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Mee-yoo, Kwon. "Leandro Erlich reimagines perception through reflections." *The Korea Times*. December 22, 2019.

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Leandro Erlich's site-specific installation "In the Shadow of the Pagoda" at the Buk-Seoul Museum of Art takes inspiration from the Korean romance legend of "Muyeongtap" (Pagoda of No Shadow). Courtesy of SeMA

Argentine artist Leandro Erlich reinterprets the Korean romance legend of "Muyeongtap" (Pagoda of No Shadow) in a poetic yet playful installation titled "In the Shadow of the Pagoda" at his solo exhibition in Korea. Titled "LEANDRO ERLICH: Both Sides Now," the solo show is currently on view at the Buk-Seoul Museum of Art in northern Seoul, a branch of Seoul Museum of Art (SeMA).

Beck Jee-sook, director of SeMA, said the museum focused on how the artist establishes relationships with each city he exhibits.

"The Buk-Seoul Museum of Art, opened in 2013, wraps up another rich year with

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a Leandro Erlich exhibition. Erlich also spent a busy year, holding large-scale solo exhibitions at the CAFA Museum in Beijing, China, and at the MALBA in Buenos Aires, Argentina, earlier this year. Most recently, he attracted public eyes to his sand car installation at Miami Beach in the U.S.," Beck said.

"Every exhibition by Erlich contains the artist's interpretations of the city or region. Among various layers of interpretation, we focused on the perspective of public art as Erlich's work transforms the site and provides new dimensions of experience. He deals with the complicated dynamics of political, historical and psychological layers in the public at the Buk-Seoul Museum of Art."

Erlich has been a frequent visitor in Korea, taking part in the Busan Biennale back in 2002 and presenting a site-specific installation "Port of Reflections" at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul in 2014.

Curator Bang So-yeon said the exhibit sheds light on how Erlich integrates the context of Eastern philosophy in his iconic works questioning existing perceptions.

"Conflicting ideas such as fiction versus reality and subject versus object coexist in Erlich's works. In this reflected image of a pagoda, Erlich evokes the imperfection of perception by blurring the lines of reality," the curator said.

"Erlich's works make visitors physically experience art, which allows people with little knowledge of contemporary art to fully immerse and enjoy the artworks."

Erlich explained how he wanted to create a dialogue with Korea and Korean culture. "To me it was not like coming to an exhibition in a museum in a city I didn't know. In this case, my intention working together with curator Bang was to create something in a site-specific way," he said.

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Leandro Erlich's "Coming Soon" / Courtesy of SeMA

The first installation that opens up the exhibition is "Coming Soon," which resembles the lobby of a movie theater full of film posters. Bang said the artwork shows the artist's love for movies as Erlich developed his imagination and creativity while watching many films when young.

The poster's images are borrowed from Erlich's existing works, but the artist titled them with words or phrases that came across his mind regardless of the original context of the original artworks. For instance, the boat image from "Port of Reflections" became a poster for "The Hypnotic Threat." The hand-drawn posters are full of details, including the recurring name of the director Charlie Lendor — an anagram of Leandro Erlich.

"All images came from photographs of my work. When you look at the image and associate it with the title, you already have an idea of what this film is about," the artist explained.

The exhibition continues to "The View," a 1997 video installation inspired by Alfred Hitchcock's "Rear Window." There are 15 videos capturing urban life in multiplex housing and visitors can have a peek through Venetian blinds, which arouses voyeurism.

"Elevator Maze" and "Changing Rooms" transform familiar environment into

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peculiar situation using mirrors. "Lost Garden" also employs optical illusion to question whether what we see is real.



Leandro Erlich's works from left, "Lost Garden," "Changing Rooms" and "Elevator Maze" / Courtesy of SeMA

The highlight of the exhibition is "In the Shadow of the Pagoda," inspired by the "Muyeongtap" legend. In the legend, wife of a master stonemason waits for her husband to complete carving the pagoda of Bulguk Temple by watching a nearby pond until the pagoda's shadow appears, but no shadow is reflected on the pond and she drowns herself there in sadness.

It could be a more poetic, contemplative version of Erlich's famous "Swimming Pool" at the 21st Century Museum of Art of Kanzawa, Japan, which creates a visual illusion of a swimming pool that can be experienced both from outside and inside the water.

The installation spreads over the first and second floors of the gallery space, allowing visitors to see the pagoda from inside and outside the pond, with a physical upside-down double of the pagoda underwater. Visitors can look at the pagoda above the pond or inside the pond, as well as seeing other visitors on the other side.

"The idea of shadow of this pagoda is the proof of existence of the pagoda itself. I found it interesting that the existence of the reflection/shadow is in the world of our perception, but the shadow shares the same value of existence," the artist

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said. "The pagoda is a very good element that implies for the Korean tradition. I also feel there are some Buddhist philosophy behind in some sense."



Leandro Erlich's "Car Cinema" / Courtesy of SeMA

"Car Cinema" is another version of the sand car installation "Order of Importance" that hit Miami Beach earlier this month. According to Erlich, the two works were conceived at the same time, but from different angles.

The rows of 13 life-size sand cars facing a screen showing cars driving down a highway portrays Erlich's recurring theme of the contrast between existence and nonexistence and the real and the reflection.

The exhibit's title "Both Sides Now" gets more evident in the last work "The Cloud." The artist created two clouds each in the shape of North Korea and South Korea — rotated to the right so it takes a while to recognize the familiar shapes.

"It is not just a political issue, but as part of the imaginary division between you and me and us and them. The idea of other is the thread of this exhibition," Erlich said.

"When we think about a country's shape, there is a very rigid image of a particular shape in our head. However, when the Roman Empire had a shape 2,000 years ago, it was different from current Italy but extended to nowadays Spain and Turkey. So when we think about territory, we have to keep in mind that

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the shape can change over the time. I associated the idea of territory with clouds because clouds change shapes in a short time."

The exhibit runs until March 31.