

# Rising Stars: Meet Yangbin Park

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Today we'd like to introduce you to Yangbin Park.

**Hi Yangbin, so excited to have you with us today. What can you tell us about your story?**

My name is Yangbin Park. I am a visual artist and an art educator in Memphis, Tennessee. I joined the faculty of the Department of Art at the University of Memphis in August 2022. I was born and raised in an art-loving family in Seoul, South Korea. My mother was a painter, and my father was an avid art collector. They would bring home many art catalogs from galleries and museums, and I enjoyed looking through them. As I got older, I began to see myself as an expressive and creative person seeking a more artistic and innovative career path. I graduated from an art college in South Korea in 2008 and wanted to see a broader world. I moved to America in the same year as an international student.

I did not speak much English then, so I had to start with a language school. New York was my first city in the US, and I chose NYC in the hope I could attend all the exciting exhibitions and art events in the city. I relocated to Chicago to study Painting and Drawing at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2010 and began my art career through a few group exhibitions in the Chicago area. At SAIC, I met a group of influential artists, best known as Chicago Imagists, who greatly influenced my earlier work.

In 2011, I moved to Philadelphia to pursue my MFA in Printmaking at the Tyler School of Art of Temple University. The transition from Painting & Drawing to Printmaking came naturally. I was looking to expand the breadth of my work and needed to explore beyond the canvas. The idea of multiplicity and dissemination in Printmaking helped me see new possibilities for my artistic practice and informed me of new ideas. In Philadelphia, I was lucky to meet many inspirational people who became my longtime friends and mentors.

In 2014, I returned to South Korea to spend more time with my family and started my university teaching career at the Chungnam National University in Daejeon. During my time in South Korea, I built a substantial body of work and collaborated with many artists and writers. I returned to the US in 2021 as a Visiting Assistant Professor at Muhlenberg College in Allentown. Although I only got to stay there for one year, I gained valuable experience and met terrific colleagues.

In 2022, Joining the Art Department at the University of Memphis as a new Printmaking professor became the topmost decision of my life. I had never lived in the South before and did not know anyone from there. But I wanted to go and establish myself in a new place. I have been in Memphis only for about three months, and I am lucky to be part of this burgeoning art program at the University of Memphis. I have an incredible cohort of faculty passionate about their artistic visions and teaching art.

Memphis is a historic and art-spirited city with captivating sites, authentic cafes, restaurants, and up-and-coming contemporary galleries and museums. I feel great vibes and heart-beating adrenaline from the dynamics of this city of art. I am currently working on multiple art projects and developing the printmaking program at the university.

**Alright, so let's dig a little deeper into the story – has it been an easy path overall, and if not, what were the challenges you've had to overcome?**

Indeed, it has not been a smooth road! I am in a place about 6,900 miles away from my family. So far, I have made multiple transcontinental moves across the Pacific Ocean—eight times in six different cities since 2008. These frequent relocations changed my idea of home and sense of place forever. South Korea has a distinctive culture, and its social and political environment is quite different from the US. When I moved here, I had to build everything from scratch and suffered from the uncertainties of my life.

Unlike those who migrated to a different country together with their families, I came to the US alone. It is hard for me to visit my family in Korea due to the physical distance between the two countries. Thanks to my friends and colleagues in the US, I feel more settled in. With my new position at the University of Memphis came an opportunity to have a long-term vision for my life for the first time.

**As you know, we're big fans of you and your work. For our readers who might not be as familiar what can you tell them about what you do?**

I have been trained in various artistic disciplines, such as fiber and material studies, painting and drawing, and printmaking, which makes me an interdisciplinary artist. I am best known for my print-based installation work that explores the concept of home, transcontinental experience, and non-linear narrative of history.

My artistic practice is deeply rooted in my endeavor to examine the intersection of place, identity, and history. Moving to the United States in 2008 as an international student profoundly affected how I perceived myself and the world around me. My new project titled Border(less) explores the concept of the border as an imaginary space beyond the current geopolitical order. I was particularly interested in the social and historical implications of artificial/manmade borders and how these borders have constantly changed throughout history, as manifested in the developments of cartography. When I started to develop this concept, I mulled over the idea of moving in different ways between fictional and politically constructed boundaries. I envisioned a non-linear narrative of history and the social meaning of the movement. I hope to shed light on the issues regarding border, migration, diaspora, and home.

My interest in the history of maps and mapmaking was a great source of inspiration for this project. To a certain degree, all maps embody a fictional worldview and tell stories about movement and changes. In addition, they possess innate artistic values and aesthetic

appeals, which consist of numerous lines, shapes, names, symbols, and information interconnected with conflicts, wars, environmental changes, and migration.

I have been collecting images of maps from various regions and periods, examining those maps' historical and formal aspects. The history of cartography provided a lens through which to explore the construction of nations and national identities. One of the striking discoveries from my research was that artificial borders tend to be geometric, with arbitrary straight lines and hard edges that are entirely out of sync with their surroundings. In contrast, natural boundaries such as the oceans, mountains, and rivers have organic lines and are cohesively connected with their neighboring environments. As someone born and grew up in a country divided by an artificial border, the 38 parallel lines that severed the Korean peninsula into two divided nations, North and South Korea, I am acutely aware of these artificial lines and how the fictional border has profoundly affected the lives of individuals in the region.

My work intends to reimagine the current geopolitical boundaries and rethink the traditional narrative of typical geopolitical borders and physical space, connoting that borders are never fundamental. Through my work, I'd like to invite viewers to think critically about borders, emphasizing transcontinental experiences that transcend the limits of the official narrative and the linear view of history.

I am driven by the fact that my personal narrative and lived experience in my work intersect with the broader discourse on the concept of home, migration, diaspora, borders, and world-building. I am driven to make meaningful contributions to society by facilitating these critical dialogues and making them more visible.

### **Any big plans?**

I want to explore Memphis and other areas in the US and beyond. My work is receptive to and influenced by the places I go. Last summer, I traveled to South Korea and visited lots of temples in the mountains. I was fascinated by their intriguing architecture and art and how the temples deeply connected with their surrounding nature. First and foremost, each temple has its unique history and behind stories, and they got me thinking about the continuing dialogues between the past and the present. It would be very interesting to do a project about the Korean temples in the mountains. I want to research the ways in which these temples reveal many fascinating mythologies, folklore, and historical events about the ancient Korean kingdoms and how they have been continuously interacting with the lives of the contemporary population in the region.

I am interested in finding historical places with certain connections to people's ways of life and like to draw similarities from those places across the globe. I am interested in initiating a fusion and cross-cultural practice. I want to connect deeply with Memphis and build my



studio here. Hopefully, I can get more involved with the local art communities and programs soon. I am excited that numerous research, creative activities, and adventures are ahead of me!

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