

Soh Jaipil Lecture Series
State of Grace: The North Korean-Built Angkor Panorama Museum
in Light of DPRK-Cambodian Cultural Relations



Speaker: Douglas Gabriel, Korea Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow,
GW Institute for Korean Studies

Thursday, February 18, 2021
3:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. Eastern Time
Virtual Event via Zoom

◇ **Event Description**

Relatively little known, and yet readily visible in the form of its conspicuous façade situated along Siem Reap’s present-day tourist trail, the Angkor Panorama Museum stands as a curious component of Angkor Archeological Park. Designed and built by Mansudae Overseas Project, a branch of North Korea’s central art studio, the space opened in December 2015 only to shutter its doors less than four years later in November 2019. On at least one front the Angkor venture veered from Mansudae Overseas Projects’ representative work, a corpus that has to date consisted largely of socialist monuments commissioned by or gifted to African nations. With the Angkor Panorama Museum, Mansudae for the first time engaged with overtly religious subject matter, giving shape to a singular condensation of socialist realism and visual conventions associated with Hinduism and Buddhism.

This talk contextualizes the eccentricities of Mansudae’s Angkor project against the historical background of what amounted to an enduring friendship between Cambodian Prince Norodom Sihanouk (1922–2012) and Kim Il-sung (1912–1994). Exiled for prolonged periods throughout his life, Sihanouk spent substantial intervals at a palace Kim had ordered built for him outside of

Pyongyang. There he produced music and poetry eulogizing North Korean–Khmer solidarity, and directed several films in the Korean language that featured all-Korean casts. This array of cultural artifacts anticipated the narrative arc of Mansudae’s Angkor museum by suggesting an unlikely convergence between the respectively secular-communist and religious ideological foundations of the North Korean and Cambodian states—one rooted in a proven resiliency against imperialist aggressors.

◇ **Speaker**



Douglas Gabriel is a 2020-21 Korea Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow at GW. Douglas received his Ph.D. in art history from Northwestern University in 2019. His current book project, *Over the Mountain: Realism Towards Reunification in Cold War Korea, 1980–1994*, examines connections between the visual art of the *minjung* democratization movement in South Korea and the work of state-sponsored artists in North Korea. Previously, he was the 2019-20 Soon Young Kim Postdoctoral Fellow at Harvard University. Douglas’s research on North and South Korean art and architecture has appeared in the *Journal of Korean Studies* and *Hyöndaemisulsa yöngu* [The Korean Journal of Contemporary Art History]. His work has been supported by the Fulbright Program, the Harvard Korea Institute, and the Northeast Asia Council of the Association of Asian Studies.

◇ **Moderator**



Immanuel Kim is Korea Foundation and Kim-Renaud Associate Professor of Korean Literature and Culture Studies. Prior to working at the George Washington University, he was Assistant Professor in the Department of Asian and Asian American Studies at Binghamton University (SUNY). Dr. Kim received his Ph.D. from the University of California, Riverside. He is an authority on North Korean literature and film and is the author of a recent book on North Korean literature, *Rewriting Revolution: Women, Sexuality, and Memory in North Korean Fiction* (University of Hawaii Press, 2018).

This event is on the record and open to the public.