happen.

But now, we're going to use a "literary vehicle" to open the door to visualizing how this happened. I am here for all conversations. This has also been regulatory to me because I have had to, through this experience, take all of what I call the flat history, the flat art history, and recreate it for a visual experience because, at that point in history, there was no photography.

So I'm working off of illustrations, prints, and paintings and having to transform them for the film group into a moving, performative experience, drawing on what I call "Urban Archaeological Resources" to deal with material culture. Now the area, which is on the rise in terms of scholarship, people now realize that the ordinary, the tangible ubiquitous, all of the things that we kind of like take for granted or dismiss or hidden in plain view, all of a sudden take on a different kind of reality.

And especially if you're going through a time travel situation, you will notice that the subjects are like, oh my God. They have to caution themselves about things they say because they know information that the people in the 1800s don't know.

So, they have to balance this. This is an excellent way through time travel.

MC: It's amazing. I mean, yeah, *you, Leslie*, are time-traveling and sharing the piece not only currently but of the future, and I would be very happy to help bridge some of that for our students.

LKH: It'll be wonderful, and then I'm going to be putting it together at some point. I'm in the process; Sarah Barnes and I are in the process of putting together a whole lecture so that you see what we had to work off of. Because first, they sent us images of what they imagined these sets and these scenes would look like.

And then we had to respond to [the images]. And then, we had to respond to the text of the story. So, this is a wonderful way in terms of processing to deal with these questions; how do you create transitions? How do you incorporate different levels of realities, of experience?

MC: Wonderful. I mean, we absolutely need to have you be the speaker.

LKH: At one point, you'll figure it out. Okay.

MC: Yeah, we have the Falvey Hall at the Brown Center for the Forum Lecture Series to share with the wider MICA audience as well as the first year students.



LKH: Yeah. I can do it at Falvey Hall. And this can, we may have to do it once or twice, or three times, when working on a project with Oletha DeVane and McDonogh School, Margaret Grace MacDonald. And McDonogh is working with its history with Oletha DeVane.

MC: and with her son, Christopher Kojzar.

LKH: When I was in an administrator position, the school decided, the administrators all the way from the top said, no, we're going to need to make presentations. So, we had to do a presentation for faculty development. We did a whole faculty development, which is what we're going to have to do now. We did, and the faculty walked out of there, and they went, but some said, oh my God, this is the best thing we have had in more than 15 years.

MC: Well, this is the thing that there's also the Mixed Media Lecture Series, and it's about getting the entire college, Mixed Media Lecture Series and Forum Lecture Series to kind of join hands. What a great impact. I don't know how you do it all.

LKH: I guess the signals, the signs come and, and the ancestors come down, and I have to respond. So, you just do what you are supposed to when you're called upon.

MC: Yes. I don't know if you have more time today—what should we talk about?

LKH: Well, what do we want to do for your conversation? I know we've had one part of the conversation dealing with your academic and administrative role.

MC: I think it's about my placement. We addressed my placement and how, while I'm a transplant, I was able to find a home of footing with the right people. It's in the right context for me to continue doing some good work, some necessary work, and being an administrator. It certainly helps with the curricular component. That's one of the things you and teaching is something to be doing when you're returning back to faculty from the Associate Dean of FYE position. So, while I'm an administrator, I have my creative practice and research, and I have a solo show coming up at the American University Museum in the fall semester.

So, I'm putting back together what cuts through the center. And I'm kind of focused on the curricular, uh, academic leadership and just slowly kind of, you know, getting closer again with my creative practice, but taking time. It was a big job this year; it was my first year in the role. And, so talking to you right now is one of the ways that I'm trying to get closer with myself and my creative and intellectual identity because I had to kind of put that aside to be truly participating in the act of service, service to the MICA community, service to the faculty, students and staff. And without the role, the service of education is within the classroom and some committee work, but you know, this is a different level of service.

And, um, it's sort of like, if you're not there, nothing will work. So you have to be there every day and respond immediately to needs to move forward. And, so I'm trying to work in, carving out important moments where I'm like, okay, finally, I'm making time to have a conversation that's supposed to help me wake up again.

There is something that you and I have always talked about, about Korea's place in the world. Korean history comes with being colonized by Japan.

Obviously, if you look at it geographically, there is Korea, Japan, and China, and Korea was always in between these neighboring countries even throughout the ancient kingdoms. And in Korea, there were three ancient kingdoms, plus an independent fourth one. So the country was never truly unified. It was always internally, you know, in conflict over territory and resources and riches and status.

And Japanese Colonization of Korea (1910-1945) came with the sweep of modernization that also brought Westernization. So, it was actually Japanese influence that allowed Koreans to learn ideas of liberation and freedom so that Koreans could rise for independence. It's very interesting how it came along with the wind of ideology of Western thought and unfortunately colonial rule.

The Koreans rose against Japanese imperialism due to the colonial devastations: including laborers in coal mines or even the sex slaves, Korean Comfort Women. And just even language-wise, that Japanese was taught, and we have generations of that, some people having to take on Japanese names.

And then, between the Allies versus Axis powers, and with the rise of Socialism and China's influence, there was an attack from the North to the South, and Americans got involved. Then, there was the Korean War (1950-1953), resulting in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) on the 38th Parallel we know of today, and the war was about where does the line fall? And we are still in a kind of frozen war, but it's not frozen. Because the nuclear threats are real, it's an everyday threat. Divided Korea is a nuclear Korea.

And the fact that North and South Korea, a country fractured, include splintering factors of all kinds and a vulnerable state, and with Japanese modern ideology and colonization, colonial racism exists, but it wasn't referenced as racism. It's dubbed nationalism or co-nationalism, but there was a sense of racial superiority when the Japanese colonized. It does take from my understanding of being American to understand the language of how racism is scattered hegemony. To pick that interpretation up and reframe it in a language that I have learned here in the United States (with liberal education) has been helpful, like how protest culture has taken so well in Korea. The rise of citizens occurred during Japanese colonization because pro-democracy ideas were born with colonization simultaneously. It has a strong foothold in South Korea and the cultural paradoxes that complicate conflicts within and beyond the country.

And so, similarly, I'm here in the United States, being able to be Korean and understand what it means to be a foreigner. And, and it was early on you took me under your wings and kind of helped navigate that for me. And when it all exploded with the pandemic and the shootings at the Atlanta spa shooting in 2021, existing anti-Asian bias and racism were exposed at another level.

I have always thought that Black Lives Matter the most; I don't mean like, more than us or that it is a comparison of who and more, but as racial conflict is not resolved and, systematically, if it's always a daily struggle for black lives, how can we (other racial minorities) not feel the ramifications?

So, what does it mean to be Korean in America? Being Korean is one example. It's my history; it's my *herstory*. It's, you know, my way in to be able to talk about these sorts of

global atrocities that hit all humankind. And it's interesting to have the language of protest and cultural protests as a response.

Right. What I'm doing is global activism and social justice work for Koreans, as an example. Questioning Korean Unification is about looking at all divided spaces, political, religious, and economic division; it could be about the stratification and division lines in neighborhoods of where the dividing line is, and who's in, who's out. Like the DMZ, the contours of borders and boundaries are examples of politicized and contested spaces beyond Korea.

How do we communicate, and how do I support the North Korean refugees in South Korea? Korea is my own/herstory because while I'm still Korean in America, and because I am Korean, I can give my children Korean citizenship. But, by being in the United States, my transnational experience is to align my activism that parallels those in the United States. For that, I thank you for the 25 years of mentorship.

You allowed me to participate and learn. I was exposed. Through the platform and opportunities you've given me, I learned beyond learning; I was able to learn beyond the scope of just teaching, and I was part of the community.

LKH: The thing that is so telling about this relationship and the whole nature of education is that, in particular, your case when you came to MICA, when you came into this new educational arena, as an immigrant with two huge immigrant bags, I knew that this was going to be a heavy lift; this was going to be a heavy load for anybody to have to navigate. With your intellect, energy, and prowess, I did not want to get in the way of you finding your own way to figure out the best methodologies through trial and error, which is what the creative process is all about.

Everything that you lay your hands on doesn't come out to be brilliant or wonderful. You have to fall down and get up because it is in the process of falling down and getting up that the genius occurs. If you had a spectacular experience at every moment of your life, after a while, those would flatline. You would not know where you are in comparison to the times in which you're living, much less the peers with whom you have to interact.

So just being there was fortuitous to have this experience for me to learn how to teach without teaching, to navigate, without steering, to encourage, without always being a cheerleader. Do you understand? Because I also did not believe in the feel-good crits because they lead to false premises, ill found elements of confidence when you have not done all the work to get to that stage.

Steady as a steady rock to channel, meditate, and be supportive. And you helped me learn to listen because of your energy in particular, and when you're off on an idea, there's no way to get in there until you get the idea out.

I just say, 'Mina is on a roll. So, let's just go with this until she kind of sputters the room.' And then, there will be a moment to slip in and say, "well, perhaps, but how about, let's think about," that's interesting. It's also about learning the timing and the rhythm of tools, timing, and rhythm.

What is the flow? Because when you try to break into assist, you can abort the process necessary for that individual to grapple with that issue to make it dynamic. So that others can

understand that, they know how they want to instinctively artistically and intellectually deal with it.

And that's a very difficult thing to learn, that I have come to respect with all of the individuals that I have had time to work with. That is that everybody has their own time. They have momentum that they are in the midst of learning what it is. It's just like you come to a new place; you come to a new experience, and you are under the aegis of a new educational apparatus.

And so, it's like a new machine. You're trying to figure out what all the working parts are. You also came in when technology was in a rapid state of an overhaul in transition, computers, digitalization, everything that technology was exploding. All of this is going on around you; you are thoroughly immersed in it.

So I can't go up to you and say Mina and shaking, tell, do this, do that because I do not know if I am being a responsible and responsive educator and learning about how these elements are impacting on just you but your peers, the environment, the institution, the structures, and the nature of what we thought. The maker traditions were becoming.

I am increasingly using maker traditions because so many artists are not artists in the traditional concept, as we have come to understand it through history. Still, they are busy making and creating things that are multifaceted and inextricably tied to each other. It's not one thing or the other; it's not painting or sculpture, performance, perhaps conceptual that it has all of these other antennae out feeling what's going on in a time when our history is in such a state of flux and transition. We are in a state of total catharsis. We sometimes, not sometimes, but most times these days, we don't know what's going to happen in the next minute, in the next hour, in the next day, week, month, or year.

Those propositions are no longer conveniently on the table for us. Because now we have to go back, and we have to work with the scientists. We have to work with the epidemiologists to understand and draw from their experiences. We now have to go back to other sources, environmentalists, geologists, and people who deal with all of the elements that make our planet viable for human life.

We are finding artists now whose expansive knowledge of how we engage human history has taken on a whole different contour and has taken on a whole other type of landscape and outreach and sense of geography. So, the teacher, the person standing at the front of the classroom, sometimes now has to move to the side of the back of the center of the classroom.

To allow other thought processes to come in because these students who are coming in now are coming in with such a range of talent, vision, and diversified experience, sometimes exceeding what your base of knowledge is, is that we have to learn how to put our egos in check so that we can understand these new interpretive venues of outreach and interpretation.

MC: Going from art history lectures to where you could, as an educator, educate, facilitate, and respond, but also mentor in a way that's helpful that hears the student and allows for student feedback to help with the educational component.

It's breaking the hierarchy. It's creating the horizontality of communication and education so that it's no longer a top-to-the-bottom relationship. And I think that's so important. Students have that much to offer and more.

So, I hear you. That makes sense to me that what you're doing and being the visual researcher for *Kindred* and its visual presentation. So, what you're doing is you're taking a piece of heritage and lineage and history, bridging it, showing the visual reality in a very accessible way so that it's a total experience. And with that, future generation students are in mind. So, you are creating time-travel, transhistorical transgenerational creative work, and transnational storytelling.

For material culture-wise, you have broken the boundary between what is a stuffy art history lecture and collapsed it as an art experience. So, I have watched, seen, and I learned that these are kind of important moments for me, your strength, the way that you are there for so many people, the way you support so many people, unbelievable, so amazing how you could be there for every person, everything, fabric, thread, and every "bead."

LKH: I'm *beading* along with you!

MC: The quilts you created at MICA with other faculty and staff, are now a Disney production, but like The Global Africa Project was, it is global. I remember you were working on The Global Africa Project (Museum of Art and Design, 2010), and you asked me, "Mina, do you want to be in the show?" I was like, 'But I'm not African.' I should've just said yes! Even Keith Haring was in the show; you certainly saw things way beyond my understanding.

LKH: What you do when you teach is that you don't teach from one spot. You try to see it as an open vessel. And you try to acclimate the students to the changes that will occur to them because people get comfortable when they discover something that they can do with success.

And then one thing that they do for, with success, they have the propensity to want to recapitulate it over and over. And I go, no, you've been there already. Let's take it in another direction. Let's see. What else can you do? With these tools, you have discovered how to use them. And part of it is that art history has not done us a favor in the way it was recorded because it was usually recorded from singular voices who felt they owned that particular posture or that particular system of theoretical thought.

And there was very little room for other points of view. The difficulty with that is that the very people they did not give attention, respect, or the time to hear were the artists and the makers. So, when you go back, which is what was very frustrating in my own work, and that's why I think the universe gravitated me to MICA to spend my career there, understanding the necessity to listen to the artists.

When I started to write with more of the artist's voice in my work, I got a lot of pushback. But then, in the past few years, having followed the people who mentored me, even though I was never in their classrooms, people like Henry Drewal and Robert Farris Thompson. And I remember once we were talking, we were doing a salute at the CAA for Robert Farris Thompson.

And afterward, we went out drinking, and we talked, and this is what he was saying. He said I find it fascinating because he got a lot of pushback for his style and work. He says, “I find it absolutely fascinating. People would say to me, ‘where did you come up with that? How did that, how did you come to those, those thoughts in this writing and everything?’”

And he said very clearly, “Have you ever asked the artist? Have you ever had a conversation with artists? What I wrote was directly from the artist.” And when you read his writings, he’s always citing someone who does not have that kind of semblance of a celebratory title or that kind of recognition, but who was an on-the-ground maker and on-the-ground creatives and artists craftsperson, somebody with technical ingenuity and brilliance. He was having a conversation with that person.

And so, I’m going, duh, what happened? Why hasn’t art history done that? Well, it’s part of the colonialist mentality, so, therefore, they own you. So therefore, your thoughts become their property. And it’s only valid when I repeat it through my voice.

MC: And frame it.

LKH: And frame it and lock it in.

MC: The colonial art historical record reduces; it reduces the experience, the storytelling, and the artist centrality; it moves it away from the human experience to the record itself. It becomes about the historian and creating facts. It becomes about the historian making (of) history. And it is colonial history.

LKH: As I began to do more research on living artists, who asked me to write about their work and everything I would say to them, well, if you live in a different part of the country that I haven’t experienced, I need to come there. I need to be in the place which invariably is the source of inspiration for you so that I understand how to position the narrative that I am creating and for you to become more authentic and valued, and realistic to the truth that you are trying to address.

MC: I wanted to ask you about all the students and artists from Korea and Asia then who you’ve worked with. The experience you get is the sense of their place and bodies when they come, and they are creating their work throughout your teaching years; we’re talking about decades. How many decades for, how long were you [teaching]? When did you begin to teach?

LKH: I started teaching when I was in grad school. Yes. Okay. I started teaching in grad school, so I had those years. Then I formally transitioned into the MICA administration. Still, at the time, I was so unimpressed with administrative roles that I said, no, I think I’m going to stay in the classroom, too. Because that way, I will be able to be more responsive and feel like I am dealing with the post institution.

MC: Yes. I understand that. Am I the only person who stayed this long and was transplanted?

LKH: I think you are the longest; you have the longest tenure. Absolutely. And the Asian from the Asian students, yes, you. Some of them went back, and some went to other parts of the country. Some of them went to other countries. To expand their experiential base in terms of how their creativity was moving. But you have been a constant, which has been an unusual



dynamic in terms of our relationship and in terms of the relationship of Asian students who have come to the school and then invariably, they either go back home, or they move on to grad school, which takes them into another realm. They float, but you have been the closest; there's Jae Ko.

MC: Yes, Jae Ko. I love her artwork.

LKH: I think she came in after you.

MC: She might've been a year after. Is she also teaching in D.C.?

LKH: I'm sure she is teaching, but not the same way you are because I think she has a full-time studio practice and teaches intermittently.

MC: Yeah. Wow. Five decades of teaching.

LKH: I started it in 1973.

MC: I was born in 1973.

LKH: I started to teach at MICA in 1973. Yes. And I became the Dean of the Graduate School at MICA in 1976. What a ride. What a journey. I'm now pulling together my own archives, and I'm like, oh my God, did I do that? Did I write that? Oh my God. Scary reading what you wrote 30, 40, and 50 years ago.

MC: Yeah. There's a trip to Asia to be had, Leslie.

LKH: Yeah, once the pandemic is done, I will go with you. I want to go.

MC: Let's go to Vietnam, Cambodia, Korea, Japan, and China.

LKH: My brother was in the Vietnam War, and my brother just started painting last year. Who knew? He painted a painting. And we had an art sale over at The Motor House on Saturday. And I said, "Come sell your paintings." And he did. And so, he's showing all of these things that he experienced, from the horror and the gore of the war to the beautiful lush environments.

He shows me this one thing, saying, "look at this." He says, "find the Vietcong in this work." And I went, and I pointed right at him. He said, "Hey, that's the one that shot at me." And so, I got that painting. I said, "oh no, that's my painting." It is the experiences that people have around Asian encounters. He is flooding up in the beauty of the landscape, not in the war, but the landscape because even when he pointed to the Vietcong, he was buried in the rice furrows. Don't stop painting. Whatever's real. Let it come out.

Thank you. Thank you for all of these precious goodies of your art catalogs Mina, which I am going through.

MC: No, of course.

LKH: Yeah. Oh, thank you. Thank you. Because the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) wants my archives for their library, you have your own shelf. You continue to grow.

MC: That's amazing.

LKH: Yes, Perfect.

*“The artistry and philosophical intellect of Mina Cheon presents contemporary history with all the conundrums that come with a globalized world at the cultural crossroads of the twenty-first century. Mina is walking and navigating the minefields of contemporaneous cultures, driven by the urgencies of a world facing enormous and complex challenges political, economic, health, environmental and technological. Art making for Mina is located at the intersection of popular and material culture. Mina's sense of selfhood and in the broader terrain-how these factors influence communities of Korean-Asian women and all women who also stand at the edge of their own cultural borders and crossroads. Thus, her political Pop Art - Polipop -becomes her personal manifesto to the world.”*

*“Mina Cheon is fascinating to observe as she seeks links to make and define connections or threads of continuity that speak to how spirituality functions in her urbane post-modern world. The vision of this artist is informed by her bi-cultural heritage, grounded in her homeland of Korea, and the adoption of her Western life in the United States. There is no separation between these two realities that are often diametrically opposed. This is the challenge of living in the twenty-first century for so many artist-scholars, thinker-makers, and all humans committed to expressing the profound realities, contradictions, and perceptions of the world in which they live and how they experience life. One of the more interesting aspects of Mina's interrogation of her realities is how does the artist-thinker mediate all of this information into a viable aesthetic that has meaning for the audience who come to interact and view this work Mina draws upon the familiar, ordinary, mundane, even the ubiquitous -those elements that are present or can be seen in several places simultaneously.”*

Dr. Leslie King Hammond's words from “The Polipop Whirls of Mina Cheon,” in *Polipop: Political Pop Art*, catalog for Mina Cheon's Mid-career Solo Exhibition at the Sungkok Art Museum, Seoul, Korea, 2012.

Mina Cheon (천민정) (b. 1973 in Seoul, South Korea; lives and works in Baltimore, New York, and Seoul)

Mina Cheon is a new media artist, scholar, educator, and activist best known for her "Polipop" paintings inspired by Pop art and Social Realism. Cheon's practice draws inspiration from the partition of the Korean peninsula, exemplified by her parallel body of work created under her North Korean alter ego, Kim Il Soon, in which she enlists a range of mediums, including painting, sculpture, video, installation, and performance to deconstruct and reconcile the precarious history and ongoing coexistence between North and South Korea. She has exhibited internationally, including at the Inaugural Asia Society Triennial, Busan Biennale, and Baltimore Museum of Art. Cheon's solo exhibitions include at the Ethan Cohen Gallery, Lance Fung Gallery, and The Korea Society in New York; upcoming solo show at the American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center, Washington, DC; the Noyes Museum of Art of Stockton University in New Jersey; Trunk Gallery, Sungkok Art Museum, and Insa Art Space in Seoul, Korea; Maryland Art Place and C.Grimaldis Gallery in Baltimore. Mina Cheon is the author of *Shamanism + Cyberspace* (Atropos Press, Dresden, and New York, 2009), contributor for *ArtUS*, *Wolgan Misool*, *New York Arts Magazine*, *Artist Organized Art*, and served on the Board of Directors of the New Media Caucus of the College Art Association, as well as an Associate Editor of the peer review academic journal *Media-N*. Reviews for *Media-N* include critical essays covering SeMA Mediacity Seoul Biennale 2016 and the Venice Biennale 2017. Awarded the 2010 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and Unity Week Award for her efforts in promoting cultural diversity within and beyond her college, she is a Full-time Professor at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) and currently serving as the Associate Dean of First Year Experience program; was a visiting professor and lecturer at Ewha Womans University in Seoul, Korea where she teaches during the summers; and a mentor of Art-Uni-On, a global mentorship network by Hyundai Co. and the Seoul National University College of Fine Arts. Cheon received a BFA in painting from Ewha Womans University, Seoul, in 1996; an MFA in painting from the Maryland Institute College of Art in 1999; an MFA in imaging and digital art from UMBC: An Honors University in Maryland in 2002; and a Ph.D. in philosophy of media and communications at the European Graduate School, Saas-Fee, Switzerland, in 2008.

Dr. Leslie King Hammond is an art historian, curator, artist and cultural and community innovator. She is Professor Emerita, former Graduate Dean and founding Director of the Center of Race and Culture at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). King Hammond sits on the board of the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture, Collections and Acquisitions Committee of the Walters Art Museum and the Baltimore Arts Realty Corporation (BARCO) - an initiative committed to developing and supporting arts hubs and incubator labs in Baltimore City. She has an active career teaching, consulting, lecturing, curating exhibitions, writing essays and publications on numerous artists and cultural movements that include Jacob Lawrence, Hughie Lee-Smith, Betye Saar, Romare Bearden, Vivian Browne, Oletha DeVane, Aminah Robinson, and Joyce J. Scott among others. King Hammond's artistry has been exhibited at the New York Historical Society, Benjamin Banneker-Douglass Museum, Museum of Biblical Art, The Smithsonian-Arts and Industries Building, Galerie Myrtis, Apex Gallery, Montserrat College of Art Gallery, MICA-Meyerhoff Gallery and the James E. Lewis Museum. Her mixed media-bricolage installations and fiber works explore the anonymity of women's handwork and the intersection of Black Atlantic Diaspora spiritual belief systems.