Dear Peter Winston Ferretto,

My name is Sung Hong KIM, a professor of architecture and urbanism at the University of Seoul. I am writing to ask your help for the Korean Pavilion, Architecture Exhibition, 2016 Venice Biennale. I was appointed as the Art Director/Curator and our curating teams are working on the exhibits and catalog since last December.

As you perhaps know, the theme of 2106 Venice Biennale is “Reporting from the Front” proposed by Alejandro Aravena. We reinterpret it and raise a question, “what is the battle that 99% of Korean architects must wage in order to survive?” Our answer is “The FAR Game.” Please find attached a crude draft statement.

I enjoyed reading PLACE/SEOUL. Your observation and interpretation of architecture and urbanism of Seoul is very intriguing and stimulating. (Some photos are very powerful) Your interest and focus may be slightly different from our theme, but I really like to reflect your ideas in our show and book. Seunghoe KIM also strongly recommended you when I talked to him about our theme.

I would like to ask you to contribute a 2,000-word essay to our book (catalog). About 10 essays by architects, planners, researchers, and scholars from Europe, North America, Japan, China, and South East Asia will be included in the book. It will be distributed by the publisher, SPACE magazine. We would like to offer a small fee of 300 USD. We will keep you updated as we work on the exhibits. The deadline of essay is March 15, 2016.

I look forwards to hearing positive response from you.

Best regards,

Sung Hong KIM

Professor of Architecture and Urbanism

University of Seoul

http://sonomad.tistory.com/

The FAR Game : Constraints Sparking Creativity

The Korean Pavilion, the 15th International Architecture Exhibition, 2016 Venice Biennale

The FAR Game is played on the front lines of Korean architecture.

A clear identity for Korean architecture has been blurred amid the struggle between conflicting agendas: demolition vs. regeneration, private interests vs public welfare, the aesthetics of high-end architecture vs the mediocrity of functional buildings. But underneath all of these considerations, the FAR Game always rages. It touches the everyday lives of both the rich and the poor, the white-collar and the blue-collar. It has been a driving force behind the growth and amplification of Korea and its architecture for the last 50 years.

Seoul is the capital of South Korea, but one could go so far as to say it essentially *is* South Korea. It holds the Triple Crown of density: the most populated, densest, and most concentrated. Half of the population of South Korea resides in the Greater Seoul Metropolitan Area, with about half of that, or over 10 million people, living in the capital city proper. It took only 45 years for Seoul's population to reach 10 million from 1 million. Compare that with London, which went from 1 million to 8 million in 150 years, or New York City which took 170 years to accomplish the same feat. Seoul's land price has grown 1,176 times over this period, and a portion land in Gangnam, site of a new commercial and business center, has risen in value by a factor of 300,000.

The average FAR of the 640,000 buildings in Seoul is only 124%. The great discrepancy between population and building density creates tremendous pressure on development. Today, 200% is expected as the minimum threshold for new development. However, the irregular and heterogeneous urban grain, coupled with plot-based building ordinances, provides very limited opportunity to increase the city's overall FAR.

Being knowledgeable about and skillful at the FAR Game is thus not only desirable for architects; it is a prerequisite for their survival. The game is played using a triad of variables (land, law, and building) through the interactions of three players: the consumer desiring maximum volume, the supplier attempting to achieve it, and the controller restricting it.

This is the background of the FAR game currently underpinning all Korean architecture. Hence the theme of the 2016 Korean Pavilion. The exhibition will explore:

1. The context of the FAR game described above.
2. The creative responses of Korean architects seeking to maximize FAR while creating a sense of spaciousness and freedom. The extraordinary geometrical and compositional inventiveness that characterizes current architecture is the outcome of this effort.
3. The distinctive, culturally inspired aims that have driven the efforts of architects, such as the extension of openly accessible and visibly connected spaces to upper floors.
4. The larger cultural trends that define the adjustment of Korea architecture urbanism and society to higher density.

None of these patterns had yet been explicitly and fully theorized. The exhibition is a contribution to understanding the front at the core of the current transformation of Korean architecture and culture. Korean architecture that gives the emerging dense city a distinctive identity. It is part of an urban culture which creatively absorbs high density and turns it into a strength. Thus the specifically architectural and the broader cultural responses to FAR offer a useful lens to better understand the current frontiers of Korean society as expressed in the architecture of the physical environment at the scale of buildings, urban areas, and cities.

The FAR Game, rooted in our past, will continue to exert itself on the development of architecture in Korea well into the future. A *far game*, indeed.

KIM Sung Hong is a professor of architecture and urbanism at the University of Seoul. He was a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at the University of Washington in 2006, and Provost of Planning and Research Office at the University of Seoul from 2007 to 2008. Between 2007 and 2010 he organized an exhibition entitled “Megacity Network: Contemporary Korean Architecture” and brought it to DAM in Frankfurt, DAZ in Berlin, MEA in Tallinn, the Espai Picasso(eP) in Barcelona, and MMCA in Korea. He has authored research papers and essays

about contemporary Korean architecture and urbanism including ‘Future Asian Space: Projecting the Urban Space of New East Asia’ (2012), ‘Street Corner Architecture’ (2011), ‘On Asian Streets and Public Space’ (2010), ‘New Imagination of Urban Architecture’ (2009), ‘Megacity Network: Contemporary Korean Architecture’ (2007). Prof. Kim was a Field Editor for the Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering (JAABE) from 2010 to 2012, and is currently a Chief Editor for SPACE Academia. He contributed columns on architecture and urbanism to the Korea JoongAng Daily from 2011 to 2013. He was a jurist for the “International Competition for the Master Plan of Yongsan National Park, Korea” in 2012, and for the “International Competition for the Sejongdaero Historic Cultural Space in Seoul” in 2015. Today he continues to deepen his research and understanding of the architecture and urbanism of contemporary Seoul.