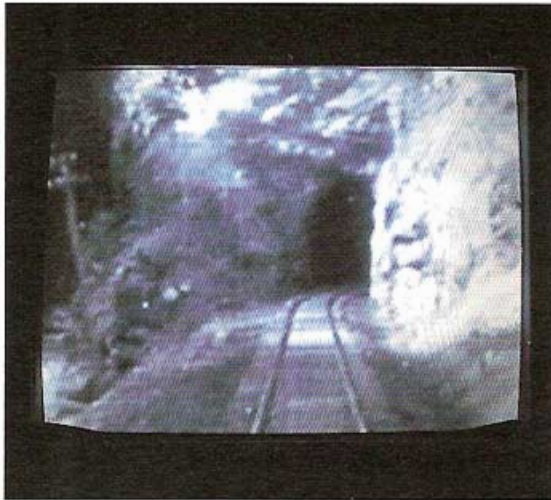


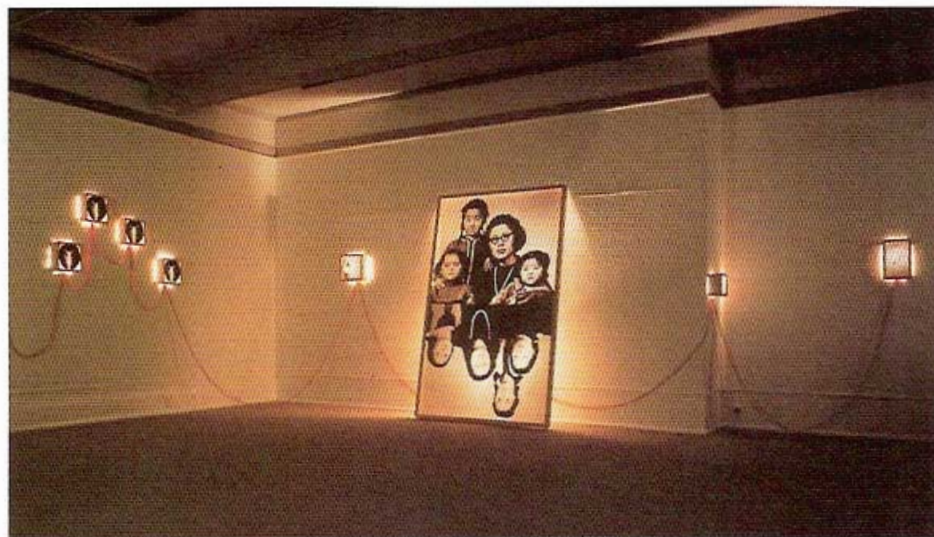
Koh, Germaine. "Jin-me Yoon."
Crossings. Ottawa: National
Gallery of Canada, 1998: 180-185.

150. *between departure and arrival* (1996-97), details and overall view. Video projection, video monitor, speakers, photographic mylar scroll, clocks



Jin-me Yoon's installations focus on the convergence of personal histories and social forces, and the ways in which these intersections relate to the construction of individual and collective identities. Her works speak of how the shared myths, policies, and memories that constitute cultural history moderate the experiences of real people.

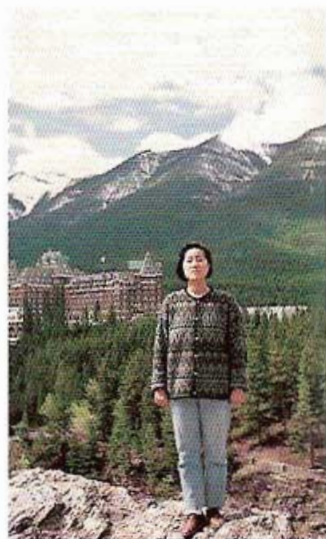
Yoon's work draws, but does not dwell, upon her own experience; where it appears, her history is presented as typical of those produced by specific cultural conditions. Some of her work explores the upheavals entailed by displacements, such as her family's emigration from Seoul to Vancouver in 1968. The central element of the installation *body a thread dis ease a mountain* (second version 1994) is a life-size doubled portrait of Jin-me, her mother and sisters, the upper half from a 1967 passport photo, the bottom half an inverted repetition of the same family grouping staged in 1993. This large panel is connected by red electrical cord, suggesting lineage, to light-boxes featuring other images of splits and doublings that may have shaped this family and others. Among these are a head of hair strictly parted in the traditional Korean style – a visual metaphor for divided subjectivity – that is echoed in photographs of Yoon's grandmothers; a map of a divided Korea, which resembles the shape of the scar seen in another light-box; the Korean nationalist heroine Yu Guan Soon (a willed link in this assembled conceptual heritage); and the passport splicing the mother's and children's identities into one family unit. Within this network of ruptures and connections, the passport is especially charged with a psychic tenacity, marking identity insistently and paradoxically fixed at the point of departure.



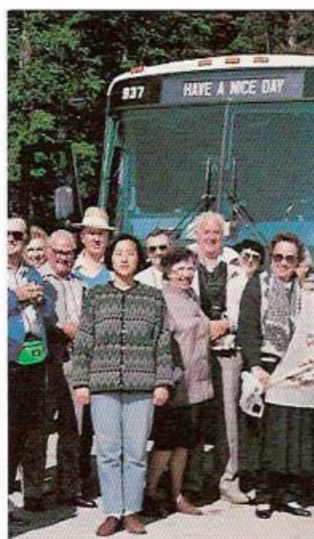
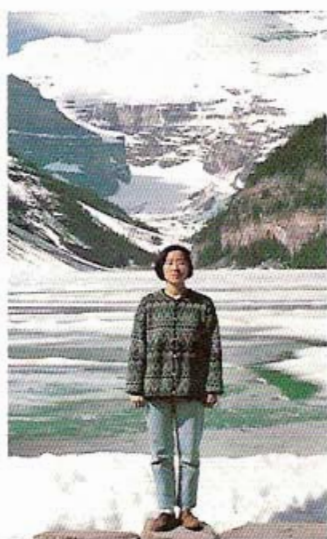
151. *body a thread dis ease a mountain*
(second version, 1994). Thirteen
wooden light-boxes, photographic mylar,
red electrical wire

A somewhat more abstract installation, *between departure and arrival* (1996-97), focuses less on points where identity condenses, exploring instead the state of suspension that is experienced, to different degrees, by the voyager and the immigrant. The immateriality of its elements emphasizes the fluidity of identity. Outside the room, clocks display the current time in Seoul, Vancouver, and the site of the installation, measuring intangible emotional distances. Inside, an ethereal video of clouds viewed from mid-air is projected across a wall, interrupted by a large hanging scroll bearing the stark abstract image of parted hair. In the shadow cast by the scroll, a video monitor embedded in the wall replays archival images of defining motifs in the history of the movement, displacement, and dispossession of Asian peoples in Canada: Japanese internment camps, Chinese railroad workers, Canadian troops departing for the Korean war. These images are conflated and entwined – as these cultures often are in both popular understanding and global history – and interspersed with mundane moving shots of contemporary urban streets. Audio tracks, spoken softly and hesitantly, emphasize the sense of displacement, fragmentation, and unfixity.

Other work examines the production of "minoritized" identities through the constructed signs of nationalist identity. Establishing the problematics for *Souvenirs of the Self* (1991), Yoon points to the notions of identity built into the very vocabulary used to describe belonging in / to a place: "I am interested in appropriating the genre of landscape photography to question the constructed 'nature' of Canadian identity. Imaged in the heroic setting of the Canadian Rockies, can I as a non-Western woman enjoy a 'naturalized' relationship to this landscape?"¹ In a series of picture postcards, a young Asian woman dressed in a nordic-style sweater and blue jeans is depicted, deliberately neutral, as the stereotypical Japanese tourist in the Rocky Mountains, whose rugged landscape is iconic for the propagation of Canadian identity. The woman poses before a majestic view of Lake Louise, by a display in the natural history museum, beside a marker identifying where Chinese railroad workers lived, and, most ambiguously, amongst a group of white tourists, perhaps as their tour guide. Deadpan, painfully "out of place," she makes the expected rounds, and in doing so elicits our recognition that the heroic narratives written on these places cannot recognize her, except as indeterminately "foreign." Like a signpost, her body measures out a standard course



152. *Souvenirs of the Self* (postcard version, 1991).
Six postcards in a perforated strip.
Edition of 2800. Project for the Walter Phillips
Gallery, Banff, Alberta



of nationalist identity, while the evident awkwardness of the fit draws out deep-seated (naturalized) assumptions about who is at home in these spaces. The project is not a simple argument for inclusion; rather, it is a matter of *denaturalizing* these constructed nationalist models by bearing witness to the limited (racialized, for example) ways in which subjects can appear within them.

Yoon explores similar expectations, as embedded in representational structures, in the recent photographic installation *A Group of Sixty-Seven* (1996). This work draws inferences between certain chapters in Canadian history: the Group of Seven, whose raw landscape paintings remain emblems for nationalist self-definition; Canada's independence in 1867; and, in its centenary year, the loosening of official policies that had restricted Asian immigration. Creating a visible record of the conflux of these moments, the work depicts sixty-seven members of the Vancouver Korean community in two grids of photos. All are posed twice: frontally, gazing evenly out from the centre of a Lawren Harris mountain landscape; and with their backs turned, facing and partially obscuring a scene of a Haida village by Emily Carr.

The installation upsets the assumptions built into certain formal – and by extension social – conventions of representation. For instance, because they refer to the accepted view that formal portraiture, whether official state document or honorific portrait, acts as a reliable record, the portraits might be seen to be suggesting a variety of symbolic messages about identity. These might include: the influence of pervasive cultural tokens in the formation of personal history, the pressure to adopt/adapt to a dominant model of identity, or an attempt by those excluded from

153. *A Group of Sixty-Seven* (1996),
details. 135 framed C-prints.
Vancouver Art Gallery

Notes

1. Jin-me Yoon in "Touring Home: Jin-me Yoon" folder, *Constructing Cultural Identity: Jin-me Yoon*, Bob Boyer, Liz Magor (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1991), p. 5.



traditional nationalist models to claim for themselves a place within the imagined vistas of Canadian identity. Likewise, the regularized grouping of the portraits may seem to implicate the individuals as a group. However, none of these interpretations is comfortable because we must also recognize that these photos tell us *little* about the individuals portrayed. On the other hand, they potentially convey *much* about the structures in/by which they are presented. The fact that this provisional group of people of Korean heritage living in Vancouver actually exists is a confirmation of real socio-historical conditions, such as those chapters of Canadian history mentioned above, which shape common experience. Yet, the deliberately artificial installation structure adopted by the artist, with the overt regularity of the view and the sitters' literally turning their backs on portrait conventions, reminds us that definitions of identity and community are still constructions. We understand that it is the presentational structures which relentlessly lead us towards a fixed definition of the overtly neutral subjects of these images. Further emphasizing these structures, Yoon places the front and back grids of portraits on adjoining walls to construct a physically triangular relationship, with the viewer in a third position, perhaps reflecting upon the uneasy proximity between self-determination and over-determination.

If a large part of Jin-me Yoon's project has been to explore identity destabilized through the crossing of expectations and personal histories, another element of her work has been the attempt to forge connections and create community within these conditions of diaspora and suspension. Her Internet project and installation *Imagining Communities (bojagi)* (1996-98) employs as an organizing metaphor the *bojagi*, a square of fabric used in Korea to create bundles. Like the *bojagi*, which conforms to the shape of whatever it contains, the experimental Internet component of the project gathers the observations of Korean diasporic women, drawing these disembodied memories together into a provisional, virtual, and *willed* community, linked by a shared history of dispersal. Just as she focused on the space between home and away in *between departure and arrival* and expressed the complexity of imputing identity in *A Group of Sixty-Seven*, by claiming the fragmented and non-linear composition of cyberspace in *Imagining Communities*, Yoon makes clear her interest in unfixity as a productive state. G.K.