

THE COLONIAL PAST OF INTERRACIAL ADOPTION

With her immersive film installation *Four Months, Four Million Light Years* (2020), the Brussels-based Korean/Dutch artist Sara Sejin Chang (Sara van der Heide) addresses the colonial narratives behind transnational and transracial adoption. Tracing the historical relations between the Netherlands and Korea, she then combines these findings with her own experiences and those of other adoptees.

The film time-travels from contemporary Dutch society and the participation of 3,418 Dutch soldiers in the deadly Korean War (1950–1953) to early Dutch colonial descriptions of Asian people.

The title refers to a Korean decree which required children to stay a minimum of four months in a Korean orphanage in order to become adoptable by law for the lucrative transnational and transracial industry. This industry started to flourish after the Korean War and still perpetuates the same colonial imagery from 300 years ago.



The colonial print *Een Schaman ofte Duyvel-Priester* [Shaman or Devil's Priest from the Tungus, 1692] by Dutchman Nicolaes Witsen acts as a pivotal entry point for a spiritual journey through time. This print is the first Western depiction of a shaman. It marks the beginning of a long history of racialised and infantilising descriptions of Asian people by white Europeans and the violent eradication of shamanistic cultures by missionaries.

Textiles, paper text banners, and drawings surround this video projection. Shamanic poems, songs and visions invoke the ancestors for support. The work is an homage to those who have been cut off from their mothers, fathers, family, ancestors, land, culture, and spirits.

The work was first shown at the 11th Berlin Biennale in 2020. On 8 February 2021 the Dutch government has decided to end transnational adoptions, because of the systemic abuse, trafficking, and fraud associated with it. Flanders is currently investigating malpractices related to transnational adoption.

The exhibition is a coproduction by ARGOS, Kunstenfestivaldesarts and the 11th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, with the support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Belgium. The opening will take place on May 15th.

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www.argosarts.org/event/sara-sejin-chang-sara-van-der-heide-four-months-four-million-light-years