

A feast of potato imagery at Stony Brook



KORYO TOURS

Hwang In-Je's "The Potato Flower Fragrance of Taehongdan County" is in the show.

Art rooted in the earth

BY DEIDRE S. GREBEN
Special to Newsday

The surprisingly multifaceted art exhibition on view at Stony Brook University's Charles B. Wang Center Gallery is — pardon the pun — no small potatoes. "Potasia: Potatoism in the East" features close to 90 artworks in all manner of media and genres that, yes, focus on the starchy tuber as a central motif.

Within art history's long tradition of isms, the movement was coined some 15 years ago by the show's co-curator Jeffrey Allen Price, whose fascination dates back to his art student days in Missouri. "I was living on potatoes — baked, fried, mashed. They were affordable," says the Lake Grove resident of his budding fondness for the versatile veggie. After encountering van Gogh's seminal 1885 painting "The Potato Eaters" on a 1992 visit to Amsterdam, Price's passion sprouted. "I was struck by the subjects' strength of character, their self-sufficiency," he says.

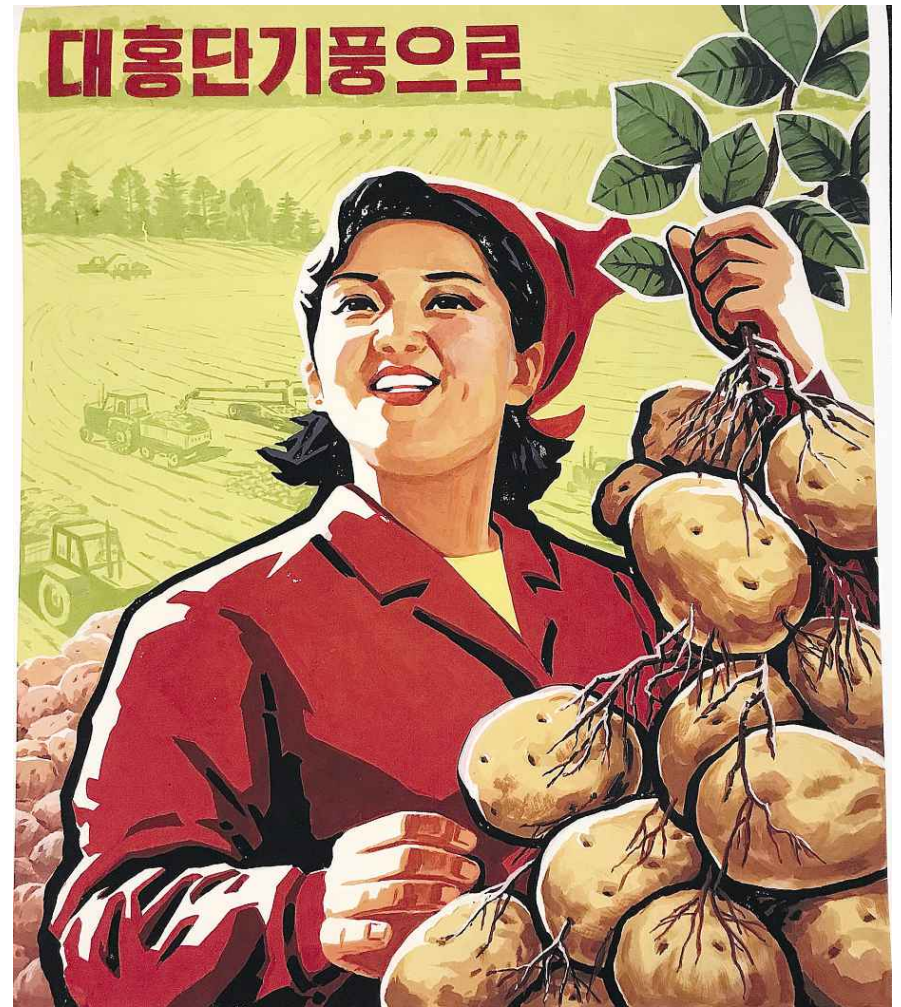
Since then, Price has cultivated a voracious appetite for spud-related imagery and culture with his Think Potato Institute, a crop of some 6,000 tater-themed books, toys, utensils, music and snacks from around the globe. Some 100 of these objects, dug up from across Asia, feature in the Wang Center show along with

WHEN | WHERE 10 a.m.-8 p.m.
Monday-Friday and noon-8 p.m.
Saturday-Sunday through June 15,
Charles B. Wang Center Gallery, Stony
Brook University, 100 Nicolls Rd.
INFO Free; 631-632-4400,
stonybrook.edu/commcms/wang

original works, ranging from the sociologically significant to the downright silly, by 19 artists from 10 Eastern countries.

According to potatopro.com, which bills itself as "the resource for the global potato industry," China, India and Russia are the top three potato producers in the world. "It is a staple food in Asia," says Jinyoung Jin, the Wang Center's program director and co-curator of the exhibition. To her point is Hwang In-Je's 1999 linoleum print "The Potato Flower Fragrance of Taehongdan County," depicting flag-carrying soldiers passing through a verdant field, meant to promote the appeal of the easy-growing crop in famine-stricken North Korea. Other socialist posters, loans from two private collections, work to similar propagandistic effect.

In more playful hands, Lebanese artist Ginou Choueiri gives new meaning to the term "potato head," having found the tuber skin an ideal fleshy backdrop for an



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감자농사에서련속통장훈을부르자!

array of human physiognomy in her 26-photo "Potato Portrait" series. Thailand's Ketsarin Oukosavanna celebrates potato variety — from the yam to the Yukon gold — with exquisite acrylic renderings on opened parasols. Price's video work-in-progress "This Is How I Say Potato" features people articulating the ubiquitous vegetable in some 30 different dialects.

Gallery-goers get to serve up their own helpings, too, adding potato lore and recipes in Price's Potato Podcast booth to the potato facts, jokes, interviews and discourse already recorded (The first installment airs March 21 at potatoradio.libsyn.com.)

With a whole menu of related programs, from a presentation on the global history of potato art to a workshop on making potato creatures by amigurumi (the Japanese art of crocheting small animals) and a lecture on food security in North Korea, "Potasia" elevates the lowly tater from side dish to main meal.

North Korean poster art by Chan-Gil Moon, above, and "Potato Portraits" by Ginou Choueiri are featured in "Potasia."



CHARLES B. WANG CENTER