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Woomin Kim (OJ Slaughter for WBUR)

"The xenophobia in the last year-and-a-half, while not new, is heightened," says Woomin Kim, a Boston/New York-based Korean artist who makes sculptures out of everyday objects. That xenophobia coupled with the limitations of the pandemic inspired her latest ongoing project: fabric murals of Korea's shijang, or open marketplaces.

"There was an idea that diseases are born in street markets, and then I started recognizing in Hollywood movies that Asian markets are dark places where something mysterious is happening, and they were one of the first places to shut down because of COVID-19," says Kim. "But they are a way of life for so many people. I used to go to the markets all the time and love the vibrancy and assemblage of everything you can get there."

She wanted to show the shijang experience in a celebratory way, and chose to work with fabric, both because it recalled the textiles sold at the markets and the colorful banners beckoning shoppers, and it was easy to work with at her small desk space. She says fabric is easily accessible and evokes memory for everyone, while offering countless possibilities in terms of color, pattern and texture, making it the perfect medium to express the vibrancy of these open air markets.

Kim moved to the United States to attend the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and afterward moved to Boston with her partner in 2016. She says that even before the pandemic hit, lack of space was a major obstacle for Boston artists.

"When I was in Chicago, it was just cheaper for artists to experiment, and a lot of spaces were available and there was this potential that anything can happen," says Kim. "That is just not possible in Boston."

Ralli, T. Bell, D., Gray, A., Mason, A., Shea, A., Guerra, C., Stanley, M., and J. "Meet The ARtery25: Artists Of Color Transforming The Cultural Landscape", *WBUR*, 2 September 2021.

Because of this, she thinks there's a false sense outside the region that Boston is devoid of artists. "There are so many young, talented artists here, and the ongoing assignment is to find each other and make things happen without the help of huge gigantic institutions or funding sources, because Boston can be expensive and spaces can be not totally welcoming to the artists."