

JIN JOO CHAE

JULIE MENERET CONTEMPORARY ART

THE CHOCO PIE-IZATION
OF NORTH KOREA

JANUARY 8 - FEBRUARY 23, 2014

My sculptural and installation work investigates the social and political dimensions of identity as a Korean living in New York City and my emotional response to international conflicts and political protests and accusations. My current art practice uses newspaper – specifically, a North Korean newspaper and the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of North Korea – to explore those issues. I screen print melted chocolate in many different layers, creating a thick textural effect. Coming from a background as a printmaker, I see the world in layered ways, as different pages and windows, or as a series of careful steps and repetitions, and I bring this perspective to my work.

My place and my physical memory of space and time have a major effect on my practice. In my work I explore displacement of my cultural condition through experimental forms, using innovative materials in printmaking. I am inspired by “news” as a conceptual structure, formulating each of us into a particular kind of subject through our consumption of media. I hope my works will have a destabilizing emotional impact on the viewer as a means to move forward. I think art is a shadow of the world and evidence of history, which tells the story of time and fragmentation of society. I create objects through the processes of editing, cutting, burning; reconnecting and recontextualizing. My goal is to find the mirror images of our blind spots and hone in on them via many channels, drawing on my experiences.

The daily news cycle exists in constant forward motion. Yesterday's paper has no function. The newspaper yellows and its stories fade from memory. By manipulating absence, I form a connection with my own absent past, and with my present self in a world where, on a daily basis, things continuously fall apart and fall together.

JIN JOO CHAE

JIN JOO CHAE draws inspiration from her experience as a Korean living abroad. She is concerned with the way that American news represents international events, especially the tense dynamics between North and South Korea. Using fragile and fragrant media such as newspaper and screen-printed chocolate, she manipulates dominant political narratives to suggest more complex and physically embodied realities. Playful modes and materials are subverted to suggest a certain despair and helplessness, a desire for transformation. Chae wants her audience to learn something from her work, and in fact the urge to tell stories unknown outside Korea has become her necessity and responsibility, driving her art practice as a whole.

For this exhibition with Julie Meneret Contemporary Art, Chae continues her project with the consequential Choco Pie, a popular South Korean dessert. Choco Pies are given out in lieu of forbidden cash bonuses to North Korean workers in the demilitarized Kaesong Industrial Complex, the only place where the two countries have any contact. Yet the workers don't eat the treats; they sell them on the black market for as much as \$10, despite an average monthly income of

\$150. Although exact data is hard to come by, South Korean newspaper Chosun Ilbo reported that 2.5 million Choco Pies were traded in the North monthly. Marshmallow cakes gained popularity via American

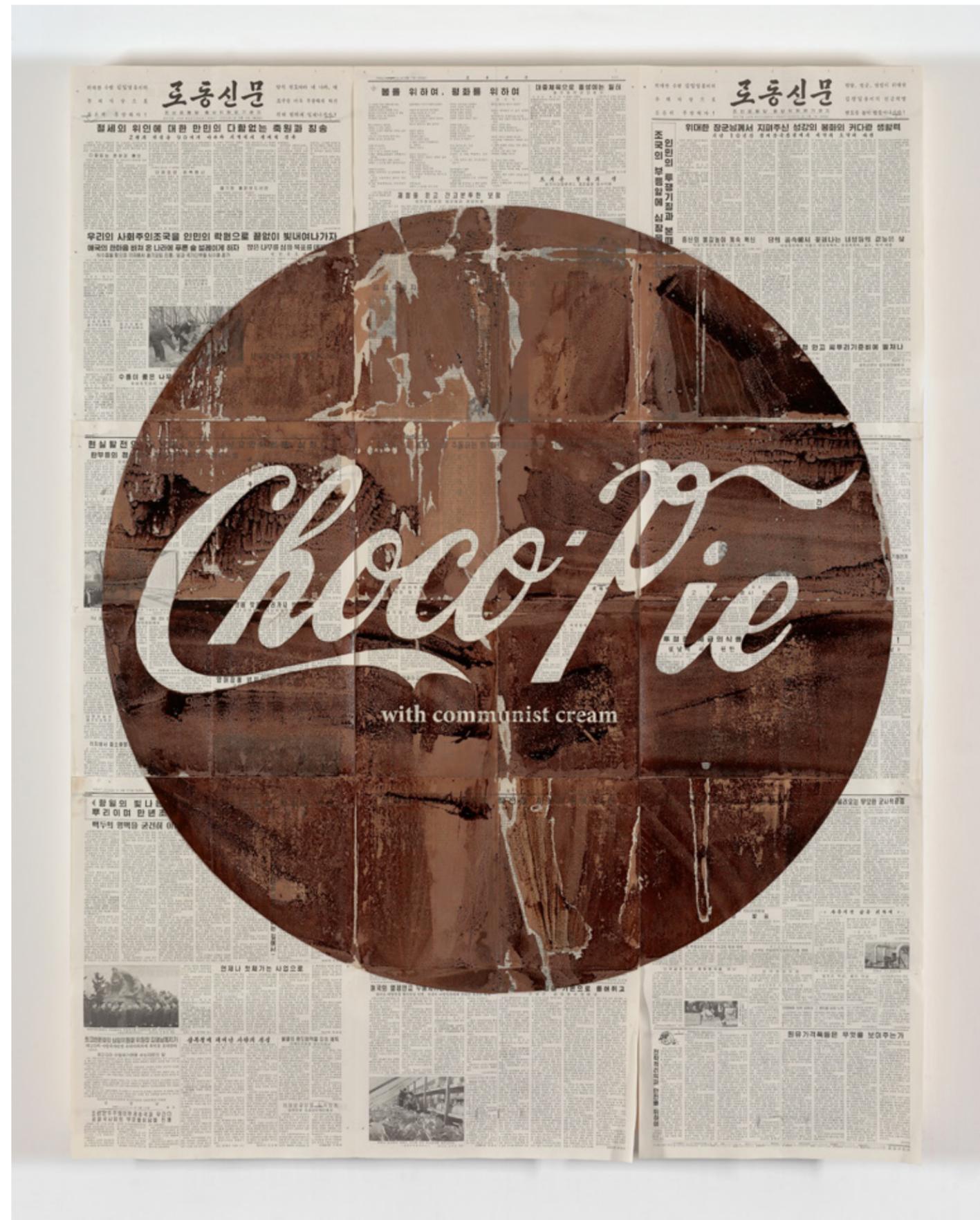
soldiers in East Asia after World War II and the Korean War. Orion, a South Korean confectionary company began producing Choco Pies in 1974, and the word is now accepted as a common noun in Korean due to its extreme popularity.

Activist groups are known to send huge balloons over the border loaded with food, clothing, radios, anti-Pyongyang leaflets, and of course Choco Pies. Although they function as valuable currency in North Korea, they also demonstrate the cruelty of the free market. They have served to introduce capitalism to a society closed off from the world. To be capitalist is to be advanced, yet what real aid does teaching commodity fetishism provide? Chae cleverly uses this humble and absurd example as an entry point into a seemingly impenetrable global system. Her formal interventions reveal personal truths—hopes, desires, frustrations—and point to a fundamental malleability of meaning in a world ruled by capital.

VANESSA THILL



CHOCO PIE WITH CAPITALIST CREAM
2013
North Korean Newspaper (Rodong Simmun: Newspaper of the Workers), Bittersweet Chocolate, Chocolate Syrup
60" x 48"



CHOCO PIE WITH COMMUNIST CREAM
2013
North Korean Newspaper (Rodong Simmun: Newspaper of the Workers), Milk Chocolate, Chocolate Syrup
60" x 48"