

march 26  
6 p.m.

spring 2015

conversations  
at the edge  
experimental media series

# soon-mi yoo

## songs from the north

2014, South Korea/Portugal/US, DCP, 72 min + discussion  
In English and Korean with English subtitles  
[Soon-Mi Yoo in person!](#)

Soon-Mi Yoo (1962, Seoul, South Korea) works with photography, film, and text to explore marginalized histories. Her films have been exhibited at festivals internationally, including Oberhausen, Pompidou Center, New York Film Festival, Rotterdam International Film Festival, and Seattle International Film Festival, and her photography has shown across the US, including the International Center of Photography, New York and Boston Center for the Arts. Yoo is a recipient of the Rockefeller Foundation's Media Arts Fellowship, a fellowship from the American Photography Institute, and the National Asian American Telecommunications Association Grant. She received her MFA in Photography from the Massachusetts College of Arts, where she is currently on faculty.

### program

#### *Songs from the North*

Soon-Mi Yoo's debut feature is a nuanced look at political ideology and everyday life in North Korea. Winner of the prestigious Golden Leopard for Best First Feature at the 2014 Locarno Film Festival, the film interweaves biography (Yoo's father fought in the war and many of his left-leaning friends abandoned South Korea for the North[AB1]), footage shot on three visits to the country, popular television spectacles, cinema, and song. Curator Andrea Picard writes, "Yoo ventures into uncharted territory as she attempts to understand the psychology and popular imagery of the North Korean people on their own terms, the fissures between daily life and its propagandistic representation, and the ideology of absolute devotion to the ruler who continues to drive the nation towards its uncertain future."

Festival del film Locarno on *Songs from the North*:

Yoo seeks to explore the roots and ramifications of the political psychology of an insular nation that persists in relating to its leader as a child does to his or her father. (This is a country where even the karaoke songs are about the Great Leader's love.) In the line of essay films from the like of Chris Marker and Andrei Ujica, *Songs from the North* interweaves poorly dubbed footage from North Korean television, news reports and big-screen cinematic epics with material shot by Yoo on

the ground, accomplished with a deft touch that resists privileging one form above the others.

Over three trips to North Korea from 2010-12, the director discovered a lonely country obsessed with the dangers of reunification, living constantly under the burden of nationalistic myths, forged from the mid-20th-century legacy of armed struggle and colonial suffering. But she also found people of all ages living with dignity and expressing genuine emotion in public, with respect to their nation's suffering. (The litany of bawling children as broadcast in a televised play, well, you can judge for yourselves.) Of course, she was restricted as to what and where she could film, and thus supplemented this footage with the aforementioned examples of popular culture, especially the songs, that help in a way to give meaning to the fleeting glimpses we are given of the day-to-day life in the hermit state, and perhaps explain what gives a modicum of warmth to the North Korean heart.

### upcoming

April 2 at 6p.m.  
**Anna**



A public program of



Department of  
Film, Video, New Media,  
and Animation

