

GLENDALE NEWS-PRESS

Glendale library to display exhibit on Korean comfort women



By MICHAEL LIVINGSTON JUL 27, 2018 | 6:20 PM

The face of a former sex slave stares at visitors when they enter an exhibit on the first floor of the Glendale Downtown Central Library.

The woman was one of many Korean women who were enslaved by the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II. The library's arts and culture department has finished its "Do the Right Thing: Comfort Women Resist" art showcase, an exhibit highlighting nine international artists and documentarians who focused on the narratives of comfort women.

The exhibit opens at 5 p.m Saturday, and features pieces by artists Jan Banning, Do-kuyama Bontaro, Hwa Hong, Hyunji Kwon, Yu Kyung Kim, Ara Oshagan, Jea Hyung Lee, Jung Min Park, and Rose Camastro Pritchett.



Ara Oshagan's photography in the "Do the Right Thing: Comfort Women Resist" exhibit at the Downtown Central Library. (Ara Oshagan)



What was done to the Korean women was "state-sponsored sexual slavery," according to the exhibit's co-curator Ara Oshagan.

"This issue [was] not known to the United States during World War II," Oshagan said. "Japan occupied a lot of countries, including Korea, during the war. They took women from those countries and made them into sex slaves."

In addition to co-curating the exhibit, Oshagan traveled to Korea in May and spent two weeks photographing the last surviving comfort women for the showcase. His photographs of comfort women and activists are displayed near the library's entrance.

Oshagan also created a replica of a room where comfort women were forced to have sex. He enlarged pictures of comfort women for inside the room, with enlarged photos of activists outside it.

"It was pretty intense, knowing what they've been through and that they've come out of that alive," Oshagan said of his visits with comfort women in Korea.

While in Korea, Oshagan attended weekly protests by activists who want the state to issue an apology to comfort women.

"Every Wednesday, there is a protest by Koreans in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul. Every Wednesday, for 10 years straight," Oshagan said. "These comfort women, if they're able to, show up. They sit down, typically. They don't do too much."

Seeing the way activists cared and fought for comfort women inspired him to include them in his art.

"The comfort women are almost gone," Oshagan said. "These young generation activists are continuing the fight for recognition."

The Glendale Downtown Central Library is located at 222 E. Harvard St.