



TEXTILE ARTREPRENEUR
YOUNGMIN
LEE

TEXTILE ART BUSINESS INTERVIEWS

WITH CLARA NARTEY

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KOREAN TEXTILES AND TRAVELS - AN INTERVIEW WITH YOUNGMIN LEE

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Clara Nartey Interviews Youngmin Lee

Youngmin's Journey into Korean Textile Arts

CN: Youngmin, tell us about your journey into the textile arts. What were your initial influences and what made you decide to pursue this path?

YL: I've always loved making things, and fabric has always been my favorite material. I studied Clothing and Textiles in college and Fashion Design in graduate school.



Textile Artist - Youngmin Lee in her Studio

After I finished my education, I worked as women's fashion designer. In Korea, I was more interested in modern and contemporary designs, but after moving to California with my family, my interest moved to my native country's culture and art forms.

After I moved to the US, I was busy adjusting to the new language, new environment, and new culture. While I was adjusting to everything new, I wanted something familiar with which I could unwind and relax. Traditional Korean textiles art felt natural to me.

CN: Interesting!!! So, moving away from the things that were familiar to you, made you miss them. I feel like that happens a lot. You tend to appreciate something more when you're away from it. You use these Korean words very often. Can you explain to us what Bojagi and Maedub are?

Bojagiare and Maedubare Korean Cloth



Bojagi

YL: Bojagiare are Korean wrapping cloths for wrapping, covering, carrying, and storing objects. It embodies the philosophy of recycling, as the cloths are made from remnants of leftover fabric. It also carries wishes for the wellbeing and happiness of its recipient.

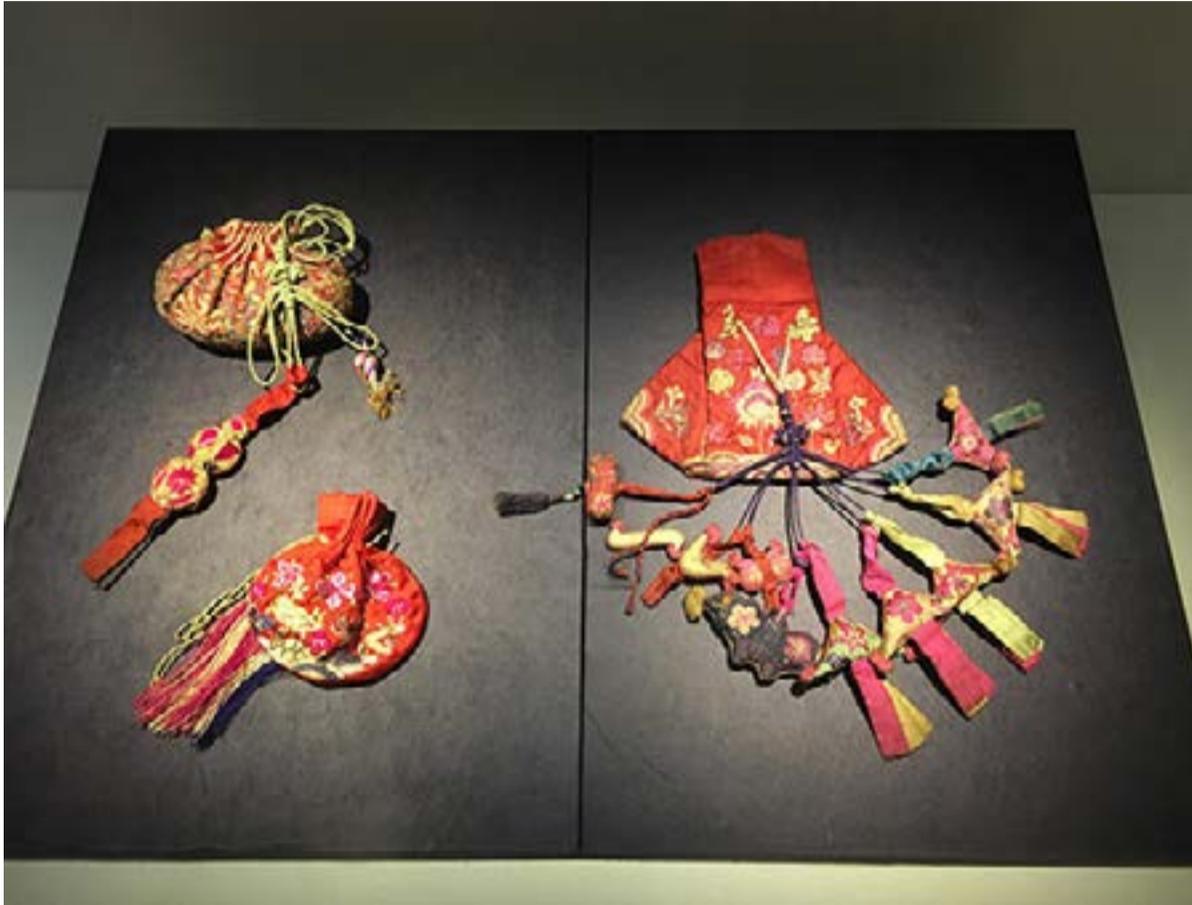
I chose bojagi as my creative medium as I appreciate the beauty that results from the long and slow process of hand stitching. My Bojagi work reflects myself, as it has traditional Korean roots as well as more modern influences from my life in America.



Maedub - Korean Textiles Knot

Maedubare Korean traditional decorative knots that have been used for centuries to decorate traditional dress and ritual objects.

Instructions for making them have been passed down through generations of skilled artisans. The knots were decorative items used on male and female outfits. For men, the knots attached a wooden identity tag to the sash of his outer garment.



Maedub - Korean Textiles Knot

Knots to decorate a folding fan were exclusively used by the scholar-officials. Knots and tassels were also used to decorate pouches, spectacle cases, and other items.

Norigae, knotted pendant trinkets, were used by women. Knots embellished many other personal belongings of women such as earring tassels, pouches, and various head-gears

CN: Wow!!! So much tradition and history in these cloths. Are there additional reasons you choose to create with fabrics?

YL: Fabrics are tactile and tangible. I love to touch, feel and create something out of it.

Fabrics are very forgiving and embracing yet strong, and they feel like a natural medium for me to express my emotions.



Youngmin Lee as Artist in Residence at Empty Spools Seminar

CN: What types of fabrics do you use for creating Bojagi and Maedub and where can someone purchase these fabrics?

YL: I use Korean silk gauze (sukgosa), brocade, organza, mosi (ramie), sambe (hemp) and cotton for bojagi making.

Most of my materials are directly from Korea, so I supply my workshops with fabric and sell to people who want to try bojagi.

It is very difficult to purchase these materials in the US. I travel to Korea every year and bring back fabrics. I have [a website](#) and an [Etsy store](#) where people can purchase fabrics, DVDs and bojagi making kits.

Maedub cords are also hard to find in the US. I go to the wholesale market in Seoul.



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Youngmin's Inspiration for Korean Textiles Tour

CN: What inspired you to go further with your love for Korean textiles and build a business around an art form that most of your audience has no idea about?

What has the response been?

YL: At the beginning, Bojagi was just an outlet for my own creativity. I had to create something and bojagi was calling me. Gradually my work got some interest and attention from people who love textile art.



Korean Cuisine during Korean Textiles Tour

CN: You've got a multi-pronged approach to your business. You teach, offer tours to Korea, and you sell on Etsy. Can you tell us more about your Korea textile tours?

YL: I was dreaming about sharing bojagi and Korean art and culture with people from all different cultures. Once people start learning about bojagi, they wanted to know more about Korean art and culture.



Korean Art Gallery

Last year I started the Korean Textiles Tour with two other friends who helped me. I took a wonderful group of textile enthusiasts to Korea and we visited museums and galleries, palaces, Hanok (Korean traditional house), temples, artist studios and workshops. And we visited fabulous fabric markets in the heart of Seoul. We also had a chance to taste Korean foods including vegan temple foods, famous Korean BBQ, dumpling soups and the many side dishes.



Indigo dye workshop during Korean Textiles Tour

CN: That sounds absolutely fabulous!!! You must get a lot of feedback from your trips. What are the biggest takeaways for those who've traveled to Korea with you?

YL: People commented on the unique chance to see Korean art and culture by visiting museums, galleries and artists' studios. Workshops gave them a chance to experience indigo dyeing, madeub and hanji (Korean mulberry paper) and more. Likeminded people shared precious moments and experiences together and built good friendship



Korean Textiles Tourists make Indigo cloths

The Link Between Textiles and Travels

CN: You see textile artists traveling to teach, students traveling to learn, and popular quilt retreats being done all over the place. What is it about textiles that make them so suitable for traveling/tours. What is the connection?

YL: I feel that people build a small creative community by traveling together and their experiences often evolve to inspiration. Travel and textiles are linked by the creative energy that flows in between them.



Hanji Workshop

CN: So, what are you currently working on?

YL: For my recent bojagi work, luminous mother-of-pearl lacquerware inspired me. I used a technique called "jewel pattern" and "Ssamsol" to reproduce the feeling and process of Korean lacquerware onto fabric.

The iridescent colors of mother-of-pearl on lacquerware reflect hidden efforts and time. I have made these works as an homage to the enormous labor and care that Joseon-dynasty mother-of-pearl artisans endured to prepare and inlay the natural materials on wooden surfaces.



Luminous by Youngmin Lee

Although the materials are different, I patched the small pieces of fabric together to transmit the essence and philosophy embedded in Joseon mother-of-pearl lacquerware. These are my interpretation of my tradition, as well as a reinterpretation of my native culture.

CN: There are two segments I include in every interview because readers really enjoy these segments.

The first is this: "What are your five favorite tools, supplies and resources"? They can be tools you use in your studio, books, anything you really love that has helped you or helps you a lot. Readers love to use the same things their favorite artists use.

Youngmin Lee's Five Faves



There is an old story in Korea. The 7 friends of a woman (Scissors, ruler, needle, flat iron, iron, thread, and thimble) had an argument about who is the friend who supports their owner best. I often use this story to introduce my best friends.

1. [Hera marker](#) (This looks like a cool tool, Youngmin. I've got to try it)
2. [Rotary cutter](#) and I love the [28mm small blade](#) (because I usually deal with thin, small, and fragile materials such as Korean silk gauze & silk organza)
3. [Needle threader](#)
4. [A pressing iron](#) and
5. My [bojagi DVDs](#) are my new friends.

The second question is this: "Based on your experience in bringing Korean Bojagi to American textile artists and enthusiasts, what are your 6 tips for creating a buzz about an unconventional business idea? If someone had an unconventional idea which they wanted to pursue, what's your advice to them?"

Youngmin Lee's Six Business Tips



- 1 Write down your ideas,
- 2 Invest your time to create visual materials,
- 3 Go out and meet people who might have interest,
- 4 Take good photographs and use them on social media,
- 5 Be nice and friendly.
- 6 Good karma always brings you more than you give.

Thanks so much for this interview about Korean textiles, Youngmin. To learn more about Youngmin and to purchase her products and take her classes, visit her website YoungminLee.com and [her Etsy shop](#).

Confidence Boost for Creatives



Interview Highlights

- △ I chose bojagi as my creative medium as I appreciate the beauty that results from the long and slow process of hand stitching.
- △ I feel that people build a small creative community by traveling together and their experiences often evolve to inspiration.
- △ Be nice and friendly. Good karma always brings you more than you give.

I hope you enjoyed this interview with Youngmin.



Clara Nartey is an artist and a writer. She finds and interviews thriving entrepreneurs from all over the world about their mindsets and the systems they use to grow their businesses, in order to help artists learn how to start or grow their own creative businesses. To get more of her writings and access to her free resources for textile & quilt artists, makers, and creators, [sign up here](#).

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