
£SOUTH KOREA

@Somiryon Artists Imprisoned

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Eleven members of *Somiryon*, the Seoul affiliate of the National Minjung Arts Movement, were arrested in March 1991. In July 1991 three of them were sentenced to prison terms ranging from eighteen months to two years. Chong Son-hee and Oh Chin-hee, both painters, and Choi Ik-kyun, an art critic, were convicted under Article 7 of the National Security Law with carrying out activities benefiting North Korea and organizing a group to carry out such activities. Amnesty International regards them as prisoners of conscience and is calling for their immediate release.

Somiryon is affiliated to the National Minjung Arts Movement (*Minmiryon*). The aims of these artists' groups is to practice and promote realism in art. The works of their members depict scenes of the life of ordinary or working people and often contain political messages, in particular in support of Korean reunification. They also campaign for freedom of artistic expression. In 1989 they arranged for a photographic slide of a painting entitled *History of the National Liberation Movement* to be sent to North Korea where it was reproduced and exhibited. Artist Hong Song-dam who designed the painting is currently serving a three-year prison sentence for sending the slide to North Korea.

Eleven members of *Somiryon* were arrested on 18 and 19 March 1991. They were reportedly interrogated continuously for about 72 hours at the Hongje-dong police station. They were charged under the National Security Law with activities benefiting North Korea. In July three of them were given sentences of imprisonment ranging from eighteen months to two years; the others were given shorter sentences and have now been released.

Chong Son-hee was born in 1959 and graduated from the Department of German Language and Literature of Hyosong Women's University in Taegu. Around 1986 she joined an art studio in Pusan. In early 1988 she joined *Kanunpae*, the Going Group, a group of artists who aimed to create a popular art reflecting political and economic oppression and supporting aspirations for the reunification of Korea. When Cha Il-hwan, the representative of *Kanunpae* was arrested in August 1988 she became acting representative of the group. Chong Son-hee was also the representative of *Somiryon*, the Seoul region chapter of *Minmiryon* and a member of the Central Committee of *Minmiryon*.

Chong Son-hee is a painter and worked with others on the production of the section entitled *Fatherland Reunification Movement* of the painting *History of the National Liberation Movement*. She also contributed to the exhibitions *National Independence* and *Power of the People* in 1990 and 1991.

Chong Son-hee was arrested on 18 March 1991. The indictment against her accused her of various activities as the representative of *Somiryon*, such as convening its several general meetings since April 1990, organizing and attending lectures on popular art theory and on the North Korean *Juche* ideology and meetings where slides of art from communist countries, including North Korea, were shown. Other activities of *Somiryon* for which she was also held responsible include the painting of a banner on the theme of Korean reunification for the Student Council of Yonsei University and the painting of a mural about Im Su-kyong, a student detained for illegally visiting North Korea in 1989, for the Student Council of the Korean University of Foreign Studies. Chong Son-hee was also charged for her active involvement in the Workers' Fine Arts School set up in the Kuro industrial zone in Seoul and for receiving and keeping various art publications, including copies of *Fine Arts Movement* published by *Minmiryon*.

Chong Son-hee was sentenced to two years' imprisonment and is presently held in Seoul prison.

Choi Ik-kyun (pen-name Choi Yol) was born in 1956 and graduated from the College of Art of Choson University in Kwangju. He is an art critic and has published numerous articles as well as books, such as *A History of the Contemporary Art Movement in Korea* and *Theory and Practice of Minjok (National) Art*. He was the chairperson of the Art Criticism Group of *Somiryon* and the chairperson of *Minmiryon*.

Choi Ik-kyun was arrested on 18 March 1991. The indictment against him accused him of being a key member of *Minmiryon*, whose platform he is accused of having drafted in April 1990, and of actively supporting the formation of *Somiryon*. Choi Ik-kyun is also accused of giving lectures at meetings organised by the two groups. For instance, in July 1990 he is said to have given a lecture on the theme of "Organized Creative Activity. Another charge against him relates to the contents of *Minmiryon's* publication *Fine Arts Movement* of which he was the publisher. Seven issues of the magazines were published. The authorities claim that the magazine advocated socialist realism and reflected marxist-leninist views, praised North Korean art and agitated for class struggle. Choi Ik-kyun was in particular charged with reproducing in the magazine's fifth issue a statement of appeal written in prison by Hong Song-dam in which Hong expressed political beliefs which the authorities regard as pro-North Korean. Choi Ik-kyun is also accused of having in his possession various books and documents on socialism and North Korea.

Choi Ik-kyun was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment and is presently held in Seoul prison.

Oh Chin-hee was born in 1967 and graduated from the department of Western Painting of Seoul National University. She participated in various exhibitions, including the exhibitions *Spring in the Fatherland* and *National Independence*, both held in 1990. She was a member of the Central Committee of *Somiryon*. The specific charges against her are not known to Amnesty International but are believed to be relate to her activities as a leading member of *Somiryon*.

Oh Chin-hee was also arrested on 18 March 1991; she was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment and is currently held in Seoul prison.

KEYWORDS:

ARTISTS1 / MASS ARRESTS / WOMEN

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