

Nguyen, Thao. "FiveMyles Gallery in Crown Heights Celebrates the Diasporic Life with New Quilt Exhibit," *BKReader*, 16 November 2022.



## FiveMyles Gallery in Crown Heights Celebrates the Diasporic Life with New Quilt Exhibit

*Artist Woomin Kim uses vibrant textiles and fabric to depict landscapes of Queens and South Seoul, two places she calls home, in the latest FiveMyles installation.*

by [THAO NGUYEN](#) 16 NOVEMBER 2022

When walking past [FiveMyles Gallery](#), a well-known exhibition and performance space located in Crown Heights, one cannot help but be drawn inside by the vibrant colors of artist [Woomin Kim](#)'s quilts.

Displayed intentionally behind the gallery's dark-brown wire mesh grid doors, the extravagant, loud, yet intimate and personal textile pieces tell a story of a diasporic artist whose life and artistic inspirations span between Korea and Queens, two places she calls home.

The exhibit, titled "Dongnae," consists of four colorful pieces about the ordinary: A general store in Queens; laundry vents in Jackson Heights laundry vents; discarded objects under a high bridge at Ridgewood Reservoir and a vintage Korean second-hand store.

Though, the way Kim uses fabrics of different textiles and colors — fabrics donated from friends or brought back from Korea — to bring the scenes to life is anything but ordinary.

According to Ruby Lindsey, program coordinator at FiveMyles, Kim's connections to her neighborhoods of Queens and South Seoul mirror the connection FiveMyles has to the Crown Heights neighborhood.

"Our director Hanne Tierney felt immediately that the love and warmth expressed in Kim's textile works reflect our own attachment and bond with the people around us," Lindsey said.

The exhibition solidifies the gallery's mission of giving emerging artists a space to showcase their art and tell their stories aloud.

For Kim, the bold idea of using fabric to depict her homes started small with her sewing machine, attempting to correct the xenophobic narrative about Chinatown, Koreatown and many Asian neighborhoods amid the pandemic.

"I thought to myself, 'Oh, I know these kinds of places, and they are being depicted in a very wrong way,'" Kim said. "And, I felt the need to correct them."

She also reflected on what it's like to be an immigrant in the United States and what it's like to be an Asian artist in the US: "When you grow up in Korea, you don't necessarily think of yourself as a Korean," Kim said.

"And of course you're Korean. It's just that if you're from Korea, you're just there. Identifying or labeling yourself doesn't come up much. And when you come to the U.S., being Korean is a daily experience. You're Korean, you're Asian, you're somebody from somewhere else every day."

"My work wasn't necessarily linked to my experience as a Korean, but once I started to make pieces about street markets in Korea and Asia, I feel like my work is directly reflecting my memories of my life and where I came from."

The collage-like quilts also indicate a milestone in Kim's artistic journey: Transitioning from gray, beige and pastel colors, to bright and simulating colors that are uniquely hers.

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"When I got here 10 years ago, I came as an adult in her late 20s, and suddenly with my relocation, I was given a whole new identity," Kim said.

"Coming to terms with how I am being seen or considered in this environment and society is a lot. So, the works I did at that time were centered around marking and erasing myself, my studio literally with pencil and erasers, and collecting gray dust that came from such a process."

Kim said that over time, she has created more room and capacity to think about her memory, where she's from and what's around her.

Now, her experimentation with fabric is what she considers "The perfect media, like how you change the radio station and suddenly a wave fits."

"Dongnae" is on view till Nov. 20, at FiveMyles Gallery at 558 St. Johns Place, in Crown Heights. After that, Kim will head to Texas to showcase her latest quilt mastery in Houston and Dallas in early 2023.