

Artist-wife Yumi Hogan strays 'outside of her normal comfort level'



Yumi Hogan, the Korean-born wife of Republican gubernatorial candidate Larry Hogan, is an accomplished abstract landscape painter. (Kenneth K. Lam, Baltimore Sun)

By Jeff Barker

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The art studio in Yumi Hogan's Edgewater home, perched above water and surrounded by tall trees, is as serene as her nuanced ink paintings of dreamlike landscapes.

Her delicate brushstrokes on traditional Korean paper seem at odds with the bruising, unambiguous political world of her husband, Republican gubernatorial candidate Larry Hogan.

The couple's challenge has been to comfortably integrate the South Korean-born artist into the campaign, just as they have blended familiar Korean items into the contemporary home on a wooded cul-de-sac overlooking Beards Creek. Korean squash grows in a garden, her artwork hangs on the walls, and the couple has a specialized refrigerator for kimchi, the fermented Korean dish.

The candidate has told Korean-American audiences that if he defeats Democrat Anthony G. Brown on Nov. 4, his wife will take the kimchi refrigerator to the governor's mansion.

Hogan met the former Yumi Kim at a Columbia art exhibit in 2001 and married her three years later. It was the first marriage for Hogan, now 58, and the second for his wife, 54, who has three grown daughters from a previous marriage.

"She's been very active and involved in many different Korean organizations for a long time," said Hogan, who

has held several fundraisers aimed at Asian-American donors. "She is a real asset on the campaign trail, even if it is a little outside of her normal comfort level. She's not usually involved in politics, but she is really good with people."

Hogan often brings up his wife while campaigning. Asked a question about immigration policy during his debate this week with Brown, he paused and said, "We're a nation of immigrants." Then he introduced Yumi, who was in the audience, as "a first-generation American."

He then said Maryland's Democratic leadership has been "too aggressive" in allowing the state to absorb unaccompanied minors from Central America who have entered the country illegally.

That position might not resonate with most Maryland voters. But Mileah Kromer, director of the Sarah T. Hughes Field Politics Center at Goucher College, said "the view of his wife as a first-generation immigrant softens that blow."

Their backgrounds are strikingly different. He is a congressman's son who owns a real estate business. She is the youngest of eight children raised on a chicken farm in the South Korean countryside.

She married when she was 20 and came with her husband to the United States, where she hoped to pursue an art career. After the marriage ended, she settled in Howard County because of the solid reputation of its public schools.

She became a U.S. citizen years ago, earned a bachelor's degree from the Maryland Institute College of Art in 2008 (she also holds a master's degree) and is now an adjunct faculty member there.

Speaking softly in her home, where Adirondack chairs line a wraparound deck with water views, Yumi Hogan described meeting her husband.

"I tell Larry I have three daughters. He didn't know. He accepted my daughters, so that's how we started dating. I asked my girls' permission. I said, 'I met this guy.'"

They were married at the Paca House and Garden in Annapolis in a ceremony that included elements of a Korean wedding.

She describes herself as traditional. She said she was reluctant to tell her family of her divorce because they might not have approved. She didn't live with Hogan until they were married.

Her medium is traditional, too: Sumi ink, favored by many Asian artists, and Korean Hanji paper.

She was initially stunned at the rough-and-tumble nature of American politics: "Shocking," she said.

She has seen the campaign ad in which Brown, the lieutenant governor, alleges that Hogan would take the state backward on abortion and other social issues if he could. Hogan, who is Catholic, is opposed to abortion, but he has said he would not try to change existing Maryland law on the subject.

Asked her position on abortion, Yumi Hogan, who is Presbyterian, demurred.

"I'm really not talking about all those issues I saw in Anthony Brown's commercial," she said. "My husband, he has three daughters. He's not that kind of person. He's a really good father, he cares about all daughters."

Each morning, she said, she takes her husband's hand and prays with him. She said she prays for honesty.

Said Larry Hogan: "She wants to make sure we are focused on the right things."

When the campaign wanted somebody to publicly rebut Brown's accusations, it decided on Jaymi Sterling,

Yumi Hogan's middle daughter.

Sterling, 33, a state prosecutor in St. Mary's County, filmed a television spot saying the ads attacking Hogan as "anti-woman" are "just wrong."

"I had a strong feeling about the way the Brown campaign was depicting my dad," Sterling said in an interview. Larry Hogan "said throughout his entire campaign he is a devout Catholic, but he does not believe he is going to change the laws. I feel the same way. I am not Catholic. I am Presbyterian. We are a religious family. We have Christian and Catholic beliefs."

"She did a nice job," Yumi Hogan said. "I am more not politician — just wife."

Sterling said her mother might not be politically oriented, but she is not shy.

Yumi Hogan attends rallies with her husband and shakes hands with crowd members. Her work has been exhibited at the Korean Embassy in Washington, the Maryland Institute College of Art, in South Korea and many other locations.

Larry Hogan said his wife's appeal in the Asian-American community "is going to help us do better than anyone expected in Howard and Montgomery county."

The Asian-American population in those counties is 16.2 percent and 14.9 percent, respectively, according to census statistics. It is 6.1 percent statewide.

Elaine Pevenstein, a friend of the Hogans' who has raised money for him, says people can be fooled by Yumi Hogan's small stature — she is 5 feet tall — and quiet demeanor.

"A lot of people mistake serenity for being solitary," Pevenstein said. "She is far from being a solitary person. She is used to being with crowds. She is a teacher. She probably would bring a huge awareness of the arts."

But Pevenstein says she did offer advice before the campaign began in earnest.

"The only thing I think I said to her was, 'Buckle up, it will be a crazy road ahead.'"

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Yumi Hogan

Age: 54

Job: Artist, adjunct professor, Maryland Institute College of Art,

Education: B.A., Maryland Institute College of Art; MFA, American University

Family: Married, three children from previous marriage

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