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**Abstract Expressionism, Art informel,
and Modern Korean Art, 1945-1965**

by

Moojeong Chung

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York

2000

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

Abstract Expressionism, Art informel,
and Modern Korean Art, 1945-1965

By

Moojeong Chung

Adviser: Professor Mona Hadler

This study discusses the development of modern Korean art in connection with the presence of American and European art in Korea. In particular, it focuses on the relationship between the *Informel* movement and American and European Abstract Expressionism.

The Korean War, which was brought to the attention of the American art community through the MOMA's 1951 exhibition "Korea: The Impact of War in Photographs," Pablo Picasso's *Massacre in Korea* of 1951 and *War* of 1952, and David Smith's *Parallel 42* of 1953, forms a backdrop against which to understand Korean *Informel* art. The war led Korean artists to reject all the existing moral, esthetic values and to start over from zero. Their struggle to create a language to express their unique experience resulted in the *Informel* movement.

During the 1950s, Korean artists were eager to absorb information on American and European art. Exhibitions, little

known today, such as "Student Work from College and University Art Department" (1956), "Eight American Artists" (1957), and "Art from the University of Minnesota" (1958) gave the Korean art community the opportunity to see some examples of contemporary American art. Magazines were another source of information about American and European art. During the 1950s, such magazines as *Life*, *Time*, *Art in America*, and *Art News*, which were easily available in Korea, mainly focused their attention on unconventional techniques of Euro-American Abstract Expressionism and Harold Rosenberg's idea of Action Painting. For Korean *Informel* artists, these stylistic characteristics became effective tools for accommodating the specific nature of the national experience.

The cultural conflicts between the United States and France were another factor that made it easier for Korean artists to embrace Euro-American Abstract Expressionism. In these conflicts, Asian art and culture served as a means for both injuring and defending the prestige of rivaling American and French positions of modern art. In the process, Asian art and culture unexpectedly emerged as a source of artistic independence, originality, and universality. In this sense, what Korean *Informel* artists saw in Euro-American Abstract Expressionism was a possibility of cultural convergence in

which Asian artistic practices have been enjoined with
Western artistic traditions.

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organized the exhibition "Contemporary Korean Paintings" (1958), also kindly provided me with her material and knowledge.

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Very warm thanks go to my friends and family who were always there when I needed them. Throughout my academic training, my family has been unceasingly supportive in so many ways and I could not have reached this goal without them.

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Abbreviations

- AFA - American Federation of Arts
- CAA - College Art Association
- CCCKC - Central Conference for the Construction of Korean Culture
- CIA - Central Intelligence Agency
- HAA - Han'guk Artists Association
- ICA - Institute of Contemporary Arts
- KAL - Korean Artists League
- KPAL - Korean Plastic Arts League
- MOMA - Museum of Modern Art
- SWNCC - State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee
- TAA - Taehan Artists Association
- UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- USAMGIK - United States Army Military Government in Korea
- USIA - United States Information Agency
- USIE - United States Information and Educational
- USIS - United States Information Service

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Introduction

In June 1959 H. Harvard Arnason, then director of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and chairman of the Art Department of the University of Minnesota, went to Korea as lecturer and consultant through the exchange-of-persons program of the United States Department of State. During a question period in one of his lectures, Dore Ashton reports, Arnason was amazed to hear a speaker from the floor deliver "a long disquisition in his native tongue through which he kept hearing the names of Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, and other luminaries of the New York art world."¹ Arnason's astonishment continued in his discussion of events in the art world with a local painter in which the aging Korean artist "argued cogently and at great length about modern Western painting, discussed the New York School and, when at a loss, consulted a variety of catalogues and Museum of Modern Art publications to illustrate his arguments."² Ashton's report shows that information about

¹ Dore Ashton, "Art: The Twain Meet," *The New York Times*, November 29, 1959, p. 37. In her letter to the author, Ashton wrote that the report was based on an interview with H.H. Arnason at the time.

² Ibid.

American art had deeply penetrated into the Korean art world by 1959.

Although most of the information on American art in Korea was available from magazines and catalogues, to which the artists could refer in the libraries of the United States Information Service (USIS), there were also several exhibitions which exposed the artists to the currents of American art. In particular, the exhibition "Eight American Artists," which was held in the National Museum in Seoul in April 1957, made a great impact on the Korean art community. After the show, the art community saw both the appearance of Korean sculptors who used metal as their material, and the First Exhibition of Hyeondae Artists Association at the USIS gallery in May 1957, which was soon to lead an art movement called *Informel*.

Although the presence of American art was conspicuous in the Korean art scene due to the aggressive cultural programs of the United States, the idea of Paris as the center of world art persisted in the minds of Korean artists until 1965. They could get in touch with the Parisian art world primarily through word of mouth and Japanese art magazines such as *Bijutsu techo* and *Mizue*. Especially articles and reports on *Art informel* and European artists' shows in Japan attracted the attention of Korean artists. My dissertation

will study the development of modern Korean art in connection with the presence of American and European art in Korea. In particular, I will investigate the relationship between the *Informel* movement and American and European Abstract Expressionism.

The term *Informel* is derived from the French phrase *Art informel*. It was introduced into the Korean art community through Japanese art magazines. Its French origin does not necessarily mean, however, that Korean artists were well aware of the specific European movement called *Art informel*. It was generally used to refer to a non-geometric, abstract art in Korea. Dore Ashton characterized it as "abstractions of a non-geometric character toward what Americans call abstract expressionism."³ I will use the term in italics to refer to the non-geometric, abstract art in Korea of the 1950s and 1960s.

The dissertation proceeds chronologically, and is divided into five chapters. It will cover a twenty-year period, from 1945, the date when United States military rule in Korea began, to 1965 when the *Informel* movement weakened and Op art was introduced. In the first chapter, I will consider the ideological division within Korean nationalism

³ Ibid.

and its reflection in the art community after liberation from the Japanese rule in 1945. The ideological conflict is contextualized within the political and cultural policy of the United States military government in Korea that supervised South Korea in 1945-48. I will also examine how the military government affected the discourse on tradition among intellectuals and artists. Record Group 332 (Records of U.S. Theaters of War, World War II, USAFIK, Twenty-fourth Corps, G-2, Historical Section), which is stored at the National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland, provides valuable information on the cultural policies and activities of the American military government in Korea. In particular, two folders in Box 64, entitled "Culture in Korea," and "Culture in Korea: Reports + Drafts," are useful. These materials have never been mentioned in the literature on Korean art.

The second chapter examines the exhibition "Korea: The Impact of War in Photographs," mounted by The Museum of Modern Art in 1951, Pablo Picasso's *Massacre in Korea*, 1951 and *War*, 1952, and David Smith's *Parallel 42*, 1953, all associated with the Korean War (1950-1953). Interestingly, these works were all done during the war and closely related with the war situation at the moment. However, they have rarely received scholarly attention. Recently Picasso's two

works have been examined in regard to his activities as a Communist. For example, based on Picasso's endorsement of Soviet political positions and newly available archival material, Andrea Feeser and Gertje R. Utley sought to interpret his two works as pieces of pro-Communism.⁴ However, they all fail to associate the works with the war situation at the time. By associating the works with specific stages of the Korean War, I will shed a new light on them.

The third chapter considers the representation of Korean art in the West during the 1950s. After the war, the United States consolidated its foreign information activities into one program administered by the United States Information Agency. Its activities in Korea, however, met with numerous obstacles due to propaganda from anti-American sources, the desire for absolute independence, and the suspicion of cultural imperialism. As a constructive way of reducing these obstacles, a great emphasis was given to cooperative educational and cultural exchange projects. As a result, Korea had the opportunity to represent her art and culture in the West for the first time since the World's

⁴ See Andrea Feeser, "The Recuperated Radical: Pablo Picasso and the Debate on Art and Politics in France, 1942-1962," (Ph.D. dissertation, The City University of New York, 1996); Gertje R. Utley, "Picasso and the 'Parti de la renaissance francaise': The Artists as a Communist, 1944-1953," (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1997).

Columbian Exposition of 1893 and l'Exposition universelle de Paris of 1900.

In the early 1950s, the United States attempted to exploit the symbolic value of Korea as freedom defended against the Communist attack. This will be discussed while examining the Korean participation in cultural events such as the International Conference of Artists of 1952 and the International Sculpture Competition, "The Unknown Political Prisoner" of 1953 during the Korean War. In the late 1950s, however, academic and humanistic approaches toward cultural exchange appeared, as can be seen in such exhibitions as "Masterpieces of Korean Art" held in 1957-58 in eight cities, and "Contemporary Korean Paintings," March 1958, World House Gallery in New York. I will consider how Korea was represented in the exhibitions, how Americans reacted to them, and why the selection of works were made by Americans, not Koreans. For this purpose, I have examined the archival material for "Masterpieces of Korean Art" at the National Gallery, Washington, D.C. I also discovered the exhibition catalogue for "Contemporary Korean Paintings," which has never been mentioned in the literature on Korean art.

The fourth chapter deals with controversies on the relationship between art and politics, in particular, the debated use of Abstract Expressionism as a weapon of the Cold

War—as for example in Max Kozloff's "American Painting During the Cold War"; Eva Cockcroft's "Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War"; D. and G. Shapiro's "Abstract Expressionism: the Politics of Apolitical Painting"; Serge Guilbaut's *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*; Michael Kimelman's "Revisiting the Revisionists: The Modern, Its Critics and the Cold War"; and Robert Burstow's "The Limits of Modernist Art as a 'Weapon of the Cold War.'" By focusing on the relationship of The Museum of Modern Art and the CIA, and exhibitions in Europe, however, they fail to mention East Asia where there were not only exhibitions sent by the United States but also young artists who were eager to absorb information on American and European art by all means. The activities of the Gutai Art Association in Japan, the Fifth Moon Group in Taiwan, and the Hyundae Artists Association in Korea show that there was great interest in and strong presence of American and European Abstract Expressionism. In this chapter, I will examine how and to what degree the presence of American and European art might have affected the Korean artists, concentrating on the activities of the United States Information Agency. Especially I will consider exhibitions sponsored or organized by the USIA and investigate some magazines such as *Life*, *Time*, *Art in America*, and *Art News*, which are considered to

have been major sources of information on American and European art. Many writers point out that American magazines were a major source of information about American and European art. However, they have never questioned to what degree the magazines might have affected Korean artists. My analysis of the magazines will clarify the issue and show that information about American and European art through magazines could not have provided Korean artists with a whole view of American and European art communities.

Among the American exhibitions held in Korea were "Masterpieces of American Art" (photographic reproductions) held at the USIS Gallery in Seoul in July 1955; "Student Work from College and University Art Department," Seoul National University, November 1956; "Eight American Artists," the National Museum in Seoul, April 1957; "Family of Man," the National Museum in Seoul, April 1957; "Art from the University of Minnesota," Seoul National University, May 1958; "Recent American Prints in Color," the USIS Gallery in five cities, November 1959-February 1960. Especially I will concentrate on the show "Eight American Artists" (Mark Tobey, Morris Graves, Kenneth Callahan, Guy Anderson, David Hare, Seymour Lipton, Rhys Caparn, Ezio Martinelli), not only because it made a great impact on Korean artists but because it was from the start organized with the Far East in mind.

For this purpose I have examined the exhibition file at the Seattle Art Museum, which organized the exhibition, and discovered the exhibition catalogue, which was published in the form of the special issue of *Sinmisul*, the only art magazine in Korea at the moment. The new material will contribute to the clarification of some doubts surrounding the exhibition.

Popular magazines mainly focused their attention on unconventional techniques of Abstract Expressionism. The image of Abstract Expressionism as a new aesthetic was only reflected in the pages of *Art News*. However, the magazine showed more interest in Harold Rosenberg's idea of Action Painting than Clement Greenberg's concept of Modernist Painting. The idea of Action Painting might have caught the attention of Korean artists, given a great vogue for Existentialism in Korean literature during the post-Korean War. With its often politically provocative articles such as "An American Action Painter Invades Moscow," and "The Artist as a Worker for the State," *Art News* might also have infused Korean artists with political implications of Abstract Expressionism. In addition, the magazine seems to have attracted the attention of Korean artists with its articles on contemporary European art and ancient East Asian art.

The fifth chapter begins with a consideration of the National Art Exhibition. It was an annual exhibition inaugurated in 1949 with the intention of striving for the development and improvement of Korean art. It consisted of sections of Oriental Painting, Western-Style Painting, Sculpture, Handicrafts, and Calligraphy. Stylistically the Exhibition supported conservative academicism. Its conservative academicism nurtured the consciousness of the avant-garde among young artists, and their antagonism toward the establishment was first expressed by the "Four Artists" show (Seo-bo Park, Yŏng-hwan Kim, Ch'ung-sŏn Kim, U-sik Mun) held at Tongbang Gallery in Seoul in May 1956. The exhibition soon led to the foundation of the Hyundai Artists Association, which was to lead the *Informel* movement from 1958. I will explore the *Informel* movement, focusing on the activities of the Hyundai Artists Association (1957-1960) and its offspring, *Actuel* (1962-1964). In particular, the work of artists such as Seo-bo Park, Tschang-yeul Kim, Sang-su Chŏn, Sŏng-sun Chang, In-du Ha, and Myŏng-ro Yun will be examined. Examinations of these artists will permit an extensive development of thematic and cultural issues such as tradition and modernism, art and politics.

Until recently the *Informel* movement has rarely received scholarly attention. The literature on the art movement has

largely consisted of recollections of artists and critics associated with it. Among them are Seo-bo Park's "Korean Avant-Garde Art as I Experienced," (1966) and "The Hyundai Artists Association and I," (1974); KŪn-taek Pang's "The Arena for Passion in the 1950s," (1984); and Ku-yŏl Yi's "The Informel Movement in Contemporary Korean Art History."⁵

Although these articles are useful to trace the activities of the Hyundai Artists Association, they also contain some incorrect information. Some critics also tried to deal with the art movement in their writings, among them Kwang-su Oh's *History of Contemporary Korean Art* (1979) and Sŏng-rok Sŏ's *Contemporary Art in Korea* (1994).⁶ However, their writings are neither more nor less than compilations of the above-mentioned articles.

In contrast, Professor Youngna Kim's "The Informel Movement in the Korean Art Scene," (1988) can be regarded as the first serious study of the art movement.⁷ Her article

⁵ Seo-bo Park, "Korean Avant-Garde Art as I Experienced," *Space*, 1, 1 (November 1966), pp. 83-7, and "The Hyundai Artists Association and I," *Hwarang*, 2, 2 (Summer 1974), pp. 43-5; KŪn-taek Pang, "The Arena for Passion in the 1950s," *Space*, 204 (June 1984), pp. 42-8; Ku-yŏl Yi, "The Informel Movement in Contemporary Korean Art History," *Space*, 205 (July 1984), pp. 49-52.

⁶ Kwang-su Oh, *History of Contemporary Korean Art* (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 1979), pp. 143-49; Sŏng-rok Sŏ, *Contemporary Art in Korea* (Seoul: Munyech'ulp'ansa, 1994), pp. 106-42.

shows an attempt to give a critical interpretation of the *Informel* movement and provides some useful information on the artists involved in the movement. In addition, Kim's "Artistic Exchange Between East and West for 20 Years After World War II and Calligraphic Abstraction," (1998) discusses abstract art in Japan, Taiwan and Korea, pointing out that the synthesis of traditional calligraphy and modern art as the common denominator of three countries.⁸

In the United States, Jeffrey Wechsler published *Asian Tradition and Modern Expression: Asian American Artists and Abstraction, 1945-70* (1997).⁹ Although he confined his discussion to the work of Asian American artists, it contains ample information on the art communities in the Far Eastern countries. Bert Winther's dissertation "Isamu Noguchi: Conflicts of Japanese Culture in the Early Postwar Years" (New York University, 1992), with its complex and subtle interweaving of such issues as cultural tensions between East

⁷ Youngna Kim, "The *Informel* Movement in the Korean Art Scene," in Kyŏng-sŏng Yi, ed., *The Trends of Contemporary Korean Art* (Seoul: Iljisa, 1993), pp. 180-225.

⁸ Youngna Kim, "Artistic Exchange Between East and West for 20 Years After World War II and Calligraphic Abstraction," in *Art of Twentieth Century Korea* (Seoul: Yegyŏng, 1998), pp. 213-48.

⁹ Jeffrey Wechsler, ed., *Asian Tradition and Modern Expression: Asian American Artists and Abstraction, 1945-70* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997).

and West, tradition and realism, tradition and modernism, has provided me with a model for my own research.¹⁰ Quite recently, Whuiyeon Jin completed her dissertation "Presentation, Modernism, and Post-Colonialism: Korean Informel and the Reception of the West" (Columbia University, 1997). Jin views the Korean *Informel* movement from a postcolonial perspective. Based on Homi Bhabha's concept of *mimicry*, she asserts, "The Korean Informel movement ... can be interpreted as an active practice of mimicry and embodies the new relationship between the U.S. and Korea. Practicing mimicry alienates the colonial object (colonizer) from his or her foreign identity and leads to the creation of indigenous cultural products that embody the responses and struggle between the realm of tradition and that of foreign."¹¹ Although post-colonialism is an attractive tool for addressing issues of cultural difference, it is quite doubtful that it could be applied to the Korean *Informel* movement. First of all, it cannot explain the conflict over supremacy between American Abstract Expressionism and

¹⁰ Bert Winther, "Isamu Noguchi: Conflicts of Japanese Culture in the Early Postwar Years," (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1992).

¹¹ Whuiyeon Jin, "Presentation, Modernism, and Post-Colonialism: Korean Informel and the Reception of the

European *Art informel* and Korean artists' shift in attention from the former to the latter in the 1960s. Second, it can not explain the role of Asian art and culture in the cultural conflict, which revealed Asian art and culture as a source of artistic independence, originality, and universality.

Scholarship on the Korean *Informel* movement has left numerous issues unanswered: the discovery and survey of primary material, the beginning of *Informel* style, the degree and character of foreign influences, and the content of *Informel* art. Partly, it has something to do with the lack of primary material and original paintings. Indeed, most of the illustrations in my study are newspaper photographs, which prevented me from describing the paintings in detail. In Korea, moreover, older artists and critics tend to assume an overbearing attitude toward younger scholars and do not easily give interviews. Indeed, I sent questionnaires to some artists and critics associated with the *Informel* movement. However, no one answered my questionnaires. Thus I focused on discovering primary material associated with the *Informel* movement by going through newspapers and magazines of the 1950s. Along with an examination of the exhibitions and magazines the Korean *Informel* artists could have seen and

West," (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1997), pp. 14-5.

read, the discovery of primary material will help answer some questions surrounding the Korean *Informel* movement and locate it in the international art community.

Chapter I

Liberation and the Korean Art Community

(1) The Thirty-Eighth Parallel and Cold War Ideology

On August 15, 1945, Korea was liberated from 36 years of Japanese colonial rule. It was not achieved, however, through the Korean people's struggle against Japanese domination, but through the victory of the Allies in the Pacific war. As had been the case with Korea throughout her history, thus, she again became an arena of great power rivalry. Among the most unfortunate results of the rivalry was the joint occupation of Korea by the United States and the Soviet Union, thereby dividing the peninsula into two separate zones at the 38th parallel.

The idea of the 38th parallel as the dividing line between Soviet and American occupation forces was proposed at a session of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) on August 10-11, 1945.¹ American officials have often

¹ Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 121; William Whitney Stueck, Jr., *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy Toward China and Korea, 1947-1950* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1981), p. 22. Some historians, however, argue that the idea came from the meetings of military officials at the Potsdam Conference in July 1945. On this point, see E. Grant Meade, *American Military Government in Korea* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1951), p. 91; Charles M. Dobbs, *The Unwanted Symbol: American*

explained the division of the Korean peninsula as a matter of military expediency and convenience. Assistant Secretary John H. Hilidring, for example, in an address delivered before the Economic Club of Detroit, March 10, 1947, said: "In no sense was this agreement more than a military expedient between two friendly powers. The line of demarcation was intended to be temporary and only to fix responsibility between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. for carrying out the Japanese surrender."² One of the versions of the session of SWNCC, however, shows that the decision was essentially political:

About midnight, August 10-11, 1945, Colonel Charles H. Bonesteel and Major Dean Rusk ... began drafting part of a General Order that would define the zone to be occupied in Korea by American and Russian forces. They were given thirty minutes to complete their draft, which a State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee was waiting for. The State Department wished the dividing line to be as far north as possible, while the military departments, knowing that the Russians could overrun all of Korea before any American troops could land there, were more cautious.³

Foreign Policy, the Cold War, and Korea, 1945-1950 (Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1981), p. 26.

² Reprinted in *Department of State Bulletin*, XVI, 403 (March 23, 1947), p. 545. Most historical accounts have depicted the division of Korea as a temporary military decision. See George M. McCune, *Korea Today* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 44; Shannon McCune, "The Thirty-Eighth Parallel in Korea," *World Politics*, 1, 2 (January 1949), p. 223; Arthur L. Grey, Jr., "The Thirty Eighth Parallel," *Foreign Affairs*, 29, 3 (April 1951), p. 484; Meade, *American Military Government in Korea*, p. 91; Carl Berger, *The Korean Knot: A Military-Political History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957), p. 47.

An examination of the Soviet-American relations around the end of World War II would further reveal the political character of the decision. At the Cairo Conference of November 1943, the Allied leaders (the United States, the Soviet Union, China, and Great Britain) agreed that Korea shall become free and independent in due course; and at the Yalta Conference of early 1945, they agreed to a four-power trusteeship for Korea.⁴ Shortly after the Yalta Conference, however, Stalin's determination to achieve hegemony in Eastern Europe caused the Roosevelt administration to question his willingness to fulfill the agreements.

³ James F. Schnabel, *Policy and Direction: The First Years* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1972), pp. 7-9. Major Dean Rusk, in his eyewitness account, also characterized the proposal as the one "which could harmonize the political desire to have U.S. forces receive the surrender [of the Japanese forces] as far north as possible and the obvious limitations on the ability of the U.S. forces to reach the area." J. Lawton Collins, *War in Peacetime: The History and Lessons of Korea* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), pp. 25-6n.

⁴ For the international conferences regarding Korea, see United States, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, The Conferences of Cairo and Teheran, 1943* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1961), pp. 399-400; United States, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, the Conference of Malta and Yalta, 1945* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1955), pp. 358-61; United States, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, The Conference of Berlin, 1945* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960), pp. 310-15.

Especially, Harry S. Truman, who assumed the presidency in April 1945, viewed Soviet actions in Asia as similar to Stalin's policies in Eastern Europe and searched for an alternative that would block Soviet expansionism in the Korean peninsula. When Truman and his advisors heard the news of the successful testing of the atomic bomb, they discarded a plan for trusteeship without hesitation and dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9 in anticipation of a rapid end to the war that would forestall Soviet participation and permit the United States to occupy Korea unilaterally. However, the Soviet Union entered the war on August 8, earlier than American leaders expected, and Japan announced its willingness to accept unconditional surrender on August 10.⁵ SWNCC's meeting for a proposal to

⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, "Korea in American Politics, Strategy, and Diplomacy, 1945-50," in Yonosuke Nagai and Akira Iriye, eds., *The Origins of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 278; Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, pp. 101-22; Matray I. James, "Captive of the Cold War: The Decision to Divide Korea at the 38th Parallel," *Pacific Historical Review*, 50, 2 (May 1961), pp. 145-168; Mark Paul, "Diplomacy Delayed: The Atomic Bomb and the Division of Korea, 1945," in Bruce Cumings, ed., *Child of Conflict: The Korean-American Relationship, 1943-1953* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), pp. 67-91; Stueck, *The Road to Confrontation*, pp. 19-30. For the Soviet response to the Hiroshima bombing, see Richard Rhodes, *Dark Sun: The Making of the Hydrogen Bomb* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), pp. 174-79. Based on the Soviet espionage documents, Rhodes' book reveals that there was a mechanism of technology transfer from the United States to the Soviet

divide Korea at the 38th parallel was held in this acute situation. As a result, Korea emerged after World War II, in the words of James I. Matray, as "a divided nation that was ... a captive of the Cold War."⁶ And thus she remains till this day.

(2) American Military Government and Its Cultural Policy

On September 8, 1945, Lieutenant General John Reed Hodge and his XXIV Corps landed in Korea. The mission of the American occupation forces was to demobilize the Japanese military forces in Korea and liquidate the Japanese administration. The first action of the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK, 1945-1948), however, was to announce that the Japanese administrators would remain in office temporarily to carry out American occupation orders. The announcement produced immediate protests among the vast majority of Koreans, who had had thirty-five years' bitter experience of Japanese colonial rule. Although the administration soon abandoned the plan, its occupation policies would remain a target of continuing harsh criticism.⁷

Union in the field of atomic bomb and hydrogen bomb during the postwar years. Professor Mona Hadler directed my attention to this book.

⁶ Matray, "Captive of the Cold War," p. 168.

Most criticism was directed to the USAMGIK's unilateral support of rightist political power. As can be seen in a political report of H. Merrell Benninghoff, State Department political advisor to General Hodge, the USAMGIK favored the conservative rightists from the beginning:

The most encouraging single factor in the political situation is the presence in Seoul of several hundred conservatives among the older and better educated Koreans. Although many of them have served with the Japanese, that stigma ought eventually to disappear.⁸

Communists advocate the seizure now of Japanese property and may be a threat to law and order. It is probable that well-trained agitators are attempting to bring about chaos in our areas so as to cause the Koreans to repudiate the United States in favor of Soviet "freedom" and control.⁹

American occupation officials feared that any political organization even slightly tainted by leftism would threaten stability; they blamed Communism for much of the disorder in

⁷ For the contemporary criticism of the USAMGIK policy, see Bertram D. Sarafan, "Military Government: Korea," *Far Eastern Survey*, 15, 23 (November 23, 1946), pp. 349-52; "Our Record in Korea," *Amerasia* 10, 5 (November 1946), pp. 141-46; Harold Sugg, "Watch Korea," *Harper's Magazine*, 194, 1160 (January 1947), pp. 39-44; Richard E. Lauterbach, "Hodge's Korea," *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 23, 3 (Summer 1947), pp. 349-68; Roger N. Baldwin, "Our Blunder in Korea," *Nation*, 165, 5 (August 2, 1947), pp. 119-21; George M. McCune, "Post-War Government and Politics of Korea," *The Journal of Politics*, 9, 4 (April 1948), pp. 43-56.

⁸ Merrell Benninghoff, report to Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, September 15, 1945, in United States, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1945, vol. 6, pp. 1049-50.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1051.

South Korea and vigorously suppressed leftist political power.¹⁰ In the process, Richard E. Lauterbach noted, they not only "alienated a healthy segment of the left which could have been wooed and perhaps even won by a living exposition of American democracy," but pushed many moderates and leftists "further left and closer to the Communists."¹¹

The USAMGIK's anti-Communist attitude was also mirrored in the cultural arena. Cultural matters in the USAMGIK were assigned to the Bureau of Culture within the Department of Education, originally given a section status, then raised to a bureau status in April 1946, and finally changed to the Bureau of Social Education in July 1948.¹² The Bureau of

¹⁰ In order to suppress the left, General Hodge turned to the Korean police that was run by anti-Communists and terrorists of the right. The police "exploited far-reaching powers for investigation and punishment to eliminate leftist opposition, frequently resorting to terrorism and torture." James Irving Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941-1950* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), pp. 94-5. See also Baldwin, "Our Blunder in Korea," p. 120.

¹¹ Lauterbach, "Hodge's Korea," p. 363. In this situation, as one observer aptly put it, "Only extremes are tolerated in Korea. You are either a pro-Soviet or rightist. If you happen actually to be a liberal, if you feel that the pro-Japanese collaborators must be purged, that the police must be removed from politics, that unions should have freedom to strike, and that northern and southern Korea must be reconciled—then you are a Communist." Baldwin, "Our Blunder in Korea," p. 120.

¹² United States Army Military Government in Korea, Department of Education, "History of Bureau of Culture," August 4, 1948, Record Group 332 (Records of U.S. Theaters of War, World War

Culture was established in order to carry out the USAMGIK policies as stated in Field Order 55, XXIV Corps, Annexes 7 and 8, which directed that "historical, cultural and religious objects and installations will be carefully preserved and protected," and that a government agency be responsible to "locate and register all historical, cultural and religious objects and real estate."¹³

Although it was later to be expanded into encompassing all aspects of culture, the Bureau of Culture in its early stage paid a great attention to preserving and protecting historical, cultural and religious objects. For this purpose, the Bureau sought to locate all such objects and reopen all the museums. The USAMGIK even assigned Helen B. Chapin, Asiatic Arts and Monuments Specialist, to give technical advice, inspect historical sites and monuments, report upon their condition, and make appropriate recommendations.¹⁴ On

II, United States Army Forces in Korea, Twenty-Fourth Corps, G-2, Historical Section), Box 64 (hereafter cited as RG 332, Box 64). National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland. The continuously changing tables of organization seemed to make even American officials so confused that they sometimes used different names for the same organization. In order to avoid confusion, I will use only the name Bureau of Culture as the organization in charge of cultural affairs in the USAMGIK.

¹³ Quoted in Culture Department, "History of the Department of Culture Since 11 September," report to Bureau of Education, USAMGIK, February 27, 1946, RG 332, Box 64.

December 3, 1945, thus, the National Museum, established in 1915 as the Museum of the Government General of Chosŏn, was reopened under the directorship of Dr. Chewon Kim; early in 1946, its branch museums were reopened in Kyŏngju, Puyŏ, Kongju, and Kaesŏng. In addition, the National Museum of Anthropology and two municipal museums in Inch'ŏn and Taegu were opened largely with objects which had fallen into private Japanese hands.

One of the striking aspects of these efforts is that the administration primarily focused its attention on the antiquity of Korean culture. Considering that the administration "officially neglected" the contemporary artists, and used the only art museum in Seoul "first as a billet and then as the M.G. Officers Club,"¹⁵ its interest in ancient Korean art and culture was quite extraordinary. The USAMGIK was also well aware of literature on Korean art and

¹⁴ Helen B. Chapin worked in Seoul on TDY from the Arts and Monuments Section, I & E, SCAP, from May 22, 1946, until August 10, 1946, when she was transferred to the Department of Education, USAMGIK. For her activities in Korea, see "History of Bureau of Culture," RG 332, Box 64. Two reports by Dr. Chapin in RG 332, Box 64—"Daily or Weekly Activities Report," and "Report of the Asiatic Arts and Monuments Specialist for Six Months Ending June 30, 1947"—also give a clear picture of her activities in Korea.

¹⁵ Warren A. Gilbertson, "Brief Discussion with Recommendations Regarding Arts and Handcrafts," report to Dr. Horace H. Underwood, Advisor, Department of Education, July 1, 1947, RG 332, Box 64.

culture. In its official reports, the administration mentioned two crucial works in English on the subject, that is, Andreas Eckardt's *History of Korean Art* published in 1929, and *The Culture of Korea* edited by Changsoon Kim and published by the Korean American Cultural Association in 1945 or 1946.¹⁶ In addition, Dr. Chapin wrote an article "A Brief Introduction to the History of Korean Art" at the request of General Helmick's assistant Colonel Wiard.¹⁷

A great degree of attention directed to the antiquity of Korean culture by the USAMGIK can be partly explained as based on an academic curiosity, a curiosity stimulated by extensive archeological excavations undertaken in several areas of the Korean peninsula in the 1920s. The archeological discoveries were so spectacular that they were even compared to those of Schliemann at Troy and Mycenae.¹⁸ The news of the discoveries, however, was known to the Western world mainly by word of mouth, leaving scholars of Far Eastern art anxious

¹⁶ See *South Korean Interim Government Activities*, 26 (November 1947), pp. 230-1; *South Korean Interim Government Activities*, 28 (January 1948), p. 212.

¹⁷ Chapin, "Report of the Asiatic Arts and Monuments Specialist for Six Months Ending June 30, 1947," RG 332, Box 64.

¹⁸ Helen E. Fernald, "Rediscovered Glories of Korean Art," *Asia Magazine* (December 1931), reprinted in Changsoon Kim, *The Culture of Korea* (Los Angeles: The Korean American Cultural Association, 1945 or 1946), p. 131.

for the details. It is quite possible, therefore, that when the USAMGIK was established in Korea in 1945, those scholars might gladly have given the administration advice and recommendations regarding artistic matters. American officials even seem to have thought of holding an exhibition of Korean art in the United States. When the exhibition "Masterpieces of Korean Art" toured the United States in 1957-1958, Chewon Kim, director of the National Museum, Seoul, wrote that it had been "in preparation for many years, almost since the liberation of Korea."¹⁹

It is doubtful, however, that the USAMGIK was merely an agent for such an academic interest. As can be seen in the fact that Dr. Chapin's above-mentioned article was intended for two propaganda offices in the United States,²⁰ the administration's interest in the Korean antiquity seems to have been largely derived from a political consideration. Here Edward W. Said's theory of Orientalism provides us with a useful tool for clarifying the political intention. One of the principal dogmas of Orientalism, according to Said, is "that the Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining himself; therefore it is assumed that a highly

¹⁹ Chewon Kim, "Masterpieces of Korean Art in America," *Artibus Asiae*, 20, 4 (1957), p. 296.

generalized and systematic vocabulary for describing the Orient from a Western standpoint is inevitable and even scientifically 'objective.'"²¹ This notion is detected in numerous American documents regarding Korea. While discussing Korean art, for example, Warren A. Gilbertson, advisor to the Bureau of Culture, noted:

In spite of his pride in the antiquity of his culture, the Korean generally lacks knowledge of it. Although he could not and would not go back to old manners and concepts, it is nevertheless this very thing upon which his present ideas and behavior are based. A true knowledge and understanding of this past and its products give perspective.²²

Gilbertson's remarks clearly reveal a desire to represent Korea as "fixed, stable, in need of investigation, in need even of knowledge about [it]self."²³ More importantly, his remarks suggest that the USAMGIK's interest in traditional Korean arts was to serve the purpose of affecting Korean society.

²⁰ Chapin, "Report of the Asiatic Arts and Monuments Specialist for Six Months Ending June 30, 1947."

²¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 301.

²² Warren A. Gilbertson, "Brief Discussion with Recommendations Regarding Arts and Handcrafts." One observer even wrote: "Korea is a land of gooks; the Korean is a gook. He is incomprehensible because his thought processes are different.... He belongs to another world." A. Wigfall, *The Epic of Korea* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1950), p. 7.

²³ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 308.

More specific political intention can be detected when we consider another dogma of Orientalism, "that abstractions about the Orient, particularly those based on texts representing a 'classical' Oriental civilization, are always preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern Oriental realities."²⁴ Realities of Korea at the moment can be summed up as intense ideological conflict between Right and Left. Every aspect of life, not excepting culture, was caught up in this conflict. Under the circumstances, it is quite possible that the USAMGIK's promotion of ancient Korean art was intended to divert the artists' attention from politics, that is, separating culture from politics.²⁵ It was only leftism or Communism, however, that the USAMGIK sought to separate from culture. It is clearly shown in Gilbertson's suggestion that the Korean art community should be in need of "outside guidance and encouragement" which would have to "insist on the civil liberties within practical limits, aid in the recognition and promotion of Korea's own traditional arts ... and in general aid in creating a constructive, hopeful, more

²⁴ Ibid., p. 300.

²⁵ When the adjective "political" is applied to Oriental societies by the Orientalist, Said wrote, it is meant as a reproach to the Orient "for not being 'liberal,' for not being able to separate ... politics from culture." Ibid., p. 299.

democratic attitude.”²⁶ As such phrases as “civil liberties” and “democratic attitude” suggest, the USAMGIK sought to instill into the minds of Korean artists a certain political belief, which was ultimately anti-Communism. In this sense, the promotion of Korean traditional arts could be seen as part of American anti-Communist stance. Here we can see a unique character of American Orientalism that derives from, according to Said, “Cold War competition with the Soviet Union.”²⁷ As can be seen in McCarthyism and the trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, American anti-Communism was particularly fervent from the 1940s through the early 1960s. To the eyes of American officials, thus, Korea’s left-right conflict would have been seen as part of the Cold War.²⁸

In dealing with contemporary cultural matters, indeed, American officials were almost preoccupied with eliminating leftist forces from the cultural scene. When Korean artists submitted the plans for the Chosun Arts Academy, American officials first of all examined the political backgrounds of

²⁶ Warren A. Gilbertson, “Brief Discussion with Recommendations Regarding Arts and Handcrafts.”

²⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 291.

²⁸ Contrary to the United States, the Soviet Union tried to totally change cultural life in North Korea. When the UN forces crossed the 38th parallel during the Korean War, what they found were portraits of Stalin, Marxist banners

its representatives;²⁹ the reason why they held the Korea United Fine Arts Exhibition was to promote a democratic attitude among Korean artists.³⁰ One incident in the theater gives a clear picture of how the USAMGIK reacted to the ideological conflicts in the cultural scene.

On January 8, 1947, a performance was being presented by the General Federation of Korean Cultural Organizations, which originated soon after the liberation and included in its membership the majority of artists, writers, musicians, and actors in South Korea. This performance, however, was disrupted by a grenade thrown by an organized group of thugs, which was alleged to be the Korean Democratic Youth Alliance, muscle men for one of the extreme right-wing political

and slogans, and propaganda pictures. See "Where the Red Shadow Fell," *Life*, 29, 22 (November 27, 1950), pp. 56-8.

²⁹ The Chosun Arts Academy consisted of Schools of Fine Arts, Music, Motion Picture, and Drama and had detailed plans for lecture courses, qualification of students, tuition, professors, and budget. Even American officials seem to have been willing to help the project materialize. However, the plan was not realized due to lack of finances and buildings. RG 332, Box 64 stores the following documents: "Declaration for the Establishment of the Chosun Arts Academy," "Plan of Establishing Chosun Arts Academy," and W. A. Gilbertson, "Investigation of Proposed Chosun Arts Academy," report to Dr. Horace H. Underwood, Advisor, Office of Military Governor, January 23, 1947.

³⁰ The Korean United Fine Arts Exhibition was held in November 1947 at the Kyōngbok Palace, Seoul. The exhibit consisted of sections of Oriental Painting, Western Painting, Posters and Industrial Arts. Most of 63 Western paintings exhibited were

groups. Although approximately eight police were present, they made no effort to restrain or detain any member of the group. And on January 9, a smoke grenade was again thrown to the stage by the same group of thugs. They also posted two signs stating that if the performances continued another twenty-four hours, the actors would be beaten and the theater burned down within a month. Again the police took no steps to apprehend the thugs. Instead they stopped the performance. It was permitted to reopen only after an inflammatory dance had been deleted.³¹ After having investigated the incident, Gilbertson made the following recommendations:

A constructive recommendation [for the Korean theater] might be the creation of a state owned theater. My concern is that such a theater would become a political tool, create further political antagonism, and would in practice tend to drive the people into more extreme and less democratic political camps. A more practical alternative might be the creation of two smaller theaters, one frankly conservative and the other experimental and modern. The healthy conflict of opinion should have a constructive effect.³²

known to be Korean portraits and scenes. See *South Korean Interim Government Activities*, 26 (November 1947), p. 232.

³¹ The incident is described in Warren A. Gilbertson, "Alleged Disturbances at Performances of Chosun Mun Wha Tan Che Chong Yun Maing [AKCOA]," report to Attn. Brig. Gen. Charles Helmick, Office of Military Governor, February 3, 1947, RG 332, Box 64. After attending the performance, Gilbertson even noted "There was a general strain of humor running through the play. The play was certainly not militant."

³² W.A. Gilbertson, "Brief Discussion with Recommendations Regarding Arts and Handcrafts."

As Gilbertson himself acknowledged, his recommendations were based on political considerations. Moreover, they implicitly reveal his support of rightist forces: the conflict of "conservative" versus "modern," which Gilbertson preferred, was tantamount to the theory of art for art's sake supported by right-wing intellectuals, writers, and artists, as opposed to the theory of social-content art supported by left-wingers.³³ From 1947, moreover, the USAMGIK began to use oppressive measures against the leftist movement, driving leftists underground and eventually to North Korea. The measures were so successful that one advisor said of the Korean art scene in an interview: "Artists are inactive in the political fields—they live only for art."³⁴

(3) The Korean Art Scene After Liberation

Immediately after liberation, Korean society was filled with hopes and aspirations for building a new nation and a national culture. In the cultural arena, these aspirations

³³ The discussion of artistic theories was mainly led by writers. See for example Yun-sik Kim, *Theories in Modern Korean Literature* (Seoul: Iljisa, 1992), pp. 373-401; Yŏng-min Kwŏn, *History of Modern Korean Literature* (Seoul: Minŭmsa, 1994), pp. 33-53.

³⁴ Interview with Mr. Lee Seung Hak and Mr. Yu Yung O, Advisors to the Chief of the Fine Arts Section, Bureau of Social Education, Dept. of Educ., Chang Do Kung Palace, June 23, 1948, RG 332, Box 64.

were materialized into the establishment of the Central Conference for the Construction of Korean Culture (CCCKC). Established on August 18, 1945, the CCCKC was a united organization that comprised the Center for the Construction of Korean Literature, the Center for the Construction of Korean Art, and so on. Although the CCCKC was headed by two left-wing writers Hwa Yim and Nam-ch'ŏn Kim, it included in its membership the majority of writers and artists of all ideological leanings in Korea. Its basic policy for cultural activities was put forth in its organ *Munhwa Chosŏn* on August 31:

1. We will demolish the legacies of barbarous and deceitful cultural policy implemented by Japanese imperialism and stage a relentless fight against cultural reactionism.
2. In order to prepare the ground for people's culture, we will struggle to eliminate the remnants and elements of feudal culture, aristocratic culture, and anti-democratic and localist culture.
3. We will draw up all the cultural projects necessary for developing and enhancing a national culture as part of world culture.
4. We will organize a strong united front in order to create people's cooperation in cultural fronts.³⁵

The CCCKC's policy reflects an effort to meet the demands from a broad spectrum of political persuasions. In particular, the extirpation of the remnants of Japanese

³⁵ Quoted in Nam-ch'ŏn Kim, "A Resolved Attitude Toward Constructing National Culture," *Sinch'ŏnji*, 1, 7 (July 1946),

imperialism and the construction of a national culture were the two most important goals supported by both the Right and the Left. With the appearance of the Korean Proletarian Art Federation,³⁶ however, the Korean cultural scene came to be divided into two opposing camps, one insisting on proletarian art and the other advocating the theory of art for art's sake. In the art scene, the former was represented by the Korean Proletarian Fine Arts Federation, the latter the Chosŏn Artists Association.

Established on September 15, 1945, the Korean Proletarian Fine Arts Federation was headed by the leftist Chu-hong Yi and advocated the creation of a genuine proletarian art and the thorough renunciation of any reactionary art. Mostly composed of unknown artists, however, the organization seems to have laid more emphasis on political activities than on artistic ones.³⁷

p. 135. (Translation by the author. Unless otherwise noted, all Korean texts were translated by the author.)

³⁶ Established on September 30, 1945, it claimed to be a descendant of an organization of the same name, known by its Esperanto acronym KAPF, which had been formed in August 1925 and dissolved on May 15, 1935 by Japanese colonial authorities. It assumed a critical attitude toward the CCKC's ideological ambiguity and advocated the liberation of workers and peasants.

³⁷ For a brief introduction of the Korean Proletarian Fine Arts Federation, see Ku-yŏl Yi, *A Study of Modern Korean Art History* (Seoul: Mijinsa, 1992), pp. 444-45.

Unlike the left-wing organization, the Chosŏn Artists Association, which was founded in November 1945, was composed of a significant number of well-established artists. Headed by Hŭi-dong Ko, who as a pioneer of Western oil painting in Korea, had organized the Society of Calligraphy and Painting,³⁸ a unique art group of Korean artists during the Japanese colonial rule, the Chosŏn Artists Association from the outset clarified its non-political attitude. The Association's goals were "(1) absolutely no interference with politics and maintenance of strict neutrality; (2) a determination to enhance art culture itself; (3) the creation of a national art contributing to building a nation."³⁹ These goals exactly corresponded to the cultural policy of the USAMGIK, which has been discussed earlier. Thus American officials were in favor of the organization and even allowed it to take over a building having been used for an art club by Japanese, which was quite preferential treatment.

Contrary to its declaration of strict political neutrality, its head Ko was more interested in politics than

³⁸ The Society was founded in 1921 and held group exhibitions annually until 1937 when Japanese authorities disbanded it. For Ko's activities before and after liberation, see To-ryŏn Sŏk, "Pioneer of Western Painting in Korea," *Korea Journal* (January 1, 1966), pp. 26-7, 34.

³⁹ Quoted in Ku-yŏl Yi, *A Study of Modern Korean Art History*, p. 445.

in art and participated as a representative of the art scene in the Representative Democratic Council, an advisory body, created by General Hodge, mostly composed of conservative rightists. Ko's political ambition eventually brought about a split of the Chosŏn Artists Association, leaving it a group of extremely conservative right-wing artists. Among the secessionists, some formed the Korean Artists League (KAL) together with members of the Korean Proletarian Fine Arts Federation on February 23, 1946 and others the Korean Plastic Arts League (KPAL) on February 28.

The establishment of the KAL, headed by Chu-gyŏng Kim, who was to go over to North Korea in early 1947 and become president of the Pyŏngyang Art School, seems to have been guided by the Korean Communist Party. The Korean Communists advocated the necessity for a two-stage revolution and asserted that Korea first of all had to undertake a bourgeois democratic revolution. In order to achieve the first stage of the revolution, according to the party, they should "concentrate upon the liquidation of Japanese imperialism," which would remove "the big landlords and monopoly capitalists," and construct a "broad democratic people's front" which included workers, peasants, the revolutionary intelligentsia, and all petty and national bourgeois

elements.⁴⁰ The KAL was part of the efforts to construct such a unified front in the art scene. The League's ties to the Korean Community Party is confirmed in its platform, which is quite similar to that of the North Korean Federation of Literature and Art:⁴¹ (1) the extirpation of the remnants of Japanese imperialism; (2) the renunciation of ultranationalism and decadent trends of art; (3) the construction of a new national art; (4) the exchange with international art; (5) the enlightenment of the masses and cultivation of the younger generation.⁴²

On the other hand, the KPAL, another group of secessionists, was composed of moderates and leftists and

⁴⁰ Quoted in Robert A. Scalapino and Chong-sik Lee, *Communism in Korea, Part I* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), p. 243.

⁴¹ Founded on March 25, 1946, the platform of the North Korean Federation of Literature and Art was (1) the establishment of a national art and culture based on the principles of progressive democracy; (2) the promotion of the national unification of all Korean literary and artistic movements; (3) the extirpation of all anti-democratic and reactionary artistic forces and concepts, be they Japanese imperialist, feudal, treasonous, or fascist; (4) the implementation of a large-scale enlightenment movement for the cultural, creative and artistic development of the masses; (5) the suitable appraisal and appropriation of the nation's cultural heritage; (6) the exchange of our national culture with international culture. For more information on the Federation, see Brian Myers, *Han Sŏrya and North Korean Literature: The Failure of Socialist Realism in the DPRK* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1994), pp. 35-54.

gave priority to artistic activities such as holding a group show and publishing its organ *Plastic Arts*. Its goals, however, were not very different from those of the KAL.⁴³ Ultimately it was to be merged with the KAL to form a new organization Korean Art League on November 10, 1946. "In constructing a democratic national art," one observer wrote, "the merger of the two organizations would firmly form the basis of purging the vestiges of Japanese imperialism and feudal elements, and promoting popularization of art."⁴⁴

While ideological and organizational changes in the postwar Korean art scene occurred with bewildering rapidity, they seems to have had little, if any, effect on artistic practice. As we have seen, the chaotic liberation period would not allow the artists to solely focus on producing works of art; moreover, given the short history of Western-style painting in Korea, which can be traced back to the early 1910s when Hŭi-dong Ko studied Western oil painting at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, it would have been difficult

⁴² Quoted in Ku-yŏl Yi, *A Study of Modern Korean Art History*, p. 451.

⁴³ The KPAL's goals were (1) the construction of a new art and purge of imperialistic, feudal vestiges in art; (2) the resurgence of Korean art, its promotion to the level of world's advanced art, and cooperation in building an independent, democratic Korea; (3) initiation of artistic enlightenment movement and infiltration of art into the masses; (4) unification of artistic organizations.

for them to formulate modes of art suitable for their ideologies, be they political or artistic. Nevertheless, they were eagerly engaged in debates on artistic matters such as the construction of a national art, the relationship between art and society, and the attitude toward traditional culture. In the process, artists and intellectuals revealed two fundamentally different attitudes toward those issues.

First, both the Right and the Left insisted on a purge of vestiges of Japanese imperialism, and it was understood that the vestiges in the art scene were some pro-Japanese artists and Japanese taste found in the use of dark, opaque colors, particularly in Oriental-style painting. The Right's approach to the issue was vague and emotional. Wrapped up in anti-Japanese sentiments prevalent in Korean society, rightist artists blindly cried for liquidation of all the remnants of Japanese colonial rule. When Ko, chairman of the Chosŏn Artists Association, discussed the future of the Korean art world, thus, all he could say was "our art world will be fine if we clear ourselves of disgraces of the past."⁴⁵ Based on emotions, not reason and historical consciousness, the cry of artists on the Right failed to have

⁴⁴ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 454.

⁴⁵ Hŭi-dong Ko, "The Future of the Korean Art World," *Sinmunye* 1, 1 (December 1945), p. 52.

an echo in the art scene. In contrast, the Left argued that Japanese taste was a reflection of the taste of the privileged classes under the Japanese regime. For the leftist artists, therefore, the liquidation of Japanese taste, that is, the liberation of plastic arts, could be "achieved only through the liberation of politics and economy."⁴⁶

Second, while the Right emphasized the importance of traditional culture in building a new national culture, the Left insisted on the importance of the present as a new beginning. The Right's emphasis on tradition, as has been discussed earlier, was a way to separate culture from politics, ultimately a way to secure a political legitimacy by providing a sense of historical continuity. On the other hand, the Left's insistence on the present signified not only a denial of the hegemony of the past but also a denial of the hegemony of the West.

Finally, while the Right encouraged modern art ranging from Impressionism to abstraction, the Left advocated people's art or social-content art. Such stylistic division was effective, however, only on the theoretical level. In reality, artists of different styles were associated with

⁴⁶ Hŭi-sun Yun, *A Study of Korean Art* (1946), quoted in Kwang-su Oh, *History of Contemporary Korean Art* (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 1979), p. 113.

both camps. For instance, the membership of the Korean Art League included Yongsŏn Park, vice-chairman of the League, who was criticized for his "pure art showing an attitude of art-making without self-criticism," and Kyu-sang Yi, one of the pioneers of abstract art in Korea, who was denounced for "an uncritical attitude unsuitable for the atmosphere."⁴⁷

Although works of art from this period have rarely survived, the work of Kwae-dae Yi can be regarded as representative of the liberation period (1945-1950). Mostly composed of a group of people set in an unspecified space, Yi's works superbly captured the hopes and aspirations of the Korean people at the moment. For example, his *Group* of 1948 (fig. 1-1) comprises approximately thirty figures, divided into three layers. In the background, a number of people in a variety of postures evoke the sufferings of the Korean people under Japanese colonial rule and their struggle against it. In particular, a woman raising her arms would remind any Koreans of Kwan-sun Yu, who as a highschool girl, stood in the vanguard of the March First Independence Movement in 1919 and died in prison. In the middleground two groups of figures opposing each other appear to signify ideologically polarized

⁴⁷ Ch'ang-hwan Oh, "The Birth of a New Man: The First Korean Art League Exhibition," *Paekje* (February 1947), quoted in Ku-yŏl Yi, *A Study of Modern Korean Art History*, pp. 455-56.

Korean society right after liberation, and those who were sitting and lying around the two groups, including four figures in the foreground, would probably be victims of the conflict. Even in those sufferings and confusion, Yi reveals his belief in a bright future of the Korean people symbolized by a baby reaching for the breast in the center.

In Korean history, the liberation period was a unique moment in which Korean people could dream of building a new culture and a new nation and trying to materialize the dreams. In this sense, intellectuals, writers, and artists of the period can be said to have been pregnant with the consciousness of the avant-garde in its original sense, implying both innovation and revolution.⁴⁸ With the presence of the U.S. and Soviet troops, however, Korean society came to be polarized into two conflicting camps, ultimately two politically opposing countries. The political division at least in theory meant the geographical dissolution of the concept of the avant-garde into artistic innovation for South Korea and political revolution for North Korea. Yet, both Koreas even failed to work out the respective aspects of the avant-garde. While political revolution in North Korea turned

⁴⁸ On the history of the term "avant-garde," see Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald

into dictatorship, artistic creativity in South Korea stiffened to conservative academism. It was only after the emergence of *Informel* art of the late 1950s and 1960s, which will be discussed in Chapter V, that the Korean art scene witnessed the rebirth of the avant-garde.

Fitzgerald (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968).

Chapter II

The Korean War and the Art World

The Korean War began on June 25, 1950, when North Korean forces crossed the 38th parallel and attacked South Korea. By late July North Korean forces overran the entire section of South Korea except a small area surrounding the port of Pusan at the southeastern tip of the peninsula. With the Inch'on landing, which was carried out under the command of General MacArthur on September 15, the war was to take a surprising turn. Within a few days, Seoul was recaptured, and by the end of September, nearly all territory south of the 38th parallel was under United Nations control. At this point, the United States and South Korea decided to forcibly reunite North and South Korea, and began to cross the 38th parallel in early October. Major sections of North Korea were rapidly overrun, and by the third week of November, American forces reached the Yalu River, the border between North Korea and China. However, a violent Chinese counteroffensive began on November 25, and by mid-December Chinese and North Korean forces had recaptured almost all of North Korea. On January 4, 1951 United Nations forces were again forced to evacuate Seoul, which was recaptured in mid-March. By the end of March, the battle line stood roughly along the 38th parallel. On July 10, truce talks began at Panmunjom; the truce agreement was finally signed on July 27, 1953.

Ever since its outbreak, the Korean War has been the object of scholarly attention to reveal its military, political, diplomatic, and cultural aspects. A recently published book *The Korean War: Handbook of the Literature and Research* introduces major works on several topics associated with the Korean War.¹ However, the response of the art world to the war has never been discussed. In this chapter, I will examine the MOMA's 1951 exhibition "Korea: The Impact of War in Photographs," Pablo Picasso's *Massacre in Korea* of 1951 and *War* of 1952, and David Smith's *Parallel 42* of 1953. Interestingly, these works, all done during the war, reveal polarized attitudes toward it and have a lot to do with the war situation at the moment.

(1) The Korean War and The Museum of Modern Art

On February 13, 1951, when American forces were struggling to recapture the city of Seoul in Korea, The Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) opened a photography exhibition entitled "Korea: The Impact of War in Photographs." Organized by Edward Steichen, director of the Department of Photography, the exhibition included 75 enlargements from negatives by 25 photographers for *Life* magazine, the Associated Press, Acme, International News Photos, and by the Army, Navy, Air Corps and the Marine Corps. Well received and attended, the

¹ Lester H. Brune, ed., *The Korean War: Handbook of the*

exhibition vividly showed the audience the war's impact on soldiers and civilians.

It is hard to understand, however, why the MOMA had to be in such a hurry as to mount an exhibition of the war with photographs from newspapers and popular magazines which were reporting on the very war on a daily basis. Was it really a matter of great urgency to show museumgoers horrible scenes of war? According to Steichen's comment on the exhibition, it was:

Human nobility, compassion, devotion, inexhaustible endurance, senselessness and brutality are scrambled together under the impact of war.... An artist with a camera gives us the beautiful timeless image of a young mother, nursing her baby, as she flees from the advancing armies[;] another creates the haunting photograph of a young Marine whispering a prayer for a tomorrow as he eats his frozen ration. Another print reveals swarms of people, from an evacuating city, crawling like ants over the smashed and twisted girders of a bombed bridge. Here are *photographs with something important to say and they say it.*² (the author's italics)

Looking back upon his MOMA days, Steichen clarified "something important to say" as an antiwar campaign.³ Indeed, an examination of the photographs included in the exhibition

Literature and Research (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996).

² MOMA press release for the exhibition, May 18, 1951. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York: Department of Circulating Exhibition, II .I/ 56 (12).

³ But he regarded the campaign as a failure: "Although I had presented war in all its grimness in three exhibitions, I had failed to accomplish my mission. I had not incited people into taking open and united action against war itself." Edward

reveals that the exhibition was filled with scenes of soldiers and civilians dying and wounded, withdrawing and fleeing. In particular, it focuses on the critical moment of the Korean War when MacArthur's "Home-by-Christmas"⁴ attack was frustrated, when American forces were forced to withdraw hurriedly to the south. The caption for David Douglas Duncan's "Marine with Can of Frozen Beans" (fig. 2-1) eloquently speaks of the war situation of the moment:

Dawn had just grayed the winter sky. Marines were trying to eat something from their frozen rations. This young Marine seemed to portray them all, in his numb frigid misery--a man so cold that his face had lost even the expression of survival. Asking him what he would have wanted had it been Christmas, he looked up from his iced can of beans, tried to make his lips form some words, failed, then tried again--and mumbled, "Give me tomorrow."⁵

In short, Duncan's Marine is speaking for all American forces who were retreating in such a hurry that they did not even have time to heat up their iced can of beans, whose hope for "home by Christmas" was crushed to pieces. Contemporary response to the exhibition also emphasizes this urgent situation which the American troops had to go through. In his

Steichen, *A Life in Photography* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963), n.p.

⁴ On October 24, 1950, General MacArthur gave all units the go-ahead to the Yalu River, thinking that the war would be over in two weeks. This gave to the advance its name of home-by-Christmas offensive.

⁵ "Korea: Caption Material." The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York: Department of Circulating Exhibition, II .I/ 56 (12).

review for *The New York Times*, for example, Jacob Deschin wrote: "This is what war is like in Korea. This is the way people look and act in a time of mortal crisis. When forced to flee from their homes in terror and uncertainty, here is how people behave. In the face of great suffering and death, it is like this that people respond to one another's needs."⁶

Furthermore, public opinion on the Korean War was getting worse at the moment. When President Harry S. Truman decided to commit American military forces to defend South Korea, the majority of Americans sustained the decision. As the war dragged on, however, more and more Americans became disillusioned with the war, and their support changed to opposition. This is clearly evident in surveys of public opinion conducted by The American Institute of Public Opinion. The Institute asked those sampled to answer the question, "Do you think the United States made a mistake in going in to the war in Korea, or not?"⁷ In August 1950, 66 percent of the respondents felt that the United States did the right thing by intervening in Korea. By January 1951, when American forces were under the attack of Chinese forces, however, 49 percent

⁶ Jacob Deschin, "Pictures from Korea," *The New York Times*, February 18, 1951, sec. 2, p. 17.

⁷ For the survey results, see John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973), pp. 44-8.

believed American intervention was a mistake. There was little doubt that by early 1951 the Korean War was no longer popular.

All these observations seem to confirm Steichen's recollection that the exhibition was an antiwar campaign. Considering the war exhibitions he had organized before, however, it is unlikely that in "Korea: The Impact of War in Photographs," Steichen attempted to incite people to take united action against war. In "The Road to Victory" (1942) and "Power in Pacific" (1945), for example, Steichen had produced dramatic accounts of World War II, evoking the idea that the United States would win the war because of the justice of its cause, and its military power and prowess.⁸ In his article "The Family of Man," thus, John Szarkowski noted:

It seems that in Steichen's memory, his mission had shifted over the years that separated the events from their recollection in his memoir. Certainly with reference to the two exhibitions produced during the hostilities of World War II, an attempt to incite people to take open and united action against war itself would have been a serious offense even for a civilian.⁹

⁸ Keeping the patriotic aspect of Steichen's war exhibitions in mind, Christopher Phillips sought to describe the exhibition as a way to stress the image of American military power. In "Korea: The Impact of War in Photographs," according to him, "doubts about dispatching American soldiers to distant regional battles are acknowledged ... only to be neutralized in an exhibition setting that emphasized stirring images of American military might." Christopher Phillips, "The Judgment Seat of Photography," in Annette Michelson, Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp, and Joan Copjec eds., *October: The First Decade, 1976-1986* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1987), p. 276.

⁹ John Szarkowski, "'The Family of Man,'" in John Elderfield, ed., *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: At Home and Abroad* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1994), p. 19.

Then why did Steichen suddenly change his attention from the images of American military power to the scenes of soldiers and civilians dying and wounded, withdrawing and fleeing? In order to understand the change, it is important to see how the failure of the "home-by-Christmas" offensive was considered in the United States.

In a statement at his press conference on November 30, 1950, right after the failure of the offensive, President Truman pointed out that Chinese Communist intervention in Korea was a part of a world-wide pattern of Russo-Chinese Communist aggression which threatened not only the fabric of the United States but the safety of its members individually. According to him, the struggle in Korea thus became "not merely a campaign in a far-distant land but a fight for our own national security and survival."¹⁰ In the same context, David Laurence, editor of *U.S. News and World Report*, enumerated the reasons why American youth should be on the battlefields of Korea:

Because the sacrifice being made in Korea can save millions of young men now at home ... sparing them the necessity of fighting another world war....

Because America sees in the Korean war a challenge to freedom everywhere....

Because America cannot allow the aggressor to come by sea or air or land to our shores. If aggression were to be successful in Korea, the Russian-Chinese alliance could then invade Japan and its northern islands and

¹⁰ "Mr. Truman Sums Up," *The New York Times*, December 1, 1950, p. 24.

secure air bases for attack on nearby Alaska. If Northwest territory were threatened, so would our own Pacific Coast cities be threatened, too....¹¹

Without the conservative view of Chinese intervention, as a consequence of McCarthyism, many Americans felt it was too risky to voice their criticisms of the war. Furthermore, since the Communist Party repudiated the Korean War, any public disavowal of the Truman administration's foreign policy might have been misconstrued as sympathizing with Communism. In this sense, the MOMA's focus on the image of losing American forces can be seen as a way to reveal the sufferings caused by the Chinese Communists, thereby condemning their intervention in Korea and enhancing the public support for the war. And it is quite consistent with the past activities of the MOMA that tried to serve as a cultural weapon for national defense to "educate, inspire, and strengthen the hearts and wills of free men in defense of their own freedom,"¹² and engaged in a number of wartime cultural programs.¹³

Curiously enough, after closing the exhibition on 21 April 1951, the MOMA was to find out that Picasso showed a picture entitled *Massacre in Korea* (fig. 2-2) in the 1951

¹¹ David Lawrence, "Why Is My Son in Korea?" *U.S. News and World Report*, XXX, 11 (March 16, 1951), p. 78.

¹² Quoted in Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), p. 233.

¹³ Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum*, 12, 10 (June 1974), pp. 39-41.

Salon de Mai. Inspired by reports of American atrocities during the Korean War, the painting shows a group of naked women and children facing execution by heavily armed soldiers. The news threw the New York art scene into confusion and embarrassment. Thomas Hess, then managing editor of *Art News*, expresses his confusion in a letter to Alfred Barr, Jr., director of the MOMA, who at the moment was in Vermont probably on a vacation:

Art News has been offered a picture story on some recent Picasso paintings, including one of some soldiers shooting some naked women and children. I have heard that this picture represents American soldiers committing an atrocity on North Korean civilians. Do you know if this is true? Or is it simply an atrocity of war picture—reminiscent of Goya's 3 May? Alfred Frankfurter heard somewhere that it was painted specifically as a piece of communist propaganda—a rumor that had passed me by. We feel rather honor-bound to publish it as a story, but are quite reluctant to get into the various political problems unless we know exactly what they are; i.e., is the artist actually taking on an active political role, or simply commenting as an artist on a world situation?¹⁴

Handwritten on both sides of Hess's letter, Barr's reply was:

"Massacre in Korea...: This big picture was shown publicly this showing (Bell L. will know what Salon) under the title. It was generally considered an anti-American propaganda pic[ture] though Picasso might deny this as he denied that the

¹⁴ Thomas Hess, letter to Alfred Barr, August 31, 1951. The Archives of American Art, New York: Alfred Hamilton Barr Papers, Roll 2178 (0066).

Guernica was political."¹⁵ Both Hess's letter and Barr's answer reveal that the New York art scene was well acquainted with *Massacre in Korea*.¹⁶ Particularly Barr's answer suggests that the MOMA would have obtained the knowledge of the painting directly from the 1951 Salon de Mai. Thus it is possible that the MOMA's knowledge of Picasso's work might have affected its decision to circulate the exhibition "Korea: The Impact of War in Photographs." The exhibition was circulated to New York, New Jersey, Florida, Virginia, and Vermont during the period of June to November of 1951.¹⁷ This tour attracted a large number of crowds and public favor.

¹⁵ Alfred Barr, letter to Thomas Hess. The Archives of American Art, New York: Alfred Hamilton Barr Papers, Reel 2178 (0066-0067).

¹⁶ In his article on a visit to Picasso's studio, Joseph H. Barry, manager of the New York Times Sunday Department bureau in Paris, also describes the work: "At the studio, Picasso pulled out a large, magnificent study for the chapel and placed it in the light. It is a long, rectangular canvas primarily in grays, whites, and blacks against a sparse, green landscape. On the left is a group of huddled nude women, some of them pregnant, one of them wearing the same broken expression as Picasso's 1938 "Crying Woman." A child flees from the right where abstract figures decked in medieval armor to the waist—and otherwise nude—point multi-barreled, stylized muskets at the women on the left." Barry, "The Two Picassos: Politician and Painter," *The New York Times Magazine*, May 6, 1951, p. 33.

¹⁷ Curiously enough, the exhibition was circulated under the title "Faces of Korea," which literally refers to three portraits of Koreans included in it: a boy, an old man, and the President of Korea. It is not known why the exhibition title changed. It seems that the MOMA sought to avoid a direct reference to the Korean War in the face of adverse public opinion.

Among the comments, which Marie Schenck, art director of Miami Beach Art Center, published in her publicity report, is a patron's words, which clearly reveal the underlying intention of the exhibition: "I'll cheerfully pay my taxes after seeing this."¹⁸

(2) The Korean War and Pablo Picasso

Pablo Picasso had already been obsessed with the problem of war and its disasters for years before the Korean War, as is evident in his work such as *Guernica* and *le Charnier*. Thus it is not unusual that Picasso took up the Korean conflict for the subject for his *Massacre in Korea*.¹⁹ What is unusual, however, is that Picasso's view of the war was predetermined by his political conviction.

Picasso emerged from World War II as a declared Communist. He explained his conversion in a statement for *New Masses*:

My joining the Communist Party is a logical step in my life, my work and gives them their meaning. Through design and color, I have tried to penetrate into a knowledge of the world and of men so that this knowledge might free us. In my own way I have always

¹⁸ A publicity report of Marie Schenck for the Miami Beach Art Center. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York: Department of Circulating Exhibitions, II. I/ 56 (12).

¹⁹ It is not clear exactly when Picasso started to work on *Massacre in Korea*. Claude Roy, who saw a lot of Picasso at the time, asserts that in September 1950 he was working on something called *Korea*. Claude Roy, *Picasso: La Guerre et la Paix* (Paris: Éditions du Cercle d'Art, 1953), p. 11.

said what I considered most true, most just and best and, therefore, most beautiful. During the oppression and the insurrection I felt that that was not enough, that I had to fight not only with painting but with my whole being.... I have become a Communist because our party strives more than any other to know and to build the work, to make men clearer thinkers, more free and more happy.... because the Communists are the bravest in France, in the Soviet Union, as they are in my own country, Spain. I have never felt more free, more complete than since I joined.²⁰

Picasso was committed to the Communist cause, doing chores for the Communists during the years between 1944 and 1953: he would produce illustrations for Communist newspapers like *l'Humanité*, and attend the Peace Congresses, which were the cornerstones of the French Communist Party's Peace Movement, a crusade designed to feed anti-American passions and increase pro-Communist sentiments;²¹ especially selected by Louis Aragon as emblem of the Peace Congress held in Paris in 1949, Picasso's dove became the symbol of the Peace Congresses.²² In reward for his efforts for the Peace Movement, Picasso was even awarded the Stalin Peace Prize in November 1950.

²⁰ Pablo Picasso, "Why I Became a Communist," *New Masses*, LIII, 4 (October 24, 1944), p. 11.

²¹ Picasso attended the Peace Congresses held in Wroclaw, Poland (1948), Paris, France (1949), Sheffield, England (1950), and Rome, Italy (1951). David Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), p. 188.

²² Pierre Cabanne, *Pablo Picasso: His Life and Times*, trans. Harold J. Salemson (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1977), pp. 407, 409.

Thus, when the Korean War broke out in June 1950, Picasso would probably have had no doubt of the French Communist Party's positions on the war: that South Korea launched the first attack, and American forces were committing atrocities in Korea. Glossing over the fact that North Korea was universally believed to have started the conflict, French Communists condemned America for intervening in the war, and circulated reports of atrocities committed by American soldiers in Korea. In this process, they could pose as the champions of peace and national independence.²³ The Korean War was also the topic of debate at the Peace Congress held in Sheffield and Warsaw in 1950. In a speech delivered at the congress, Alexander Fadeyev stated:

Under our eyes, literally in a couple of months, an immense country, governed by men bursting with all the wealth and all the earthly goods, has transformed another country of thirty million inhabitants with a centuries-old past, into a heap of ruins, in dust and ashes.... The country bathes in the blood of children.²⁴

²³ James Lord, *Picasso and Dora: A Personal Memoir* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1993), pp. 75-6; Cauter, *Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960*, pp. 190-91.

²⁴ *Compte rendu du deuxième Congrès Mondial des Partisans de la Paix, Varsovie, November 16-22, 1950*, p. 4, quoted and translated in Gertje R. Utley, "Picasso and the 'Parti de la renaissance française': The Artist as a Communist, 1944-1953," (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1997), p. 495. Furthermore, Picasso might have heard of the war directly from North Koreans. North Korean delegates, including Sōrya Han, chairman of Federation of Literature and Art, attended the Peace Congresses and met with Picasso. Myers, *Han Sōrya and North Korean Literature*, p. 51.

As Andrea Feeser pointed out in her dissertation, thus, it would be naive to think that *Massacre in Korea* functioned merely as a general statement about the horrors of war.²⁵ Indeed, the topic itself is said to have been supplied by the Communist Party,²⁶ and contemporary Communist discussion of anti-Americanism, in which America was identified with technology which was in turn associated with war and destruction, could have helped recognize the dehumanized and heavily armed soldiers as Americans.²⁷ Thus David Caute wrote of the canvas: "there is little doubt that it was the U.N. troops, rather than both armies, whom it indicted."²⁸

²⁵ Andrea Feeser, "The Recuperated Radical: Pablo Picasso and the Debate on Art and Politics in France, 1942-1962," (Ph.D. dissertation, The City University of New York, 1996), p. 91.

²⁶ See Utley, "Picasso and the 'Parti de la renaissance francaise'," p. 501. And Jean-Paul Crespelle maintained that "Les <<Massacres de Corée>> lui ont été suggérés par le parti communiste." Jean-Paul Crespelle, *Picasso, les femmes, les amis, l'oeuvre* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1967), p. 262. Roland Penrose also wrote: "His communist friends had grown to expect a gesture from him condemning this new outbreak of violence, and it was hoped that he would paint a picture which could be used to blame the Western powers as aggressors." Roland Penrose, *Picasso: His Life and Work* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), p. 373.

²⁷ For anti-American sentiments in France, see Tony Judt, "America Has Gone Mad: Anti-Americanism in Historical Perspective," in *Past-Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 187-204.

²⁸ Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960*, 191. And according to Utley, "the very fact that Picasso, who before his joining the party had never participated in any official Salons, sent the painting to the Salon de Mai

With *Massacre in Korea*, Picasso might have felt that he fully showed his support for the party. However, the Communists, who wanted to see the valiant resistance of the Koreans, were disappointed at Picasso's focus on the suffering and death of innocent civilians, and dismissed the work as "politically incorrect."²⁹ As Aragon indicates, the Communists could not ascertain whether the victims were North or South Koreans, and the soldiers were Americans or Chinese.³⁰ Thus the French Communist Party almost boycotted it, and tried to mention it as little as possible.³¹ John Berger even wrote that "the effect is almost the opposite of what he intended."³² However, Picasso himself denied that the painting was anti-American propaganda: "To call up the face of war I

confirms his desire to provide public exposure for his canvas and his political position." Utley, "Picasso and the 'Parti de la renaissance française'," p. 506.

²⁹ Cited in Hélène Parmelin, *Picasso Plain: An Intimate Portrait*, trans. Humphrey Hare (London: Secker & Warburg, 1959), p. 192

³⁰ "Ces Coréens massacrés pouvaient être du Nord ou du Sud, et ces guerriers aux fusils compliqués être des Américains ou des Chinois." Louis Aragon, *L'Exemple de Courbet* (Paris: Éditions Cercle d'Art, 1952), p. 72; See also Parmelin, *Picasso Plain*, p. 192.

³¹ For the criticisms leveled against *Massacre in Korea*, see Pierre Daix, *Picasso: Life and Work*, trans. Olivia Emmet (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), p. 305; Parmelin, *Picasso Plain*, p. 192-3.

³² John Berger, *The Success and Failure of Picasso*, updated and with a new preface (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), p. 114.

have never thought of any particular trait, only that of monstrosity. Still less of the helmet or uniform of the American or any other army. I have nothing against the Americans. I am on the side of men, of all men."³³

In the middle of 1952, when he was making drawings for the two walls of a deconsecrated chapel in Vallauris, Picasso again took up the Korea War as his subject for the *War* panel (fig. 2-3), thereby making another bid for winning the recognition and approval of the party. He had been offered the walls of the chapel to decorate on 6 August 1950, when he presented his sculpture *The Man with a Lamb* to the town of Vallauris. While working on the murals during the summer of 1952, he was determined to make "a fighting work against war," not "a massacre of the innocents."³⁴ The facts that Picasso made 278 preparatory sketches for the project and quickly made them public reveal the degree to which Picasso had been affected by the failure of *Massacre in Korea*.³⁵ And Parmelin recalls that Picasso often told visitors that she and Edouard Pignon, who spent that summer with Picasso in Vallauris, were there to make sure that he followed the party line. She also recounts that while working on *War and Peace*, Picasso asked

³³ Picasso, reprinted in Dore Ashton, *Picasso on Art: A Selection of Views* (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), p. 158.

³⁴ Parmelin, *Picasso Plain*, p. 54.

³⁵ Pierre Daix, *Picasso: Life and Work*, p. 307.

them why *Massacre in Korea* had not been successful, in the hope of avoiding the same faults.³⁶

Although no one could see Picasso work, he seems to have had a carefully planned schedule. When he finally showed his studio to a few friends after the completion of *War and Peace* in October, what caught their attention was a calendar:

Finally one day in October...the doors were opened and a few friends were allowed in for the first time. The panels were finished. On a table by the door stood an alarm clock and a calendar on which the date of his beginning was marked and two months mapped out in advance. To the astonishment of all, for no one had ever realized that he was capable of such precision in timing, he had kept his programme to a day.³⁷

Once he attacked the murals, thus, Picasso could work with such unprecedented speed that he told Jean Leymarie with excitement that "no house painter could cover such a surface in so short a time."³⁸ Although Picasso had no sketch of the whole, every element of *War* seems to have been carefully calculated to show American atrocities and Chinese valor.³⁹ In the *War* panel, a horned war monster scatters the insects or germs of biological warfare, while carrying a sack of skulls

³⁶ Parmelin, *Picasso Plain*, pp. 20, 193.

³⁷ Penrose, *Picasso: His Life and Work*, p. 376.

³⁸ Picasso, cited in Cabanne, *Pablo Picasso*, p. 427.

³⁹ However, Vallentin argues: "When he began to transpose his vision of *War and Peace* on to the panels, the result seemed, and in part was in fact due to improvisation.... The most

on his back and a blood-soaked dagger in his right hand. And his horses pulling the carriage trample books emblematic of civilization, while the black shadows of soldiers are swinging their weapons in the background. On the left rises a heroic nude, the "peace-warrior," with a shield adorned with a dove, the symbol of the Communist Peace Movement, holding a scales of justice and a lance. With the advent of the "peace-warrior," the procession of the war monster is about to be stopped.

A careful examination of *War* reveals that Picasso brought to the fore two crucial events of the war, which the Communists could exploit as propaganda materials: MacArthur's "home-by-Christmas" offensive and germ warfare. As I have described earlier, MacArthur's "home-by-Christmas" offensive refers to the moment when United Nations forces began to advance toward the Yalu River, the border between North Korea and China, in late November 1950. As indicated in the procession of the war monster which covers four-fifths of the picture plane, United Nations forces at the moment had occupied almost all the Korean peninsula except the areas bordering China and the Soviet Union (fig. 2-4).⁴⁰ Believing that the United Nations forces could destroy all resisting

impressive part of the picture of *War* was entirely improvised...at the last moment." Vallentin, *Picasso*, p. 246.

armed forces in North Korea and end the war in two weeks, General MacArthur finally gave the order of a movement toward the Yalu River, on 24 November 1950. The confrontation of the "peace-warrior" and the war monster in *War* clearly conveys the tense situation of the moment. And it would be no coincidence that there is a vertical burst of blue between them, which was probably meant to refer to the Yalu River.⁴¹ However, the movement toward the Yalu met a massive Chinese counteroffensive, as the "peace-warrior" in the *War* implies, and caused heavy casualties, which Picasso subtly disregarded by portraying the warrior as a defensive guardian of peace.

Germ warfare is another way in which Picasso chose to associate the war monster with the United States. The Communist accusations of germ warfare began early in 1951 and continued through 1952 until the truce was signed on July 27, 1953. The Communists truly believed that American forces were engaging in bacteriological warfare in North Korea and Manchuria by dropping canisters of infected insects from

⁴⁰ The 1st Marine Division attained the Yalu on November 21, to become the only United States troops ever reached the river.

⁴¹ No one did pay serious attention to the blue area of the *War* panel. Boggs saw it just as a protection "from the vision of the nightmare of war," while Utley simply described it as "the blue azure of a sunny Mediterranean day." See Jean Sutherland Boggs, "The Last Thirty Years," in Roland Penrose and John Golding, eds., *Picasso in Retrospect* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973), p. 134; Utley, "Picasso and the 'Parti de la renaissance francaise'," p. 520.

airplanes.⁴² They were so sincere that one correspondent for *Life* expressed his perplexity: "Rarely have they stressed such a ridiculous theme so long, rarely so bitterly."⁴³ A report published in *Time* shows the degree to which the Communists were denouncing germ warfare:

Across the world, Communism waged germ warfare against the mind of man. In Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Minsk, in almost every city, town, village and collective farm in the U.S.S.R., workers and farmers were pulled from their jobs for mass inoculations of the fiction that the U.S. is deluging the Korean and Chinese Communists with bacteriological weapons. Peking newspapers printed photographic 'proof' of weird insects and rotting food. So did London's *Daily Worker*. The editors of the New York *Daily Worker* joined in the cry against their own countrymen. In Italy, in France, in Belgium, Holland and West Germany there were Communist protest parades.⁴⁴

Although the United States dismissed the germ warfare charges as propaganda designed to prepare against epidemics in Korea and China, or an effort to whip up support for a break-off of truce talks, there was a reason for the Communists to be so persistent. The Japanese germ warfare experiments were

⁴² For the history of germ warfare and its relationship with the United States, see Marcel Prenant and Georges Teissier, "La guerre bactériologique a-t-elle commencé?" *La Pensée*, 42-43 (May-June, July-August 1952), pp. 5-32; Prenant and Teissier, "Oui, la guerre bactériologique a commencé," *La Pensée*, 45 (November-December 1952), pp. 25-33; and Albert E. Cowdrey, *United States Army in the Korean War: The Medics' War* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1987), pp. 217-27.

⁴³ *Life*, 7 April 1952, p. 52.

⁴⁴ *Time*, 7 April 1952, p. 30.

of great importance not only in shaping the views of the Communists but also in raising durable suspicions of Americans. By the late 1930s Japan's germ warfare experiments were considerably advanced and being employed against Chinese troops and civilians, which were comparable to those in Nazi concentration camps.⁴⁵ By 1945 Japan was known to have a huge arsenal of stockpiled germs, vectors and delivery equipment. After the surrender of Japan, American experts working for the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee termed the results of Japan's program "of great value in confirming, supplementing and complimenting several phases of U.S. research."⁴⁶ With the aim of securing exclusive possession of information on the experiments, thus, American officials concealed evidence of the experiments and failed to prosecute Japanese soldiers associated with the experiments for war crimes. During the Korean War when the Communists accused the United States of employing up-dated versions of Japan's earlier biological weapons, they not only denied the charges but also claimed that there was no proof of the earlier Japanese actions,

⁴⁵ The experiments were conducted by a unit of the Kwantung Army under Lt. Gen. Shiro Ishii, known as Unit 731, at Pingfan, Manchuria. For detail, see John W. Powell, "Japan's Germ Warfare: The U.S. Cover-up of a War Crime," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 12, 4 (October-December 1980), pp. 2-17. Powell's article is based on declassified documents, secured under the Freedom of Information Act.

⁴⁶ Cited in Cowdrey, *United States Army in Korean War*, p. 218.

thereby making their rebuttal suspicious. Even without the Japanese germ warfare experiments, as Cowdrey claimed, the germ warfare charges leveled against the United States during the Korean War possessed great emotional power and considerable plausibility "for a variety of reasons—the country's technological bent, its real BW [biological warfare] program."⁴⁷

In France the denunciation of American use of bacteriological weapons provoked violent demonstrations, in particular, immediately after General Matthew Ridgway was nominated as head of the Nato forces in Europe in May 1952. As former United Nations commander in Korea, Ridgway was held to be responsible for the alleged use of bacteriological weapons. Thus his presence in Europe, in the eyes of the Communists, provoked an imminent fear of germ warfare. The Communist press was filled with the accusations that American forces used biological weapons in the Korean War and reports on the protests against Ridgway.⁴⁸ Picasso was well aware of the

⁴⁷ Cowdrey, "'Germ Warfare' and Public Health in the Korean Conflict," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Science*, 39, 2 (April 1984), p. 171.

⁴⁸ According to Utley, Picasso's papers in the archives of the Musée Picasso, Paris, includes a copy of *l'Humanité*, January 10, 1952. Utley, "'Picasso and the 'Parti de la renaissance française'," p. 595n. The newspaper reports that there were 3,500 cases of variola reported in P'yŏngyang, capital of North Korea after the withdrawal of American forces in December 1950: "La délégation coréenne au congrès annuel des microbiologistes hongrois a révélé, au cours d'une conférence

Communist germ warfare charges against the United States and even participated in a protest meeting at the Salle Pleyel.⁴⁹ Thus when Picasso inserted insects of bacteriological warfare in his *War*,⁵⁰ he may have been supporting the Communist positions. While a *New York Times* correspondent saw the reference to germ warfare as "anti-American," the Communist press hailed the work as "symbol-studded mural."⁵¹ In short, as Parmelin described, Picasso "threw in the work his whole

de presse, que 3,500 cas de varirole, dont 358 mortels, avaient été enregistrés à Pieng-Yang, capitale de la République Populaire de Corée, après le repli des troupes américaine, en décembre 1950." *l'Humanité*, January 10, 1952, p. 3. And *l'Humanité* of May 20, 1952 contains reports on meetings against Ridgway and protestations against the interdiction of "Colonel Foster plaidera coupable." *l'Humanité*, May 20, 1952, pp. 2, 3.

⁴⁹ Utley, "Picasso and the 'Parti de la renaissance française'," p. 530.

⁵⁰ Scholars agree that the source for Picasso's insects was contemporary magazines or newspapers. According to Keen, who was the first to associate anti-American sentiments with bacteriological warfare in *War*, photographs in *l'Humanité* were inspiration for Picasso's insects. On the other hand, John Richardson argues that the vermin has been inspired by similarly curious creatures in the margins of Jarry's frontispiece to his *César Antechrist*. Recently Utley presented the Communist periodical *Regards* of April 4, 1952 as another source. See Kirsten Hoving Keen, "Picasso's Communist Interlude: The Murals of 'War' and 'Peace'," *The Burlington Magazine*, CXXII, 928 (July 1980), p. 468; John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso, Volume 1: 1881-1906* (New York: Random House, 1991), pp. 364, 366; and Utley, "Picasso and the 'Parti de la renaissance française'," p. 532.

⁵¹ See Alain B. Louchheim, "Propaganda and Picasso," *The New York Times Magazine*, May 17, 1953, p. 14; and "Murals from the Party," *Time*, June 1, 1953, p. 73.

heart and soul as Communist."⁵² After his portrait of Stalin of 1953 was officially condemned by the French Communist Party, however, Picasso's enthusiasm for Communism cooled.⁵³

(3) The Korean War and David Smith

David Smith produced *Parallel 42* (fig. 2-5) on 26 February 1953, when the peace talks at Panmunjom, Korea, were at a standstill. Executed in steel, the sculpture shows a small silhouette of the Korean peninsula at top surrounded by a couple of ominously protruding shapes. Designed to be suspended from above, the macabre image was interpreted by Edward F. Fry, the only critic who commented on it, as "a tragic memento of the last phases of the Korean War."⁵⁴ It is doubtful, however, that Smith conceived the sculpture just as "a memento" of the war. As Dorothy Dehner argued, Smith always committed himself on social, political events:

Smith was seasoned in his role of protester, both by political events and by the quality of his own nature. Always a rebel, always a pioneer, always outspoken, it was not even half a step to move from his avant-garde

⁵² Hélène Parmelin, "Picasso, La Guerre et La Paix," *l'Humanité Dimanche*, May 17, 1953, p. 1.

⁵³ For the Stalin portrait affair, see The Barbican Centre for Arts and Conferences, *Aftermath: France 1945-54, New Images of Man*, exh. cat. (Paris, 1982), p. 46; Louis Aragon, "Sur un portrait de Staline," *Les Lettres françaises*, 459 (April 2, 1953), reprinted in *Écrits sur l'art moderne* (Paris: Flammarion, 1981), p. 110-12.

⁵⁴ Edward F. Fry, *David Smith* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1969), p. 86.

position of an abstract artist employing an innovative new welding technique, to stating bold and challenging credos about the ills of the world.⁵⁵

When it comes to war, particularly, Smith clarified his attitude. According to Dehner, he was "outspoken in support of the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War; he supported the revolutionaries in China, and ultimately supported World War II, although he deplored it, blaming the imperialist powers for getting the world into period holocausts."⁵⁶ Indeed, influenced by John Graham, who was politically, as well as artistically, radical during the 1930s, Smith was a staunch supporter of radical causes. Smith and Dehner even visited the Soviet Union. In an interview with Katharine Kuh, he explained his position: "I believe in any revolutionary idea when it's necessary—in any push against what I believe is wrong. You do it in defense of your own convictions, even if you feel it won't work. Revolutionary action is never lost. Something comes out of it finally."⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Dorothy Dehner, "Medals for Dishonor--The Fifteen Medallions of David Smith," *Art Journal*, XXXVII, 2 (Winter 1977-78), p. 146.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 145. In a letter to Marian Willard dated December 10, 1941, Smith wrote: "What I point out are ills of war--the contradictions of a society--the forces that profit from death. I never meant that I was against all war--a war for freedom, for revolution is another matter." Smith, quoted in Miranda McClint, *David Smith: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Collection*, exh. cat. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1979), p. 12.

Given Smith's support of radical causes, it is not surprising that he obsessively dealt with themes of war and other social evils in his work during the 1940s. Starting with the fifteen *Medals for Dishonor* (1939-40), which he created as a protest against the political, economic, and military injustices of the pre-war world, Smith's interest in war themes continued throughout the 1940s in a series of war spectres. According to Robert S. Lubar, who thoroughly analyzed Smith's war themes, such pieces as the *Medals for Dishonor*, *False Peace Spectre* (1945), and *Jurassic Bird* (1945) are closely related to the events of the period when the sculptures were executed. For instance, the *Medals for Dishonor*, began in reaction to World War II as it was just unfolding, represents a premonition of future evils; *False Peace Spectre*, executed in June 1945 after Germany's surrender, is a powerful indictment against American imperialism; and *Jurassic Bird*, made at the very end of World War II, represents Smith's response to the Atomic Age, to the nuclear detonations at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Katharine Kuh, *Talks with Seventeen Artists* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), p. 222.

⁵⁸ See Robert S. Lubar, "Metaphor and Meaning in David Smith's *Jurassic Bird*," *Arts Magazine*, 59 (September 1984), pp. 78-86. The suggestion that *Jurassic Bird* is Smith's response to the Atomic Age was first made by Jeffrey Weiss in his article "Science and Primitivism: A Fearful Symmetry in the Early New York School," *Arts Magazine*, 57, 7 (March 1983), p. 86.

In this context it is not unreasonable to suppose that Parallel 42 might have something to do with contemporary development of the Korean War. The war situation in the summer of 1952 can be summarized as a military stalemate on the battlefield and a verbal impasse at the peace talks at Panmunjom. In an attempt to produce concessions from North Korea and China, American forces continued bombing raids on dams and power facilities along the Yalu River. A photograph published in the 7 July 1952 issue of *Life* captures a dramatic moment of actual bombing on the Yalu installations (fig. 2-6).⁵⁹ As we have seen, the Communists used these bombing raids as evidence of American atrocities and bacteriological warfare. In the United States, on the other hand, opposition to the war reached its zenith by mid-1952 and became the crucial issue in the Presidential election in November 1952. Eisenhower's election to the presidency lay in his implied promise to terminate America's participation in Korea. His plan to terminate the war included the use of nuclear weapons.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *Life*, July 7, 1952, p. 27.

⁶⁰ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower, Vol. 2: The President* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), pp. 34-5. According to Richard Rhodes, nine Mark IV nuclear capsules had been in the custody of the United States Air Force for possible use against the Chinese by April 10, 1951. See Rhodes, *Dark Sun*, p. 450.

Probably Smith might have felt that all the events were repeating his premonition represented in the *Medals for Dishonor*. Among the series are medals such as *Propaganda for War, Bombing Civilian Populations, Sinking Hospital and Refugee Ships, and Death by Bacteria*, which can be considered exact descriptions of the Korean War. Especially the news of germ warfare allegedly waged in Korea might have reminded Smith of *Death by Bacteria*. In the caption for the medal, he expressed the fear of germ warfare:

Gloved hands hold test tubes emitting froth of bacteria disseminated from the music harp symbolizing death music. The foetus is balanced on the harp column—rats for cultures—germs pour from flasks—music bars provide places for notes and rat dung to rest. From a flask the culture eats the earth in furrows—the dead lie in seas marked by common crosses.⁶¹

All things considered, it is quite possible that Smith's attitude toward the Korean War would have been similar to Picasso's. It is not surprising if we consider the facts that he supported the revolutionaries in China and indicted American imperialism in his *False Peace Spectre* of 1945. More convincing evidence of the argument can be found in Smith's choice of the title *Parallel 42*. As we have seen, the Korean War started when North Korean forces crossed the 38th parallel; during the peace talks, there were fierce battles

⁶¹ David Smith, *Medals for Dishonor*, exh. cat., with foreword by William Blake and Christina Stead (New York: Willard

along the parallel; and finally the cease-fire was signed with the parallel as the armistice line. The 38th parallel was almost the symbol of the Korean War.⁶² Smith's sudden attention to the 42nd parallel thus means that he studied the war very carefully and sought to address it in his own terms. In this context it is significant that the 42nd parallel refers to the latitude of the source of the Yalu River. During the Korean War the Yalu River was frequently associated with aggressiveness of American forces. It was the target of MacArthur's "home-by-Christmas" offensive, and its dams and power facilities were severely damaged by bombing raids of American air forces during the peace talks.

In *Parallel 42*, especially, Smith put emphasis on the revolving action, as indicated in his letter to Marian Willard explaining an incident in a TV show for Tulsa University: "My new hanging piece 'Parallel 42' was suspended under lights and revolved for the cameras while discourse was on, at least part of the time."⁶³ The image of suspending and revolving in the work probably refers to the danger and crisis of the war. And three long fishlike forms at bottom, the axis of the

Gallery, 1940), n.p. The Archives of American Art, New York: David Smith Papers, Reel 3472 (0068).

⁶² Summing up the political history of the 38th parallel, *Time* wrote: "The 38th parallel in Korea has become almost as famous as another imaginary line, the equator." "Facts About the 38th," *Time*, LVII, 14 (April 2, 1951), p. 28.

revolution, would suggest the cause of the crisis. It would be no coincidence that the fishlike forms look like an airplane and bombs, obviously implying the bombing raids of American air forces. Thus Smith's *Parallel 42* can be interpreted as an indictment of American forces.

The Korean War was a touchstone by which believers in the two world systems could demonstrate their loyalty and affirm their support of the side they had chosen, or had felt compelled to choose. The art world was no exception to this. Under the intense ideological passions of the Cold War, artists sought to win the sympathy of mankind or to condemn their ideological enemies. Although for the rest of the world, the war was a limited one, the extension of the Cold War, for Koreans, it was a total war. Three million Koreans were killed, wounded, and missing; another ten million saw their families divided, and five million became refugees. Historian Bruce Cumings wrote:

In 1953, the Korean peninsula was a smoldering ruin. From Pusan in the South to Sinuiju in the north, Koreans buried their dead, mourned their losses, and sought to draw together the shattered remains of their lives. In the capital at Seoul, hollow buildings stood like skeletons alongside streets paved with weird mixtures of concrete and shrapnel. At American military encampments on the outskirts of the capital, masses of beggars waited to pick through the garbage that foreign soldiers tossed out. In the north, modern edifices scarcely stood anymore; P'yongyang and other cities were heaps of bricks and ashes, factories stood empty, massive dams no longer held their water. People emerged from a mole-like

⁶³ Smith, letter to Marian Willard, April 12, 1953, reprinted in McCoy ed., *David Smith*, p. 205.

existence in caves and tunnels to find a nightmare in the bright of day.⁶⁴

It was in this situation that Korean *Informel* artists spent their adolescences. Their experience of the war led them to reject all the existing moral, esthetic values and to start over from zero. Their struggle to create a language to express their unique experience resulted in the *Informel* movement. In this sense, the Korean War forms a backdrop against which to understand the *Informel* movement.

⁶⁴ Bruce Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War*, p. xix.

Chapter III

The Representation of Korean Art in the West

(1) The Background of American Interest in Asian Culture

The Second World War had a devastating effect on the European intellectual community. The United States feared that Marxism and Communism would exert a growing appeal among these disaffected intellectuals, posing a serious challenge to Western European democracy. Furthermore, the increasing Soviet involvement in the Middle East, the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia, and the victory of Mao in China made the task of luring European intellectuals away from Communism urgent. It was in this context that the United States expanded the existing Latin American interchange program to the rest of the world by enacting the United States Information and Educational (USIE) Exchange Act of 1948. The purpose of the Act was "to promote the better understanding of the United States among the peoples of the world and to strengthen cooperative international relations."¹ The Act called for the establishment of a permanent international service, the United States Information Service (USIS), throughout the world.² On August 1, 1953, President Eisenhower's

¹ *Semiannual Report to Congress* (July-December 1948), III.

Reorganization Plan No. 8 consolidated the foreign information activities of the U.S. Government into one program dominated by a new independent agency called the United States Information Agency (USIA).³ Its mission was, in the words of President Eisenhower, "to submit evidence to peoples of other nations by means of communication techniques that the objectives and policies of the United States are in harmony with and will advance their legitimate aspirations for freedom, progress and peace."⁴

² In Korea, the USIS office was set up at the Bando Hotel, Seoul in 1948. Soon it was expanded to have 8 branches throughout the country. Because of the outbreak of war and the extensive information and educational program being carried on in North Korea by the Soviet Union, the USIE exchange program in Korea was considerably larger than the programs in other countries of Asia in the early 1950s. In the first half of 1950, for instance, the USIE program involved English-language programs, library activities, and publication services. Particularly, it seems to have placed great emphasis on publication services. USIE funds were used to purchase and distribute subscriptions to 4 American periodicals (*Life*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *The New York Times*) to key organizations and individuals. In an effort to bring basic concepts of American democracy to the largest possible audience through the medium of the book, it also launched a special translation project. Among the books translated into Korean were Ellis Credle's *Johnny and His Mule*; Ingri and Edgar Parin d'Audlaire's *Abraham Lincoln*; Frances Cavanah's *Our Country's Story*; Elizabeth Olds's *Riding the Rails*; Bertha Morris Parker's *Soil*; and David E. Lilienthal's *Yardstick for Democracy*. See *Semiannual Report to Congress* (January-June 1950), p. 24.

³ *Semiannual Report to Congress* (January-June 1953), p. 3.

⁴ Quoted in *Semiannual Report to Congress* (July-December 1953), III.

Although the United States considered Europe to be of the highest priority, the need for cultural activities in Asia was also emphasized by government officials, diplomats and scholars. In its 15th Semiannual Report to Congress, for example, the Department of State claimed:

Obstacles to good relations between the United States and the countries of the Far East are numerous and difficult to solve. The great diversity in culture, propaganda from anti-American sources, the desire of these countries for absolute independence, and the ensuing suspicion of cultural imperialism all present roadblocks to mutual understanding and respect. Cooperative educational exchange projects offer one constructive way of reducing these obstacles. They can do much to convince the people of these countries that the United States is sincerely interested in helping them to help and in understanding their problems and aspirations.⁵

In the early 1950s, the United States and the Soviet Union considered India as a priority target in Asia for their cultural offensive because it assumed the policy of neutrality. The Soviet Union seems to have put emphasis on the use of motion pictures for propaganda in India. Soviet film festivals had been held in Bombay and Calcutta, and a three-man "Soviet Cine Art Delegation" was sent to India late in 1951. In addition, the All-India Cultural Conference and Festival for Peace was held in Calcutta in April 1952, and there was a large Soviet exhibition of paintings, in March

⁵ *Semiannual Report to Congress* (January-June 1955), p. 11.

1952, the first Soviet display of its kind ever held outside the U.S.S.R. China also intensified its cultural program in India.⁶

As a way to restrain Communist cultural progress in India, the United States participated in the Second Contemporary Art Exhibitions held in New Delhi in 1952. With a grant from the Ford Foundation, the American Federation of Arts selected and sent to India twenty paintings, including works by Arshile Gorky, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Jackson Pollock, and Ben Shahn.⁷ Given congressional hostility, in which modernists were being attacked for their rejection of representational depictions and for their alleged subversive activities, it is surprising that the works of Pollock and Kuniyoshi were included in the U.S. representation. It was one of the first exhibitions which Abstract Expressionist works were introduced into Asian audience.⁸ In addition, the Congress for

⁶ For the Soviet cultural offensive in India, see H. Howland Sargeant, "How Can We Defend Free Culture?" *The Archives of American Art*, New York: Alfred Hamilton Barr Papers, Roll 2178 (0285-0287).

⁷ Kathleen D. McCarthy, "From Cold War to Cultural Development: The International Cultural Activities of the Ford Foundation, 1950-1980," *Daedalus*, 116, 1 (Winter 1987), pp. 98-9.

⁸ In return the United States invited Indian artists and held an exhibit of 300 objects from ivory elephants to embroidered shawls, and 172 contemporary paintings assembled by Calcutta's Academy of Fine Arts and All India Association of

Cultural Freedom sponsored the Indian Congress for Cultural Freedom held in March 28-31, 1951, Bombay, India.⁹ It was attended by such delegates as Denis de Rougemont, W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Ignazio Silone, Louis Fisher, Norman Thomas, and James Burnham. Designed as an answer to the World Peace Conference supported by the Soviet Union, the Congress emphasized that "indifference and neutrality to the menace of totalitarianism constitutes a betrayal of the free spirit."¹⁰ However, many Indians boycotted the Congress because it had been branded widely as a U.S. propaganda device. The Indian government also took pains to withhold its official sanction from the meeting, insisting that it be moved from New Delhi, the original site of the conference, to Bombay.¹¹

Fine Arts at the Smithsonian in 1953. "Old & New Asia," *Time*, 61, 6 (February 9, 1953), p. 72.

⁹ Robert Trumbull, "India Parley Links Food and Freedom," *The New York Times*, March 29, 1951, p. 3. As an intellectual movement of the non-Communist Left, the Congress for Cultural Freedom was organized in 1950 by Michael Josselson, formerly an officer in the Office of Strategic Services, and Melvin J. Lasky, who had earlier served in the American Information Services. Christopher Lasch, "The Cultural Cold War: A Short History of the Congress for Cultural Freedom," in Barton J. Bernstein, ed., *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), p. 323.

¹⁰ "Indian Leaders Organize Congress in New Delhi," *Bulletin of American Committee for Cultural Freedom* (1951). The Archives of American Art, New York: Alfred Hamilton Barr Papers, Roll 2178 (0178).

¹¹ Lasch, "The Cultural Cold War," pp. 332-33.

As the negative reaction to the Indian Congress for Cultural Freedom reveals, American efforts to win the minds of the Asians were not successful. It led the United States to reconsider its cultural and economic program with its stress on the imperialistic, dictatorial nature of Communism and the superiority of the American way of life. At a conference "In Defense of Free Culture," sponsored by the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, held on March 29, 1952, scholars and government officials discussed the problem of American failures in Asia. According to F. S. C. Northrop, professor of philosophy, Yale University, American efforts in Asia were not successful due to the standpoint of the provincialism of a Westerner's world. Emphasizing the importance of Asian traditions and religions as a way to combat Communism, thus, Northrop called for a shift in attention from what the Asians think about the United States to what they think about themselves:

Suppose that we identified ourselves with this resurgence of Islam and of Confucian, Taoist, Hindu and Buddhist Asia.... Suppose that we not merely urge Asians to preserve their particular cultural values and traditions for mankind, but emphasize, in addition, that we value and prize them.... The more the other Asian people return to their own Hindu, Buddhist or Islamic roots, the more they become aware of the inescapably religious core of their life and institutions. Once this occurs, they themselves will know and decide what to do with materialistic atheistic Communism.¹²

Unlike Northrop, H. Howland Sargeant, Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, Department of State, argued that a conviction of fundamental human unity underlying all the national differences should be the basis of American cultural program in Asia:

The great problems of human existence are, after all, common to all men. The deepest aspirations of the human spirit are the same everywhere. Birth and death, hunger and work, peace and freedom, brotherhood and love are common to all men. Through this unity of human fears and needs and hopes can be communicated in its moving fullness and immediacy, the creative outpourings of free minds and spirits. Only through freely creative and freely shared cultural expression, we believe, can every people see its own values, its own fundamental humanity, mirrored in its neighbor. Only through such cultural expression can they arrive at that sense of identity and common purpose that must underlie all efforts at common political and economic action. When these objectives are clearly understood by others to be our only objectives in presenting abroad examples of our cultural life in America, then the reasons for American participation in art exhibits, film festivals and theatrical performances become evident. Then ... an exhibition of paintings becomes not a strained and dull attempt to show the excellence of a political system, but the honest efforts of artists to paint pictures which will create honest impressions.¹³

Although they put emphasis on universal cultural heritage and Asian traditions and religions, they were still

¹² F.S.C. Northrop, "How Can We Defend Free Culture?" The Archives of American Art, New York: Alfred Hamilton Barr Papers, Roll 2178 (0197-0198)

¹³ H. Howland Sargeant, "How Can We Defend Free Culture?" The Archives of American Art, New York: Alfred Hamilton Barr Papers, Roll 2178 (0292).

steeped in Cold War thinking. In the second half of the 1950s, however, there appeared a tendency to see cultural exchange not just as instruments of propaganda but also as a way of developing American culture. For instance, in his address at a symposium sponsored by the International Council of The Museum of Modern Art on May 12, 1955, George F. Kennan, former American Ambassador to the U.S.S.R. argued:

"It is the belief that however great the importance of international cultural exchange from the standpoint of our relations with other countries, this is not the main reason why we Americans have need for cultural contacts with other peoples at this time. The main reason lies rather in our own need as Americans for just this sort of enrichment of our national spirit."¹⁴ At the annual meeting of the Mid-Western College Art Conference held at Northwestern University on October 27-29, 1958, Holcombe M. Austin even reflected the decline of the Cold War in his claim for "international symphony": "In sending our art and artists abroad and in bringing foreign art and artists to this country we should seek not the exaltation of American art over its rivals but rather world recognition and praise for excellence of whatever national origin.... Not the American trumpet blast

versus the Soviet but rather an international symphony; not brass bands that drown each other out but orchestral diversity and mutual respect for each other's music; this is a better goal than cacophony."¹⁵

However, it would be naïve to think that these attitudes toward cultural exchange had directly been reflected in actual cultural programs. Indeed, the emphasis on universal human heritage and native traditions often served as an excuse for covering ideological intentions. The exhibition "Family of Man" is a case in point. Organized by Edward Steichen in 1955, the exhibition consisted of 503 photographs made by 273 photographers from 68 countries.¹⁶ Sponsored by the USIA, five copies of the exhibition were circulated to 37 countries.¹⁷ Although it was an outstanding success, it was

¹⁴ George F. Kennan, *International Exchange in the Arts* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1956), n.p.

¹⁵ Holcombe M. Austin, "The American Artist and the Cold War," *College Art Journal*, XV, 3 (Spring 1956), p. 208.

¹⁶ The exhibition included 6 photographs taken in Korea by *Life* photographers and American soldiers. Two of them had been included in the exhibition "Korea: The Impact of War in Photographs" of 1951. See Edward Steichen, *The Family of Man*, ext. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1955), pp. 133, 140, 149, 161, 169, 178.

¹⁷ John Szarkowski, "The Family of Man," John Elderfield, ed., *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century at Home and Abroad* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1994), p. 13. In Korea, the exhibition was held on April 3-28, 1957 at Kyōngbok Palace Museum, Seoul. The exhibition was favorably received by the press, which published numerous reviews by writers,

also criticized for its sheer universality.¹⁸ When Paul Rasmussen inquired as to the possibility of showing the "The Family of Man" in Dresden, Grant Parr, German Affairs Officer, USIA, implicitly revealed that the exhibition theme, the universal oneness of human beings, was limited:

This puppet regime ("German Democratic Republic") is so all-pervasive in local matters that no institution such as the Dresden Museum could remain sufficiently independent to display the 'Family of Man' in the objective way it deserves. Thus to send the exhibit to Dresden would involve ... risking the likely use of the exhibit for the propaganda purposes of this puppet regime. For this reason, we must inform you that USIA cannot endorse the showing of the 'Family of Man' either at Dresden or elsewhere in the Soviet zone of Germany.¹⁹

With having these various motives in mind, I will examine cultural events Korean artists participated in and

artists, and intellectuals. See, for example, Sang-dŏk Sŏ, "The Epic of Man in Photographs," *Korean Daily*, April 2, 1957, p. 4; Hyŏng-sŏk Kim, "The World of Humanity," *Chosŏn Daily*, April 6, 1957, p. 4; Yŏng-ju Kim, "The Lyric of the Century," *Pyŏnghwa News*, April 12, 1957, p. 4

¹⁸ For instance, Roland Barthes claimed that "we are held back at the surface of an identity, prevented precisely by sentimentality from penetrating into this ulterior zone of human behaviour where historical alienation introduces some 'differences' which we shall here quite simply call 'injustices'." Roland Barthes, "The Great Family of Man," in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 101. Hilton Kramer also argued that the exhibition was nothing but "a reassertion in visual terms of all that has been discredited in progressive ideology." Hilton Kramer, "Exhibiting the Family of Man," *Commentary*, XX (October 1955), p. 367.

¹⁹ Grant Parr, letter to Paul Rasmussen, May 24, 1961. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York: International Program Records, SP-ICE-10.55 (VII. 145.3).

exhibitions of Korean art held in the United States during the 1950s.

2) The Use of the Symbolic Value of Korea

When North Korea attacked South Korea on June 25, 1950, the Congress for Cultural Freedom was having its founding meeting in Berlin. Sidney Hook vividly recorded the moment: "The news of the invasion of Korea broke just before the first session when it seemed uncertain whether the Russians would march in Germany too, in which event every delegate would have been a prisoner of M.V.A. in a few hours."²⁰ The outbreak of the Korean War brought on a dramatic change in the conference. For instance, Theodore Plivier, author of *Stalingrad* who had originally recorded his message to the Congress on tape, flew to Berlin in order to emphasize by a public appearance his denunciation of the Soviet Union. Hans Thirring, the Austrian theoretical physicist, withdrew his paper, "The Responsibility of Intellectuals," because some of its assumptions had become untenable as a result of the Korean War.²¹ The concurrence of the two events was so

²⁰ Sidney Hook, "The Berlin Congress for Cultural Freedom," *Partisan Review*, XVII, 7 (September-October 1950), p. 715.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 715-16. As a result, "the definition of freedom, and the discussion about the place of culture in society, remained secondary; the Congress was primarily ... a

dramatic that South Korea and Berlin came to be inscribed in the minds of Western intellectuals as the symbol of freedom defended against Communism.

After the war, the United States, which played a leading role in defending Korea against Communist attack, tried to exploit the propaganda value of Korea as a way to promote an image of the US as a protector of freedom. In his field circular, Theodore C. Streibert, director of the USIA, emphasized the issue:

The Korean combat came to an end without the usual military symbols of conclusive triumph (signing a surrender, handing over the sword, etc.). The fact of UN victory was not readily dramatized in the minds of either Communists or free people; hence, it is important not only to underscore this attainment ... but to seek creation of substitute symbols.²²

For these objectives, as Streibert noted, the United States used all media such as "publications, special events, memorials, exhibits or any other appropriate method, in addition to radio and press."²³ One of the examples is found in the American pavilion at Thailand's international fair in

political event." Francois Bondy, "Berlin Congress for Freedom," *Commentary* (September 1950), p. 249.

²² Theodore C. Streibert, "Campaign to Establish Premise That UN Action in Korea Was Successful," Field Circular No. 1, November 17, 1953, Policy Program Circular #1. United States Information Agency, Washington, D. C. The declassified document was secured by the author through the Freedom of Information Act.

²³ *Ibid.*

December 1954. There, the USIS organized an anti-Communist exhibit using "a whip made of barbed wire, allegedly from a prison in Korea where it had been used to scourge prisoners, and a Korean flag covered with hundreds of signatures in the 'blood of Korean soldiers' pledging to defend their country."²⁴ The participation of Korea in international events as a member of the free world would also have served a purpose to exploit the propaganda value of the country. It explains Korea's abnormally frequent cultural contact with the West during the war.²⁵ Among the international cultural events in which Korea participated were the International Conference of Artists and the International Sculpture

²⁴ Robert H. Haddow, *Pavilions of Plenty: Exhibiting American Culture Abroad in the 1950s* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977), p. 42. For Thailand's international fair, see also "America Triumphs at Bangkok Fair," *Life*, 38, 5 (January 31, 1955), p. 47-8.

²⁵ A report on the Korean art world published in *The New York Times* indicates that the United States might have played a leading role in the Korean participation in those events: "The Korean War scattered the artists. Many went north with the Communists.... Other artists hid in Seoul during the first Communist occupation. Finally the cold and hungry bulk of Seoul's art colony found its way to Pusan, where the artists lived in the dirty squalor of Pusan's refugee district. There the determined ones got jobs as waiters, school teachers, itinerant portrait artists and jeep drivers, and kept right on painting.... The artists are still doomed to a life of poverty even greater than endured in the coldest Paris garret. The future is bleak for the Korean artist although not hopeless. The United States Information Service recently distributed \$5,000 worth of supplies to the better

Competition, "The Unknown Political Prisoner."

Understandably, these events all promoted the ideological value of freedom.

The International Conference of Artists was held in September 1952, at Venice, Italy. Sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the conference was attended by 300 eminent writers, architects, musicians, painters, sculptors, motion picture directors and others from 44 countries.²⁶ The Korean delegates were the writer So-un Kim, the architect Chung-ŏp Kim, and the sculptor Hyo-jung Yun.²⁷ Composed of six separate sections—music, literature, theatre, cinema, painting and sculpture, architecture, the conference dealt with such themes as removal of custom barriers, condemnation of censorship, and the need for public subsidies. At the conference Henry Moore read his address urging the artist to choose between two traditions of art:

It is an assumption that takes no account of the fact that the tradition of modern art is an individualistic one—a craft tradition passing from artist to artist. We

artists." "Cubism Is Blended in New Korean Art," *The New York Times*, May 24, 1953, p. 4.

²⁶ "UNESCO Congress Asks Art Subsidy," *The New York Times*, September 29, 1952, p. 13.

²⁷ Kyu Chŏng, "The Art and Life of Hyo-jung Yun," *Space*, 2, 12 (December 1967), p. 97. After the conference, Yun visited the studios of such sculptors as Marino Marini, Emilio Greco, and Pericle Fazzini, and came under the influence of them.

have only to look eastwards, beyond Iron Curtain, to see that state patronage on an authoritarian basis requires quite a different tradition—a tradition in which the state that pays the artist calls the tune—in other words, determines the style.... We have to choose between a tradition which allows the artist to develop his own world of formal inventions—to express his own vision and sense of reality; and one which requires the artist to conform to an orthodoxy, to express a doctrinaire interpretation of reality.²⁸

Although Moore did not specify which tradition to choose, the atmosphere of the conference would have given the participants the impression that the former tradition was preferable. In his closing speech as rapporteur, Thornton Wilder, American author, summed up the general sentiment: "We have spoken of freedom but we have not asked casually for freedom for freedom's sake, as a thoughtless adolescent or even criminal might. As true artists we have asked for and spoken of freedom as a discipline to which we must be subservient."²⁹

The International Sculpture Competition, "The Unknown Political Prisoner," held in 1953 at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London, had a much clearer political implication. The competition was proposed to the ICA by Anthony Kloman, a former U.S. cultural attaché in

²⁸ Henry Moore, "Sculptor in Modern Society," *Art News*, 51, 7 (November 1952), p. 25.

²⁹ "UNESCO Congress Asks Art Subsidy," *The New York Times*, September 29, 1952, p. 13.

Stockholm. Attracted by the opportunity to enhance its financial position, the ICA accepted Kloman's proposal.³⁰ As the largest international sculpture competition, it drew a huge response of 3,500 entries, and 52 nations were represented in an exhibition of 145 finalists at the Tate Gallery.³¹ The prospectus announcing the competition presented the theme in apolitical terms:

The organizers wish to emphasize that the competition is international in scope, and that in their view the theme should be regarded as of universal significance. No artist of any nationality is excluded from the competition, and the theme is to be viewed as one of the widest human significance. In choosing as a theme The Unknown Political Prisoner they have felt a desire to have commemorated all those unknown men and women who in our time have given their lives or their liberty to the cause of human freedom.³²

In a period of Cold War tension, however, as Robert Burstow argued, "the theme was widely regarded as directed at

³⁰ Kloman's proposal was to offer the anonymously donated prize money, £11,500 for a competition on the theme of the "Unknown Political Prisoner." The ICA received £1,000 for its trouble. Richard Calvocoressi, "Public Sculpture in the 1950s," in Sandy Nairne and Nicholas Serota, eds., *British Sculpture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1981), p. 137.

³¹ Robert Burstow, "Butler's Competition Project for a Monument to 'the Unknown Political Prisoner': Abstraction and Cold War Politics," *Art History*, 12, 4 (December 1989), p. 473.

³² Quoted in The Museum of Modern Art, *International Sculpture Competition: The Unknown Political Prisoner, American Preliminary Exhibition* (New York, 1953), n.p. The Museum of

the communist bloc."³³ The proposed sculpture was thus described as a "monument to democracy."³⁴ This resulted in the refusal of such prominent European sculptors as Arp, Epstein, Giacometti, Lauren, Lipchitz, Marini and Moore to participate in the competition "on the grounds that it made no distinction between different types of political prisoners and hence opened its doors to politically undesirable interpretations of the subject."³⁵ Furthermore, the Soviet Union and its satellite countries refused to participate, considering the competition's theme to be provocative and in furtherance of the Cold War.

Indeed, in his article "The Limits of Modernist Art as a Weapon of the Cold War," Robert Burstow confirmed the Communists' suspicion by examining confidential correspondence exchanged between the chief organizers of the competition. According to him, the anonymous donor for the competition was the American oil millionaire, John Hay

Modern Art Archives, New York: International Program Records, SP-ICE-3.53 (VII.142.2).

³³ Robert Burstow, "The Limits of Modernist Art as a Weapon of the Cold War: Reassessing the Unknown Patron of the Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner," *The Oxford Art Journal*, 20, 1 (1997), p. 70.

³⁴ R. Melville, "Miscellany: Exhibition," *Architectural Review*, 113, 6751 (March 1953), p. 203.

³⁵ "Editorial: A Modern 'Ecce Homo'," *The Burlington Magazine*, XCV, 603 (June 1953), p. 179.

Whitney, who was an acquaintance with Kloman through their common membership of the Office of Strategic Services, the wartime forerunner of the CIA. Based on this fact, Burstow claimed that third parties mentioned in their correspondence referred to the CIA's Clandestine Service.³⁶ Then he redefined the theme of the competition: "Once the source of the competition's 'corporate' funds is uncovered, the monument loses all pretense to universality; the implied political identity of the gaolers of the 'Unknown Political Prisoner' is only too apparent. Indeed, the competition theme is revealed, not as a disinterested humanitarian ideal, but as a rhetorical device to naturaliz[e] the idea of 'International Communism' as the threat to liberal democracy."³⁷

The underlying political intentions became more certain in the decision to site the winning monument in West Berlin. As the most distant outpost of capitalist democracy and the focus of Cold War tension, according to Burstow, West Berlin was "the most provocative site imaginable."³⁸ In this context, it is not difficult to imagine how the Korean participation would have affected the competition theme. *The New York Times*

³⁶ Burstow, "The Limits of Modernist Art as a Weapon of the Cold War," pp. 73-4.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 76-7.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 72.

even publicized that Korea would be one of the countries represented in the competition.³⁹ Considering that the peace talks at Panmunjom came to a deadlock over the issue of prisoners of war in the summer of 1952, indeed, Korea would have been viewed as the most appropriate country for promoting the underlying political intentions. More importantly, Chong-yŏng Kim, one of two Korean entrants, was given a runner-up prize. Although Kim was a pioneer of abstract sculpture in Korea, his work was still realistic in the early 1950s.⁴⁰ Unfortunately Kim's work is not extant. His *Madonna*, which was included in a 1950 exhibition, organized for Rome's Holy Year by Monsignor Celso Costantini, Vatican Secretary for the Propaganda of the Faith, gives a glimpse of his early work.⁴¹ Hyo-jung Yun, another entrant, presented a nude female reminiscent of traditional Buddhist sculpture (fig. 3-1).

The jury for the final prizes included internationally celebrated critics, museum directors and art historians, most notably Alfred H. Barr, Jr., director of the MOMA and Herbert

³⁹ Aline B. Louchheim, "11 Sculptors Will Represent U.S. at International Contest in London," *The New York Times*, June 28, 1953, p. 29.

⁴⁰ Youngna Kim, "The Trend and Character of Modern Korean Sculpture," in *Art of Twentieth Century Korea* (Seoul: Yegyŏng, 1998), p. 168.

Read, president of the ICA.⁴² Although the organizers of the competition claimed judicial impartiality towards artistic style in the prospectus,⁴³ the jury unmistakably showed a bias toward modernist art.⁴⁴ Almost all the winning works, most of which were drawn from the major post-war Western powers, especially West Germany, Great Britain, the United States, France, and Italy, were in an abstract style. Naturally judicial prejudice provoked protests from artists and critics. When the exhibition of finalists and prize-winners were being held at the Tate Gallery in March 1953, Laslo

⁴¹ See *Time*, 56, 7 (August 14, 1950), p. 49.

⁴² In addition to Barr and Read, the international jury included George Salles, director of the National Museum of France, Will Grohman, professor and art critic for *Neue Zeitung*, Mulk Raj Anand, editor of *Marg*, India, Giulio Carlo Argan, professor, Italy, and others. See *The Museum of Modern Art, International Sculpture Competition*, n.p.

⁴³ The prospectus reads as follows: "The subject has been selected without any intention of limiting in any way the type of style of work which may be submitted. All forms of expression in sculpture, whether for example realistic, symbolic, expressionistic or abstract, will be judged on their own merits." Quoted in *Ibid*.

⁴⁴ This had already been anticipated from the national elimination contests. For instance, "The American jury," *The New York Times* wrote "chose to give very liberal interpretation to the theme. They thought of political prisoners as those physically confined and those who suffered mental and spiritual torture. They apparently accepted the abstract ideas of confinement and freedom as part of the theme and further accepted the expression of these ideas in the formal, plastic terms of tension and movement." Aline B. Louchheim, "11 Sculptors Will Represent U.S. at International Contest in London," *The New York Times*, June 28, 1953, p. 29.

Szilvassy, a refugee Hungarian artist, created a sensation by smashing the grand prize winning model by British sculptor Reg Butler, a cage-like structure of wire.⁴⁵ Thus, it is possible that the decision to give a Korean sculptor a prize might have been partly based on a political consideration rather than aesthetic one.

(3) Ancient Korean Art

When the 6th National Conference of the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO was convened in San Francisco, November 6-9, 1957, the San Francisco Museum of Art held the exhibition "Art in Asia and the West" from October 28-December 1, 1957. Organized by Grace L. McCann Morley, director of the museum, the exhibition was dedicated to UNESCO's project of encouraging mutual appreciation of the cultural values of Asia and the West.⁴⁶ By examining mutual

⁴⁵ See "Prize Sculpture Smashed in London," *The New York Times*, March 16, 1953, p. 17; "Final Prisoner," *Time*, 61, 12 (March 23, 1953), p. 82; "Big Row for Big Prize," *Life*, 34, 22 (June 1, 1953), pp. 39-40, 41. With some photographs of winning and losing models, *Life's* article clearly reveals the jury's aesthetic tastes.

⁴⁶ Korea was represented by 4 Buddhist paintings and sculptures and 3 contemporary paintings. Buddhist paintings and sculptures were lent by the Fogg Art Museum, the Honolulu Academy of Arts, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Contemporary paintings (Young-ki Kim's *Winter Scene*, Su-kun Pak's *Selling by the Roadside*, and Jae-hoe Song's *Fishing Village, South Korea*) were from the collection of Mr. And

influences in the art of Asia and the West, including contemporary developments represented by such artists as Mark Tobey, Morris Graves, Zao Wou-ki, Kenzo Okada, and Sabro Hasegawa, the exhibition could provide artists and public with an increased understanding of the universal values of art, common to both Asia and the West. As these two events indicate, the attitude toward cultural exchanges tended to focus on aesthetic and intellectual aspects rather than ideological one in the late 1950s. The exhibition "Masterpieces of Korean Art," held in the United States in 1957-1959, can also be considered in this context.⁴⁷

As the first large exhibition of Korean art to be seen outside Korea, the "Masterpieces of Korean Art" was organized with the cooperation of the Department of State, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the American-Korean Foundation. After its Washington showing at the National Gallery of Art, the collection was circulated throughout the United States until June 1959: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Seattle Art Museum; The Minneapolis

Mrs. J.M. Zimmerman. See Grace L. McCann Morley, *Art in Asia and the West*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: The San Francisco Museum of Art, 1957), pp. 35, 38.

⁴⁷ According to Chewon Kim, director of the National Museum, Seoul, American museum directors had expressed the desirability of such an exhibition almost since the

Institute of Art; California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco; Los Angeles County Museum; and Honolulu Academy of Arts. By presenting a cross-section of Korean art from 200 BC to about 1900, the exhibition contributed to the improvement of the image of Korea from a country devastated by war to one with a precious cultural heritage.

On the part of Korea, the improvement of her image would probably have been one of the most important motives of sending the exhibition to the U.S. When its preliminary exhibition was held in May 1957 in Seoul, thus, Chewon Kim, director of the National Museum, Seoul, said, "the exhibit will be better than 10 goodwill missions and by this chance the world will come to know our valuable cultural heritage and the accomplishments of our fathers as a civilized people since a long time ago."⁴⁸ And the desire to show a variety of the accomplishments of Korean culture made Korean daily newspapers flooded with reviews of the preliminary show. The reviewers invariably claimed that the selection was not representative of Korean art and culture.⁴⁹ Indeed, as these

liberation of Korea after World War II. See Chewon Kim, "Masterpieces of Korean Art in America," p. 296.

⁴⁸ Y. B. Min, "For Korean Art: A Journey to U.S.," *The Korean Republic*, May 15, 1957, p. B.

⁴⁹ See Sang-baek Yi, "The National Treasures Exhibition Without Enough Treasures," *Korea Daily*, May 15, 1957, p. 4; Yŏng-gi Kim, "The Magnificent Trend of Korean Art," *Seoul*

reviewers pointed out, the selection put emphasis on Koryŏ celadons and did not include earthen wares of the Old Silla (57 B.C.-668), gilt-bronze Buddhist statues of the Koryŏ period (935-1392), and white porcelain and calligraphy of the Chosŏn period (1392-1910). This unbalanced selection had something to do with the American Selection Committee.

The Selection Committee was composed of two members of the American Selection Committee, Alan Priest, curator of Far Eastern art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Robert Treat Paine, Jr., curator of the department of Asiatic art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and the seventeen members of the Korean Selection Committee.⁵⁰ However, the final decision was primarily made by Priest and Paine. According to *Korea Daily* of June 23, 1957, Korean members could not set forth their views because American members asserted themselves about what to select.⁵¹ Furthermore, when an American survey

News, May 22, 1957, p. 4; Yŏng-ju Kim, "The Significance of the National Treasures Exhibition," *Pyŏnghwa News*, May 22, 1957, p. 4; Pil-dong Han, "Review of the National Treasures Exhibition," *Yŏnhap News*, May 27, 1957, p. 4.

⁵⁰ They came to Korea under the international educational exchange program in September 1956 and stayed for 6 weeks, selecting objects for the exhibition and giving lectures. "U.S. Experts to Select Korean Art for Loan Exhibition," *Department of State Bulletin*, XXXV, 901 (October 1, 1956), p. 515.

⁵¹ "Our National Treasures Going Abroad," *Korea Daily*, June 23, 1957, p. 6. It is also true, however, that there were difficulties in selecting objects. In the field of painting,

team including Harold Philip Sterns of the Smithsonian Institution visited the Bulguk Temple to see gilt-bronze Buddhist statues, they evoked a strong protest from Buddhists and the temple authority by considering the statues only as objects for transportation not as objects for worship.⁵² Nevertheless, the overall reaction to the exhibit was favorable, and all the criticism and protests were overshadowed by the aspirations to show a positive and proud image of Korea to the West.

Finally, the "Masterpieces of Korean Art" opened at the National Gallery of Art on December 15, 1957. Described by John Walker, director of the National Gallery, as "a rare opportunity to be able to introduce to the American public a field of art with which they have been too little familiar,"⁵³ the exhibition was the center of the public attention.⁵⁴ All

for example, Chewon Kim explained that the committee was restricted to paintings of the Chosŏn period because of "the limited number of paintings and a desire to choose Korean works free from Chinese influence." Chewon Kim, "Masterpieces of Korean Art in America," p. 302.

⁵² "Protest from Buddhists," *Korea Daily*, May 24, 1957, p. 3.

⁵³ John Walker, "Foreword," in Robert T. Paine, Jr., *Masterpieces of Korean Art* (Boston: T.O. Metcalf Co., 1957), p. 14.

⁵⁴ Its attendance amounted to 43,393 for 27 days in Washington, D.C. Explaining the public reception, Chewon Kim wrote that he would be besieged by a number of people for his autograph after his lecture "Koreans and Their Art," which was given for a week starting from the opening

major newspapers and NBC reported on the exhibition.⁵⁵ The Korean press also showed deep interest in the American reaction to the exhibition. It carried almost on a daily basis reports on such topics as the arrival of the national treasures, the introduction of the National Gallery of Art, and the reception of the press.⁵⁶ Especially when *Time* magazine carried an article on the exhibition, it was the talk of the town in Korea.⁵⁷ *The Korean Republic*, an English daily in Seoul, for instance, reported, "The Dec. 16 issue of

day. Chewon Kim, "They Are Looking at Korea Anew," *Seoul News*, January 8, 1958, p. 4.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Leslie Judd Portner, "Korean Exhibition Is Outstanding," *Washington Post and Times Herald*, December 15, 1957; Florence S. Berryman, "Korean Art Display at National Gallery," *The Sunday Star*, December 15, 1957; "Capital to Show Rare Korean Art," *The New York Times*, December 15, 1957; Leslie Judd Portner, "Masterpieces of Korean Art in Wash.," *Christian Science Monitor*, December 21, 1957. All in the newspaper clippings, the holdings of the Gallery Archives, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

⁵⁶ The reports were mostly written by Chewon Kim and his assistant Sunwoo Choi, who accompanied the exhibition. See, for example, Chewon Kim, "National Treasures Arrived Safely," *Chosŏn Daily*, November 4, 1957, p. 4; "The Exhibition of National Treasures Approaching," *Seoul News*, November 27, 1957, p. 4; "The Exhibition of Our Treasures I-II," *Chosŏn Daily*, February 27-28, 1958, p. 4; "After the Boston Showing," *Korea Daily*, June 19, 1958, p. 4; and Sunwoo Choi, "The Exhibition of Ancient Art in Washington I-II," *Seoul News*, December 12-13, 1957, p. 4.

⁵⁷ See "Art Treasures from Korea," *Time*, 70, 25 (December 16, 1957), pp. 76-9. The *Time* magazine's coverage of the exhibition itself was a news item for Korean newspapers. See, for example, "The Exhibition of Our Treasures in America,"

America's *Time Magazine*, now on sale in Seoul, is drawing great attention here because of a special article about Korean art treasure, accompanied by two pages of illustrations in color."⁵⁸

Although *Time's* report on the exhibition caught the attention of the Korean people, its article was still steeped in Cold War thinking: "When the North Koreans swept down over the 38th parallel on June 25, 1950, one of the prizes they had their sights on was the great national collections of Korean art in Seoul. Delaying tactics by the museum staff ... and the recapture of Seoul three months after it had fallen to the Communists saved the treasures."⁵⁹ The most perceptive review was written by Horace H. F. Jayne, assistant director of the Philadelphia Museum. Unlike other reviewers, who almost harped on the same string based on the press release issued by the National Gallery of Art, Horace showed a deep knowledge of Far Eastern art and culture in his review published in the January 1958 issue of *Art News*. Particularly, admiring the fine assemblage of Koryŏ celadons, he rated the exhibition as one of the best:

Segye Daily, December 15, 1957, p. 4; "High Praise in *Time*," *Korea Daily*, December 15, 1957, p. 8.

⁵⁸ "U.S. Magazine Covers ROK Treasures Show," *The Korean Republic*, December 14, 1957, p. 2.

In comparison with the large number of loan exhibitions that have come to this country from Europe since the end of World War II, those from the Far East could be counted on the fingers of one hand, but the few that have come have been notable for their quality and the great taste used in selecting their contents. The exhibition lent from the Korean national and private collections which recently had its formal opening at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. is outstanding among these few.⁶⁰

While the exhibition "Masterpieces of Korean Art" contributed to the enhancement of the image of Korea, it also gave momentum for re-examining Korean tradition in a new perspective. Korean reviewers of the exhibition mostly pointed out the risk of falling into provincial patterns of sterile self-complacency and cultural stagnation. Claiming that the significance of national treasures does not lie in the objects themselves but in the creativity underlying them, they urged Korean artists and intellectuals to construct a new culture based on creativity in order to contribute to the development of international culture.⁶¹ In other words, Korean intellectuals and artists began to consider the role and status of Korean culture in the international community. In

⁵⁹ "Art Treasures from Korea," *Time*, 70, 25 (December 16, 1957), p. 76.

⁶⁰ Horace H. F. Jayne, "Treasures That Join Ancient China to Japan," *Art News*, 56, 9 (January 1958), p. 33.

⁶¹ Yŏng-ju Kim, "The Significance of the National Treasures Exhibition," *Pyŏnghwa News*, May 22, 1957, p. 4; Tae-o Kim, "Ancient Korean Art and Nationality," *Sasaggye*, 52 (November 1957), pp. 103-9, 253.

America, on the other hand, the exhibition furthered the tendency to examine the meaning of Asian art in relation to religion, philosophy and general background, and stimulated "increased interest in the whole field of Oriental Studies."⁶² Furthermore, as is evident in an editorial of *The New York Times* of December 22, 1957, it expanded the scope of American interest in Asian art to include contemporary art:

We will make a mistake, however, if we think of Korean art only in terms of the past. It is still alive, still vigorous, still a part of the essential life of a people and of a civilization. Some of the values of the old forms have been transmitted. Some have been transmuted. The concepts remain because they are imperishable. It will be a good thing if we can have, later on, some exhibits here of what these contemporary Koreans are doing. In the meantime we will understand them better if we take advantage of the opportunity to see what classic backgrounds are represented in the life of these people. We have a chance to learn, to understand, and to enjoy.⁶³

(4) Contemporary Korean Art

When *The New York Times* expressed a hope for seeing contemporary Korean art, Dr. Ellen Psaty Conant, Far-Eastern expert of the University of Georgia, had already been working on a project of holding an exhibition of contemporary Korean art in the United States. When the plans for "Masterpieces of

⁶² "Asia and the United States," *College Art Journal*, XVII, 2 (Winter 1958), p. 203.

⁶³ "Editorial: Korean Art Exhibit," *The New York Times*, December 22, 1957, sec. 4, p. 6.

Korean Art" were announced, Alfred R. Krakusin of World House Galleries consulted Dr. Conant regarding contemporary Oriental art, and seized the opportunity to organize simultaneously the first comprehensive exhibition of contemporary Korean painting to be shown abroad. Thus, the project was partly personal and commercial in character.⁶⁴

Conant visited Korea in August 1957 to select works. In a press interview, she made it clear that she herself would select works that were "modern, original, and executed within 10 years."⁶⁵ After selecting 107 works, Conant was quoted as saying, "it was beyond her expectation."⁶⁶ However, her selection seems to have given a shock to the Korean art scene. According to traditional standards, the works of old masters should have been given priority. Contrary to this expectation, the selection was mostly composed of works of middle-aged or younger artists. Thus, some felt that it

⁶⁴ World House Galleries opened in New York in February 1957. Owned by Herbert Mayer and designed by Frederick Kiesler and Armand Bartos, the gallery was based on Kiesler's idea of "design in continuity." See *Newsweek*, 49, 5 (February 4, 1957), p. 85. According to Ellen Conant, some of the works were sold, and the remaining works were all returned to the artists. Ellen Conant's email to the author, January 16, 2000.

⁶⁵ "Contemporary Korean Art to Be Shown in New York," *Dong-a Daily*, August 21, 1957, p. 4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

represented "the backwardness of the Korean art scene."⁶⁷

Others claimed that "the selection could not be representative of Korean art."⁶⁸

The exhibition "Contemporary Korean Paintings" was held from February 25 through March 22, 1958 at World House Galleries, New York (fig. 3-2). Included in the exhibition were 62 works consisting of oils, ink scrolls, gouaches, and woodcuts. It is difficult, if not impossible, to figure out what the works were like, because the exhibition catalogue listed only the artists' names and the titles of the works without any reproductions.⁶⁹ Based on the title and date, I could identify some works, among them Pyŏng-gi Kim's *Avenue of Trees*, 1956 (fig. 3-3), Yŏng-ju Kim's *Black Sun*, and Ch'ang-sŏp Chŏng's *Form*, 1957. Pyŏng-gi Kim's work is a cubistic landscape in which objects are decomposed into geometric forms, while Chŏng's work is a pure abstraction which does not have any recognizable objects, and whose lines and colors are free from their denotative functions.

⁶⁷ "The Art World of This Year," *Korea Daily*, December 28, 1957, p. 4.

⁶⁸ "Contemporary Korean Art to Be Shown in New York," *Dong-a Daily*, August 21, 1957, p. 4.

⁶⁹ See Ellen Psaty Conant, *Contemporary Korean Paintings* (New York: World House Galleries, 1958).

Given the international art community dominated by abstract expressionism, however, it is not surprising that these paintings did not produce a deep impression on the New York art world. Most reviewers pointed out that contemporary Korean art lagged behind the latest trends of international art.⁷⁰ In his review for *Art News*, for example, Parker Tyler wrote: "Whether or not the usual nature and genre subjects are the content, or some such 'Surrealist' conceit as *Man Eating Pearl*, continuous-line, homogenized space, abstraction of subject to Cubist or Expressionist structure hold pictorial sway in Korea, if this show be a true all-over picture."⁷¹ Hugo Munsterberg also wrote of the influence of School of Paris in his review for *Arts*: "Most of them, with the exception of an occasional Korean subject and a preference for dark tonalities, seem merely to reflect the School of Paris both in realistic and abstract phase. The only oil which achieves some kind of fusion between Korean motives and modern abstraction is [Hwan-gi] Kim's Korean

⁷⁰ In her email to the author, Prof. Conant wrote that "the exhibition played a crucial role that had not received due attention which I had been inclined to attribute to nationalism." Ellen Conant's email to the author, January 16, 2000.

⁷¹ Parker Tyler, "Reviews and Previews: Contemporary Koreans," *Art News*, 57, 1 (March 1958), pp. 12-3.

Landscape showing an abstractly rendered Korean temple and mountains against a vast blue space."⁷²

Unlike oils, Oriental-style painting seems to have attracted the attention of the reviewers. Especially they showed interest in the tendency of combining Oriental-style painting with abstraction. For example, Munsterberg wrote: "More typically Oriental are the hanging scrolls executed in Chinese ink with a little color, such as [Ki-ch'ang] Kim's powerful *Loquat* which recalls the work of the great Chinese contemporary Chi Pai-shih. The mixture of old and new is evident in [No-su] Park's *Rock and Flute*, which combines traditional Oriental landscape painting with abstraction."⁷³

In her selection of Oriental-style painting, Conant seems to have taken pains to reflect that tendency. Of the 23 Oriental-style paintings, 13 were the works of Ki-ch'ang Kim, Nae-hyŏn Park, and Ung-no Yi, who were playing a leading role in modernizing Oriental-style painting. Indeed, Oriental-style painting in Korea at the moment was making great strides in terms of infusing traditional techniques with some formal qualities of international abstract movements. When Kim and Park had a couple show in May 1956, for example,

⁷² Hugo Munsterberg, "In the Galleries: Contemporary Korean Painting," *Arts*, 32, 6 (March 1958), p. 59.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

critics praised them for exploring modernity of expression.⁷⁴ And when Ung-no Yi had an exhibition in March 1958, it was described as "a remarkable event in modernization of Oriental-style painting."⁷⁵ In his review, in particular, Pyŏng-gi Kim viewed Yi's work in the context of the latest trends of international art.⁷⁶ Yŏng-ju Kim, an artist and critic, associated Yi's work specifically with *Informel* esthetic, noting that "his work tells a narrative of nihilism in which man in anxiety and self-torture is rushing into nothingness."⁷⁷

Conant herself thought that the future of Korean art lay in a synthesis of East and West. In the introduction to the exhibition catalogue, thus, Conant wrote:

This is what has wrought the challenging character of contemporary Korean painting—its utter sincerity, its probing search for significant form and technique, its conscious evocation of native tradition and lore. It remains to be seen whether this struggle will enable them to realize a new synthesis of the two radically different currents confronting Asiatic artists everywhere and permit them to create an art that is

⁷⁴ Chosŏn Daily, May 17, 1956, p. 4.

⁷⁵ Pyŏng-gi Kim, "Modernizing Oriental-Style Painting," *Dong-a Daily*, March 22, 1956, p. 4.

⁷⁶ Ibid. Kim also mentioned that young oil painters were interested in combining oil painting with Asian tradition.

⁷⁷ Yŏng-ju Kim, "A New Realm of Oriental-Style Painting," *Chosŏn Daily*, March 12, 1958, p. 4.

neither western-style nor oriental-style, but contemporary Korean in the ultimate sense.⁷⁸

Conant's emphasis on a new synthesis of two different currents gained the sympathy of Korean artists. When the exhibition opened in New York, they hoped that it would contribute to the development of Korean art and stimulate Korean artists' interest in recent developments of international art as well as a new approach toward tradition.⁷⁹

Another exhibition in which contemporary Korean art was included is the Fifth International Biennial of Contemporary Color Lithography. The exhibition was a survey of original color lithographs printed in two or more colors made during 1956 and 1957 and held from February 28 through April 15, 1958 at the Cincinnati Art Museum. Korean participation in the Biennial seems to have been made possible through the good offices of the American Embassy in Seoul. According to the exhibition catalogue, the loan of the Korean section was assembled by A. S. Hietala, assistant cultural affairs

⁷⁸ Conant, *Contemporary Korean Paintings*, n.p.

⁷⁹ See Hun Kim, "Taking the Show of Our Contemporary Painting as a Start," *Seoul News*, February 25, 1958, p. 4; "Our Painting Going Abroad," *Pyŏnghwa News*, February 25, 1958, p. 4. *Pyŏnghwa News* also noted that there would be an attempt to participate in international art exhibitions in Pittsburgh, Venice, and São Paulo.

officer, American Embassy in Seoul.⁸⁰ The Korean section comprised 8 lithographs by 6 artists, and Hang-sung Lee's *Silhouette* (fig. 3-4) won a prize. When an international section of the Biennial was being circulated throughout the U.S. by the American Federation of Arts, in his review for *The New York Times*, Howard Devree characterized his work as "something vaguely suggestive of ancient temple painting and wall hanging with quaint fantasy in a highly abstract approach."⁸¹ Winning a prize at an international art festival made a great impact on the Korean art scene, which was to see the foundation of the Korean Print Association in March 1958.⁸² The art magazine *Sinmisul* even carried a translation of the catalogue and reproduced the work of Korean artists along with that of Hans Hartung, Fritz Winter, Jean Arp, and Stuart Davis.⁸³ Thus the exhibition would further have stimulated Korean artists' interest in discovering a common ground between tradition and abstraction.

⁸⁰ The Cincinnati Art Museum, *Fifth International Biennial of Contemporary Color Lithography*, ext. cat. (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1958), n.p.

⁸¹ Howard Devree, "New Ways in Prints," *The New York Times*, July 13, 1958, sec. II, p. 6.

⁸² Myŏng-ro Yun, "The Development of Contemporary Korean Print," *Wolgan Misool*, 5, 6 (June 1993), p. 62.

⁸³ "The Cincinnati Print Biennial," *Sinmisul* (September 1958), pp. 1-8, 52-3.

Chapter IV

The Presence of Abstract Expressionism in Korea

(1) Abstract Expressionism and Politics

During the last three decades, there have been controversies about the relationship between art and politics, in particular, the use of Abstract Expressionism as a weapon of the Cold War. According to some revisionist historians of postwar American art, the success of Abstract Expressionism was closely related to the American government's desire to promote an image of America as a land of freedom and individualism.¹ Recently, scholars have successfully refuted the claims of these revisionist historians by presenting specific cases where Abstract Expressionist painting was not predominant.² By focusing on

¹ See Max Kozloff, "American Painting During the Cold War," *Artforum*, 11, 9 (May 1973), pp. 43-54; Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum*, 12, 10 (June 1974), pp. 39-41; John Tagg, "American Power and American Painting: The Development of Vanguard Painting in the United States Since 1945," *Praxis*, 1, 2 (Winter 1976), pp. 59-79; David and Cecile Shapiro, "Abstract Expressionism: The Politics of Apolitical Painting," *Prospects*, 3 (1977), pp. 175-214; Serge Guilbaut, "The New Adventures of the Avant-Garde in America," *October*, 15 (Winter 1980), pp. 61-78. See also Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1973).

² See Frances K. Pohl, "An American in Venice: Ben Shahn and United States Foreign Policy at the 1954 Venice Biennale," *Art History*, 4, 1 (March 1981), 80-113; Michael Kimmelman,

the relationship between The Museum of Modern Art and the CIA, and exhibitions sent to Europe, however, these scholars fail to mention Asia where there were not only exhibitions sent by the United States but also young artists who were eager to absorb information on American and European art by all means. Given the Korean War and violent anti-Communism, the exhibitions sent to Asia seem to have been different in character. In this chapter I will briefly consider the controversies and examine the validity of their claims in an Asian context.

In his seminal article "American Painting During the Cold War," Max Kozloff noted that the work of Abstract Expressionists was sent abroad as evidence of America's coming of creative age by the USIA and the International Council of the MOMA. However, he dismissed similarities between the discourse of the Abstract Expressionists and Cold War rhetoric as "a coincidence that must surely have gone unnoticed by rulers and ruled alike."³ Unlike Kozloff, in her article "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," Eva Cockcroft argued that the political relationship between

"Revisiting the Revisionists: The Modern, its Critics and the Cold War," in John Edlerfield, ed., *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century at Home and Abroad*, pp. 38-55; Robert Burstow, "The Limits of Modernist Art as a Weapon of the Cold War," pp. 68-80.

Abstract Expressionism and the Cold War was by no means coincidental. After examining the activities of the MOMA as an official patron of art, its connections with U.S. government agencies, and its use of Abstract Expressionism for political ends, Cockcroft maintained that "In terms of cultural propaganda, the functions of both the CIA cultural apparatus and MOMA's international program were similar and, in fact, mutually supportive."⁴

After Cockcroft, revisionist historians tended to restate or exaggerate her conclusion. In "Abstract Expressionism: The Politics of Apolitical Painting," for example, David and Cecile Shapiro, boldly asserted that the CIA supported the export of Abstract Expressionism in the propaganda war.⁵ Acknowledging Kozloff, Cockcroft, and the Shapiros, Serge Guilbaut also addressed the connections between Cold War rhetoric and the discourse of the Abstract Expressionists. In his book *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, he summed up the position of revisionist historians: "abstract expressionism was for many the expression of freedom: the freedom to create controversial

³ Kozloff, "American Painting During the Cold War," p. 45.

⁴ Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," p. 40.

⁵ David and Cecile Shapiro, "Abstract Expressionism: The Politics of Apolitical Painting," p. 207.

works of art, the freedom symbolized by action painting, by the unbridled expressionism of artists completely without fetters. It was this freedom ... that the moderns (Barr, Soby, and Greenberg) defended against the conservatives (Dondero and Taylor). Abroad, this domestic battle was presented as a token of the freedom inherent in the American system and contrasted with the restrictions placed on the artist by the Soviet system."⁶

While the claims of revisionist historians are not based on firm historical evidence, the rebuttals of recent scholars are quite specific and convincing. In her article, for example, Frances K. Pohl examined the reason why Ben Shahn was sent to the 1954 Venice Biennale. After going through the promotional literature and Shahn's own writing, Pohl argued that Shahn "was meant to appeal to the Italian people, specifically, through his concern for the oppressed, his sympathy for the causes of organized labour, and his support of a realistic, socially-relevant art that rivalled communist social realism yet remained decidedly 'democratic' and American."⁷ In other words, Shahn's work could serve as

⁶ Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, p. 201.

⁷ Frances K. Pohl, "An American in Venice: Ben Shahn and United States Foreign Policy at the 1954 Venice Biennale," p. 94.

effective cultural propaganda because of its specific Italian and humanitarian subject matter. Thus Pohl successfully dismantled the notion that only Abstract Expressionism fitted the objectives of American cultural campaigns.

In his article "Revisiting the Revisionists: The Modern, Its Critics, and the Cold War," on the other hand, Michael Kimmelman examined the accuracy of revisionist historians' accounts of the MOMA's activities. Contrary to Cockcroft's contention, Kimmelman argues, the MOMA did not "take sole responsibility for the U.S. representation at the Biennales from 1954 through 1962," and in the Biennale exhibitions organized by the MOMA, "it is not at all self-evident that [Abstract Expressionists] were dominant."⁸ In his introduction to the book *Defining Modern Art: Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.*, Irving Sandler also argued that Barr was slow to patronize Abstract Expressionism and by 1958 promoted younger artists who were reacting against it.⁹ Finally, investigating the history of the 1953 International Sculpture Competition "The Unknown Political Prisoner," Robert Burstow revealed that "it was the longer established European forms

⁸ Michael Kimmelman, "Revisiting the Revisionists: The Modern, Its Critics, and the Cold War," p. 45.

⁹ Irving Sandler, "Introduction," in Irving Sandler and Amy Newman, eds., *Defining Modern Art: Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), p. 45.

of modernist art, with their secure critical acceptance in the West and equally certain critical rejection in the East, which seemed most likely to offer powerful ammunition in 'the battle for the mind of Europe'."¹⁰

The claims of revisionist historians do not stand up in an Asian context either. It is true, as Cockcroft contended, that Abstract Expressionist painting was sent to Asia during the 1950s.¹¹ Already in 1951, Pollock's *No. 11* of 1949 and *No. 7* of 1950 as well as works by Rothko and Clyfford Still were included in the Yomiuri Indépendent exhibition in Japan.¹² The First International Art Exhibition of 1952, sponsored by the Mainichi Newspapers also displayed Pollock's *Number 21*, 1951, in addition to works by Adolph Gottlieb, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, John Marin, Ben Shahn, Charles Sheeler, Theodoros Stamos, and Max Weber.¹³ In India, as we have seen, works by Pollock and Gorky were shown at the Second International Contemporary Art

¹⁰ Robert Burstow, "The Limits of Modernist Art as a Weapon of the Cold War," p. 77.

¹¹ In her essay Cockcroft mentioned that Abstract Expressionist painting was shown in international exhibitions in Japan and India. Cockcorft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," p. 40.

¹² Kazu Kaido, "Reconstruction: The Role of the Avant-Garde in Post-War Japan," in Museum of Modern Art Oxford, *Reconstructions: Avant-Garde Art in Japan 1945-1965*, ext. cat. (London, 1985), p. 21.

Exhibition of 1952. However, these American paintings received little notice in Asia at the time.¹⁴ Among the exhibitions sent to Asia by the MOMA were the Third International Contemporary Art Exhibition of 1957 (India) and the Fourth International Art Exhibition of 1957 (Japan), which all featured Abstract Expressionist painting.

Organized by the All-India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, the Third International Contemporary Art Exhibition was held in New Delhi in February 1957. The U.S. representation consisted of 13 paintings by 9 artists—Stuart Davis, Arshile Gorky, Adolph Gottlieb, Grace Hartigan, Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Niles Spencer, and Mark Tobey.¹⁵

¹³ Francis V. O'Connor, *Jackson Pollock* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1967), pp. 65-6.

¹⁴ In Japan, the 1956 exhibition "World Art Today," sponsored by Asahi Newspapers, is considered to have been especially influential. The exhibition introduced the work of European avant-garde artists such as Fautrier, Dubuffet, Mathieu, Fontana and the Italian Space Artists, as well as the American Abstract Expressionists. Kazu Kaido, "Reconstruction: The Role of the Avant-Garde in Post-War Japan," p. 25.

¹⁵ The Museum of Modern Art, press release for U.S. Representation in the 3rd International Contemporary Art Exhibition, India, February 18, 1957. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York: International Program Records, SP-ICE-15-56 (VII. 149.2). The MOMA seems to have attached great importance to the exhibition. The press release noted: "Inaugurated in 1946 to promote cultural understanding between India and foreign countries, the International Contemporary Art Exhibitions ... have gained steadily in size and prestige and are now recognized not only throughout Asia but the world as among the most important international

Although the press release stated that "the paintings in the United States section were all executed during the fifteen years and were chosen to demonstrate a variety of styles,"¹⁶ the chosen artists indicate that Abstract Expressionist painting predominated the U.S. representation.

Sponsored by the Mainichi Newspapers, the Fourth International Art Exhibition was held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Tokyo in May 1957. Chosen by the poet Frank O'Hara, the U.S. representation consisted of the work of younger American artists, all executed within the preceding four years. It was in accordance with the request of Japan.¹⁷ Thus the chosen artists such as Sam Francis, Helen Frankenthaler, Grace Hartigan, Alfred Leslie, Joan Mitchell, and others, were mostly from the second generation of Abstract Expressionism. Sam Francis's *Black in Red* of 1953 received one of the five prizes given to non-Japanese artists.¹⁸

events in contemporary art. Thirty-five countries are participating in this year."

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Helen M. Franc, "The Early Years of the International Program and Council," in John Elderfield, ed., *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century at Home and Abroad*, p. 130.

¹⁸ The National Museum of Modern Art, *The Fourth International Art Exhibition*, exh. cat. (Tokyo, 1957), n.p. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York: International Program Records, SP-ICE-16-57 (VII.149.4)

Even though these two exhibitions consisted of Abstract Expressionist paintings, it does not give credence to the claims of revisionist historians. First of all, the exhibitions were international competitions for contemporary art whose representative was Abstract Expressionist art in the United States at the moment. Secondly, the host nation wanted to see Abstract Expressionist art, as is evident in the case of the Japanese exhibition.¹⁹ Finally, the two were the only exhibitions of Abstract Expressionist painting the MOMA sent to Asia. Indeed, in its programs for Asia, the MOMA focused on such media as photography, print, design, and watercolor rather than painting.²⁰

¹⁹ Reporting on the International Council at the Museum of Modern Art, the December 30, 1956 issue of *The New York Times* also wrote, "the Indian government is anxious that we participate in their coming show of contemporary art." Stuart Preston, "To Help Our Art," *The New York Times*, December 30, 1956, II, p. 15.

²⁰ In the list of the international circulation of exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art Archives, I found out that the following exhibitions were sent to Asia during the 1950s: "Seven American Watercolor," for the U.S. representation, the Second International Art Exhibition, Japan, 1953; "Contemporary American Photography," Japan, 1953; "Twentieth Century Design in Europe and America from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art," Japan, 1957; "Contemporary Printmaking in the United States," circulated to Australia and New Zealand in 1958-59; "Recent American Prints in Color," Hawaii, Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Ceylon and Korea, 1957-60; "Design Today in America and Europe," India, 1958-1961.

After all, revisionist historians failed to see that a variety of media and styles could be employed in American Cold War propaganda. By focusing on the relationship between government agencies and the MOMA, furthermore, they failed to consider that other museums and cultural institutions were actively engaged in cultural exchanges. In the U.S. during the 1950s and 1960s, many Americans affiliated with the arts believed that the increased exposure of American art abroad benefited the United States. Though their motives were rarely political, it is also true that they supported the export of American art in the belief that international art exchanges could politically benefit the United States. In Asia, where the U.S. government put emphasis on the educational aspects of cultural exchanges, such institutions as the American Federation of Arts (AFA), the College Art Association (CAA), and university museums played an important role in exposing Asian people to American art. It is clearly evident in the exhibitions of American art in Korea.

(2) Exhibitions of American Art in Korea

In 1956 the American art world was involved in a controversy over the USIA's decision to cancel support of touring American art shows. One exhibition called "Sport in Art" was put together by the magazine *Sports Illustrated*. The

exhibition was sponsored by the USIA to tour the U.S. and thereafter to travel to Australia during the Olympic Games. When the show arrived at the Dallas Museum of Arts, Dallas, Texas, however, a group of organizations calling themselves the "Dallas Patriotic Council" attacked the show on the grounds that some of the artists were reported to have Communist-front records. The artists referred to were Leon Kroll, Ben Shahn, William Zorach and Yasuo Kuniyoshi. Although the Dallas Museum trustees defended the show, the USIA cancelled its plans to send it to Australia for fear of criticism from the Congress.²¹

Another projected show was to have included 100 twentieth-century American paintings. When the AFA was getting the paintings together, the Communist issue again intervened: the USIA told the AFA that some of the artists were unacceptable for political reasons. The AFA stuck to its conviction that art "should be judged on its merits as a work of art and not by the political or social views of the artist,"²² and the project was abandoned. These two events

²¹ For the controversy over "Sports in Art," see Aline B. Saarinen, "Art Storm Breaks on Dallas," *The New York Times*, February 12, 1956, II, p. 15; "Dallas Trustees Take a Stand," *The New York Times*, February 19, 1956, II, p. 8; "U.S. Cancels Art Tour Abroad After Controversy on 'Red' Links," *The New York Times*, May 26, 1956, p. 1, 10.

show how extreme anti-Communism was in American society during the period of McCarthyism. In a recently published book, David Craven even revealed that various Abstract Expressionists were monitored by the FBI.²³

The USIA's decision to withdraw its sponsorship from the two exhibitions was severely criticized by senators, art critics and museum directors. Senator Hubert H. Humphry, Democrat of Minnesota, for example, lamented: "While President Eisenhower talked of the urgency of exploiting breaches in the Iron Curtain and opening 'people-to-people' contacts, the agency chiefly responsible for that job was shrinking from it in cowardly fashion."²⁴ The art world also invariably criticized the USIA's cancellation of the two exhibitions. The September issue of Arts magazine addressed an open letter to President Eisenhower in which the magazine claimed that "The free world is presently engaged in a crucial battle for the hearts and minds of men. Among America's greatest assets in this struggle are our cultural heritage and achievements. When these are silenced, we not

²² Quoted in Anthony Lewis, "Red Issue Blocks Europe Art Tour," *The New York Times*, June 21, 1956, p. 33.

²³ David Craven, *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique: Dissent During the McCarthy Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 79-104.

only stifle creative art, we forfeit the respect of people in other lands." Then the magazine asked him to "intervene so that these acts of censorship will not obliterate the freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights."²⁵ In its September issue, *Art News* also carried a long review of the controversy over the exhibitions. The magazine even alleged that the U.S. government "decided not to sponsor any further international shows including oil paintings executed after 1917 because one of them might be by a Communist or an artist suspected of Communist sympathies."²⁶

In his article "Footnote One: The Idea of the Cold War," Fred Orton presented an interesting analysis of America's ruling class: the "old guard" and the "business liberals." According to him, the old guard are the nationally oriented businessmen who are right-wing Republicans and tend toward "America First" isolationism. On the other hand, the business liberals are internationalists, committed to an "Open Door" policy. The key conflict between the two was articulated over

²⁴ "Senator Attacks Information Unit," *The New York Times*, June 26, 1956, p. 15.

²⁵ Jonathan Marshall and James N. Rosenberg, "An Open Letter to the President of the United States, the Honorable Dwight D. Eisenhower," *Arts*, 30, 12 (September 1956), p. 11.

²⁶ Charlotte Devree, "The U.S. Government Vetoes Living Art," *Art News*, 55, 5 (September 1956), p. 34.

foreign policy, between nationalism and internationalism.²⁷ Thus he saw the aforementioned controversy as the struggle for class power between the nationalists and the internationalists.²⁸ If we accept Orton's analysis, the year 1956 marked a final phase of the struggle for class power. With George Dondero's retirement in 1956 and Joseph McCarthy's death in 1957, the internationalists began to increase their influence.

In 1956, indeed, there was a drastic change that would contribute to the increase of the export of American art. First, the President's emergency fund, which was to be used "(1) to increase United States participation, mostly through private industry in international trade fairs, and (2) to encourage outstanding American cultural and artistic groups to visit abroad,"²⁹ increased from \$5 million for fiscal year 1956 to \$11 million for fiscal year 1957. The United States Information Agency budget for fiscal year 1957 also increased to \$124 million as against \$92 for fiscal year 1956.³⁰ Second,

²⁷ Fred Orton, "Footnote One: The Idea of the Cold War," in David Thistlewood, ed., *American Abstract Expressionism* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), p. 182.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 185.

²⁹ Quoted in *Congressional Record-Appendix*, 84th Congress, First Session, January 31, 1955, A794.

in September 1956, President Eisenhower launched the people-to-people program, "designed to promote contacts and activities among individuals and nongovernmental organizations in this and other countries and in this way to promote mutual understanding and friendships among the people of the world."³¹ Finally, in order to expand the MOMA's international program of circulating exhibitions, which began in 1952 with a \$625,000 grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the International Council at The Museum of Modern Art was formed in December 1956.³² All these events happened in 1956.

The sudden increase of exhibitions sent to Korea in the second half of the 1950s can be seen in this context. Among the exhibitions of American art held in Korea were "Dong Kingman's Watercolors," held at the USIS gallery, Seoul in April 1956; "Masterpieces of American Art" (photographic reproductions), the USIS gallery, Seoul, July 1956; "Student Work from College and University Art Departments," Seoul National University, November 1956; "Eight American Artists,"

³⁰ John W. Henderson, *The United States Information Agency* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1969), p. 308.

³¹ David E. Finley, *Statement on Scope, Purpose and Activities of the Fine Arts Committee of the People-to-People Program*, reprinted in *Congressional Record-Appendix*, 85th Congress, First Session, August 16, 1957, A6736.

the National Museum, Seoul, April 1957; "Art from the University of Minnesota," Seoul National University, May 1958; "Twentieth Century Highlights of American Painting," the Kaepoong Building gallery, October 1958; "Recent American Prints in Color," the USIS galleries in Chinju, Pusan, Seoul, Kwangju, and Taegu, November 1959-February 1960. Here I will examine some exhibitions that would probably have influenced Korean *Informel* artists.

"Student Work from College and University Art Departments"

At the annual meeting of the College Art Association in 1955, Lois Bingham, a former lecturer at the National Gallery, presented a proposal from the USIA that the CAA prepare two types of exhibitions suitable for foreign circulation. One of them was to consist of oil paintings by college art students. Its purpose would be to demonstrate the fact that advanced work in creative art is encouraged in many of our college art departments."³³ It was suggested that three editions be prepared for Europe, Latin America, and Asia. The

³² "Council Organized for Art Exchange," *The New York Times*, December 16, 1956, p. 53.

³³ "Association Activities: College Art Exhibitions for USIA," *College Art Journal*, XIV, 4 (Summer 1955), p. 312.

CAA Board adopted these proposals and agreed to act in an advisory capacity.³⁴

Under the direction of Alden Megrew of the University of Colorado, the jurors met with Thomas Messer of the AFA in December 1955 in New York, to select the entries for all three editions from the 400 canvases submitted.³⁵ The jurors were reported to have been well pleased with the quality of the some 150 oil paintings chosen. The selected works were mostly abstract expressionist in style. The summer 1957 issue of *College Art Journal* reported that the jurors "were surprised by the overwhelming preponderance of work in the 'abstract expressionist' style, at all levels of competence--good, indifferent and bad. The 20 or 30 entries of 'representational' painting were indifferent or bad, but in response to a later appeal a few good paintings of this kind were obtained."³⁶ It is not surprising considering that the 1950s was the heyday of second-generation Abstract Expressionism in American art schools.

³⁴ The CAA's advice included recommended choices of paintings for all exhibitions, recommended explanatory text and photographs, and recommendation of a designer to prepare descriptive panels accompanying each of the exhibitions. See *Ibid.*, p. 313.

³⁵ "USIA Exhibition: Progress Report," *College Art Journal*, XV, 1 (Fall 1955), p. 5.

Consisting of 37 paintings, the Asian edition of "Student Work from College and University Art Departments" opened on November 1, 1956 at Seoul National University, Korea and then traveled to the Philippines and Australia.³⁷ The exhibition provided the Korean public with the first opportunity to see an aspect of contemporary American art. In his review, the artist Pyŏng-gi Kim characterized the work of American art students as the spirit of freedom and experimentation.³⁸ By considering American art as a variation of the School of Paris, however, he revealed Korean artists' preference for French art. Furthermore, he showed that the Korean art community was not well aware of abstract expressionist style. While most of the works were abstract expressionist, he only talked about cubism, abstraction and surrealism. The works reproduced in the Korean press were also cubistic or representational: Jen Baudman's *Musical Instruments* (fig. 4-1) and Richard Muller's *Boating*.³⁹

³⁶ "College Art News: USIA," *College Art Journal*, XVI, 4 (Summer 1957), p. 342.

³⁷ See "Paintings by American College Students," *Dong-a Daily*, November 4, 1956, p. 4; "Message from the President," *College Art Journal*, XVI, 2 (Winter 1957), inside cover.

³⁸ Pyŏng-gi Kim, "Freedom and Experimentation," *Seoul News*, November 14, 1956, p. 4.

³⁹ "Paintings by American College Students," *Dong-a Daily*, November 4, 1956, p. 4; Pyŏng-gi Kim, "Freedom and

However, for Korean art students, the exhibition would probably have had some effect on their involvement in *Informel* movement in the late 1950s.

"Art from the University of Minnesota"

The University of Minnesota had a contract relationship with Seoul National University beginning in 1954. Although the contract was to strengthen and develop the educational and research programs of Seoul National University in the fields of agriculture, engineering, and medicine,⁴⁰ there seem to have been a series of exchanges in other fields too. In this sense, the exhibition "Art from the University of Minnesota" can be seen an extension of the contract relationship.⁴¹

The exhibition was held in May 23-31, 1958 at Seoul National University. It consisted of 83 works by faculty and

Experimentation," *Seoul News*, November 14, 1956, p. 4. The spelling of Jen Baudman is based on Korean pronunciation.

⁴⁰ Tracy F. Tyler, "The Korea-Minnesota Bridge," Korean Survey (June-July 1956), reprinted in *Congressional Record-Senate*, 85th Congress, First Session, January 14, 1957, p. 500.

⁴¹ Before the Seoul exhibition, Seoul National University had had an exhibition of works by its faculty and art students in the United States. In his letter to Frederick A. Colwell, American Specialists Branch, International Educational Exchange Service, Department of State, H.H. Arnason mentioned the exchange of art exhibitions as the result of the contract relationship. See H.H. Arnason, letter to Frederick A.

art students. At the opening ceremony, Malcolm M. Willey, vice-president of the University of Minnesota said: "The exhibition is intended to show that the physical distance between the two countries can not be a measure of friendship. Our heart and mind can be united beyond the physical distance. The exhibition symbolizes the common objective, ideal, and love for beauty, which will bring us courage and faith."⁴²

In his review published in the May 19, 1958 issue of *Seoul National University Press*, Tong-guk Ahn, an art student, described the exhibition at length.⁴³ First, Ahn pointed out that the exhibition would be on the whole a valuable experience because of a variety of media such as *dessin*, print, sculpture, painting and ceramic. In particular, the juxtaposition of finished works and sketches, he noted, gave a vivid picture of working methods and processes. Then he wrote of the passion for orientalism in ceramic and sculpture. It is not clear what he meant by orientalism. The Seoul National University Museum still keeps two sculptures: W.S. Rauder's *A Husband Driving His Wife Out*

Colwell, December 11, 1959. The Walker Art Center Archives, Minnesota: Harvard H. Arnason Papers.

⁴² "The Exhibition of the University of Minnesota," *Korea Daily*, May 25, 1958, p. 8.

of the House (fig. 4-2) and John Rood's Growth (fig. 4-3).⁴⁴ While Rauder's work shows psychological tension through the effective use of geometric and biomorphic forms and negative and positive space, John Rood's work is open-form sculpture in which five vertical plant-like forms are connected with curving lines. Rood's work shows an affinity to the sculpture of Herbert Ferber and Ibram Lassaw.

Ahn seems to have been more interested in painting than in the other media. His description of painting is more specific. He wrote that oil paintings were similar in style to those at the "Student Work from College and University Art Departments." This indicates that most of oil paintings were abstract expressionist. In particular, he mentioned that Walter Gwalt's *A Boy Dancing in a Circle* (fig. 4-4) was notable for its dynamic brushstrokes and bright colors, and Camaron Pood's *Plants* (fig. 4-5) was similar to those by students. Finally, regretting that there were not many newer

⁴³ Tong-guk Ahn, "The Review of Minnesota Art Exhibition," *Seoul National University Press*, May 19, 1958, p. 3.

⁴⁴ After the exhibition, the University of Minnesota donated all the works but 11 by graduate students to Seoul National University. Professor Youngna Kim kindly told me that the Seoul National University Museum held some works from the exhibition. However, the museum did not have any record of the artists and titles. I could identify the two sculptures in the September 1958 issue of *Sinmisul*, which carried four reproductions from the exhibition. The spelling of the names

and more daring works, he finished his review in the hope of frequent cultural exchanges. Ahn's final remarks reveal that even art students came to be well aware of abstract expressionist style by May 1958.

"Eight American Artists"

The exhibition "Eight American Artists" was held in April 9-21, 1957 at the National Museum in Seoul. It was sponsored by the USIA and organized by the Seattle Art Museum. Two editions were prepared for Europe and Asia, and the Asian edition consisted of 30 paintings by Mark Tobey, Morris Graves, Kenneth Callahan and Guy Anderson and 10 sculptures by Rhys Caparn, David Hare, Seymour Lipton and Ezio Martinelli.⁴⁵ Unlike the above-mentioned two exhibitions, whose main audiences were students, it was designed to show American high culture to Asian intellectuals and artists. According to the July 22, 1957 issue of *Time*, "Such works are clearly not aimed at a mass audience, though Tobey's delicate calligraphic style and the general Orientalism and mysticism of the Northwest painters were thought likely to be received

is based on Korean pronunciation. See *Sinmisul*, 10 (September 1958), p. 25.

⁴⁵ "The Opening of the Exhibition of Eight American Artists," *Korea Daily*, April 11, 1957, p. 4. In the Korean art

sympathetically in the Far East. Aimed at letting the elite of Europe and Asia know the kind of art being produced in the U.S., the shows fortunately are accompanied by curators."⁴⁶

When the USIS announced the plans for the exhibition, *Art News* welcomed the project and commented: "This may mean that the U.S.I.A., perhaps in response to the adverse publicity it received on its post-1917 ban, may have switched lines once again, and is prepared to carry on the responsible efforts it inaugurated a few years ago. All friends of American culture must hope so."⁴⁷ However, the project had already been under way even before Charlotte Devree asserted that the USIA had a ban on post-1917 works in the September 1956 issue of *Art News*.⁴⁸ In his letter dated August 1, 1956

community the exhibition is known to have come to Korea though Europe.

⁴⁶ "Contemporaries Abroad," *Time*, 70, 4 (July 22, 1957), p. 56. As the collector Lawrence Fleischman noted, the United States would also have had a certain political intention in mind in presenting the exhibition to Asian audience: "In this propaganda battle today, Russia's weakest point is that its artists have to create according to the way the government tells them. Nobody who sees these shows can fail to understand that our artists paint the way they feel." *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁴⁷ "Art News International," *Art News*, 55, 6 (October 1956), p. 13.

⁴⁸ See Devree, "The U.S. Government Vetoes Living Art," *Art News*, 55, 5 (September 1955), pp. 34-5, 54-6. In his interview with Paul Cummings, the collector Lawrence Fleischman, who was on the USIA's Committee on Fine Arts from 1956 to 1959, also said: "There I was always fighting against

to Guy Anderson, Richard E. Fuller, director of the Seattle Art Museum, wrote:

I know that you will be thrilled to hear that I have just been requested by the U.S. Information Agency to form one or possibly two exhibits for foreign circuits of paintings by you along with Mark, Ken, and Morris, and two East Coast sculptors David Hare and Rhys Caparn. For the European show they want 6 or 7 paintings by each of you and a smaller number for circuit in the Far East including Japan, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand.⁴⁹

Fuller's letter reveals not only that there was no ban on post-1917 works, but that the USIA played a leading role in organizing the exhibition. The USIA made all the decisions on such matters as artists and number of works to be included and the itinerary for the exhibition. In its *News Notes*, the Seattle Art Museum summed up the process:

In midsummer we were requested by the U.S. Information Agency in Washington, D.C. to assemble an exhibit of the work of four Seattle artists ... and two New York sculptors ... for circuit through our European Embassies. Subsequently the program was doubled to include another exhibit of the same artists for circuit in the Pacific, namely, Japan, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand. Since the latter was to be designed for air shipment it needed smaller works. The number of sculptors was then doubled to include two

ensorship of exhibits. I didn't believe there should be such a thing.... When I was finally appointed to this committee we debated this subject a great deal and we finally broke the censorship." Paul Cummings, *Tape-Recorded Interview with Lawrence Fleischman*, February 28, 1970. *The Archives of American Art*, New York.

⁴⁹ Richard E. Fuller, letter to Guy Anderson, August 1, 1956. *The Archives of American Art*, New York: Guy Irving Anderson Papers, Roll 2786 (0445).

other creative New York artists Seymour Lipton and Ezio Martinelli.⁵⁰

In this preparatory stage, however, Korea was never mentioned in the itinerary for the Pacific circuit. Even when the preliminary exhibition was held at the Seattle Art Museum, the January 20, 1957 issue of *The Seattle Times* reported that the Pacific circuit included "Japan, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand."⁵¹ Unexpectedly, however, Korea became the first country to host the exhibition in April 1957. The decision to include Korea in the circuit, thus, should have been made sometime roughly between February and March. Probably the geographical proximity of Korea to Japan, the original first destination in the Pacific circuit, would have made the sudden change easier.

In terms of publicity, however, it seems to have caused a serious problem. In his statement presented to the Subcommittee on Distinguished Civilian Awards and Cultural Interchange and Development of the Committee on Education and Labor of the House of Representatives in 1955, Abbott

⁵⁰ The Seattle Art Museum, *News Notes*, 1957. The Seattle Art Museum, Washington: the Dorothy Stimson Bullitt Art Reference Library, the Eight American Artists File.

⁵¹ Boyer Gonzales, "Uniformly High Quality Marks U.S.I.A. Show at Museum," *The Seattle Times*, January 20, 1957. The Seattle

Washburn, deputy director of the USIA, revealed how much emphasis the USIA put on the publicity activities:

We see to it that any coming visit by a United States artist or performing group, or United States representatives to a trade fair, is made known in advance to the local people. We also see to it that the performance gets full publicity over the radio, in newspapers, and magazines, etc. In this way the effect of what the United States does is multiplied many times.⁵²

The sudden inclusion of Korea in the circuit, however, did not give USIS officials in Seoul enough time to prepare publicity material in Korean for the exhibition. It explains why the exhibition catalogue came out in the form of the July 1957 issue of the magazine *Sinmisul*.⁵³ It also explains why the exhibition did not get the attention of the Korean press on the opening day. The first report on the exhibition appeared in the April 11, 1957 issue of *Korea Daily*. Yet, no serious review was written during the first week. Daily newspapers just reproduced one or two works from the exhibition with a brief caption.⁵⁴ When *Time* magazine reported

Art Museum, Washington: the Dorothy Stimson Bullitt Art Reference Library, the Eight American Artists File.

⁵² Reprinted in *Congressional Record-Appendix*, 84th Congress, First Session, July 26, 1955, A5492.

⁵³ See *Sinmisul*, 5 (July 1957). The magazine *Sinmisul* seems to have been lost in oblivion in the Korean art community. It has been rarely mentioned in literature on Korean art. The presence of the catalogue has also been forgotten.

on the reaction to the exhibition, it might have had the initial Korean reaction in mind: "The shows have aroused neither scorn nor outraged contempt, and they have had serious attention from critics. But the general reaction of both press and public has been rather tepid and indifferent."⁵⁵

During the second week, however, things were dramatically changed. Suddenly Korean art critics began to contribute their reviews to daily newspapers. For example, the April 16 issue of *Chosŏn Daily* carried a review by the artist Kyu Chŏng; the April 17 issue of *Dong-a Daily* published the critic Kyŏng-sŏng Yi's "The Significance of Modern American Art"; and the April 17 issue of *Pyŏnghwa News* carried an article entitled "The American in Art" written by "R."⁵⁶ Quite interestingly, these reviews came out almost simultaneously. More importantly, a careful examination of these reviews shows that they were all based on John I.H.

⁵⁴ See, for example, *Chosŏn Daily*, April 13, 1957, April 15, 1957, April 16, 1957; *Seoul News*, April 14, 1957; *Kyŏngnyang News*, April 16, 1957. Among the works reproduced are Seymour Lipton's *Winter Solstice*, David Hare's *Figure and Chair*, Guy Anderson's *St. Sebastian*, *Dry Country*, Mark Tobey's *Two Men*, and others.

⁵⁵ "Contemporaries Abroad," *Time*, 70, 4 (July 22, 1957), p. 56.

⁵⁶ Kyu Chŏng, "The Action of Oriental Fantasy," *Chosŏn Daily*, April 16, 1957, p. 4; Kyŏng-sŏng Yi, "The Significance of

Baur's book *Revolution and Tradition in Modern American Art* (1951).

In his review "The Significance of Modern American Art," for example, Kyŏng-sŏng Yi first urged the Korean art community to show interest in American art, which had become an important part of international art. Then he explained the process in which surrealism and abstraction had been introduced to the United States and developed into the main streams in American art.⁵⁷ Yi's explanation is clearly reminiscent of Baur's statements on the development of abstract art in America:

As early as 1935 abstract art began again ... to capture the creative imagination of the American artist. At first the movement developed slowly, but after 1940 it became, for the first time in our history, the dominant one in American art. This was partly due to the fresh channels which surrealism opened into romantic territory. But our modern abstract art has also reexplored its earlier European sources and its earlier native traditions and has devised many new forms through the crossing of these with each other and with surrealism.⁵⁸

Modern American Art," *Dong-a Daily*, April 17, 1957, p. 4; R, "The American in Art," *Pyŏnghwa News*, April 17, 1957, p. 4.

⁵⁷ Kyŏng-sŏng Yi, "The Significance of Modern American Art," *Dong-a Daily*, April 17, 1957, p. 4.

⁵⁸ John I. H. Baur, *Revolution and Tradition in Modern American Art*, 3 ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 9.

Then, he described the quality of American art as simple, naïve, vigorous, matter-of-fact, ingenious, and realistic, which is exactly Baur's characterization of American art.⁵⁹

The other review "The American in Art" frankly starts with a quotation from Baur's book: "The great diversity of our modern art is a measure, I believe, of its strength and vitality."⁶⁰ Indeed, the review makes a systematic use of the book, sometimes distorting Baur's ideas. For example, the reviewer saw surrealism and abstraction as the two main trends in American art, which were represented by "romantic visionaries" and the New York School respectively.⁶¹ Then the reviewer traced the origin of romantic visionaries to Jennings Tofel's manifesto which was "a protest against superficial surface art ... a plea for ... insight, feeling,

⁵⁹ On the American quality in art, Baur wrote: "Insofar as one can generalize, then, the commonest attempts to isolate the American quality in our art have centered on such adjectives as simple, naïve, vigorous, matter-of-fact, ingenious, realistic, independent, and the like." Ibid., p. 149.

⁶⁰ Ibid., vii.

⁶¹ In his book Baur never used the term New York School. He classified abstraction into three branches: the purely classical and rational abstraction, the dynamic-classical abstraction, and romantic abstraction. According to Baur, abstract expressionism was the earliest romantic form of abstract art. (Ibid., pp. 67-75.) Thus, the reviewer's use of the term New York School indicates that "R" must have been very well aware of American art. Considering that the Korean art community had been indifferent to American art by 1957,

imagination."⁶² The reviewer's use of the term "romantic visionaries" and his reference to Jennings Tofel's manifesto all were derived from Baur's book. Unlike Baur, who viewed romantic visionaries as one of the native traditions, however, the reviewer elevated romantic visionaries to the status of one of the two main trends in American art, probably as a way to address the exhibition "Eight American Artists."

While looking back upon the first half of 1957, the artist and critic Yŏng-ju Kim also commented on the exhibition based on Baur's book.⁶³ After quoting from his book that "the American quality in work of art depends on two factors: the length of time that the artist has been exposed to an American environment and the artist's sensitivity to that environment,"⁶⁴ Kim noted that romantic visionaries were representative of the American quality in art. Then he stated that romantic visionaries rejected industrial civilization and rationality and explored the subconscious of mysterious forces and man's relation to nature and to the universe.

it is quite possible that "R" was an American or a Korean translator.

⁶² Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁶³ Yŏng-ju Kim, "The Art Community in Transition," *Pyŏng-hwa News*, June 26, 1957, p. 4.

Kim's description of romantic visionaries again reveals that he owed much to Baur.⁶⁵

The reviews' simultaneous appearance and reference to Baur's book seem to have something to do with the USIS's publicity activities. In the face of tepid reaction to the exhibition, USIS officials, who had not had enough time to provide publicity material in Korean, seem to have hastily made out reference material for Korean critics based on Baur's book. Given the fact that Baur's book was to be translated into Korean in 1958 with the aid of the USIS,⁶⁶ the assumption is quite convincing. After all, the exhibition gave the Korean art community not only the opportunity to see some examples of contemporary American art but also the framework through which to understand them.

The exhibition "Eight American Artists" made a great impact on the Korean art community. Its impact was, above all, perceived in the field of sculpture. After the

⁶⁴ Baur, *Revolution and Tradition in Modern American Art*, p. 152.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-19.

⁶⁶ Professor Youngna Kim noted that two books on American art were translated into Korean with the help of the USIS: John Baur, *Revolution and Tradition in Modern American Art*; James Thomas Flexner, *A Short History of American Painting* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950). See Youngna Kim, "Artistic Exchange Between East and West Since World War II and Calligraphic Abstraction," in *Art of Twentieth Century Korea* (Seoul: Yegyŏng, 1998), p. 217.

exhibition sculptors began to have an interest in new materials such as steel and wire. For example, in the Sixth National Art Exhibition, held in October 1957, Sang-bŏm Chŏn showed his *Rebirth* (fig. 4-6), executed in thin sheet steel. His work bears a striking similarity to Seymour Lipton's *Geminal* of 1953 (fig. 4-7) both in form and subject. Those steel sculptures were regarded as a novelty in the exhibition.⁶⁷ Chŏn explained his interest in new materials as follows: "I have come to acquire a habit of stopping by secondhand shops or ironworks. These days, I also look at any kinds of things with attention. I intend to base a new expression on new materials."⁶⁸

In the field of painting, the works of Mark Tobey such as, *Forms Follow Man* of 1943 (fig. 4-8), *Written Stone* of 1944 (fig. 4-9), and *Canal of Cultures* of 1951 (fig. 4-10) might have had an impact on Korean artists. Those works were executed in his well-known, semi-automatic "white writing," which enmeshes his hidden, evocative images in an endless web of complicated lines. In addition, Kenneth Callahan's darkly mystical art, executed in a fluid, baroque manner, would have made a strong impression on

⁶⁷ "The Sixth National Art Exhibition: Sculpture," *Sinmisul*, 7 (November 1957), n.p.

⁶⁸ *Sinmisul*, 8 (March 1958), p. 43.

Korean artists. Considering that the surrealist tendency was dominant in the first year of the Hyundai Artists Association, Callahan's works such as *Cove Between Two Worlds* of 1952 (fig. 4-11), *Echoes of Ancient Battle* of 1955, and *Riders on the Mountain* of 1956 (fig. 4-12) might have stimulated the creative imagination of Hyundai artists.⁶⁹

"Twentieth Century Highlights of American Painting"

The exhibition "Twentieth Century Highlights of American Painting" was conceived by the USIA in response to many requests from overseas personnel for educational material on American contemporary painting. It consisted of forty color reproductions of American paintings of the twentieth century, selected and assembled by the USIA for distribution to government posts abroad.⁷⁰ In Korea, the exhibition was held in October 22–November 5, 1958 at the Kaepoong Building gallery, Seoul.

⁶⁹ Unfortunately, Korean works of surrealist tendency was known only as titles mentioned in newspaper reviews. See Chapter V.

⁷⁰ Howard Devree, "Crisis Averted: Museum Damage Is Cut by Prompt Action—Our Art for Overseas," *The New York Times*, April 20, 1958, II, p. 11.

The collection showed a wide range of styles including works by Eakins, Luks, Glackens, Sheeler, Hopper, Kuhn, Weber, Gorky, Spencer, Hartley, Shahn, Marin, Tobey and Pollock among others. This variety of styles was intended to emphasize the variety and vitality of the United States as against Communist totalitarianism, as is evident in the introduction of the exhibition catalogue: "American painting of the twentieth century thrives in the energizing atmosphere of democracy.... American painters today continue their adventure to new frontiers of style and ideas in an atmosphere of free speech and free expression."⁷¹

However, what caught the attention of Korean artists was Jackson Pollock's work. In his review, the critic Syngboc Chon reveals how Korean artists looked at Pollock: "One of the most striking pieces on view is an abstract work by Jackson Pollock, the most controversial American artist, who was killed in an automobile accident a few years ago. Visible in this oil entitled No. 27 is the 'drip' method by which the artist creates the accidental effect of canvas through chance, and his inner rebellion

⁷¹ The United States Information Agency, *Twentieth Century Highlights of American Painting* (Washington, D.C., 1958), vii, ix.

against convention, logic, and standardization of modern society."⁷² This view of drip technique as a rebellion against convention was one of the conspicuous features in the Korean *Informel* movement.

(3) Abstract Expressionism in Magazines

In an interview with Dorothy Bestor on March 9, 1965, Kenneth Callahan stated the importance of popular magazines in a shift in the public's attitude toward art:

I feel myself that one of the things that has been a very great influence is Life, Time, and Newsweek magazines, not from the quality of what they reproduce but just the fact that, for so many years, every week anyone opens that magazines and here's a section devoted to art, several pages.... So after weeks and weeks and weeks, anyone is bound to get into his consciousness that it is a part of contemporary life.... And I think the quality of the reproductions and the kind of paintings or sculpture they use is of less consequence than just the fact it appears, because that's the first time in this country that art has become a news thing.⁷³

In fact, popular magazines have played an important role in bringing art to the attention of the American public. The

⁷² Syngboc Chon, "Show of U.S. Paintings Opens at Kaepoong Building Today," *The Korean Republic*, October 22, 1958, p. 5.

⁷³ Kenneth Callahan, interview with Dorothy Bestor, March 9, 1965. The Archives of American Art, New York: The Oral History Collections of the Archives of American Art, Roll 3949 (0547).

relationship between *Life* magazine and Abstract Expressionism has even been the object of scholarly attention.⁷⁴

Given the importance of popular magazines in American art, it is not difficult to assess how these magazines would have been regarded by Korean artists and critics during the 1950s. They virtually served as art magazines in the Korean art community, which had been almost isolated from the currents of international art. In regard to the *Informel* movement, in particular, *Life* and *Time* seem to have been one of the major sources from which Korean artists could get information about postwar art in America and Europe. This is evident in the recollection of the Korean art critic Ku-yŏl Yi: "I remember that on the walls and tables of their [*Informel* artists'] studios I would often see full-color reproductions torn off from *Life* and *Time*, in which the work of the Abstract Expressionists such as Pollock, de Kooning, Motherwell and Rothko were often featured."⁷⁵

⁷⁴ See Mary Lee Corlett, "Jackson Pollock: American Culture, the Media and the Myth," *Rutgers Art Review*, VIII (1987), pp. 71-106; Bradford R. Collins, "Life Magazine and the Abstract Expressionists, 1948-51: A Historiographic Study of a Late Bohemian Enterprise," *Art Bulletin*, LXXIII, 2 (June 1991), pp. 283-308. While Corlett claimed that *Life* was not favorable to Abstract Expressionism until the mid-1950s, Collins argued that *Life* had an essentially positive attitude toward the modern tradition and sought to educate their readers and to expand their awareness about an important cultural sphere.

These popular magazines were easily available to the Korean readers. As has been noted, USIE funds had been used to purchase and distribute subscriptions to four American periodicals—*Life*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *The New York Times*—to key organizations and individuals in Korea since 1950. Furthermore, some of the Koreans could have afforded to subscribe to those magazines by the mid-1950s. An article in the December 4, 1957 issue of *Korea Daily* showed that 2,000 copies of *Life* and 3,200 copies of *Time* and *Newsweek* respectively were being subscribed.⁷⁶ The article also informed the reader of some places where Koreans could get and read those magazines: bookstores behind the building of Korea Commercial Bank in downtown Seoul, where numerous kinds of magazines were pouring in from the U.S. Army; and the USIS libraries, where there were many magazines Koreans had never heard of.

In addition to popular magazines, some Korean artists and critics seem to have read such art magazines as *Art in*

⁷⁵ Ku-yŏl Yi, "The *Informel* Movement in Contemporary Korean Art History," *Space*, 205 (July 1984), p. 49

⁷⁶ "How Much Do We Read Foreign Newspapers and Magazines?" *Korea Daily*, December 4, 1957, p. 4. The article also noted that 250 copies of *Bijutsu techo*, a Japanese art magazine, were officially being imported. It suggests that Japanese magazines were another source from which Korean artists and critics could get information on the currents of international art.

America and *Art News* in the libraries of the USIS. In recollecting his military days, Kŭn-taek Pang, one of the leading exponents of the *Informel* movement, stated that he was exposed to the currents of American art through *Art News*, which he could read in the USIS library in Kwangju.⁷⁷ In this section I will examine the 1950s issues of *Life*, *Time*, *Art in America*, and *Art News* in order to find out to what degree Abstract Expressionist art was covered in these magazines and to what aspect of Abstract Expressionism the Korean art community was exposed.

Life

Although *Life* magazine played an important role in bringing art to the attention of the general reader, it did not pay much attention to Abstract Expressionist art during the 1950s. The general impression of the magazine's broad coverage of Abstract Expressionism seems to have stemmed from its 1949 article on Jackson Pollock.⁷⁸ As a seminal article that exposed Pollock to the attention of the American public,

⁷⁷ Kŭn-taek Pang, "The Arena for Passion in the 1950s," *Space*, 204 (June 1984), p. 42.

⁷⁸ "Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painters in the United States?" *Life*, 27, 6 (August 8, 1949), pp. 42-3, 45. The article was accompanied with reproductions of his works such as *Number 9*, *Number 12*, *Number 17*, and a photograph of Pollock at work.

it gave a detailed description of his unconventional techniques. For example, the caption accompanying *Number 12* described his liking for aluminum paint as a way to get an exciting textual contrast. Another caption for *Number 17* stated, "he numbers his paintings instead of naming them, so that his public will not look at them with any preconceived notion of what they are."⁷⁹ A photograph of Pollock and the accompanying text gave a much clearer view of how his work was produced:

When Pollock decides to start a painting, the first thing he does is to tack a large piece of canvas on the floor of his barn.... Working on the floor gives him room to scramble around the canvas, attacking it from the top, the bottom or the side.... He surrounds himself with quart cans of aluminum paint and many hues of ordinary household enamel. Then starting anywhere on the canvas, he goes to work. Sometimes he dribbles the paint on with a brush. Sometimes he scrawls it on with a stick, scoops it with a towel or even pours it on straight out of the can. In with it all he deliberately mixes sand, broken glass, nails, screws or other foreign matter lying around. Cigaret ash and an occasional dead bee sometimes get in the picture inadvertently.⁸⁰

Life's focus on Pollock's new techniques continued in its report on his death: "Pollock's method made him famous. His style, with its restless activity of color and dramatic textures, stirred a whole generation of young American

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 43.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 45.

painters."⁸¹ Indeed, *Life's* insistence on new techniques and process was conspicuous in its articles on contemporary art.

In a 1954 article, for instance, the magazine reported:

"There are strange goings-on in the art world today. Studios have been transformed into foundries, carpenter shops and laboratories. Artists, garbed in mechanics' aprons instead of smocks, wielding acetylene torches instead of chisels, are in the throes of experiment, surrounded by automobile paints, rayon fiber, liquid plastics, wood shavings, metal rods, glass, wires."⁸² And in a report on the Carnegie International Art Exhibition in 1955, *Life* reproduced de Kooning's *Woman VI* and a detail in order to point out his brush technique.⁸³ Only in late 1959, *Life* sought to explain how Abstract Expressionism had developed and what it had aimed to communicate by publishing Dorothy Seiberling's two-part series on the Abstract Expressionists.⁸⁴ In her article, Seiberling wrote: "like vital artists of every new era, [the

⁸¹ "Rebel Artist's Tragic Ending," *Life*, 41, 9 (August 27, 1956), p. 58.

⁸² "New Means for Moderns," *Life*, 37, 21 (November 22, 1954), p. 160.

⁸³ "New Art at Close View," *Life*, 39, 21 (November 21, 1955), pp. 134-5.

⁸⁴ See Dorothy Seiberling, "Baffling U.S. Art: What It Is About," *Life*, 47, 19 (November 9, 1959), pp. 68-80; "Varied

Abstract Expressionists] found themselves rejecting the styles of the past. They considered them adequate only to express the times in which they were created. Their own times—charged with wars and tension, bombarded with the complexities of science, clouded by the mysteries of outer space and man's inner being—were as different from past epochs as an airplane from a wagon. To express these times, they felt they needed a style that was tense, explosive, mysterious and altogether new."⁸⁵

In general, *Life* tended to emphasize the working methods of Abstract Expressionists and later sought to explain it with the language of existentialism.

Time

Unlike *Life*, *Time* showed a persistent interest in Abstract Expressionist art during the 1950s. Interestingly, *Time* also tended to stress the unorthodox techniques employed by the Abstract Expressionists. However, in the early 1950s, *Time's* focus on their working methods gave the impression of questioning the legitimacy of Abstract Expressionist art. For example, *Time's* report on Pollock's 1950 exhibitions in Italy

Art for Four Pioneers," *Life*, 47, 20 (November 16, 1959), pp. 74-86.

⁸⁵ Seiberling, "Baffling U.S. Art," p. 69.

started with bewilderment at his 'drip' technique and finished with quotations from the commentary of Italian critic Bruno Alfieri on Pollock's work:

Jackson Pollock's abstractions ... stump experts as well as laymen. Laymen wonder what to look for in the labyrinths which Pollock achieves by dripping paint onto canvases laid flat on the floor; experts wonder what on earth to say about the artist.... "It is easy ... to describe a [Pollock]. Think of a canvas surface on which the following ingredients have been poured: the contents of several tubes of paint of the best quality; sand, glass, various powders, pastels, gouache, charcoal.... Jackson Pollock's paintings represent absolutely nothing: no fact, not ideas, no geometrical forms."⁸⁶

Reporting on de Kooning's one-man show in a 1951 article entitled "Willem the Walloper," *Time's* sarcastic attitude toward the techniques was more outspoken: "Doubtful or not, De Kooning wallops into each canvas with a will, drawing lines that resemble streams of ticker tape on the wind, whipped free one instant, snarled the next, and punctuated with blobs and smears which break the canvas into arcs, tunnels, humps and skies of space."⁸⁷ Interestingly, while derisively commenting on the work of the Abstract Expressionists, *Time* tended to emphasize it in illustrations. A case in point is *Time's* commentary on the exhibition "American Vanguard Art" and a traveling American art

⁸⁶ Quoted in "Chaos, Damn It!" *Time*, 56, 21 (November 20, 1950), pp. 70-1.

exhibition, both held in Paris, 1951.⁸⁸ According to the commentary, "there is nothing really new about U.S. abstractionism. It is just more helter-skelter than the kind practiced in Europe ever since World War I.... Parisians, who have long been glutted and lately bored with the abstractions of their own compatriots, may be somewhat intrigued by the extremes to which abstraction has been stretched in the U.S. But a traveling U.S. exhibit which included the works of such conservatives as Hopper, Burchfield and Wyeth would do more than intrigue the French. It might even show them that the U.S. has a solid and fruitful tradition of its own."⁸⁹ However, *Time* featured Hofmann's *Scotch and Burgundy*, de Kooning's *Woman*, and Pollock's *Painting 49-9*, instead of the works of those conservatives.

Time magazine's attitude toward Abstract Expressionist art began to change around 1955. In an article about Pollock's retrospective show at Sidney Janis Gallery, for instance, *Time* noted:

The exhibition stretched back to the time when Pollock was imitating imitations of Picasso, reached a climax with the year 1948, which Pollock first conceived the idea of dripping and sloshing paint from buckets onto

⁸⁷ "Willem the Walloper," *Time*, 57, 18 (April 30, 1951), p. 63.

⁸⁸ "Abstractions for Export," *Time*, 59, 6 (February 11, 1952), p. 71.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

vast canvases laid flat on the floor. Once the canvases were hung upright, what gravity had accomplished came to look like the outpouring of Herculean energy. Pollock had invented a new kind of decoration, astonishingly vehement.⁹⁰

Another article in the February 20, 1956 issue exhibited a much clearer change: "The advance guard is advancing in a number of different directions at once, and swiftly outrunning the abstract-expressionist formula. The variety of the paintings is in itself a strong indication of the movement's vitality."⁹¹ Furthermore, *Time* began to perceive political values in Abstract Expressionist art. In an article on the Brussel's World Fair in 1958, the magazine suddenly argued that the unorthodox methods of the Abstract Expressionists were an indication of freedom: "In contrast with the Soviet exhibit, the U.S. show makes an important point. The purpose of the Soviet's towering statues of Lenin in bronze or Finnish granite is clear and explicit. The spidery, welded-steel world of U.S. sculpture and the splashy abstractions on canvas are not state-commissioned, nor likely

⁹⁰ "The Champ," *Time*, 66, 25 (December 19, 1955), p. 66.

⁹¹ "The Wild Ones," *Time*, 67, 8 (February 20, 1956), p. 70. Describing the title "Wild Ones" as an obvious reference to a movie of the same title, Corlett pointed out that it was intended to equate Pollock with the alienation and rebelliousness of the youth culture heroes. According to her, this facet of the youth culture was to eventually act as one vehicle through which the conservative press would gradually

to be. They leave no doubt that in the U.S. an artist is free to pursue his personal vision and interpretation. The hope of the U.S. show is that this unique message of freedom will make its way through the bewilderment."⁹²

Finally, when the exhibition "The New American Painting," organized by the International Council at the MOMA, went to Europe, *Time* acknowledged the prevalence of Abstract Expressionism and suggested that their techniques could be seen as a sign of the vitality of American art, which influenced young European artists:

Empty or vital, art or droolings, U.S. abstract expressionist painting has arrived and is not likely to be rubbed out. Most of the paintings submitted in art competitions in major U.S. art centers show strong abstract-expressionist influence. The interest and enthusiasm of young European artists for "The New American Painting" suggest that this influence is now being exported to Europe.⁹³

In short, *Time* tended to emphasize the new techniques of Abstract Expressionist art and gradually invest it with ideological values. Among the reproductions that might have caught the attention of Korean artists were Still's Red and

come to accept Jackson Pollock." See Corlett, "Jackson Pollock: American Culture, the Media and the Myth," p. 100.

⁹² "Americans at Brussels: Soft Sell, Range & Controversy," *Time*, 71, 24 (June 16, 1958), p. 75.

⁹³ "American Abstraction Abroad," *Time*, 72, 5 (August 4, 1958), p. 45.

Black, Mitchell's Hemlock, Hartigan's Broadway Restaurant, de Kooning's February, and Kline's Wanamaker Block.

Art in America

Art in America seems to have made little impact on Korean artists, for it had been a quarterly until 1962 and did not pay a special attention to Abstract Expressionist art. The magazine's first mention of Abstract Expressionist art in the 1950s appeared in Baur's essay "Modern American Art and Its Critics," published in the April 1952 issue. The essay was actually part of his book *Revolution and Tradition in Modern American Art*, in which he argued against the charges that abstract art was un-American, escapist, or uncommunicable.⁹⁴

In the December 1954 issue, Herbert Ferber wrote an important article about modern sculpture, in which he made a clear distinction between traditional and modern sculpture, between "monolithic sculpture" and "sculpture of extension":

Monolithic sculpture, centripetal sculpture, possessed by the idea of mass, presents a continuous surface, enclosing a volume, which is motivated from the center. Sculpture of extension; centrifugal sculpture, is neither massive nor monolithic, nor does it present a

⁹⁴ John I. H. Baur, "Modern American Art and Its Critics," *Art in America*, 39, 2 (April 1952), pp. 53-65.

continuous surface. Its elements are not oriented to a center nor are they projections from a central mass. Where sculpture had been solid, closed, it is now an art of open, airy, discontinuous forms, suspended in space.⁹⁵

The article was accompanied with reproductions of Ferber's works such as *Flame*, *Wall Sculpture*, and *Green Sculpture*.

In the same issue, Gottlieb's article about the relationship between abstract art and the public was published along with reproductions of his works such as *W*, and *Labyrinth*.⁹⁶

The first serious article on Abstract Expressionist art appeared in the December 1955 issue of *Art in America*. In his article "Profile: Jackson Pollock," B. H. Friedman, like those authors of *Life* and *Time* magazines, focused on Pollock's methods, but without any derisive tone:

After Pollock tacked canvas to the floor of his studio, he "arranges his palette" by lining up cans of the household paint which he intends to use. He applies paint to canvas directly from the cans with sticks, knives, trowels, occasionally his bare hands—anything to scoop up the paint and dribble it upon the canvas. The speed, excitement, and rhythm with which he works result in images of interlaced color rhythmically interrupted by explosions. The techniques which Pollock has developed are the result of his need to express fluidity—energy and motion made visible. No image could better express this concept than that of liquid paint spilled on canvas.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Herbert Ferber, "On Sculpture," *Art in America*, 42, 4 (December 1954), p. 263.

⁹⁶ Adolph Gottlieb, "The Artist and the Public," *Art in America*, 42, 4 (December 1954), pp. 267-71.

In the summer 1958 issue, Friedman also introduced a new trend in collecting in which contemporary collectors began to turn to the work of the Abstract Expressionists. The article was accompanied with reproductions of Pollock's *One*, Motherwell's *Je t'aime*, Guston's *Zone*, and several photographs of other works hanging in the home of the collector Ben Heller.⁹⁸

However, what caught the attention of Korean artists would probably have been its annual features "New Talent in the U.S." Started in 1954, the project was "planned to present to the public a sampling of the many talented young or relatively unpublicized artists working in various parts of the country ... intended to be representative of the promising artists."⁹⁹ Selected by committee members and consultants, the works of those younger artists were to be reproduced in the New Talent issue of *Art in America* and included in a traveling exhibition organized by the American Federation of Arts.¹⁰⁰ Among the artists represented are Grace

⁹⁷ B. H. Friedman, "Profile: Jackson Pollock," *Art in America*, 43, 4 (December 1955), p. 58.

⁹⁸ Friedman, "Trends in Collecting," *Art in America*, 46, 2 (Summer 1958), pp. 12-9.

⁹⁹ Jean Lipman, "Foreword: Americans with a Future," *Art in America*, 42, 1 (Winter 1954), p. 10.

Hartigan, Kenzo Okada, Sam Francis, Helen Frankenthaler, John Levee, and others. Understandably, the works selected during the 1950s were mostly in Abstract Expressionist style.

Evaluating the first five issues, Arnason stated: "One is again conscious how few younger artists are working within the tradition of geometric abstraction. Sharp-focus realism is less prominent in the fifth than in any previous issue. In fact there is little evidence of any waning vitality in abstract-expressionism or any large-scale movement towards a new realism."¹⁰¹ Thus the New Talent issues might have provided Korean artists with the opportunity to see numerous examples of Abstract Expressionist art.

Art News

Unlike the other magazines, *Art News* showed a deep, favorable interest in Abstract Expressionism during the 1950s. Indeed, with Alfred Frankfurter as its publisher and

¹⁰⁰ Katharine Kuh explained the selecting procedure: "A number of committee members and consultants were asked to recommend young, gifted and relatively little known American artists from all parts of the country. Each of these artists was then invited to send photographs of his work together with brief biographical notes. From a large group of nominations, the committee made its final selections." Katharine Kuh, "Foreword: New Talent in the U.S.A.," *Art in America*, 44, 1 (February 1956), p. 10.

¹⁰¹ H. H. Arnason, "New Talent in the U.S.: Foreword," *Art in America*, 46, 1 (Spring 1958), p. 12.

Thomas B. Hess as its editor, the magazine could be seen as a stronghold of Abstract Expressionism. Its broad coverage of Abstract Expressionism, however, emphasized certain aspects of the art movement.

First, like the other magazines, *Art News* tended to emphasize the unorthodox working methods and techniques of the Abstract Expressionists. It is evident in a series of articles in which the artist was shown creating the work of art. Through photographs and texts, the articles gave the reader a clear view of the whole process of finishing the work of art, an effect of peeping over the artist's shoulder as he goes about the work. Among the Abstract Expressionists who were featured in these articles are Hofmann, Pollock, Smith, Ferber, Kline, de Kooning, Tworikov, and Mitchell.¹⁰² Unlike the other magazines, *Art News* from the start defended the new techniques as a sign of genius. For instance, after

¹⁰² Elaine de Kooning, "Hans Hofmann Paints a Picture," *Art News*, 48, 10 (February 1950), pp. 38-41, 58-9; Robert Goodnough, "Pollock Paints a Picture," *Art News*, 50, 3 (May 1951), pp. 38-41, 60-1; Elaine de Kooning, "David Smith Makes a Sculpture," *Art News*, 50, 5 (September 1951), pp. 38-41, 50-1; Robert Goodnough, "Ferber Makes a Sculpture," *Art News*, 51, 7 (November 1952), pp. 40-3, 66; Goodnough, "Kline Paints a Picture," *Art News*, 51, 8 (December 1952), pp. 36-9, 63-4; Thomas Hess, "De Kooning Paints a Picture," *Art News*, 52, 1 (March 1953), pp. 30-3, 64-7; Fairfield Porter, "Tworikov Paints a Picture," *Art News*, 52, 3 (May 1953), pp. 30-3, 72-3; Irving Sandler, "Mitchell Paints a Picture," *Art News*, 56, 6 (October 1957), pp. 44-7, 69-70.

making a detailed description of Pollock's working method,

Robert Goodnough added:

Of course anyone can pour paint on a canvas, as anyone can bang on a piano, but to create one must purify the emotions; few have the strength, will or even the need, to do this.¹⁰³

In the case of Franz Kline, his technique was compared to Oriental calligraphy. However, the comparison was to deny any influence of the Orient on Kline:

The word "calligraphy" often seems to come up in connection with Kline's painting. His early fondness for such Japanese painters as Sesson, Korin and Hokusai may have influenced what he does, but he says that while calligraphy is a matter of writing on an unlimited surface in which the papers acts only as background to support the writing, his own use of black and white is quite different since his intention is to create definite positive shapes with the white as well as with the black so that the eye may move easily over the surface. In writing, one is directed by the character of the letter used.... What Kline attempts is quite different. His desire is to set up a conflict between the white and black that will resolve itself into a final unity encompassing the rectangle, with all the shapes equally controlled.¹⁰⁴

Indeed, *Art News* took a firm stand against the issue of influences, whether European or Asian, on Abstract

¹⁰³ Goodnough, "Pollock Paints a Picture," p. 61.

¹⁰⁴ Goodnough, "Kline Paints a Picture," p. 63. Rather, Kline's influence on the Orient was emphasized: "His influence has reached abroad, especially in Japan. Two issues of the Tokyo magazine, *Bokubi* ("The Beauty of Black and White"), were devoted almost exclusively to his work (1951, 1952) with several reproductions and editorials by the well-known Japanese artists Sabro Hasegawa and Shiryu Morita." *Ibid.*, p. 64.

Expressionism. Already in 1951, Hess claimed: "It seems as though, after the beginning of World War II, the matrix of pictorial invention was magically transferred to America, stimulating to the point of death our provincial tradition, and evolving in its place styles that no longer 'look American,' but have the confident, international air that is characteristic of modern art."¹⁰⁵ Alfred Frankfurter even showed a hysterical response to the presence of a similar art to the New York School in Europe: "There is little question any longer that the hegemony of style in advanced painting has been transferred from Paris to New York. Abstract Impressionism has taken hold of younger studios, not only in Paris, but in Rome and London, too.... Is there any reason why Parisians need paint like the Ecole de New York? Not only Mathieu's somehow contrived automaticism, which makes one think of rock 'n' roll in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, but the whole group of Hartung, Soulages and the Milanese like Carmassi seems to an American only too regrettably like the self-conscious and far too well contained Charleston dancers in Paris of the 1920s."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Thomas B. Hess, "Is Abstraction Un-American," *Art News*, 49, 10 (February 1951), p.41.

¹⁰⁶ Alfred Frankfurter, "Editorial: Transatlantic Airdrome Syndrome, Part I," *Art News*, 56, 6 (October 1957), p. 23.

Second, *Art News* tended to be extremely sensitive to the issues of freedom of expression and the relation of art to politics. Whenever these issues were brought up, *Art News* gave voice to its opinion in the editorial column. In the 1950s its concern about artistic freedom took the form of criticism against conservative, anti-modernists. Standing up to the attacks of Representative George A. Dondero, Michigan, for instance, it carried "Statements on Modern Art," issued by the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.¹⁰⁷ When André Marie, Minister of Education, at the Salon d'Automne in November 1951, Paris, removed the works by avowed Communist painters, Frankfurter also seized the opportunity to defend abstract art:

Why is abstraction-distortion called Communist in America, while in Paris, five thousand miles nearer the Kremlin, even cabinet ministers can spot the official Totalitarian brand of propagandistic realism for what it is?¹⁰⁸

Throughout the 1950s, the magazine published articles defending abstract art. Meyer Schapiro's "The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art," published in the summer 1956

¹⁰⁷ Alfred M. Frankfurter, "Vernissage: Manifesto to End All Manifestoes," *Art News*, 49, 2 (April 1950), p. 15.

¹⁰⁸ Frankfurter, "Vernissage: Freedom to Paint," *Art News*, 50, 8 (December 1951), p. 17.

issue, is representative of the magazine's position. In his article, Schapiro wrote:

Painting by its impressive example of inner freedom and inventiveness and by its fidelity to artistic goals, which include the mastery of the formless and accidental, helps to maintain the critical spirit and the ideals of creativeness, sincerity and self-reliance, which are indispensable to the life of our culture."¹⁰⁹

For *Art News*, such qualities as freedom and creativity were closely associated with the ideological values of democracy. It is evident in a two-part series entitled "How Art Exists under Communism."¹¹⁰ In these articles, *Art News* sought to show the degree to which the State controlled art and artists in the U.S.S.R. and describe the presence of abstract artists as a protest against the cultural and political dictatorship. Harry L. Colman's report, in which he described his demonstrations of his working method at the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students held in Moscow in the summer of 1956, was even provocatively entitled "An American Action Painter Invades Moscow."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Meyer Schapiro, "The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art," *Art News*, 57, 4 (Summer 1956), p. 42. See also Hess, "Is Abstraction Un-American," pp. 38-41; Devree, "How the U.S. Government Vetoed Living Art," pp. 34-5, 54-6.

¹¹⁰ "How Art Exists under Communism: Part I, Art and Artists under Communism Today," *Art News*, 57, 2 (April 1958), p. 25-34, 50, 59-66; "Art under Communism: 2," *Art News*, 57, 8 (December 1958), pp. 31-7, 56-9, 62-5.

The magazine's anti-Communist stance sometimes led it to adopt a double standard in dealing with cultural politics. For instance, when American artists such as Edward Biberman, Philip Evergood, William Gropper, Stanley Kaplan, and others, participated in an exhibition held in Warsaw, Poland, *Art News* warned the American artist of the risk of endorsing Communist art policy:

There is nothing wrong in an American artist exhibiting his work behind the Iron Curtain—in fact, we hope the day of freedom, when every American artist can do so, will dawn before long. Until then, however, any American artist who does cannot avoid implicitly endorsing the totalitarian persecution of all art except Soviet-sanctioned social realism—of which their exhibitions were exclusively composed.”¹¹²

While asking the State Department to invite Picasso to come to the United States, however, *Art News* kept in mind that the invitation would “be making a master stroke in the psychological warfare campaign.”¹¹³ This attitude is also detected in its report on Picasso's work. Writing on Picasso's later work at Vallauris, Frankfurter focused on his sculptural innovations as a way to avoid the burden of explaining the political contents of his painting. Thus, *War*

¹¹¹ Harry L. Colman, “An American Action Painter Invades Moscow,” *Art News*, 57, 8 (December 1958), pp. 33, 56-7.

¹¹² Frankfurter, “Editorial: Social Notes from All Over Totalitaria,” *Art News*, 53, 3 (May 1954), p. 17.

¹¹³ Frankfurter, “Editorial: Picasso; Marin, Arms,” *Art News*, 52, 7 (November 1953), p. 13.

and *Peace*, one of Picasso's major works at Vallauris, were just reproduced without any description of its anti-Americanism. The accompanying caption simply stated: "Each 34 feet wide, these two 1952 oils of *War and Peace*, now shown for the first time, are the largest Picasso ever painted. He intends them to decorate the vaults of a dimly-lit wall leading to the chapel of a rest home at Vallauris"¹¹⁴

Finally, *Art News* tended to emphasize Harold Rosenberg's idea of Action Painting rather than Clement Greenberg's formalist criticism. In fact, the magazine was a major arena for Rosenberg's art criticism.¹¹⁵ Among his articles published in the magazine is "The American Action Painters," which occupies a central place in his art criticism. In the article Rosenberg argued:

At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act—rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze or "express" an object, actual or

¹¹⁴ Frankfurter, "Picasso Brings Himself Up to Date," *Art News*, 52, 7 (November 1953), p. 28.

¹¹⁵ See Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *Art News*, 51, 8 (December 1952), pp. 22-3, 48-50; "Community Critics vs. Modern Painting," *Art News*, 54, 10 (February 1956), pp. 33, 58-60; "Everyman a Professional," *Art News*, 55, 7 (November 1956), pp. 26-7, 55-6; "Hans Hofmann: Nature into Action," *Art News*, 56, 3 (May 1957), pp. 34-6, 55-6; "Aaron Siskind: The Camera and Action Art," *Art News*, 58, 5 (September 1959), pp. 22-3, 57-8; "Critic within the Act," *Art News*, 59, 6 (October 1960), pp. 26-8; and "Action Painting: A Decade of Distortion," *Art News*, 61, 8 (December 1962), pp. 42-4, 62-3.

imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event. The painter no longer approached his easel with an image in his mind; he went up to it with material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter.¹¹⁶

However, Rosenberg did not give enough explanation of why the canvas had to be "an arena in which to act." Thus Annette Cox stated in her book that "Rosenberg failed to explain how the interlaced webs of line, broad brushstrokes, and fragmented shapes of gesture painting represented oppression to Stalinism and McCarthyism."¹¹⁷ In order to grasp theoretical foundations for Rosenberg's idea of Action Painting, it is necessary to examine his discussion of mass culture and individual culture in his earlier essays.

Mass culture, for Rosenberg, was a way of thinking available to all people when they stopped thinking as individuals. In "The Herd of Independent Minds," he argued that mass culture spoke to the part of consciousness given up to the mass: "Mass-cultural statements are constantly in the process of making themselves true by causing people to experience their common lives in those terms."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," p. 22.

¹¹⁷ Annette Cox, *Art-as-Politics: The Abstract Expressionist Avant-Garde and Society* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1982), p. 137.

¹¹⁸ Rosenberg, "The Herd of Independent Minds," *Commentary* 6, 3 (September 1948), p. 245.

Against mass culture, Rosenberg placed in direct opposition individual culture, the culture of individual consciousness. For him, individual consciousness, to which individual culture spoke, was a way to gain "a capacity for the historical."¹¹⁹ Individual culture concerned itself with actual experience, a reassertion of the individual's control over his perception of reality. For Rosenberg, the practitioner of individual culture was "the American,"¹²⁰ because the American existed without a past. And the attribute Rosenberg considered most central to the American was action:

Free of traditional auras, the American stakes everything on the value of his deed. Nothing "in" objects or men checks him from changing or replacing them.¹²¹

While writing his "American Action Painters," as James D. Herbert argued, Rosenberg gave the Abstract Expressionists two personalities from his earlier essays: "They were both artists producing individual culture and Americans of action."¹²² According to Rosenberg, "the artist is the only

¹¹⁹ Rosenberg, "The Pathos of the Proletariat," *Kenyon Review*, 11, 4 (Autumn 1949), p. 611.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 607n.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* Rosenberg also wrote: "The American does not meditate, he acts." *Ibid.*, p. 606.

figure in this society who is able not to be alienated, because he works directly with the materials of his own experience and transforms them."¹²³ It explains why "the act-painting is of the same metaphysical substance as the artist's existence."¹²⁴ Moreover, "the gesture on the canvas was a gesture of liberation, from Value—political, aesthetic, moral."¹²⁵ Freed from the past and in control of their means of production, thus, the Abstract Expressionists were perfect models of Rosenberg's Americans. Rosenberg's

¹²² James D. Herbert, *The Political Origins of Abstract-Expressionist Art Criticism: The Early Theoretical and Critical Writings of Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg* (Stanford, California: Humanities Honors Program, Stanford University, 1985), p. 25. According to Robert Motherwell, however, the notion of action "was taken by Harold Rosenberg from a piece by Hulsbeck.... At the time I was editing 'Dada' proofs of Hulsbeck's which ultimately appeared in the Dada anthology as 'En Avant Dada.' It was a brilliant piece ... Harold came across the passage in proofs in which Hulsbeck violently attacks literary esthetes, and says that literature should be action, should be made with a gun in the hand, etc. Harold fell in love with this section.... Harold's notion of 'action' derives directly from that piece." Max Kozloff, "An Interview with Robert Motherwell," *Artforum*, IV, 1 (September 1965), p. 37. Recently, associating the notion of action with existentialism, Nancy Jachec wrote: "The concrete yet non-scientific subject matter which the Abstract Expressionists could not find in geometric art was to be provided by the feeling which Sartre describes as the motivation behind action." Nancy Jachec, "'The Space Between Art and Political Action': Abstract Expressionism and Ethical choice in Postwar America 1945-1950," *The Oxford Art Journal*, 14, 2 (1991), p. 22.

¹²³ Rosenberg, "The Herd of Independent Minds," pp. 244-5.

¹²⁴ Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," p. 23.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

emphasis on action and material in "American Action Painters" can be understood in this context.

Without any consideration of his theoretical foundations, however, Rosenberg's idea of "Action Painting" was often misunderstood as a term referring only to the physical aspect of painting. Discussing the importance of the term "Action Painting," in a dialogue with Rosenberg, Hess noted a general misunderstanding of the term: the term "by now is being used, from London to Tokyo, with as many different meanings as there are writers to misunderstand it. Generally 'Action' has come to indicate some kind of athletic messiness--the blob of flung paint--what Herbert Read misunderstands as Tâcheisme."¹²⁶ Even American artists themselves did not use the term in the sense that the critic meant. In an interview with Max Kozloff, Robert Motherwell noted: "Certain artists here constantly used to talk about painting as a form of 'gesture.' (But I don't think they meant it in the sense that Harold Rosenberg talks about 'action' painting at all.) I think they must have meant that painting was, in some way, a ritualistic act. The 'gesture'

¹²⁶ The Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts, *Action Painting*, exh. cat. (Dallas, Texas, 1958), n.p.

was, so to speak, that of an artist standing alone before the Absolute."¹²⁷

The same can be said of Korean artists. Without having any knowledge of Rosenberg's earlier essays, Korean artists might have understood the notion of Action Painting in terms of working methods. In short, with its emphasis on the unorthodox techniques and Rosenberg's idea of Action Painting, *Art News* would have contributed to Korean artists' awareness of the physical means of painting. With its articles of political persuasion, the magazine would also have impressed on Korean artists the image of Abstract Expressionism as a symbol of freedom.

In addition, Korean newspapers and magazines often carried articles on American art. Although most of these articles were brief, important articles by American writers were sometimes published in them. For instance, I found writings by James Johnson Sweeney and Nicolas Calas in newspapers.¹²⁸ These articles seem to have been supplied by the USIS. Publishing Norman Smith's article, for example, *The*

¹²⁷ Max Kozloff, "An Interview with Robert Motherwell," p. 34.

¹²⁸ Nicolas Calas, "The Symbolic in Modern American Art," *Donga Daily*, June 3, 1959, p. 4; James Johnson Sweeney, "Play as the Fundamental Nature of Creation," *Chosŏn Daily*, November 25, 1959, p. 4;

Korean Republic noted that it was distributed by the USIS.¹²⁹ According to David E. Finley, chairman of the Fine Arts Committee of the People-to-People Program, it was part of promoting the prestige of American culture:

The general purpose of the program ... is to make it possible for people in other countries to learn about our artistic achievements largely through their own art historians, museum directors and curators; university professors; and teachers in schools; and through books and articles about American art published in their own journals and in their own languages. In order to do this we must make available to foreign museums, libraries, institutions of learning, journals and publishers, source material on American art.¹³⁰

However, it is doubtful that those articles would have contributed to an increased understanding of American art in Korea. First, they were just given not sought after. Secondly, those articles in abridged forms could not fully communicate the intentions of the authors. Finally Korean artists drew inspiration more from France than the United States.

(4) The Presence of *Art informel* in Korea

¹²⁹ Norman Smith, "Pace-Setters of Modern Age Honored at New York Exhibit," *The Korean Republic*, September 19, 1959, p. 5.

¹³⁰ David E. Finley, Statement on Scope, Purpose and Activities of the Fine Arts Committee of the People-to-People Program, August 14, 1957, reprinted in *Congressional Record-Appendix*, 85th Congress, First Session, August 16, 1957, A6736.

Although the presence of American art was conspicuous in the Korean art scene due to the aggressive cultural programs of the United States, the idea of Paris as the center of world art persisted in the minds of Korean artists in the 1950-60s. They seem to have been able to get in touch with the Parisian art world primarily through word of mouth and Japanese art magazines such as *Bijutsu techo* and *Mizue*. Particularly Korean artists showed a keen interest in *Art informel*.

The term *Art informel* was coined in 1950 by the French critic Michel Tapié, primarily in relation to work of Wols, Jean Fautrier, and Hans Hartung. Later it came to include Georges Mathieu, Pierre Soulages, Alberto Burri, Jean-Michel Atlan, Alfred Mannesier, Antoni Tàpies and others. As a parallel development to Abstract Expressionism in the United States, *Art informel* often emphasized the tactile quality of the paint and expressive action. The full scope of *Art informel* was gradually revealed through a series of exhibitions. The first of these was an exhibition entitled "L'Imaginaire" held at Galerie de Luxembourg in 1947. It included the work of Atlan, Bryen, Hartung, Mathieu, Jean-Paul Riopelle and Wols. The following year, the exhibition H.W.P.S.M.T.B. was held at Galerie Colette Allendy. Tapié himself organized several exhibitions, including two

"Signifiants de l'informel" exhibitions in 1951 and 1952 and "Un Art autre" in 1952, all held at Studio Facchetti in Paris. The "Véhémences confrontées" exhibition at Galerie Nina Dausset in 1951 illustrated the links between contemporary French art and the work of American Abstract Expressionists. Considering that Korean artists borrowed the term *Informel* from the French phrase *Art informel*, it is important to find out exactly how this French art was introduced into the Korean art community.

It is generally known that the term *Informel* was first used by KŪn-taek Pang, the leading exponent of the movement, in his 1958 article "The Problem of Modernizing Painting." In the article, Pang noted that "we prefer so-called Informel painting by Jenkins or Wols, because there are more freedom of creation in it."¹³¹ Pang himself bragged that he was the first critic to use the term, and this was accepted as a fact in the Korean art community.¹³² *Informel* artists also argued that they came to know of the aesthetic of *Art informel* only in late 1958. In an interview, Seo-bo Park, one of the leading artists of the Hyundai Artists Association, stated:

¹³¹ KŪn-taek Pang, "The Problem of Modernizing Painting, I," *Yŏnhap News*, March 11, 1958, p. 4.

¹³² See Pang, "The Arena for Passion in the 1950s," p. 45; Ku-yŏl Yi, "The *Informel* Movement in Contemporary Korean Art History," p. 51.

If my memory serves me, it was in the late fall of 1958 when we read Michel Tapié's "The Necessity of an Autre Esthetic," which was published in a Japanese magazine *Mizue*. The artist Se-dŭk Lee lent us the magazine. Based on Tapié's article, we often discussed our art and realized that what we were doing was closely related to the esthetic of *Art informel*.¹³³

However, these claims seem to have been made with a view to describing Korean *Informel* art as an independent movement. While going through major Korean newspapers of the 1950s, I found out that the term *Informel* was first used in 1956 by Yŏng-ju Kim, an artist and critic. In his article "The Course of Contemporary Art: The Advent of New-Expressionism and Its Ideology," Kim argued that contemporary art sought to give vent to the expressive impulses of the artist rather than grasp physical objects. According to him, New-Expressionism was an art movement that prevented abstraction from turning into a decoration or stereotype and rejected surrealism with its literary orientation. Then he noted such artistic groups as *Informel* and *Abstract Expression* as representative of the art movement.¹³⁴ Among artists associated with New-Expressionism, according to him, were Arnal, Riopelle,

¹³³ Kyŏng-sŏng Yi and Seo-bo Park, "Korean Art of the 1950s," *The Collection of Contemporary Korean Art*, vol. 20 (Seoul: Korea Daily, 1979), p. 92.

¹³⁴ Yŏng-ju Kim, "The Course of Contemporary Art: The Advent of New-Expressionism and Its Ideology, I," *Chosŏn Daily*, March 13, 1956, p. 4. The term *Abstract Expression* seems to refer

Gillet, Soulages, Mathieu, Francis, and Etienne Martin.¹³⁵ In addition, Korean artists, who were studying in Paris, sometimes contributed their reviews of the Parisian art world to daily newspapers, in which they mentioned *Art informel*. For instance, in his 1956 report on the 12th Salon de Mai, Hŭi-gyun Na, expressed his bewilderment at the predominance of *Art informel* and described Alfred Mannesier as a well-known artist of *Art informel*.¹³⁶ Thus it is quite safe to say that the Korean art community was exposed to the currents of postwar French art already in 1956. Once the claims by artists and critics have turned out to be unreliable, it is quite reasonable to question exactly when Korean artists could read Tapié's essay. Considering that the essay was published in the December 1956 issue of the Japanese magazine *Mizue*,¹³⁷ it is unlikely that they encountered the essay

to Abstract Expressionism. If it is true, Kim is also the first artist to use the term Abstract Expressionism.

¹³⁵ Yŏng-ju Kim, "The Course of Contemporary Art: The Advent of New-Expressionism and Its Ideology, II," *Chosŏn Daily*, March 14, 1956, p. 4

¹³⁶ Hŭi-gyun Na, "The Parisian Art World Now," *Chosŏn Daily*, June 22, 1956, p. 4.

¹³⁷ Michel Tapié, "The Necessity of an Autre Esthetic," *Mizue*, 617 (December 1956), pp. 23-8. The article was published on the occasion of the exhibition "Sekai Konnichi no Bijutsu" (World Art Today), sponsored by Asahi Newspapers. It introduced the work of European artists such as Fautrier, Dubuffet, Mathieu, Fontana and the Italian Space Artists, as well as the American Abstract Expressionists. The Japanese

almost two years later. Indeed, part of his essay began to appear in the art magazine *Sinmisul* in early 1958. For instance, the March 1958 issue of *Sinmisul* carried a short article entitled "The Essence of Informel," with 2 photographs of Mathieu at work.¹³⁸ The definition of *Informel* in the article repeats exactly that of Tapié's:

'Informel', contrary to 'formless', of which it contains none of the negative or restrictive qualities, is an extremely general term of the abstract domain of the immediate, which includes any system of form conceivable and possible.¹³⁹

In addition, Dŏk-hyu Choi, an artist, published a book entitled *The Understanding of Modern Painting* in June 1958.¹⁴⁰ Describing the latest trend in art as *Art informel*, Choi quoted Tapié's definition of *Informel* and reproduced Pollock's *Number 1* along with works by Francis, Mathieu, and Fontana in his book. He also noted that the new art was close to the spirit of the Orient and its roots lay in Nietzsche

translation was based on the English version published in Paul and Esther Jenkins, eds., *Observations of Michel Tapié* (New York: George Wittenborn, Inc., 1956), pp. 19-25. Hereafter I will refer to the English version.

¹³⁸ "The Essence of Informel," *Sinmisul*, 8 (March 1958), pp. 29, 38.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p.29; Michel Tapié, "The Necessity of an Autre Esthetic," p. 25.

¹⁴⁰ Dŏk-hyu Choi, *The Understanding of Modern Painting* (Seoul: Munhwagyoyuk, 1958). This book was also introduced in the June 1958 issue of *Sinmisul*.

and Dadaist liquidation.¹⁴¹ Thus it is quite possible that the Korean art community would have known about Tapié's essay by March 1958. The *Informel* artist Tschang-yeul Kim even said that from reading art magazines from Japan and France, he first became aware in 1955 of the Paris-based movement known as *Art informel*.¹⁴²

The interest of Korean artists in Tapié's essay in early 1958 seems to have something to do with Tapié's activities in Japan in 1957-58. Before his visit to Japan in 1957, Tapié had been well aware of the Japanese Gutai Art Association, founded in December 1954 by Yoshihara Jirô, through its organ *Gutai*, which had been sent to many advanced artists and critics in the world. Having a great interest in it, Tapié visited Japan in September 1957 along with Georges Mathieu and Sam Francis. Jirô reflected on his visit:

Mr. Michel Tapié is the first critic in or outside this country, to take the art of Gutai in earnest. He showed keen interest in the works of the group's prominent members beginning with the occasion last year, when he saw them for the first time at my house in Osaka, together with Mr. Mathieu who was also in Japan at that time. It was really quite amazing. We opened the Tokyo show in great haste during his stay at that time. He surprised us by a visit, during an all-night preparation for the show, at two o'clock in the morning. Moreover, in all of these three days, until the very last day of

¹⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 46-8.

¹⁴² Ronny Cohen, *Tschang Yeul Kim* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1993), p. 22.

his stay in Japan, he would spend most of his hours at the show, not leaving the hall. I realize meanwhile, that the words he utters during such hours are very significant; they could not but deepen our confidence in him.¹⁴³

Tapié himself was surprised at the group's affinities with *Art informel* and wanted to have the honor of becoming a member of the group.¹⁴⁴ Tapié's visit brought about several events, making "the Informel Cyclone" in Japan.¹⁴⁵ One of the events was Mathieu's performance in a kimono at the Shirokiya department store. *Time* gave a detailed description of the whole process:

With the canvas well primed, Mathieu paused to swig down a frothing glass of Japanese beer while assistants propped the work up against the wall. Then, glaring like a buccaneer about to board ship, he kicked at the debris of brushes, tubes and bottles, plunged one brush into a bowl of white paint, grasped a second brush in his teeth, and rushed at the canvas. A white cross with red

¹⁴³ Yoshihara Jirô, "On 'The International Art of a New Era'," in *The International Art of a New Era: U.S.A., Japan, Europe*, ed., Shozo Shimamoto (Japan: Publishing Committee of Gutai, 1958), p. 7. The catalogue was published as the 9th issue of *Gutai*.

¹⁴⁴ "J'étais venu pour la première fois au Japon avec l'idée d'y proposer et d'y faire quelque chose: j'y ai en fait trouvé en pleine forme cette gageure qu'est, et existentiellement, et qualitativement, le phénomène Gutai, à qui je fais très humblement la haute requête de me faire l'honneur de m'accepter comme élément (actif, bien entendu)." Michel Tapié, "Homage to Gutai," *Gutai*, 8 (September 1957), p. 2. The magazine is not paginated. I gave page numbers here, starting from the first inside page.

¹⁴⁵ Ashiya City Museum of Art & History, ed., *Document: Gutai, 1954-1972* (Ashiya: Ashiya City Cultural Foundation, 1993), p. 22.

outline appeared on one side, a yellow squiggle on the other.... Aiming a 5-ft. brush like a lance, he carved broad, pink lines running the length of the 25-ft. canvas. From then on, the battle raged with such fury that Mathieu was soaked in paint, turpentine and sweat.¹⁴⁶

Mathieu had another painting session in the front window of the department store, drawing crowds so dense that they almost broke in the plate-glass window. His show was a success, and his work *The Battle of Hakata* was sold for \$8,333. Sofu Teshigahara, who bought the work, was quoted as saying: "In many respects, his work resembles that of old Japanese art, where emphasis was placed on spirit rather than detail."¹⁴⁷ His performances certainly contributed to an increase in the public attention to *Art informel*.

During his stay in Japan, Tapié contributed an essay entitled "L'aventure informelle" to the 8th issue of *Gutai*.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ "In the End, Nothing," *Time*, 70, 12 (September 16, 1957), p. 86.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. Mathieu himself noted an affinity between his art and Asian art: "Far Eastern calligraphy improvises, it is true, on given symbols, but in full freedom and with the full play of individual inspiration, and speed goes with it as much as does a certain state of 'ecstasy.' When I was in Japan in 1957, I had the opportunity of seeing some great masters of calligraphy achieve gigantic signs in a few seconds. It would have occurred to no one that these signs could be deprived of any artistic value because they were made in a few seconds." Georges Mathieu, *From the Abstract to the Possible: Pointers Towards an Elucidation of Western Art* (New York: Wittenborn and Company, 1960), p. 20

The essay is basically a paraphrase of "The Necessity of an *Autre Esthetic*," attacking academicism and bankrupt rationality and promoting Dada spirit. In particular, he praised Gutai artists for their strong intention and quality.¹⁴⁹ The essay was accompanied with 96 photographs of the works by Fautrier, Tàpies, Mathieu, Dubuffet, Appel, Burri, Wols, Pollock, de Kooning, Mitchell, Tobey, Francis, Guston, Motherwell and Gutai artists.

Establishing a close collaboration with the group, Tapié also played a critical role in organizing the exhibition "The International Art of a New Era," which was held as one of the events of the Osaka International Festival in April 1958. The exhibition presented the work of the Gutai artists along with the work of 30 American Abstract Expressionists and 25 European artists, promoting the global scale of *Art informel's* network.¹⁵⁰ In this context, Korean artists' interest in Tapié's essay in early 1958 can be seen partly as

¹⁴⁸ Michel Tapié, "L'aventure informelle," *Gutai*, 8 (September 1957), pp. 4-5, 14, 31-2, 35, 43-4.

¹⁴⁹ "Justement l'extrême richesse de l'extrême confusion fait que la qualité du ton et la puissance quantitative des intentions révélées par GUTAI pourrait nous faire dire, en toute exigence, exactement le contraire: les jeux se font, qui n'avaient fait que commencer, et il est permis de penser que presque tout reste à faire." *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁵⁰ In his introduction to the exhibition, Tapié stated: "L'art, maintenant, ne peut être pensé autrement qu'à

the aftermath of his activities in Japan.¹⁵¹ Given the fact that Tapié's activities in Japan were closely associated with the Gutai group, it is also quite possible that Korean artists might have known about the Japanese group.¹⁵²

In addition, Korean artists might have gotten information about contemporary European art through American magazines such as *Time* and *Art News*. *Time* frequently reported on European artists' winning prizes in international art competitions and their exhibitions in the United States. *Art News* also published several articles on European artists. In particular, the magazine included Dubuffet, Burri, Mathieu,

l'échelle mondiale." Tapié, "The International Art of a New Era: U.S.A., Japan, Europe," p. 1.

¹⁵¹ The critic Kŭn-taek Pang himself acknowledged that he knew about "the Informel Cyclone" in Japan through the Japanese magazine *Mizue*. "The Arena for Passion in the 1950s," p. 48. The *Informel* artist Tshang-yeul Kim also noted that Korean *Informel* artists "were considering Informel at the same time as were artists in Japan." Cohen Ronny, *Tschang Yeul Kim*, p. 24.

¹⁵² In his recent article, Professor Youngmok Chung argued that Korean artists were more influenced by the Gutai group than by European and American Abstract Expressionism. Youngmok Chung, "Abstraction in Contemporary Korean Painting, 1950-1970," *Form*, 18 (1995), pp. 18-30. However, Korean artists' knowledge of the Gutai group does not guarantee that they were influenced by the Japanese group. Rather strong anti-Japanese sentiments in Korean society would probably have prevented Korean artists from acknowledging the presence of Japanese art.

Fautrier, and Michaux in its series of articles on the artist's working method.¹⁵³

Generally, Korean artists seem to have been more exposed to American art than to European art because of the aggressive cultural programs of the United States. In fact, as we have seen, Korean artists could see actual examples of abstract expressionist style or contemporary American artists through exhibitions sent by the United States. Considering that exhibitions of French art had never been held in Korea during the 1950s, it is logical to assume that American art should have been more influential in the Korean art world. However, with the "Informel Cyclone" in Japan, *Art informel* suddenly loomed large in the Korean art scene, making American Abstract Expressionism a part of it. How could this happen? First of all, it should be remembered that Paris was still the center of world art in the eyes of Korean artists. It explains why Korean artists were so easily attracted to the "Informel Cyclone," which happened in Japan. Secondly, as we have seen, Korean artists were primarily exposed to a

¹⁵³ See Thomas B. Hess, "Dubuffet Paints a Picture," *Art News*, 51, 3 (May 1952), pp. 30-3, 66-7; Milton Gendel, "Burri Makes a Picture," *Art News*, 53, 8 (December 1954), pp. 28-31, 67-9; Michel Tapié de Celeyran, "Mathieu Paints a Picture," *Art News*, 53, 10 (February 1955), pp. 50-3, 74-5; Michel Tapié, "Fautrier Paints a Picture," *Art News*, 54, 8 (December 1955), pp. 30-3, 63.

certain aspect of Abstract Expressionism, that is, Rosenberg's idea of Action Painting. Thus they did not have any difficulty in identifying Abstract Expressionism with *Art informel*.¹⁵⁴ Finally, the social, psychological and philosophical atmosphere in Korean society was similar to that of France. They both had been occupied by neighboring countries, and experienced war. Furthermore, Existentialism had a great vogue in Korean society as in France. For artists of both countries, after all, *Art informel* was an appropriate art to express their own times.

¹⁵⁴ When the Gutai group had an exhibition at the Martha Jackson Gallery, Dore Ashton could criticize the group with the help of Greenberg's formalist criticism: "Gratuitous publicity and vogue-making doesn't help the young artist make an original work of art in which his acknowledgment of the new convention is just a point of departure and not an end in itself. Also, no matter how wild the experiments are in the informal group publicized today, they still indicate the artists' basic allegiance to easel painting. Since that is the case, these artists must learn to accept the philosophical limitation of easel painting and to express original insights within and in spite of those limitations. The maturity of the informal style depends on this." Dore Ashton, "Japanese Avantgardism," *Arts & Architecture*, 75 (November 1958). Quoted in Ashiya City Museum of Art & History, ed., *Document: Gutai, 1954-1972*, p.323.

Chapter V

Korean *Informel* Art

(1) The National Art Exhibition and the New Generation

In September 1949, the Ministry of Education instituted the National Art Exhibition (Taehanmin'guk misuldaejeŏn) with the official intention to "promote the development and improvement of art in Korea."¹ Yet, its ulterior intention was to provide governmental protection and patronage for rightist artists who lost a sense of direction in the social, political confusion right after the liberation. The annual exhibition consisted of sections of Oriental Painting, Western Painting, Sculpture, Handicrafts and Calligraphy, and followed the format of the Chosŏn Art Exhibition, which had been inaugurated in 1922 by the Japanese Government-General in Korea as a means to control the art community. The exhibition was virtually the only venue for artists to get public recognition. Accordingly it attracted extensive public attention and press coverage. Unfortunately, however, it soon turned into a hotbed of factionalism surrounding the selection of the jury and prize-winning works. The jury was dominated by a couple of older artists who favored

¹ The Charter of the National Art Exhibition, Article 2, September 22, 1949. Quoted in Kwang-su Oh, *History of Contemporary Korean Art* (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 1979), p. 117.

conservative academism, and there were constantly struggles for hegemony among the jury members.

With the foundation of the Han'guk Artists Association (HAA) in May 1955, in particular, the hegemony struggles brought about the split of the art community. At the moment, the Korean art community was represented by the Taehan Artists Association (TAA), which had succeeded the Chosŏn Art Association in August 1948. As the only national art organization in post-Korean War period, the TAA exercised its power over the art community and represented Korea abroad by joining the International Association of Plastic Arts in 1955.² At the general meeting of the TAA on May 16, 1955, however, there was a conflict over the appointment of the board members, which eventually led a group of artists with Pal Chang as leader to secede from the organization and create the HAA.

The HAA held its inaugural meeting on May 21, and its goals were: (1) to promote the development of national culture; (2) to establish a pure attitude of art-making and hold an annual exhibition; (3) to support the advancement of a younger generation; and (4) to stimulate international

² Kyu Chŏng, "Commentary on the Art World," *Saebyŏk*, 3, 1 (January 1956), p. 94.

exchanges of art.³ Yet, the HAA was basically not a product of differences in artistic ideas or styles but that of hegemony struggles in the art community. Furthermore, by affiliating primarily with the faculty and alumni of the Fine Arts College, Seoul National University, it also triggered academic sectarianism.⁴ Although some artists and critics viewed the situation with great concern,⁵ the conflict between the two groups got more and more intense. Especially, when the list of the jury for the 5th National Art Exhibition was released in September 1956, the TAA even boycotted the exhibition on the grounds that the selection of the jury was strongly in favor of the HAA, causing the postponement of the Exhibition for a month.⁶

It was in this situation that a new generation emerged in the postwar Korean art community. Most of them, born in

³ Quoted in Kyōng-sōng Yi, "Art," *Saebyōk*, 2, 5 (September 1955), p. 82.

⁴ On the contrary, the TAA was affiliated with the faculty and alumni of Hong-Ik University. Interestingly, while surveying the Korean cultural arena, *The New York Times* described the presence of the two art organizations as a sign of the cultural revival. "Korea's Culture Hailed as Reborn," *The New York Times*, June 26, 1955, p. 10.

⁵ See, for example, Yōng-ju Kim, "An Appeal to Artists' Reason," *Sinmisul*, 2 (1956), pp. 30-3.

⁶ "Something Wrong with the 5th National Art Exhibition," *Seoul News*, September 19, 1956, p. 4; "The National Art

the thirties, experienced the political confusion after the liberation and the subsequent outbreak of the Korean War as students or soldiers. They also witnessed the division of the country, one of the most formidable problems in her history. The younger generation could not be content simply to accept the ideas, themes and methods of the established artists who worked in the realistic and naturalistic tradition, untroubled by current anxieties and uninformed of modern developments in art. Conscious of the political, social, and moral chaos caused by the war and its aftermath, a group of young artists began to rise to repudiate this chaotic world and to challenge the ruling artistic fashions and conventions.

Their antagonism toward the establishment was first expressed by the "Four Artists" show held at the Tongbang Cultural Center in Seoul in May 16-25, 1956. In their manifesto, the artists Seo-bo Park, Ch'ung-sŏn Kim, Yŏng-hwan Kim and U-sik Mun, all graduates of Hong-Ik University, proclaimed that they were determined to "separate themselves from the National Art Exhibition, resist and challenge the egotism of the establishment, and actively participate in

Exhibition to Be Postponed Indefinitely," *Seoul News*, October 6, 1956, p. 3.

formulating a creative mode of art."⁷ This manifesto of anti-National Art Exhibition was quite significant in the history of Korean art. In a situation in which the National Art Exhibition was the only venue for artists to get public recognition, the manifesto was viewed as the abandonment of being an artist. Furthermore, the National Art Exhibition was a government-sponsored event, the rejection to which might have been regarded as an anti-governmental activity.⁸ In a sense, the "Four Artists" show was a test through which younger artists could see how the art community would react to their rebellion against the establishment. Fortunately, the show was favorably noticed by daily newspapers and gave rise to the creation of a series of art groups in 1957.⁹

⁷ Quoted in Ma-dong Yi, "Western-Style Painting," in *Annual of Korean Arts*, 1 (1966), p. 175.

⁸ Indeed, Sang-bong To, a jury of the National Art Exhibition, was quoted as saying that "the manifesto of anti-National Art Exhibition was the kind of act that only the Communists would do." Quoted in Kyu-il Yi, *The Changes of Korean Art* (Seoul: Sigongsa, 1997), p. 185.

⁹ Among the art groups created in 1957 were the Modern Art Association, the Creative Artists Society, and New Plasticism. Created by Muk Han, Ko-sŏk Pak, Yŏng-guk Yu, Kyu-sang Yi, Chŏm-sik Chŏng, Kyu Chŏng, and others, the Modern Art Association was a group of artists advocating geometrical abstraction; the Creative Artists Society, a group of figurative artists who were associated with the National Art Exhibition; and New Plasticism, a group of artists who pursued the artistic ideas of the Bauhaus. See "Art Information," *Annual of Korean Arts*, 1 (1966), pp. 280-1.

What caught the attention of art critics in their work was their desire to address modern concerns. In his review, for instance, Kyōng-sōng Yi wrote that the artists expressed "a consciousness of anxiety and tragedy caused by modern civilization."¹⁰ Dark colors, facial expressions, and crudely distorted forms in such works as Park's *Face and Image*, Ch'ung-sōn Kim's *Woman*, and Yōng-hwan Kim's *Dessin* were probably the key factors in evoking human anxiety.¹¹ In addition, art critics showed a deep interest in the potential of the youth. Thus, although their works were regarded as a new attempt to express a new era,¹² the critic Yi even called on them for a more daring attitude: "Seo-bo Park, Ch'ung-sōn Kim, Yōng-hwan Kim and U-sik Mun, they all are surely young. And they began to speak. Yet their utterance was too passive and unfortunately nearsighted. With their youth, could they

¹⁰ Kyōng-sōng Yi, "Voices of Younger Artists," *Dong-a Daily*, May 26, 1956, p. 4.

¹¹ Today the works included in the show have not survived. For detailed description of their works, see Muk Han, "The Groping of the Younger Generation," *Chosōn Daily*, May 24, 1956, p. 4. Unlike Yi, Muk Han saw a world of fantasy in Seo-bo Park's work: "In Park's art is poetry. He paints actualities of life. He is interested in people and objects on the streets. In the process of painting, however, he is unconsciously drawn into a world of fantastic poetry in which objects lose their original forms."

¹² "The Season of Diverse Gropings," *Korea Daily*, August 4, 1956, p. 4; Pong-sang Yi, "Individuality and Creativity," *Yōnhap News*, December 25, 1956, p. 4.

have spoken something much stronger and bigger?"¹³ The favorable responses soon led them to found an art group entitled the Hyundai Artists Association in October 1956.¹⁴

(2) The Hyundai Artists Association

The Expression of Modern Korean Experience

The First Exhibition of the Hyundai Artists Association was held in May 1-9, 1957 at the USIS gallery in Seoul. The artists included were Yŏng-hwan Kim, Ch'ŏl Yi, Chong-hwi Kim, Sŏng-sun Chang, Ch'ŏng-kwan Kim, U-sik Mun, Tschang-yeul Kim, and In-du Ha. In their manifesto drafted by Tschang-yeul Kim, they proclaimed: "With establishing our association, we will refuse all the feudal elements detrimental to the development of culture and consider how different our art should be from the past. We are keenly aware of these two urgent problems. Whether or not we could achieve the assignments and come to grips with the spirit of the 'high-brow' who cherishes modern

¹³ Kyŏng-sŏng Yi, "Voices of Younger Artists," *Dong-a Daily*, May 26, 1956, p. 4.

¹⁴ The Korean term "Hyundai" means contemporary or modern in English. Korean critics and art historians think that the art group was founded in May 1, 1957, the opening date of the 1st Exhibition of the group. However, it was actually founded in October 1956. See Yŏng-ju Kim, "Retrospect and Prospect of the Art World," *Yŏwŏn* (January 1957), p. 299; "This Year's Harvest in the Art World," *Seoul News*, December 28, 1956, p. 4.

art depends only on our efforts and the advice of senior artists."¹⁵

The manifesto clearly shows the determination of the Hyundae artists to break with the past and to create a new art. More importantly, it openly declared the new status of the artist in postwar Korean society. This is evident in the use of the term "high-brow" to describe their objective. Considering that they associated the "high-brow" with modern art, it is possible that they picked up the concept in the article "High-Brow, Low-Brow, Middle-Brow," published in the April 11, 1949 issue of *Life* magazine. Describing three basic categories of a new U.S. social structure, the article declared that "We have a society of the intellectual elite, run by the high-brows."¹⁶ It was accompanied with a photograph of each "brow" admiring a sample of his taste: "One, a tall man in a baggy tweed suit, likes paintings by Picasso. The shortest, a man in shirtsleeves, enjoys calendar art. The third likes Grant Wood reproductions suitable for framing."¹⁷ In defense of the high-brow, Winthrop Sargeant, *Life's* own high-brow, argued:

¹⁵ Quoted in Ma-dong Yi, "Western-Style Painting," p. 175. (Translation by the author)

¹⁶ "High-Brow, Low-Brow, Middle-Brow," *Life*, 26, 15 (April 11, 1949), p. 99.

What culture and civilized living we have today is provided by the interaction of two groups—the esthetically radical high-brows and the somewhat more conservative and stable upper middle-brows. Beneath the upper middle-brows there yawns an awful chasm peopled by masses whose cultural life is so close to that of backward children that the difference is not worth arguing about.¹⁸

Traditionally, the artist was a marginal presence in Korean society. Art was just considered a hobby scholars or intellectuals could enjoy in their spare time. With the introduction of Western art and large-scale exhibitions like the Chosŏn Art Exhibition inaugurated in 1922, the traditional view of art began to gradually change. In her article, the art historian Youngna Kim, described this shift:

This type of public exhibition was a new experience to the Korean public. Formerly, art lovers had only been able to see a few paintings at a collector's home or artist's studio. Now anybody could go and see large numbers of paintings and sculptures assembled in one place. Newspapers ran introductory articles on Western-style art or technique and featured commentaries by journalists, writers or even anonymous viewers. These not only stimulated public interest in the arts but also helped to develop art criticism. During the initial period this was largely journalistic in nature but in nevertheless informed and educated people that art was something to be pursued seriously for its own sake, and was not merely seen as a gentleman's avocation or a matter of manual artisanship.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁹ Youngna Kim, "Modern Korean Painting and Sculpture," in John Clark, ed., *Modernity in Asian Art* (Australia: Wild Peony, 1993), pp. 157-58.

In the wake of social, political upheavals during the late 1940s and early 1950s, in particular, the traditional view of the artist was totally replaced by the view of the artist as a leader of cultural life and a producer of a new culture. The Hyundai artists' use of the term "high-brow" was an announcement of this newly defined role of the artist in postwar Korean society.²⁰ The new status of the artist is also evident in the fact that newspapers and literary journals began to display deep interest in the art community and allow space for artists during this period.²¹

The works included in the first Hyundai exhibition seem to have varied in style. Unfortunately, these works have not survived. In an interview with the critic Kyŏng-sŏng Yi, Seo-bo Park explained the situation: "Most of the works of the period have not survived, not even in the form of

²⁰ Together with the fact that their first exhibition was held in the USIS gallery, the Hyundai artists' use of the term "high-brow" also indicates that American culture might have played a role in their awareness of the new status of the artist.

²¹ Especially daily newspapers frequently ran reviews, poems, and essays written by artists. Among *Informel* artists, Seo-bo Park and Tschang-yeul Kim often contributed their writings to newspapers. See, for example, Seo-bo Park, "Gibberish at 12 O'clock," *Yŏnhap News*, June 14, 1959, p. 4; Park, "My Favorite Zero O'clock," *Dong-a Daily*, May 15, 1962, p. 4; "Internationalism and Import," *Dong-a Daily*, November 19, 1962, p. 6; Tschang-yeul Kim, "Secret Words," *Korea Daily*, January 11, 1958, p. 4; Kim, "My Explanation," *Korea Daily*, January 24, 1960, p. 4.

photographs. At the moment few artists could afford a camera. Indeed we could not keep body and soul together, not to speak of having a camera."²² In the case of Tschang-yeul Kim, all the paintings done between 1957 and 1959 were destroyed by accident: "Kim, who was teaching at the time, lived in a rented apartment that was too small to accommodate storage of his paintings, some of which were as large as two by three meters. He arranged to leave the paintings in a covered shelter outside his building, and a group of neighborhood children, carried away one day by a street game, wrecked the canvases beyond repair."²³

Fortunately, however, I discovered 5 reproductions published in daily newspapers of 1957: Tschang-yeul Kim's *A Boy and Me*, and *Morning*, U-sik Mun's *The Way to the Church*, Ch'ŏl Yi's *Confession*, and an unidentified work.²⁴ Kim's

²² Kyōng-sōng Yi and Seo-bo Park, "Modern Korean Art in the 1950s," p. 88.

²³ Cohen, *Tschang Yeul Kim*, p. 35.

²⁴ The reviews of the exhibition also mention the following works: Tschang-yeul Kim's *Sunflower*; Ch'ŏl Yi's *A Reality in the Inner Side of Reality, An Address Commanding a Remote Area*; Yōng-hwan Kim's *Modern Classic, Eros Encountered with Such a Beautiful Absolute, and When the Old Tree Brooms*; Ch'ōng-kwan Kim's *A Black Bird, Sunflower*; Sōng-sun Chang's *Flower and A Boy*; Chong-hwi Kim's *Everlasting Spring*; In-du Ha's *Hug*; U-sik Mun's *Iron Foundry, A Hoop and Gas Tank*. See Kyōng-sōng Yi, "Power Transcending Beauty," *Chosŏn Daily*, May 11, 1957, p. 4; Hwal Yi, "A New Momentum in Art Movement, I-II," *Yŏnhap News*, May 7-8, 1957, p. 4.

Morning (fig. 5-1) and Mun's *The Way to the Church* (fig. 5-2) are Cubist in style, while the others are landscapes and a figure painting in a figurative style. Judging from the titles of the other works, the Hyundae artists seem to have employed a broad range of styles ranging from figurative to surrealist. Especially Surrealism represented by Ch'ŏl Yi and Yŏng-hwan Kim seems to have been a major force in the first year of the group.²⁵ Thus critics displayed deep interest in their work. Kyŏng-sŏng Yi, for example, described Yŏng-hwan Kim's work as representing the world where "dream and reality are resolved into one, and the conscious and unconscious, the rational and irrational cease to be perceived as contradictions."²⁶ Hwal Yi, a poet who professed to be a Korean André Breton, also wrote that "Yŏng-hwan Kim's work,

²⁵ The artist and critic Yŏng-ju Kim wrote that most of the works could be associated with Surrealism. Kim, "The Art Scene in Transition," *Pyŏnghwa News*, June 26, 1957, p. 4. It is not known if the Surrealist tendency had anything to do with the Surrealists in Japan. While Surrealism in Japan was closely associated with leftist movement, it seems to have had more to do with literature in Korea. For Surrealism in Japan, see John Clark, "Artistic Subjectivity in the Taisho and Early Showa Avant-Garde," in Alexandra Munroe, ed., *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), pp. 41-53.

²⁶ Kyŏng-sŏng Yi, "Power Transcending Beauty," *Chosŏn Daily*, May 11, 1957, p. 4. The quotation seems to have been derived from Surrealist Manifesto.

reminiscent of Max Ernst, consciously revealed the irrational by accidentally combining figures and objects."²⁷

The avant-garde spirit of the Hyundai artists also caught the attention of the critics. In his review for *The Korean Republic*, for example, Syngboc Chon wrote: "[these] unknown painters in their twenties paint in a complex mood of fantasy and fiery rebellion. There seems little doubt that the 'avant-garde' spirit of these young artists will develop an output of truly original quality."²⁸ Kyŏng-sŏng Yi also described them as the lonely and unhappy artists who had to start on a journey of artistic and creative anguish on their own responsibility after rejecting all the existing authorities and established artists. Then he added: "these young artists prefer to act rather than think, adventure rather than arrange, advance rather than settle, and expand rather than rest.... Why don't their works look unpleasant and gross even though they are unfinished and crude? Maybe it is because power is surmounting beauty in their works.... The reason why I was this much impressed by their works is that their spirit of creation and their anxiety and distrust in

²⁷ Hwal Yi, "A New Momentum in Art Movement, I-II," *Yŏnhap News*, May 7-8, 1957, p. 4.

²⁸ Syngboc Chon, "Recent Group Shows Demonstrate Increased Vigor of Korean Artists," *The Korean Republic*, August 23, 1957, p. 3.

everything were sublimated into pure action through the overwhelming youth."²⁹

The Second Exhibition of the Hyundai Artists Association was held in December 8-14, 1957 at the Hwasin Gallery in Seoul. There was a change in the membership at the point: Seo-bo Park, Su-hŏn Yi, Yang-ro Yi, and Kŏn-mo Chŏng newly joined while U-sik Mun withdrew from the group. Among the works included in the exhibition are Kŏn-mo Chŏng's *Moon Woman*, Tschang-yeul Kim's *Bird and Flower* (fig. 5-4); Seo-bo Park's *The Way* (fig. 5-5), Sŏ-bong Kim's *Composition*, Sŏng-sun Chang's *Moon* (fig. 5-6), *Untitled*, and *Study*.³⁰

In his review, Pong-sang Yi commented that "compared to the first one, the second exhibition showed great progress."³¹ Indeed, the degree of abstraction in the exhibition is worthy of close attention. Although Chŏng's *Moon Woman* and Kim's

²⁹ Kyŏng-sŏng Yi, "Power Transcending Beauty," *Chosŏn Daily*, May 11, 1957, p. 4. (Translation by the author)

³⁰ In addition, the following works are mentioned in the reviews: Ch'ŏl Yi's *Apathy*; Yong-hwan Kim's *New Lovers Still Dreaming a New Happiness*; Ch'ung-sŏn Kim's *Family and Two Men Having a Talk*; Ch'ŏng-kwŏn Kim's *Cow*; Sang-su Chŏn's *Two Soldiers*; Yang-ro Yi's *Two Old Men*, and others. In the catalogue Park's *The Way* is dated 1955. But a photograph (fig. 5-3) taken at the time of the second exhibition shows four Hyundai artists including Park before his *The Way*. Park's *Two Men*, executed in a similar style, seems to have also been included in the second exhibition.

³¹ Pong-sang Yi, "Normalized Group Activity," *Seoul News*, December 18, 1957, p. 4.

Flower still have geometrically simplified figurative elements, the other works show a deliberate turning away from figuration and representation. It is true that most of abstractions have the sharp, angular geometry of the shapes. But at the same time, there is a tendency to soften the contours of forms and make the outlines blurry especially in the works of Tschang-yeul Kim and Seo-bo Park. This tendency probably made it easier for them to adopt the *Informel* style in the third exhibition. In addition, Sŏng-sun Chang's *Moon* is totally composed of robust lines reminiscent of a seal character, a calligraphic style. Interestingly, as Syngboc Chon pointed out, it has "an affinity with David Smith's welded piece *Family Decision*."³² In general, the Hyundai artists seem to have displayed varying understandings of abstraction in the second exhibition.

In terms of subject matter, Kyŏng-sŏng Yi, as in his review for the first exhibition, interpreted the work of the Hyundai artists as the expression of the condition of modern man. Yi compared the Hyundai artists to nomads in the wilderness of modern art. According to him, "these young artists chose to lead a nomadic life out of their desire to escape from anxiety and fear. No matter how tragic and

hopeless life may be, they have themselves to rely on to the last. It does matter little even if they borrowed other men's styles in a path of the nomadic life. I am sure that they must throw off them when they find a place for settlement."³³ Then Yi explained their subject matter as "dry," a state of exhaustion at which the modern man had arrived going through human tragedy. This "dry" is, in his opinion, characteristic of man who suffers from tragedy and despair, who rejects the existing moral code and sacred authority.³⁴

Yi's emphasis on tragedy, despair and the rebellion of the youth has a great deal to do with the social, psychological atmosphere of postwar years. The *Informel* artist Seo-bo Park commented on the situation of younger artists at the moment:

³² Syngboc Chon, "Latest Group Shows Arouse Wide Interest," *The Korean Republic*, December 17, 1957, p. 5.

³³ Kyōng-sōng Yi, "Nomads of Beauty, I," *Yōnhap News*, December 15, 1957, p. 4. (Translation by the author)

³⁴ Kyōng-sōng Yi, "Nomads of Beauty, II," *Yōnhap News*, December 16, 1957, p. 4. Yi's idea of "dry" reveals a similarity to Peter Selz's idea of "New Images of Man." According to him, "The revelations and complexities of mid-twentieth-century life have called forth a profound feeling of solitude and anxiety.... Like the more abstract artists of the period, these imagists [Appel, Bacon, Dubuffet, Giacometti, and others] take the human situation, indeed the human predicament rather than formal structure, as their starting point. Existence rather than essence is of the greatest concern to them." Peter Selz, *New Images of Man*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1959), p. 11.

The Korean War, which young Koreans had experienced at puberty, gave rise to the disbelief in existing order or values and the crisis of reason. Even though they could survive, poverty and hunger took all their dreams away from them.... Thus young Koreans came to distrust everything their ancestors had believed.... Without fleeing from reality, they all had to go up against a sea of moaning. Sharing this urgent destiny, young Koreans set everything on the fact of existence.³⁵

Contemporary writers and intellectuals in postwar Korean society also tried to address those concerns. In the literary world, for example, new literary trends such as "Angry Young Men" and "the Beat Generation," which were characterized as a rebellion against the establishment, were often introduced in the pages of daily newspapers and literary magazines.³⁶ The magazine *Sasanggye* also carried feature articles on "The Demand of the Youth," which examined characteristics of the youth such as creative impulses, anxiety, and freedom.³⁷

More importantly, existentialism, which was introduced into Korea as a literary fashion immediately prior to the

³⁵ Seo-bo Park, "Korean Avant-Garde Art as I Experienced," *Space*, 1, 1 (November 1966), p. 84. (Translation by the author)

³⁶ See "Angry Young Men and Beat Generation," *Kyŏngnyang News*, November 9, 1959, p. 4; Ch'ŏl Paek, "On Angry Young Men," *Saebyoŏk* (January 1960), pp. 208-11; Ŏ-ryong Yi, "Anti Roman in France," pp. 212-15; Ju No, "The Beat Generation," pp. 216-18. (All in Korean)

³⁷ Chang-ho Yi, "The Logic of the Youth," *Sasanggye*, 46 (May 1957), pp. 131-35; Sŏng-sik Kim, "The Youth Moving," pp. 136-50; Chae-jun Kim, "The Root of Anxiety," pp. 151-58; Tong-

Korean War, became quite a vogue.³⁸ According to Sartre, man is meaninglessly thrown into the world. He did not ask to be born but he is here now and thus responsible to fulfill his existence. Although man's existence is fraught with anxiety and fear, at the same time he is free. He creates his own values, not by thinking but acting them. Thus, each man is his own project. It is in this sense that Sartre conceives of existence as preceding essence.³⁹ For young Koreans maturing through the postwar years, the message was quite enticing. Existentialism described their plight and offered an answer in both personal and social terms.⁴⁰

Most of *Informel* artists were also interested in the new philosophy. Tschang-yeul Kim, for example, said that he used to read authors like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, whom

myōng Kim, "The Loss of the Youth," pp. 224-28. (All in Korean)

³⁸ The coverage of existentialism by daily newspapers and magazines were quite extraordinary. See for example Sang-wōn Oh, "Is Existentialism Individualism?" *Korea Daily*, May 12, 1956, p. 4; "John Wild's Existentialism," *Yōnhap News*, May 31, 1956, p. 4; "Existentialism and Kafka," *Seoul News*, May 19, 1958, p. 4; "The Logic of Modern Existential Philosophy," *Seoul News*, May 22, 1958, p. 4. In addition, the magazine *Sasanggye* featured the topic in 1958 and 1960 respectively. (All in Korean)

³⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Methuen, 1948).

⁴⁰ For the relationship between postwar art and existentialism, see Frances Morris and Sarah Wilson, *Paris*

he had discovered while studying French at the College of Fine Arts of Seoul National University.⁴¹ In their writings and recollections, thus, *Informel* artists often employed the vocabulary of existentialism. When Seo-bo Park said, "young Koreans set everything on the fact of existence,"⁴² he clearly echoed Sartre's theory that existence precedes essence. Kyōng-sōng Yi's concept of "dry" also reflects an existentialist view of man. In this sense, the work of the Hyundai artists could be seen as the expression of the modern Korean experience.

The Advent of Korean *Informel* Painting

It was in the Third Exhibition of the Hyundai Artists Association that the first *Informel* style appeared. In the exhibition, held in May 15-22, 1958 at the Hwasin Gallery in Seoul, the first examples of Korean *Informel* style were presented. Such artists as Seo-bo Park, Ch'ōng-kwan Kim, Pyōng-Jae Na, and Tschang-yeul Kim showed abstract works in which a variety of new techniques were employed. Art critics soon hailed their works as the advent of the Korean *Informel* art. In his review, for instance, Kyōng-sōng Yi wrote: "Seo-

Post War: Art and Existentialism 1945-55 (London: Tate Gallery, 1993).

⁴¹ Cohen, *Tschang Yeul Kim*, p. 19.

bo Park finally arrived at the world of *Informel* from a wilderness of despair. I am not sure whether it was the reflection of the zeitgeist or the natural outcome of pictorial quest. What matters is the fact that he produced *Informel* paintings."⁴³ Syngboc Chon wrote that the exhibition reflected "the feverish state of the new *peinture informelle*."⁴⁴ The art critic Kŭn-taek Pang even argued that the exhibition suggests "the Korean character of *Informel* art."⁴⁵

Among the works included in the third Hyundai exhibition are Seo-bo Park's *Painting No. 1*, *Painting No. 2*, *Painting No. 3*, *Painting No. 4*, Sang-su Chŏn's *No. 2*, Yang-ro Yi's *Figures*, Pyŏng-jae Na's *Strange Landscape*, In-du Ha's *Mother and Child*, Ch'ŏng-kwan Kim's *Work*, Tschang-yeul Kim's *Work*, and Sŏng-sun Chang's *Work*. Yi's *Figures* (fig. 5-7) and Ha's *Mother and Child* show that they still didn't shake off figuration. Chang's *Work* (fig. 5-8) also retains a figurative

⁴² Park, "Korean Avant-Garde Art as I Experienced," p. 84.

⁴³ Kyŏng-sŏng Yi, "Fantasy and Form," *Korea Daily*, May 20, 1958, p. 4.

⁴⁴ Syngboc Chon, "Young Artists Hold Third Group Show," *The Korean Republic*, May 20, 1958, p. 5.

⁴⁵ Kŭn-taek Pang, "What Does the New Generation Ask?" *Yŏnhap News*, May 23, 1958, p. 4. In addition, the artist Kyu Chŏng welcomed the passion of the younger artists who launched into the *Informel* movement. Kyu Chŏng, "The Passion and Volition of the Youth," *Dong-a Daily*, May 24, 1958, p. 4.

element, a human face. Yet the face was overwhelmed by graffiti-like lines, suggesting the tragic condition of man. Interestingly its evocation of anguish and dread with graffiti-like lines reminds us of the work of the Cobra artists, in particular Bernard Buffet and Karel Appel. Other works indicate a definite turning away from figuration. Especially, Ch'ŏng-kwan Kim's *Work* (fig. 5-9) is quite impressive in the display of expressive bodily gestures. Kyŏng-sŏng Yi commented on his work: "Kim's anguish was more severe than Seo-bo Park. He struggled to forget a sad legacy by resorting to all kinds of esthetic violence. He tried to work only with fluidity. Thus there is neither tradition, nor harmony, nor rationality in his canvases. There is nothing but a scream, agony, and quest."⁴⁶ Pyŏng-jae Na's *Strange Landscape* (fig. 5-10) shows calligraphic strokes that rhythmically echo the energetic gestures of the artist's arm. His work also displays such techniques as spilling and smearing.

However, the artist who cut a conspicuous figure in the exhibition was Seo-bo Park. He is known to have taken the lead in adopting the *Informel* style. According to his fellow artist In-du Ha, "in the third exhibition, a serious *Informel*

painting was started by Park, and Ch'ōng-kwan Kim and Pyōng-jae Na followed. Tschang-yeul Kim began to break down forms."⁴⁷ Thus Syngboc Chon called Park "the eloquent prototype of this group."⁴⁸ Indeed, his works shown in the exhibition display an impressive use of such techniques as dripping, smearing, and spilling. *Painting No. 1* (fig. 5-11) still shows traces of his earlier geometrical composition in the dark blue background. However, entangled knots of thin black lines covered the geometrical background structure, and red, yellow, and gray colors were smeared and splashed onto it. It seems that all the new techniques were employed to erase the geometrical structure, to which Park stuck before. In this sense, Park's drip technique can be interpreted as a metaphor for an attack against pre-existing moral, esthetic values, for a return to origins as a starting point for a new art. The same may be said of Ch'ōng-kwan Kim. The fact that his esthetic violence got rid of tradition, harmony, and rationality can be understood in this context.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Kyōng-sōng Yi, "Fantasy and Form," *Korea Daily*, May 20, 1958, p. 4.

⁴⁷ In-du Ha, "A Friend of Love and Hatred for 30 Years," *Sōnmisul*, 27 (Winter 1985), p. 28.

⁴⁸ Syngboc Chon, "Young Artists Hold Third Group Show," *The Korean Republic*, May 20, 1958, p. 5.

⁴⁹ Writing her essay "Paris Post War: In Search of the Absolute," Sarah Wilson noted: "Dubuffet's graffiti art,

Park's *Painting No. 2* (fig. 5-12) is similar in style to *Painting No. 1*. A skein of black lines was laid on a geometrical structure, and red, violet and pink colors were randomly daubed here and there. In *Painting No. 3* (fig. 5-13) and *Painting No. 4* (fig. 5-14), however, there appeared a subtle change in composition. With the expansion of smeared areas, the geometrical structure began to break down almost completely. Furthermore, as is evident in No. 4, rivulets of liquid paint gradually dominated the surface in place of the drip technique.

Park's employment of a variety of new techniques seems to reflect the influence of Jackson Pollock. Considering that popular American magazines such as *Life* and *Time* focused on the unconventional techniques in their articles on Abstract Expressionism, the assumption is quite reasonable. The art historian Youngna Kim also presumed that when Park employed the drip technique he had some knowledge of Pollock.⁵⁰ By

Michaux's ink blotches, Artaud's screams, Giacometti's minute, thread-like sculptures all share this concern [a return to origins]. Despite the fact that these artists had reached maturity in the 1930s, they now aimed to retrieve an authenticity, a sense of beginning at the beginning which was the only way to begin from nothing." Sarah Wilson, "Paris Post War: In Search of the Absolute," in Frances Morris and Sarah Wilson, *Paris Post War*, p. 26. In this sense, Korean *Informel* artists shared a similar concern with European artists.

denying Pollock's influence, however, Park caused confusion in the historiography of the *Informel* movement. Here I will examine some issues regarding the beginning of *Informel* art in Korea.

One of the issues is exactly when Seo-bo Park began to work in the *Informel* style. According to Park, it was in late 1957: "Right after the second Hyundai exhibition, my works became *Informel* in style, and I showed them in the third exhibition next year in 1958."⁵¹ Considering that the second exhibition closed on December 14, 1957, Park should have come to the *Informel* style during the last 17 days of 1957. However, a photograph of the artist before an unfinished work (fig. 5-15), published in the January 11, 1958 issue of *Seoul News*, indicates that Park was still working in the same style as his works shown in the second exhibition. Thus it is possible that Park's *Informel* style might have started sometime between January and April 1958.

Another issue is whether or not Korean *Informel* started independently of the currents of international art. According to Park, his work has nothing to do with European Art

⁵⁰ Youngna Kim, "The *Informel* Movement in the Korean Art Scene," in Kyōng-sōng Yi, ed., *The Trends of Contemporary Korean Art* (Seoul: Iljisa, 1993), p. 193.

⁵¹ Seo-bo Park, "The Hyundai Artists Association and I," *Hwarang*, 2, 2 (Summer 1974), p. 45.

informel or American Action Painting. He explained the beginning of his *Informel* style as accidental:

One day, I broke down all the forms clinging to me and poured water onto the canvas. Then I scrubbed the wet canvas with a laundry-soap and polished it with a stone. It felt really great to see gem-like colors emerge from underneath, but I didn't content myself with it. So I meaninglessly dripped, spilled, scratched, and blotted paint. I didn't know what I was doing. I even asked myself what in the world I was doing these ridiculous things for. After drinking down my agony in a tavern, I came back to my studio and turned on the light. Suddenly, I exclaimed, "Oh! That's it." Finally I could feel liberated in a simplified world of pure action without any narratives. This is the beginning of the so-called *Informel* painting.⁵²

To further support his argument, Park emphasizes the Korean artists' rebellion against accepted social, esthetic norms:

They often make a hasty conclusion that the Korean *Informel* movement was just under the influence of *Art informel* that gained international currency during the 1950s, without considering its historical background. I totally disagree with such an opinion. Korean society was isolated from the international community during the 1950s, which made it impossible for us to get information on the currents of international art. The Korean *Informel* movement started as a rebellion against bankrupt values of the establishment. Thus, we can not say that it was closely related with the international style of *Art informel*.... It was an art in which artists sought to confirm the brute fact of their existence after rejecting and destroying everything.⁵³

Park's insistence on an attack on accepted values and the existence of the artist as a starting point for art

⁵² Seo-bo Park, "Modern Korean Art in the 1950s," p. 91. (Translation by the author)

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 85. (Translation by the author)

should be considered a basis on which to establish the independence and originality of Korean *Informel*.⁵⁴ However, it does not guarantee the independent appearance of new techniques that were prevalent in the international art community. In fact, as we have seen, a couple of events during the years of 1957-58 gave Korean artists ample exposure to the currents of international art. For example, the exhibition *Eight American Artists*, held in April 1957 in Korea, included Mark Tobey's *Canal of Cultures*, *Gothic*, *Forms Follows Man*, and *Written Stone*, which exemplified his "white writing." In Japan, Tapié's visit produced "the Informel Cyclone" in September 1957. *The International Art of a New Era* exhibition in April 1958 promoted the global scale of *Art informel*'s network by showing the work of 30 American Abstract Expressionists and 25 European artists along with that of Japanese artists. Furthermore, the Korean art

⁵⁴ While examining postwar Italian art, Marcia E. Vetrocq also expressed a similar view: "The consolidation of attention on the experience and expression of an extreme individualism in painting was not received truth from American Abstract Expressionism. It was a fundamental condition of post-war painting in Italy which had been emerging as Italians formulated a new position with respect both to their national past and to the European present. This new position is what prepared Italians for an appreciation of American painting in the first place." Marcia E. Vetrocq, "National Style and the Agenda for Abstract Painting in Post-War Italy," *Art History*, 12, 4 (December 1989), p. 466.

magazine *Sinmisul* introduced Tapié's notion of *Informel* in its March 1958 issue. All these events happened before the third Hyundai exhibition.

In addition, the Hyundai artists themselves frequently had discussion sessions about the trends of international art at the Yi Pong-sang Art Institute, a focal point of the Korean *Informel* movement. The institute was a place where Seo-bo Park was teaching oil painting and *dessin* to college art students such as Chong-hak Kim, Myŏng-ro Yun, Pong-tae Kim, Ch'an-sŏng Son, Man-ik Yi, Hye-ja Pang, and others who were soon to be the second generation of Korean *Informel*. Newspaper reporters and art critics such as Myŏng-wŏn Yi, Ku-yŏl Yi, and Kŭn-taek Pang also frequented the institute. The artist Tschang-yeul Kim recollected those days:

One of the first jobs we had in forming Hyundai was to arrive at an understanding of modern Western art history that we could agree on. We considered this to be of primary necessity. We were willing to take the time and do the work necessary to develop an art-historical sense and definition for the group's activities. We made the modern Western movements the focus of our discussions. Whatever was thought to be important in Western art had to have meaning to us. We argued over everyone's opinion. We went stage by stage, from Cézanne and Cubism to Dada and Surrealism to *Informel*.⁵⁵

In association with the meetings of the Hyundai artists, the activity of the art critic Kŭn-taek Pang is worthy of

⁵⁵ Cohen, *Tschang Yeul Kim*, p. 25.

notice. As a fierce defender of *Informel*, Pang played an important role in the development of the Korean avant-garde. While he served in the army in Kwangju, he frequented the USIS library there, reading art books and magazines. According to him, he was well aware of the New York School through the writings of Harold Rosenberg and Thomas Hess published in *Art News*. He is also known to have tried his hand at painting under the influence of de Kooning and Guston in 1955. It was in those days that he first met the artist Seo-bo Park who happened to be in the same military unit. After being discharged from the army, he went to Seoul and met Park again at the Yi Pong-sang Art Institute in February 1958. After that, they visited each other almost every day, "talking of recent events in the art scene and the necessity of expressionistic abstraction."⁵⁶

While participating in the meetings of the Hyundae artists, Pang wrote his first art criticism on modernism, which was published in *Yŏnhap News*. In the first part of his essay "The Problem of Modernizing Painting," Pang classified the Korean art scene into three generations. According to him, the first generation, all in their forties and fifties,

⁵⁶ Pang, "The Arena for Passion in the 1950s," p. 45. Seo-bo Park acknowledged the importance of Pang in the Hyundae

was still under the influence of Japanese academism based on Western naturalism and impressionism. The second generation, all in their thirties and forties was working in styles of revolutionary art of the early 1910s, revealing the tendency toward the decorative and romantic. Finally, the third generation, all in their twenties and thirties, was groping for a new art through modern consciousness. Then Pang asked the third generation to critically examine the currents of international art and to feel the freedom of creation in *Informel* art represented by Jenkins, Wols, Hartung, and Schneider. For Pang, *Informel* art was "the expression of the whole man in a state of the inchoate, which includes all the possibilities of becoming and death."⁵⁷

In the second part of his criticism, Pang further explained how to see and paint abstract painting: "Abstract painting should be interpreted in terms of the spirit. Therefore the total person should participate in it.... The artist should be daring in his Promethean rebellion and break himself down by dashing against all the restrictions. He should paint not as a painter but as a human being."⁵⁸ Pang's

Artists Association. Seo-bo Park, "The Hyundai Artists Association and I," p. 4.

⁵⁷ Pang, "The Problem of Modernizing Painting, I," *Yŏnhap News*, March 11, 1958, p. 4.

art criticism seems to owe much to the vocabulary of existentialism and Tapié. Not only was the notion of the inchoate the most important element in Tapié's concept of *autre art*, but the ethos of new beginning also echoes Sartrean "authenticity."⁵⁹ Thus Pang should have been aware of Tapié's writing by March 1958, and could have talked about it with the Hyundai artists.⁶⁰

The Peak of Informel Painting

After the third exhibition, the Hyundai artists began to seriously study *Informel* esthetic. The critic KŪn-taek Pang would also give lectures on *Art informel*--its esthetic basis and artists--with color reproductions at the Yi Pong-sang Art Institute. It was also at the moment, according to Seo-bo Park, that they read and discussed Tapié's essay "The Necessity of an Autre Esthetic."

⁵⁸ Pang, "The Problem of Modernizing Painting, II" *Yŏnhap News*, March 12, 1958, p. 4.

⁵⁹ For the relationship of Tapié's writing and existentialism, see Frances Morris, "Introduction," in *Paris Post War: Art and Existentialism 1945-55*, p. 15-23.

⁶⁰ In his criticism, Pang attacked the literary strand of surrealism that sought for the intentional surreal rather than creative automatism. Thus it is quite possible that Pang's attack against surrealism prompted Yŏng-hwan Kim and Ch'ŏl Yi to withdraw from the group before the third exhibition. However, their withdrawal is generally explained as personal conflicts between these artists and Seo-bo Park.

In his earlier essay "Un art autre," Tapié had emphasized the importance of autre art: "There can be no question today of art for pleasure, whatever transcendent meaning, including aesthetics, one gives that word, however elaborate, however far fetched it may be. Art is made elsewhere, outside of it, on another plane of that Reality which we perceive in a different fashion: art is other."⁶¹ According to him, this new art sprung from the void following the Nietzschean destruction and Dada liquidation, and its pioneers were Mark Tobey and Jean Fautrier.⁶² It is produced by the authentic Individual who "is not imprisoned by his past, but rather by his becoming."⁶³ Paul and Esther Jenkins, the authors of *Observations of Michel Tapié*, characterized it in the following terms:

See In-du Ha, "The Sailing and Wreck of the Hyundai Artists Association," *Hwarang*, 3, 3 (Autumn 1975), p. 40.

⁶¹ "Il ne saurait plus être question d'arts d'agrément, quelque sens transcendant que l'on puisse donner au mot agrément, esthétique comprise, aussi poussée, aussi violentée qu'elle puisse être: l'art s'exerce ailleurs, en dehors, sur un autre plan de ce Réel que nous percevons autrement, l'art est autre." Michel Tapié, *Un art autre: où il s'agit de nouveaux dévidages du réel* (Paris: Gariel-Giraud et Fils, 1952), p. 2-3. The page numbers were given by the author, counting page 1 at "Il est temps de témoigner pour cet Actuel qui est le nôtre...."

⁶² Tapié, "The Necessity of an Autre Esthetic," p. 21.

⁶³ "[le authentique Individu] n'est pas prisonnier de son passé, mais bien plutôt de son devenir." Michel Tapié, *Un art autre: où il s'agit de nouveaux dévidages du réel*, p. 19.

Autre art confronts the intangible, the unknown, the unseen, with fearless equanimity and acknowledgment. It accepts the paradoxical, the contradictory, the interference of chance, with grace as a blessing.⁶⁴

In terms of techniques, Tapié focused on the experiments with materials and with body gestures.⁶⁵ Influenced by existentialism, Tapié regarded the artist's action as a register of authenticity and his marks as an affirmation of essence. In other words, art was to be an activity performed by the totality of the artist.⁶⁶

Thus, it is no accident that after the third exhibition, the Hyundai artists began to work on large canvases filled with vigorous brushstrokes. Seo-bo Park seems to have led this trend too. Pang wrote, "Since my lectures, Park began to work on a large canvas, daubing paint with a knife. Other members would often watch him work."⁶⁷ The artist In-du Ha also recollected, "One day when I stopped by Park's studio, he was, with a gust of passion, wielding a broom-brush over a large canvas laid on the floor. I was unconsciously

⁶⁴ Paul and Esther Jenkins, "Preface," *Observations of Michel Tapié* (New York: George Wittenborn, 1956), p. 7.

⁶⁵ For example, Tapié wrote, "the act of expression that is equivalent of creation; the beat of action; since it is only in this beat that action takes on meaning—thus, once and for all—vehemence. Tapié, *The Significant Message of Georges Mathieu* (New York: Stable Gallery, 1952), p. 7.

⁶⁶ See Frances Morris, "Introduction," pp. 21-2.

influenced by that startlingly violent painting, the gesture of destruction, which showed his true character."⁶⁸

The Fourth Exhibition of the Hyundai Artists Association, which was held in November 28-December 8, 1958 at the Duksoo Palace Museum in Seoul, was a showcase of such pictorial violence. According to In-du Ha, it was "the peak of Korean *Informel*."⁶⁹ Although some of the works were still geometrical or even Fauve-like in their approaches, the *Informel* style definitely dominated the show.⁷⁰ The exhibition displayed 65 canvases by 12 Hyundai artists. The artists seem to have displayed a variety of new techniques. For example, the critic Pang pointed out that Pyŏng-jae Na employed a spray technique and In-du Ha fitfully scratched the entire canvas with a knife.⁷¹ In the newspapers and magazines, I could identify the following works: Seo-bo Park's No. 7, Tschang-yeul Kim's No. 2, Sŏ-bong Kim's *Work*, Sang-su Chŏn's No. 1, and Myŏng-ŭi Yi's No. 1. Yi's work reveals a couple of rhythmic brushstrokes forming large curves. These curves

⁶⁷ Kŭn-taek Pang, "The Arena for Passion in the 1950s," p. 48.

⁶⁸ In-du Ha, "A Friend of Love and Hatred," p. 28.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁷⁰ Syngboc Chon, "Local Painters Reveal Pointed Paradoxes in Exhibit Works," *The Korean Republic*, December 3, 1958, p. 5.

⁷¹ Kŭn-taek Pang, "A New Power in the Art Community," *Seoul News*, December 11, 1958, p. 4.

serve to emphasize Yi's bodily gestures. In contrast, Sŏ-bong Kim's work (fig. 5-16) shows a layer of meticulously applied white in small, sharp brushstrokes. Bright colors of red, blue, and green are then applied to reveal the underlying geometrical shapes.

What was prominent in the exhibition, however, was the work of Sang-su Chŏn and Seo-bo Park. Chŏn's two works (figs. 5-17, 5-18) are entirely composed of large brushstrokes of green, red, and black.⁷² Brushstrokes are laid on in curves that rhythmically echo the energetic gestures of the artist's arm. Park's No. 7 (fig. 5-19) was the largest canvas in the exhibition. For this work, Park is known to make colors himself by mixing up paint and zinc and oil and use scraps of old tent sheeting which he scavenges from a military dump.⁷³ The thick blocks of paint in red, blue, and black, wantonly scattered over the canvas, remind us of In-du Ha's witness of Park's working process. The crisscrossing of large brushstrokes makes energy and motion visible. However, these energetic brushstrokes, which had served as metaphor for an attack against pre-existing moral, esthetic values, now act as independent pictorial elements. It is no accident that the

⁷² For Chŏn's coloration, see Ibid.

⁷³ Syngboc Chon, "Local Painters Reveal Pointed Paradoxes in Exhibit Works," *The Korean Republic*, December 3, 1958, p. 5.

underlying geometrical structure, a trace of bankrupt rationality, completely disappeared in his work. Thus, it is possible that by the fourth exhibition, Park had come to have a good command of new techniques. In this context, it is worth noticing Park's own remarks that he produced the work "with both his body and mind all that are alive in them."⁷⁴ It clearly reflects Tapié's declaration that creative authenticity demands extreme degrees of feeling and expression: "Unless it is totally and passionately experienced, art is nothing."⁷⁵

Art critics tried to explain the sudden rise of *Informel* style in terms of the general sentiments of postwar period. Calling the Hyundai artists a combat unit of beauty, for example, the critic Kyōng-sōng Yi noted: "Such daring acts as crudity, violence, and cruelty are being made in their canvases without hesitation. These artists are a startling group of power, totally disregarding the accepted concept of beauty. Yet those acts are not self-abusive. They are the outcome of the courageous youth who struggles to reject all kinds of authority and start again from zero."⁷⁶ The artist

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Tapié, quoted in Frances Morris, *Paris Post War*, p. 211.

⁷⁶ Kyōng-sōng Yi, "A Combat Unit of Beauty," *Yōnhap News*, December 8, 1958, p. 4.

and critic Yŏng-ju Kim also justified the presence of *Informel* in Korea by emphasizing its universality: "There is no distinction between East and West in *Informel* esthetic. It does not have a fixed form or conceptual type. It is realized by the condition of man rather than individuality, by a philosophical understanding of the contemporary world beyond a region, race, or tradition. *Informel* is the first pictorial language common to the world."⁷⁷ The emphasis on universality of *Informel* esthetic is quite significant in the development of Korean *Informel*. Although Kim focused only on the condition of man as a basis of universality, Korean artists began to realize that Asian art and culture were also part of its universality. The realization would probably have led them to produce calligraphic abstractions in the Fifth Exhibition of Hyundai Artists Association. Before examining the exhibition, I will consider the role of Asian art and culture in the postwar international art community.

(3) The Role of Asian Art and Culture in the Postwar International Art Scene

In September 1953, *The Art Digest* asked three American artists and a critic to express their opinions about advanced

⁷⁷ Yŏng-ju Kim, "Informel and Our Art," *Chosŏn Daily*, December 13, 1958, p. 4.

Parisian art. While the artists Ralston Crawford, Robert Motherwell, and Jack Tworckov gave credit to French art and artists, the critic Clement Greenberg confidently claimed that the new American abstract painting was superior to the French:

Every fresh and productive impulse in painting since Manet, and perhaps before, has repudiated received notions of finish and unity, and manhandled into art what until then seemed too intractable, too raw and accidental, to be brought within the scope of esthetic purpose. This extension of the possibilities of the medium is an integral factor of the exaltation to be gotten from art, in the past as now. I miss this factor in too much of the latest Parisian painting.⁷⁸

The following month, the magazine again asked three French artists Jean Dubuffet, Georges Mathieu, and Alfred Manessier, to respond to questions about the American avant-garde. Contrary to Greenberg, Dubuffet found American avant-garde art "characterless":

As for what I learned of American avant-garde art during my stay in New York, I had not at all the impression of being in the presence of an art different from that which can now be encountered in abundance in Paris and elsewhere. It is an international art, characterless, homeless, comparable to Esperanto.... I must say that I have been greatly disappointed to see the young American painters give themselves over so lazily to this safe, freewheeling art, instead of applying themselves to translating something of the American soil and of the specific American genius.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ "Symposium: Is the French Avant Garde Overrated?" *The Art Digest*, 27, 20 (September 1953), p. 12.

⁷⁹ "Symposium: Is the American Avant Garde Overrated?" *The Art Digest*, 28, 2 (October 15, 1953), p. 33.

These two contradictory claims reflect cultural conflicts between the United States and France over the leadership of postwar art world. During the 1950s, in particular, the cultural tensions between two countries were heightened. It is interesting to note that Asian art and culture served as a means for both injuring and defending the prestige of each other in the conflicts. It was primarily done through the discussion of Mark Tobey and the "Pacific School."⁸⁰ In his response to *The Art Digest's* questions, for example, Georges Mathieu acknowledged that American vanguard art broke with European tradition. Yet he marked the "Pacific style" as the most original mode of expression in the United States:

Having discovered new means of expression, an American art is now established, and Mark Tobey may be considered as its greatest innovator. The solitary of Seattle, by the intermediary of a cascading series of influences that have passed over Graves, Pollock, Rothko and Sam Francis, has begun to awaken Paris to what Michel Tapié has called "the Pacific style," certainly the most original mode of expression the U.S. has given us.⁸¹

⁸⁰ The term "Pacific School" was coined by Michel Tapié and referred to the art of Mark Tobey, Sam Francis and others who were influenced by the Orient. Lawrence Alloway, "Background to Action: A Series of Six Articles on Post-War Painting, 6, the Words," *Art News and Review*, IX, 26 (January 18, 1958), p. 4.

⁸¹ "Symposium: Is the American Avant Garde Overrated?" *The Art Digest*, 28, 2 (October 15, 1953), p. 34.

No doubt, Mathieu's emphasis on the Pacific Northwest was intended to highlight a foreign source in American avant-garde art, thereby damaging its originality. This attitude persisted throughout the 1950s. While surveying the American art scene in 1959, Michel Ragon also stated: "Let's not forget that the American artists' first attempt to free themselves from Europe was done in looking forward the Far East."⁸² In its editorial column, thus, *The Art Digest* complained of the French taste: "Curiously, when the French speak of American artists they do know and like, they insinuate a proprietary note into their remarks. They seem more eager to admire the artists we neglect than those we honor; they prefer to make their own discoveries, to assert their own criteria.... Mark Tobey seems to have much more appeal and influence in France than he has here; he comes closest to being the unanimous favorite of the French artists, though many know his work only through reproductions."⁸³ Greenberg even denied any Oriental influences on Abstract Expressionism: "Kline's apparent allusions to Chinese or Japanese calligraphy encouraged the cant, already started by Tobey's case, about a general

⁸² Michel Ragon, "L'Art actuel aux Etats-Unis," *Cimaise*, VI, 3 (Jan.-Feb.-Mar. 1959), p. 8.

Oriental influence on 'abstract expressionism.' This country's possession of a Pacific coast offered a handy received idea with which to explain the otherwise puzzling fact that Americans were at last producing a kind of art important enough to be influencing the French, not to mention the Italians, the British and the Germans. Actually, not one of the original 'abstract expressionists'—least of all Kline—has felt more than a cursory interest in Oriental art. The sources of their art lie entirely in the West."⁸⁴

However, the American interest in Asian art and culture was more than cursory. In his book *The Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture*, David J. Clarke showed that a whole generation of American artists from the 1940s to the 1960s was enthusiastic about Asian thought, which they could cull from the literary works by Ananda Coomaraswamy, Ernest Fenollosa, Eugen Herrigel, Arthur Waley, and others.⁸⁵ Among the Abstract Expressionists who were interested in Asian thought, Clarke noted, were Paul Jenkins, Franz Kline, Ibram Lassaw, William Baziotes, Philip

⁸³ "Editorial: Toward a New Definition of Chauvinism," *The Art Digest*, 28, 2 (October 15, 1953), p. 5.

⁸⁴ Clement Greenberg, "'American-Type' Painting," in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 220.

⁸⁵ David James Clarke, *The Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988).

Guston, Seymour Lipton, Jackson Pollock, Ad Reinhardt, and Theodoros Stamos. Then he explained the Oriental influence on the styles of these artists primarily through the concepts of Eastern philosophy such as the void and the continuum.

Mark Tobey and the "Pacific School" were especially prominent in their assimilation of the Oriental influences. In a 1946 statement, for example, Tobey stated: "Ours is a universal time and the significance of such a time all points to the need for the universalizing of the consciousness and the conscience of man. It is in the awareness of this that our future depends unless we are to sink into a universal dark age. America more than any other country is placed geographically to lead in this understanding, and if from past methods of behavior she has constantly looked toward Europe, today she must assume her position, Janus-faced, toward Asia, for in not too long a time the waves of the Orient shall wash heavily upon her shores."⁸⁶ And at the Sixth National Conference of the United States National Commission for UNESCO in November 1957, he explained the American interest in Asian culture as a way of developing "an indigenous style":

⁸⁶ Mark Tobey, statement in Dorothy Miller, *Fourteen Americans* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1946), p. 70.

I have often thought that if the West Coast had been open to aesthetic influence from Asia, as the East Coast was to Europe, what a rich nation we would be! When I was in Japan in 1933 there was a hiatus between the art of the East and of the West.... But World War II broke this hiatus. Today the European influence in on the wane, and we are developing an indigenous style. However, we are growing more and more conscious of what I would term the Japanese aesthetic.⁸⁷

While discussing the relationship between Japanese calligraphy and Abstract Expressionism, Barbara Rose specified how Asian culture could have served as a way of declaring artistic independence: "Japanese calligraphy, however, had the advantage of belonging to an ancient tradition—a pre-European tradition—which made it particularly attractive to American artists who wished to break with European forms and express their own individuality. Turning away from Europe toward the Orient was one way of declaring artistic independence."⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Mark Tobey, "Japanese Traditions and American Art," *College Art Journal*, XVIII, 1 (Fall 1958), p. 21.

⁸⁸ Barbara Rose, "Japanese Calligraphy and American Abstract Expressionism," in *Words in Motion: Modern Japanese Calligraphy*, ext. cat. (New York: 1984), p. 39. In his dissertation, Bert Winther also noted: "American interest in Asian culture already rested on a long tradition by the postwar years, nevertheless it amounted to little more than a sporadic tendency compared to the parentage of American culture in Europe. Thus the attempt to reorient the United States toward Asia was also an attempt to express a sense of independence from Europe." Winther, "Isamu Noguchi: Conflicts of Japanese Culture in the Early Postwar Years," (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1992), p. 33.

As we have seen, however, to the eyes of Europeans, the American interest in Asian culture was an indication of America's dependence upon a foreign source. Furthermore, the Asian culture was not something that Americans could monopolize, but a legacy of the world. Thus, Europeans also sought to associate the implications of Asian culture with their art. This effort to absorb Asian culture was made in close connection with contemporary discourse on the "School of Paris," which appeared in a series of articles on the subject, published in *Cimaise* of 1955-56.

With the exception of Julien Alvard, who denied the existence of the "School of Paris" on the grounds that the slightest collective infatuation was interpreted as an attack on individual personality,⁸⁹ most French art critics presented an expanded version of the "School of Paris." For instance, Michel Ragon emphasized its ability to absorb: "The School of Paris has an extraordinary faculty of absorption. It registers and digests all that comes to it from the five parts of the world and transforms it into a unique and diverse art ... but one in which you can always find the mark of Paris. This absorbed and digested art influences in turn

⁸⁹ Julien Alvard, "Paris sans école," *Cimaise*, 3, 1 (Oct.-Nov. 1955), p. 10-1. According to Alvard, the advance of American avant-garde art was a result of commercialism and chauvinism.

the national artists."⁹⁰ In the same context, Herta Wescher pointed out the pedagogical importance of Paris: "The artists from all different countries ... are attracted by the ensemble of the thousand and one artistic adventures which are possible here.... It is exactly the multiplicity of the techniques that come together at this place that gives it this pedagogical importance. The constant confrontation of divergent works obliges the artist who wants to find his way to look at all of them closely, and in trying to discover the intentions of others, he often comes to clarify his own way."⁹¹ It is no doubt that this expanded concept of the "School of Paris" had the advantage of encompassing

⁹⁰ "L'Ecole de Paris a une faculté d'absorption extraordinaire. Elle enregistre, elle digère tout ce qui lui vient des cinq parties du monde et le transmue dans un art divers et singulier ... mais où l'on reconnaît sa marque. Cet art absorbé et digéré influence à son tour des artistes nationaux." Michel Ragon, "L'école de Paris se porte bien," *Cimaise*, 3, 2 (December 1955), p. 17. (French text with English translation by John Koenig)

⁹¹ "Les artistes de tous les pays ... sont attirés par l'ensemble de mille et une aventures artistiques possibles qui les attendent ici. C'est justement la multiplicité des tendances se croisant en ce lieu lui donne cette importance pédagogique. La confrontation constante d'oeuvres divergentes oblige l'artiste qui veut s'orienter à les regarder de près et, en s'efforçant à découvrir les intentions des autres, il gagne souvent en clarté dans sa propre voie." Herta Wescher, "A l'Ecole de Paris," *Cimaise*, 3, 3 (Jan.-Feb. 1956), p. 16. (French text with English translation by John Koenig)

international art under its hegemony, thereby revealing a universal character of French art.

In this geographical expansion of the "School of Paris," Asia assumed a critical position, especially because its traditional art shared the characteristics of postwar art in Europe and the United States. Osaki Shinichiro thus noted: "After 1955, the Informel movement was somewhat at a low ebb, and Tapié together with Mathieu tried to turn the tide by expanding Informel through links outside Europe. The Gutai was a most desirable collaborator for Tapié who was looking for an overseas base, and actively introducing American and Japanese artists, channelled mainly through Galerie Stadler."⁹² However, as can be seen in the "Pacific School," the United States got the lead in assimilating Asian art and culture into its soil. In his article, Georges Boudaille explained this situation: "Already more than 10 years ago, we could see the contamination of the style of West Coast painters by a certain orientalism. The West-East trip across the continent took place quickly, and Frenchmen soon after this were shown a novel form of plastic poetry and Japanese charm when Pollock and Co. crossed the ocean. Since this time

⁹² Osaki Shinichiro, "Art in Gutai; Action into Painting," in Ashiya City Museum of Art & History, ed., *Document: Gutai, 1954-1972*, p. 23.

the School of Paris painters have become conscious of this influence, and have tried to discover the headwaters of this art."⁹³ In order to secure the universality of the "School of Paris," thus, French critics tried to divest the "Pacific School" of its American character and explain it in terms of the fatal confrontation of East and West. For example, Pierre Restany stated:

The West has just re-discovered the art of writing, after having exhausted the contents of all of its logical vocabularies in its avid desire for total understanding. The West is not sure of itself, and seeks elsewhere for its balance and hope. Where?—in the Orient, in its exact contrary, its essential antimony, the seed of its very annihilation.... This Far-Eastern contamination made the fortune of the so-called "Pacific School." Has calligraphy, once passed through the American filter, changed its nature? It's of no importance. The calligraphic gesture is before all a *gesture*; it is a phenomenon of the investigations of space that renders an account of some of today's most interesting adventures.⁹⁴

Although the United States eventually displaced France as the center of world art, in the process of the cultural conflicts, they unexpectedly revealed that Asian art and culture could be a source of artistic independence, originality, and universality. This partly explains why the *Informel* movement could sweep over Asia during the 1950s and

⁹³ Georges Bondaille, "Que viennent chercher à Paris les peintres japonais?" *Cimaise*, 5, 5 (May-June 1958), p. 26.

⁹⁴ Pierre Restany, "Japan Made in Paris," *Cimaise*, 5, 5 (May-June 1958), p. 30.

1960s. In other words, Asia could find its own tradition in the postwar art in Europe and the United States. In an article about the Japanese art scene for the French reader, Shinichi Gegui thus wrote: "Among the new notions of space recently invented by different European and American artists, several had already been discovered, centuries ago by our ancestors: infinite space, topographical vision, the sign, the power of the gesture in painting, etc. Time has given us this paradox: in spite of the youthfulness of our modern movement, from a certain point of view, already we are mature, and at the same time, old."⁹⁵

The Korean art scene also paid close attention to the Western interest in the Orient. In his address entitled "Oriental and Western Painting Approaching" at the library of the Headquarters of the American 8th Army in Seoul, December 4, 1955, Yŏng-gi Kim, a professor at Songkyunkwan University, already pointed out that Tobey's new art based on Asian calligraphy was attracting public attention.⁹⁶ Recalling the

⁹⁵ Shinichi Gegui, "The Adventure of Art in Japan's Four Islands," *Cimaise*, 5, 5 (May-June 1958), p. 10. In this sense, Sabro Hasegawa also noted that "in general old Japan was 'newer' than the new Occident, while new Japan is apparently more old-fashioned than either the new Occident or old Japan itself." Sabro Hasegawa, "Abstract Art in Japan," in *The American Abstract Artists*, ed., *The World of Abstract Art* (New York: George Wittenborn, 1957), p. 72.

exhibition "Eight American Artists," in particular, Pyŏng-don Song, a professor at Seoul National University, mentioned that Tobey's work presented a new possibility by uniting Asian and Western traditions.⁹⁷ Furthermore, Korean society began to examine its own tradition from a new perspective at this moment. For example, the magazine *Sasanggye* carried feature articles on the topic "The Rediscovery of the East" in its August 1957 issue. The articles reexamined Asian culture, philosophy, art, and history with a view to making an alternative in the face of the crisis of the West.⁹⁸ The theory of the cultural decline of the West proposed by Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee may have been one of the factors

⁹⁶ Yŏng-gi Kim, "Oriental and Western Painting Approaching," *Chosŏn Daily*, December 11, 1955, p. 4.

⁹⁷ Pyŏng-don Song, "A Survey of Contemporary Art in Europe and the United States," *Seoul National University Press*, June 9, 1958, p. 3. Even before the exhibition, Korean artists and critics would probably have been aware of the "Pacific School" through such popular magazines as *Time* and *Life*, which carried several articles on it. See, for example, "Mythic Painters of the Northwest," *Life* 35, 13 (September 28, 1953), pp. 84-89; "A Seattle Painter Wins Top European Prize," *Life*, 45, 3 (July 21, 1958), pp. 50-51; "Seattle Tangler," *Time*, 57, 15 (April 9, 1951), pp. 86, 89; "Whiter Away," *Time*, 63, 22 (May 31, 1954), pp. 54-55; "Westerners Up," *Time*, 66, 3 (July 18, 1955), p. 73; "Northwest Mystic," *Time*, 66, 14 (October 3, 1955), p. 80; "West Coast Pioneer," *Time*, 67, 10 (March 5, 1956), pp. 88-89.

⁹⁸ Dong-hwa Kim, "The Significance of Nothingness in Eastern Philosophy," *Sasanggye*, 49 (August 1957), pp. 171-179; Kyŏng-tak Kim, "The Essence of Eastern Culture," pp. 200-207; Su-yŏng Hwang, "The Characteristics of Eastern Art," pp. 266-

that stimulated Korean intellectuals to reexamine their own tradition.⁹⁹ It was in this context that Korean artists began to combine the *Informel* style with Asian tradition.

(4) The Proliferation of *Informel* Painting

The Dissolution of the Hyundai Artists Association

The Fifth Exhibition of the Hyundai Artists Association was held in November 11-18, 1959 at the Korea Information Center in Seoul. The Hyundai artists published a manifesto drafted by Kŭn-taek Pang:

In the chaos of today, we are groping for a vocabulary of conviction that will clarify our volition for life. We reject all the rationality based on close intellectual systems; we are determined to base the volition for life on "I", and start from "I". We acknowledge that a large part of the world is still unknown to us. This acknowledgment gives us a duty to expand freedom. We are searching for a great discovery from the clash of creative impulses.... I see the conquest of the world through the development of "I", filled with inspiration and the premonition of the unknown. Our activity will guarantee the conquest.¹⁰⁰

274; Chae-gwan Chŏng, "The Historical Reality of the East," pp. 278-283.

⁹⁹ In his book *Decline of the West*, for instance, Spengler inferred that Western civilization had in the 20th century passed the zenith of its creative power and reached the point at which nothing remained for it to do. It was vain, according to Spengler, for Western man to rebel against this destiny. Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Knopf, 1929).

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Seo-bo Park, "Korean Avant-Garde Art As I Experienced," p. 86. (Translation by the author)

Filled with ambiguous vocabulary, Pang's manifesto is not clear enough to understand. However, the emphasis on "I" as a beginning for art clearly reflects Sartre's theory that existence precedes essence. This ethos of beginning from "I" was later to be adopted as a credo by the younger generation of the *Informel* movement.

Before the exhibition, Seo-bo Park, one of the leading Hyundai artists, had been dismissed from the group due to personal conflicts among members. Ch'ŏng-kwan Kim and Sang-su Chŏn had also withdrawn from it. Although such new members as Sang-wha Chŏng, Yong-ik Cho, Yong-sŏn Kim, Yong-hwan Yi, and Sang-u Yi were recruited, the Hyundai Artists Association began to show signs of dissolution. The interest of the press also cooled. Thus it is almost impossible to identify the works included in the fifth exhibition. Sŏ-bong Kim's *Work* (fig. 5-20), which would have been included in the show, is quite similar in style to his work at the fourth exhibition. Yet the geometric forms and brushstrokes are more refined, evoking a decorative effect. Tschang-yeul Kim's *Work II* (fig. 5-21), which was reproduced in the November 16, 1959 issue of *Segye Daily*, shows a definite shift in his style. Unprecedented in Korean *Informel*, the use of large calligraphic strokes clearly reveals an interest in combining

Asian calligraphy with the *Informel* style. According to the critic Yŏng-sam Kim, Yong-ik Cho also employed similar strokes in his work.¹⁰¹ Syng-boc Chon even cautioned that the Hyundae artists followed "too closely [the works] of Kline, Soulages."¹⁰² With their direct contacts with the international art world in the 1960s, in particular, Korean artists' interest in Asian tradition was to be conspicuous.

Although the Hyundae artists described their art as *Informel*, they acknowledged that American Action Painting was more influential than European *Art informel* until 1960. For example, Seo-bo Park noted: "I think the *Informel* movement in the late 1950s was stimulated by American Action Painting rather than by European *Art informel*. Although few works have survived, so far as my experience goes, Korean *Informel* art was Americanized from 1957 to 1960."¹⁰³ The critic Ku-yŏl Yi also commented on the influence of Abstract Expressionism in the fourth exhibition.¹⁰⁴ Although Korean artists did not

¹⁰¹ Yŏng-sam Kim, "The Surplus of Ideas," *Segye Daily*, November 16, 1959, p. 4.

¹⁰² Syng-boc Chon, "Four Exhibits Held, Reveal Hard Work," *The Korean Republic*, November 14, 1959, p. 5.

¹⁰³ Seo-bo Park, interview with Yŏng-ju Kim, October 21, 1967. Published in "Abstract Art Movement for Ten Years: Its Legacy and Prospect," *Space*, 2, 12 (December 1967), p. 88.

¹⁰⁴ Ku-yŏl Yi, "The *Informel* Movement in Contemporary Korean Art History," *Space*, 205 (July 1984), p. 52.

specify what differentiated American Action Painting from European *Art informel*, they generally seem to have associated the former with the emphasis on energetic brushstrokes, the latter with the emphasis on materials and *matière*. Indeed, they began to emphasize the texture or tactile quality of the paint from 1960. The Sixth Exhibition of the Hyundai Artists Association marked Korean artists' focus on European *Art informel*.

The final, sixth exhibition was held in December 4-20, 1960 at the Kyōngbok Palace Museum in Seoul. Seo-bo Park rejoined the group at this point. In the exhibition 83 canvases by 10 Hyundai artists were displayed along with large reproductions of 6 Western artists such as Karel Appel and Antoni Tàpies, all of whom won prizes in the Venice Biennale.¹⁰⁵ Although the reproductions of foreign artists were included to raise funds for the Korean pavilion in the Venice Biennale, they also suggest an increasing influence of European *Art informel*. In fact, in his review, Kyōng-sōng Yi claimed that Korean *Informel* was a part of Michel Tapie's *art autre*.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Kŭn-taek Pang, "The Conquest of Avant-Garde Art," *Korea Daily*, December 9, 1960, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ Kyōng-sōng Yi, "The Challenge to the Unknown," *Dong-a Daily*, December 15, 1960, p. 4.

Among the works shown in the exhibition were Tschangyeul Kim's *Work 20* (fig. 5-22), Seo-bo Park's *Work 6* (fig. 5-23), and Sŏng-sun Chang's *Work 77* (fig. 5-24). Kim's work shows the thickly impastoed surface, reminiscent of Jean Fautrier's *Otages* paintings. However, Kim's work still keeps the traces of aggressive brushstrokes. His other 1960 work (fig. 5-25), which was reproduced in the January 24, 1960 issue of *Korea Daily*, shows a calligraphic approach to *Informel* style, which appeared in the previous exhibition. On the other hand, Park's *Work 6* no longer reveals the expression of energy and action. His work seems to be totally composed of thick slabs of paint, emphasizing the *matière* itself. Park also began to incorporate foreign materials into his paintings. In his *No. 1* (fig. 5-26), which would probably have been shown in the sixth exhibition, such materials as cement and cloth play an active and expressive role. Finally, Chang's *Work 77* displays an overall spread of calligraphic strokes. The sixth exhibition, after all, announced both the end of the Hyundai Artists Association and the start of the second stage of the *Informel* movement in which emphasis was put on texture, calligraphic strokes, and expressive colors.

After having a united exhibition with the Artists Association of 1960, a group of younger artists, the Hyundai Artists Association was disbanded to form a new group *Actuel*

in 1962.¹⁰⁷ The choice of "actuel," a French word meaning the present, was definitely indicative of Korean artists' focus on Paris. Composed of the leading members of both the Hyundai Artists Association and the Artists Association of 1960, Actuel had its first exhibition in August 18-24, 1962 at the Korea Information Center in Seoul. In their manifesto, the Actuel artists proclaimed: "No matter how hard we strive, we always get empty-handed. If there is a fruit, it is madness. We console ourselves with the thought that madness is a basic condition in which a new value can be produced."¹⁰⁸ The Actuel artists all showed works in which they freely experimented with materials such as plaster, earth, cloth, string, rags, and sand in order to emphasize the *matière*.¹⁰⁹ In-du Ha's

¹⁰⁷ For the united exhibition, Tschang-yeul Kim drafted the following manifesto: "In other words, it is a state where everything is resolved, a state where 'yesterday' and 'now', 'you' and 'I', and objects are all melted into one another. Totally resolved, all the elements of 'I' are rolling over, mixing with other components; forms yet unresolved are struggling with each other. It is the creative activity of 'I'. Thus it can not have a fixed form; it is only a movement itself as a process of transfer; only heat and light generated from the transfer. This is the portion of freedom allotted to 'I'. The absolute of today may crystallize to form a core some day. 'I' am hot; we are now sizzling." Quoted in Seo-bo Park, "Korean Avant-Garde Art As I Experienced," p. 86. (Translation by the author)

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. (Translation by the author)

¹⁰⁹ See "Free Play with Materials," *Korea Daily*, August 22, 1962, p. 4; "The Avant-Garde of the Avant-Gardes," *Chosŏn Daily*, August 21, 1962, p. 4.

Fetal Movement (fig. 5-27) shows thickly painted texture in the tracks of a broad, sweeping brushstroke. However, with the proliferation of *Informel* style, their group activity soon lost its vitality. With the second exhibition in 1964, thus, the *Actuel* was disbanded, putting an end to the violent *Informel* movement in Korea.

The April Revolution and *Informel* Painting

On March 15, 1960, the fourth presidential election in Korea took place. In an attempt to win the election, the Syngman Rhee government, which had prospered for a dozen years in corruption and terrorism, again used all sorts of election frauds. Unprecedented election rigging caused thousands of students in Masan to rise in revolt on election day. It soon spread across the country, climaxing in Seoul on April 19 when 149 student demonstrators were killed by the police and thousands of others wounded. In the face of the student demonstrations, Rhee resigned from the presidency, putting an end to his despotic 12-year rule. Although subsequent social and political instability invited the military revolution in 1961, the April Revolution gave the younger generation a unique experience of freedom and democracy.

In the art community, the April Revolution aroused a hope that the National Art Exhibition system would also be renovated.¹¹⁰ By evoking again controversy over the selection of the jury, however, it did not meet the expectation of the younger artists. Compared to the Hyundae artists, these younger artists were more conscious of the ideological values of freedom and democracy because they were contemporary with the victims of the revolution. Fresh from college, they began to attack the conservatism and sectarianism of the National Art Exhibition system by holding street exhibitions.

When the 9th National Art Exhibition was being held in October 1960 at the Kyŏngbok Palace Museum, two groups of younger artists displayed their works on the walls of the nearby Tŏksu Palace as a sign of resistance. The Wall Group (fig. 5-28), one of the two groups, was composed of art students of Seoul National University such as Ik-su Kim, Hyŏng-dae Kim, Pyŏng-uk Park, and others. Their manifesto is filled with the rebellion against the establishment and desire for freedom:

¹¹⁰ On the art community after the April Revolution, see "The Reform of the Art Community," *Yŏnhap News*, May 7-10, 1960, p. 4; Ch'ŏng-gang Kim, "The National Art Exhibition and The Spirit of the April Revolution," *Chosŏn Daily*, October 11, 1960, p. 4; Pyŏng-gi Kim, "A Cross Section of Contemporary Korean Art," *P'yŏng-hwa News*, October 25, 1960, p. 4; "The

Today all doors to safety and pleasure are shut down before our eyes. In front of us lies a cold wall of reality. Having experienced the war in our teens, we did nothing wrong except being young. Everything was done by the inability and greed of some senseless politicians. We had just gone through all the cruelties without realizing the reason. There was just a war. Stricken with poverty and thirst, we have only developed the consciousness of despair and rebellion. After the collapse of existing order, there should have been a strong movement for a new era. However, our predecessors were bent on keeping their status and power, leaving our national art and culture uncultivated.

Rivalry between factions took the form of a power struggle rather than an ideological conflict. Our national culture and tradition have been abandoned, and we are yet far from a new creation. We do not intend to advocate our position by impeaching our predecessors with their faults and placing the responsibility for history on them. We are going to accept what already happened. Now it is time to act and we will do it.

Please let us have freedom to act and freedom to create.

In the first exhibition of the Wall Group, we eliminated all the unnecessary formalities and facilities. The works exhibited here are our body, thought, blood, and everything. Although there are differences in style and technique, no one could suppress our desire and passion to enhance our national culture.¹¹¹

The other group, the Artists Association of 1960 (fig. 5-29), was composed of young artists in their early twenties such as Pong-tae Kim, Chong-hak Kim, Myŏng-ro Yun, Ch'an-sŏng Son, Yŏng-yŏl Yu, and others; some of them had once attended the Yi Pong-Sang Art Institute, and sympathized with the

Confrontation Between Academism and Avant-Garde Art," *Chosŏn Daily*, December 16, 1960, p. 4.

Hyundae artists. Like the Wall artists, they also expressed their antagonism against the establishment and emphasized the importance of freedom in their manifesto:

We displayed our works on the street as a way to find a new breakthrough in a state of modern despair. Some might blame us for our misunderstanding and mistakes. However, we cannot help it because freedom is our true colors. By nature we reject order; we reject the stagnant and degenerated establishment and order. We consider existing order to be hypocritical and delusional.... We want to inspire the retrogressive establishment with fresh values and order. Now we are going to be rebels of the era. As rebels who reject all the established values and contradictory order, we are going to act and adventure, only thinking about how much our creative spirit could reveal truth.¹¹²

The pictorial emphasis of these younger artists was on aggressive brushstrokes, primary colors, and densely impastoed surface. The critic Seung-jun Ch'ŏn also noted that bits of metal, concrete, gravel and sand were mixed together in their works.¹¹³ For these artists, *Informel* style was a visual language appropriate to express their feelings of rebellion, anger, and freedom. After the April Revolution,

¹¹¹ Quoted in Dal-jin Kim, *Looking Again at Contemporary Korean Art* (Seoul: Palŏn, 1995), pp. 357-78. (Translation by the author)

¹¹² Quoted in Seung-jun Ch'on, "Two Street Exhibitions by Postwar Art Groups," *Korea Daily*, October 6, 1960, p. 4. (Translation by the author)

¹¹³ Ibid. These works are not extant today. They were so large that artists could not find a place for storage. Myŏng-ro Yun noted that they even had to put an ad that they would give their works for free to those who would want to have them.

particularly, *Informel* became more closely associated with the ideological values of freedom and democracy. In-du Ha once recalled that the Hyundai artists were elated by the concurrence of the confusion, vortex, and passion with those of the April Revolution.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, the April Revolution itself often became the subject of *Informel* artists. Yŏng-ju Kim's *It Was Tuesday* (fig. 5-30) conveys the historical urgency and turmoil of the revolution in a crisscrossing of lines and blots in red. When the magazine *Sasanggye* asked artists to present works on the April Revolution for reproduction in 1960, most artists expressed their attitude toward the revolution through broad, aggressive brushstrokes representing the heroic act and sacrifice of students (figs. 5-31, 5-32).¹¹⁵

(5) Tradition and Politics in *Informel* Painting

See Myŏng-ro Yun, "When I Was a Member of the Artists Association of 1960," *Hwarang*, 2, 4 (Winter 1974), p. 57.

¹¹⁴ In-du Ha, "The Sailing and Wreck of the Hyundai Artists Association," *Hwarang*, 3, 3 (Autumn 1975), p. 40.

¹¹⁵ See "Poetry and Painting Dedicated to the April Revolution," *Sasanggye* (April 1960), pp. 344-57. Interestingly, in his essay "Critic within the Act," written as a counterargument against Mary McCarthy's statement that "you can not hang an event on the wall, only a picture," Rosenberg juxtaposed an Abstract Expressionist painting and a photograph of students rioting in Japan, claiming what matters is a quality of energy released into the whole

Tradition and Informel Painting

For *Informel* artists, the avant-garde meant a total disregard for all the existing esthetic values. Korean tradition was not an exception. During the late 1950s they were concerned with breaking down pre-existing moral, esthetic values. Their employment of aggressive brushstrokes was a symbolic gesture of rejection. Gradually, however, they began to consider the relevance of tradition to modernism. As we have seen, there was an interest in calligraphic abstraction already in the 1959 Hyundai exhibition. It was probably the result of their awareness that Asian art and culture were playing an important role in the international art community. The participation in international art exhibitions (the Paris Biennial and the São Paulo Biennial) further inspired Korean artists with the importance of tradition. Here I will examine the two international art exhibitions in conjunction with the issue of tradition.

The Paris Biennial was started in 1959 by André Malraux, Minister of Cultural Affairs, as part of plan to bolster the position of Paris in the art world.¹¹⁶ It differed from the

configuration or arena of a contending world." Rosenberg, "Critic within the Act," p. 27.

biennales of Venice and São Paulo in restricting participation to artists who were between 20 and 35 years of age. Although its age limit was the target of the attacks of the press, French critics tried to emphasize its positive aspects. For example, Geroges Boudaille said, "Still more positive, the thirty-five-year age limit, so hotly criticized forcefully demonstrated to the general public the extension on an international scale of a common esthetic ground. Although a thousand 'dialectical' nuances of abstraction could be distinguished, as a whole the young painters of all countries speak the same language and understand each other."¹¹⁷

Abstract art was dominant in the First Paris Biennial. Pierre Schneider himself was surprised at "the standardization of style in avant-garde art throughout the world".¹¹⁸ However, as Malraux mentioned at the Biennial's opening, there was also a sign of decline of *Art informel*: "The birth of a neo-figurative painting, radically different

¹¹⁶ Pierre Schneider wrote: "It seems as if the organizers secretly hoped to prove not only Paris' continued rule as capital of the arts ... but also the continued supremacy of the Ecole de Paris." Pierre Schneider, "Art News from Paris," *Art News*, 58, 9 (December 1959), p. 46.

¹¹⁷ Georges Boudailli, "Après la première Biennale de Paris," *Cimaise*, 7, 2 (Jan.-Feb.-Mar. 1960), p. 50.

¹¹⁸ Pierre Schneider, "Art News from Paris," *Art News*, 58, 9 (December 1959), p. 46.

from that of the Soviet Union and other countries absent from the exhibition, could have proven an obstacle to the development of the informal. Such is not the case. But let us not make rash predictions about this. When impressionism conquered the Salons, it was no longer the art of the future."¹¹⁹

Korea began to participate in the Paris Biennial from 1961. When Seo-bo Park visited Paris, attending a conference of world young artists sponsored by the French Commission for the International Association of Plastic Arts in January 1961, he played a decisive role in bringing Korea into the international event.¹²⁰ Four Hyundai artists, Tschang-yeul Kim, Sŏng-sun Chang, Ch'ang-sŏp Chŏng, and Yong-ik Cho were chosen for the Second Paris Biennial of 1961. The general level of the Second Biennial was, according to Michel Ragon, "very inferior to that of 1959." In particular, he commented on the foreign sections: "What lack of imagination! What lack of personality!"¹²¹ However, Park noted that Korea was the

¹¹⁹ Frank Elgar, "French Question: The Biennial Backfires, and Painters Grope Toward New Expressions," *The New York Times*, November 8, 1959, II, p. 15.

¹²⁰ Seo-bo Park, "Art Festival of 49 Countries," *Chosŏn Daily*, December 27, 1961, p. 4.

¹²¹ Michel Ragon and Pierre Restany, "Biennale de Paris 1961," *Cimaise*, 8, 5 (November-December 1961), p. 62, 66.

most hopeful among Asian countries, pointing out a Parisian newspaper's mention of Tschang-yeul Kim.¹²²

The Third Paris Biennial of 1963 showed an increase of latest tendencies such as Pop Art, Op Art, and New Figuration. The critic Marc Albert-Levin thus claimed that the exhibition revealed "exhausted young painters, or the exhaustion of a style which is abandoned for the sake of new conceptions of art."¹²³ However, Korean artists were not yet affected by these new trends. Korea was again represented by *Informel* artists such as Tschang-yeul Kim, Seo-bo Park, Myŏng-ro Yun, Ki-wŏn Choi, and Pong-tae Kim.

Among the works shown in the Biennial were Park's *Primordialis* series (figs. 5-33, 5-34). Produced in 1962, the series usually show a couple of circles defined by thick reddish black paint. They look like protozoa seen through a microscope. While staying in Paris for a year in 1961, Park deepened his understanding of *Informel* esthetic, seeing European works through his own eyes. His *Primordialis* series was the outcome of the experience. Thus it is not surprising that his title *Primordialis* reflects the notion of the inchoate or a return to origins, which was important in

¹²² Seo-bo Park, "Art Festival of 49 Countries," *Chosŏn Daily*, December 27, 1961, p. 4.

Tapiè's concept of *autre art*. Park's insistence on a new beginning led him to deny the influence of tradition: "The true significance of tradition lies in a meaningful reaction against it.... Young Korean artists refuse to discuss their own tradition. The 'meaningful reaction' is based on our faith in the creation of a new tradition."¹²⁴

Unlike Park, Myŏng-ro Yun tried to combine Asian tradition with *Informel* style. His *Painting M-10* (fig. 5-35), also exhibited in the Third Paris Biennial, shows a dense texture of plaster and glue over which layers of silver and blue colors are applied. Both the surface pattern and texture refer to Chinese bronze wares as the source of Yun's inspiration.¹²⁵ Yun's interest in Asian tradition was a reflection of the trend of Korean art at the moment. This trend was based not just on the affinity between Asian calligraphy and *Art informel*, but also on an awareness of Asian sensitivity in *Informel* esthetic. Thus the Hyundai artist In-du Ha could say: "Look at Fautrier's *Otages*. Look at Dubuffet's crude work. There are only hard, constricted

¹²³ Marc Albert-Levin, "Biennale de Paris 1963," *Cimaise*, 10, 4 (Nov.-Dec. 1963), p. 71.

¹²⁴ Seo-bo Park, "The Situation of Young Korean Artists," *Kyŏngnyang News*, January 29, 1962, p. 4. Park's *Ecriture* series of 1970s, however, shows that for him, the new beginning meant a return to Asian tradition.

materials in their works, where cultural sensitivity, psychology, and fantasy were completely obliterated. However, in the materials is a life in an inchoate state; in its warmth of vibration is the Orient.... Art brut, which was considered to be foreign in the West, had already existed in our art."¹²⁶ Myŏng-ro Yun also noted, "In the past, I had seen only the trends of the West. Now that I have come to participate in an international exhibition, I tend to focus on myself. I intend to start again from myself."¹²⁷ The critic Il Yi aptly summarized the trend in his introduction to the Korean representation for the Third Paris Biennial:

Where is the ancient tradition of the "Land of Morning Calm"? It is suffocating in a prison of convention. Anyone who can see its original spirit and sensitivity would be blessed. Although it might be an exaggeration that our young artists have succeeded in that, it is true that they are, consciously or unconsciously, inspired by the deep, bountiful spring of tradition.... Young Korean artists' turn to abstract art is quite natural because there has always been the potentiality of abstract art in our country. Our artists, on the one hand, have a highly developed sense of form probably due to their practice of calligraphy; on the other hand they have a special sense of space coming from their attachment to nature. This is why our art is quite different from Western art, even though we are absorbing

¹²⁵ Youngna Kim, "The Informel Movement in the Korean Art Scene," p. 219.

¹²⁶ In-du Ha, "Avant-Garde Art Today," *Chayu-munhak*, 6, 4 (April-May 1961), p. 255.

¹²⁷ Myŏng-ro Yun, as quoted in "Top-Runners of 1963," *Seoul News*, December 18, 1963, p. 8.

it. In addition, Korean art can be characterized by meditation, calm lyricism, and tenacity.¹²⁸

The participation in the São Paulo Biennial from 1963 further stimulated Korean artists in their interest in Asian tradition. Unlike the Paris Biennial, Euro-American Abstract Expressionism was still a dominant style in the São Paulo Biennial of the 1960s. For example, the grand prix went to Adolph Gottlieb in 1963, to Alberto Burri in 1965.¹²⁹ For the São Paulo Biennials, the older generation of artists was also included. Two pioneers of abstract art in Korea, Hwan-gi Kim and Yŏng-guk Yu, were chosen for the 1963 Biennial and drew a favorable comment. Kim's *Summer Moonlit Night* (fig. 5-36) shows such traditional Korean motifs such as mountains, birds, and moon. Simplified forms, smooth surface, and bluish tone transform the painting into a poem of longing for the pastoral beauty of his native country. Yŏng-guk Yu's *Mountain* also reflects the indigenous climatic atmosphere created by the mineral crust of the earth.

In the 1965 Biennial, Ung-no Yi, who had explored the potentiality of abstraction inherent in Oriental-style

¹²⁸ Il Yi, "The Preface to the Paris Biennial," *Chosŏn Daily*, July 5, 1963, p. 5. (Translation by the author)

¹²⁹ See Tony Spiteris, "Septième Biennale de São Paulo," *Cimaise*, 10, 4 (Nov.-Dec. 1963), pp. 76-80; Jacques Lassaigue, "8è Biennale de São Paulo," *Cimaise*, 12, 4 (Oct.

painting, won the silver medal. Ung-no Yi's *Composition A* (fig. 5-37) shows his unique approach to abstraction, achieved by manipulating traditional materials of Oriental-style painting such as Oriental paper and ink. The jury member Jacques Lassaigne commented that Yi's work expressed Korean tradition in a new perspective, revealing the individuality of Korean art.¹³⁰ Furthermore, Kwan Nam, who established himself as an artist in Paris in the 1950s, won the grand prix at the 1966 Menton Biennale in France where Serge Poliakoff and Antoni Tàpies also participated. The prize-winning work, entitled *Crumbled Historical Remains Exposed to the Sun* (fig. 5-38) is an embodiment of his experience of the Korean War in abstract form. Employing a variety of techniques such as dripping, spilling, and scribbling, the work seems to evoke a cathartic action of time. Later, the work was to be included in the exhibition "Espaces Abstraits," organized by Tapié in 1969.¹³¹ Encouraged by winning prizes in international exhibitions, Korean artists were convinced that the possibility of the Korean

1965-Jan. 1966), pp. 48-53. Victor Vasarely was a co-winner of the grand prix in 1965.

¹³⁰ Lassaigne, quoted in "Korean Painting Arousing Admiration," *Chosŏn Daily*, September 28, 1965, p. 5.

contribution to the currents of international art lay in Asian tradition. In a discussion on the development of Korean art in 1965, thus artists and critics invariably claimed, "The future of our art depends on the degree to which we could refine our collective character and sensitivity. In order to know and advance into the world, we need to know more about Korea and the Orient."¹³²

The tendency to combine tradition and modernism thus became conspicuous in the 1960s. For example, Pong-tae Kim's *Work* of 1963 (fig. 5-39) and Chong-hak Kim's *Work* of 1964 (fig. 5-40) show the dynamic use of calligraphic brushstrokes, revealing the essential rhythmic structure of the pictorial form. Korean *Informel* artists also exploited the Asian principle of space design, of placing the elements in uncrowded space and making the space an active and imaginative factor of design. In Sŏng-sun Chang's *Zero Zone* of 1961 (fig. 5-41) and Ch'ang-sŏp Chŏng's *Pilgrimage* of 1963 (fig. 5-42), for example, shapes of color seem to have just emerged from underneath, occupying only half of the canvases. The remaining part is full of misty color, suggesting

¹³¹ See Michel Tapié, *Espaces abstraits: De l'intuition à la formalisation*, exh. cat. (Milano: Galleria d'Arte Cortina, 1969).

¹³² "The 20 Years Growth After Liberation," *Kyŏngnyang News*, May 31, 1965, p. 5.

vibrating tensions of voids. Even if forms or marks are dominant, their blurry outlines make them look as if they float or disappear in the depth of mist as in Yong-ik Cho's *Work* of 1964 (fig. 5-43) and Yŏng-yŏl Chŏng's *Work* of 1964 (fig. 5-44). In this sense, Korean *Informel* artists showed a unique sense of space design, quite different from modernist Western space.¹³³

Interestingly, this traditional sensitivity is more strongly found in the work of artists who studied abroad.¹³⁴ For example, Su-jae Yi, who returned from the United States in 1958, presented to the 7th National Art Exhibition her *Summer Forest*, which showed a suggestive use of space. In her *Work* of 1961 (fig. 5-45), furthermore, Yi produced an effect of traditional landscape by exploiting calligraphic brushstrokes and void. Sŏng-u Chŏn, who studied at the San Francisco State College, at Mills College and at the

¹³³ In this context, it is important to note that Clement Greenberg's idea of two dimensionality of the picture plane was never known in the Korean art community during the 1950s and early 1960s. This again shows that Korean artists saw Abstract Expressionism in terms of Rosenberg's idea of Action Painting.

¹³⁴ In his essay, Hun Kim wrote that while he studied in the United States, he tried to establish his own way of expression which was quite different from that of Westerners. Hun Kim, "The Emphasis on the Significance of Our Existence," *Dong-a Daily*, January 26, 1958, p. 4. In this sense, their interest in traditional sensitivity would

California School of Fine Arts with Elmer Bischoff and was one of the "Young Americans" in the Whitney exhibition in 1960, interpreted a vision of nature reflecting Far Eastern esthetic. His *Nature Mandala* of 1966 (fig. 5-46) is executed in tender, misty colors that make pale spheres float and collide. The Buddhist term Mandala means enlightenment, a state of mind in which stone and gold can be equated.

Politics and Informel Painting

While international exhibitions stimulated Korean artists' interest in Asian tradition as the source of originality, the Korean Committee for Cultural Freedom tried to infuse them with political implications of Asian tradition. The Korean Committee for Cultural Freedom, known as the Ch'unch'u-hoe, was founded on April 11, 1961 in Seoul in the presence of 6 delegates from the Congress for Cultural Freedom such as Nicolas Nabokov, John Hunt, Prabhakar Padye, and Edward Seidensticker (fig. 5-47).¹³⁵ At the founding

probably have been stimulated by their sense of identity in a foreign land.

¹³⁵ "Intellectual Freedom," *Dong-a Daily*, April 11, 1961, p. 4. At the opening ceremony, the Manifesto of Congress for Cultural Freedom was announced: "We hold it to be self-evident that intellectual freedom is one of the inalienable rights of man. Such freedom is defined first and foremost by his right to hold and express his own opinions, and particularly opinions which differ from those of his

ceremony, the Indian delegate Padye read his essay "Progress in Freedom in Asia," in which he emphasized the importance of native culture in Asia.¹³⁶ In his address "Confucian View of Life and Liberal Culture," Professor Sang-Ūn Yi was also emphatic about common features between Confucian ideas and liberal culture.¹³⁷ From the beginning, Ch'unch'u-hoe put emphasis on the issue of tradition, which exactly reflected the direction of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in the 1960s.

According to Peter Coleman, the seventeen years (1950-67) of the Congress for Cultural Freedom can be divided into three periods--its formative period in the 1950s, its moves to new directions between 1958 and 1963-4, and its final stage of retreat before the exposé of CIA funding.¹³⁸ In its first period, its activities were mostly limited to Europe. In the late 1950s, however, there was a rising concern at the situation in many underdeveloped Asian and African countries,

rulers. Deprived of the right to say 'no,' man becomes a slave...." The manifesto was published in *Chosŏn Daily*, April 13, 1961, p. 4.

¹³⁶ Prabhakar Padye, "Progress in Freedom in Asia," *Korea Daily*, April 13, 1961, p. 4.

¹³⁷ Sang-Ūn Yi, "Confucian View of Life and Liberal Culture," in Yong-gu Kim, ed., *Developments Under Freedom* (Seoul: Sasaggye, 1962), pp. 1-9.

where the intellectuals increasingly saw the option of the Soviet model as their only hope: Indonesia, Burma, Pakistan, and Thailand abandoned democracy, and the prospects in Africa were disheartening. The anti-American riots in Tokyo led to the cancellation of President Eisenhower's visit to Japan in 1960. It was in this context that the Congress diverted its attention to Asia and Africa in its second period. In his essay, Christopher Lasch explained the shift: "The particular brand of anticommunism that flourished in the fifties grew out of the postwar power struggles in Europe and out of traumas of twentieth-century history—fascism, Stalinism, the crisis of liberal democracy—all of which had concerned Europe, not Asia.... The anticommunism of the sixties, on the other hand, focused on the Third World and demanded another kind of rhetoric."¹³⁹

Then, what kind of anti-Communist rhetoric was employed for the Third World? It is revealed in Sidney Hook's report written after his 1959 tour of Asia that left him depressed at the strength of the pro-Communist and anti-American outlook among Asian intellectuals:

¹³⁸ Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), p. 243.

¹³⁹ Christopher Lasch, "The Cultural Cold War: A Short History of the Congress for Cultural Freedom," p. 336.

While there is still time, we should find and multiply the occasions of bringing together the intellectuals of Asian (and African) countries with those of America and free Europe in common cultural projects. Second, we must explore with Asian intellectuals their own cultural past and encourage existing efforts in this direction. Such an exploration can be sympathetic and still critical. There are fundamental ethical values in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions that have relevance to problems of social change, once they are disentangled from certain other-worldly accretions.¹⁴⁰

In other words, sympathetic discussions of Asian traditions and religions, and their relevance to modernization were suggested as a way to address the issues of Soviet totalitarianism and liberal anti-Communism. While creative freedom in Europe encouraged individualism presupposing a diversity of expression, it was a collective individualism that freedom of expression promoted in Asia. Whether personal or collective, however, individualism was to be incorporated into universalism in the Cold War vocabulary aimed against Communism, "because individualism is indicative of a universal desire for freedom."¹⁴¹

The Ch'unch'u-hoe primarily propagated its message of freedom by publishing magazines and books, holding seminars, and sponsoring art exhibitions. It published the magazine

¹⁴⁰ Sidney Hook, "Grim Report: Asia in Transition," *The New York Times Magazine*, April 5, 1959, p. 108.

¹⁴¹ Yule F. Heibel, "New Unravellings of the Real? Autre Art's Threadbare Subject Meets the New Universalism," *Rutgers Art Review*, VII (1986), p. 101.

Ch'unch'u between 1964-66, and held a variety of seminars in which Korean intellectuals discussed such issues as problems of economic growth, the future of democracy, and the relationship between tradition and modernity. The essays read at the seminars were published in book form.¹⁴²

Its activity in the arena of art was particularly surprising. When the Korean government could not afford to pay attention to the art scene, the *Ch'unch'u-hoe* brought Korean artists together to discuss such topics as "Art in East and West," "Revolution and Freedom of Arts," "Contemporary Art and the Direction of Korean Art," "Reality of Korean Art," and "Development of Korean Art."¹⁴³ In these seminars, they usually emphasized the importance of national culture, tradition, and freedom of creation. Unprecedented in the history of Korean art, these seminars served as the focal point of the Korean art scene, regardless of the low level of discussion. Furthermore, it contributed to international exchanges of art by sending catalogues of its annual exhibitions abroad and having the exhibition "Young Korean

¹⁴² Yong-gu Kim, ed., *Developments Under Freedom* (Seoul: Sasanggye, 1962); Yong-gu Kim, ed., *Tradition and Modernity* (Seoul: *Ch'unch'u-sa*, 1965).

¹⁴³ See "Seminar on Art in East and West," *Seoul News*, March 9, 1961, p. 4; "Contemporary Art and the Direction of Korean Art," *Dong-a Daily*, May 4, 1963, p. 4; "Reality of Korean

Artists" at Galerie Lambert in Paris in October 1963.¹⁴⁴ In addition, it sponsored the annual exhibition "The Invitational Exhibition of Korean Committee for Cultural Freedom" from 1962 to 1966. The invited artists were mostly *Informel* artists such as Seo-bo Park, Tschang-yeul Kim, Yŏng-ju Kim, Myŏng-ro Yun, Ch'ang-sŏp Chŏng, Sang-hwa Chŏng, and others. Considering that the Ch'unch'u-hoe was founded in the maelstrom of the April Revolution, its preference for *Informel* can be interpreted as an attempt to incorporate social, political confusion into the artistic expression of transgression and violence.¹⁴⁵

In the political chaos, indeed, *Informel's* capacity to absorb social, political confusion seems to have been exploited for political ends. The April Revolution was soon followed by a coup d'état under the leadership of General Chung-hee Park on May 16, 1961. In order to clear social, political confusion, the military government took drastic

Art," *Ch'unch'u*, 2 (November 1964), pp. 103-4; "Development of Korean Art," *Ch'unch'u*, 16 (January 1966), pp. 13-5.

¹⁴⁴ As a part of the International Youth Biennial sponsored by the Congress for Cultural Freedom, the exhibition displayed 11 works by Ok-yŏn Kwŏn, Chong-hak Kim, Seo-bo Park, and Sang-hwa Chŏng. See Yŏng-ju Kim, "An Important Momentum for the Development of Korean Art," *Ch'unch'u*, 12 (September 1965), p. 7.

measures such as restriction of newspapers and a ban on political activities. However, *Informel* art continued to be promoted under this military dictatorship. When the Invitational Exhibition of Contemporary Artists, started in 1957 and sponsored by *Chosŏn Daily*, was held in April 1962, General Park even participated in the opening ceremony to cut the tape. In his report for *The New York Times*, A. M. Rosenthal observed: "There may have been some trepidation as to what General Park, whose personal style is brim and brusque, would think of the swirls and splotches of paint and the sculptures of junk-yard tin."¹⁴⁶ Then Rosenthal reported on General Park's attitude toward art:

Art was good and art was good for Korea, he said. Artists should be helped. All Government ministers were to be instructed forthwith to buy one painting and sculpture each from Korean artists. The artists and their friends were delighted, and they put a problem to the ruler. Paints and canvas, they told him, were fearfully expensive in Seoul because they came from abroad and were subject to heavy import taxes. The general said this was wrong and announced that the tariffs would be cut beginning the next morning.¹⁴⁷

The Park government's promotion of *Informel* art can also be detected in the National Art Exhibition. In the 14th

¹⁴⁵ The Ch'unch'u-hoe would probably have worried over the potential connection between social confusion in South Korea and the agitation of North Korea.

¹⁴⁶ A. M. Rosenthal, "Art and General," *The New York Times*, April 14, 1962, p. 8.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

National Art Exhibition of 1965, the grand prize went to an abstract work for the first time in its history: Chong-bae Park's *Field of History* (fig. 5-48).¹⁴⁸ For the Park government, *Informel's* symbolic gesture of freedom would probably have been seen as a safety valve that could absorb the desire for freedom and democracy. While both American Abstract Expressionism and Korean *Informel* promoted ideological values of freedom and individuality against Communist totalitarianism, they eventually served two different political purposes: the former for democracy, the latter for dictatorship.

¹⁴⁸ See Emerson Chapin, "Korean Art Show Attracts Crowds," *The New York Times*, November 28, 1965, p. 142.

Conclusion

In his recent writing *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha claimed that the postcolonial perspective "attempts to revise those nationalist or 'nativist' pedagogies that set up the relation of Third World and First World in a binary structure of opposition.... It forces a recognition of the more complex cultural and political boundaries that exist on the cusp of these often opposed political spheres."¹ Indeed, postcolonial interrogations of Western canons have stimulated studies which are directed at formulating a grand theory valid for each and every discursive system of discrimination and oppression by extending 'colonization' as an explanatory notion applicable to all situations of structural domination. In this context, the postcolonial perspective could be a useful tool for examining the modernization of postwar Korean society.

In her recent dissertation "Presentation, Modernism, and Post-Colonialism: Korean Informel and the Reception of the West," indeed, Whuiyeon Jin attempted to view modern Korean culture from the postcolonial perspective. Drawing on Bhabha's concept of mimicry, in particular, she saw the

¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 173.

Korean *Informel* movement as an active practice of mimicry. For her, the fusion of traditional Korean elements of painterly expression and foreign sources in *Informel* art was a practice of mimicry. Concluding her study, thus, Jin wrote: "Bhabha's concept of mimicry is relevant in the examination of postwar Korean culture. Because the colonized alienates the object of mimicry from its nationality or identity, at the same time it actively promotes the reception of the "other." In this process, the object of mimicry is transformed symbolically. Korean artists involved in this practice, while their ambivalent identity kept them in a critical place in Korean society. This is a peculiarly direct creation of a 'double othering,' one which allowed artists to oscillate between playing Korean against U.S. discourses and vice versa, so as to remain relatively independent of both. It is almost a paradigm of transcultural space."²

However, Jin's study is ultimately flawed because it was not the "other" but Asian tradition that Korean *Informel* artists saw in Euro-American Abstract Expressionism. According to Bhabha, "the discourse of mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other,

² Whuiyeon Jin, "Presentation, Modernism, and Post-Colonialism: Korean Informel and the Reception of the West," p. 169.

as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*.... Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers."³ In disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse, mimicry radically revalues the normative knowledges of the priority of race, writing, and history.⁴

In order for Korean *Informel* art to be a practice of mimicry, thus, it should contain the sign of the inappropriate, "a difference or recalcitrance which ... poses an immanent threat" to Euro-American Abstract Expressionism. As my study has revealed, however, Asian art and culture had already been part of Euro-American Abstract Expressionism. To quote Pierre Restany's words: "The West has just re-

³ Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October*, 28 (Spring 1984), p. 126.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 131-2.

discovered the art of writing, after having exhausted the contents of all of its logical vocabularies in its avid desire for total understanding. The West is not sure of itself, and seeks elsewhere for its balance and hope. Where?--in the Orient, in its exact contrary, its essential antimony, the seed of its very annihilation."⁵

Furthermore, if Euro-American Abstract Expressionism constituted "normalized" knowledges and disciplinary powers, how can we explain the cultural conflict between the United States and France? And how can we explain the emergence of Asian art and culture as a source of artistic independence, originality, and universality in the process? What Korean *Informel* artists saw in Euro-American Abstract Expressionism was a possibility of cultural convergences in which Asian artistic practices have been enjoined with Western artistic traditions. The cultural convergences can be partly explained by the common situation of postwar years. As we have seen, Korean *Informel* art had a great deal to do with the social, psychological, and philosophical atmosphere of postwar years. For Korean artists, *Informel* art was an appropriate pictorial language to express their feelings of rebellion, anger, and freedom just as Euro-American Abstract Expressionism was for

⁵ Pierre Restany, "Japan made in Paris," p. 30.

Western artists. As the artist and critic Yŏng-ju Kim claimed, thus, Korean artists thought: "There is no distinction between East and West in *Informel* esthetic. It does not have a fixed form or conceptual type. It is realized by the condition of man rather than individuality, by a philosophical understanding of the contemporary world beyond a region, race, or tradition. *Informel* is the first pictorial language common to the world."⁶ Rather than posing a threat to Euro-American Abstract Expressionism, Korean *Informel* art suggested a way of coexistence.

In this sense, what Mikhail Bakhtin has termed the 'dialogical' nature of art seems to be a more sophisticated conceptual framework with which to analyze Korea *Informel* art. According to this model, an artwork is not a unified whole, but rather an open-ended site of contestation wherein various cultural practices are temporarily combined. Any visual language in the arts is thus understood as a locus for competing cultural traditions along with conflicting ideological values. Based on this model, in his article "Abstract Expressionism and Third World Art: A Post-Colonial Approach to 'American' Art," David Craven saw Abstract

⁶ Yŏng-ju Kim, "Informel and Our Art," *Chosŏn Daily*, December 13, 1958, p. 4.

Expressionist art as "an uneasy synthesis—more or less stable but not conclusively resolved—of hegemonic values with subordinate ideological tendencies, out of which broader signification is constructed."⁷ Unlike Bhabha's concept of mimicry, this model can be helpful in considering the indigenous forces and internal logic that have shaped the modern Korean experience. After all, the validity of postcolonialism vis-à-vis Korean *Informel* art lies in its critique of modernist hierarchies and acknowledgment of pluralistic worldviews where multiple local histories can coexist.

During the tumultuous postwar period, Korean *Informel* artists sought to establish an autonomous artistic identity and cultural sensitivity that would draw from both Korean and foreign sources. They struggled to preserve, transform, and universalize their cultural legacy, and deeply resisted the blind assimilation of Western culture. In other words, Korean *Informel* art was an integral force within the social, political, and intellectual histories of the postwar period. I hope that this study will stimulate other scholars to seek out more documented information to further explicate the

⁷ David Craven, "Abstract Expressionism and Third World Art: A Post-Colonial Approach to 'American' Art," *The Oxford Art Journal*, 14, 1 (1991), p. 45.

myriad aspects of the art movement. In particular, the relation between *Informel* art and Korean politics, which I briefly mentioned in Chapter V, would be worth examining. The field of sculpture would be also an enticing subject for research.

Illustrations



1-1 Kwae-dae Yi, *Group*, 1948



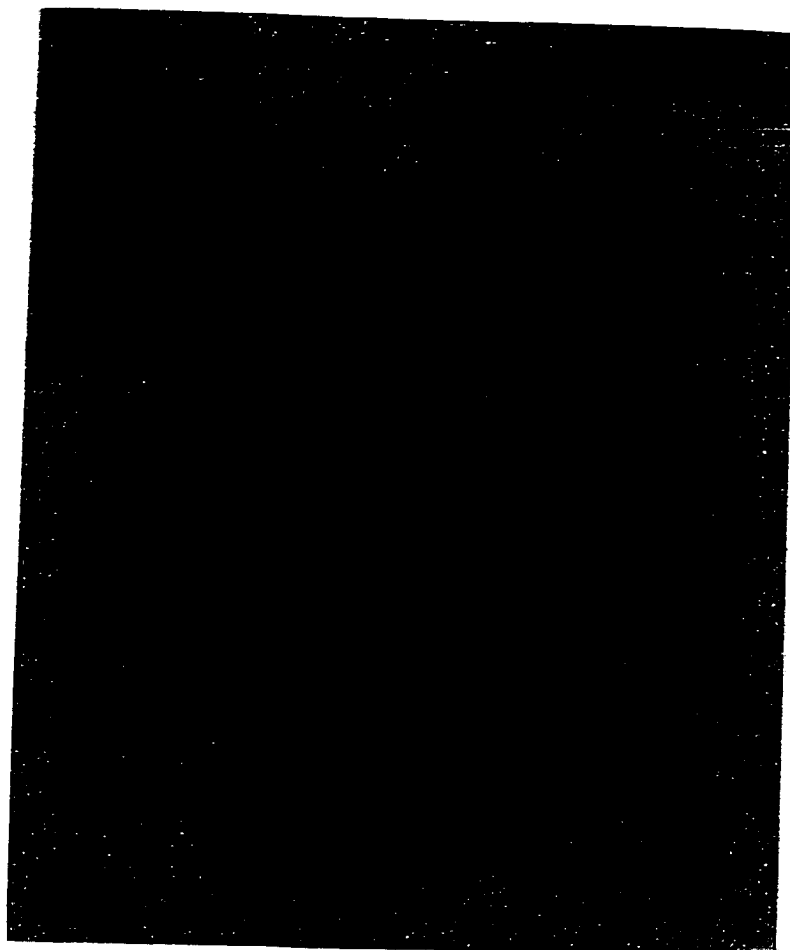
2-1 David Douglas Duncan,
Marine with Can of Frozen Beans, 1950



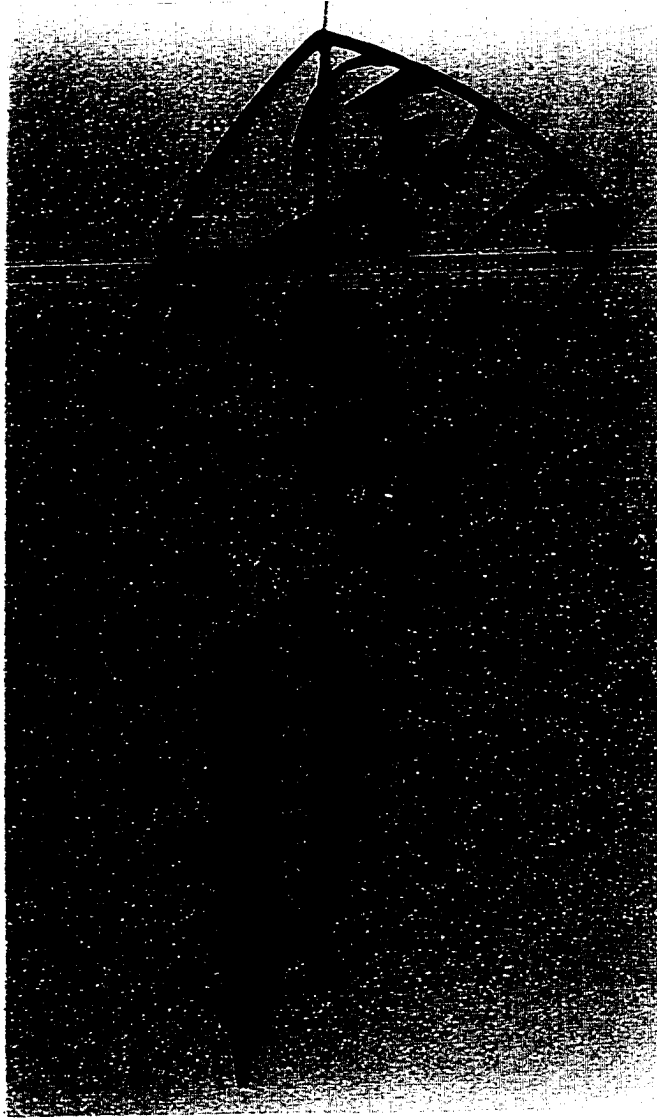
2-2 Pablo Picasso, *Massacre in Korea*, 1951



2-3 Picasso, *War*, 1952



2-4 U.N. Offensive, Fall 1950



2-5 David Smith, *Parallel 42*, 1953



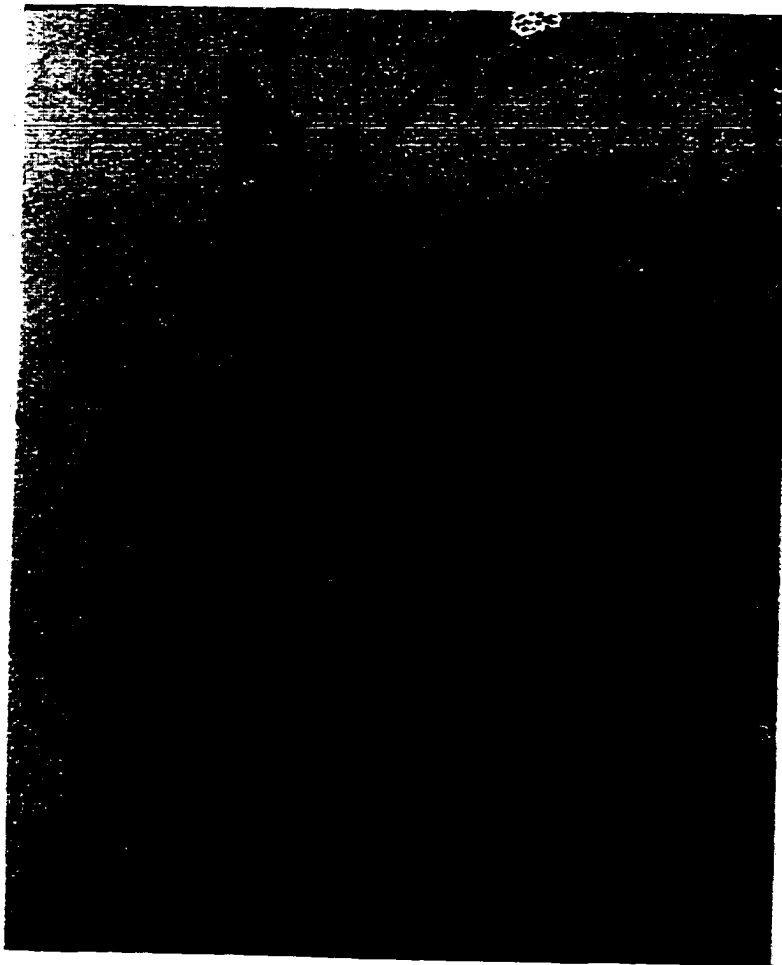
2-6 U.S. Bombing on the Yalu Installations in July 1952



3-1 Hyo-jung Yun, *Unknown Political Prisoner*, c. 1953



3-2 The "Contemporary Korean Paintings" Exhibition,
World House Galleries, February 1958



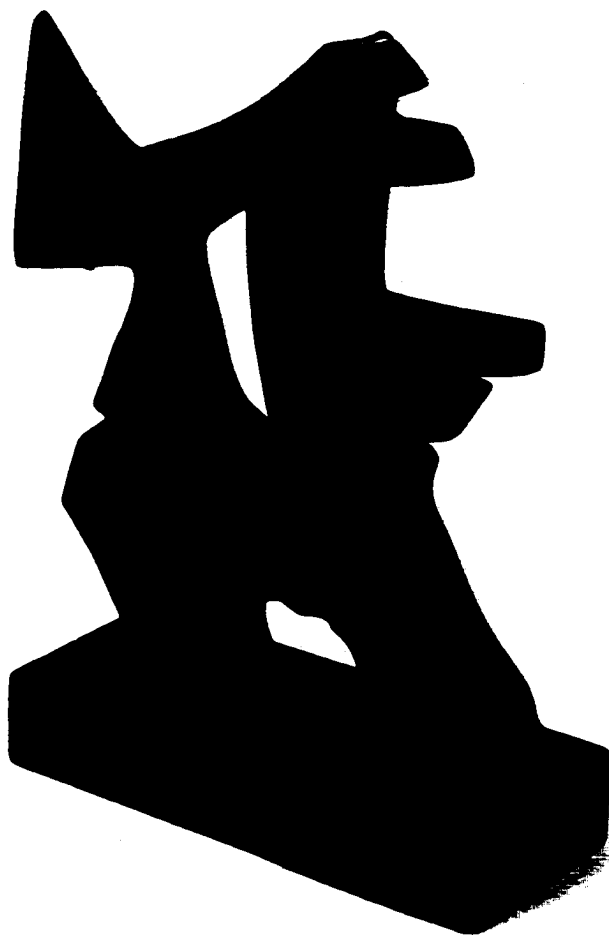
3-3 Pyŏng-gi Kim, *Avenue of Trees*, 1956



3-4 Hang-sung Lee, *Silhouette*, 1958



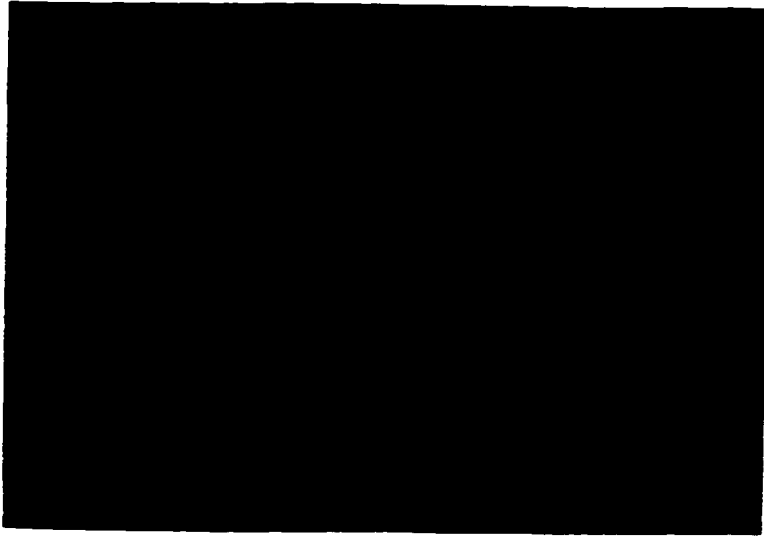
4-1 Jen Baudman, *Musical Instruments*, ca 1955



4-2 W.S. Rauder,
A Husband Driving His Wife Out of the House, ca. 1958



4-3 John Rood, *Growth*, ca. 1958



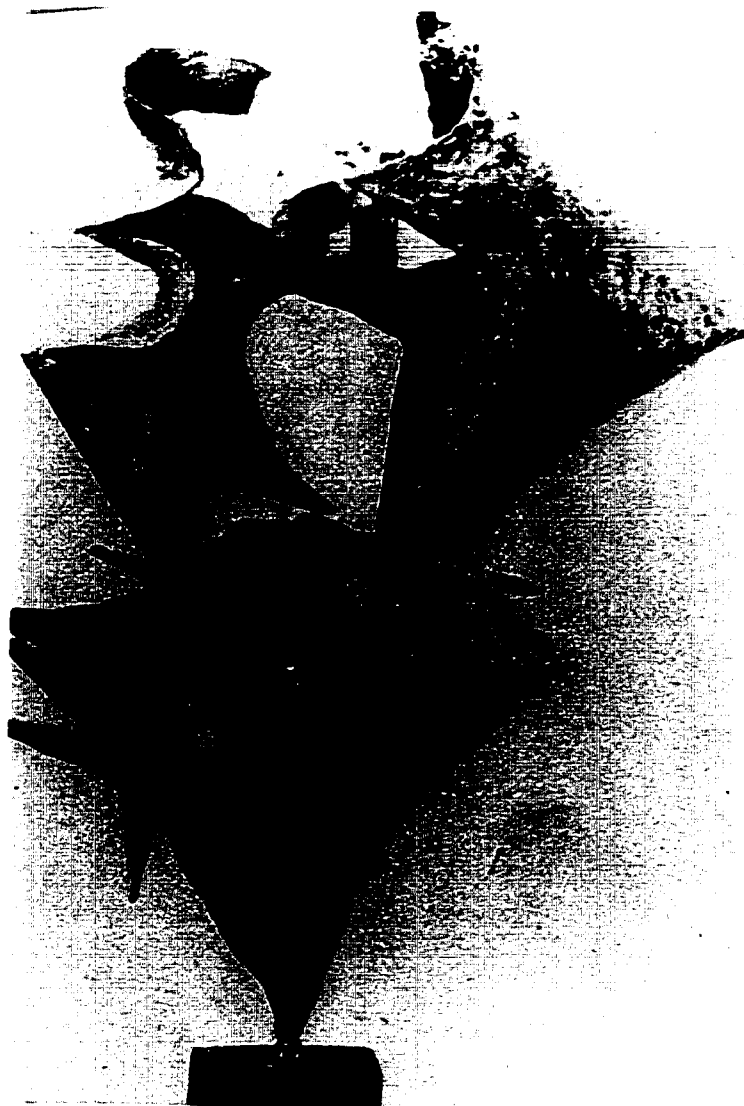
4-4 Walter Gwalt, *A Boy Dancing in a Circle*, ca. 1958



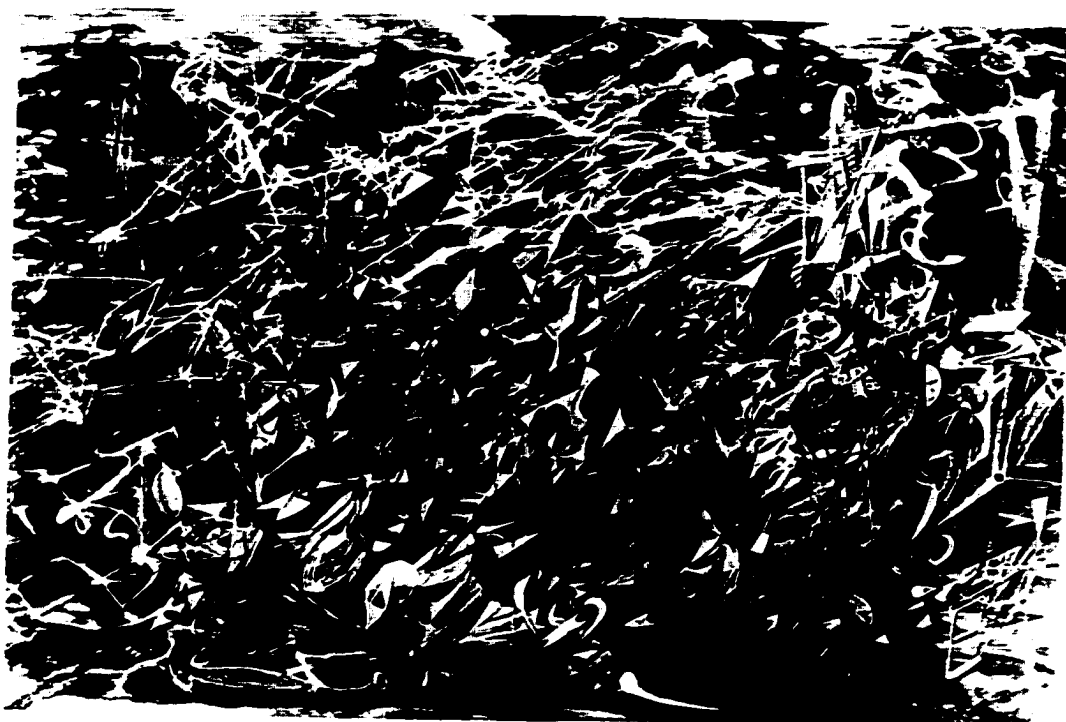
4-5 Camaron Pood, *Plants*, ca. 1958



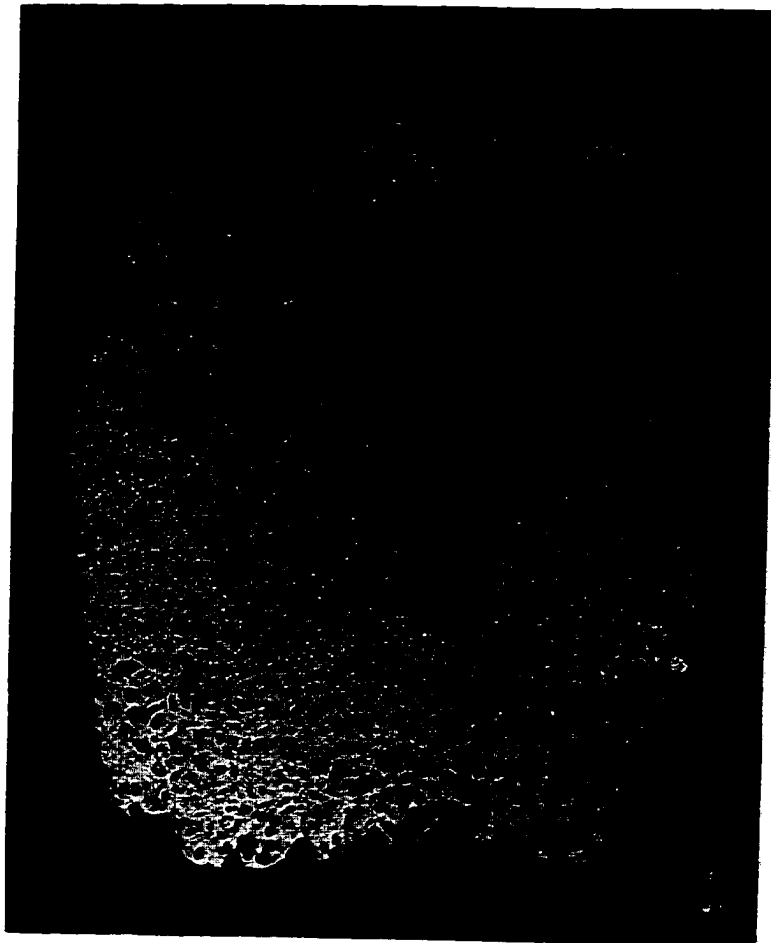
4-6 Sang-bŏm Chŏn, *Growth*, 1957



4-7 Seymour Lipton, *Germinal*, 1953



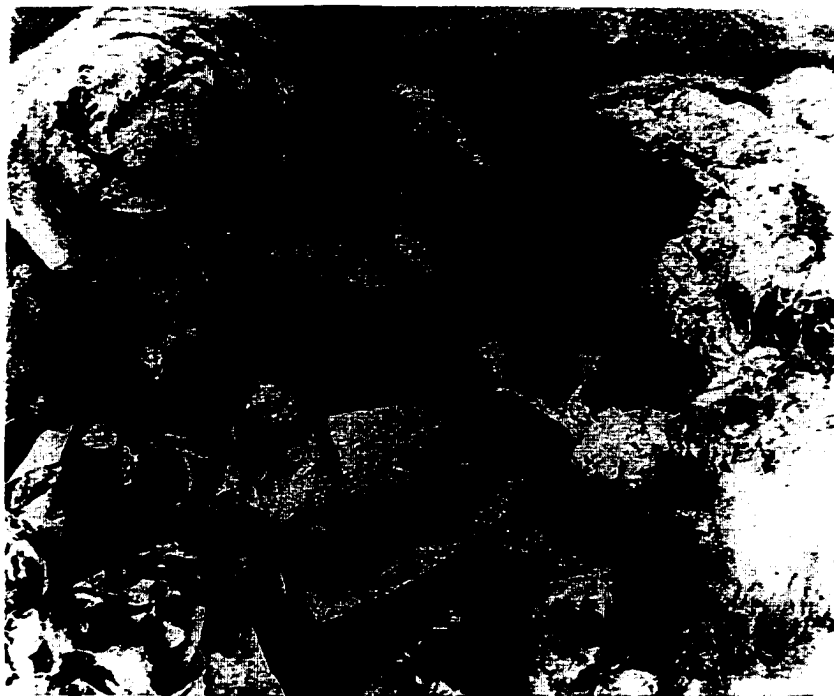
4-8 Mark Tobey, *Forms Follow Man*, 1943



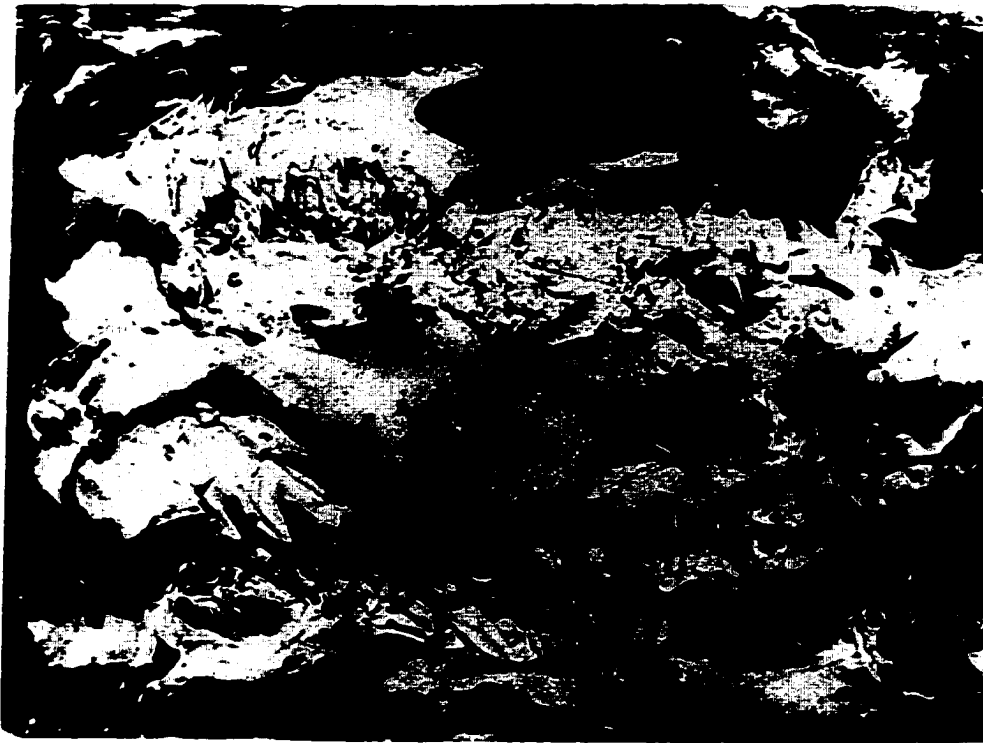
4-9 Mark Tobey, *Written Stone*, 1944



4-10 Tobey, *Canal of Cultures*, 1951



4-11 Kenneth Callahan, *Cove Between Two Worlds*, 1952



4-12 Kenneth Callahan, *Riders on the Mountain*, 1956



5-1 Tschang-yeul Kim, *Morning*, 1957



5-2 U-sik Mun, *The Way to the Church*, 1957



5-3 Seo-bo Park at the second Hyundai exhibition, 1957



5-4 Tschang-yeul Kim, *Flower*, 1957



5-5 Seo-bo Park, *The Way*, 1957



5-6 *Sŏng-sun Chang, Moon, 1957*



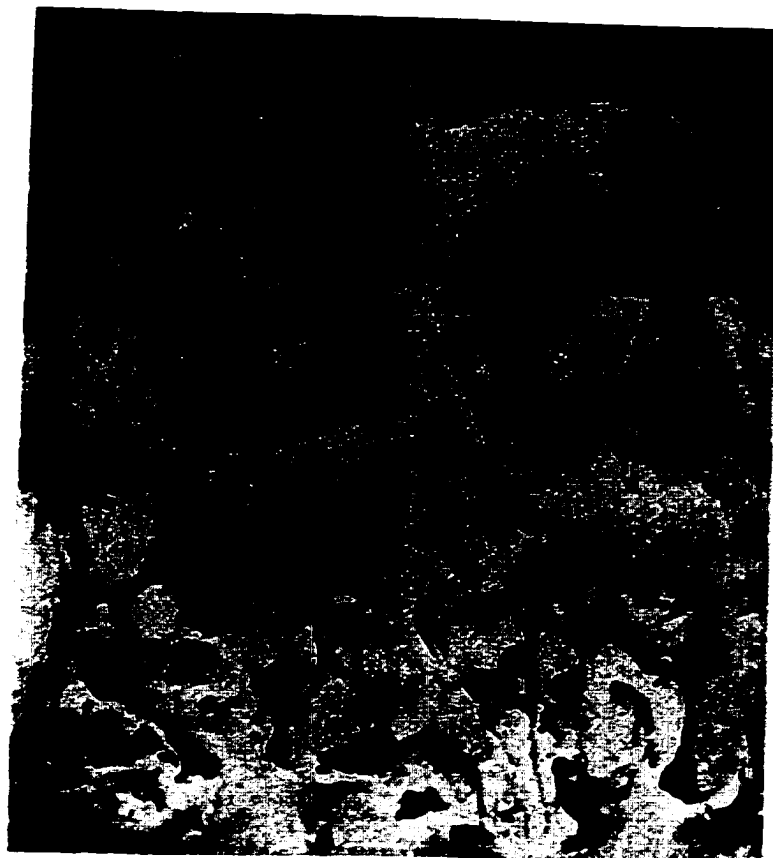
5-7 Yang-ro Yi, *Figures*, 1958



5-8 Sŏng-sun Chang, *Work*, 1958



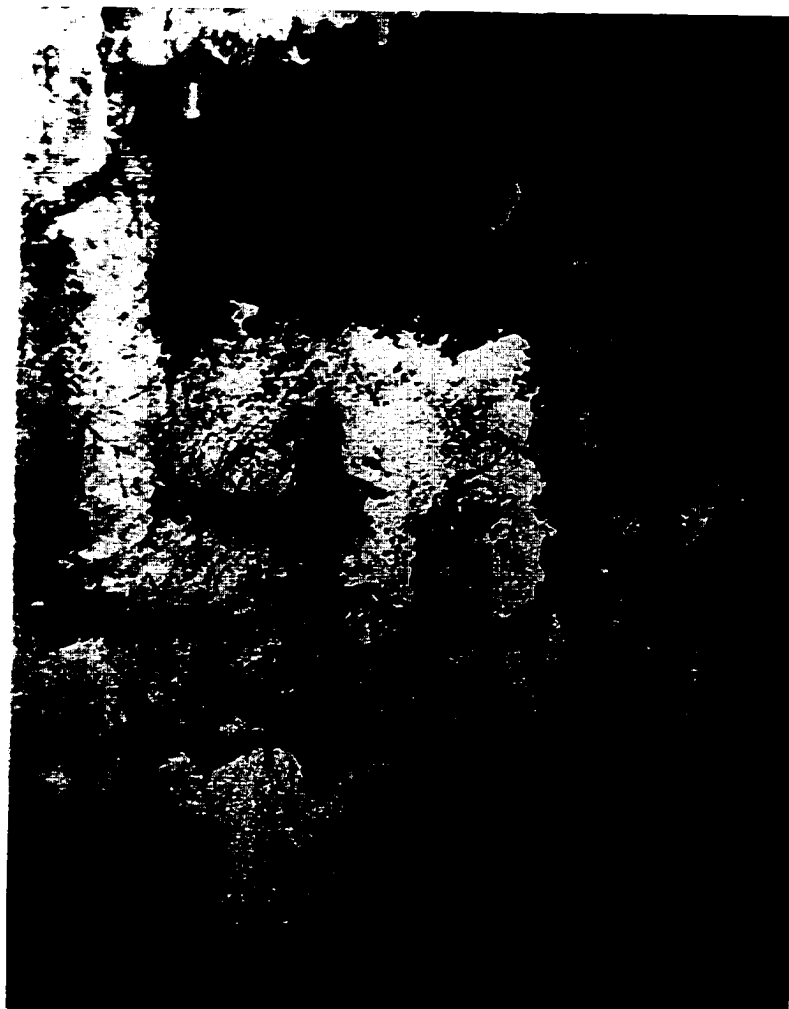
5-9 Ch'ŏng-kwan Kim, *Work*, 1958



5-10 Pyŏng-jae Na, *Strange Landscape*, 1958



5-11 Seo-bo Park, *Painting, No. 1*, 1958



5-12 Seo-bo Park, *Painting, No. 2*, 1958



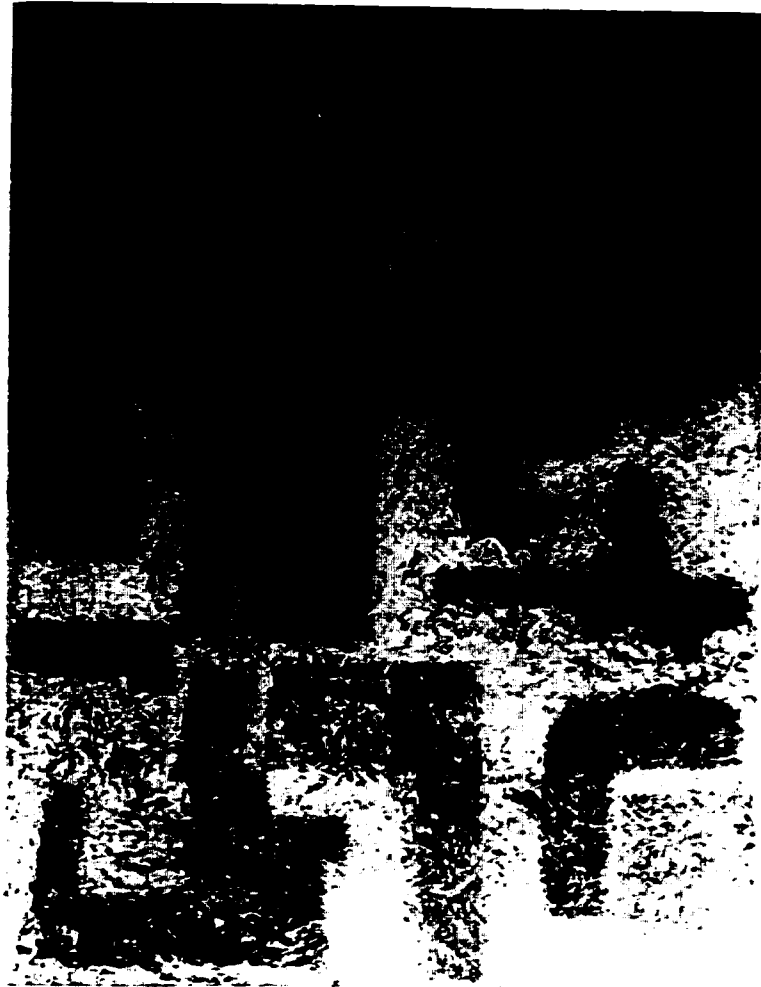
5-13 Seo-bo Park, *Painting, No. 3, 1958*



5-14 Seo-bo Park, *Painting, No. 4, 1958*



5-15 Seo-bo Park in front of an unfinished work, January 1958



5-16 Sŏ-bong Kim, *Work*, 1958



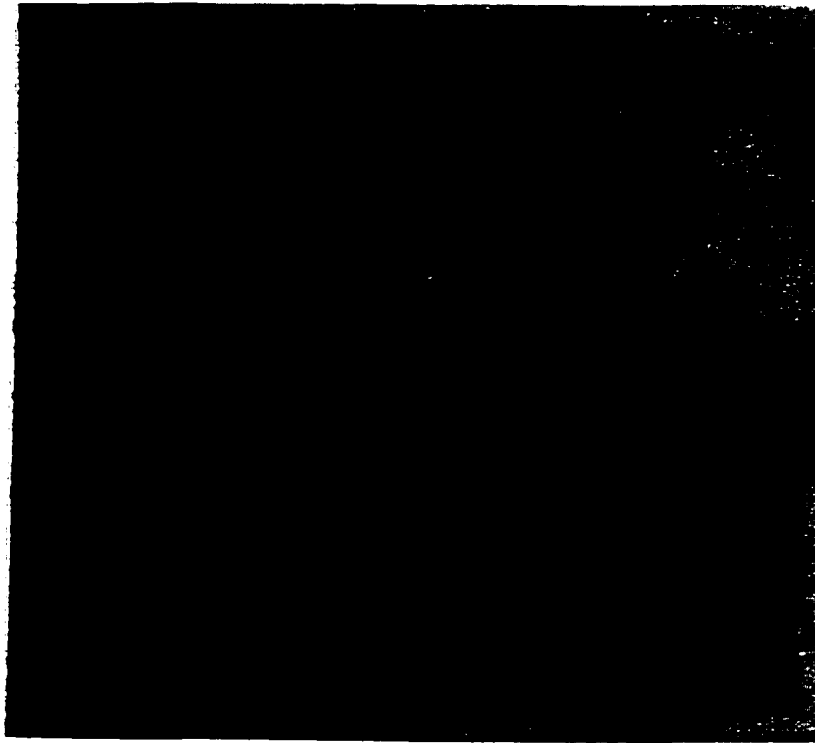
5-17 Sang-su Chŏn, No. 1, 1958



5-18 Sang-su Chŏn, title unknown, 1958



5-19 Seo-bo Park, No. 7, 1958



5-20 Sŏ-bong Kim, *Work*, 1959



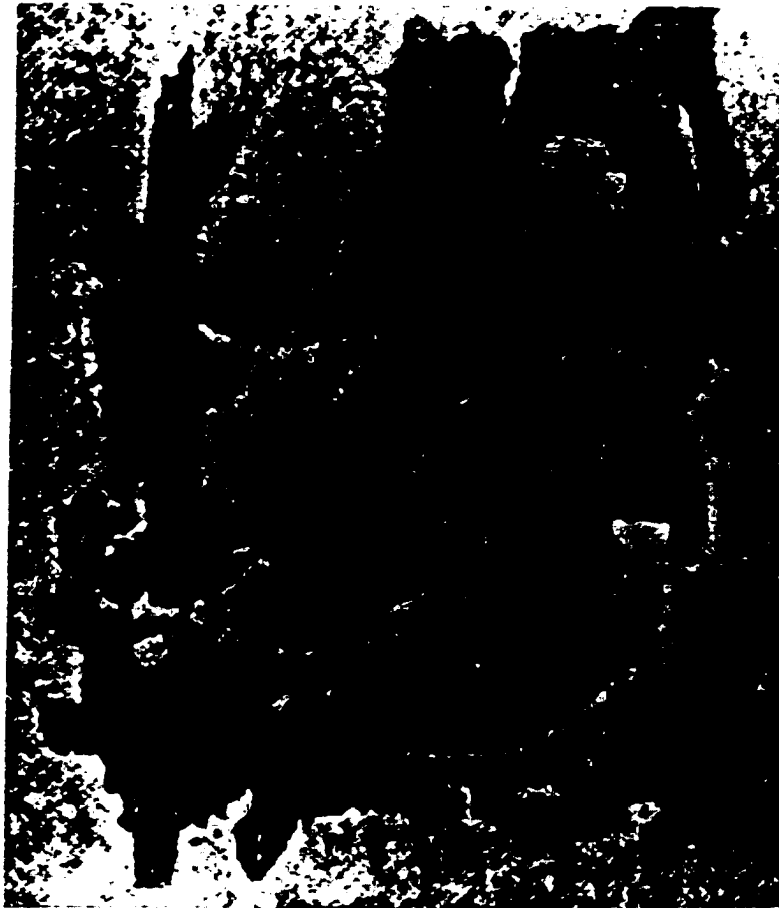
5-21 Tschang-yeul Kim, *Work II*, 1959



5-22 Tschang-yeul Kim, *Work 20*, 1960



5-23 Seo-bo Park, *Work 6*, 1960



5-24 Sŏng-sun Chang, *Work 77*, 1960



5-25 Tschang-yeul Kim, title unknown, 1960



5-26 Seo-bo Park, *Painting No. 1-60*, 1960



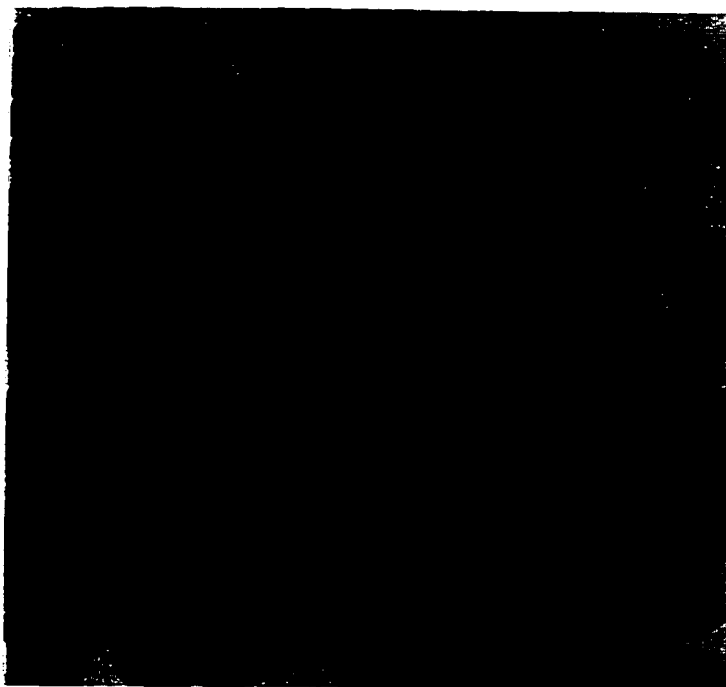
5-27 In-du Ha, *Fetal Movement*, 1960



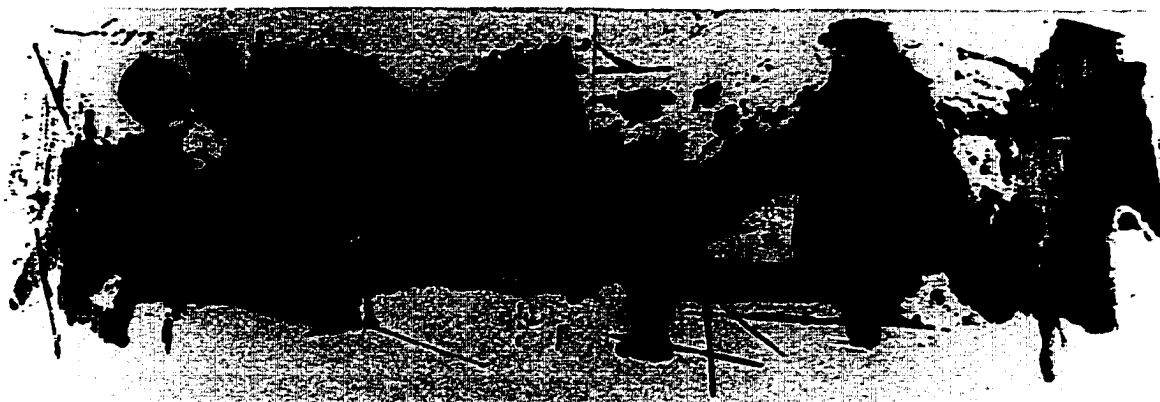
5-28 Wall Group Exhibition, 1960



5-29 Artists Association of 1960, 1960



5-30 Yŏng-ju Kim, *It Was Tuesday*, 1965

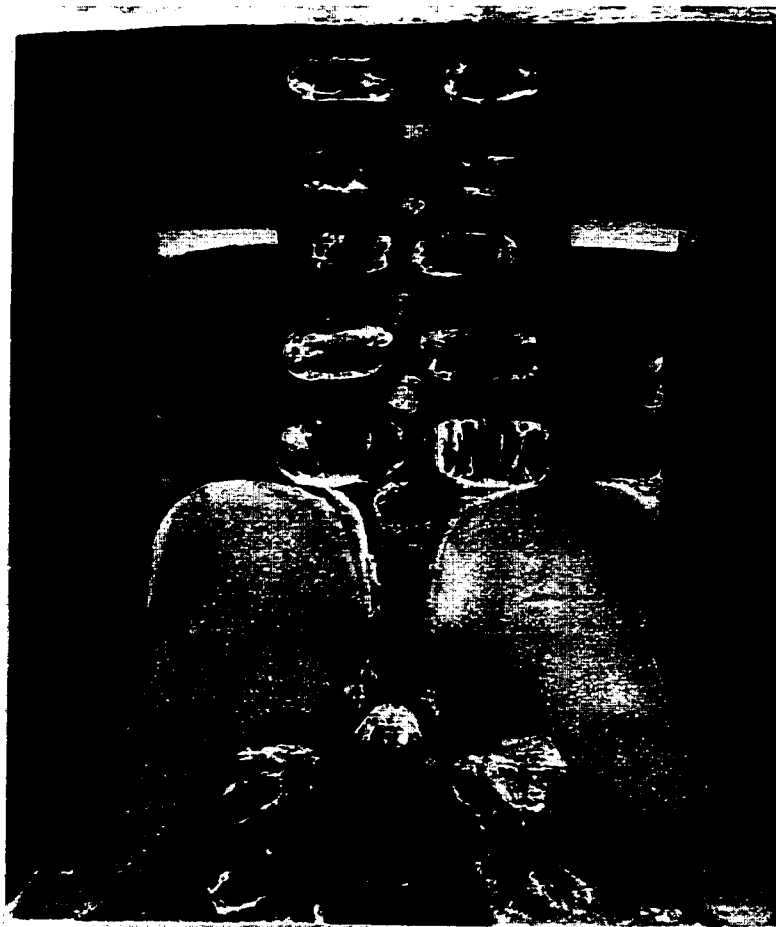


5-31 Pyŏng-gi Kim, *Heroic Blood*, 1960

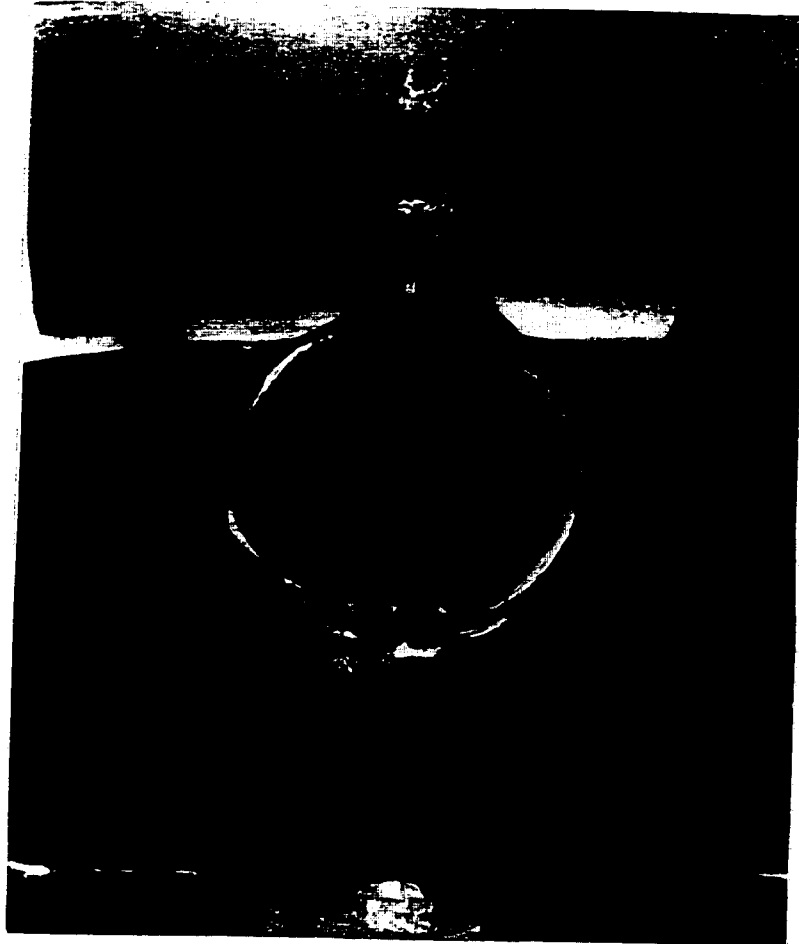


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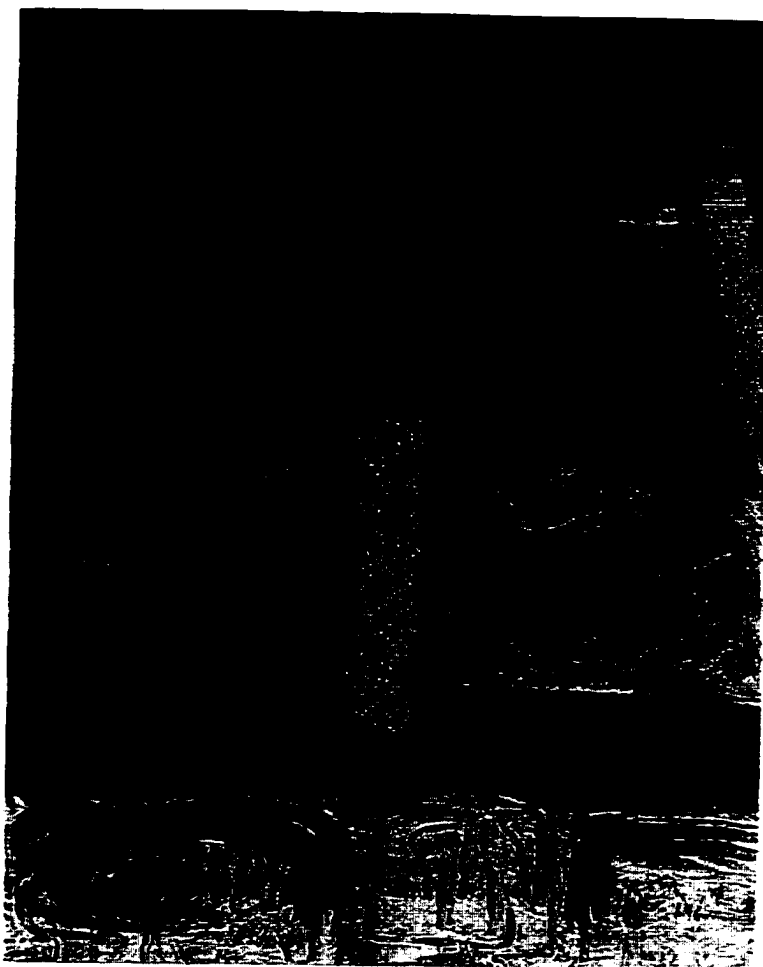
5-32 Yŏng-guk Yu, *April*, 1960



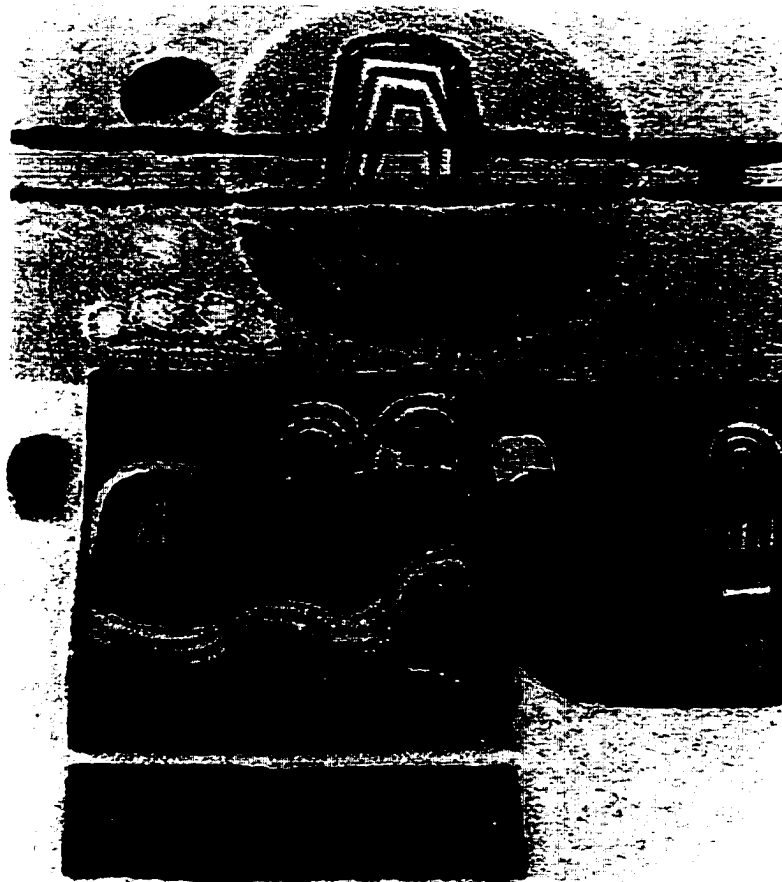
5-33 Seo-bo Park, *Primordials No. 1-62*, 1962



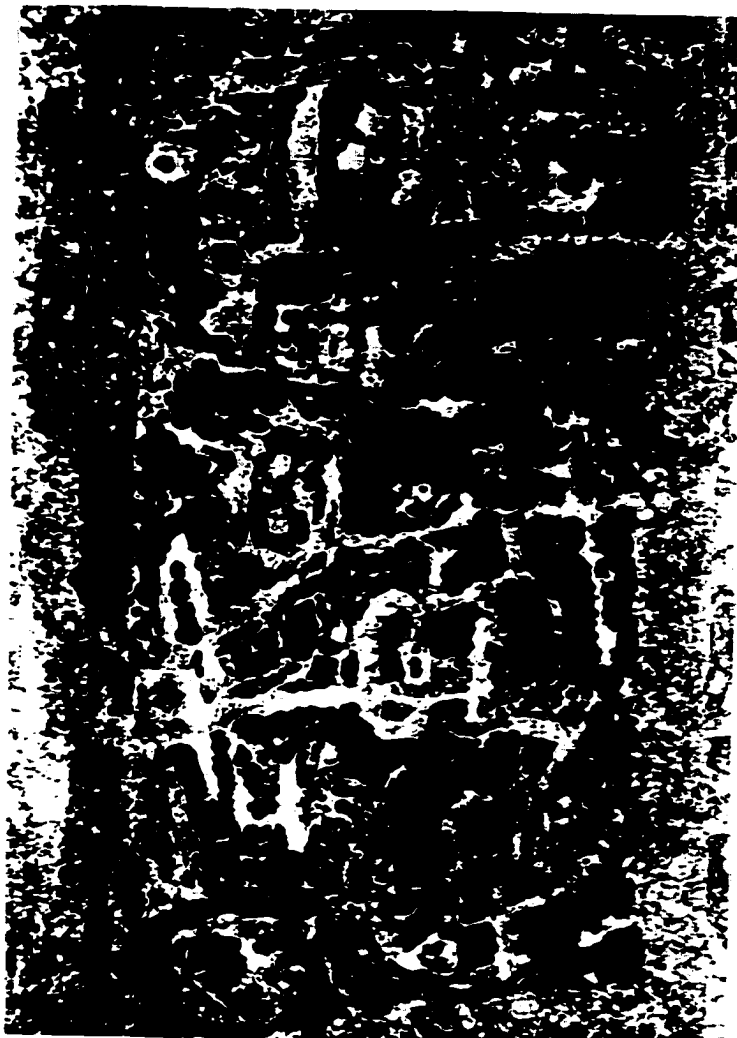
5-34 Seo-bo Park, *Primoridals* No. 3-62, 1962



5-35 Myŏng-ro Yun, *Painting M-10*, 1963



5-36 Hwan-gi Kim, *Summer Moonlit Night*, 1961



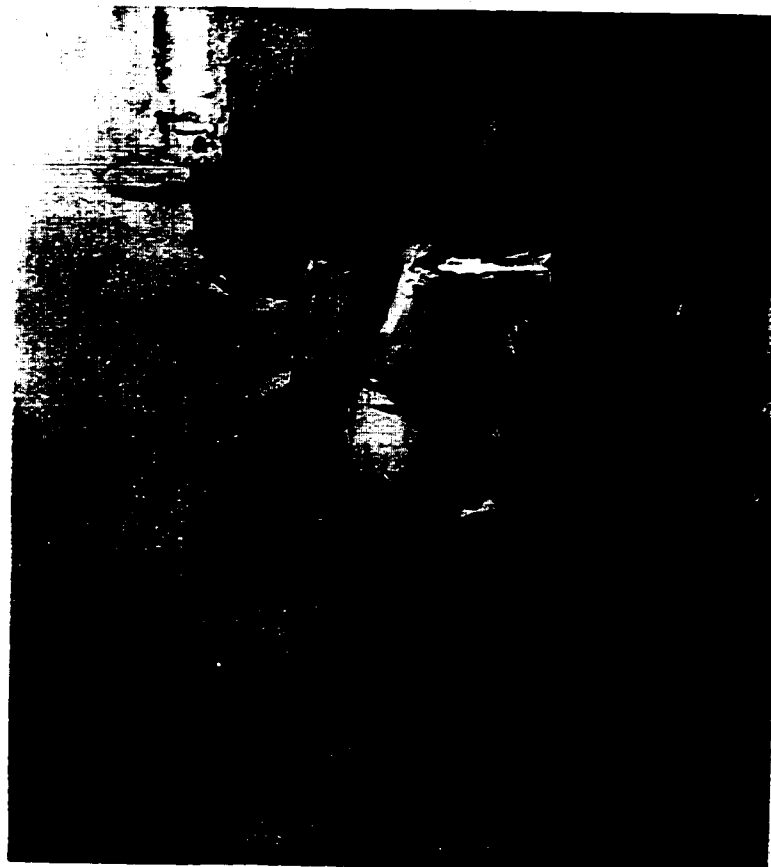
5-37 Ung-no Yi, *Composition A*, 1964



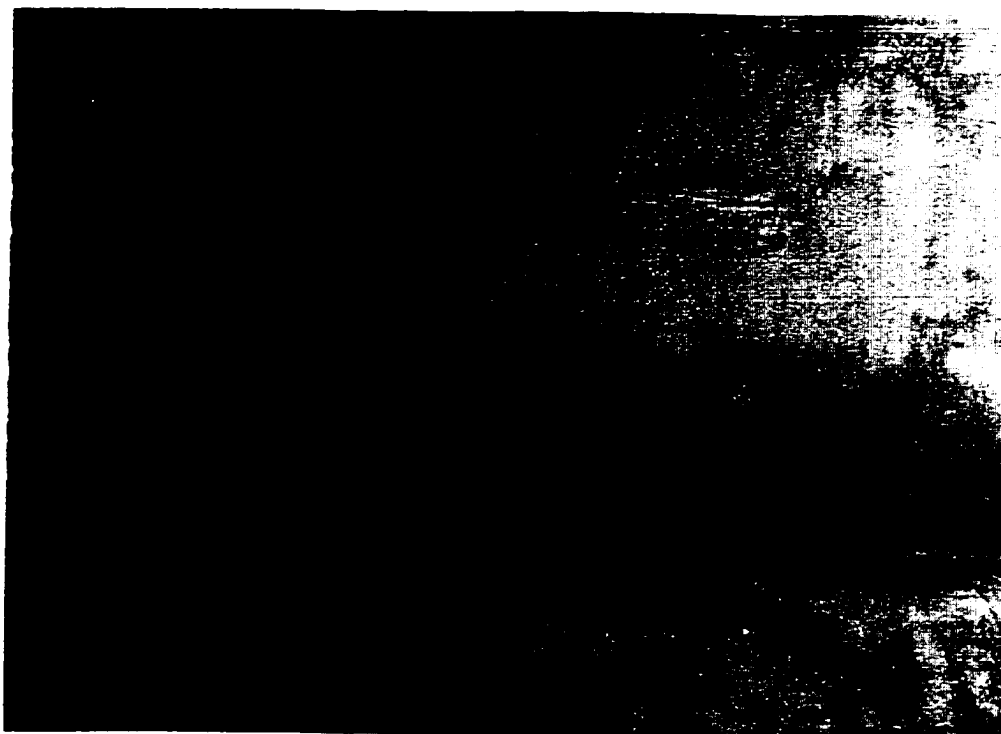
5-38 Kwan Nam,
Crumbled Historical Remains Exposed to the Sun, 1965



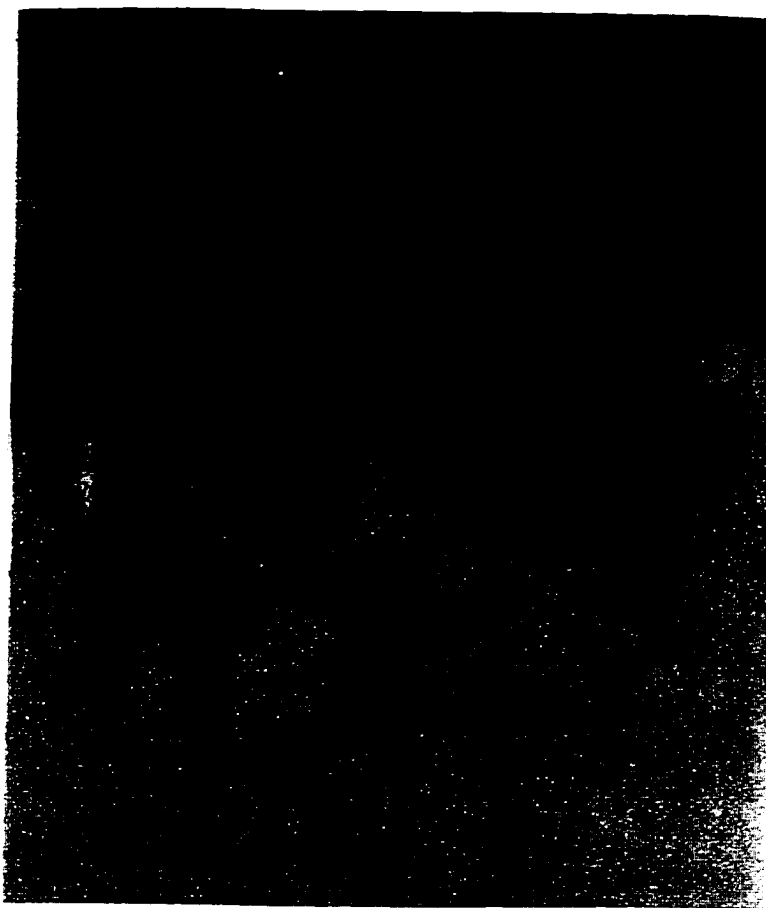
5-39 Pong-tae Kim, *Work*, 1963



5-40 Chong-hak Kim, *Work*, 1964



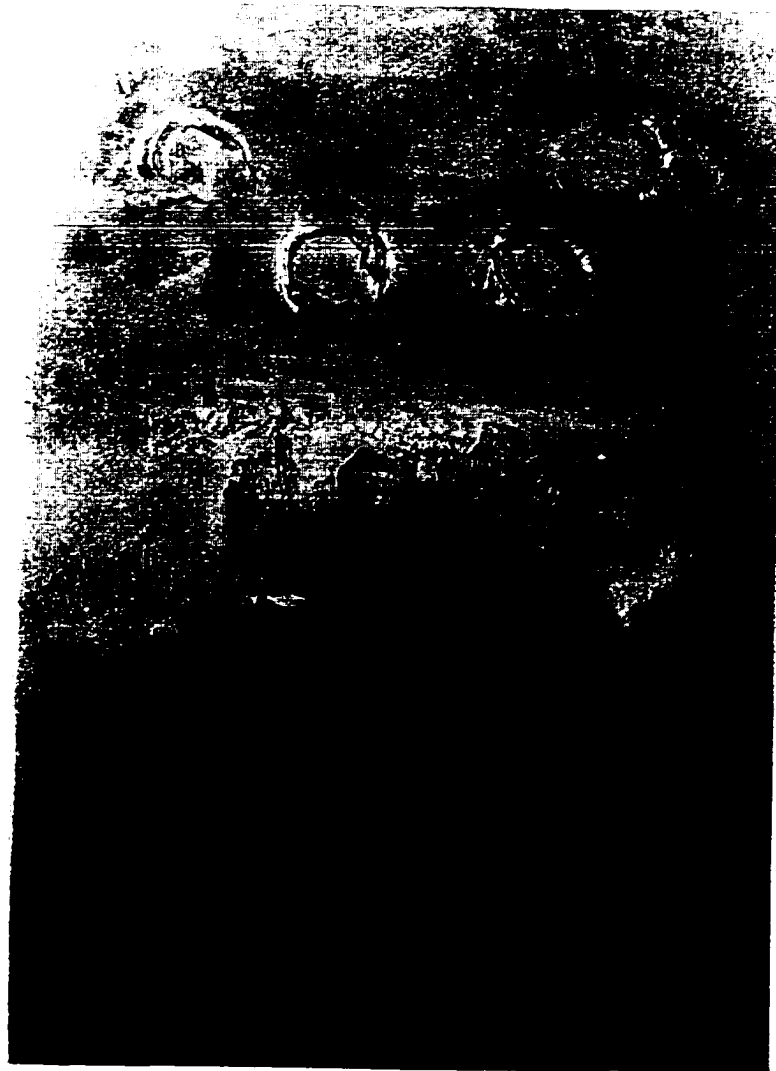
5-41 Song-sun Chang, *Zero Zone*, 1961



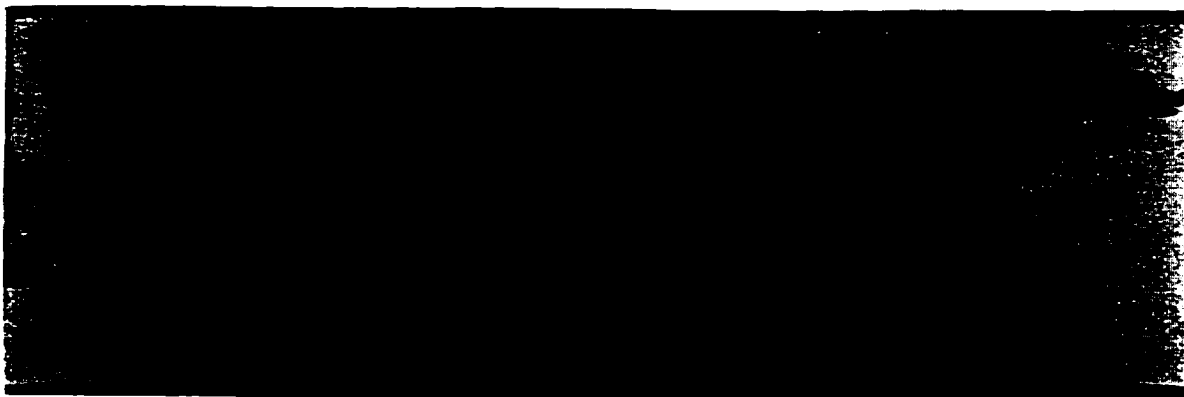
5-42 Ch'ang-sŏp Chŏng, *Pilgrimage*, 1963



5-43 Yong-ik Cho, *Work*, 1964



5-44 Yǒng-yǒl Chǒng, *Work*, 1964



5-45 Su-jae Yi, *Work*, 1961



5-46 Sŏng-u Chŏn, *Nature Mandala*, 1966



5-47 Visitors from the Congress for Cultural Freedom,
Seoul, April 10, 1961



5-48 Chong-bae Park, *Field of History*, 1965

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