

CHARLOTTE HORLYCK:

Korean Art from the Nineteenth Century to the Present.

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This highly illustrated volume provides a thorough introduction to the dynamic and fast-changing art scene in Korea, from the opening of the peninsula to foreign influence until the present day. For general readers, information about historical and political developments is necessary to contextualize the various artistic stages and movements, and the author has helpfully included pertinent historical background throughout.

Starting with Koreans' first exposure to Western art, the story of modern Korean art included an optimistic period of participation in world fairs such as Chicago 1893 and Paris 1900, before Japan annexed Korea in 1910. The political context shifted dramatically. Competitions and exhibitions were shaped by the efforts of the Japanese colonial rulers to associate artistic expression with "progressive" pro-Japanese styles and themes. Art school teaching assumed two main strands – one group working in oil and engaging with international themes, and another working on paper and using ink and colour, who generally trained at the Kyōngsōng School (pp. 42–3). Early twentieth-century Korean artists who studied in Europe, such as Pae Un-sōng (1900–78) and those who studied in Japan, including the "first Korean oil painter" Ko Hui-dong (1886–1965) are introduced through biographical narrative and well-chosen examples of their work. Women artists such as Na Hye-sōk (1896–1948) are a welcome inclusion in the list of names highlighted. *Nihonga* school artists (those trained in painting techniques deriving from traditional Japanese artistic conventions) are discussed, pp. 63–70. The story also encompasses the beginnings of abstraction and the work of Kim Whan-ki (1913–74).

North Korean art from about 1948 onwards, heavily influenced by Soviet thinking on the place of the artist in society, is the subject of the third chapter, covering little-known artists like Kim Chu-gyōng (1902–81) and O Chi-ho (1905–82) before tracing the relationships between Korean and Soviet artists and theorists.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 return to South Korea and continue the journey through abstraction (1950s to 70s), art and politics (1980s and 90s) before closing with an ambitious chapter that surveys the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century scene. With the division of the country after the Korean War, and the forceful presence of American interests in the South, Korea's artists responded to the horrors of war and the devastation of their country in diverse ways, reflecting the chaos and divisions of the time. The self-taught artist Park Soo-keun (1914–65) painted rural scenes using a technique of repeated brush strokes while Lee Jung-seop, who died aged 40 in 1956, was a poverty-stricken artist whose paintings of tormented bulls seem to echo the difficulties of his short life. Informel, an art movement that attracted significant figures in the Korean scene through the late 1950s and 60s, is well illustrated, as is the monochrome movement of the 60s and 70s. Minjung art (art engaged with political and social issues) was part of a broad political movement in the years following the death of President Park Chung-hee in 1979. The cover image, *Mirage* by Shin Hak-ch'ōl (1944–) is a satirical fantasy from this time. It depicts a group of rural workers eating lunch in a field, unconcerned with a dream-like cloud above them, on which skyscrapers and balloons advertising consumer goods float alongside scantily-clad young women. The Minjung movement is indivisible from the tumultuous events of 1980s and 90s Korea, and from popular revulsion against state brutality and economic corruption.

An important section is devoted to a discussion of the rise of feminist art (pp. 148–54) with illustrations of work by Kim In-sun (1941–), Yun Suk-nam (1939–), the photographer Park Young-sook (1941–) and the performance artist siren eun young jung (1974–). Later, the powerful effect of government-supported art programming became apparent with the success of the Seoul Olympics of 1988 when the video artist Paik Nam June (1932–2006) created a striking video tower for the newly opened Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art. Other important examples of state-sponsored programmes include the Kwangju Biennale, launched as Asia's first international biennale and attracting 1.6 million visitors to its inaugural showing; and Korea's participation in the Venice Biennale, starting in 1995. Internationally renowned artists such as Kimsooja, Lee Bul and Kang Ik-joong have flourished during this time.

In the discussion of art of the 1990s and 2000s in the final chapter, the media adopted by artists become more challenging to represent. Kim Beom's *Painting Yellow Scream* is a 31-minute video whose conceit is to mimic a television lesson in painting, accompanied by a soundtrack of screaming. It is difficult to convey the power or experience of such works in a printed book. Some of the artists discussed, such as Yeesoogyung (1963–), are well-established on the international scene, “referencing past and present, local and global history and traditions her work highlights issues pertinent to contemporary Korean art” (p. 174). Others chosen for detailed discussion include Choi Jeong-hwa, known for using unconventional materials in surprising places; the digital artist Jeon Joonho (figure 155); Kang Ik-joong, whose practice focusses on the form of the moon jar; Suh Do Ho, illustrated at figs 162, 163 and 165; and Yang Haegue (1971–) the Berlin-based artist whose installations of blinds and lights alter in response to different locations.

This is a thoughtfully argued history of modern Korean art, one which will serve students and general readers equally well. It stands comparison with *Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea: Tradition, Modernity and Identity* by Kim Youngna (2005) and with the more recent work of the US-based scholar Joan Kee. Its six-page glossary, ten-page index and detailed list of illustrations including details about whereabouts and rights ownership, all contribute to the lasting value of the book, which should without doubt find a place on the shelves of anyone interested in Korean visual culture. It also represents good value for money, given the high number of illustrations included.

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