

September 28, 2018 | By Anthony King

MFA Artist Heejung Shin Named First David Antin Prize Winner at UC San Diego

Department of Visual Arts graduate uses gender and language to explore immigrant experience in performance and video

The UC San Diego Department of Visual Arts awarded [artist Heejung Shin](#) the inaugural David Antin Prize. Named after poet, artist and founding member of the department, the prize is given to a graduating MFA student who not only shows originality and creativity in art practice or criticism, but who reflects Antin's focus of interdisciplinary work and the use of multiple mediums.

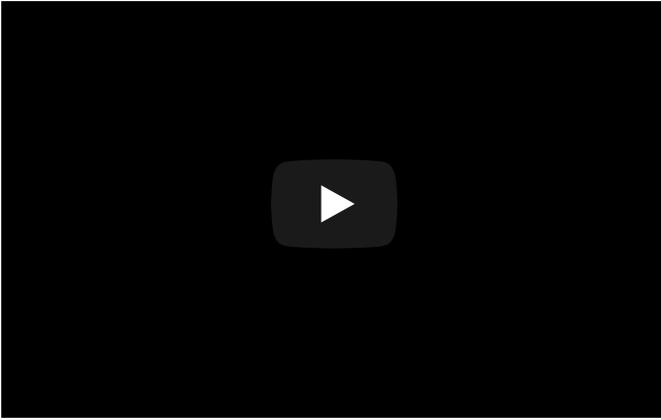


A still from the video installation "Free Fish'es" by Heejung Shin, part of the MFA student's thesis. (Courtesy Heejung Shin)

While studying at UC San Diego, Shin's work centered on the immigrant woman experience, in part using food, gender and language to explore culture from the perspective of an international student. Her performance art and video work question popular beliefs of one's mother tongue, asking viewers to "critically recognize," she said, "that there is always the very 'otherness' rooted in every language."

"Heejung Shin's work as both a visual artist and rapper — a skill she learnt in her final year here — and her fearless challenging of boundaries and gender hierarchies place her firmly in the poetic tradition of David Antin," said Department of Visual Arts faculty member and artist Brian Cross, who served as advisor to Shin. "She impressed the entire department with her ability to turn the linguistic gaps that exist for English as a second language folks into portals to fight discrimination, sexism and racism."

Shin received the award in large part for her thesis "ImagiNATION is my nation." An extensive overview of Shin's research as a student, the thesis included "Free Fish'es," a video installation that imagines the world of immigration and border policing as a "vast body of water [where] the migrant body as fish has to navigate and confront obstacles, which endlessly confines migrants into the water," she said. "Why [does] the sea and the sky both have the same color — blue — but are not traversable? Let's make fish fly. Let's break the horizon."



Now an alum, Shin said she is grateful for the honor and expressed thanks to Cross, who was supportive and encouraging as she faced cultural and language barriers. Her time at UC San Diego shaped her art in many positive ways, she said.

“I hope my music-video works would empower ‘othered’ bodies in this xenophobic world, and create imagination in between: not only for marginalized ones, but also people who have internalized patriarchal ideas,” Shin said.

After receiving her BFA in painting and design from Seoul National University in 2012, Shin attended UC San Diego for her MFA, graduating in June 2018. While there, Shin received an Academy of Korean Studies Graduate Student Summer Research Grant and a Russell Grant. She won the first place Emerging Artist award from Casa Familiar’s FRONT Arte Cultura in 2018.

The David Antin Prize was established by an endowment following the death of David Antin, an accomplished artist, poet and art critic who helped shape the Department of Visual Arts from its inception. Antin served as the educational curator for the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston before joining the department in 1968. He began teaching courses full time in 1972, covering Structure of Art, History of Criticism, Theories of Modernism and Postmodernism, and Narrative Theory, among others.



Antin’s graduate work in linguistics at New York University — where he mapped the language structure of Gertrude Stein — led, in part, to him helping to establish the university’s New Writing Series, with recordings now kept in the Archive for New Poetry at the UC San Diego Library Special Collections & Archives.

In 1987 and 1988, Antin produced “Sky Poems,” using a team of aerial skywriters to present lines of poetry above the beaches of California, including La Jolla. On Sept. 29, the poems will appear again over the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, with the [daylong event beginning at 11 a.m. in La Jolla](#). On Sept. 27, coinciding with this historic restaging, a

David Antin, "Sky Poem" (1988). (Courtesy Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2008.M.56) © J. Paul Getty Trust)

group of poets, artists and scholars convened to commemorate Antin and his legacy at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles.

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