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MODERNIZATION AND NATIONALISM: THE RISE OF SOCIAL REALISM IN SOUTH KOREA (1980-1988)

BY

JIN HAN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

MODERNIZATION AND NATIONALISM: THE RISE OF SOCIAL REALISM IN SOUTH KOREA (1980-1988)

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Adviser: Professor Harriet F. Senie

This dissertation is the first monograph on social realist art in South Korea. Defying mainstream Modernism such as Impressionism combined with Academic conventions during the Japanese occupation (1910-1945) and abstraction in post-Korean War (1950-1953) South Korea, socially critical art, commonly called *minjok* (national) or *minjung* (ordinary people) art, emerged in 1980. Modernist art idealized a permanent, essential and metaphysical idea of nation and its harmonious relationship with the trajectory of modernization, or Westernization, of Korean society. On the other hand, social realist artists represented the contradiction between the state-sponsored idealistic nationalism and the *minjung*'s uprooted life in the pursuit of Western values and materialism. They sought to re/locate historical positions of their personal identities with regard to *minjung*-oriented nationalism, and anticipated, reflected, and participated in the nationwide democratization movement centered on the creation of historical subjectivity during the 1980s. Specifically this

study examines the work of first two social realist groups, Reality and Utterance (Hyŏnsilgwa balŏn, 1980-1988) and Imsullyŏn (1982-1987), and a prominent social realist artist Shin Hak-chul (b.1943).

From a methodological point of view, this study uses Fredric Jameson's concept of "national allegories" implicit in third-world cultural productions as the equivalent to his own definition of "postmodernism"--the fragmented and isolated cultural expression of the current stage of capitalism in the US-led first world. Third-world "national allegories" reveal a blind spot of first-world postmodernism, a totalizing vision of the global system. In this way, South Korean social realism embodied an expression of resistance against the standardizing ideology of multinational capitalism. After the Kwangju Biennale was founded in 1995, social realism again offered, within and outside the Biennale, an alternative to an attempt to substitute the supposedly centerless multiculturalism and globalization for the old notion of modernization. In an increasingly ambiguous boundary between the global system and South Korea as its subsystem, the future of South Korean social realism, particularly in relation to the nation's most urgent agenda—the reunification of South and North Korea—remains to be seen.

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I would like to thank Professor Harriet F. Senie, my adviser, for her calm supports and invaluable advice throughout the process and for her careful readings and insightful suggestions. I was fortunate to have Professor Namhee Lee from UCLA as my second reader. I could not have started this project without her encouragement, and her dissertation and published articles offered me an excellent historical guideline. Professors Mona Hadler and George A. Corbin, other members of my dissertation committee, also gave me encouragement and insightful comments. I could broaden my art historical perspective by attending seminars and colloquia offered by Art History Program at the Graduate Center. My special thanks go to Professors Carol Armstrong, Jack Flam, Romy Golan, and Rose-Carol Washton Long.

I would like to express my appreciation to all artists and critics who contributed to South Korean social realism. Professor Shin Kyung-ho at Chonnam National University kindled my interest in *minjung* art nearly two decades ago and encouraged me throughout the current project. I also thank Professor Kim Jeong-heon and painters Lee Jong-gu and Hwang Jae-hyung for their interviews and for showing me their exhibition catalogs and brochures. The archivists at Archives of Korean Art at Samsung Museum of Modern Art helped me find the most valuable materials with regard to my dissertation. Letha Wilson at Artists Space generously provided me with slides and documentation. Librarians at the East Asian Library at Columbia

University, the Oriental Division at the New York Public Library, and the Museum of Modern Art Library kindly helped me view important secondary sources.

My deepest thanks go to Hyunjoo for her love, support and sacrifice, and to Yeseo and Yejee for an abundance of joy they have given me.

I dedicate this dissertation to my late parents, who always encouraged me to continue my study.

Notes on Romanization and Translation

I have romanized all Korean words in accordance with the McCune-Reischauer system; exceptions are those Korean writers and artists who have published in English using a different spelling and well-known historical names and places such as Nam June Paik and Seoul (Paek Nam-jun and Sŏul in McCune-Reischauer system). In the case of Korean critics and artists with different spelling in their publications, I also have provided the McCune-Reischauer romanization in parentheses at the first appearance of the name. I have written Korean names in accordance with the standard usage in Korea, with surnames preceding given names.

I have translated titles of Korean works into English at their first appearance in the footnotes, with the translated English titles in parentheses.

Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Korean to English are mine.

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Introduction

Representations of the In/Compatibility of Modernism and Nationalism

In the early twentieth century, modern art was transplanted in Korea and represented a utopian vision of the Westernization, or modernization in a more euphemistic term, of Korean society.[1] Under the thirty-five years of Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945), Impressionist style combined with illusionist Academic conventions often portrayed a harmonious coupling of nationalism (*minjokchuŭi*) and modernization (*kŭndaehwa*). In the south of the divided country after the Korean War (1950-1953), where anti-Communist governments prohibited by law the practice of leftist ideology, modernization and nationalism continued to be two dominant forms of "ideology," a collective pattern of imagination and belief most often imposed on various representations.[2] The trajectory of modernization dominated by multinational capitalism and domestic political authoritarianism entailed radical cultural

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[1] Kim Young-na, "Modern Korean Painting and Sculpture," in Modernity in Asian Art, ed. John Clark (Sydney: Wild Peony, 1993), 155. Korean art critics and historians have regarded that modern art in Korea launched in 1909 when Ko Hui-tong (Ko Hui-dong, 1889-1965) entered the Tokyo Academy of Art (Tokyo Bijutsu Gakko). However, Korean scholars introduced the knowledge of Western-style art since the eighteenth century, and some Western artists, like American painter Hubert Vos who painted a portrait of King Kojong, visited Seoul during the nineteenth century. See also Yi Kyŏngsŏng, Han'guk kŭndaehoehwa [Modern Korean Painting] (Seoul: Iljisa, 1980) with a focus on chapter II and Yi Gu-yŏl, "1910 nyŏndaeŭi sŏul hwadan" [Seoul Art World in the 1910s] in Kŭndae han'gukmisulsaŭi yŏn'gu [A Study of the History of Modern Korean Art] (Seoul: Mijinsa, 1992), 51-60.

[2] T.J. Clark, The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 8.

transformations as well as socio-economic changes in post-war South Korea. In this new historical context, abstraction such as Korean *Informel* art, endorsed by the theory of Modernism, again represented the illusion of harmony between pre-existing national culture and infiltrated Western culture now essentially equated with Americanization.[3] During the 1980s, however, socially critical art or social realism emerged along with the nationwide movement for democracy. Rejecting false harmonies between nationalism and Modernist art, social realism represented contradictions between the myth and the reality of modernization.

I call socially critical art emerging during the 1980s social realism as opposed to abstraction in post-war South Korea as well as ahistorical modern art such as Impressionism/Academic realism dominant under the Japanese colonialism. My notion of social realism embraces '*minjok* (nation) art' and '*minjung* (ordinary people) art.' While their differences have never been clearly addressed, both national art and *minjung* art rejected Modernism and embodied a nationalism critical of modernization. On the other hand, Impressionism/Academic realism and abstract art idealized state-sponsored conservative nationalism in harmony with modernization.

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[3] For a discussion of the emergence of Korean *Inforemel* in the historical context of post-Korean War South Korea, see Whuiyeon Jin, "Presentation, Modernism, and Post-Colonialism: Korean *Informel* and the Reception of the West." (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1997). In post-war South Korea, art critic Yi Il, the foremost purveyor of Modernism, published numerous articles emphasizing the significance of self-referentiality in modern art based on theories discussed by Maurice Denis, Roger Fry, and Clement Greenberg, among others. See, for instance, Yi Il, "Hyŏndae misulesŏŭi hwanwŏngwa hwagsan" [Reduction and Expansion in Modern Art], in Hyŏndae misulesŏŭi hwanwŏngwa hwagsan (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 1991), 73-87 and "Han'guk hyŏndae misul, gŭ 10nyŏnŭi paljach'ui" [A Decade of Korean Modern Art], in Hyŏndae misulŭi sigak [A View of Modern Art] (Seoul: Mijinsa, 1985),34-353.

Literary Critic Paik Nak-chung (Paek Nak-ch'ŏng, b.1938) has theorized the National Culture Movement since the 1960s and translated nation as *minjok*.[4] According to him, the meaning of *minjok* places more importance on a group of sovereign people consisting of a nation than on a nation itself as a governing state. From his standpoint of critical nationalism, *minjok* is not equated with a governing state. In this way, Paik Nak-chung's idea of nationalism is critical of both colonialism and domestic conservative nationalism that idealized collective Korean identity and gave priority to a governing state.[5]

Thus the "national literature" Paik Nak-chung championed produced not only anti-colonial but also anti-state critiques under the military dictatorship in post-war South Korea. Corresponding to Paik Nak-chung's idea of "national literature," Kim Yun-su (b.1936), the art critic dedicated to the rise of socially critical art in South Korea, coined "national art" (*minjok misul*). According to Kim Yun-su:

> Therefore, national art, transcending its superficial implication as an art created by the Korean people and an art depicting something unique about Korea, embodies modern consciousness through which we historically recognize and cope with the nation's critical situations. In this respect,

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[4] Paik Nak-chung, ed., Minjokjuŭiran muŏsin'ga [What is Nationalism ?] (Seoul: Ch'angbisa, 1981), 6-7. Paik Nak-chung received a doctoral degree in English literature from Harvard University, and as a faculty member at Seoul National University, founded the journal *Ch'angjakkwa bip'yŏng* (Creation and Criticism) in 1966, which served as a major platform for literary, cultural, and political discourses in South Korea. See also Paik Nak-chung, "The Idea of a Korean National Literature Then and Now," *positions* I: 3 (1993), 553-580.

[5] Historian Henry H. Em argued that conservative state-nationalism adopted by South and North Korea is historically linked to the ahistorical concept of *minjok* constructed by Korean nationalists and the Japanese colonial state in the early twentieth century. According to Em, "In the process of trying to compete, or simply survive, in the nation-state system, *both* the colonial state and the Korean nationalist movements and organizations had to study, standardize, and thus re-invent (or just invent) everything we now associate with the Korean nation, including such 'essential' elements as the Korean language and Korean ethnicity." Henry H. Em, "*Minjok* as a Modern and Democratic Construct: Sin Ch'aeho's Historiography," Colonial Modernity in Korea, eds. Gi-wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 351.

> national art attains the necessity and significance of its own existence, while our contemporary art has been suffering not only colonial history but also colonial relationships with Western art.[6]

In 1980, the group Reality and Utterance (Hyunsilgwa Balŏn) first created national art as discussed by Kim Yun-su. It took seven decades for South Korean artists to represent a socio-political agenda with Western-style art. After 1985, *minjung* art became the common name for socially critical art in South Korea. [7] The emergence of *minjok* and *minjung* art paralleled the democratization movement culminating in the 1980s. The *minjung* (ordinary people), characterized as "the people capable of rising up against the oppressive system and thus constituting historical subjectivity," played a key role in the democratization movement.[8] Championing the *minjung*, the South Korean intellectuals and university students led the movement for democracy. Paik Nak-chung and Kim Yun-su also stood at the forefront of the *minjung* democracy movement and their idea of *minjok* was based on the notion of *minjung* and *minjung*-oriented nationalism.

The labeling of *minjung* art and concomitant discussions have tended to limit socially critical art to part of the 1980s-democratization movement; it, first, overlooked differences between socially critical art (embodied by Reality and Utterance in particular) and the democratization movement's cultural politics, and,

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[6] Kim Yun-su, Han'guk hyŏndae hoehwasa [A History of Korean Modern Painting] (Seoul: Han'gukilbo, 1975), 45.

[7] In 1985, when the government authorities interrupted an exhibition of young social realist artists under the title of "20 taeŭi himjŏn" [The Power of the Artists in Their Twenties], it was widely reported in the mass media and socially critical art came to be known as "*minjung* art." "Sakkŏn hwadoen *minjung* misulŭi p'amun" [Sensationalism of the Spotlighted '*Minjung* Art'], *Kyeganmisul* (Fall 1985), 49-53.

[8] Namhee Lee, "Making *Minjung* Subjectivity: Crisis of Subjectivity and Rewriting History, 1960-1988" (Ph. D. diss., The University of Chicago, 2001), 193.

second, its connection to previous discussions of national art led by Kim Yun-su since 1969. In the democratization movement, for instance, Korean mask drama and folk dance were adopted and performed as a prime form of anti-state satires and of resistance to infiltrated foreign powers and cultures. The anonymity of masked players implied the primacy of collective identity over individuality, and drew a distinction between the democratization movement's cultural politics and social realist artists' uses of individual styles and personal narratives. Social realism in South Korea thus demonstrated a constant process of conflict and compromise between art and politics. For this reason, many Koreans have wanted to call it *minjok minjung* art. My study aims at a unified discussion of national (*minjok*) and *minjung* art under the notion of social realism.

This dissertation discusses the rise of social realism concentrating on the first and second social realist groups, Reality and Utterance (Hyŏnsilgwa balŏn,1980-1988) and Imsullyŏn (1982-1987), and a prominent social realist artist Shin Hak-chul (Sin Hak-ch'ŏl, b.1943). These artists formed an axis of the South Korean art world during the 1980s and the following years. My study analyzes their works of art and critical texts in relation to the theories of art critic Kim Yun-su. In 1995, the Kwangju Biennale, Asia's first biannual international art festival, was founded in commemoration of the democratization movement in South Korea.[9] The Biennale

[9] The first Kwangju Biennale invited some 660 artists from 58 countries showing 1,200 works with a $23-million budget. 1.6 million people including 23,000 from abroad visited the Biennale held in the city with 1.3 million citizens. From its inception, the Kwangju Biennale has been discussed throughout international art magazines as a major multinational art show corresponding to the biennales held in Johannesburg (South Africa), Venice (Italy), and Lyon (France), and Kassel Documenta (Germany). See Richard Vine, "Report from Korea: Asian Futures," *Art in America* (July 1998), 34-41. See also

aimed to bring together Western art with the art of the third world.[10] In the context of the Kwangju Biennale's cultural politics aiming for a harmony between Korean and Western art now under the rubric of multiculturalism, the works and ideas of social realist artists and critics were tested and contested.[11] In the new millennium, South Korean social realist artists continued to represent a socio-political agenda such as the dispatch of the South Korean troops in Iraq at the request of the United States.[12]

The focus of this dissertation is the apparently incompatible coupling of *minjung*-oriented national agenda and Western styles of art. At one level the coupling in and of itself colludes with representations of modernization as a conflict between domestic and foreign cultures. This uneasy coupling started to undermine the decades-old myth of Modernist art and of modernization in South Korea. At another level social realist artists, by integrating Western figurative arts with personal and national self-expressions, wanted to transcend the placeless and timeless

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Jason Edward Kaufmann, "Kwangju, Korea: Asia's Own Biennial," *Art Newspaper*, no. 54 (December 1995), 9.

[10] Young-bang Lim, "The Biennale and the Creation of Culture," in Beyond the Borders: The First Kwangju International Biennale, exhibition catalog (Seoul: Life and Dream, 1995), 9. See also Martin Jay, "Kwangju: From Massacre to Biennale," Salmagundi no.120 (Fall 1998), 15-25.

[11] Among the members of the two groups Reality and Utterance and Imsullyŏn, art critic Sung Wan-kyung (b.1944) was most actively involved in the Kwangju Biennale. He worked as a curator for the main exhibitions of the first (1995) and second (1997) Kwangju Biennale, and became the chief curator, or "the artistic director," in charge of the fourth Biennale (2002). Reality and Utterance's art critics Won Dong-suk (b.1938) and Yun Pum-mo (b.1950) also participated as curators in the first Kwangju Biennale. The members of the two groups invited to the Kwangju Biennale more than once included Oh Yun (b.1946), Kim jeong-heon (b.1946), Noh Won-hee (b.1948), Shin Kyung-ho (b.1949), Lim Ok-sang (b.1950), Kim Yong-tae (b.1946), Hwang Jae-hyung (b.1952), Lee Jong-gu (b.1954), Lee Myung-bok (b.1957), Kang Yo-bae (b.1952), Sohn Jang-sup (b.1941), Ahn Chang-hong (b.1952), Park Pul-ttong (b.1956), and Lee Tae-ho (b.1951).

[12] In September 2004, about 3,600 South Korean soldiers were stationed in the northern Iraq, which was the second largest American coalition partner in Iraq after Britain. Ryu Jin, "Zaytun Takes over Operational Command in Northern Iraq," *The Korea Times* (1 October 2004). Opposing the South Korean government's decision to send troops to Iraq, for instance, six social realist artists held a joint exhibition "Baghdad 551km" [Pagŭdadŭ 551km jŏn] from January 30 to March 31, 2004 at the Jebiwool Art Museum in Seoul, after they visited Iraq in August of 2003. http://jebiwool.org/01_Exhibition/01_Exhibition_02_Past_View.htm (accessed February 23, 2005).

individualism symbolized by Modernism. The second observation is crucial to my central argument that social realist art demonstrated a radical process of depriving Western art of foreign identity; as if social realist art was *nationalizing* Western art, foreign styles of art went hand-in-hand with *minjung*-oriented nationalism. In this mutual process lies social realist art's vitality and openness unprecedented in the history of modern Korean art.

Thus far, general accounts in the relevant literature have overly emphasized differences between Western art and South Korean social realism, focusing on its anti-Western political content. Synthesizing various stylistic resources from two cultures, social realist artists represented social totality. They not only reformulated Korean folk painting (*minhwa*) but also used montage techniques and Photo-Realistic styles. Montage was an effective style for them to represent a simultaneous juxtaposition of different scenes in time and place. With Photo-Realism, the artists from Imsullyŏn represented current social agendas in a comprehensible and concrete manner. In this regard, South Korean social realism distinguished itself from Socialist Realism developed in North Korea and other Communist blocs.

Social realist artists in South Korea also emphasized individual styles and personal narratives, often portraying themselves and their family members in the context of social totality. Thus, South Korean social realism apparently paralleled Georg Lukács's idea of realism. In the field of art, argued Lukács, "the destruction of the complex tissue of man's interaction with his environment" not only "saps the

vitality of this opposition" but also "furthers the dissolution of personality."[13] In order to overcome mainstream Modernist art alienated from social reality, social realists assimilated historical and social environments with expressions of personal subjectivity. Their works are full of personal metaphors and symbolism, in addition to overt representations of sociological data and historical agendas.

Positing the set of personality and social totality further in a third-world context, my study draws on Fredric Jameson's idea of "national allegories"—"the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society."[14] (The third world refers to a group of countries having experienced colonialism and imperialism.) Jameson identified third-world national allegories as an equivalent to his own definition of postmodernism--an isolated, fragmented, and schizophrenic cultural expression of the current stage of capitalism in the United States-led first world. But the literature on social realism in South Korea never discussed the relationship between the discourse of postmodernism and that of third-world nationalism.

This dissertation considers, first, the relationship between the superstructure (art) and the infrastructure (the trajectory of modernization or the current stage of multinational capitalism in South Korea); second, collective national experiences suggested through personal subject matters in the social realist works ("national allegories"); and, third, the relationship between social realism in South Korea and

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[13] Georg Lukács, Realism in Our Time (New York: Harper & Low, 1964), 28.
[14] Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* no.15 (Fall 1986), 65-88.

contemporary art in the first world (the totality in the global system). South Korean social realist artists, rejecting Modernist art and its representations of the harmonious relationship between capitalist modernization and idealized nationalism, embodied "an aesthetic of cognitive mapping" put forth by Fredric Jameson as "a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system."[15] In this way, South Korean social realist artists represented diverse individual modes of *minjung*-oriented nationalism in defiance of both multinational capitalism and domestic political authoritarianism.

Nationalism and *Minjung* (Ordinary People)

The divergent trends of social realism and Modernism in the South Korean art world reflected a larger cultural, intellectual, and social movement in post- war South Korea. Whereas "the institutional (state-sponsored) intellectuals" supported the trajectory of modernization for materialistic prosperity, according to historian Namhee Lee, the "critical" intellectuals were equally concerned with "recovering or creating subjectivity."[16] Discussions of modernization not only emphasized values of modernity such as liberalism, scientific rationality and internationalism, but also forged conservative nationalism conformable to modern values.

[15] Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, no. 146 (July/August 1984), 92.
[16] Namhee Lee, 15-16.

The discourse of embodying subjectivity, on the other hand, presupposed a critical consciousness of modernization, and took an oppositional stance toward hegemonic political powers. The post-colonial consciousness of critical intellectuals was constituted by a series of "negative" historical experiences, including Japanese colonial rule, the divided nation after the Korean War, and the trajectory of modernization dominated by both domestic military governments and multinational corporations.[17] In order to formulate the counter-concept to modernization, the "critical" intellectuals including social realist artists combined such concepts as nationalism, *minjung*, and the third world.

Minjung-oriented nationalism was also a counter-concept to conservative nationalism systematically constructed and idealized by hegemonic political powers in post-war South Korea.[18] In concealing the difference between a nation and the global system, idealized nationalism is similar to "official nationalism" defined by Benedict Anderson.[19] Rather than Anderson's characterization of nationalism as an imaginary religious belief, however, the critical intellectuals in South Korea supported Ernest Gellner's contention that "It is not the aspirations of nations which create nationalism: it is nationalism which creates nations." [20] Instead of seeking a permanent and idealistic idea of nationalism, the critical intellectuals like Pain Nak-

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[17] Ibid., 13-18.
[18] For a discussion of conservative nationalism constructed by hegemonic political powers in South Korea, see Hyung Il Pai, Constructing Korean Origins: A Critical View of Archeology, Historiography, and Racial Myth in Korean State-Formation Theories (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).
[19] Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (New York: Verso, 1991), 110.
[20] Paik Nak-chung, ed., What is Nationalism ?, 5, and Ernst Gellner, "Nationalism," in Thought and Change (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), 147-78.

chung and Kim Yun-su sought to embody nationalism to cope with specific historical moments in post-war South Korea.

In this context, social realist artists sought to represent, recover, and create nationalism as a way to overcome alienation engendered by the rapid capitalization of South Korean society. During the 1980s, social realist artists' focus gradually shifted from the idea of nation to the notion of *minjung*. On this point, Lee observed:

> If coloniality, with its inseparable couplet of modernity and capitalism, dictated that the narrative of emancipation be written on the notion of nation (*minjok*), the couplet of authoritarianism with its intense pace and contradiction of capitalistic development of the 1970s and 1980s dictated the narrative to be written on the notion of people (*minjung*)."[21]

Despite subtly different boundaries and the nature of collectivity embedded in nation and *minjung*, there existed an overlapping zone in which a unified resistance against capitalist modernization was formed. By connecting nationalism with third-world identity, the critical intellectuals relocated a national agenda in the context of the global system arbitrated by multinational capitalism.

National Art and National Literature

Literary critic Paik Nak-chung's theory of nationalism in the context of the first and third world relationship greatly influenced the rise of social realism in art. He co-founded the literary journal *Creation and Criticism* (*Ch'angjak kwa Bip'yŏng*) in 1966. The quarterly magazine became one of the most important resources for

[21] Namhee Lee, 16.

social realist artists. Social realist art critic Kim Yun-su has published articles in this magazine, since 1971, and joined it as an editor in 1978. The journal introduced Western theories of social realism; for instance, Paik Nak-chung translated Arnold Hauser's The Social History of Art, and published it in series in 1966. Paik Nak-chung has been a leader in national and *minjung* literary theory and criticism.

If nationalism emerged in the late nineteenth century Korea "as an attempt to deflect the epistemic violence of the global nation-state system," national literature appeared corresponding to the needs of the anti-colonial intellectuals under the Japanese colonialism in Korea (1910-1945).[22] Paik Nak-chung defined national literature as "a special concept demanded in a historical situation in which imperialistic aggressions of the Superpowers threatens the nation's subjectivity and dignity."[23] After the liberation from Japan at the end of World War II in 1945, in Paik Nak-chung's view, the history of national literature has continued representing the division of the nation, the Korean War, and the crisis of the nation's identity and subjectivity in the course of modernization.

Moreover, participants in national literature in South Korea have been conscious of its potential as a positive contribution to world literature. Paik Nak-chung claimed:

> True national literature is by no means a sentimental or opportunistic revivalism, or an expression of ultranationalism. Or, an over-precaution of ultranationalism under colonial or half-colonial situation may be a product of

[22] Henry H. Em, "Nationalist Discourse in Modern Korea: Minjok As a Democratic Imaginary," (Ph.D diss., University of Chicago, 1995), 2.
[23] Paik Nak-chung, "Minjok Munhak Kaenyŭmŭi Jŏnglip'ŭl Wihae" [Defining the Concept of National Literature] *Wolganjung'ang* (July 1974). Republished in Paik Nak-chung, Minjok munhakkwa segye munhak [National Literature and World Literature] (Seoul: Changbisa, 1978), 123-138.

> false consciousness of the reality. Ultranationalism in a strict sense is only possible to the Superpowers such as Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy, and imperial Japan…. True national literature belongs to world literature, and nationalism under colonial situation is inseparable from internationalism since it struggles with international opponents."[24]

Elsewhere, Paik Nak-chung extended the significance of national literature as a cultural movement for the liberation of humanity from any oppressive environment:

> Thus we expect from nationalism of the so-called underdeveloped countries--direct victims of the developed countries' imperialism --a work that can stop the corruption and violence caused by the developed countries' nationalism. In this context we reconsidered and justified today the necessity of nationalism in the third world, although it is said that the age of nationalism has ended in the West.[25]

According to him, only when third-world nationalism pursues a goal of true subjectivity, rather than a reaction to the developed countries' nationalism and imperialism, does it become a movement for the humanistic liberation. For this reason, Paik Nak-chung probably regarded the "National Literature Movement [ongoing in South Korea in the 1980s] as one of the newest and the best form of international liberation movements and an expression of desire for the individual here and now to live as a human being."[26]

In accordance with Paik Nak-chung's discussion of national literature, art critic Kim Yun-su defined national art in 1971, which "historically recognizes and copes with the nation's critical situations."[27] Although Kim Yun-su originally suggested the concept of national art as a criterion for clarifying the history of modern

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[24] Ibid, 136-137.
[25] Paik Nak-chung, "In'gan Haebanggwa Minjok Munhwa Undong" [Human Liberation and National Culture Movement], *Changjak kwa Bi'pyŭng* (Winter 1978), 6.
[26] Ibid, 27.
[27] Kim Yun-su, A History of Modern Korean Painting, 45.

Korean art in past decades, it would also characterize social realist art emerging in the 1980s. While Paik Nak-chung sought to universalize national literature in the context of world literature, Kim Yun-su's definition of national art put more weight on the nationalization of international art. Unlike national literature written in Korean, national art used Western mediums and styles, and Kim Yun-su wanted to relate the Western elements to realistic traditions of Korean art. In this way, Kim Yun-su emphasized a tight combination of thematic reflections of alienated reality and corresponding formal effects.

Fredric Jameson and Third-World Nationalism

Under a totalizing vision of the first and third world, Paik sought solidarity with international intellectuals. In 1978, Paik Nak-chung argued that some first-world intellectuals clarified their own countries' problems by examining their lies, aggressions, and exploitation of the third world.[28] He did not name any of them, then. Later, in 1989, he published his interview with American Marxist critic Fredric Jameson, who was visiting Seoul to lecture, in *Creation and Criticism* under the title "Marxism, Postmodernism, and National Culture Movement."[29] In its English version, Paik Nak-chung added, "it is Jameson's rare distinction among practitioners of the postmodern discourse to always insist on the difficult grappling with

[28] Ibid, 7.
[29] Fredric Jameson and Paik Nak-chung, "Maksijŭm, postmodŏnijŭm, minjok munhwa undong" [Marxism, Postmodernism, and the National Culture Movement] *Creation and Criticism* (Spring 1990), 268-300.

representation and to have given attention to instances of such in the non-Western world."[30] Since his early career Jameson has consistently discussed the relationship between the third world and the capitalist first world from a Marxist point of view. As early as 1971 he wrote that, "In the age of American imperialism, indeed, as has often been pointed out, we have our lower classes *outside* the national borders: even our working classes are as a bourgeoisie to the alien peasantry or proletariat of the Third World."[31] In the article "The 60s without Apology," published in 1984, he not only regarded the third world as a new collective voice in the capitalist global society but also saw the rising interests in "Third-Worldism" among the intellectuals in the West.[32] Two years later, he theorized third-world cultural productions as "national allegories" in his article "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism."[33]

Even though Paik Nak-chung had never mentioned Jamson's concerns with the third world before, both Paik, in 1978, and Jameson, in 1986, respectively conceptualized the first and third world relationship from the standpoint of Hegelian philosophy.[34] Both of them cited Hegel's analysis of the Master-Slave relationship as

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[30] Fredric Jameson and Paik Nak-chung, "South Korea as Social Space: Fredric Jameson Interviewed by Paik Nak-chung, Seoul, 28 October 1989," chap. in Rob Wilson and Wilmal Dissanayake, eds. Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary (Dunham: Duke University Press, 1996), 348-371.
[31] Fredric Jameson, Marxism and Form (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 399.
[32] Fredric Jameson, "The 60s without Apology," *Social Text* (1984), 178-209.
[33] Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* (Fall 1986), 65-88.
[34] Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," 85, and Paik, "Human Liberation and National Culture Movement," *Creation and Criticism* (Winter 1978), 8.

an analogy to the distinction between two cultures.[35] Since the slave provides labor for the master, according to Hegel, only the slave achieves a concrete consciousness of social totality. But the master is condemned to idealism, and cannot attain any picture of reality. In this way, the slave becomes the truth of the Master.[36] Equating the slave with the third world, Paik Nak-chung regarded the liberation movement by colonized nations as an intense fighting in which the slave sacrificed his life for freedom and liberation for himself and posterity. On the other hand, specifically applying Hegel's analysis to Americans as masters of the world, Jameson claimed:

> The view from the top is epistemologically crippling, and reduces its subjects to the illusions of a host of fragmented subjectivities, to the poverty of the individual experience of isolated monads, to dying individual bodies without collective pasts or futures bereft of any possibility of grasping the social totality.[37]

Paik Nak-chung's and Jameson's discussions of the total relationship between the first and third world provides a basic theoretical framework for my study.

During his stay in Seoul for a week, Jameson met with writers from the National Literature Association (Minjok munhak chakka hyŏphoe), and watched videotapes on *minjung* art.[38] In the interview, Jameson and Paik Nak-chung shared many positive ideas on nationalism developed in the third world and in South Korea in particular. If Paik Nak-chung theorized third-world nationalism from the inside, from the point of social realism, Jameson conceived it from the outside, from the point of postmodernism.

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[35] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind, trans. A.V. Miller, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 111-119, 234--237.
[36] Hegel, 237.
[37] Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," 85.
[38] Jameson and Paik, "Marxism, Postmodernism, and the National Culture Movement," 268.

At first Jameson differentiated South Korea's social environment from those of other third-world countries as well as that of the first world. His previous discussions of nationalism mostly referred to embattled situations like the Palestinians' nationalism or Cuba's nationalism in view of constructing socialism. Thus, it was a "surprise" for him to see the national struggle in South Korea which had the high level of industrial prosperity and productivity close to that of first world countries. Jameson observed on the uniqueness of the National Culture Movement in South Korea and its suggestion of a totalizing vision of global reality:

> A powerful sense of the unity of the national situation does not necessarily involve xenophobia or narrowness but can be a whole opening to both political praxis and very vigorous kinds of cultural expression, something which seems uniquely the case here in Korea. I'm tempted to say if the First World doesn't understand this—and it's clear why, except for the strange case of Japan, the superstate in the United States or this new Europe has really no place for this kind of thing—then too bad for the First World: that is to say, there are realities that it needs to think about some more, and those are the index of its blind spots and its repression and the things it doesn't want to know about in the outside world.[39]

The coexistence of the third world's political consciousness and the first world's capitalist economy in South Korea apparently suggested to Jameson an alternative to his own definition of postmodernism.[40] His interest in the third world is part of his utopian vision that the individual and society can be transformed through a consciousness of social totality. But in the first world of late capitalism, according to Jameson, a picture of social totality is not available. Postmodernism as defined by

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[39] Ibid, "South Korea as Social Space," 361-362.
[40] Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* (July August, 1984), 53-92.

him is a cultural expression devoid of the vision of totality in relation not only to its own society but also to the global society. Jameson argued:

> But then in that case, what I would like to suggest is—and this is very consistent with the whole postmodern period where people lament the disappearance of the older, inner–directed personality, the acquisitive individual, the centered subject, and all those things—that instead of replacing those with the rhetoric of psychic fragmentation, schizophrenia, and so on, one should return again to notions of collective relations, but collectivities of new types, not of traditional kinds. That would be a way of looking at human nature as a social thing that would be in my opinion the most productive socially and culturally, politically as well.[41]

Then, he suggested "political postmodernisms" or "an aesthetic of cognitive mapping" as "a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system."[42] In this regard, Jameson also emphasized the importance of a genuine sense of history to overcome the limits of postmodern fragmentation.

"National Allegories" and Postmodernism

The notion of "national allegories" was a form of cognitive mapping in the third world, in which even private narrative and experiences suggest the collective experience of social totality.[43] If the notion of "national" presupposes the individual subject's collective consciousness of its society in relation to the global system, the notion of "allegory" repudiates any homogeneous symbolism. Allegory has been

[41] Ibid, 54.
[42] Ibid, 92.
[43] Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," 69.

widely discussed in contemporary literary theory as a concept of discontinuous breaks and self-referential heterogeneity without any organic unity. For instance, Walter Benjamin pointed out the splintered nature of the allegory as a melancholic nostalgia for lost wholeness:

> In the field of allegorical intuition the image is a fragment, a rune. Its beauty as a symbol evaporates when the light of divine learning falls upon it. The false appearance of totality is extinguished.[44]

Aware of false conceptions of totality, Jameson posited allegory against both modernist symbolism and realism; he renounced not only modernism's metaphysical and idealistic representations of human essence but also realism's historicist approaches adhering to a linear and evolutionist conception of history.

In other words, Jameson accepted in part a deconstructionist operation of poststructuralism, so-called, "war against totality."[45] Poststructuralism is based on a belief that without a reductive violence, difference and plurality cannot be subsumed to a larger whole. According to Steven Best, "There is no underlying essence which can be appealed to in the unification of particulars, no grand abstraction common to all terms to sew up difference within a final identity."[46] Likewise, yet elsewhere, Jameson suggested allegory as a different conception of totality that can hold fragments and discontinuities without a synthesis between them.[47] In this respect, his

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[44] Walter Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, trans. John Osborne (London: NLB, 1977), 176.
[45] Steven Best, "Jameson, Totality, and the Poststructuralist Critique," in Douglas Kellner, ed., Postmodernism, Jameson, Critique (Washington, D.C.: Maisonneuve Press, 1989), 333-368.
[46] Ibid, 336.
[47] Fredric Jameson, "Interview," *Deacritics*, vol. 12 (Autumn 1982), 82. See also Fredric Jameson, "On Contemporary Marxist Theory: An Interview with Fredric Jameson," *Journal of Comparative Poetics*, vol. 0, Issue 10 (1990): 114-131.

notion of national allegories provides an epistemological map in which different nationalities can coexist in the global totality without a unifying scheme or center. Within the decentered wholeness, according to Jameson, the transformation of being is experienced through participation in national collective life; it is a cognitive and empirical experience to overcome both the anxiety of fragmentation and the reality of reification—the reductions of human relations to materialistic relationships under capitalism.[48] For this purpose, Jameson suggested the usefulness of postmodernist techniques such as "pastiche, historical nostalgia, and cliché," although he ultimately sought for a socialist model to compete with capitalist postmodernism.[49] Thus, acording to Douglas Kellner, Jameson "proposes using the strategies, techniques, and elements of postmodernism against postmodernism itself."[50]

On this point, the ideal of "national allegories" and the goal of social realist art in South Korea strikingly converge. For instance, Jameson's idea of allegory as a representation of totality without imposing a synthesis between differences corresponds to art critic Kim Yun-su's suggestion of montage as a proper formal strategy for representing alienated reality under capitalist modernization in Korea. Among others, Shin Hak-chul, using montage, represented great panoramas of modern Korean history in simultaneous juxtapositions of different elements and events. However, I apply allegorical heterogeneity in a limited manner to South Korean social realism, for it can distort itself as a gross sign of indifference to

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[48] Ibid.
[49] Douglas Kellner, "Introduction: Jameson, Marxism, and Postmodernism," in Douglas Kellner, ed., Postmodernism, Jameson, critique (Washington, D.C.: Maisonneuve Press, 1989), 36.
[50] Ibid.

negative historical experiences and social reality. Thus, nationalism embodied by social realism imbued itself, first, with allegorical heterogeneity as opposed to the standardizing ideology of transnational capitalism, second, with utopian socialism as opposed to widespread social, economic, and political inequality, and, third, with homogeneous symbolism as opposed to the division between the South and the North.

In his 1989-interview with Jameson, Paik Nak-chung proposed a "postmodern realism" in the historical context of post-war South Korea where the modern and the postmodern has been simultaneously experienced through a rapid modernization. He emphasized the positive functions of realism capable of keeping alive the totalizing vision of social reality. Whereas Jameson conceived of the historical progression of cultural expressions from realism through modernism to postmodernism in accordance with the changing stages of capitalism in the first world, Paik Nak-chung consistently championed realism as an alternative to conservative formalism under the guise of modernism or postmodernism. In post-war South Korea, apolitical (post)modernist avant-garde arts continued to affirm hegemonic political powers directing the trajectory of modernization.

The split between apolitical avant-garde arts and social realism occuring in the post-war South Korean art world signified not only a binary opposition concerning the vision of modernization but also the contradictory receptions of a certain style of international art. For example, the divided art world in South Korea received Photo-Realism in two different manners. Whereas formalist-modernist artists such as Kim Ch'ang-yong emphasized Photo-Realism's flat surface structure, social realist artists

from the group Imsullyŏn used Photorealistic facture for detailed social reality often combined with personal narratives. If Photo-Realism belongs to postmodern art because it re-presents photographic images as simulacra of capitalist society in the West, it was either formalized or personalized/politicized in South Korea. In regard to this point, Jameson's conception of national allegories failed to notice the scale and power of apolitical, yet state-sponsored, culture, and to capture the intensity of the conflict between two cultural forces concerning nationalism or modernization. Because of this failure ("[I]n the third world situation the intellectual is always in one way or another a political intellectual."[51]), he over-simplified the relationship between the first and third world culture. In post-war South Korea, social realist artists' immediate targets were domestic cultural forces supporting modernization or Westernization, a version of first-world culture modified within the third world. It also means that the relationship between national culture and first-world culture was never purely antagonistic. Social realist artists and critics discussed many precedents and models in Western realism including realism in France before World War II and American Social Realism, attempting to dissociate their own social realism from Socialist Realism.

[51] Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," 74.

Representing a Totality

Social realist artists' representations of a totalizing vision of the society sustained two relevant directions. They addressed the diachronic connection between the self and history, and at the same time, demonstrated the synchronic connection between the self and the current society. According to historian Lee, a series of "negative" experiences marked the history of Korea in the twentieth-century, including "colonialism, foreign interventions, civil war, socialist authoritarianism in the North and the equally authoritarian military dictatorship in the South, and the confrontation between the two Koreas."[52] In the late 19th century, Korea became the focus of intense competition among imperialist powers such as China, Russia, French, the United States, and Japan. In 1910, Japan finally annexed Korea, bringing the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392-1910) to an end, and instituted colonial rule until the end of World War II in 1945. Within a few months after Korea was liberated from Japan in August 1945, Korea was effectively divided; the United States operated a full military government in the South, while Soviet troops were stationed in the North. In 1948, two opposing republics were established in the South (The Republic of Korea) and the North (The Democratic People's Republic of Korea).

Two years later, the geographical and ideological division led to a military conflict called the Korean War (June 25, 1950- July 27,1953) between South and North, between the United States and its United Nations allies and the Communist powers of the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. The Korean War

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[52] Ibid., 13. For a general account of modern Korean history, see also Bruce Cumings, Korea's Place in the Sun: a Modern History (New York: Norton and Company, 1997).

marked a significant moment in modern Korean history, since the Syngman Rhee regime (1948-1960) in the South consolidated its power over civil society, and also established the close relationship of the United States and South Korea.[53] During and after the Korean War, the United States supported the South Korean governments through massive economic aids and military backing. According to an official source, aid funds amounted about $12 billion from 1945 to 1965.[54] But the April 19th Student Uprising in 1960 toppled Rhee's authoritarian regime, which was "the first democratic experience" in South Korea.[55]

On May 16th, 1961, however, Lieutenant General Park Chung Hee (Pak Chŏng-hŭi, 1917-1979) came into power through a military coup, and "reversed the course of democratic society by dissolving a constitutionally elected government."[56] The 5.16 coup leaders adopted anti-communism and rapid industrialization as the state policy, and embarked on an economic development project in 1963. According to Stephen D. Bach, "During the first ten years of the country's rapid development beginning in 1963, its manufacture exports grew at an extraordinary average rate of over 50% a year."[57] To accomplish this goal, Park Chung Hee's military-dominated

[53] Namehee Lee, 179-180.
[54] Cumings, 306.
[55] Namhee Lee, 54.
[56] Ibid., 61.
[57] Stephen D. Bach, "Redefining 'Success' in South Korean Development" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Irvine, 2001), 1.

government efficiently mobilized resources, suppressed dissent, and controlled labor.[58]

In 1972, Park Chung Hee solidified his dictatorship by declaring the Yushin Constitution and martial law. Bruce Cumings, an eminent scholar on modern Korean history, wrote:

> Park had his scribes write a new constitution removing all limits on his tenure in office and giving him powers to appoint and dismiss the cabinet and even the prime minister, to designate one-third of the National Assembly (reducing it to a rubber stamp and a cringing bunch of myrmidons), to suspend or destroy civil liberties, and to issue decrees for whatever powers the Yushin framers forgot to include. Meanwhile, the National Security Law and the anticommunist law remained in place.[59]

In accordance with the new constitution, Park Chung Hee issued a total of nine Emergency Measures from 1974 to 1975. For instance, Emergency Decree Number Nine prohibited "any criticism of constitution, any political activity by students, or any public presentation or statement describing or discussing any act which might violate the decree."[60] The assassination of Park Chung Hee on October 26, 1979, ended the Yushin era (1972-1979).[61]

With the sudden death of Park Chung Hee, South Koreans expressed hopes for democratization in all sectors of society, which were often called the "Spring of Seoul." On May 17, 1980, however, the declaration of Martial Law by Major General

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[58] For instance, the "Law Concerning Special Measures for Safeguarding National Security" gave Park Chung Hee "the authority to ban public demonstrations, control wages, rents and prices, and mobilize any material or human resources for national purposes." Namhee Lee, 72.
[59] Cumings, 358.
[60] Namhee Lee, 74. The Emergency Measures Number Two and Three made it illegal to criticize the Yushin Constitution, the Number Four made it illegal to join any anti-state organization, the Number Seven allowed the military to occupy universities.
[61] Kim Jae-kyu (1926-1980), the director of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency and one of Park's closest friends, assassinated Park Chung Hee, and was subsequently executed.

Chun Doo Hwan (Chŏn Du-hwan), a longtime loyalist of Park Chung Hee, brutally ended the euphoric period, and completed his coup. He "closed the universities, dissolved the legislature, banned all political activity, and arrested thousands of political leaders and dissidents."[62] The next day, on May 18, elite paratroopers indiscriminately slaughtered hundreds or thousands students and citizens including women and children in Kwangju (a Southern city in South Korea), who, along with other nationwide protesters, demanded the repeal of Martial Law.[63] (The exact number of casualties has never been established.[64]) By May 21, hundreds of thousands of the Kwangju citizens drove the paratroopers from the city. The citizen's councils controlled Kwangju in peace for the next five days until the armed soldiers recaptured the city by force. Lee wrote:

> Although the uprising failed, it became 'a turning point' and 'watershed event of the last hundred years' in the way that it was counter-remembered, rearticulated, and in the way that it altered the political culture and the grounds of the body politic…. Most significantly, Kwangju became a point of departure for the *minjung* movement. What had until then been vaguely termed as anti-government, pro-democracy movement was interjected sharply with an urgency of revolution, based on scientific analysis and popular base, the meaning and theoretical elaboration of which consumed the decade of the 1980s. The entire movement of the 1980s and its future vision were neither imaginable nor possible without Kwangju.[65]

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[62] Cumings, 377.

[63] Bruce Cumings observed: One woman was pilloried near the town square, where a paratrooper attacked her breasts with his bayonet. Other students had their faces erased with flamethrowers. Cumings, 377. For a further discussion of the 5.18 Kwangju massacre, see Donald N. Clark, ed., The Kwangju Uprising: Shadows over the Regime in South Korea (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988).

[64] The Chun government announced 144 civilians died, but the South Korean National Assembly investigations "have suggested a figure no lower than 1,000." Bruce Cumings, Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History, (New York: Norton, c.1997), 338. At that time, South Koreans believed that 300-3000 people were killed in the Kwangju Uprising. See Chŏnnam sahoe munje yŏnguso, ed., 5.18 kwangju minjung hangjaeng jaryojip [The 5.18 Kwangju Minjung Uprising, Collection of Related Materials] (Kwangju, South Korea: Tosŏch'ulp'an Kwangju, 1988), 236.

[65] Namhee Lee, 187.

During the 1980s, "South Korea not only saw the proliferation of *minjung* as a social movement of students, workers, the urban poor, and woman but also as academic, religious, and artistic activities such as *minjung* historiography, sociology, theology, literature, and art, and even comics."[66] A nationwide organization of college students became an important force in the *minjung* movement, and "these students gave up their studies, diplomas, and personal dreams and hopes, and family expectations and obligations, plunging themselves into the life of activists, factory workers, farmers, fugitives, and political prisoners, risking their youth and futures, and sometimes even their lives."[67]

In June 1987, the nationwide *minjung* movement for democracy finally brought a breakthrough in South Korea. Not only students and workers but also a number of middle-class people joined the massive protests. On June 29, the South Korean ruling party and its presidential candidate appointed by Chun Doo Hwan announced "direct presidential elections, an opening campaign without threats of repression, amnesties for political prisoners, guarantees of basic rights, and revision or abolishment of the current press law."[68] In 1995, Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo were indicted and jailed for their coup in 1979 and the massacre at Kwangju in 1980.

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[66] Namhee Lee, 3.
[67] Ibid., 7-8. 117,000 students were forced to quit school from 1980 to 1988 because of their involvement in anti-state protests.
[68] Cumings, 388.

If modern Korean history is a "failed" history, it also negatively affected the route of modern Korean art.[69] In Korea, the first Western-style modern art was produced around the year 1910 at the beginning of Japanese colonialism (1910-1945). In South Korea after the Korean War, abstraction became a dominant form of art, along with the massive infiltration of American culture. During and after the Korean War, American culture took the place of Japanese colonial culture. The social circumstances, laden with colonialism and Cold War ideology, severely suppressed the subjective representation of the social totality. As a result, the range of subject matter in visual art was reduced to a monotonous cycle of ahistorical self-referential content.

Reality and Utterance's founding exhibition in the wake of the Kwangju People's Uprising (1980) reflected a paradigmatic turning point in the South Korean art world or in the cultural perception of the West as a whole. Because of the United States' suspicious roles in the tragic incident in Kwangju, South Koreans started to question Americanism as the symbol of freedom or as an ideal of modernization.[70] The Kwangju Uprising signaled "the beginning of the long process of unraveling the uneasy history, undoing the four decades of internalization of the western worldview

[69] Namhee Lee, 15.

[70] According to Cumings, "the citizens' councils appealed to the United States embassy to intervene, but it was left to General Wickham to release the Twentieth Division of the [Republic Of Korea] Army from its duties along the [Demilitarized Zone] on May 22. A 1988 [Republic of Korea] National Assembly report alleged that the suppression forces waited for three days to enter Kwangju, until the United States aircraft carrier *Midway* and other American naval ships could arrive in Korean waters." Cumings, 377.

and American ideals."[71] In this specific historical context, South Korean social realist artists started to represent *minjung* as historical subjectivity.

Social realism also visualized a vast field of narratives about the widespread multinational capitalism in contemporary culture and society. Within the span of a little more than a generation, South Korea demonstrated spectacular achievements of capitalist modernization. But it sacrificed many other social values. Reality and Utterance, Shin Hak-chul, and Imsullyŏn represented such detrimental consequences including labor and political repression, exploitation of the environment, displacement of the peasantry, and repudiation of traditional culture. In particular, the members of Reality and Utterance focused on the agenda of changing cultures and alienation under capitalism. To them, mass culture was the prime sign of the rising capitalist system, whereas the peasantry was the major victim of modernization. In this regard, their critical representations of modernization in South Korea also implied a view of the global system arbitrated by multinational capitalism.

From a different sociological perspective, however, we may consider the rise of social realism in South Korea as a positive result of modernization. Based on statistical data, sociologist Ronald Inglehart examined cases of modernization in 43 countries including South Korea.[72] According to Inglehart, economic stability affected changes in political and cultural perception in the process of modernization. Inglehart argued:

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[71] Namhee Lee, 192.
[72] Ronald Inglehart, Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

> The historically unprecedented degree of economic security experienced by the postwar generation in most industrial societies was leading to a gradual shift from 'Materialist' values (emphasizing economic and physical security above all) toward 'Postmaterialist' priorities (emphasizing self-expression and the quality of life).[73]

Postmaterialist values de-emphasize the instrumental rationality that characterizes capitalist modernization, and endorse participation and self-expression conducive to democratization.[74] Inglehart's Postmaterialist stage of modernization, "Postmodernism" or "Postmodernization," is almost opposite to Jameson's definition of postmodernism as a cultural expression of fully blown capitalism in its current stage.[75]

Given that social realist art emerged nearly two decades after the trajectory of modernization launched in South Korea, Inglehart's claim seems quite plausible. The rise of social realism paralleled the cultural shift toward the "Postmaterialist" stage of modernization or "Postmodernization" in South Korea.

In South Korea, however, the shift from Materialist to Postmaterialist values did not just "grow out of the unprecedented mass prosperity" as observed by Inglehart.[76] South Koreans accomplished the shift through bloodshed struggles with the dominators of modernization. Many social realist artists also suffered not only cancellations of exhibitions and confiscation of works but also arrest, torture, and imprisonment during the period.

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[73] Ibid., 4.
[74] Ibid, 43.
[75] Ibid, 4-5.
[76] Ibid, 42.

Review of Literature

Most books on modern Korean art published from the early 1990s have included chapters on social realism mostly in the name of *minjung* art. Social realist art critics and artists published numerous articles, which were later collected and republished as anthologies.[77] But there has been no academic dissertation on this topic. In 1991, art critic Choe Yŏl published a survey book on the history of social realism.[78] The first half of the book introduced leftist artists or socially oriented artists from the late nineteenth century until 1970s in Korea, illustrating relevant images published in newspapers. In the second part, the author traced formations of social realist groups and organizations in the 1980s. He emphasized the importance of the leftist artists active until the Korean War, yet without discussing Kim Yun-su's critical activities. However, the early leftist artists' influence on the rise of social realism was tenuous; only after October 1987, when the South Korean government legalized studies and publications on the leftist artists including those who defected to North Korea, did social realist artists and critics start to discuss Socialist Realism

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[77] To name a few, Kim Yun-su, Minjokui gil, Yesulŭi gil [Way of Nation, Way of Art] (Seoul: Ch'angbisa, 2001); Minjung Editorial Committee, Minjung misul [*Minjung* Art] (Seoul: Kongdongch'e, 1985); Reality and Utterance, Minjungmisulul hyanghayŏ [Toward *Minjung* Art] (Seoul: Science and Thought, 1990); Won Dong-suk, Minjokmisului nolliwa jŏnmang [National Art, Theory and Prospect] (Seoul: P'ulbit, 1985); Sung Wan-kyung,*Minjung* Art, Modernism and Visual Culture (Seoul: Yŏlhwatang, 1999); Yu Hong-jun, 80 nyundaeui hyunjang gwa jakka [Art Scenes and Artists in the Eighties] (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 1987); Yu Hong-june, Tasi hyunsilkwa jŏnt'ongui jipyungesŏ [Again on the Horizon of Reality and Tradition] (Seoul: Ch'angbisa, 1996); LeeTae-ho, Urisidae, Urimisul [Our Times, Our Art] (Seoul: Pulbit, 1991); Lim Ok-sang, Nuga arumdaun sesangul kkumkkuji anurya [Who Does Not Dream of a Beautiful World?] (Seoul: Saeng gakui namu, 2000); and Lim Ok-sang, Byŏkŏpnun misulkwan [Art Museum without a Wall] (Seoul: Saeng gakui namu, 2000).

[78] Choe Yŏl, Han'guk hyundae misul undongsa [A History of Modern Art Movements in Korea] (Seoul: Tolbegae, 1991).

developed in the North. Choe Yŏl's book provides concise information on social realist artists in a chronological order.

Some early exhibitions of South Korean social realism opened in New York. In 1987, Minor Injury Gallery in New York co-hosted with A Space Gallery in Toronto an exhibition entitled "*Minjoong* Art: New Movement of Political Art from Korea." In the catalog, art critic Lucy R. Lippard claimed: "I have to admit my surprise when I found that there were South Korean artists working on this level of socio-esthetic sophistication."[79] Lippard deemed the show as "a significant event and an important model for the movement for cultural democracy everywhere in the world."[80] She was a member of the Artworkers Coalition, which initiated institutional critique in the United States in 1969. She has demanded equal legal rights for women and artists of color, and has been a consistent supporter of *minjung* art.[81] In 1988, Artists Space, which was established during the (non-commercial) alternative space movement in Soho in the 1970s, organized the show " *Min Joong* Art: A New Cultural Movement from Korea." In her article "Countering Cultures Part II" published in the catalog,[82] Lippard characterized *minjung* art as a counter culture *from* the third world, and discussed it in relation to the discourses on third-world culture,

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[79] Lucy R. Lippard, "Countering Cultures," in Brian Gee,ed., "Minjoong Art: New Movement of Political Art from Korea," exhibition catalog (New York: Minor Injury, 1987), unpaginated.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Alan Moore, "Collectivities: Protest, Counter-Culture and Political Postmodernism in New York City Artists' Organizations, 1969-1985," (Ph. D diss., City University of New York, 2000), 4. See also Lucy R. Lippard, Get the Message?: A Decade of Art for Social Change (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1984).
[82] Lucy R. Lippard, "Countering Cultures Part II," chap. in Susan Wyatt, ed, Minjoong Art: A New Cultural Movement from Korea, exhibition catalog (New York: Artists Space, 1988), 19-24.

feminism, and the Black movement rising in the United States during the 1970s. According to Lippard:

> There may even be a way in which these artists' political commitment (combined with the appeal of the exotic, despite its negative sources) will help a New York art audience to understand the vitality and validity of a sophisticated populism in this country as well. But there will remain the usual obstacles—the liberal and conservative taboo against political statements in art; ignorance of and indifference to the Asian context.[83]

In 1993, The Queens Museum of Art opened an exhibition "Across the Pacific: Contemporary Korean and Korean American Art."[84] This exhibition presented social realism in a larger scale and a more systematic manner than the previous exhibitions. But Jane Farver, a curator of the Queens show, also argued: "Seeking to make a form of art free of Western influence, these artists appropriated the images and forms of Korean traditional and folk art forms and invested them with contemporary sociopolitical content."[85] Like other articles written by art critics from Korea, Lippard's and Farver's critiques emphasized political and military, rather than artistic and cultural, connections between the United States and South Korea.

In 1994, under the first civilian government in over thirty years, a large-scale retrospective exhibition of social realism, "Korean *Minjung* Arts: 1980-1994" opened at the National Museum of Contemporary Art, the most prestigious art museum in South Korea.[86] This retrospective showed works of 318 invited social realist artists,

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[83] Ibid, 20.
[84] Jane Farver, ed. Across the Pacific: Contemporary Korean and Korean American Art, exhibition catalog (Queens, N.Y.: The Queens Museum of Art, 1993).
[85] Jane Farver, "Introduction," in Ibid., 6.
[86] Minjung misul 15 nyŭn jŏn ch'ujinwiwŏnhoe, Korean *Minjung* Arts: 1980-1994 (Minjung misul 15 nyŭn), exhibition catalog (Seoul: The National Museum of Contemporary Art, 1994).

and its catalogue published articles written by critics and artists who have contributed greatly to social realism. But it showed neither an analytical nor a coherent interpretation of social realism.

The catalog's brief articles revealed the same problem as critical discussions of social realism in general had previously suffered. They discussed a history of social realism, focusing on artists and organizations. The articles elaborated the works of art as a body of iconography as if their values are solely determined by the degree of political militancy in the narrative content. None of them attempted a formal analysis of individual works, or questioned the odd coupling of Western forms and national themes. But "*Minjung* Art within the *Minjung* Culture Movement," written by Chŏng Ji-chang, a literary critic close to Paik Nak-chung, is a rare article proposing a substantial connection between national literature and the emergence of social realist art.[87]

In 1997, Lee Yong-woo (LeeYong-u, b.1948), the chief curator of the 1995 Kwangju Biennale, organized a solo exhibition of Lim Ok-sang, a painter of Reality and Utterance, at The Alternative Museum in New York. Eleanor Heartney, an American art critic who previously wrote several articles on contemporary Korean art, contributed an article to the accompanying catalog. Focusing on political and historical iconography in Lim's works, Heartney claimed, "At a moment when questions about the relationship between art and society are increasingly murky in the United States, Lim's body of work is striking for its range, its depth and the strength

[87] Chŏng Ji-ch'ang, "Minjung munhwa undong sogesŏūi minjung misul" [*Minjung* Art within the *Minjung* Culture Movement], chap. in Korean *Minjung* Arts, 258-265.

of its conviction. It provides a model for an art whose passion for justice is as clear as a cry against the night sky."[88] Despite Heartney's emphasis on differences between the two cultures, contemporary American art inspired South Korean social realism in various ways. For instance, the Imsullyŏn group reused Photo-Realism for their own purpose; in 1982, South Korean art magazines started to discuss the return of figuration in American art, along with other similar trends in European art[89]; in the same year, Choe Min (b.1944), an art critic of Reality and Utterance, published an article on the art and life of Ben Shahn in *Kyeganmusul*, a major art magazine in South Korea[90]; in 1985, the same art magazine reported the Hirschhorn Museum's exhibition "Content: A Contemporary Focus 1974-1984" with illustrations including political works done by Leon Golub and Barbara Kruger.[91] As a cross cultural study, this dissertation discusses historical and theoretical connections between South Korean social realism and its Western counterparts.

Chapter One entitled The Beginning of a New Paradigm: Before 1980 discusses the rise of socially critical art criticism in reaction to fractured Impressionist style combined with illusionist Academic conventions prevalent in colonial Korea and abstraction in post-war South Korea. The first section examines representations of the harmonious relationship between pre-existing national culture and modern art

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[88] Eleanor Heartney, "Strength from the Earth: the Art and Politics of Ok Sang Lim," in Ok-Sang Lim: In the Spirit of Resistance (New York: The Alternative Museum, 1997), 37-45.
[89] See Mark Stevens, "Art Imitates Life: Revival of Realism," *Newsweek* (June 7 1982), 64-70. This article was translated and published in *Kyeganmisul* no.23 (Fall 1982), 79-89.
[90] Choe Min, "Ben Shahn" *Kyeganmisul* no. 23 (Fall 1982), 63-78.
[91] Howard N. Fox, Miranda McClintic, and Phyllis Rosenzweig, Content: A Contemporary Focus 1974-1984, exhibition catalog (Washington, D.C.: Published for the Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden by the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1984). This exhibition was introduced in *Kyeganmisul* no. 34 (Summer 1985), 190-205.

modified in Korea. The second part of this chapter shows ways in which Kim Yun-su, the most influential art critic among social realist artists in post-war South Korea, emphasized contradictions between national and foreign cultures. Focusing on Reality Group (Hyŏnsil tongin, 1969)'s Manifesto and Kim Yun-su's critical texts published during the 1970s, this section analyzes the art critic's idea of new realism and national (*minjok*) art situated in Korean history and society. Kim Yun-su formulated social realism that could tightly combine visual forms and narrative contents, synthesizing Georg Lukàcs's theory of artistic reflection of reality, Arnold Hauser's view of montage technique and simultaneity, Bertolt Brecht's theory of the alienation effect, and the realistic tradition in Korean art.

Chapter Two, The Rise of Social Realism: Art/Historical Sources, focuses on the foundation of the first social realist group Reality and Utterance in Seoul in 1979 and its artistic and historical contexts. The members of Reality and Utterance explored ways to create art as a vehicle of narrative messages, as opposed to the auto-referentiality of Modernist art. In this regard, they studied Mexican mural paintings and Korean folk painting (*minhwa*). After the Kwangju People's Uprising, the members of Reality and Utterance discussed ways in which they could represent current historical agenda and embody the idea of *minjung* (ordinary people) as historical subjectivity.

Chapter Three, The Rise of Social Realism: Artists, interprets the works on view at the annual exhibitions of Reality and Utterance from 1980 on. This chapter also includes Shin Hak-chul (Sin Hak-ch'ŏl, b. 1943), a prominent *minjung* artist who

was not a member of Reality and Utterance. Examining their critical writings and verbal statements as well as visual representations, this chapter discusses ways in which social realist artists rejected both Modernist art and consumer culture. Exploring various styles and mediums, these social realist artists represented the idea of the *minjung* (ordinary people) as the masters of history in relation to the Kwangju People's Uprising and to displaced peasantry in the context of modernization.

Chapter Four, Against Socialist Realism: Realism in France before World War II, American Social Realism, and the French New Figuration, reveals ways in which South Korean social realism emphasized the creative uses of figuration for the works of art representing social, political, and historical subject matter in the context of international arts, and thereby rejected Socialist Realism. South Korean social realists supported the eclectic styles of realism using semi-abstraction practiced by André Fougeron before World War II and Fernand Léger in France, the American Social Realist Ben Shahn's compassionate expression of social reality, and Alain Jouffroy's view of the French New Figuration as contemporary history painting.

The fifth chapter, Nationalism and the Receptions of Photo-Realism, discusses ways South Korean artists received and modified Photo-Realism originating in the United States. In South Korea, Photo-Realism diverged into an apolitical *tromp l'oeil* realism and a branch of social realism. This divergence again had to do with different attitudes toward nationalism. A group of young painters, emphasizing the overall flat structure, represented select objects and natural scenes isolated from social reality. For instance, Kim Chang-yong's Photo-Realistic paintings of footprints suggested an

idealistic notion of Korean national identity based on pan-naturalism and its implicit harmonious relationship with Western culture. On the other hand, the second social realist group Imsullyŏn (1982-1987) used the metonymic mode of representation in Photo-Realism, the associations of elements through contiguity,[92] in order to reveal concrete social reality under the trajectory of modernization, and represented *minjung*-oriented nationalism. For instance, Lee Jong-gu's detailed representation of the rural life in his hometown implied the displaced peasantry as a whole in post-war South Korea.

Conclusion, Social Realism and the Democratization Movement and its Aftermath, briefly traces the foundation of the National Art Association, its activities in the context of the nation wide democratization movement and its aftermath. In 1994, the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Seoul organized the retrospective "Korean *Minjung* Arts: 1980-1994." The next year saw the Kwangju Biennale founded in commemoration of the Kwangju People's Uprising. Asia's first international art festival became new battlefield between social realism and multiculturalism at this time. The conclusion also discusses some realist artists' projects concerning the dispatch of South Korean troops in the Iraqi War.

[92] Linda Nochlin, "The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law," *Art in America* (September/October 1973): 54-61.

Chapter 1

The Beginning of a New Paradigm: Before 1980

The first section of this chapter discusses modern art emerging in colonial Korea and abstract art in post-colonial Korea, focusing on their representations of the harmonious relationship between pre-existing national culture and Western-style modern art. Modified in Korea, Impressionism combined with the style of Academic realism, and abstraction such as *Informel* art represented the illusion of harmony between two cultures. This section reveals that these styles contained an insidious ideological nature in relation to colonialism and modernization. The second part of this chapter shows ways socially critical art criticism, emerging in 1969, discussed contradictions between national and foreign cultures in South Korea. Focusing on Kim Yun-su, who has been the most influential art critic of social realist artists, this section analyzes his formulation of the new realism and national (*minjok*) art. Synthesizing Georg Lukàcs's theory of artistic reflection of reality, Arnold Hauser's view of montage technique and simultaneity, Bertolt Brecht's theory of the alienation effect, and the realistic tradition in Korean art, Kim Yun-su formulated the basis of a new realism. He sought social realism that could tightly combine visual forms and narrative contents in his criticism published during the 1970s.

Modern Art, Colonialism, and the Idealization of National Culture

In 1909, when Ko Hui-tong (Ko Hŭi-dong, 1889-1965), a former court official, entered the Tokyo Academy of Art (Tokyo Bijutsu Gakko) to study Western-style painting, the history of modern Korean art began.[1] The government-operated Tokyo Academy of Art laid foundations for Western-style painting in Japan. After Japan colonized Korea in 1910, the Japanese government encouraged Korean artists to study at the Tokyo Academy of Art by granting them special admission and scholarships. During the thirty-five years of Japanese colonial rule, no art school was established in Korea. When Ko Hui-tong graduated from the Academy in 1915, Korean newspapers welcomed him as "a pioneer of Western-style painting in Korea."[2] Before the end of the decade, a group of other Korean students including Kim Kwan-ho (1890-?), Yi Jong-u (1899-1981), and the first woman-painter among them, Na Hye-sŏk (1896-1946), followed Ko Hui-tong's path. The Korean graduates from the Tokyo Academy of Art became leading artists in Korea.[3]

Bound up with colonial cultural policy, modern Korean art in the formative years imitated so-called Japanized Western art, a mixture of European Academic art and Impressionism. Ko Hui-tong's Chahwasang [Self-Portrait] (1915, fig. 1) and Kim Kwan-ho's Haejilnyŏck [Sunset] (1916, fig. 2), two of few remaining paintings from the period, embodied a mode of modern art in Korea. Ko Hui-tong's self-

[1] Youngna Kim, "Modern Korean Painting and Sculpture," in John Clark, ed., Modernity in Asian Art, (Sydney: Wild Peony, 1993), 155.
[2] "Sŏyanghwagaŭi hyosi" [The First Western-Style Painter] *Maeilsinbo*, 11 March 1915.
[3] Sixty-nine Korean students graduated from the Departments of Western-Style Painting and Sculpture at the Tokyo Academy of Art until Korea's liberation from Japan in 1945.

portrait shows generic Impressionistic facture: broken contours, simplified forms, loose brushstrokes, skirmishes of colors coarsely mixed on canvas, and a flat pictorial space overall close to the picture plane. Yet the modeling of the head, the area of the nose in particular, reflects the painter's familiarity with Academic drawing.[4] Kim Kwan-ho's Sunset (fig. 2) shows a fuller version of Japanized Academic painting. The painting depicts a timeless narrative in European tradition. Kim Kwan-ho fully modeled the two bathers, contoured them in wiry lines, and posed them in contrapposto with artificial gestures. The viewer's gaze, once eroticized by the bathers' bodies, slowly recedes along the oblique shorelines to a point in the distance suggested through the hazy atmosphere rendered in chiaroscuro. The painting shows repetitive and lateral spacing of the two bathers. Without a visual or conceptual hint of the bathers' frontal images, the painting oddly conveys a sense of optical immediacy. In the foreground, the pointed strokes of bright greens barely staying within the drawn shapes of grass highlight the painting's overall soft-hued texture.

The loosely combined Impressionistic techniques and Academic art in both paintings demonstrated the Japanese preference at this time. Japanese artists, who taught Ko Hui-tong and Kim Kwan-ho, had learned Impressionism and Academic art

[4] According to art historian James Harding, European practices of Academic art include: "the Albertian articulation of the laws of composition and action, principles of design and the appropriate deployment of bodies in space, derived as they were from Aristotle's writings about unities; the identification of art as a liberal profession through its association with the mastery of perspective, geometry and color relations; the regular use of the nude model in teaching, composing and copying, as well as écorché anatomical statues, based on a conceptions of the human body as the summit of natural unity and variety." James Harding, Artists Pompiers: French Academic Art in the 19th Century (New York: Rizzoli, 1979), 8.

in Paris.[5] Seiki Kuroda (1866-1924), the first professor of Western-style painting at the Tokyo Academy of Art, had studied under the French Academic painter Raphael Collin (1850-1917). Collin represented conventional Academic themes in natural settings filled with bright light. In comparison, Kuroda's painting depicts more contemporary subject matter with rougher brushstrokes. Kuroda combined Impressionist brushwork with illusionist Academic conventions that French Impressionist painters had avidly rejected in favor of flattened forms and composition. In Japan, Kuroda's painting became popular as the first Western-style art to express a Japanese sensitivity.[6] Influenced by Kuroda's eclectic style, Kim Kwan-ho's Sunset won the grand prize at the graduate exhibition of the Tokyo Academy of Art in 1916, and later in the same year, won a special prize at the Ministry of Education-sponsored Exhibition (*Bunten*, 1907-1919) in Japan. A copy of the French Salon, *Bunten* was the most important competition for young artists. The winners were guaranteed successful careers in the Japanese art world.[7]

With the sensual representation of the bathers, Kim Kwan-ho's painting challenged the conservative Korean society constricted for centuries by Confucianism. Despite the immediate report of Kim Kwan-ho's award in Japan, the *Maeilsinbo*, the colonial government's official newspaper, did not reproduce Sunset

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[5] Yi Gu-yŏl, Gŭndae han'gukmisulsaŭi yŏn'gu [A Study of the History of Modern Korean Art] (Seoul: Mijinsa, 1992), 97.
[6] Michiaki Kawaita, "Western Influence of Japanese Painting and Sculpture," 91, in Dialogue in Art: Japan and the West ed. Chisaburo F. Yamada (Tokyo: Kodansa, 1976), 71-112; Yamanashi Eiko, "Kuroda Seiki and Yang-hwa Education at the Tokyo Art Institute," *Modern Asian Art* (June 1995), 74-89.
[7] Yun Pum-mo, Han'guk hyŭndae misul 100 nyŭn [A Century of Modern Korean Art] ((Seoul: Hyŭnamsa, 1984), 32.

"because it is a picture of naked women."[8] But the newspaper's decision aroused no public reaction, which suggested a widespread indifference to Western art or a conservative consensus regarding nudity as a subject of art.[9] On the other hand, Yi Kwang-su, the novelist who would publish Korea's first modern novel in the same newspaper the next year, acclaimed that Kim Kwan-ho"demonstrated the artistic genius of the Korean people in the world."[10] His equation of Japan with "the world" revealed a colonized worldview. Yi Kwang-su accepted Japanese colonialism as a way to modernize Korea. Specifically, the colonial governor Saito Makoto supported Yi Kwang-su's ideas for renewal of Korean nation and national culture.[11] In this context, Kim Kwan-ho's painting, as well as Ko Hui-tong's, suggested Korean intellectuals' naive visions of the West or utopian hope for modernization.

In Ko Hui-tong'sSel f-Portrait (fig. 1), the painter's look with mustache and short hair represented a kind of new man in favor of modern culture. For centuries, Korean men kept their hair or beards in accordance with the Confucian principle of the filial piety. They wore their hair tied in a knot at the top of head (*sangt'u*), and put a hat on it. In 1895, Kojong, the last emperor of the Korean dynasty, declared a law to cut *sangt'u*but it only brought about a nationwide opposition to modernization. After Korea was annexed to Japan, Confucian intellectuals consisted of the majority of the

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[8] Yun Pum-mo, Han'guk gŭndae misulŭi hyŭngsŏng [Formation of Modern Korean Art] (Seoul: Mijinsa, 1988), 148.

[9] But in 1923, when Kim Kwan-ho exhibited another painting of a bather, Hosu [Lake], the colonial government again banned its reproduction in the newspaper. In Japan, nudity in works of art had been legally allowed since 1894. Seiki Kuroda's painting contributed to this change in modern Japanese art. Yun Pum-mo, Formation of Modern Korean Art, 148.

[10] Yi Kwang-su, "Munbusŏng misulch'ŏllamhoigi" [Review of the Ministry of Education-Sponsored Exhibition] *Maeilsinbo*, 28-31 October 1916.

[11] Park Chan-sung, Hankuk kŭndae jŏngch'i sasangsa yun'gu [A Study of the History of Political Thoughts in Modern Korea] (Seoul: Yŭksapi'pyŭngsa, 1992), 291.

resistance movement for independence. But pro-Western intellectuals, like Ko Hui-tong, voluntarily changed their hairdo. These intellectuals considered modernization as a historical necessity, and passively tolerated the Japanese colonial rules. Later on, Ko Hui-tong revealed his motivation to be an artist:

> In our country colonized by Japan, nothing was possible. As a Korean, I could accomplish nothing. In my occupied country, frustrated and sad, I decided to be a painter as if I wanted to abandon my life. I was soaked in drink everyday. At first I learned Korean painting. But Korean painting was a mere copy of Chinese painting. I chose to study Western-style painting and left for Japan alone.[12]

A member of a formerly prominent family, Ko Hui-tong chose to be an artist as an escape from colonial life.[13]

Unlike modern art emerging in Europe, modern art in Korea had nothing to do with heroism about modern life.[14] Most intellectuals gaining access to Western knowledge belonged to the upper classes of the last dynasty in Korea. But these intellectuals could not have influential positions in the colonial society, which Japanese officials and Korean collaborators took over. Nonetheless, the former upper class families remained relatively untroubled by Japanese authorities, unless they participated in the independence movement. Moreover, Ko Hui-tong's statement that "Korean painting was a mere copy of Chinese painting" specifically indicated a

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[12] Ko Hui-tong , "Na wa sŏhwa hyŭphoi" [The Painting and the Calligraphy Association and I] *Sinchŏnji* (February 1954), 181-182.
[13] Yun Pum-mo, A Century of Modern Korean Art, 21.
[14] See Charles Baudelaire, "On the Heroism of Modern Life," in Art in Paris, 1845-1862, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Publishers, 1965), 116-119.

systematic distortion of Korean culture conducted by the Japanese colonial government.[15]

Ko Hui-tong's Self -Portrait (fig. 1) and Kim Kwan-ho's Sunset (fig. 2) also suggested a representation of national culture vis-à-vis a view of modernization in Korea under Japanese colonialism. Although the bathers in Sunset essentially were a copy of Western counterparts, the natural surrounding is the Taedong River at Pyungyang, now the capital city of North Korea.[16] Ko Hui-tong's self-portrait depicts the painter himself wearing a Korean outfit and holding a Korean fan. As the two painters depicted Korean motifs in Western-style painting, contemporary art criticism also began to discuss the proper relationship between "immigrated art" (meaning Western art) and traditional Korean art.[17] Art criticism of the time, mostly written by artists themselves, attempted to forge a new concept of art that could overcome both Western art and tradition. The central issue was the expression of national identity, yet it was discussed from two opposing perspectives of aestheticism and leftist ideology.

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[15] Art historian Ahn Hwi-joon (An Hwi-jun) claimed that Korean painting was a major victim of Japanese colonial cultural policy. According to him, Korean painting distinguishes itself from Chinese painting in many aspects. Ahn Hwi-joon, History of Korean Painting (Seoul: Ilchisa, 1980), 1-11, and see also Ahn hwi-joon, "Korean Landscape Painting in the Early Yi Period: The Kuo His Tradition," (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1974); For example, Japanese art historians such as Yanagi Muneyoshi and Tadashi Sekino characterized Korean culture, emphasizing its negative aspects. Even Choe Nam-sŏn, a respected poet and supporter of modernization, justified colonial views, saying that Confucian culture had disturbed the progression of art in Korea. Choe Yŏl, Hanguk kŭndae misul pi'pyŭngsa [A History of Criticism on Modern Korean Art] (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 2001), 37.

[16] Yun Pum-mo, Formation of Modern Korean Art, 147.

[17] Kim Bok-chin, "Chosŏn yŏksa gŭdaeroŭi banyŏng'in chosŏnmisulŭi yun'gwak" [An Outline of Korean Art As a Reflection of Korean History] *Kaebyŏk* (January 1926), 24.

Artists championing aestheticism or the idea of 'art for art's sake' wanted to embody Korean national identity (*chosŏnsŏng*) by idealizing regional characteristics or colors (*hyangt'osaek*).[18] The painter Na Hye-sŏk claimed:

> Having used Western palettes, brushes, and canvases, we have choices of Western styles and tools. At the same time, we must find expressions proper to Korea, expressions of individuality associated with the nation or regions, which are different from those of the West.[19]

The anonymity of the bathers in Kim Kwan-ho's Sunset (fig. 2) colludes with the timelessness of an idealized regional landscape. But a Korean fan held by the painter in Ko Hui-tong's Self-Portrait (fig. 1) becomes an object of cultural recollection, which seems to reduce the notion of nation to a collective cultural souvenir. This sort of object referring to cultural legacy has frequently appeared in modern Korean art.

In fact, the jurors of the annual Korean Art Exhibition (*Sŏnjŏn*), most of whom were Japanese artists, publicly announced the importance of regionalism in contemporary Korean art. In 1922, the colonial government founded *Sŏnjŏn* as a counterpart to Japan's Imperial Exhibition (*Teiten*). *Sŏnjŏn* lasted until 1944, a year before the liberation of Korea from Japan at the end of World War II. Among others, Somei Yuki, in 1927, and Itaro Tanabe, in 1928, said that they expected more of "regional colors" representing a regional peculiarity of Korea from submitted works in *Sŏnjŏn*.[20]

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[18] Kim Ch'an-young, Kim Hwan, Kim Ŏk, Im Chang-hwa, Yu P'il-young and Chang To-bin also published art criticism based on aestheticism.

[19] Na Hye-suk, "Ilnyŏn mane bon kyungsŏngŭi japkam" [Crowded Emotions on Seoul After a Year] *Kaebyŏk* (July 1927), 27.

[20] Somei Yuki, "Maeu ch'ungsil hao" [It's Very Sincere] *Maeilsinbo*, 21 May 1927; Itaro Tanabe, "T'aedo bulpunmyŏnggwa yŏlpujok" [Uncertain Attitudes and Lack of Passion] *Maeilsinbo*, 6 May 1928.

In the early 1930s, *Sŏnjŏn*'s panel of jurors announced the representation of regional characteristics as an important criterion of evaluation.[21] Kaŭlŭi ŏnŭnal [A Day in Autumn] (1934, fig. 3) painted by Lee In-sung (Lee In-sŏng, 1912-1950) was a canonical example. It won a special prize at *Sŏnjŏn* in 1934. Winning special prizes for six consecutive years, Lee In-sung became one of the most successful painters in the history of modern Korean art. His paintings also won prizes in *Teiten*For instance, A Day in Autumn (fig. 3) shows a skillful description of figures and individual motifs. Yet the figures are awkwardly spaced against the rural background in a typical pose. The half-naked woman looks like a hybrid of a Gauguinesque primitive woman, with her heavy physicality depicted in localized colors and simplified shading, and a classical nymph holding a European-style fruit basket in an elegant pose. Despite the overall exotic ambience, Yi Kyŏng-sŏng and other art critics and historians championing formalism thought that the painting represented a proper Korean theme.[22] According to them, the painting shows the red Korean land which the Japanese also identified as a Korean element.[23] Representing apolitical themes associated with Korea in the style of modern Japanese art, Lee In-sung's painting ultimately conformed to a guideline laid out by colonial cultural policy for Korean artists. Later in 1938, Kengetsu Yazawa, a Japanese juror, specifically demanded

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[21] "Kak simsawŏnŭi sogam" [Each Juror's View] *Maeilsinbo*, 20 May 1931; Shintaro Hiroshima, "Chosŏnsaegeda churyŏkhara [Concentrate on Korean Colors] and Kanae Yamamoto, "Hyangtosaek sŏnmyŏnghan kŏsŭl" [Clear Expressions of Regional Characteristics] *Maeilsinbo*, 16 May 1934.
[22] Yi Kyŏng-sŏng, "Kŭndaejŏk Kamgakjuŭi [Modern Sensualism], in Han'guk hyundae misul chŏnjip [Complete Works of Modern Korean Art] vol. 15 (Seoul: Han'guk ilbo sa, 1978), 88.
[23] Young-na Kim, "Artistic Trends in Korean Painting during the 1930s," in War, Occupation, and Creativity Japan and East Asia 1920-1960, eds. Marlene J. Mayo and Thomas Rimer (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 131.

works that "absorbed and digested superior techniques of the artists in the central art world" (meaning Japan) as well as represented colors, techniques, and conventions "proper to the peninsular" (meaning Korea).[24]

The Japanese jurors' promotion of regionalism in Korean art reflected colonial policy, in which the colonized was given a status of the marginal in relation to the colonizer as the center. According to Chungmoo Choi, a US-based Korean scholar who organized an international conference accompanying the second Kwangju Biennale "Unmapping the Earth" in 1995, Japanese imperialism copied "a pastiche of the European Enlightenment" in an attempt to justify its colonization of Korea.[25] The discourse of Enlightenment in Europe authorized a scientific construct establishing racial hierarchy and the self/other binary opposition with non-Europeans as the inferior other. This opposition made it possible for colonizers to "shed the humanity that they inscribed on themselves and over which they had claimed a preemptive monopoly."[26] Japan aligned itself with the Western superpowers, and projected itself onto Korea as a purveyor of modernization in Asia.[27] Through a pastiche of Western colonialism, Choi argued, Japanese imperialism launched and justified its colonial project to capitalize Korea in the name of the Enlightenment or modernization. Imperial Japan assimilated Korea "under the banner of the 'one-bodiment of

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[24] Yazawa Kengetsu, "Chosŏn hwagaŭi chŏngjine kyŏnt'an" [Admiring Korean Painters' Progress] *Dongailbo*, 31 May 1938.
[25] Chungmoo Choi, "Decolonization and Popular Memory: South Korea," *Positions* 1: 1 (Spring 1993), 77-102.
[26] Ibid., 84.
[27] No Tae-don, No Myŏng ho, Han Yong-u, Kwon Tae-ok, and Sŏ Chŏng suk, Siminŭl wihan han'guk yŏksa [Korean History for Citizens] (Seoul: Ch'angbisa, 1997), 359-360.

[civilized] inner land [that is, Japan] and [the uncivilized, hinterland] Korea."[28]

According to Choi:

> Korea was embodied as a part of Japan's national body only to extract human and natural resources from the former so that it could satisfy the needs of metropolitan Japan as a capitalistic body—but never be nurtured with the fruits harvested through the body's accumulation of capital. Colonized Korea became the organs without a body, and Japan the body without organs. Thus the colony as organs was dismembered from the body, under the schizophrenic reality of colonialism, the capitalistic machine operating in a dismembered yet interconnected relationship. The grotesqueness of this type of interconnectedness is characteristic of imperialism: power flows only in one direction in a vain attempt to satisfy the insatiable desire of capitalism.[29]

Idealized representations of the regional or national characteristics of colonized Korea in Japanized Western-style art engendered the illusion of "one-bodiment" between Korea and Japan, concealing Korea's subjugation to imperial Japan's capitalist expansionism. Put differently, by equating Japanese colonialism with a utopian vision of modernization, modern Korean art intoxicated colonial viewers. In the de-historicized space of modern art, Korean national identity idealized through cultural legacy or regional characteristics seamlessly linked itself to a modernized future symbolized by the West or Western art. In this way, colonial reality was completely absent from modern Korean art. The idealized Korean national identity disguised the one-directional flow of power from the colonizer to the colonized, and essentially paralleled the colonial government's cultural policy.

However, leftist artists and critics knew of the limitation of regionalism as an expression of nation. Among them, the sculptor Kim Bok-chin (1901-1940) actively

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[28] Choi, 85.
[29] Ibid.

published art criticism and reviews of exhibitions. In 1925 he became a founding member of KAPF (In Esperanto, Korea Artista Proleta Federatio), the first leftist organization for writers and artists in Korea. Because of his activities related to KAPF, he was imprisoned for over five years under Japanese rule. In an article published in 1926, he discussed the concept of art from the leftist standpoint:

> Art belongs to the superstucture of the society. So when the social infrastructure--economic system, politics--has changed, art itself must undergo self-disintegration, self-drowning.[30]

Thus, for Kim Bok-chin, traditional art was not an alternative to "immigrated art." Kim Bok-chin argued:

> Regional characteristics, upon which Korean art has depended most in fighting against immigrated art, are now changing because capitalism and immigrated taste have been destroying regional borders. In this way the single and only weapon of Korean art is getting eaten up day by day.[31]

From this critical perspective, Kim Bok-chin reviewed one of Ko Hui-tong's landscapes on display at an annual exhibition of The Painting and Calligraphy Association (*Sŏhwahyŏphoe*), of which Ko Hui-tong himself was a founding member, as "an unhappy marriage between painterly styles of Impressionism and calligraphic brushstrokes of literati painting (muninhwa)."[32] He also cynically viewed No Su-hyŏn's painting, Il-wan [Free Day] on view at the same exhibition, as a work of "a harmony between Korea and the West, which represents a Western child (body, face, and skin color) in Korean woman's clothing."[33]

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[30] Kim Bok-chin, "An Outline of Korean Art As a Reflection of Korean History ," Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Kim Bok-chin, "Hyŏpchŏn 5 hoep'yŏng" [Review of the Fith Exhibition of the Painting and Calligraphy Association] *Chosunilbo*. 30 March 1925.
[33] Kim Bok-chin, "Mijŏnŭl bogonasŏ" [After Seeing an Exhibition] *Chosunilbo*, 4-5 January 1927.

Despite his extensive theoretical exploration, however, Kim Bok-chin's sculptural works never embodied the Marxist ideology. He entered the Tokyo Academy of Art and studied Western-style sculpture. In 1925, he became the first Korean sculptor to win a prize at the Japanese Imperial Art Exhibition. One of the photographs shows his famous wooden sculpture Paekhwa (1938, fig. 4).[34] It won a prize in the 1938 *Bunten*, the Ministry of Education-sponsored Exhibition in Japan. Kim Bok-chin represented the protagonist of a play adapted from a Korean novel in the same title written by Park Hwa-sŏng (1904-1980). In the novel whose historical setting belongs to a feudal Korean dynasty, Koryo, Paekhwa is a typical anti-colonial heroine. The actress who assumed the role as Paekhwa in the play was the actual model for the sculpture.

The figure's upright standing pose and symmetrical composition in the sculpture create a sense of severity. The soaring verticality provides the subject with monumentality, although the sculpture's actual size is not known. Sustaining the sculpture's verticality crossed once by the horizontal placement of the arms, the imaginary central line leads downward from the coronet, through the nose, to the hands put together, and to the skirt's pleated lines. The multiple vertical movements recall the flutings on the columns of classical Greek temples. The sculpture's geometric structure certainly recalls Archaic *kore* figures or Early classical sculptures.[35] But in Kim's sculpture, the skirt's pleats are individually detailed in a

[34] Except a Buddhist sculpture Kim Bok-chin was commissioned to design for the Kumsan Temple, only photographs of his sculptures have remained until today.
[35] See, for instance, Aegina, Temple of Aphaia, west pediment, Athena, marble, c. 490 B.C.

more naturalistic manner. The pleats' short and irregular waves tend to dematerialize the sculptural corporeality. At the same time, they substantiate the subtle movement caused by the body underneath, conceptually parallel with the individualized facial features.

The iconography of the sculpture refers to no specific social class. Rather, the figure seems close to a fictive image of a goddess wearing a coronet decorated with flowers and appearing in Korean fairy tales or legends. Without imposing a leftist perspective, the sculptor combined the figure's individual physiognomy with timeless iconography, archaic severity with naturalistic details, and a meditative pose with a monumental composition. Within a neutral arena deprived of historicity and social reality, Kim Bok-chin offered a model that could embrace both regional characteristics and idealistic national identity, not unlike the formalist artists. Along with Kim Bok-chin, the painters Kim Yong-jun (1904-1970), Im Hwa (1908-1953), Yun Hi-sun (1902-1947), and Park Mun-wŏn (1920-1974) practiced art criticism from the standpoint of leftist ideology, yet none of their remaining paintings represent socially critical content.

During the period between the liberation from Japan in 1945 and the Korean War (1950-1953), the division in the art world intensified. After the anti-Communist government, supported by the United States, was established in South Korea, conservative Korean artists came to dominate the art world. In 1949, *Kukchŏn* (national art exhibition) was founded in place of *Sŏnjŏn,* yet with no substantial

change. The painters Ko Hŭi-tong and Lee In-sung joined the first *Kukchŏn*'s jury.[36] Most of the jurors had been previously awarded prizes in *Sŏnjŏn*. These Korean jurors continued to select Academic realist or Impressionist works with apolitical subject matter. Before the end of the Korean War, meanwhile, most of the leftist artists or critics defected to the North.[37] Their activities in the North were unknown in the South for four decades. Any public discussion or publication concerning leftist artists or Socialist Realism was illegal in the South until 1987.

Abstract Art and "Official Nationalism"

After the end of the Korean War, the most significant stage of modernization took place in South Korea. In 1957, the formation of the Hyundai Misulga Hyŏphoe (Modern Artists Association) signaled the emergence of a new generation in the art world of the South. In 1958, Park Seo-bo (Pak Sŏ-bo, b.1931), one of the Hyundae artists, produced No. 1 (fig. 5), and showed the painting in the Association's third exhibition. It is the first abstract painting demonstrating drip techniques in the manner of Abstract Expressionism/*Art Informel* in South Korea. South Korean art critics regarded the painting's rough texture and traces of the artist's bodily movement as the crucial elements of Abstract Expressionism/*Art Informel*, and they immediately called

[36] Other members included Yi Jong-u, Chang Bal, and To Sang-pong.
[37] The Western-style artists who defected to North Korea include painters Kim Yong-jun, Pae Un-sŏng, Kim Ju-gyŭng, Kim Jin-sŏp, Im Gun-hong, Yi Koae-dae, and sculptors Cho Gyu-bong, Kim Jŏng-su, and art historian Park Mun-wŏn.

it *Informel*.[38] For them, Korean *Informel* expressed despair and anguish related to the Korean War in a similar way its European counterpart was associated with the historical tragedy of World War II.

In Europe, *Art Informel* emerged in 1945 and explored gestural abstraction as opposed to French geometric abstraction and the lyricism of the later School of Paris. The series Hostage painted by Jean Fautrier has been considered a quintessential work of European *Informel*.[39] In Fautrier's Head of a Hostage, no. 1 (1943, fig. 6), the heavy blobs of pigment are spontaneously colored and drawn to form a disfigured face. Motivated by the news of the execution of French partisans by the Germans, Fautrier represented a combination of the current history and his existentialist interest in the theme of death.[40] Unlike Fautrier's Hostage, Park Seo-bo's No. 1 shows no attempt to fuse materiality and imagery in a tragic mood.

Despite the differences between European and Korean *Informel* arts, Hyundai artists came to dominate the South Korean art scene. From the early 1960s, along with Academic realists and Impressionist artists, the Hyundae artists won prizes in *Kukchŏn*, and some of them became jurors. They also started to participate in international art shows including the Paris, Venice, and São Paolo biennials. At the same time, art critics discussed the issue of national identity in relation to Korean

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[38] See Yi Il, 60nyŏndaeŭi han'gukŭi aengp'orŭmel misul [Korean *Informel* Art in the 1960s], chap. in Hyŏndaemisul ŭi sigak [A View of Contemporary Art] (Seoul: Mijinsa, 1985), 334-9.

[39] Art historians have regarded October 1945, when Jean Fautrier's Hostage was exhibited at the Gallery of Renê Drouin in Paris, as the date for the official advent of *Art Informel* in Europe. But Fautrier started the series of Hostage in 1943 or at the end of 1942. See Renato Barilli, Jean Fautrier e *l'Informale in Europa* (Milano: Mazzotta, 2002) and Jean Fautrier, 1898-1964, eds. Curtis L. Carter and Karen K. Butler (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002).

[40] Barilli, 62.

Informel. Among them, Yi Il (1932-1997), having studied modern art in Paris, was the foremost champion of abstract art in postwar South Korea. In his "Introduction to the Submitted Works to the Third Paris Biennale (1963)," Yi related the symmetrically balanced composition of Park Seo-bo's painting to an Asian spiritual tradition, and the rhythmical painterly lines of Yun Myung-ro (Yun Myŏng no, b.1936)'s painting to a flowing movement of Korean dance.[41] In another introduction to the fourth Paris Biennale, Yi Il emphasized the influence of Asian calligraphy on European or American contemporary art, and called for young Korean artists to assimilate their tradition with new international trends.[42] Since then, Yi Il had consistently theorized connections between Korean traditional culture and contemporary international art such as monochrome painting or Minimal art.

Moreover, Korean *Informel* art again reflected a utopian vision of modernization embedded in the postwar intellectual discourse. In her dissertation "Representation, Modernism, and Post-colonialism: Korean *Informel* and the Reception of the West," Whuiyeon Jin argued that *Informel* painting in Korea could be specifically regarded "as the sign denoting the cultural involvement of Korea with the United States" since the Korean War.[43] In the close political, economic, and military relationship between the two countries, American culture was highly

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[41] Yi Il, "Che3hoe p'ari biennale ch'ulp'um sŏmun" [Introduction to the Submitted Works to the Third Paris Biennale (1963)], in chap. Yiil misulbip'yŏngilji [Art Critic Yi Il's Diary] (Seoul: Mijinsa, 1998), 256-257.

[42] Yi Il, "Che4hoe p'ari biennale ch'ulp'um sŏmun" [Introduction to the Submitted Works to the Fourth Paris Biennale (1965)], chap. in Art Critic Yi Il's Diary, 258-259.

[43] Whuiyeon Jin, "Presentation, Modernism, and Post-Colonialism: Korean *Informel* and the Reception of the West," (Ph.D. diss. Columbia University, 1997), i. See also Moojeong Chung, "Abstract Expressionism, *Art Informel*, and Modern Korean Art, 1945-1965," (Ph.D. diss. City University of New York, 2000). Based on his extensive archival researches, Chung emphasized the importance of the United States's cultural politics in the reception of abstraction in South Korea.

promoted, and Korean *Informel* functioned "as a compliment to a generally American, but increasingly Western, mythology."[44] According to Jin, Korean *Informel* was "the most successful example of internalizing the Western avant-garde art incorporating the indigenous dialogue of Korea."[45] For example, she identified "a simpler composition with calligraphic lines" or "using ink of various tones with abstract surface structure and contrast between positive and negative space" with "traditional Asian visual features with Korean sensibility." Primarily based on these formal descriptions, she claimed that *Informel* artists expressed new Korean identity through foreign art.

However, Jin overlooked that there are fundamental aesthetic differences between abstraction and Asian art. This is also true of Yi Il's art criticism and other numerous interdisciplinary discussions of art between East and West. Some writers discussed certain stylistic similarities between Asian art (such as Chinese, Korean, and Japanese art) and abstract art (such as Abstract Expressionism and *Art Informel*).[46] In the United States in 1997, Jeffrey Wechsler organized the exhibition "Asian Traditions, Modern Expressions: Asian-American Artists and Abstraction," which explored East-West cultural encounters between 1945 and 1970.[47] In a panel

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[44] Ibid., 84.
[45] Ibid., ii.
[46] For example, Helen Westgeest, Zen in the Fifties: Interaction in Art between East and West (1997), Gail Gelburd, The Transparent Thread: Asian Philosophy in Recent American Art (Hempstead, NY: Hofstra University, 1990), and Yi Il, Hyŏndae misulŭi sigak [A View of Contemporary Art] (Seoul: Mijinsa, 1985).
[47] Jeffrey Wechsler, ed. Asian Traditions, Modern Expressions: Asian-American Artists and Abstraction, 1945-1970 (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997).

discussion accompanying the exhibition, Wen C. Fong, an eminent Chinese art historian, argued:

> Eastern art is based on conventions, whether it is dance or calligraphy…. I would have difficulty using this word "abstraction" with traditional Chinese art.[48]

Elsewhere, another scholar on Chinese art John Hay explained the incompatibility of abstraction in an Asian context.[49] According to Hay, great Chinese painters were "acute perceivers of transformation between the micro/macrocosmic polarity."[50] But these transformational creations are not abstractions, "for they come closer to life rather than farther away."[51] In the West, on the other hand, the symbolist Dutch painter Piet Mondrian created abstract paintings based on "duality," rather than polarity, between the concrete external world and the internal human mind. Mondrian claimed:

> Art will become the product of another duality in man: the product of a cultivated externality and of an inwardness deepened and more conscious. As a pure representation of the human mind, art will express itself in an aesthetically purified, that is to say, abstract form.[52]

In Chinese art, however, metaphysical contents are represented through concrete images. Despite radical exaggerations or simplifications of form usually found in Zen painting, identifiable imagery is never completely removed from Asian visual arts. In this regard, abstract art is rootless in Asian/Korean culture. Therefore, Jin's argument

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[48] Ibid., 55.
[49] John Hay, "The Human Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Values in Calligraphy," in Theories of the Arts in China, eds., Susan Bush and Christian Murck (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 74-104.
[50] Ibid., 96.
[51] Ibid., 97.
[52] Quoted in Michel Seuphor, Piet Mondrian, Life and Work (New York: Abrams, 1957), 142.

that *Informel* artists expressed traditional Korean identity through foreign art is by no means convincing.[53]

Nevertheless, the theoretical explorations to harmonize Korean and Western arts essentially echoed formalist art critiques that prevailed in colonial Korea. While the same formalist artists continued to lead the art world in post-colonial Korea, "the political elite of the former Japanese colony," according to historian Choi, also "mimicked the same techniques of terror that the colonizers had used to subjugate Korea."[54] The former collaborators under the Japanese rule reproduced colonial policy in the form of an authoritarianism in post-colonial Korea under the patronage of the United States. In the Koreans' mind, Japan has also remained as an Asian model of modernization to follow and overcome.[55] Modernization nurtured the illusion of prosperity in Korea, and it was, according to Choi, "what blinded South Koreans to the reality of their subaltern status."[56] Engendering the illusion of modernization or Western mythology, Korean *Informel* apparently helped forge a false sense of security created through the hegemony of bourgeois nationalists.

Furthermore, the theoretical efforts made since 1961 by art critics to graft Korean tradition with Western avant-garde art, no matter how vague they were, implicitly or explicitly, embodied "official nationalism." [57] According to Benedict

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[53] Jin, 2.
[54] Chungmoo Choi, "The Discourse of Decolonization and Popular Memory: South Korea," *positions* (Spring 1993), 86.
[55] Byung Tai Hwang, "Confucianism in Modernization: Comparative Study of China, Japan and Korea" (Ph.D. diss,. University of California, Berkeley, 1979), iii.
[56] Choi, Ibid.
[57] Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (New York: Verso, 1991), 110.

Anderson, official nationalism concealed differences between a nation and the global system. In South Korea, the conservative bourgeois nationalism functioned as an effective ideological apparatus justifying capitalist modernization as the only path toward a developed country, which justified postwar authoritarian rules. The South Korean government under the late President Park Chung Hee (Pak Chŏngh ŭi, 1917-1979) embodied official nationalism through the famous political catch phrase: "Modernization of the Fatherland."[58] After a military coup in 1961, Park became president in 1963, and his dictatorial power lasted until he was assassinated in 1979. Identified with the quantitative economic development achieved under Park Chung Hee's presidency, modernization in South Korea has become a foremost example of internationalization of capitalism in the third world.[59]

Under the historical and social condition, Korean *Informel* not only reflected a politicized myth of modernization but also contributed to its formation. *Informel* painters in South Korea actively took part in the government's art project propagandizing official nationalism under Park Chung Hee's rule. In 1966, Kim Jong-pil (Kim Chong-p'il, b.1926), a South Korean politician having orchestrated the 1961-military coup, commissioned fifty-five artists to paint the National Documentary Painting (*minjok kirokhwa*) monumentalizing great historical events in Korea.[60] Twenty-five of them were abstract painters including *Informel* painters like

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[58] Park Chung Hee, "Modernization of the Fatherland: President Park Chung Hee's Political Philosophy (Seoul: Ministry of Public Information, Republic of Korea, 1966).
[59] Stephen D. Bach, "Redefining 'Success' in South Korean Development" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Irvine, 2001), 1-2.
[60] Pak Yŏng nam, "Minjok kirokhwa 10 nyŏnŭi ch'aejŏmp'yo" [A Report of a Decade of the National Documentary Painting] *Kyeganmisul* (Fall 1979), 167-174.

Park Seo-bo and Yun Myung-ro, and all of them used figurative styles for the project.[61] Another *Informel* painter Chŏng Ch'ang-sŏp became a mastermind of the event. A number of well-known Korean artists such as the *Kukchŏn* jurors continued to join the government project that lasted until 1979. Like French history painters, they idealized select historical events on the mural-size canvas. In 1972, Park Seo-bo represented the South Korean army dispatched to the Vietnam War in Chungdaegiji ch'ogye [Guarding the Company Base] (1972, fig. 7). Tens of thousands of South Korean troops, the largest number of foreign soldiers next to the United States, fought in the Vietnam War at the request of the United States. Three years later, the painter also represented a spectacle of South Korea's economic growth in Such'ulsŏnbak [Exporting Ships] (1975, fig. 8).[62] Although the propagandistic paintings do not show any stylistic relation to his abstract paintings, both groups of Park Seo-bo's paintings thematically embodied conservative nationalism that could go hand in hand with capitalist modernization.

Reality Group's Manifesto (1969): Georg Lukàcs, Bertolt Brecht, and "Dynamic Realism"

In reaction to conservative modern art in Korea ranging from Academic realism or Impressionism to abstract art, and in reaction to the teleology of

[61] Minjok kirokhwajŏn dorok [A Catalogue of the National Documentary Painting], exhibition catalog (Seoul: Kyŏngbokkung misulkwan, 1967).
[62] Park Seo-bo executed three more National Documentary Paintings until 1976. Ibid., 174.

modernization dominating post-war South Korean society, art criticism supporting socially critical art emerged in 1969. Focusing on art critic Kim Yun-su's writings, this section examines the emergence of social realism in art criticism before 1980. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Kim Yun-su first published art criticism in the quarterly literary journal *Creation and Criticism* (*Ch'angjakkwa Bip'yŏng*) in 1971, and became its editor in1978. Thus Kim's critical and historical perspective closely colluded with the National Literature Movement led by Paik Nak-chung. Because of his dissident activities, Kim was imprisoned under Park Chung Hee's military rule in 1975, and was forced to leave his teaching positions at the universities. In 2003, nearly three decades later, however, at the age of seventy-two, he was appointed the director of the prestigious National Museum of Contemporary Art in Seoul. Kim Yun-su has been the most influential and respected art critic among social realist artists to date.

In 1969, when three young painters Oh Yun (1946-1986), Im Se-taek (b.1940), and Oh Kyung-hwan (b.1947) formed Reality Group (Hyŏnsil Tongin), Kim Yun-su and Kim Chi-ha, "the poet laureate of a protesting nation in the 1970s,"[63] wrote a manifesto for them. Although Reality Group failed to open its planned exhibition under the oppressive political environment, its 31-page long manifesto was widely distributed among young artists who would participate in the social realist or *minjung* art movement in the 1980s.

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[63] Bruce Cumings, Korea's Place in the Sun (New York: Norton, c.1997), 368. See also Chi Ha Kim, The Middle Hour: Selected Poems of Kim Chi Ha, trans. David R. McCann (Stanfordville, N.Y.: Human Rights Publishing Group, 1980).

In the Manifesto, Kim Yun-su's formulation of new realism discusses not only its thematic conceptions but also its flexible and dynamic formal strategies. He also defined a proper relationship between Western realism and the realistic tradition in Korean art. Emerging in 1980, South Korean social realist art or *minjung* art would embody the Manifesto's critical points. Thus the Manifesto marked the beginning of new paradigm in the South Korean art scene. However, general accounts on *minjung* art have rarely discussed this important article.

The first chapter of the Reality Group Manifesto sums up Kim Yun-su's view of realism. It begins with a boldfaced line:

> **Art is the reflection of reality.**
>
> True art embodies itself by reflecting dynamic reality, and is the fruit of flexible responses to the challenges from a reality full of contradiction. There is no future for a passive representation of formulated objects and for a formalist enthusiasm alienated from reality. We affirm the necessity and justification of dynamic realism coming to offer an alternative to the current sterile arts occupied by exhausted aesthetic, impotence to reality, anarchistic visual forms, subjugation to foreign arts, and superstition of purity.
> Our thesis is to recover the social affectedness of visual arts that have been alienated from reality. It is to oppose formalism alienated from nation's history, quietism devoid of reality, and stagnancy tied up by old canons, but is to produce a powerful art charged with new dynamism and realistic visual languages. It is to accomplish the concreteness of expression and the vitality of forms, and is to arrive at a typical compression of contradictions represented through a sharp struggle between visual forms.[64]

Claiming that art is the endless reflection of reality and is itself the endless movement emerging from reality and returning to reality, Kim Yun-su ended this chapter.

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[64] Kim Yun-su and Kim Chi-ha, Hyŏnsil tong'in cheil sŏn ŏn [Reality Group's First Manifesto] (Seoul: [], 1969), 1.

The Manifesto's emphasis on art as the reflection of reality clearly recalls Georg Lukàcs's theory of "the artistic reflection of reality," although Kim Yun-su did not mention the Hungarian critic's name.[65] According to Lukàcs:

> The objectivity of the artistic reflection of reality depends on the correct reflection of the totality. The artistic correctness of a detail thus has nothing to do with whether the detail corresponds to any similar detail in reality. The detail in a work of art is an accurate reflection of life when it is a necessary aspect of the accurate reflection of the total process of objective reality, no matter whether it was observed by the artist in life or created through imagination out of direct or indirect experience.[66]

From the standpoint of the Marxist conception of art, Lukàcs posed the reflection of reality against both "mechanistic materialism" and "philosophic idealism." According to Lukàcs, mechanistic materialism directly reflects the external world without suggesting social totality. To him, mechanistic materialism is a scrap of uncritically reproduced reality, shows a false objectivity, and often becomes poetic through the operation of empathy. Following Theodor Lipps's idea of empathy that the form of an object is always determined by the subject's inner activity such as feelings and thoughts, Lukàcs saw the subjectivizing phenomena in both Naturalism and Impressionism.[67] Lipps claimed:

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[65] Georg Lukàcs, "Art and Objective Truth," chap. in Writer and Critics and Other Essays, ed. and trans. Arthur Kuhn (New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1970), 25-60. Although this book was published after Kim Yun-su wrote the Manifesto, its original articles written in German had been published in the 1930s and 1940s, and been introduced to academic society in Korea. The library of Seoul National University where Kim Yun-su completed his master's thesis on Immanuel Kant and taught aesthetics during the 1960s kept a number of Lukàcs's books published in German and Japanese. In South Korea, however, publications regarding Marxists such as Georg Lukàcs and Socialist Realism were illegal until 1987, and it probably is the reason Kim Yun-su did not mention any Marxist critic's name in the Manifesto.

[66] Ibid., 43.

[67] Lukàcs, 40-41.

> In empathy, therefore, I am not the real I, but am inwardly liberated from the latter, i.e. I am liberated from everything which I am apart from contemplation of the form. I am only this ideal, this contemplating I. [68]

Thus, for Lukàcs, empathy is a means for engendering subjective illusion alienated from social problems.

On the other hand, philosophic idealism elevates subjective idealism above reality. It is close to the Platonic theory of art as the reflection of ideas, which Lukàcs believed easily falls into mysticism.[69] For Lukàcs, abstraction is nothing but a form of extreme subjectivism, a flight from the concrete space of reality. This idealism tends to deny reality by abstracting it out of existence. In comparison with Lipp's idea of empathy, Wilhelm Worringer explained the notion of abstraction:

> In the urge to abstraction the intensity of the self-alienative impulse is incomparably greater and more consistent. Here it is not characterized, as in the need for empathy, by an urge to alienate oneself from individual being, but as an urge to seek deliverance from the fortuitousness of humanity as a whole, from the seeming arbitrariness of organic existence in general, in the contemplation of something necessary and indisfutable. Life as such is felt to be a disturbance of aesthetic enjoyment.[70]

But Lukàcs rejected abstraction, as well as empathy, as the representation of "a culmination of the subjectivist elimination of all content from aesthetics," and of "the subjectivist petrification and decay of artistic forms in the period of capitalist degeneration."[71] Instead, he suggested life as the content of art.

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[68] Theodore Lipps, Aesthetik: Psychologie des Schönen und der Kunst, (Hamburg: Voss, 1903-06), 247. Quoted and translated in Wilhelm Worringer, Abstraction and Empathy, trans. Michael Bullock (London: Putnam,1908), 24.
[69] Lukàcs, 41.
[70] Wilhelm Worringer, Abstraction and Empathy, trans. Michael Bullock (London: Putnam,1908), 23.
[71] Lukàcs, 34.

In a similar critical scheme to the one suggested by Lukàcs, the Manifesto's second chapter critiqued modern Korean art as an embodiment of purism. In this context, both Kim Yun-su and Lukàcs criticized abstraction, by citing together Worringer's definition of it as an impulse to "spiritual space-phobia" or "overwhelming need for tranquillity."[72] According to Worringer:

> Tormented by the entangled inter-relationship and flux of the phenomena of the outer world, such people were dominated by an immense need for tranquillity. The happiness they sought from art did not consist in the possibility of projecting themselves into the things of the outer world, of enjoying themselves in them, but in the possibility of taking the individual thing of the external world out of its arbitrariness and seeming fortuitousness, of eternalizing it by approximation to abstract forms and, in this manner, of finding a point of tranquillity and a refuge from appearances. Their most powerful urge was, so to speak, to wrest the object of the external world out of its natural context, out of the unending flux of being, to purify it of all its dependence upon life, i.e. of everything about it that was arbitrary, to render it necessary and irrefragable, to approximate it to its *absolute* value.[73]

Thus Kim Yun-su thought that abstraction as the absolute will to art in accordance with Worringer's theory was an expression of either purely formal embodiment or mysticism.

In the underdeveloped countries, "the cult of pure art with no content, no idea, and no meaning" becomes intensified.[74] If abstraction is a reflection of capitalist degeneration in the first world, as Lukàcs observed, it becomes more problematic when it is transplanted in the third world caught in the underdeveloped stage of capitalism.[75] In the third world including South Korea, with no corresponding socio-economic infrastructure, abstract art becomes purer and more alienated. Accordingly,

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[72] Manifesto, 6, and Lukàcs, 34.
[73] Worringer, 16-17.
[74] Manifesto, Ibid.
[75] Lukàcs, 62.

Kim Yun-su acknowledged the connection between art and infrastructure in South Korea:

> We have a false belief that specific art-styles of industrialized society characterized by division of labor, mechanization, automatization and systematization through advanced technology, generalized alienation, and enormous economic surplus, can be transplanted in our society and can bear fruit in our society—where we hope for industrialization more than hatred of mechanization, we need solution of poverty more than management of a surplus, and we demand realist art that emphasizes active changes of the present more than spiritual art that emphasizes transcendence of the present.[76]

In South Korea, followers of abstract art often used flattened color patterns found in pre-existing cultural objects.[77] But Kim Yun-su criticized the techniques of brushstroke and flattening surface used in Korean *Informel* art as a distinct example of false eclecticism between the two cultures.

Kim Yun-su also regarded practitioners of Impressionism combined with Academic realism as mere followers of outmoded foreign styles: "They have remained at the lowest level of visual experience and representation, that is, still-life and landscape alienated from dynamic reality."[78] In a quietist art, according to KimYun-su, the will to change reality is emasculated and, only the will to contemplate the appearance of reality remains. KimYun-su argued that artists could achieve a true unity of tradition and foreign art only through the reflection of real life and social totality, and must reveal and overcome timeless and placeless cosmopolitanism hidden under purism and formalism.

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[76] Manifesto, 6.
[77] Ibid., 4.
[78] Ibid., 5.

The third chapter elaborates specific stylistic strategies for the new realism. In place of the idyllic lyricism of Academic realism and the contemplative space of *Informel* painting developed in colonial and post-colonial Korea, Kim Yun-su proposed a noisy dynamism of the real world. Yet it has nothing to do with Italian Futurism; he rejected Futurist dynamics as an admiration of the machine's cruel domination of human beings.[79] For him, dynamic expression is an effective means to reflect reality laden with internal divisions and collisions. In this way, new dynamism "forms the core of the technical system of the art corresponding to contemporary themes characterized by division and opposition, hostility, absurdity and alienation, destruction, mistrust and factional conflicts."[80] In place of harmony idealized by colonial and post-colonial Korean art, Kim emphasized the importance of "struggle."[81] According to him, the struggle between the forms in space enriches the dynamism and content of the new realism, and was "the eye of realist form-building."[82] In its center of expression, collision and confrontation become much more intensive. The intensive struggle between an image and a form cause another struggle between the painting and the viewer so that it provides the viewer with a critical and intellectual challenge, rather than narcissism, self-absorption or subjective nostalgia. Kim Yun-su called the cognitive moment "estrangement (*sogyŏk*)", an expression of contradictions embedded in capitalist society. According to him:

> Isolation of humans from the world, exclusion of humans from mechanization and automatization, exclusion of the masses from prosperity and freedom,

[79] Ibid., 17.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid., 18.
[82] Ibid.

> isolation of the individual from the masses, separation of the self from the other, failure of a global and national solidarity, development of social hostility, differences between the rural and urban areas, extravagance and poverty, secularization of religion and religious devotion to ideology, division between the masses and the elite. Since all these contradictions are the causes of alienation, the expressions of all these contradictions are estrangement. Choice, montage, and discontinuity belong to estrangement.[83]

Kim Yun-su also suggested that the new realism use the idea of temporal and spatial simultaneity to represent social and historical totality on the same plane. In place of harmonious recollection of the past forged in modern Korean art, the new realism must represent a dynamic and struggling historical relationship between the past and the present. For this historical representation, montage was again an appropriate mode of expression. In this regard, Kim Yun-su related his notion of struggle to montage, and to Bertolt Brecht's idea of the alienation effect. He argued:

> Struggle is both a spatial mode of reflection and an optical mode in composition. It is a mutual collision between optical components, and is a synthesis of that collision…. Struggle has a tendency to appear in extreme as montage and close-up. The alienation effect (*sogyŏkhyogwa*) of montage as a direct result of reflecting the total reality and of expressing the contradictions embedded in reality creates not only a basic familiarity of the object of contemplation but also a sense of alienation from it, and induces a critical attitude toward the same object. It depends on the technique of struggle properly blocking the operation of empathy engendered through an illusion of the object and through an analogy of the object. By colliding with the viewer's primal desire for identification with the object, sustaining a distance between the viewer and the object, and then alienating the viewer from the object, the alienation effect helps the viewer clearly capture, and concretely criticize, the core of contradictions compressed within the object.[84]

The term alienation effect repeated in the Manifesto refers to Brecht's experimental idea of Epic or Non-Aristotelian Theater. In the Brechtian Epic Theater, "The

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[83] Ibid., 26.
[84] Ibid., 18-19.

spectator was no longer in any way allowed to submit to an experience uncritically by means of simple empathy with the characters in a play."[85] According to Brecht, the alienation effect (*Verfremdungseffekte*) is an artistic means against the operation of empathy, and its aim is "to make the spectator adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism in his approach to the incident" represented in a work of art.[86] Thus the alienation effect emphasizes the importance of historicizing, instead of subjectivising, the content.

Brecht's theory of Epic Theater appeared to inspire the cultural movement revitalizing traditional play, dance, and puppet shows during the 1970s in South Korea. Several articles exploring the relationship between traditional Korean play and Brecht's theory of Epic Theater were published in *Creation and Criticism*.[87] Later on, Paik Nak-chung also observed that Brecht's application of Chinese play to Epic Theater suggested a way in which the embodiment of realism and the recreation of tradition could work together.[88] (In 1935, Brecht found the alienation effect in Chinese play.[89])

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[85] Bertolt Brecht, "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction," chap. in Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic, ed. and trans. John Willet (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 69-76.
[86] Brecht, "Short Description of A New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect," in Ibid, 136-147. This article was also translated in Korean and published in Kim Yun-su, ed., Yesulŭŭi ch'angjo [Creation of Art] (Seoul: T'aegŭkch'ulp'ansa, 1974), 319-330.
[87] See, for examples, Hŏ Sul, "Chŏnt'onggŭgŭi mudae gonggan" [The Stage-space of the Traditional Play] *Creation and Criticism*, no. 32 (Summer, 1974): 340-365; Ibid, "Inhyŏngŭgŭi mudae" [The Stage of Puppet Shows] *Creation and Criticism*, no. 38 (Winter, 1975): 213-238; and Im Jin-taek, "Saeroun yŏngŭgul uihayŏ" [Toward New Play] *Creation and Criticism*, no 55 (Spring 1980): 97-122.
[88] Paik Nak-chung, "Realisme kwanhayŏ" [About Realism], chap. in The Current Stage of Korean Literature II [Hyŏndan'gyeŭi han'gukmunhak], eds. Paik Nak-chung and Yŏm Mu-ung (Seoul: Ch'angpisa, 1983), 315-351.
[89] Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting," chap. in Brecht on Theatre , ed. and trans. John Willet, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 91-99.

In terms of style, Brecht's idea of realism was more flexible than Lukàcs's. Brecht claimed:

> Our conception of *realism* needs to be broad and political, free from aesthetic restrictions and independent of conventions. *Realist* means: laying bare society's causal network/showing up the dominant viewpoint as the viewpoint of the dominators/writing from the standpoint of the class which has prepared the broadest solutions for the most pressing problems afflicting human society/emphasizing the dynamics of development/concrete and so as to encourage abstraction.[90]

However, Kim Yun-su's view of new realism consistently rejected abstraction.

Placing emphasis on the importance of representing temporal and spatial simultaneity, KimYun-su's new realism was also different from Lukàcs's theory of reflection. For an objective reflection of reality, Lukàcs emphasized the "organic" relationship between the detail and the totality.[91] According to Lukàcs, "healthy" art "fixes those moments of our development—otherwise transitory—that point ahead and enhance man's self-consciousness and are thus lasting."[92] Rejecting "a collage of photographic material," Lukàcs sought a classical mode of realism, which was also true to Socialist Realism sanctified in Communist countries.

Montage and Arnold Hauser

Arnold Hauser, a friend of Lukàcs's, probably offered Kim Yun-su another idea concerning the montage technique for the embodiment of social and historical

[90] Brecht, "The Popular and the Realistic," chap. in Ibid., 109.
[91] Lukàcs , 43.
[92] Ibid., 109.

totality. In 1966, Paik Nak-chung translated and published the fourth volume of Hauser's Social History of Art in the journal *Creation and Criticism* (*Ch'angjak kwa Bip'yŏng*) which he founded in the same year. Paik first published the chapter "The Film Age" and then the other chapter "Naturalism and Impressionism," and published them as a book in 1974. The Korean version of Hauser's book became an important source for South Korean social realist artists. KimYun-su also frequently cited Hauser's articles to clarify and support his own critical positions.[93]

In "The Film Age," Hauser argued that the arts of the twentieth century developed various styles to express the fragmented reality engendered under capitalism. In contemporary art, according to Hauser, "the real subject of the representation is the absurdity of life, which seems all the more surprising and shocking, the more realistic the elements of the fantastic whole are."[94] In this way, he regarded Surrealism as a proper representation of contemporary social totality. Hauser claimed:

> The sewing machine and the umbrella on the dissecting table, the donkey's corpse on the piano or the naked woman's body which opens like a chest of drawers, in brief, all the forms of juxtaposition and simultaneity into which the non-simultaneous and the incompatible are pressed, are only the expression of desire to bring unity and coherence, certainly in a paradoxical way, into the atomized world in which we live. Art is seized by a real mania for totality.[95]

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[93] See Kim Yun-su, Han'guk hyŏndae hoehwasa [A History of Modern Korean Painting] (Seoul: Han'gugilbosa, 1975).
[94] Arnold Hauser, The Social History of Art, vol. 4, Naturalism, Impressionism, The Film Age, (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), 237.
[95] Ibid.

Hauser acknowledged not only Surrealism but also Impressionism and Naturalism as appropriate expressions of different stages of capitalism.[96] Whereas Lukàcs sought a classical mode of art, its objective idealism, and its positive contribution to the socialization of the society, Hauser emphasized the importance of educating the masses to understand contemporary art. According to Hauser:

> The problem is not to confine art to the present-day horizon of the broad masses, but to extend the horizon of the masses as possible. The way to a genuine appreciation of art is through education. Not the violent simplification of art, but the training of the capacity for aesthetic judgment is the means by which the constant monopolizing of art by a small minority can be prevented…. Genuine, progressive, creative art can only mean a complicated art today. It will never be possible for everyone to enjoy and appreciate it in equal measure, but the share of the broader masses in it can be increased and deepened. The preconditions of a slackening of the cultural monopoly are above all economic and social. We can do no other than fight for the creation of these preconditions.[97]

Hauser suggested that ideologically progressive society be open to new art and popularize it through the educational system. For him, developments of new art and democratic society are mutual.

In this context, cinema, with its innovative techniques and its appeal to the masses, was "the stylistically most representative genre" of contemporary art, whereas Socialist Realism, repeating narrative styles of the nineteenth-century European realism, was an outmoded art incompatible with revolutionary politics.[98] Hauser saw a few examples from Russian and American films; the Russian

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[96] For Lukàcs's attack on German Expressionism, see Georg Lukàcs, "Expressionism: Its Significance and Decline [1934], in Essays on Realism, ed. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 76-113, and Ernst Bloch, "Discussing Expressionism [1938]," in Aesthetics and Politics, ed. Fredric Jameson, (London: Biddles,1977), 16-27.
[97] Ibid., 259.
[98] Ibid., 239.

documentary films represented the construction of communist Russia, yet the best part of American cinema reproduced everyday American life. "A film is the more cinematic," Hauser claimed, "the greater the share extra-human, material facts have in its description of reality, in other words, the closer the connection in this description between man and the world, the personality and the milieu, the end and the means."[99]

Specifically, Hauser elaborated cinema's montage technique as a proper method of representing or juxtaposing discontinuous contemporary reality in accordance with a new concept of time. Hauser argued:

> The accent is now on the simultaneity of the contents of consciousness, the immanence of the past in the present, the constant flowing together of the different periods of time, the amorphous fluidity of inner experience, the boundlessness of the stream of time by which the soul is borne along, the relativity of space and time, that is to say, the impossibility of differentiating and defining the media in which the mind moves. In this new concept of time almost all the strands of the texture which form the stuff of modern art converge: the abandonment of the plot, the elimination of the hero, the relinquishing of psychology, the "automatic method of writing" and, above all, the montage technique and the intermingling of temporal and spatial forms of the film.[100]

As a foremost technique of representation for the idea of simultaneity, montage embodied a mode of contemporary experience in totality. In Hauser's view, the discovery of simultaneity is equated with that of "universalism," and was "the real source of the new conception of time and the whole abruptness with which modern art describes life."[101] Through the juxtaposition of temporally and spatially discontinuous scenes and images, the montage technique represented contiguous,

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[99] Ibid., 257.
[100] Ibid., 239.
[101] Ibid., 244.

rather than metaphoric, connections between different historical events and social conditions. On the montage technique, Hauser argued:

> Two utterly different realities, a spiritual and a material, were joined together here, and not only joined but identified, in fact, the one preceding from the other. But such a conscious and deliberate trespassing presupposed a philosophy which denies the autonomy of the individual spheres of life, as surrealism does, and as historical materialism has done from the very beginning.[102]

In Hauser's conception of reality, the epistemological structure of simultaneity in montage appropriately expresses the contemporary global totality.

In the Manifesto, Kim Yun-su affirmed that the montage technique and the concept of simultaneity could represent the totality of postwar South Korean society where pre-existing national culture and infiltrated Western culture constantly compromised and conflicted with one another. Unlike Hauser, however, Kim Yun-su regarded Surrealism as a false embodiment of the alienation effect, because of its dependence on the subconsciousness and subjectivism. For Kim Yun-su, montage's simultaneous juxtaposition of unrelated objects and events was an effective style to represent unbalanced developments in the different sectors of the society under the trajectory of modernization. For social realist artists, thus, montage would become a major aesthetic strategy, a method running counter to the harmonious representation of the past and the present or the East and the West prevalent in modern Korean art.

But Hauser never mentioned non-Western culture or the third world and its relationship to European culture and society. For this reason, in the preface to his translation of Hauser's book, Paik Nak-chung pointed out that Hauser's Eurə centric

[102] Ibid., 254.

view of art contradicted his vision of "universalism" to be embodied through the simultaneous structure of the contemporary global system.[103]

The Manifesto's last section focuses on realistic traditions in Korean culture and their relationships to the new realism. Kim Yun-su insisted that the new realism succeed genre painting (fig.9) done by Kim Hong-do (b.1745, died after 1816), site-specific landscape painting (*chinkyŏngsansu*, fig.10) by Chŏng Sŏn (1676-1759), and folk painting (*minhwa*, fig. 11), and combine them with the tradition of realism in Western art.[104] He also related the simultaneous representation and the alienation effect to the composition of screen painting and ancient mural paintings found in Korea.

On the other hand, he argued, the new realism must keep a critical distance from literati painting (*muninhwa*) including idealistic landscape painting (*chŏnghyŏngsansu*, fig.12). The scholar-officials in Chinese Northern Sung (960-1127) laid the foundation for the aesthetic of literati painting, in which their utopian vision of archaic simplicity and balance brought about artistic renewal through the study of ancient masters.[105] Literati painting, culminating in the late Chinese Yüan (1279-1368), also became one of the most popular genre among Korean scholar-officials and artists during the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392-1910).[106] Whereas idealistic

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[103] Paik Nak-chung, "Preface to 'The Socal History of Art,'" in National Literature and World Literature (*Minjok munhakkwa segye munhak*), 219-225.
[104] But it does not mean that *minhwa* only belonged to the plebeian culture; it also decorated royal courts in Korea.
[105] Wen C. Fong, "Revival and Synthesis: Yüan Literati Painting," chap. in Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, 8th-14th Century (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), 496.
[106] Ahn Hwi-joon, Han'gukhoehwasa [A History of Korean Painting](Seoul: Iljisa, 1980), 90.

landscape painting symbolically represented spiritual idealism in accordance with conventions mostly inherited from Chinese art, Chŏng Sŏn's landscape, such as Mt. Kumgang, represented specific sites in Korea. Kim concludes the Manifesto, claiming that Realism and tradition are mutually related and united to establish a new tradition of national art.

Kim Yun-su's Social Realist Art Criticism during the 1970s

Solidifying his critical perspective throughout the 1970s, Kim Yun-su examined modern art in the past decades as well as contemporary art in South Korea. In 1971, Kim Yun-su published "Art and Alienation" in the magazine *Creation and Criticism*, which discussed a positive role of art to overcome alienation that the author considered as a social disease resulting from modernization.[107] Kim Yun-su discussed philosophical and sociological observations on the notion of alienation, made by Hegel, Henri Lefebre, Georg Simmel, Herbert Marcuse, Lewis Mumford and Hauser, and attributed modern Korean art's alienation from the masses to an increasingly reified socio-economic environment under the ongoing process of modernization. "Surrendering itself to the ghost of modernization-Westernization-Western art-Internationalism," according to Kim Yun-su, modern Korean art used, reduced, and distorted national culture and arts.[108] Due to its cult of foreign art and

[107] Kim Yun-su, "Yesul gwa sooe" [Art and Alienation] *Creation and Criticism* (Spring 1971), 201-213.
[108] Ibid., 206-207.

internationalism, modern Korean art was not appreciated by the masses, but alienated from them. "This alienation was also caused by the expulsion of humanistic elements from modern art so that modern art was preoccupied with the creation of new styles."[109] Referring to José Ortega y Gasset's views of modern art, as well as Hauser's, Kim Yun-su characterized modern Korean art as an expression of narcissistic escape from the capitalist reality. The Spanish philosopher and critic Ortega y Gasset observed:

> [Modern art] tends (1) to dehumanize art, (2) to avoid living forms, (3) to see to it that the work of art is nothing but a work of art, (4) to consider art as play and nothing else, (5) to be essentially ironical, (6) to beware of sham and hence to aspire to scrupulous realization, (7) to regard art as a thing of no transcending consequence.[110]

When the artists chose not to confront social totality, narcissism was another way of condoning their alienated selves. Corresponding to the progression and degeneration of capitalism, Kim Yun-su argued, modern art expressed narcissism, dehumanization, and alienation. Like its Western counterpart, according to Kim Yun-su, modern Korean art consistently embodied socially detached aesthetics, which modernist critics championed as a universal sign of modernity in art.

As opposed to modern art alienated from reality, Kim Yun-su proposed a "healthy art" that could help communicate between the individuals and contribute to the embodiment of total human beings. Put differently, Kim Yun-su reformulated the Lukàcsian notion of realist "healthy art," whose goal was to embody the integration

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[109] Ibid., 211.
[110] Ibid., 210. And José Ortega Y Gasset, The Dehumanization of Art and Other Writings on Art, Culture, and Literature (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 13.

of the individuals and the society. In place of the specialization emphasized in modern art, Kim's Yun-su healthy art would support the interdisciplinary approach between different genres of art. Kim argued:

> Healthy art creates joy, humanistic experience, and the style of sympathy, enriches human life, and recovers the masses and the society. The Recovery of the masses and the society does not mean surrendering to them. It is the opposite; it means the integration between social and individual experiences, between the society and the artist's individual freedom.[111]

Kim Yun-su's healthy art aimed to overcome the alienation of art from the society being reified under the process of modernization.

In this regard, Hauser's sociological perspective on the history of Western art continuously influenced Kim Yun-su's art criticism. In his 1972-article "The Logic of Frustration and Overcoming,"[112] Kim Yun-su specifically applied Hauser's view of Impressionism to modern Korean art originating from the colonial period. For instance, Kim Yun-su questioned the painter Lee In-sung's status as a true founder of Korean beauty in the history of modern Korean art. Although Lee In-sung often depicted Korean landscapes and subjects, according to Kim Yun-su, the painter copied Impressionist styles created by Paul Cézanne, Claude Monet, and Van Gogh. For example, Lee In-sung's A Day in Autumn (1934, fig. 3) demonstrates painterly techniques that capture momentary sensual impressions, illuminating effects activated by rough and multi-directional brushstrokes, summation of details, sensory representation of materiality, and improvisation. A number of his paintings depicted

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[111] Kim Yun-su, 210.
[112] Kim Yun-su, "Chwa jŏlgwa gŭkbokŭi nolli" [The Logic of Frustration and Overcoming] *Creation and Criticism* Vol. 7, no. 3 (Fall 1972), 560-580.

typical Impressionist themes such as landscapes, gardens, interior scenes with still life, and Western-style buildings, all alienated from the life of ordinary people (*minjung*).[113] Citing Hauser's article on Impressionism, Kim Yun-su regarded Lee In-sung as "a flawless Impressionist."[114] According to Hauser:

> Aestheticism reaches the pinnacle of its development in the age of impressionism. Its characteristic criteria, the passive, purely contemplative attitude to life, the transitoriness and non-committing quality of experience and hedonistic sensualism, are now the standards by which art in general is judged. The work of art is not only considered an end itself, not only a self-sufficient game, whose charm is apt to be destroyed by any extraneous, extra-aesthetic purpose, not only the most beautiful gift which life has to offer, for the enjoyment of which it is one's duty devotedly to prepare oneself, it becomes, in its autonomy, its lack of consideration for everything outside its sphere, a pattern for life, for the life of the dilettante, who now begins to displace the intellectual heroes of the past in the estimation of poets and writers and represents the ideal of the *fin de siécle*.[115]

In accordance with Hauser's description, Kim Yun-su related the apolitical nature embedded in Lee In-sung's paintings to European Impressionism.

But Lee In sung's paintings are essentially different from the Impressionist works in Europe in many other aspects. If European Impressionism emphasized fleeting moments over permanence in terms of subject matter, A Day in Autumn idealized the timeless subject matter associated with the nation's cultural identity.[116] The Korean painter modified an innovative style originated from modern art in France to represent or idealize subject matter in relation to Korean national identity.

Like Hauser, however, Kim Yun-su overlooked Impressionism's subversive aspects against conventional art and institutional systems in the nineteenth-century

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[113] Ibid., 572.
[114] Ibid., 573.
[115] Hauser, The Social History of Art, vol. 4, Naturalism, Impressionism, The Film Age, 180-181.
[116] Ibid., 178.

Europe. Korean artists and critics did not seem to be conscious of the radical nature of Impressionism in defiance of the conventional notion of painting (i.e. history painting) as a mere vehicle of conveying narrative content.[117] Thus their superficial understanding of modern art might have been another factor sustaining the division of the South Korean art world.

Three years later, Kim Yun-su pointed out the limitation of modern Korean art built upon a distorted consciousness of modernity.[118] In 1975, Kim Yun-su published a book under the title of A History of Korean Modern Art with several articles he had previously contributed to *Creation and Criticism*. Here, he argued that modernity in the West was attained through the process of replacing old feudal systems with bourgeois civil society, and modern art represented the increasingly alienated relationship between the individual and the society. But in Korea, the goal of attaining modernity or modernization was interrupted by the Superpowers' imperialism, and modern art expressed the upper class's idealistic desire for modernization. Thus Korean modern art represented no anti-feudal or anti-colonial agenda.

Compared to Impressionism, according to Kim Yun-su, realism was a healthy art, a product of the civil consciousness searching for a way to overcome the absurdity embedded in the bourgeois society. By revealing deception, violence, moral degeneration and spiritual poverty spread in the capitalist society, in Kim Yun-su's

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[117] On the Impressionist painter's intention to destroy the subject matter, see Georges Bataille, Manet (New York: Skira/Rizolli, 1983).
[118] Kim Yun-su, Han'guk hyŏndae hoehwasa [A History of Modern Korean Art] (Seoul: Han'gugilbosa, 1975), 8-48.

view, realism embodied art's social responsibility. In this case, Kim Yun-su probably referred to Honoré Daumier, who was, then, along with Gustave Courbet, a French realist painter well-known to South Koreans. However, Kim Yun-su argued, Western realism limited the problem of the bourgeois society as a domestic agenda within the boundaries of the West, and implicitly approved its own country's imperialistic aggressions into non-European countries.[119] As an alternative to both aestheticism (like Impressionism) and Western realism, Kim Yun-su proposed national (*minjok*) art that could embody the Koreans' responses to the nation's critical situation from a historical standpoint, and also overcome colonial relationships with Western art.[120]

Rather than chauvinistic ultranationalism, national art seeks to recover the concept of nation as a counter-concept to colonialism, and to reveal imperialistic intentions embedded in the new culture and socio-economic system developed under the trajectory of modernization. Corresponding to national literature theorized by Paik Nak-chung, Kim Yun-su defined national art. According to Paik Nak-chung:

> National literature results from our consciousness of the crisis that the nation's independent survival and its members' welfare are in great danger. A righteous attitude toward the national crisis is a decisive factor in regard with the healthy development of national literature itself. National literature is a historically characterized concept. That means, this concept is effective in so far as a historically critical situation exists; otherwise, it is negated or absorbed by other concepts in higher priority. Thus the theory of national literature is fundamentally different from nationalist dogmas on literature or culture, which predetermined nation (*minjok*) as the permanent and highest value.[121]

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[119] Ibid., 22.
[120] Ibid., 45.
[121] Paik Nak-chung, "Minjok munhak kaenyŏmŭi chŏnglipŭl uihayŏ" [Toward a Concept of National Literature], chap. in Minjokmunhakkwa segyemunhak [National Literature and World Literature] (Seoul: Ch'angbisa, 1978), 125. Paik first published this article in the monthly magazine *Wolganjung'ang* (July 1974), 44-45, and Kim Yun-su quoted it to define national art.

As long as de-colonization remained a living issue throughout intellectual and cultural discourses, Paik Nak-chung argued, national literature is still no anachronistic concept.[122]

Kim Yun-su also stressed that the agenda of national art and that of historical subjectivity are inseparable.[123] National art aims to represent subjectivity from a specific historical perspective, instead of idealizing abstract meanings of nation. In this way, Kim Yun-su viewed national art as a category differing from both modern art and contemporary abstraction. Elsewhere, in 1979, he argued, "Since its inception, abstract art rejected reality."[124] To him, expressive abstraction initiated by Vassily Kandinsky and geometric abstraction by Piet Mondrian equally lost contact with reality by abstracting the essence and foundation of the world. Kim Yun-su regarded mystical abstraction including *Informel* painting as a by-product of capitalist society whose atomized human relationship lost the sense of social totality.

But Kim Yun-su never mentioned Russian Constructivism and its effort to embody abstraction as a progressive symbol for new socialist society. At the same time, modernist art critics in South Korea continued to associate Asian philosophy such as Zen Buddhism not only with *Informel* painting but also with monochrome painting and Minimal art. Both camps thus allowed no room for a compromise between them. During the 1970s, Kim Yun-su's critiques offered a theoretical mode

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[122] Paik Nak-chung, "The Idea of a Korean National Literature Then and Now," *positions* I: 3 (Winter 1993), 553-580.
[123] Ibid., 43.
[124] Kim Yun-su, "Han'guk ch'usangmisulŭi bansŏng" [Re-thinking Abstract Art in Korea] *Kyeganmisul* no.7 (1979), 88.

of social realist art that would be called national art or *minjung* art, as opposed to the apolitical formalism dominant in the South Korean art world. In 1980, the firstsocial realist group Reality and Utterance (Hyŏnsilgwa Balŏn) would launch a full-scale battle against the established art world in South Korea.

Chapter 2

The Rise of Social Realism: Art/Historical Sources

This chapter discusses the artistic and historical contexts in which South Korean social realist art emerged. The members of Reality and Utterance, the first social realist group formed in 1979, examined various approaches to embody art as a vehicle of narrative messages, as opposed to the auto-referentiality of Modernist art. In this regard, they studied Mexican mural paintings, but criticized the placeless and timeless cosmopolitanism embedded in abstract art. Whereas Modernist artists associated the white tones of their Monochrome paintings with an idealized notion of nation (minjok) symbolized by white in South Korea, Social realist artists discovered the importance of Korean folk painting (*minhwa*), as opposed to the elitist literati painting, and used bright colors such as five major colors (*obangsaeg*) and the symbolism inherited in folk painting. After the Kwangju People's Uprising in 1980, the members of Reality and Utterance discussed ways in which they could represent a current historical agenda and embody the idea of *minjung* (ordinary people) as historical subjectivity.

The Formation of Reality and Utterance: Defying Mainstream Modernism

On December 6, 1979, four art critics and eight painters founded Reality and Utterance (Hyŏnsilgwa balŏn) in Seoul. The number of the members varied over time as many members left the group and new members were accepted until it disbanded in 1987. Art critic Kim Yun-su was a consistent supporter.[1] Oh Yun (1946-1986), a former member of Reality Group (Hyŏnsil tongin, 1969), joined Reality and Utterance from its inception. Most members of Reality and Utterance started their careers during the 1970s, saw the rising national literature movement, and supported Kim Yun-su's critical points.

The members chose Reality and Utterance as the group's name by vote. They also considered "Humanity and Freedom," "Recovery of Humanity," "Reality," "Fact," "*Minjung* and Fact," "Reality and Witness," "*Minjung* and Reality," and "Reality and Expression," among others, for the group's name.[2] Later on, Sung Wan-kyung (Sŏng Wan-kyŏng, b.1944), one of the art critics of the group, explained the meaning of Reality and Utterance:

> It was obvious that both 'reality' and 'utterance' were, then, quite irritating words in the art world. We discussed 'reality and expression' and 'reality and utterance,' which were proposed for the group's name…. I used 'utterance' to indicate our intention that not only professional painters and sculptors but also the people from different areas outside the art world can be the subjects of multiple utterances. If the word expression presupposed an idealistic distance, utterance emphasized more immediate, direct, and concrete, more real and effective, responses.... We emphasized that it meant direct expressions of life rather than an 'aesthetic expression' whose values are given and categorized by the professionals.[3]

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[1] Yun Pum-mo, "<Hyŏnsilgwa balŏn> 10 nyŏnŭi baljach'wi" [A Decade of <Reality and Utterance>], in Hyŏnsilgwa balŏn, ed., Minjung misulŭl hyanghayŏ [Toward *Minjung* Art] (Seoul: Kwahakkwa sasang, 1990), 534-585.
[2] Ibid., 535.
[3] Hyŏnsilgwa balŏn, ed., Hyŏnsilgwa balŏn [Reality and Utterance] (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 1985), 186-187.

Concepts like 'reality,' 'art as language,' and 'utterance' emphasized art as a vehicle of communication similar to a verbal language, and undermined the "professional" aestheticism, that is, the Modernist idea of auto-referentiality prevalent in the established art world. Art critic Yi Il, the foremost purveyor of abstract art in Korea, characterized the second half of the 1970s as the age of "post-illusionism and pictorialization of the flat surface."[4] Materialized flat surfaces, lines, colors, or forms sustain two-dimensionality and accomplish an integrated existence within the painting, rather than as an addition to it.[5] Thus Yi Il's view was not substantially different from self-reductive and self-critical Modernism defined by Clement Greenberg.[6] The renowned American art critic argued:

> It was the stressing of the ineluctable flatness of the surface that remained, however, more fundamental than anything else to the processes by which pictorial art criticized and defined itself under Modernism. For flatness alone was unique and exclusive to pictorial art. The enclosing shape of the picture was a limiting condition, or norm, that was shared with the art of the theater; color was a norm and a means shared not only with the theater, but also with sculpture. Because flatness was the only condition painting shared with no other art, Modernist painting oriented itself to flatness as it did to nothing else.[7]

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[4] Yi Il, "T'al illusionisŭmgwa p'yŏngmyŏnŭi hoehwahwa(1979) "[Post-Illusionism and Pictorialization of the Flat Surface (1979)], chap in Hyŏndae misulŭi sigak [A View of Contemporary Art] (Seoul: Mijinsinsŏ, 1985), 302-308.
[5] Ibid., 306.
[6] Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in The Collected Essays and Criticism vol. 4, ed. John O'Brian, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 85-93.
[7] Ibid., 87.

Yi Il, however, also observed that the new trend in Korea reflected the return of painting in the American and European art scenes under various names like 'Post-Minimal Painting,' 'Fundamental Painting,' or '*Autopeinture.*'[8]

At the same time, Yi Il related concerns about flat painting to Korean traditional painting. Since he published the article "Current Conditions of Art in Our Country: Abstract Art, Before and After" in the literary magazine *Creation and Criticism* in 1967, Yi Il continued to search for a meeting ground between abstraction and Korean traditional painting. In this case, Yi Il seemed to refer to the strong tradition of literati painting (*muninhwa*) in Korea.

Yi Il argued that abstract art reached its peak in South Korea in the 1970s, and could be an expression of "a primitivism of modern civilization."[9] He appeared to relate Korean painting and abstraction to ways traditional African art played a key role in the evolution of modern art, particularly in the rise of Cubism.[10] If the history of European painting is a history of the battle for flatness, according to Yi Il, Korean traditional painting such as literati painting always maintained the flat surface. It is true that unlike conventional European painting based on the one point linear perspective, Korean literati painting, strongly influenced by Chinese art, did not have a hierarchical system for coherent spatial simulation. Calligraphic writings, an integral part of Korean/Chinese literati painting, also maintain the presence of the flat picture surface.

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[8] Yi, 305.
[9] Yi Il, Ibid.
[10] See, for instance, William Rubin, ed., "Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984).

Roger Fry, the English art critic who made a great contribution to the formulation of Modernist aesthetics and whose writings would surely have known to Yi Il, observed self-referential formal qualities in Chinese painting.[11] According to Fry, "[In Chinese art], the painting was always conceived as the visible record of a rhythmic gesture."[12] But he was skeptical about Chinese painting's overall flat structure. According to Fry:

> [The Chinese] show a keen feeling for the volumes which their contours evoke, and avoid anything in the nature of the rhythm or in the manner of drawing it, which will check the idea of plasticity, will bring us up, as it were, with a jerk on the surface of the picture.[13]

Similarly, Korean painting's multiple-point perspective hardly reduces the whole space to the painting's two-dimensional plane. Even its empty space as such represents rich atmospheric phenomena in nature, and often symbolizes an infinite void. No matter how vague it was, the "professional" aestheticism eagerly sought to find a meeting ground between abstraction and Korean traditional art. During the 1970s in South Korea, art critics and artists also frequently associated Asian philosophy such as Zen Buddhism not only with *Informel* painting but also with monochrome painting and Minimal art.[14]

Reality and Utterance criticized the established art world for its indifference to representations of social totality. In the group's founding manifesto (1980), the members claimed:

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[11] Roger Fry, "Some Aspects of Chinese Art," chap in Transformations: Critical and Speculative Essays on Art (New York: Chatto and Windus, 1927), 67-81.
[12] Ibid., 73.
[13] Ibid., 74.
[14] Yi Il, Ibid.

> Existing art, conservative or traditional, avant-garde or experimental, flatters philistine tastes of the leisure class. By blocking the space of art from the outside and only seeking after highbrow and idealistic pleasures, it has alienated and isolated itself from the reality of its neighborhood, and even has not discovered the internal truth of isolated individuals.[15]

They wanted to find a "new direction," and wanted to represent social totality in both style and content. In other words, they paralleled what had been suggested in Reality Group's manifesto and Kim Yun-su's criticism during the 1970s.

Mexican Mural Painting

Having joined the short-lived Reality Group in 1969, Oh Yun (O Yun, 1946-1986) now became an important member of Reality and Utterance. Thus he bridged a gap between the two groups born a decade apart. Oh Yun painted The Year 1969 (1969, fig. 13) for Reality Group's failed exhibition. Even though the frustrated artist destroyed the painting after the forced cancellation of Reality Group's exhibition, it was illustrated in black and white in the Group's Manifesto. The painting, influenced by the Mexican painter David Alfaro Siqueiros, demonstrated South Korean social realist artists' interest in Mexican Mural Paintings.

In The Year 1969, Oh Yun represented a number of people in groups working, talking, agonizing, shouting, and screaming in a compressed space. There is no logical connection between different activities simultaneously happening in the crowded composition. At the upper right corner, a small group of young men appear

[15] Reality and Utterance, brochure of the founding exhibition, 1980.

to fight against the policemen wielding their clubs, which is the only politically charged event in the painting. All the figures are depicted in a generic manner. Scant iconographic signs such as farming tools and parts of the letters relate the scene to Korean culture. Otherwise, the painting bears a strong similarity to Mexican murals.

Oh Yun was, at that time, familiar with David Alfaro Siqueiros's painting in particular.[16] He would have seen reproductions of Siqueiros's mural paintings such as From Porfirio's Dictatorship to the Revolution (1957-1967, fig. 14), and apparently admired the Mexican painter's depiction of simplified contours, generalized physiognomy, and large round hats frequently found in a busy composition.[17] Energized by spiky forms and rapid diagonal movements, however, Siqueiros's mural is much more expressive.

In general, Oh Yun's mural-size painting The Year 1969 seemed to reflect what Siqueiros suggested for a revolutionary art. In the important manifesto of the Syndicate of Technical Workers Siqueiros wrote together with the painters Diego Rivera and Xavier Guerrero in 1922, Siqueiros claimed:

> Our fundamental aesthetic goals must be to socialize artistic expression and wipe out bourgeois individualism.
>
> We *repudiate* so-called easel painting and every kind of art favored by ultra-intellectual circles, because it is aristocratic, and we praise monumental art in all its forms, because it is public property.

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[16] Kim Jeng-heon, interview by author, 24 June 2002, New York City, New York.

[17] In the mural From Porfirio's Dictatoship to the Revolution (1957-1967), the detail with the revolutionaries and the view of the Cananea Strike look similar to Oh's painting. About 4,500 square feet, this mural is installed at Revolution Hall, National History Museum, Chapultepec Castle, Mexico City.

> We *proclaim* that at this time of social change from a decrepit order to a new one, the creators of beauty must use their best efforts to produce ideological works of art for the people; art must no longer be the expression of individual satisfaction which it is today, but should aim to become a fighting, educative art for all.[18]

Unlike Siqueiros who fought in numerous battles in the Mexican Revolutionary war, however, Oh Yun never supported a socialist revolution. ButThe Year 1969 was one of few paintings representing political contents critical of South Korean governments during the Cold War era.

Moreover, "dynamic realism" discussed in Reality Group's Manifesto recalls Siqueiros's emphasis on dynamism. In his 1936 lecture "The Vehicles of Dialectic-Subversive Painting" presented at the New York John Reed Club, Siqueiros claimed that his new art form would "be neither academic nor modernist; it shall be dialectic and subversive, that is to say, logically materialistic, objective, dynamic."[19] Thus Siqueiros's embodiment of socialist art represented a break in Socialist Realism idealizing the socialist achievement of the Soviets. Ideologically drawn to Socialist Realism, Siqueiros praised radical movements including Futurism and Cubism. In particular, he used the Futurist cinematic effects, and represented the twentieth century's technological innovations positively. In this way he rejected conventional narrative painting.

At the same time, Siqueiros emphasized the importance of the indigenous Mexican artistic tradition, yet in a quite critical manner. In "Three Appeals of Timely

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[18] David A. Siqueiros, Art and Revolution (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 24-25.
[19] Quoted in Laurance P. Hurlburt, The Mexican Muralists in the United States (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 206.

Orientation to Painters and Sculptors of America" (1921), Siqueiros rejected artificially constructed nationalist art based on a "fashionable" archaeological reconstruction of ancient cultures.[20] Thus Reality Group's Manifesto (1969) and Siqueiros's view of mural painting shared many points on the role of art in society. In fact, the co-author of the Manifesto Kim Chi-ha introduced Siqueiros's works to Oh Yun.[21] But unlike Siqueiros, Oh Yun neither took part in any political party nor endorsed any prominent political figure including oppositional party leaders in South Korea. In his mature works mostly created in the 1980s, Oh Yun showed no substantial influence of the Mexican mural style. However, many other social realist artists including Lim Ok-sang and Kim Jeong-heon (Kim Jŏng-hŏn) explored the narrative system of Mexican mural painting throughout the 1970s and the 1980s.

Abstraction and Cosmopolitanism

Won Dong-suk (Won Tong-sŏk, b.1938), an art critic who had prepared a draft of Reality and Utterance's manifesto, raised issues questioning the harmonious relationship between Korean art and abstraction and the placeless and timeless cosmopolitanism embedded in South Korean abstract art. Like Kim Yun-su, he also supported the national literature movement, and was "stunned" by the established art world's indifference to it.[22] Winning an art criticism contest in 1977, Won Dong-suk

[20] Quoted in Ibid., 197.
[21] Kim Jŏngh ŏn, Ibid.
[22] Won Dong-suk, Minjok misulŭi irongwa jŏnmang [National Art, Theory and Prospect] (Seoul: P'ulbit, 1985), 11-13.

launched his career as an art critic.[23] In the prize-winning article, he first demonstrated his critical point of view:

> Today's art criticism has given up methodology connecting the interpretation of the work of art with social meanings. The cause of this phenomenon lies in that contemporary aesthetics of abstraction defined the domain of art as another absolute and pure reality isolated from reality in life and abandoned social responsibility in creative activities, and Formalism, corresponding to the trend, dominated critical activities.[24]

In this article, along with Reality and Utterance's manifesto, Won Dong-suk strongly criticized the absence of social realism in South Korean art, and specifically attributed it to the predominance of abstraction. According to him, abstract art in Korea did not go through any external historical process, drew itself to contemporaneity merely in style, lost social meanings, and alienated itself from the taste of *minjung* who are historical subjects.[25] He argued that "We should break the glass wall of abstract space sealed up in the absolute vacuum of purity, interconnect it with the atmosphere of real society, and need to reveal that the value of permanence and universality they have claimed is nothing but a deceptive ideal and a historically relative value."[26] Won Dong-suk believed that abstract art's idealization of certain values concerning nationalism or internationalism embodied a politically affirmative (thus, "historically relative") goal under the trajectory of modernization.

As an example of Korean abstract art in this regard, Won analyzed Kim Whan-ki's painting. Kim Whan-ki (Kim Hwan-gi, 1913-1974) is one of the first

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[23] Won Dong-suk, "Ŏdisŏ muŏsidoeŏ dasimannarya?—Suhwa Kimhwan'giron" [Where and as What Will We Meet Again?—An Essay on Suwha Kim Whan-ki] *Kyeganmisul* (Summer 1977), 171-178.
[24] Ibid., 171.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.

major painters in the history of Korean modern art. Born to a prosperous family under Japanese colonialism, Kim Whan-ki was educated in Tokyo, Japan, and studied Western avant-garde art there during the 1930s. Exhibiting his new paintings mostly in Seoul, Kim Whan-ki lived many years in Paris (1956-1959) and New York (1965-1974) as well as Tokyo, and died in New York in 1974. (His wife is still living in Manhattan, New York.)

In Won Dong-suk's view, Kim Whan-ki did not represent anything specific about his hometown since he had left it in his boyhood. According to him, Kim Whan-ki's abstract painting reflected the painter's desire for an escape from reality, often idealized as cosmopolitanism or a cosmic voyage: "Kim's art represented his life-long voyage toward an internal abstract space—an idealistic voyage toward a timeless cosmic space—as opposed to an external space he ignored or never considered problematic."[27] In New York, Kim Whan-ki produced a series of abstract paintings under the title Ŏdisŏ muŏsidoeŏ dasimannarya? [Where and As What Will We Meet Again?]. In one of the series numbered as 16-IV (1970, fig. 15), Kim Whan-ki filled the canvas with a number of horizontal rows of numerous tiny square shapes connected one another. The rows of loosely drawn squares having a smudge dot within are flatly placed on the picture surface. As the ink's incidental smudges undermine the overall geometric structure, subtle variations in the size of squares and dots and in the thickness of colors create optical dynamism.

[27] Ibid., 172.

The painting's repetitive shapes in groups seem to resonate metaphorically among the celestial and microscopic bodies alike. Unlike biomorphic forms of Surrealism, however, they lack the sense of bodily movement. Putting more weight on their associations with constellations, Won Dong-suk emphasized the painting's metaphysical subject matter. As the painting's title suggests, Won Dong-suk interpreted it as the painter's search for spiritual and philosophical encounters in terms of "Buddhist Transmigrationism," "Christian Utopia," or "Platonic Idealism." According to Won Dong-suk:

> [Kim Whan-ki] suggested an ideal world without challenging concrete reality and indulged in pleasures of private world without sharing the taste of *minjung*. If he thought in depth where and as what we would meet again, he should have shown the place of departure for us to meet again, instead of the place of meeting. Only after did we identify the place of departure, we can justify the necessity of our reunion. Put briefly, Su-wha's art is a brilliant light emitted from a meteor whose place of departure is unknown.[28]

Won Dong-suk analyzed a timeless and placeless subject matter suggested in Kim Whan-ki's painting as the given nature of abstract art in general. By doing so, he wanted to reveal the incompatibility of abstract art with Korean culture influenced by Buddhism or Taoism, in which figuration, without reducing itself to abstraction, could also represent metaphysical meanings. In another article published in 1979, Won Dong-suk argued that even a Korean/Asian painting full of spiritual expressions never represented pure abstraction.[29] In this pantheistic world, according to him, the subject and the object are one, everything has a specific form, and the spiritual is

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[28] Ibid., 178.

[29] Won Dong-suk , "Ch'usanggwa saŭiŭi yesulyŏngyŏk" [Abstraction and Copying the Mind in the Domain of Art] *Misulchu'nch'u* (March 1979), 16. Republished in Won Dong-suk, Minjok misulŭi ironkwa jŏnmang [National Art, Theory and Prospect] (Seoul: P'ulbit, 1985), 91.

always visualized through a concrete image of things. In Asian metaphysics such as Buddhism and Taoism, the ideal is not severed from the real. Emphasizing the holistic connection between reality and ideality, Won Dong-suk wanted to reveal the false harmony between abstraction and Korean/Asian aesthetics forged in contemporary South Korean art.

Furthermore, Won Dong-suk's theoretical exploration of socially critical art as an alternative to placeless and timeless abstraction recalls Fredric Jameson's idea of "an aesthetic of cognitive mapping," which is a pedagogical and didactic art seeking to "endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system."[30] The "cognitive mapping" also seeks to represent a sense of time or historical stages of social development.[31] In a similar way, Won Dong-suk championed politically engaged art providing mapping functions. But Jameson specifically called cognitive mapping demonstrated in third-world culture "national allegories" in which, he observed, personal narrative and experiences suggested the collective experience of social totality.[32] In Jameson's notion of national allegories, thus, the fate of the individual is not separable from the fate of the nation. On the other hand, according to Won Dong-suk, Kim Whan-ki's abstract art idealized a cosmopolitanism severed from the painter's national identity.

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[30] See also Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* (July-August, 1984), 92.
[31] Douglas Kellner, "Introduction: Jameson, Marxism, and Postmodernism," in Douglas Kellner, ed. Postmodernism, Jameson, Critique (Washington, D.C.: Maisonneuve Press, 1989), 35.
[32] Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (Fall 1986), 69.

In 1980 the members of Reality and Utterance held monthly conferences and discussed their aims and methods. In an article presented at Reality and Utterance's first monthly conference in January of the year, Won Dong-suk suggested that with their sensibility and imagination, artists reveal political corruption and recover the freedom of humanity. In this respect, "art lives as the truth of the age, the mirror of reality, and universal conscience."[33] To the members, Won Dong-suk first emphasized that artistic creativity was not equated with individualism and, second, that the members needed to find ways they could combine Korean and Western aesthetics, although most of them had majored in Western painting or sculpture.

Rediscovery of *Minhwa* (Folk Painting)

As opposed to literati painting, *minhwa* provided social realist artists not only with formal components such as bright colors, flattened forms and composition but also an archetypal mode of art as symbolic or Shamanistic expression of the Korean people's wishes. The stylistic affiliation with *minhwa* also became a crucial element that would differentiate South Korean social realism from North Korean Socialist Realism based on the Western convention of the single-point perspective.[34] The importance of *minhwa* in relation to *minjung* art has been considered to be self-

[33] Won, 35.
[34] Yi Gu-yŏl, Won Dong-suk, and Yu Hong-jun, "Pundan ihuŭi pukhanmisulŭl malhanda" [A Discussion of North Korean Art after the Division] *Kyeganmisul* (Fall 1988), 66. For a detailed discussion of Socialist Realism, see Chapter 4.

evident, yet it was never fully discussed.[35] Among the members of Reality and Utterance, Shin Kyung-ho (Sin Kyŏng-ho, b.1949) first explored *minhwa*. As early as 1971, he started to integrate his interpretations of *minhwa* in painting. For instance, Yetnal Iyagi [Fairy Tale] (1971, fig. 16) depicts a smoking white tiger attended by two rabbits. The white tiger refers to the ancient idea of four cardinal spirits (*Sasin*) in Korea: the Blue Dragon of the east, the White Tiger of the west, the Red Bird of the south, and the Black Turtle snake of the north. These four colors and yellow symbolizing the center consists five major colors (*obangsaeg*) in Korean art.[36]

In the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910), the mythical White Tiger especially became popular (fig. 11).[37] Koreans respected the tiger "as the symbol of an evil-repelling force or as the Mountain Spirit," and kept the image of the tiger as talisman, door painting, scroll, screen painting, and ritual banner.[38] One of the Twelve Zodiac Guardians, the rabbit also often appears in Korean folk tales. In Shin Kyung-ho's painting, animal subjects and the simplified backdrop are evenly close to the picture surface. The painter appropriated the frontal mode in composition and the use of primary colors from *minhwa*. But his painting, unlike*minhwa* , is full of personalized expressions, simplified backdrops, and subtly overlapped translucent colors.

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[35] See Won Dong-suk, "Han'guk hyŏndaemisulsokŭi minhwa" [*Minhwa* in Contemporary Korean Art] *Wolganmisul* (July 1984), 46-50, Kim Bong-jun, "Ilŭi misulŭl wihayŏ" [For an Art of Work], and "Chŏnt'ong misulŭi barŭnihae (Jwadam)" [Right Understanding of Traditional Art: A Discussion], chaps. in Minjung Misul [*Minjung* Art] (Seoul: Gongdongch'e, 1985), 114-139 and 34-63.
[36] Han'guk munhwa sangjing sajŏn pyŏnch'anuiwŏnhoe, Han'guk munhwa sangjing sajŏn [Dictionary of Korean Myths and Symbols] (Seoul: Dong-a ch'ulp'ansa, 1992)
[37] Cho Ja-yong, Guardians of Happiness: Shamanistic Tradition in Korean Folk Painting (Seoul: Emile Museum; Los Angeles: Crafts and Folk Art Museum, 1982), 69.
[38] Ibid., 74.

At that time, however, *minhwa* was stigmatized and rejected as low art in the art world. Later on, Shin Kyung-ho demonstrated theoretically that *minhwa* was not low art. According to him, Japanese art historians like Yanagi Muneyoshi (1889-1961) misrepresented it as an art of plebeians or the lower classes in Korea based on his knowledge of *Otsu-e*, the folk paintings produced in the Otsu region, Japan.[39] Yanagi learned Zen Buddhism under Daisetzu Suzuki, the Japanese Zen Buddhist well-known in Europe and the United States, praised anonymity of the folk arts in terms of the Buddhist notion of "void."[40] Thus he emphasized that "Otsu-e were painted by unknown artisans."[41] In this regard, Yanagi also admired Korean folk arts created by anonymous craftsmen.[42] The Korean people from all walks of life, however, appreciated and possessed *minhwa*. It was also a major genre of art decorating royal courts in Korea. Thus, Cho Ja-yong (1926-2000), an authority of *minhwa*, called it "art-of-all the-people," and regarded it as the representation of the Korean people's Shamanistic wishes for longevity and good fortune.[43] He claimed that "A Shamanistic pulsebeat lies at the foundation of Korean cultural expression, so that Shamanism forms the 'mother-thought' behind our various organized religions."[44]

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[39] Shin Kyung-ho, "Han'guk minhwaron sogo" [An Essay on Korean *Minhwa*] (MFA thesis, Seoul National University, 1978), 7. Also see Yanagi Muneyoshi, Chosŏnŭi minhwa [Minhwa in Chosun], trans. Yu Hong-jun, (Seoul: Tongsanbang, 1988).
[40] Soetsu Yanagi, The Unknown Craftsman: A Japanese Insight into Beauty, trans. and ed. Bernard Leach (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1972), 122-124.
[41] Soetsu Yanagi, Otsu-e (Tokyo: Sansaisha, 1960), 5.
[42] Soetsu Yanagi, The Unknown Craftsman, Ibid.
[43] Cho Ja-yong, Ibid., 5.
[44] Ibid.

Nevertheless, the tradition of *minhwa* as a popular genre of art was discontinued in the course of modernization.[45] The discontinuation of *minhwa* is also related to its distinct position in Korean life. According to Cho Ja-yong:

> Such works of art were held or hidden within each house hold as its family treasure and thus they have neither been collected systematically nor have they been opened up for modern study until recently. Frankly, old popular thought believed that the household's good luck would move away if such family heirlooms were shown to outsiders.[46]

Unlike literati painting, an art of self-expression among high officials and scholars, professional painters created *minhwa* to the consumer's order. Put differently, *minhwa* represented the owner's tastes and desires. Thus the painter did not need to include his seal or signature. Even though many South Korean art historians from the standpoint of the ruling classes attempted to segregate folk culture, according to Cho Ja-yong, *minhwa* was a mode of art accessible to all walks of life in Korea.[47]

Whereas literati painting represented elite culture, *minhwa* appealed to the tastes and desires of the lower classes as well as the upper classes. Thus Shin Kyung-ho, along with Cho Ja yong, regarded the anonymous authorship as part of a collective representation of Korean culture. Whereas Yanagi emphasized the absence of the individual artist's subjectivity in Korean folk arts to be "an uneventful, natural outcome of the people's state of mind, free from dualistic, man-made rules," Shin Kyung-ho appropriated the style of *minhwa* as a cultural embodiment of collective

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[45] Ahn Hwi-joon and Choe Sun-u, "P'ungsokhwa Chŏnt'onggwa Kyesŭngŭi gil" [Folk Painting, Its Tradition and Continuation] *Wolganmisul* (Winter 1982), 31.
[46] Cho, 8.
[47] Ibid.

subjectivity.[48] Yanagi's view of Korean folk arts was isolated from social contexts, yet Shin Kyung-ho embraced *minhwa* as a cultural legacy associated with *minjung* (ordinary people) as historical subjectivity.

Shin Kyung-ho's emphasis on the importance of five major colors (*obangsaeg*) including blue, white, red, black, and yellow stood in vivid contrast to South Korean *Informel* painters' uses of white. In 1975, South Korean abstract artists held a joint exhibition in Tokyo, under the title "Five Artists' White Colors." Park Seo-bo, who executed the first Korean *Informel* painting in 1958, participated in this exhibition. He must have presented one of his *ecriture* series (Myopŏp No. 14, 1974, fig. 17). Art critic Yi Il then framed Park Seo-bo's new painting, along with the others, as "Monochrome" painting. According to the art critic, the Koreans' white Monochrome paintings demonstrated "a spiritual vision that embraces the world," unlike European Monochrome which focused on "a new manner of treating the color."[49] In the accompanying catalog, Yi Il wrote:

> What does 'White' or 'White Color' mean to us? In a more concrete sense, a consideration of what it means is the focus of this show. As a matter of fact,

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[48] Yanagi, The Unknown Crartman, 123.

[49] Yi Il, "'Baegsaeg'ŭn saengakhanda" ['The White Color is Thinking (1975)], in Yi Il misulpip'yŏng ilji [Art Critic Yi Il's Diary] (Seoul: Mijinsa, 1998), 26. In this case, thus, Yi Il might have had Italian artist Piero Manzoni in mind. Manzoni's 'achromes' seems to be close to Korean Monochrome in their whiteness, yet the gap is wide. Manzoni produced "a totally white—or rather, totally colorless—surface, removed from all pictorial phenomena… a white which is in no sense a polar landscape, an evocative or even merely beautiful material, a sensation or a symbol, or anything else of the kind; a white surface which is a white surface which is, and nothing else: being." Quoted in Germano Celant, "From the Open Wound to the Resurrected Body: Lucio Fontana and Piero Manzaoni," chap. in Emily Braun, ed. Italian Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture, 1900-1988 (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1989), 297. Although the symbolic uses of white recalled Kasimir Malevich's Suprematism, Russian avant-gard art had rarely been introduced in South Korea during the Cold War ear. In 1990, Yi Il himself reviewed an exhibition of Russian art held in South Korea as a sign of new era. See Yi Il, "Soryŏn jŏnuimisulŭi ŏjewa onŭl" [The Past and the Present of the Soviet Avant-Garde Art], in Yi Il, Hyŏndae misulesŏŭi hwanwŏngwa hwaksan [Reduction and Expansion in Contemporary Art] (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 1991), 254-261.

> white is the color that has been traditionally and deeply related to our nation (minjok). And this color for us not only mirrors our aesthetic sensation but also has meaning as a spiritual symbol for our nation. Furthermore, it is one of the most fundamental languages defining our way of thought. In sum, for us, white is more than a mere 'color,' the white color is a field of creation where all the possibilities are realized for themselves.[50]

For instance, the white background of the Korean national flag symbolizes the purity of the Korean race and the love of peace.[51] In this way, Yi Il associated the white tones of South Korean *Informel* or Monochrome painting with official nationalism.

On the other hand, South Korean abstract artists adopted Yanagi's idealistic view of Korean folk arts. In 1977, Yi Il translated a book on *minhwa* written in Japanese by Lee U-fan (I U-hwan, b.1936), a leader of Mono-ha (School of Things) in Japan. Around 1969, the Mono-ha artists started to explore material-based artistic expressions that bore an indirect relationship to Minimalism.[52] They presented raw, mostly natural, materials as an intermediary between the viewer and the surrounding world. Lee U-fan had moved to Japan in 1956, and studied philosophy at Nihon University. Active in Tokyo and Paris, he was widely known in South Korea as an international artist, similar to the video artist Nam June Paik. Most of his paintings are abstractions consisting of a few monochromatic brush strokes on an empty background, as seen in Tongp'ung S-84-7 [East Wind S-84-7] (1984, fig. 18). Lee U-fan was deeply impressed by the anonymity embedded in *minhwa*. Calling *minhwa* "the painting of everyday life," Lee U-fan claimed:

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[50] Ibid.
[51] The National Academy of the Korean Language, An Illustrated Guide to Korean Culture (Seoul: Hakgojae, 2002), 460. For a discussion of the white color and Korean national identity, see also Chŏn Dong-hyŏn,Paeg ŭi minjokŭi ppuri: Yŏksa [The Root of the White-clad Nation: History] (Seoul: T'aebongkihoek, 2003).
[52] See Minemura Toshiaki, "What Was 'Mono-ha'?" (Tokyo: Kamakura Gallery, 1986).

> For the Koreans, a space for everyday life is the resident's sacred field, and a colorless and transparent open world. The painting revives this world, yet should not assert itself…. The *raison d'être* for the painting of everyday life belongs to an anonymous world, and itself is nothing but anonymous. Put briefly, whether the painting has a seal or not, a professional painter of everyday life may be anonymous; whether it has a seal or not, the painting of everyday life may be called an anonymous painting. Since the painter is a catalyst living in the commonness of an everyday-life space, he must void himself, and reveal everything by creating nothing.[53]

Lee U-fan further indicated a parallel between "anonymity" in Korean folk arts and a new trend in international contemporary art scenes.[54] For instance, he found a similar neutral approach in Conceptual Art.[55] Since the beginning of his career, Lee U-fan has theorized "an art of encounter," and idealized the work of art as an empty space.[56] From this metaphysical standpoint, Lee U-fan not only identified with a *minhwa* painter but also demonstrated a meeting ground between Korean art and abstraction. He explored "an intermediary working between actuality and the ideal permeated by both and affecting both," which is the realm beyond the artist and far from the quotidian.[57] In this case, "actuality" meant an objective, neutral, and sterile state that has nothing to do with social totality. Thus it recalls Won Dong-suk's critique of Kim Whan-ki's abstract painting as a journey to a transcendental space separated from social reality. Lee U-fan emphasized intuitive processes through free brushstrokes and empty space, yet their sensory effects like naturalness, immediacy,

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[53] Lee U-fan, Ijoŭi minhwa [*Minhwa* in the Yi Dynasty], translated by Yi Il from Japanese, (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 1977), 47.
[54] Lee U-fan, "Han'guk hyŏndaemisulŭi munjejŏm" [Problems in Contemporary Korean Art] *Kyeganmisul* (Summer 1977), 147.
[55] Ibid., 143.
[56] See Jean Fisher, ed., Selected Writings by Lee U-fan, 1970-96 (London: Lisson Gallery, 1996) and Lee U-fan, Un art de la rencontre, translated by Anne Gossot from Japanese, (Paris: Actes Sud, 2002).
[57] Fisher, ed., Ibid., 11.

movement, and materiality resonate only within his work's transcendental space. In an analogous logic he used against Kim Whan-ki, Won Dong-suk argued that Lee U-fan's theory and art had no root in Korean art: "A single brushstroke does not have a meaning of itself; what matters is to see 'a time of creation,' in which a brushstroke can give birth to ten thousand images, and a brushstroke is visible among ten thousand images."[58]

Lee U-fan's, as well as Yanagi's, emphasis on the anonymous nature of *minhwa*, according to Shin Kyung-ho, resulted from a misconception that amateur artists, traveling around the country, produced *minhwa*, which only happened at the end of the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392-1910), Korea's last dynasty. As discussed above, trained professional artists like court painters produced the majority of *minhwa*. During the late 1980s, younger social realist artists widely adopted *minhwa*. Among them, the group Durŏng, formed in 1983, led the popularization of *minhwa* in the new context of a widespread social realist art movement.

Historical Subjectivity and the Kwangju People's Uprising (1980)

If the members of Reality and Utterance accepted figuration associated with holistic Korean aesthetics in terms of style, they considered *minjung* (ordinary people) as historical subjectivity as a primary concept to embody in terms of subject

[58] Won Dong-suk, "Han'guk modŏnismūi hŏsangkwa maengjŏm: Yi uhwan hoehwairon kujoŭi punsŏk" [A False Image and Blind Spot of Korean Modernism: An Analysis of the Theoretical Structure of Lee U-fan's Painting] *Konggan* (November 1984), 52.

matter. Some of them proposed "*Minjung* and Fact" and "*Minjung* and Reality" for the group's name.[59] In the article quoted above, Won Dong-suk also pointed out the incompatibility of "the taste of *minjung*" and idealistic reductivism embedded in Modernist abstraction, that is, the ideal severed from the real. At the group's meeting in February 1980, members discussed the notion of *minjung*.[60] Won Dong-suk emphasized the connection of reality and *minjung*, and *minjung* as the subject of reality. Painter Oh Yun claimed:

> I would like to see *minjung* from the logic of the ruling/oppressed classes. It is, however, our reality that there is no single proper history [book] written on *minjung*. In case of the art world, the older generation's views, as have been revealed in the National Exhibition (Kukchŏn), only follow the logic of the ruling class.[61]

In the discussion, art critics Choe Min and Sung Wan-kyung also explained the importance of *minjung* in their conception of reality.

In 1975, Won Dong-suk first discussed the relationship between nationalism, national art, and *minjung*.[62] He regarded nationalism as "an effort initiated from basic recognition of one's own national identity to meet other nations in the world on the horizon of universality."[63] In this context, Won Dong-suk claimed, nationalism not only emphasized a nation's special characteristics but also was inseparable from the individual person's subjectivity. Thus, it was different from state-sponsored nationalism that idealized pre-existing culture as a means of imposing collective

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[59] Yun Bum-mo, 542.
[60] Yun Bum-mo, 542-543.
[61] Ibid., 542.
[62] Won Dong-suk, "Minjokchuŭiwa yesulŭi inyŏm" [Nationalism and the Ideology of Art], in National Art, Theory and Prospect, 17-29. Originally published in *Wonkwangmunhwa* no. 2 (1975).
[63] Ibid., 19.

nationalist values over individual subjectivity. Won Dong-suk also argued that "The ultimate purpose of nationalism is to embody national culture."[64] The creation of a national culture presupposes the knowledge of history. In this case, history is not an abstract idea reduced from history but rather what has been accumulated in the consciousness of the people living here and now and is continued to the future.[65] Along with subjectivity and independence, Won Dong-suk observed the involvement of the *minjung* as an essential part of national culture. According to him, "It is possible to embody vital national culture only through creative activities in which the *minjung* become the subjects."[66] In an attempt to expand the meaning of *minjung* as historical subjectivity to cultural identity and artistic creativity, Won Dong-suk claimed, "Art is the highest form of national culture."[67] Based on Asian philosophy such as Buddhism and Taoism, Won Dong-suk emphasized a holistic relationship between the real and the ideal, the individual and the collective, and nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Accordingly, he suggested that national art aim to mediate between *minjung* subjectivity and Western art, yet representing differences and contradictions between them.

The Reality and Utterance members' conceptions of the idea of *minjung* were greatly indebted to ongoing literary movements and discussions under the different

[64] Ibid., 22.
[65] Ibid., 22-23.
[66] Ibid., 24.
[67] Ibid., 22.

names of "*Engagement* Literature," "National Literature," or "*Minjung* Literature."[68] In the context of the third world, Paik Nak-chung observed that "The *minjung* are precious since they are human beings, are great since they are not rulers or oppressors, and have been historical subjects by supporting the real life of human kind."[69] Paik Nak-chung considered the emergence of the third world as part of the long process for the *minjung* not only to be the subjects of history but also to achieve international solidarity.[70] In this regard, Paik Nak-chung's theory of national literature in the 1970s was accepted as one of the first concrete discussions on *minjung*.[71]

In accordance with a sociological definition of *minjung*, Kim Yun-su also saw the *minjung* as the basis of society and the masters of history. He identified the *minjung* as "the majority of the people, who are politically oppressed, who are the driving forces of history, yet excluded from the right to make decisions, who are the subjects of production, yet isolated from the distribution of the wealth."[72] To the members of Reality and Utterance, Kim Yun-su claimed in 1985:

> Here, we can raise a question if the *minjung* have the ability to manage and create their own culture. At present, however, the *minjung* have no environment to create it. They live in a false culture alienated from their life, and are culturally suppressed; the intellectuals' task is to liberate them from this suppression and what has responded to this seems to be *minjung* culture by the intellectuals…. At this stage, concerning the intellectuals' *minjung*

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[68] Won Dong-suk, "Hyŏnsilkwa misulŭi mannam" [An Encounter of Reality with Art], chap. in Hyŏnsilkwa Balŏn, ed. Hyŏnsilkwa Balŏn: Toward New Art in the 1980s, (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 1985), 31-38.
[69] Paik Nak-chung, "Chesamsegyewa minjungmunhak" [The Third World and *Minjung* Literature] *Ch'angjakkwa Pi'pyŏng* (Fall 1979), 51.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Hyun-moo Choi, "Contemporary Korean Literature," in Kenneth M. Wells, ed. South Korea's Minjung Movement: The Culture and Politics of Dissidence (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 171.
[72] "Hyunsil insikkwa misulllsŏŭi silch'ŏn: Chwatamhoe" [The Consciousness of Reality and the Practice as Art: A Round-Table Discussion," Hyŏnsilgwa Balŏn, ed., Ibid., 217.

> culture, we need to discuss what position Reality and Utterance would take up from now on.[73]

Emphasizing art's didactic function, Kim Yun-su suggested that Reality and Utterance contribute to the construction of *minjung* culture.

Even among historians, the agenda of *minjung* presented a complex problem because the *minjung* are not a specific social class or group. While many *minjung* historians in South Korea characterized *minjung* from the empirical historical data, historian Kenneth M. Wells defined *minjung* as a cultural idea existing in history. According to Wells:

> Admittedly, one requires an idea of class also when one identifies classes in society, but this is not quite the same problem. One may take a group—say, those who do manual labor in cities—whose existence affords little argument and give them a term like "urban proletariat" by which to make other claims which may or may not be useful. "*Minjung*," however, refers less to such a group than to a *quality* which, it is claimed, can be found in the past, is active in the present, and will determine Korea's future. In the final analysis, *minjung* is applied, not to people who form a group within a structure of social relations by virtue of their *doing* something, but to "the people" who form the dynamic of history by virtue of their *being* something—the bearers of certain values and qualities.[74]

Wells provided a succinct analysis of *minjung* applicable to the project of Reality and Utterance. Most of the Reality and Utterance members were educated in prestigious universities in South Korea such as Seoul National University, yet desired to be, represent, and enlighten the *minjung* as historical subjects.

Reality and Utterance's first and main goal was to represent historical subjectivity. In September 1979, a group of socially oriented artists agreed to prepare

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[73] Ibid., 217-218.
[74] Kenneth M. Wells, "The Cultural Construction of Korean History," in South Korea's *Minjung* Movement: The Culture and Politics of Dissidence, 11.

an exhibition commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the April 19th Student Uprising (1960), the historical event that toppled Syngman Rhee's authoritarian regime (1948-1960).[75] It was this meeting that led to the formation of Reality and Utterance. Then, on October 26, 1979, the assassination of Park Chung Hee put an end to nearly two decades of his military dictatorship (1961-1979). Even though the artists agreed to organize a group before the sudden death of the draconian ruler, their first meeting as the group Reality and Utterance in December of that year certainly paralleled the hopes and euphoria for democratization soaring in all the sectors of society, the so-called "Spring of Seoul."[76]

The members of Reality and Utterance belonged to the 1980's generation who "came into age with utter despair over the failure of the Kwangju People's Uprising" and "struggled with the meaning and conflicting legacy of Kwangju."[77] Painter Shin Kyung-ho lived in Kwangju city. After he graduated from Seoul National University, he started to teach at Chŏnnam National University in Kwangju, an epicenter of the 5.18 Uprising, and witnessed the historical event. Lim Ok-sang, another painter of Reality and Utterance, then teaching at Kwangju Teacher's College for a short period, also witnessed it. Accused of hiding a newspaper reporter wanted by the police in relation to the Uprising, art critic Choe Min was arrested; the group members had a meeting on the occasion of his release in July 1980.[78] After the 5.18 Kwangju Uprising until the end of 1981, Chun Doo Hwan's military regime suppressed the

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[75] Hyŏnsilkwa balŏn,Minjungmisul ŭl hyanghayŏ [Toward Minjung Art], 590.
[76] Kim Jŏngh ŏn, interview by author, 8 September 2002. New York.
[77] Ibid., 105-106.
[78] Kim Jŏngh ŏn, Ibid.

freedom of expression more harshly than Park Chung Hee's did, and jailed a number of critical intellectuals and dissident political leaders. Under these circumstances, the Reality and Utterance members prepared their founding exhibition in Seoul.

Chapter 3

The Rise of Social Realism: Artists

This chapter focuses on the members' works on view at the founding exhibition of Reality and Utterance in 1980. It also covers other related works, particularly those submitted to the group's second and third annual shows. The second exhibition was titled "The City and Vision," and the third annual exhibition, "Appearances of Happiness." This chapter also includes Shin Hak-chul (Sin Hak-ch'ŏl, b. 1943), a prominent *minjung* artist who was not a member of Reality and Utterance. Examining their critical writings and verbal statements as well as visual representations, this chapter discusses ways in which social realist artists rejected both Modernist art and consumer culture. Exploring various styles and media, these social realist artists represented the idea of the *minjung* (ordinary people) as the masters of history in relation to the Kwangju People's Uprising (1980) and to displaced peasantry in the context of modernization.

The First Exhibition of Reality and Utterance (1980)

From November 13th through 19th, 1980, the members of Reality and Utterance held their founding exhibition at the Tongsanpang Gallery after Korean

Culture and Arts Foundation (Munyejinhŭngwon), a governmental institution, suddenly rejected the group's scheduled exhibition (October 17-23, 1980) on the opening day. In the same year, Paik Nak-chung's journal *Ch'angjakkwa Bip'yŏng* (*Creation and Criticism*) was forced to close.[1] The show was a rare cultural event under Martial Law that got attention from young artists and critical intellectuals. A number of modernist art critics and artists also visited the show.[2] The group's thirteen artists and three art critics took part in the founding exhibition. Since any public discussion of the Kwangju Uprising was not allowed during Chun Doo Hwan's presidency (1980-1987), the Reality and Utterance members could not explicitly represent the Kwangju Uprising, yet the forbidden agenda became the subtext for the subjects they represented. They were also clearly conscious of critical agendas elaborated in Reality Group's Manifesto written in 1969.[3] Thus Reality and Utterance became a meeting ground between the notion of national (*minjok*) art first discussed in the Manifesto and the notion of *minjung* highlighted in the aftermath of the Kwangju Uprising. Social realist art in South Korea rose through the constant compromises and conflicts between the notions of nation (minjok) and *minjung*.

Oh Yun: Dynamic Realism and Mass Culture

[1] See Kim Jong-chŏl, "For the Scenes of History and Life: The Current Stage and Prospect of *Minjung* Culture Movement" (*Yŏksawa salmŭi hyŏnjangŭl wihayŏ*), in Hyŏnsilgwa Balŏn (1985), 39-48.
[2] Yun Bum-mo, Ibid., 555-556.
[3] Shin Kyung-ho, interview by author, 27 July 2002, Kwangju, South Korea.

In Reality and Utterance's founding exhibition, Oh Yun (O Yun, 1946-1986) presented two paintings, Maketing 1: Chiokdo [Marketing 1: Hell] (1980, fig. 19) and Maketing 2: Ballala [Marketing 2: Put the Makeup On] (1980, fig. 20). The two paintings critically juxtaposed images of the rising consumer culture with pre-existing culture. In this way, they recalled a key issue of Reality Group's Manifesto, the construction of "dynamic realism" capable of representing conflicts and struggles in the context of modernization or Westernization.[4] As a stylistic approach of dynamic realism, Kim Yun-su emphasized montage and the simultaneous juxtaposition of different realities in terms of space and time. In Marketing 1: Painting of Hell, Oh Yun appropriated the facture of Buddhist painting such as localized primary colors and simultaneous representations of multiple narratives, and also used stylized motifs appearing in Buddhist painting. The painting's four sections show different kinds of punishment for the sins the people had committed in life. Billboards are planted between the scenes; among them the Coca-Cola advertisement stands out prominently. Despite each scene's stereotypical backdrop appropriated from Buddhist mural painting, all the figures are individualized and finely drawn with concise details. Some scenes contain humorous critiques: a gigantic Coke can is half-buried in an iceberg where the sinners are punished, and the mirror with a flaming edge is reflecting a man's previous life as an abstract painter. Decorative elements like flowing lines and repetitive patterns create waves of lively movement throughout the painting. At the bottom, it reads: "Creation of Consumption, Is It Science or Art?"

[4] See Kim Yun-su and Kim Chi-ha, Hyŏnsil tong'in jeil sŏn ŏn [Reality Group's First Manifesto] (Seoul: [], 1969).

If Marketing 1 metaphorically suggests cultural clashes between old and new, Marketing 2: Put the Makeup On emphasizes the real impact of consumer culture on everyday life in South Korea. Like a montage, a painted makeup advertisement with a pinup girl is juxtaposed with the image of a group of girls in a farming village printed directly on canvas through wood-cut printing. Along with oil painting, Oh Yun often used wood-cut prints. On the upper left corner of the advertisement, a copy of cosmetic design written with ballala sarcastically cites: "From Cradle to Grave." The elegantly posed pinup girl is drawn with fine and fluid lines, and her skin is painted in pure white. On the other hand, the five country girls, typified in accordance with their everyday work and represented in black and white, are contoured with thick and angular lines, and the details are rendered with sharp and choppy cuts. In contrast to the pinup girl's white skin, their skins are dirty, almost black. Between the two sections, a promotional text reads: "Take Care of Yourself. At the Age of 12, You are a Lady." This kind of makeup advertisement became ubiquitous throughout the nation after the 1970s. The contrast between the makeup ad's sumptuous, yet artificial, image and the country-side girls' ungainly looks summed up radical cultural changes of postwar South Korea shifting from a Confucius society based on agriculture to a capitalist society based on heavy industry. The number '88' inscribed on a girl's shirt indicated the opening of the Olympic games at Seoul in 1988 symbolized a decisive moment in the shift, while the letter LOVE on another girl's shirt suggested the infiltration of Western mass culture in the everyday life of a farming village.

In these paintings, Oh Yun seemed to refine, personalize, and expand the issues discussed in Reality Group's Manifesto in 1969. He was close to the Manifesto's co-authors, Kim Yun-su and Kim Chi-ha. Later on, he recalled some points of "dynamic realism" the art critic and the poet had defined a decade ago:

> Through an active application of [exaggeration] and [distortion], we must attain total reality, instead of superficial reality. Since the attaining of reality is not of materialistic realism, we must embody figuration in totality, including its internal as well as external aspects, as an organic moving object, and from multiple directions. We must enliven art through expressions of confrontation, of contradiction, of Yin and Yang, of duality or multiplicity, and of expansion, beyond a monotonous structure in expression.[5]

Oh Yun thought that scientism, materialism, and fetishism altogether impeded the unfolding of imagination and creative expressions in art. He attempted to redefine realism in the context of the spiritual tradition embedded in South Korean culture: "It is wrong to negate an art combined with *chusul* (rituals in a form of verbal prayer) because it is reality in a world that needs it."[6]

Oh Yun represented a connection between concrete reality and spiritual experience, and between this world and the previous world or the next. Whereas Lukács rejected naturalist realism in favor of critical realism based on leftist ideology, Oh Yun expanded social realism to express spiritual subject matter as opposed to commercialism. The painter sought a realism that could represent collective spirituality nurtured in national culture as an alternative to the rising commercial culture based on corporate capitalism. In this context, Oh Yun rejected scientism "in

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[5] Oh Yoon, "*Misuljŏk sangsangnyŏk kwa segyeŭi hwakdae*" [Imagination in Art and the Expansion of the World], in Reality and Utterance (1985), 74.
[6] Ibid.

order to recover the warmth in which human beings coexist with innocent and good nature, as if they have a conversation with the sky, with all nature."[7] Thus Oh Yun's realism turned out to be quite different from Gustave Courbet's well-known materialistic conception of realism. According to Courbet:

> I also hold that painting is a quite concrete art, and can consist of nothing but the representation of real, tangible things. It is a physical language, whose words are visible objects. No abstract, invisible, intangible object can ever be material for a painting.
>
> Imagination, in art, is a matter of finding the most complete expression of a tangible thing: it is never a matter of imagining or creating that thing itself.[8]

If Courbet's realism aimed to reject the artifice of French history painting, Oh Yun's realism reinstated fantastic images inherited from old Korean cultures in order to criticize widespread materialistic culture. Kim Chi-ha thus related Oh Yun to the *minjung*: "At last, Oh Yun understood secrets of true *minjung* life leading to a happy and optimistic wisdom, after overcoming hard work, poverty, disease, and pain, the wisdom which frames in one universal nature and human life, and life and death."[9] At that time, Oh Yun had cirrhosis of the liver, and tried to find a cure from a mystic Korean philosophy (*Chŭngsando*). Refusing Western medication, he died at the age of forty in 1986.

But Oh Yun was not the first artist who juxtaposed old and new cultures. As early as 1976, Lim Ok-sang, another painter of Reality and Utterance, also

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[7] Quoted in Yu Hong-jun, "Minjungjŏk naeyong, Minjokjŏk hyŏngsik" [*Minjung* oriented content, National Style], chap in 8o nyŏndae misulŭi hyŏnjanggwa jakkdŭl [Art Scenes and Artists in the 1980s], (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 1987), 216.

[8] Gustave Courbet, "Letter to Young Artists (1861)," in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds. Art in Theory, 1815-1900 (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 404.

[9] Kim Chi-ha, "Ohyunŭl saenggaghamyŏn" [Remembering Oh Yun] in Toward *Minjung* Art, 215.

represented cultural clashes occurring in the course of modernization. His Sansu II [Landscape II] (1976, fig. 21) is a Korean landscape painting executed in traditional black ink on paper, yet showing an image of a billboard with a pinup girl painted in oil colors on a ridge of the mountains. The commercial sign literally infiltrated the pre-existing culture and the nation's land. Or, the juxtaposition of a billboard and the landscape painting belonging to a genre of high art like literati painting metaphorically reveals an ungainly reality of the harmonious coexistence between two cultures sought by *Informel* painting or established art in general in South Korea.

For social realist artists like Oh Yun and Lim Ok-sang, the emergence of mass culture and its conflict with pre-existing culture was a major theme. Their representations of the cultural conflict also reflected the *Minjung* Culture Movement launched in the early 1970s. The rising national literature formed the basis of the *Minjung* Culture Movement, and scholars and writers supporting national literature articulated differences between *minjung* culture and mass culture.[10] Rejecting mass culture as the ruling class's culture popularized through mass media, according to Chŏng Ji-ch'ang, a writer who supported Reality and Utterance, the Movement aimed for "a culture of the *minjung*, for the *minjung*, by the *minjung*."[11] The Movement revived traditional masked dance (*t'alch'um*) and masked drama (*madanggŭk*), and they became cultural agents linking student movements for democracy and workers, farmers, and the urban poor. Masked dance in particular became not only a medium

[10] Chŏng Ji-ch'ang, ed., Minjung munhwaron [Theory of *Minjung* Culture] (Taegu: Youngnam University Press, 1993).
[11] Chŏng Ji-ch'ang, "Che3segyewa munhwaundong" [The Third World and Culture Movement], in Minjung munhwaron , 70.

of self-expression but also an effective means of education and organization as well as a weapon of protest.[12]

In this context, *minjung* culture was considered a counter-culture to mass culture. If the consumer is alienated from the producer in mass culture, a great deal of communication and trust exists between the producer and the audience in *minjung* culture. Oh Yun himself argued that above all, social realist artists should become *minjung*, and live as one of them, rather than exploring the meaning of the *minjung* from the position of a third person. He publicly suggested to other members of Reality and Utterance as conditions to overcome as "enemies within" "individualistic exploitation of the *minjung* for selfish achievements," "imposition of authoritative aspects of art on the *minjung*," and "consideration of yourself as a spokesperson of the *minjung*."[13] In this regard, the works created by the members of Reality and Utterance not only represented *minjung* but also became the objects of interpretation as an embodiment of *minjung*.

Social realist artists attacked commercial mass culture as well as Modernist art. In the West, however, avant-garde arts such as the Italian Futurism, Russian Constructivism, and American Pop Art used mass culture in order to undermine Modernist high culture. The "Great Divide" between Modernism and mass culture, as a result, in Andreas Huyssen's view, became a dominant agenda in discourses of postmodernism since the 1960s. But dichotomies between Modernism and social

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[12] Chŏng Hŭi-sŏp, "Minjunmunhwawa minjungmunhwaundong" [*Minjung* Culture and *Minjung* Culture Movement], in Minjung munhwaron, 40.
[13] Oh Yun, "Hyŏnsilinsik" [Understanding Reality] (1980), in Minjung misulŭl hyanghayŏ: Hyŏnsilgwa Balŏn 10 nyŏnŭi baljach'wi [Toward *Minjung* Art: A Decade of Reality and Utterance], 708-710.

realism, and between mass culture and *minjung* national culture dominated the South Korean art world.[14] For instance, Andy Warhol used silk screens to reproduce mass-produced images of pop icons like Marilyn Monroe, and emphasized anonymous approaches in art as a contrast to Abstract Expressionist subjectivism. In this way, he also attempted to reveal the impersonality embedded in the capitalist culture industry.[15] On the other hand, Oh Yun attempted to create a typical image of the *minjung* as subjects using the angular and choppy lines and the simplified forms of wood-cut prints as a contrast to sleek mechanical images of consumer society (as seen in Ballala). Oh Yun's representation of the *minjung* was an expression of his compassionate desire to become one of the *minjung*. In this way, Oh Yun offered an alternative to what Warhol represented in the United States.

Oh Yun chose to use wood-cut prints for satirical expressions.[16] National literature writers often discussed technical concepts like irony, ugliness, humor, and satire for effective representations of *minjung*. One scholar observed that by representing the "irony" of the situations surrounding the *minjung*, the *Minjung* Culture Movement appealed to the *minjung* themselves.[17] In his famous article, "P'ungjanya Jasalinya" [Satire or Suicide] published in 1970, the poet Kim Chi-ha

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[14] Andreas Huyssen, After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), viii.
[15] Rainer Crone, "Form and Ideology: Warhol's Techniques from Blotted Line to Film," in Gary Garrels, ed., The Work of Andy Warhol (Seattle: Bay Press, 1989), 70-92. See also Benjamin Buchloh, "Andy Warhol's One-Dimensional Art: 1956-1966," in Kynaston McShine, ed., Andy Warhol, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1989), 39-61.
[16] Sung Wan-kyung, "Oh Yunŭi butkwa k'al" [Oh Yun's Brush and Knife] *Kyeganmisul* (Fall 1985). Republished in Minjung misulŭl hyanghayŏ: Hyŏnsilgwa Balŏn 10 nyŏnŭi baljach'wi. [Toward *Minjung* Art: A Decade of Reality and Utterance], 218-235.
[17] Yu Jae-ch'ŏn, "Minjungmunhwawa daejungmunhwa" [*Minjung* Culture and Mass Culture], in Ibid., 14-15.

elaborated ways of representing *minjung*, especially in anti-state protest poetry.[18] The young poet, then, explained irony in relation to satire:

> In order to express irony, we should consider, as a central principle, expressions of confrontation, that is, struggle, and also consider, as an important means, contradictions between the original and the derivative, conflicts and struggles not only between internal pieces of the derivative but also between pieces and the whole of the derivative. However, we should not overlook harmonious relationships between them, such as balance, mutual penetration, and congealment. In addition to collisions between the elements and contradictions resulted from their sharp confrontations, the expression of satire comprehensively includes mutual harmonies and inter-penetrations between the elements.[19]

For him, satire was a higher form of irony. Combined with expressions of irony, according to him, satire could accomplish an incomparable mode of representations concerning *minjung*. Kim Chi-ha continued:

> A direction of satire must coincide with a direction of the *minjung*'s hatred. It must be criticism, revelation, or denunciation, based on the *minjung*'s strong self-affirmation. It becomes anything but a poetical expression condemning the *minjung* themselves. It is in essence a violent expression against an anti-*minjung* minor group. If ugliness (Häßlich) is a reflection of actual vices or violence in reality and, at the same time, of a protest against them, satire is like the stones which the *minjung*, who have been affected by actual vices, throw at the vices by means of arts. We can find countless examples of such earnest satires from our inherited folk arts and folk songs.[20]

Despite Kim Chi-ha's praise, however, Oh Yun's satire focused on the *minjung*'s cultural life, and hardly suggested the *minjung* 's specific sufferings from political oppressions. At the beginning of Reality and Utterance, he emphasized

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[18] Kim Chi-ha, "P'ungjanya Jasalinya" [Satire or Suicide] *Siin* (July 1970). Republished in Kim Chi-ha, T'anŭn mogmarŭmŭro [With Parching Thirst] (Seoul: Ch'angjakkwa bip'yongsa, 1982), 141-199. See also Kim Chi-ha, The Middle Hour: Selected Poems of Kim Chi-ha, trans. David R. McCann (New York: Human Rights Pub. Group, 1980) and Kim Chi-ha, Heart's Agony: Selected Poems, trans. Won-chung Kim and James Han (New York: White Pine Press, c. 1998).
[19] Ibid., 156-157.
[20] Ibid., 157.

cultural battles: "We are caught in the middle of two cultures. We are soaked in a culture that we should overcome."[21] Put differently, Oh Yun failed to associate his rich cultural critiques with a sense of political protest he had suggested in The Year 1969. In South Korean social realism, however, Oh Yun's painting set up a classical mode of style representing contradictions between pre-existing national cultures and Westernized mass culture. His rhythmical and dynamic representations of the themes associated with inherited cultures inspired a number of younger *minjung* artists.

Shin Kyung-ho: Shamanism and History

Compared to Oh Yun, other artists of Reality and Utterance, including Shin Kyung-ho (Sin Kyŏng-ho, b.1949), tended to combine representations of cultural conflicts with concurrent political agendas. If discussions on national art led by Kim Yun-su focused on the infiltration of first-world culture into third-world culture in the age of multinational capitalism, these young artists, under the name of *minjung* art, wanted to embody a realism more oriented toward an anti-state political protest. As suggested above in the Introduction, the term social realism is used to cover both national art and *minjung* art, even though the boundary between them is quite thin.

While Oh Yun optimistically represented mystical collective traditions as an alternative to rising commercial culture, Shin Kyung-ho represented archetypal

[21] Oh Yun, "Hyŏnsilinsik" [Understanding Reality] (1980), in Minjung misulŭl hyanghayŏ: Hyŏnsilgwa Balŏn 10 nyŏnŭi baljach'wi [Toward *Minjung* Art: A Decade of Reality and Utterance], 708-710.

shamanic themes associated with the victims in the Kwangju Uprising in particular. At the group's founding exhibition, Shin Kyung ho presented Nŏksirado Itgo Ŏpgo: Mudŭngsando [Soul or Not: Mt. Mudŭng] (1980, fig. 22). This painting shows no superficial semblance to *minhwa*.[22] Rather than employing iconic images appearing in *minhwa*, Shin Kyung-ho appropriated its frontal composition and primary colors. In this structural system the painting directly confronts the viewer. The painter applied acrylic colors with brushes, and despite no modulation in colors, the painting breathes through subtle drippings and traces left by the brush.

In this painting, Shin Kyung-ho paid homage to Mudŭng Mountain. Kwangju city is located at the foot of the mountain so that the mountain has been used to symbolize the spirit of the Kwangju people. The painting consists of three parts: a dark blue sky with a crescent, a green mountain full of graves in the sense of an abandoned cemetery with a wolf screaming on the ridge, and a flaming red ground. At the center of the mountain, there is a loosely erased translucent area. It is an intimidating fist, a mark of the painter's indignation at the current political situation. After the founding exhibition was rejected by the Korean Culture and Arts Foundation and before it opened at the Tongsanbang Gallery, the members themselves censored their works by erasing some parts.

[22] See Won Dong-suk, "Han'guk hyŏndaemisulsokŭi minhwa" [*Minhwa* in Contemporary Korean Art] *Wolganmisul* (July 1984), 46-50. Because of Shin Kyung-ho's scant use of *minhwa* icons, Won Dong-suk perhaps did not include Shin Kyung-ho among other fourteen painters in his discussion.

In the Painting of Mt. Mudŭng, the anonymous graves refer to the dead people in the Kwangju Uprising.[23] Another painter of Reality and Utterance, Noh Won-hee described the painting:

> Shin Kyung-ho's painting represents the graves for the victims sacrificed in the Kwangju Uprising. At that time, while the government made no public confirmation of the facts [about the Kwangju Uprising], the painting raises questions about the circumstances and significance of the tragedy that happened in Kwangju.[24]

The majority of the people who rose up in arms to fight for democracy were ordinary people (*minjung*).[25] Through the Uprising, the Kwangju citizens were "projected as true examples of *minjung* as historical subjectivity."[26] Manual workers, unemployed workers, and workers with occasional jobs made up more than eighty percent of the people's task force and about sixty percent of the dead in the Uprising. According to historian Namhee Lee, "While the workers and 'lumpen proletariat' were deemed as true revolutionaries in the immediate aftermath of Kwangju, intellectuals and students were to go through a number of years of 'repentence,' for their 'abandonment of Kwangju.'"[27] Shin Kyung-ho himself acknowledged: "Then, I did not go out."[28] In

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[23] Hwang Ji-u, "Salmŭi p'yomyŏnjangnyŏk" [Life's Surface Tension], in Shin Kyung-ho, Nŏksirado itko ŏpko [Soul or Not, 1968-1992], exhibition Catalogue (Seoul: Myunglipmisul, 1992), 16.
[24] Noh Won-hee, "Ch'amdaun jŏnmusŏngŭl hoigtŭhagi wihayŏ" [To Accomplish True Professionalism], in Minjung misulŭl hyanghayŏ: Hyŏnsilgwa Balŏn 10 nyŏnŭi baljach'wi. [Toward *Minjung* Art: A Decade of Reality and Utterance], ed. Hyŏnsilgwa Balŏn (Seoul: Kwahakkwa sasang, 1990), 112.
[25] National Democratic Student's Association, "Kwangju minjung hangjaengŭi hyŏndaesajŏk Chaejomyŏng" [Historical Reconsideration of the Kwangju *Minjung* Uprising], in 5.18 Kwangju minjunghangjaeng jaryojip [The 5.18 Kwangju *Minjung* Uprising: Collection of Related Materials], ed. Chŏnnamsahoemunjeyŏnkuso (Kwangju: Tosŏch'ulp'an Kwangju, 1988), 280.
[26] Namhee Lee, 193.
[27] Ibid., 194.
[28] Hwang Ji-u, 19.

this context, the graves imply not only the actual victims in Kwangju but also the symbolic death of intellectuals including the artist himself.

The grim subject matter of deaths represented in Shin Kyung-ho's painting also undermined the rosy vision of the nation's prosperity, forged by another military regime, to be attained through quantitative economic growths and Westernization now specifically symbolized by the opening of Olympic games in 1988. The cultural legacy related to the trauma of death certainly belongs to the last cultural terrain that can be Westernized. In this way, the painting provided a mode of resistance to the growing presence of consumer culture. For this reason, the government officials repeatedly asked Shin Kyung-ho to change the subjects of his painting: "Why don't you, like others, depict roses or country-side scenery instead of the graves? If you do so, we will support you."[29] Shin Kyung-ho's painting offers extremely subversive metaphors rejecting both a widespread optimism about modernization and an idealized national identity collusive with it, the basis of which codified a conservative ideology under the authoritarian government.

After the group's founding exhibition, Shin Kyung-ho received a warning notice from the Ministry of Education. The notice sealed as secret reads: "Despite your claim that you are a painter in the manner of Abstract Expressionism, we acknowledged that you have produced and exhibited socially critical works …so that they have become a factor stirring up the public mind and agitating student

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[29] Quoted in Lee T'ae-ho, "Mudŏm gŭrimésŏ sijaktoen hyŏn silŭi naengsojŏg p'yohyŏndŭl" [From the Paintings of Graves to Sarcastic Expressions of Reality], in Shin Kyung-ho, Nŏksirado itko ŏpko [Soul or Not, 1968-1992], Exhibition Catalogue (Seoul: Myunglipmisul, 1992), 8.

demonstrations."[30] An art critic championing abstract art provided the Ministry with a negative analysis of Shin Kyung-ho's painting.[31] As a result, the government authorities listed Shin Kyung-ho as an artist stained with suspicious thoughts, along with seven others, and confiscated two of his paintings. One of them was Nŏksirado Itgo Ŏpgo--Ch'ohon [Soul or Not—Invocation of Soul] (1980, fig. 23).

The painting reveals the nature of harsh censorship conducted under Martial Law. It is a simplified rendering of a shaman's house indicated by the bamboo tree, and does not contain an overt sign of political critique. The central motif is a bamboo tree with a woman's red skirt tied on it, waving in the wind. The government authorities must have associated the *red* skirt with Communism in general or the flag of North Korea in particular.[32] The color red in works of art literally conjured up 'Red Scare,' the infamous anti-Communist hysteria in South Korea during the Cold War era. The bright and localized colors, symbolic iconography such as moon, and simplified composition recall *minhwa* , although Shin's painting embedded with rough surface and pointed shapes activates a much more electrifying response than *minhwa*.

The subtitle Ch'ohon means a funeral ritual inherited from ancient Korea, in which a shaman acts as a medium to summon a dead soul whose corpse is missing. Shin Kyung-ho often represented animals such as dogs (as in Mt. Mudŭng) and snakes (as in Invocation of Soul), as symbols of the rebirth of the dead. The painting's vibrant brushstrokes, as if they are visual incantations, symbolically

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[30] Quoted in Shin Kyung-ho, Soul or Not: A Retrospective, 1968-1992 (*Nŏksirado Itgo Ŏpgo*) (Seoul: Myunglip Art, 1992), 8.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Shin Kyung-ho, Interview by author, July 2002, Kwangju, South Korea.

transform the shamanic theme into a collaborative ritual invoking the *minjung* who were killed in the Kwangju Uprising as the true masters of history, and the rebirth of their resistant spirits against oppression in those repenting survivors. The idea of the shamanic ritual also seems to invoke the repressed under the trajectory of modernization because practices of shamanism were antagonistic to the scientific rationality sought by modernization.

It did not mean, however, that Shin Kyung-ho merely revived old Korean arts. He majored in Western-style painting, and mainly used oil or acrylic colors on canvas, along with Korean ink. As a matter of fact, Shin Kyung-ho was quite interested in Abstract Expressionism in his early career, and his painting's shamanic theme charged with raw emotions may be associated with Abstract Expressionism, which emphasized a transformational symbolism of mythic origin and embraced non-European cultures.[33] But Shin Kyung-ho's painting invoked an indigenous shamanism still active in the people's everyday life in modern Korea.

Lim Ok-sang: An "Alchemist" of *Minjung* Art

At the group's founding exhibition, Lim Ok-sang (Im Ok-sang, b.1950), Shin Kyung-ho's close friend, also exhibited a painting with an implicit reference to the Kwangju Uprising. Lim Ok-sang is a versatile and prolific artist, and produced

[33] Stephen Polcari, Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 233. David Craven, "Abstract Expressionism and Third World Art: A Post-Colonial Approach to 'American' Art," The Oxford Art Journal v. 14, no. 1 (1991), 44-66; Craven reveals that Abstract Expressionist artists embraced not only native American culture but also the third-world culture including pre-colonial South Pacific and Latin American cultures.

paintings, sculptures, collages, bas-reliefs, and installation-works. An art critic called him "an alchemist of images."[34] He was outstanding in drawing, yet often used bright "hallucinogenic" colors.[35] In Ungdŏngi [Pond] (1980, fig. 24), in a symmetrical composition, Lim Ok-sang meticulously depicted a red cloud mushrooming from a pond filled with the blood. In the same year, also referring to the 5.18 Kwangju, he painted Ttang IV [Land IV] (1980, fig. 25), Namu III [Tree III] (1980, fig. 26), and Ŏllug I [Stain I] (1980, fig. 27). In a foreshortened perspective, Land IV shows a vast green field of rice with red soil dug up in a shape roughly resembling a prone human body. On the other hand, Tree III shows the old tree soaring up against the stormy sky, and emphasizes its verticality crossed by the horizon. It was painted fast in broken contours, rising across the horizon and burying itself from the midpoint up in a Prussian-blue cloud whose lower area is coarsely mixed with white. The dimly lit tree's scales and roots are rendered with red, like the bursting blood vessels of a human body. If Land IV suggests the supine position of humanity embraced by the land, Tree III associated the old tree standing in an imminent tempest with the indomitable human spirit confronting history. In Stain, the painter mixed sand with gray colors to represent the surface-texture of a paved road, which the red literally smeared and blotted like a bloodstain. While the other paintings' symbolism of wounded or stormy nature suggests "the suffering and the wound of the nation's land" in history as a whole, Stain metonymically refers to the bloody streets of the

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[34] Yu Hong-jun, "'Sangch'ŏbatŭn' ttangesŏ, 'ilŏsŏnŭn' ttangŭro" [From 'Wounded Land' to 'Rising Land'], chap in Tasi hyunsilkwa chŏnt'ongŭi chip'yŏngesŏ [Again on the Horizons of Reality and Tradition] (Seoul: Ch'angjakkwa Pip'yŏngsa, 1996), 259-270.

[35] Eleanor Heartney, "Strength from the Earth: The Art and Politics of Ok Sang Lim," in Ok-Sang Lim: In the Spirit of Resistance, exhibition catalog (New York: The Alternative Museum, 1997), 41.

recent Kwangju Uprising.[36] If the former paintings symbolize a holistic connection between humanity and nature, the latter materializes the artificial pavement completely blocking the contact between them (i.e. blood and land). Without using a figurative image in Stain, the painter represented a powerful color field associated with the state's reckless use of military forces against its own people. About these paintings, Lim Ok-sang wrote:

> **Kwangju allowed no word.**
>
> The painting, distinct in symmetry, with no excess.
> The painting, as clear as a mirror, with no superfluous rhetoric like neutral colors.
> The painting, touching and inspiring, with no need to explain.
> When we are driven to a limited situation in which we cannot communicate in words certain truths or facts, the painting can be, I believe, more effective than words as a way of communication.[37]

Lim Ok-sang wanted to become a witness and participant, rather than a neutral observer of what he represented, and identified himself with the *minjung* as he represented them as the masters of history. He wanted to represent "this present history and this place" where he was living.[38] For this purpose, Lim Ok-sang emphasized muti-disciplinary approaches in art:

> Anything about a human being interests me. A human being possessed history, culture, philosophy, politics, society, etc. The meaning of art is thus expanded to a human being's total problems. That is, art must actively recover its synthesizing and unifying functions. If art ignores human being's problems, what is its value?
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> **Therefore, I am related to all.**

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[36] Lim Ok-sang, Ibid., 71.
[37] Ibid., 66.
[38] Lim Ok-sang, Hanparam Im Ok-sang jakp'umjŏn [Lim Ok-sang Exhibition], exhibition catalog (Seoul: Munyejinhŭngwŏn misulhoegwan, 1981), unpaginated.

Elsewhere, he suggested a new way of seeing as an alternative to "the habitual way of seeing."[39] His new way of seeing rejects disinterested representations of art in search of pure opticality, and aims to represent a total relationship embedded in society. In this way, Lim Ok-sang identified himself with the *minjung*: "My neighbors I represented in my paintings are not only farmers and laborers; in these people who have lived on this land and protected this land, I have found portraits of myself and us."[40] He also said, "I, the painting, and the viewer meet one another at a certain point."[41]

However, he denied the effect of empathy, claiming that "I should not invite the viewer only to the internal site of my painting."[42] Empathy as "objectified self-enjoyment," according to Wilhelm Worringer, means psychological assimilation of works of art and the viewer isolated from the other person.[43] According to Worringer, moreover, empathy is associated with organic naturalism (as opposed to the urge to inorganic abstraction).[44] By rejecting empathy, thus, Lim Ok sang also differentiated his painting from asocial and ahistorical naturalism. He wanted his painting to become a site where the painter, the viewer, and the subject are socially and historically interconnected.

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[39] Lim Ok-sang, An Chong-gwan, and Kang Yo-bae, "A Discussion," in Lim Ok-sang, Im Ok-sang Jakp'umjŏn [Lim Ok-sang Exhibition], exhibition catalog (Seoul: Seoul Art Museum, 1984), unpaginated.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Wilhelm Worringer, Abstraction and Empathy (1908), trans. Michael Bullock (New York: International Universities Express, 1953), 14.
[44] Worringer, Ibid., 3-25.

In this context, Lim Ok-sang's symbolic representation of land implied social agendas concerning the peasantry being displaced under modernization. His personification of the wounded land also referred to the failure of agricultural policy in the course of industrialization, and farmers' sufferings. Since the late 1970s he represented land and pond in order to symbolize the crisis of historical subjectivity. To Ungdŏngi I [Pond I], (1976), in which the central motif is a round pond filled with lurid crimson red blood, the painter added a verse: "Living land, Mother-land. Land's anger, land's compassion, land's spirituality."[45] In Ŏmŏni [Mother] (1988, fig. 28), he seamlessly merged a close view of his aunt and a bird-eye view of her flooded farm. Inscribed in the painting's upper area is a letter from the painter to his mother who could not tolerate urban life and returned to her hometown to live. The painter seemed to agree with his mother that both farmers and land die, if they are separated from one another.[46]

Lim Ok-sang further related the land's symbolism with the *minjung* as historical subjects. His painting Poribat II [Barley Field II] (1983) represented nine farmers standing in a ripe barley field as if they are planted there. In 1987, he produced a poster using a similar image of the barley field and with words like pori gogae literally meaning a "Barley-Hill" (1987, fig. 29). Pori gogae indicates spring famine in which the farmers did not have anything to eat after the end of winter and before the barley harvest in spring. For poor farmers, pori gogae was the highest hill

[45] Lim Ok-sang, Lim Ok-sang Gallery: Pyŏgŏmnŭn misulkwan [Lim Ok-sang Gallery: Museum without Walls] (Seoul: Saenggakŭi namu, 2000), 32.
[46] Lim Ok-sang, Ibid., 92

to go over in life. At the upper part of the poster, it was preceded by another irritating word to Korean farmers "the Uruguay Round." In 1986, the World Trade Organization initiated The Uruguay Round negotiation that aimed to extend the trading system into the sector of agriculture by cutting subsidy and tariff.[47] The United States and Europen countries strongly supported the Uruguay Round to open the rice markets in rice-importing countries like South Korea.[48] South Korean farmers ever since fiercely opposed the import of rice more than anything else and globalization on agriculture in general. (In 2003, a South Korean farmer Lee Kyung-hae killed himself amid a protest with farmers from twenty-one third-world countries against the Uruguay Round open in Cancun, Mexico.[49]) At the bottom of the poster, was the text of a political slogan: "Abolish the power of monopoly capitalists, Win *minjung* democracy!" In June 1987, the South Korean democratic movement finally achieved a breakthrough. Lim Ok-sang wanted the painting to serve as a vehicle of message and a medium of compassion, representing the idea/ideal of 'becoming one' through active interaction among the painter, the viewer, and the painting's content, and thus their totality in historical and social contexts. In this way, he also represented the *minjung* as the masters of history in the advance of the global capitalism.

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[47] "Understanding the WTO: The Uruguay Round," http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/tif_e/fact5_e.htm (accessed September 7, 2004).
[48] Yi Jae-ok, Uruguay Round Nongsanmul hyŏpsang baegsŏ [Report on the Uruguay Round Negotiations] (Seoul: Han'guk nongch'on kyŏngje yŏnguwŏn, 1994), 3.
[49] The protesting farmers demanded that their proposal to cut farm subsidies in the United States and Europe be discussed in the conference. However, the WTO meeting rejected most of the pleas for change in agriculture, and allowed the United States to maintain billions of dollars in annual subsidies. "Korean Protester Mourned," *The New York Times* (16 September 2003) and "A Farmer's Suicide," *The New York Times* (22 September 2003).

Kim Jeong-heon: The Farmer's Painter

However, it was another painter, Kim Jeong-heon (Kim Jŏng-hŏn,b.1946), who first specifically represented the farmer's life struggling under modernization, and set up a prototype of "Nongmin misul" (Farmers' Art).[50] Reality and Utterance's founding exhibition contained four of his paintings including Nongbu [Farmers] (1980, fig. 30). This painting shows an old peasant-couple sitting in the foreground; above them, the bright fields, a village nestled in a low hill, and a monotone sky are piled one upon another in a schematic design. Two white areas of the drifting cloud originally consisted of cut-out newspaper-articles with a controversial political message. But the painter erased the areas with white, after the group's exhibition was rejected at the Korean Culture and Arts Foundation. Kim Jeong-heon deliberately avoided refined looks in his paintings. In Farmers, Kim Jeong-heon appeared to represent the farmers in the same awkward manner as he did the furrowed fields. In particular, the couple's faces full of deep furrows overlap the fields' furrows. The rough brushstrokes emphasize the painter's labor, and may be associated with the farmers' works. On the theme of peasantry, Kim Jeong-heon wrote:

> I previously felt a vague sense of pity toward underdeveloped rural areas, since they have been isolated from modernization, and toward farmers, the *minjung*, since their lives are laden with unjust treatments. Now, however, I have realized that the farm has an almost archetypal meaning we must retain in modern life. It is, I think, not an abandoned territory isolated from blessings of materialistic civilization, but a foundation in which healthy human life is,

[50] Yu Hong-jun, "Kim Jŏngh ŏn: minjungjŏk naeyong, nŏgŭroun hyŏngsik" [Kim Jŏng-hŏn: *Minjung* Contents, Flexible Styles], chap. in Tasi hyunsilgwa chŏnt'ongŭi chip'yŏngesŏ [Again on the Horizons of Reality and Tradition] (Seoul: Ch'angjakkwa Pip'yŏngsa, 1996), 226.

> and can be, sustained. Then, I came to trust and respect them who chose to live there. And I wanted to produce paintings with appeal for these people living together with land.[51]

But Kim Jeong-heon had been a Modernist painter until his first solo show held in 1977. He was then painting in a semi-abstract style, appropriating geometric patterns and simplified images from old Korean tiles. Art critic Kim Yun-su stressed the painter's radical change as a rare case in "the art world where the artists' beliefs in the separation of art and life, their ways of life as conformists in the established system and as spectators of history became manners and customs."[52] As a counter-concept to Modernism, according to Kim Yun-su, Kim Jeong-heon suggested "Large Painting."[53] The painter defined the "Large Painting" as a truly communicable art as opposed to "a small and pretty painting," which referred to "a contemporary painting possessed and consumed as a thing."[54] "Large Painting," in Kim Jeong-heon's view, was neither a symbol nor a decoration, yet was a substantial life-story, "a story about you and I living hand-in-hand liberated from exploitative relationships, a story about one's being a subject of life against separation and oppression."[55] According to him, it ultimately aimed for "a healthy circulation of work (production) and play (expression)."[56]

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[51] Kim Jeong-heon, interview with Yu Hong-jun, in Kim Jeng-heon Jakp'umjŏn [Kim Jeong-heon's Exhibition], exhibition catalog (Seoul: Gŭrimmadang Min; Chŏnju: Ontara misulkwan, 1988), unpaginated.
[52] Kim Yun-su, "Kim Jŏngh ŏn jakp'umjŏne puch'yŏ" [On Kim Jŏngh ŏn's Exhibition], in Kim Jŏng hŏn jak'pumjŏn (1988), unpaginated.
[53] Kim Jeong-heon, "Misulgwa soyu: k'ŭn gŭrimŭlwihan jean" [Art and Possession: A Proposition for Large Painting], in Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

An art for communication was a central idea for social realist artists to embody against the Modernist idea of auto-referentiality. In the above article, Kim Yun-su also mentioned some concepts frequently appearing in discussions of *minjung* art, such as utterance and communication.[57] But Sung Wan-kyung, an art critic of Reality and Utterance, dominated the discussions elaborating the importance of communication in social realism.[58] As pointed out above, Kim Jeong-heon believed that Modernism reduced the value of art to the status of commodity in the name of high art, and art criticism mythicized and fetishized it.[59] Their critiques were also based on the fact that the art market expanded fast during the economic booms in the 1970s.[60] During this period, commercial galleries multiplied and the prices of the senior artists' works skyrocketed. Thus the established art world was not only ideologically endorsed by current political powers but also financially benefited from the concurrent economic growth.

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[57] Ibid. See also Choe Min, "Is Art a Thing?" *Munyejungang* (Fall 1981), 326-330.

[58] See Sung Wan-kyung, "Han'guk hyŏndae misulŭi pitnagan kwejŏk" [Modern Korean art has gone astray] *Kyeganmisul* (Summer 1980), "Ch'oedaehanŭi sot'onggwa ch'oesohanŭi sot'ong" [Maximum Communication and Minimal Communication] *Madang* (October 1981), "Misulŭi minjuhwawa sot'ongŭi hoebok" [Democratization of Art and the Recovery of Communication] *Yesulgwa Bip'yung* (Summer 1984), and "Sot'ongŭi misulgwa gongdongch'eŭisik" [Communicative Art and Communal Consciousness] *Kyeganmisul* (Winter 1986). All these articles are republished in Sung Wan-kyung, Minjungmisul, modŏnisŭm, sigakmunhwa [Minjung Art, Modernism, and Visual Culture] (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 1999), 21-46, 77-83. See also Choe Min, "Ŭisasot'ongŭrosŏŭi misul" [Art as Communication], in Hyŏnsilgwa Balŏn: 80 nyŏndaeŭi saeroun misulŭl hyanghayŏ [Reality and Utterance: Toward a New Art in the 1980s] (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 1985), 103-109.

[59] Kim Jeong-heon, "Misulgwa soyu: k'ŭn gŭrimŭlwihan jean" [Art and Possession: A Proposition for Large Painting], in Ibid. See also Choe Min, "Hwanwŏnjuŭi kyŏnghyange daehan han pansŏng" [A Reflection on the Reductivist Trend], *Yesulpip'yŏng* (January 1982), 177 -179, and Noh Won-hee (No Wŏn-hi), "Snobbism and Criticism as Junk Information," in Choe Min and Sung Wan-kyung, eds., Sigakkwa Ŏnŏ 2 [Vision and Language 2: Contemporary Korean Art and Criticism], (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 1985), 51-63.

[60] Choe Yŏl, Han'guk hyŏndae misul undongsa [A History of Modern Art Movements in Korea] (Seoul: Tolbegae, 1994), 158-160.

On the other hand, the farmers Kim Jeong-heon and his colleagues represented were the major victims of modernization. According to Geographer Jeongman Lee, "the farmers' only alternative is to move to the city and become a part of it," due to "the inexorable trend towards industrialization and the globalization of the economy and the shift of political and economic power to cities."[61] In Lee's view, "A thousand-year tradition rooted in the country-side has been deeply fractured and seems to be tearing apart."[62] Leaving farmers became a common theme for social realism, as represented in Kim Jeong-heon's painting Ttŏnanŭn saramdŭl [Leaving People] (1988). Many other farmers had to watch their children leave home for education and jobs in the cities.

Noh Won-hee and the Underside of Urbanization

The members of Reality and Utterance also represented urban proletariats as another major category of subject matter. At the group's first show, Noh Won-hee (No Wŏn-hi, b.1948) presented Ch'ang [Window] (1980, fig. 31), which depicts a man with his arms folded in front of the brick wall with a gridded window showing a dark interior. Later, the painter revealed that she wanted to express the "oppressed

[61] Jeongman Lee, "The Generation of Sacrifice: Modernization and Korean Farmers," (Ph.D diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1991), 3. See also Clark W. Sorenson, Over the Mountains Are Mountaions: Korean Peasant Households and Their Adaptations to Rapid Industrialization (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1988) and Nancy Abelmann, Ehoes of the Past, Epics of Dissent: A South Korean Social Movement (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1996). Despite the declining importance of agricultural productions in the postwar national economy, Sorenson emphasizes farmers' living standard has improved. On the other hand, Abelman explores the significance of the farmers' dissident movements during the 1980s in the context of the inherited *minjung* ideology or the democratization movements.
[62] Lee, Ibid.

collective psychology" in this painting.[63] The slightly oblique lines of the bricks slowly recess from the right front to the left rear, and allow the narrow space between the wall and the picture surface at the left to accommodate the man's upper body. The lateral spacing of the figure is also marginal in the painting, where the dark window takes over the central area. No narrative connection between the painted motifs or the figure's marginal position in particular conjures up a sense of alienation embedded in a corner of the urban space.

Ten days after the end of the group's exhibition, Noh Won-hee opened her solo show, and it drew critical acclaim. Kŏriesŏ [On the Street] (1980, fig. 32), a painting on view at the show, became a canonical work of social realism. It depicts a suburban area of a city, apparently a factory district. Migrated farmers made up a great portion of the poor in big cities like Seoul. In the painting, a small group of seemingly unemployed workers gather around a con artist and watch his performance as spectators. The con artist's performance is invisible, blocked by the surrounding spectators, yet becomes the conceptual focal point that also draws the viewer's gaze which is then distracted by the man leaving toward the vanishing point of the painting's single-point perspective. But the viewer's gaze at the painting is constantly compared to the spectators' gaze suggested within the painting. In this way, the painter seemed to confound a pure way of seeing in visual art and impure ways of seeing in real life.

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[63] Noh Won-hee, "Ch'amdaun jŏnmusŏngŭl hoigtŭhagi wihayŏ" [To Accomplish a True Professionalism], in Minjung misulŭl hyanghayŏ: Hyŏnsilgwa Balŏn 10 nyŏnŭi baljach'wi. [Toward *Minjung* Art: A Decade of Reality and Utterance] (Seoul: Kwahakkwa sasang, 1990), 110.

With the spectators' backs turned toward the viewer, moreover, the painter maintains a psychological and cognitive distance between the painting's subjects and the viewer. This practice of alienating the painting from the viewer colludes with the optical tension between the painting's flat physicality revealed through the ink-splashes and the painting's infinite spatial depth simulated through the perspectival system. Noh Won-hee's cold analysis of a quotidian theme emphasizes a sense of abnormality and isolation prevailing in the space of new society.

Above all, Noh Won-hee rejected a stereotypical expression and theme. For this purpose, she explored ways to "maintain a tension between form-making and reality," and often multiplied the layers of formal and thematic structure in her paintings.[64] Through this uneasy tension, according to art critic Yu Hong-jun, she revealed hidden truths embedded in everyday life.[65] But "she does not allow anything permanent and fixed, and any holy existence [in her paintings]." Put another way, the painter did not like to use spectacular and familiar symbolism. Elsewhere, she also stated that "The people, who are wandering and frightened, strong and weak, and full of inconsistencies, and their sense of life, their desire and predictions for innovative changes, a synthesis of all these elements is the source of agonies and hopes I have represented in my painting."[66] In this way, she represented "the portraits

[64] Quoted in Kim Bok-yŏng, "Hyŏnsil insikkwa sangjing," *Konggan* (January 1981), 37.
[65] Yu Hong-jun, "Noh Won-hee: Gasangjŏk realismŭi segye" [Noh Won-hee: A World of Imaginative Realism], chap in 80 nyŏndae misulŭi hyŏnjanggwa jakkadŭl [Art Scenes and Artists in the 1980s] (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 1987), 205.
[66] Noh Won-hee, the brochure of her fourth exhibition held in Seoul, 1990.

of numerous people who have lived in the shadow of the prosperity and spectacular slogans of the 1970s."[67]

Noh Won-hee continued to represent the underside of modernization, focusing on farmers along with the urban poor. Shin Kyŏng nim (b.1936), along with Kim Chi-ha, one of the most influential poets in national literature, enthusiastically praised Noh Won-hee's painting, saying that "she painted what I wanted to write in verse."[68] The poet's reading of her paintings also suggests a common ground shared by both the writers from national literature and social realist artists. Shin Kyŏng-nim wrote a review of her works in retrospect:

> Since I saw Namu [Tree], she has been my favorite artist. Although I could not remember which exhibition it was, I still cannot forget the shiver penetrating my whole body at the moment I saw Namu covering almost an entire wall. Lifeless bare branches stretching out everywhere, numerous loudspeakers tied between the branches, and frozen sky. Through these loudspeakers the furious dictator's venomous orders are likely to be given in any moment; the man stumbling in fears under the trees, he is the very image of ourselves, the survivors from the 1970s and 80s.[69]

In Noh Won-hee's paintings, the eminent South Korean poet read "a protest against distorted history and hatred toward the ones who did it." For instance, he regarded her painting Kin'gŭp nyusŭ [Urgent News] as a representation of the situation of the 1970s, and related it to Kim Chi-ha's poem 1974 nyŏn 1 wŏl (January 1974) in which Kim Chi-ha chanted: "Let us call January 1974 a death—The street in the afternoon, after the broadcasting, the fading light in your eyes, let us call it a death." Shin

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[67] Kim Yun-su, "Noh Won-hee Gaeinjŏn" [Noh Won-hee's Solo Exhibition] *Kyeganmisul* (Spring 1981), 37.
[68] Shin Kyung-lim, "Naŭi Noh Won-hi gŭrim ilkki" [My Reading of Noh Won-hee's Painting], in Noh Won-hee, Noh Won-hee, exhibition catalog (Seoul: Hakkoje, 1991), 82.
[69] Ibid.

Kyŏng-nim viewed Kŭrimja [Shadow] painted by Noh Won-hee as an edited impression of the South Korean society in the 1980s ruled by threats and fears of death. He claimed, "I find in her paintings what still often reappears and chokes me in my dreams, and I feel the shiver of my body."[70]

In the above article, Shin Kyŏng-nim also specifically discussed agendas concerning farmers, migrated farmers in the city, urban proletariats, ecological changes and pollution in relation to the subject matter represented by Noh Won-hee. As a parallel to Noh Won-hee's painting Pinjip [Vacant House] (1990, fig. 33), Shin Kyŏng-nim quoted his own poem:

> Last night, from the vacant house on the hill, doors open repeatedly, they heard.
> Through the night, unceasing coughs, they heard.
> Ch'ŏlgŏdŏg ch'ŏlgŏdŏg, someone was weaving mats, they also heard.
> The old man with a limping leg perhaps returned after a decade he had left and abandoned farming.
> So, wanting to go up there in the morning,
> Old friends waited for daybreak.
> Before roosters crow, the first telephone call, they heard.
> By will, the old man came back to be buried in his home soil.[71]

The poet concluded that "In Noh Won-hee's works, however, I do not read any sense of disappointment, frustration, and despair from the people living in cruel situations and gloomy realities."[72] Farmers and urban proletariats sacrificed themselves not only for modernization, but also for democracy. Characterized as *minjung*, they were considered as true revolutionaries particularly after the Kwangju Uprising, and Noh

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[70] Ibid., 83.
[71] Shin Kyŏng nim, "Orangk'ekkot" [Violet]. Quoted in Ibid., 83.
[72] Ibid., 84.

Won-hee, along with other members of Reality and Utterance, also represented the *minjung* as the masters of history.

Shin Hak-chul and Photomontage

The members of Reality and Utterance formed a body of the first generation of *minjung* art. Without Shin Hak-chul (Sin Hak-ch'ŏl, b.1943), who never joined the group, however, the first generation of *minjung* art would be incomplete. He produced a number of powerful social realist works during the 1980s. But he was "a committed Modernist" until 1976.[73] He was active in the group A.G., an abbreviation of Avant-Garde, from 1969 until it disbanded in 1975. One of the leading members of A.G. was Park Seo-bo, who launched *Informel* art in Korea, and Modernist art critic Yi Il theoretically championed A.G. For A.G.'s first exhibition, he wrote that "The meaning of art in its most primitive state was about an affirmation of life (or being, perhaps) before it became art. Contemporary art seeks its meaning in the primitive state."[74] Yi Il again proposed an artistic quest for something permanent and original, unaffected by capricious realities. At that time, Shin Hak-chul executed works in various styles from geometric abstraction, found objects, figurative images, and syntheses of them. At the A.G.'s annual exhibition in 1974, he presented eight assisted objects. The artist placed a single object or a photographic image found in

[73] Kim Yun-su, "Ilsanggwa yŏksae daehan ch'unggyŏjŏk sangsangnyŏk" [Shocking Imagination about Everyday Life and History] *Kyeganmisul* (Winter 1982), 109.
[74] Yi Il, brochure for A.G.s first exhibition in Seoul, unpaginated.

everyday environments at the center of the canvas. Three of them are a folded paper in a rectangular shape. In Untitled 3 (1974, fig. 34) with a colorful string tied on its upper area, the gentle movement of the fabric string and the slow shift of light and shade caught on the paper's wavy surface resonate with the paper's fragile materiality, yet simultaneously undermine the overall geometric layout. Each of the works generates a subtle formal play completely isolated from the outside world.

In 1977, Shin Hak-chul suddenly painted a gruesome scene of piled corpses under the title Chŏnjaeng: Wŏlnamjŏn (War: The Vietnam War), and the next year P'inan'gil [Refuge Road] (1978, fig. 35) showing two dead refugees on the road during the Korean War. Except the titles, both paintings do not depict a specific motif related to these wars. In P'inan'gil, the barren, exotic landscape looks as dead as the bodies, and contains no symbolism that is rich in the works created by the members of Reality and Utterance. He represented a realistic subject matter in figurative forms, in an objective manner. In November 1979, Shin Hak-chul published an article in an art magazine, and explained the recent changes in his works.[75] He wrote:

> My ways of producing works began and ended with thoughts and speculations, regardless of my body…. I felt like being plunged into an infinite freedom with no beginning and ending, with no sense of affiliation, restraint, and conflict. At this point, I could see neither a reason for my existence nor a reason for my paintings. I was nothing but a flying arrow with no target. I was standing with no reason on a deserted territory filled with emptiness and loneliness. I had to escape from this infinite freedom; I had to know why I was standing there.[76]

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[75] Shin Hak-chul, "Chayuljŏgin johyŏngesŏ, Jayŏnjŏgin johyŏngŭro" [From Autonomous Form-making to Natural Form-making] *Gonggan* (November 1979). Republished in Shin Hak-chul, Shin Hak-chul, exhibition catalog (Seoul: Hakkoje, 1991), 96-97.
[76] Ibid., 96.

Shin Hak-chul's statement recalls Won Dong-suk's critical essay on Kim Whan-ki, in which the art critic regarded Kim Whan-ki's abstract painting as a representation of a placeless and timeless freedom. But Shin Hak-chul came to realize the vague nature of abstraction alienated from the external world, and wanted to recover a bodily connection with it.[77] Thus Shin Hak-chul's new exploration of his physical affiliation with the external world may be related to Fredric Jameson's idea of "an aesthetic of cognitive mapping" that provides "the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system."[78] The "cognitive mapping" also emphasizes a sense of time or history.[79] Shin Hak-chul's effort to affiliate himself with a certain order that is not institutional started from a critique of commercial culture, and extended to a representation of Korean history and *minjung*.[80] The new path of his art demonstrated that the fate of the individual is connected with collective experiences of the nation, and coincided with Jameson's notion of "national allegories" embedded in third-world culture.[81]

In 1979 Shin Hak-chul started to produce photomontages that combined photographic images of commodities and parts of the human or animal body. In his extensive uses of montage techniques, he would surely have known Reality Group's Manifesto that explains montage's simultaneous representations of various themes

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[77] Ibid., 97.
[78] Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* (July August, 1984), 92.
[79] Douglas Kellner, "Introduction: Jameson, Marxism, and Postmodernism," in Douglas Kellner, ed. Postmodernism, Jameson, Critique (Washington, D.C.: Maisonneuve Press, 1989), 35.
[80] Shin Hak-chul, 97.
[81] Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (Fall 1986), 69.

that happened in different times and spaces as an effective style to embody social and historical totality. In 1981, Kim Yun-su first saw Shin Hak-chul's photomontages on view in a group show. Kim Yun-su wrote, "At the moment I saw his works, I was shocked as if I was struck by high-voltage electricity."[82] The next year, the artist held his first solo exhibition in Seoul Misulgwan (Galerie de Séoul) directed by Kim Yun-su. In the accompanying pamphlet, Shin Hak-chul revealed that he wanted to paint in manners in which he could "combine painting with literature."[83] Opposing Greenbergian Modernism that defined the painting as an embodiment of literal, rather than literary, contents, Shin Hak-chul further solidified the key issue he raised in the previous statement.

Among the works viewed at the solo show, Sanghwang 801 [Situation 801] (1980, fig. 36) and Han'guk kŭndaesa-3 [Korean Modern History-3] (1981, fig. 37) encapsulate the artist's concerns about consumer culture and history. Situation 801 is a photomontage juxtaposing photographic images such as a man's muscular legs and arms (wielding a Korean ancient sword), a woman's buttocks, a Coca Cola bottle, a plastic bottle of a South Korean-brand soft drink, a shoe, and a beach tube. These cut-out images are seamlessly connected against the dark backdrop so that the combined image sustains three-dimensionality and resembles a moving monster as a whole. According to Kim Yun-su:

> [Shin Hak-chul] concentrates on a society of mass-production and mass-consumption and its aggressive and spectacular reality. In order to represent

[82] Quoted in Kim Yun-su, "Mulch'e, in'gan, gŭrigo yŏksa" [Things, Human, and History], in Shin Hak-chul, Shin Hak-chul Jakp'umjŏn [Shin Hak-chul's Exhibition], exhibition pamphlet (Seoul: Seoul Misulkwan, 1982), unpaginated.
[83] Quoted in Ibid.

> this reality in itself, rather than as an idea or a metaphor, he used various images from commercial advertisements and photographs in a form of collage.[84] The photograph has the appealing power almost as powerful as that of an actual object; arrayed in an irrational order or assembled into a certain shape, it conjures up an unexpected illusion, and multiplies our visual impacts. Also taking a devilish look, the photograph often attacks us. Fully applying [these elements] to his works, he revealed and satirized human beings inflicted by the material, and contemporary people occupied by enforced consumption and desires.[85]

In a similar manner he used found objects in previous years, the painter emphasized metonymy for concrete representations of the external world. Shin Hak-chul rearranged found photographs in a way they form a grotesque shape in *trompe l'oeil* illusionism, and this grotesque organism suggested a "monstrous" reality embedded in current society, which was emphasized by the fathomless dark space.[86]

In Korean Modern History-3, Shin Hak-chul, using the photomontage technique, painted familiar historical images from the period of Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) to the present, widely circulated in documentary photographs in South Korea. Here, again, Michelangelesque bodily images dominate the whole scene. A deformed gigantic pig whose torso includes a Coca Cola bottle and parts of a YAMAHA motorcycle is emerging or growing from the ground covered with the casualties of Japanese Occupation and the Korean War. The narrow foreground at the bottom shows a group of anonymous soldiers of the Korean resistance army that

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[84] Since Shin Hak-chul only used snippets of photographs with figurative images, I use photomontage as the correct term for his collage technique. Whereas Cubist collage emphasizes the pasted object's material qualities in terms of the reality of the picture itself, photomontage tends to sustain the representational values of the stuck elements, like a word. For photomontage, thus, "the thing expressed is more important than the manner of expressing it." See Dawn Ades, Photomontage (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 15.

[85] Kim Yun-su, "Ilsanggwa yŏksae daehan ch'unggyŏjŏk sangsangnyŏk" [Shocking Imagination about Everyday Life and History], in Shin Hak-chul's Exhibition (1991), 100. This is an expanded version of his original article published in *Kyeganmisul* (Winter 1982), 107-109, 112.

[86] Shin Hak-chul, 96.

fought against the Japanese Imperial Army. All the pieces and parts are organically connected with one another in an ominous vertical structure, which the artist often used throughout the 1980s. He continued this series until the end of the 1980s. In the series of Korean Modern History, according to Kim Yun-su, Shin Hak-chul used photographs in order to represent history not as an idea but as a concrete object.[87] The art critic described the above painting in series: "Our modern history inflicted with wounds such as invasions and oppressions from foreign enemies, the [Korean] War, the nation's division, and the *minjung*'s sufferings, like a writhing huge body, like a devilish being, advances to the viewer, and strikes our dormant consciousness."[88]

Shin Hak-chul's photomontages or his use of the photomontage technique in painting apparently recall the works of the Berlin Dadaists, who invented photomontage nearly six decades earlier.[89] The Berlin Dadaists, used photomontage as an effective way to reject both abstraction and painting, to represent the advance of technology and the social chaos spawned under the Weimar Republic (1919-1933), and to reveal the underside of capitalism combined with militarism in the context of World War I. As in Raoul Hausmann's photomontage, Tatlin at Home (1920, fig. 38), for instance, the Berlin Dadaists enjoyed using irrational and illogical elements like chance, and the photographic images from current society had no coherent relationship among them in the photomontage. Whereas the Berlin Dadaists' photomontages represent the chaotic reality of society as such, Shin Hak-chul's

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[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Among the Berlin Dadaists, George Grosz and John Heartfield claimed that they experimented with the methods of photo-pasting-montage as early as 1915, while Raoul Hausmann and Hanna Höch claimed that they found the idea of photomontage in 1918. See Ades, 19-20.

photomontages suggest a total relationship between various events and objects having existed in different times in history and different places in current society. Thus, Shin Hak-chul's use of photomontage coincided with Arnold Hauser's argument that the montage technique is a proper method of representing contemporary reality.[90] As discussed above in the first Chapter, Paik Nak-chung translated and published Hauser's The Social History of Art in 1966, and it was widely read among social realist artists in South Korea.

Shin Hak-chul repeatedly emphasized the importance of photographs in his works. He considered the photograph as "a substitute for a real object or an *objet* [*trouvé*] identified with the real object in life," and used it represent history as a found object.[91] In the following years, he also took pictures of the themes that interested him, and copied them in his paintings. He never tried to hide this fact. (He, even, titled a painting representing a farmer Why Do You Take a Picture of Me? in1990.) The painter explicitly revealed the presence of the photograph as a medium between himself and the external world or history as such. In this sense, Shin Hak-chul's use of photographs apparently recalled the French critic Roland Barthes's analysis of photography, in which Barthes viewed the photograph as "a carnal medium" or "a sort of umbilical cord" connecting the photographed objects with himself."[92] In a similar way, the montage of conflicting photographic images literally linked Shin

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[90] Arnold Hauser, The Social History of Art, vol. 4, Naturalism, Impressionism, The Film Age, (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), 239. For a detailed discussion, see Chpater 2.
[91] Quoted in Hwang Ji-u, "Shin Hak-chulŭi 'mujangdoen sisŏn'" [Shin Hak-chul's 'Armored Gaze'], *Hangilmunhwa* (May 1990). Republished in Shin Hak-chul, 110.
[92] Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 80-81.

Hak-chul to the history and reality of the external world, and addressed a total relationship between him and the pasted or painted photographic referents.

Through the monstrous hybrid images formed by a collection of mass-mediated photographic images, he further wanted to suggest the abnormality embedded in the cultural and social environment. Shin Hak-chul, working by himself at that time, had a limited access to specific information regarding contemporary historical events such as the Kwangju Uprising, which was excluded from public news media. He claimed: "I did not know much of [recent situations] except quite general things, even though I was interested in knowing what happened."[93] In 1990, he copied a photograph of a victim from the Kwangju Uprising under the title Kwangjunŭn kkŭtnaji anatta [Kwangju is Still Alive.] (1990, fig. 39). She must be one of those innocent high school students cruelly killed by elite paratroopers. During the 1980s, similar photographs were circulated among college students and often exhibited by student organizations at college campuses, particularly in the late 1980s, to expose what happened in Kwangju.

Since 1984, Shin Hak-chul has put more emphasis on the painting's narrative content than on its formal intensity. Along with his kaleidoscopic photomontages, he started to represent a consistent narrative concerning peasantry. In Sin'giru [Mirage] (1984, fig. 40), he contrasted a group of farmers resting in the field with a modern city full of skyscrapers nestled on a huge mass of a cloud hanging low over the rice fields. Some of the farmers look at the girl dropping her head and leaving for the city.

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[93] Quoted in Hwang Ji-u, 109.

In the 1970s, 600,000, about 30 percent, of manufacturing workers were women and 83 percents of textile workers were also women.[94] According to Bruce Cumings, young women between 18 and 22 years of age were truly "the foot soldiers" of the export-led light industries. As the name of a Japanese electronic company, "Pioneer," imprinted on an advertising balloon in the painting indicates, multinational corporations also employed such young women, "at a better wage than they could get elsewhere."[95] Kim Chi-ha, who wrote Reality Group's Manifesto with Kim Yun-su in 1969, began in the same year his prominent career as poet, publishing the poem "Seoul gil" [The Road to Seoul] on the sacrifices of young women:

> I am going.
> Do not cry;
> I am going.
> Over the white hills, the black, and the parched hills,
> Down the long and dusty road to Seoul
> I am going to sell my body.
> Without a sad promise to return,
> to return some time blooming with a lovely smile,
> to unbind my hair,
> I am going.
> Do not cry;
> I am going.
> Who can forget the four o'clocks, or the scent
> of wheat? Even in this wretched, wretched life, the
> deeply unforgettable things…
> and in countless dreams I return,
> drenched with tears,
> following the moonlight….
> I am going.
> Do not cry;
> I am going.
> Over these parched hills that anguish
> Even the skies, down the long and dusty road to Seoul

[94] Bruce Cumings, Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History (New York: Norton, 1997), 368.
[95] Ibid., 369

I am going to sell my body.[96]

The sad poem not only suggests the fact that few young people remained in rural areas at the time, but also conceptually relates the two different worlds juxtaposed in the painting.

In the painting, Shin Hak-chul carefully composed a stereotypical narrative that prevailed in social realism. Deprived of a "pricking" sense of the real re-presented by the photograph, *punctum* in Barthes' term, this painting represents a view of declining peasantry already repeated by other social realist artists like Oh Yun and Kim Jŏng-hŏn.[97] But Shin Hak-chul was clearly conscious of it. He told an art critic that in order to reveal a distorted truth, the painter deliberately yielded immediate painterly expressions.[98] He wanted to represent the subject of the farmers in ways they could clearly understand. In 1987, in a similar comprehensible style, he painted Monaegi [Rice-Planting] (1987, fig. 41), with the farmers, using the plow, driving out materialism, commercial culture and foreign powers. But the authorities assumed the peaceful village rendered in the upper area of the painting, along with the Paektu Mountain located in the North Korea, to be a propagandistic representation of the North Korea.[99] They arrested the painter, and confiscated the painting. But Shin Hak-chul has insisted that he depicted his hometown Kŭmnŭng in the Kyŏng-buk

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[96] Kim Chi Ha, The Middle Hour: Selected Poems of Kim Chi Ha, trans. David R. McCann (Stanfordvill, N.Y.: Human Rights Publishing Group, 1980), 19.
[97] See Roland Barthes, 25-28.
[98] Yu Hong-jun, "Shin Hak-chul: Salmŭi silch'erŭl palk'inŭn yesul" [Shin Hak-chul: An Art Representing Actual Life], chap in 80 nyŏndae misulŭi hyŏnjanggwa jakkadŭl. [Art Scenes and Artists in the 1980s] (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 1987), 81.
[99] In 1999, Shin Hak-chul made an appeal to United Nation's Human Rights Committee, and the Committee advised the South Korean government to nullify the conviction and to return the painting to the painter. As of June 2004, the Ministry of Justice concluded that there was no way to return the painting confiscated by law to the original owner. *Internet Hankyore* (June 11, 2004).

province, South Korea. He became the first painter prosecuted and convicted as an offender of the National Security Law, yet not the last one, in post-war South Korea. The painter was released on bail, but his painting is still kept by the authorities.

Using various sources from folk art to photography and diverse styles from montage to narrative, the first generation of social realist artists represented social totality. Their immediate target was mainstream Modernism in the art world. As opposed to the auto-referentiality of Modernism, the members of Reality and Utterance and Shin Hak-chul explored ways in which they could identify with the subjects or objects they represented. South Korean social realists ultimately wanted to represent the *minjung*, and to identify themselves with them as the masters of history.

Chapter 4

Against Socialist Realism:
Discussions of Realism in France before World War II,
American Social Realism, and the French New Figuration

This chapter examines ways South Korean social realist art critics discussed Western realism and contemporary figurative painting in relation to their own social realism. Since its inception, the members of Reality and Utterance carefully dissociated their socially committed art from Socialist Realism.[1] In this vein, the group's art critics like Sung Wan-kyŋg (S ŏng Wan-kyŏng, b.1944) and Choe Min (b.1944) discussed some examples of realism from the West, consistently minimizing their connection with Socialist Realism. Emphasizing stylistically flexible embodiments of realism, Sung Wan-kyung introduced Fernand Léger's idea of New Realism and André Fougeron's realism before World War II in France and Choe Min reviewed the American Social Realist Ben Shahn in a popular art magazine in South Korea. This chapter also examines the two exhibitions of the French New Figuration held in 1982 at the Gallerie de Séoul (Seoul misulkwan or Seoul Art Museum) founded by Yim Setaik (Im Se-t'aek, b.1947), a former member of Reality Group (Hyŏnsil Tongin, 1969), and their careful avoidance of Socialist Realism. In this

[1] Kim Cheong-heon, interview by author, 8 October 2002, New York City, New York.

context, the Seoul Art Museum not only supported South Korean social realist artists but also became a meeting ground for them and newly emerging European figurative art.[2]

Sung Wan-kyung: Léger and André Fougeron Before and After World War II

Among the art critics of Reality and Utterance, Sung Wan-kyung, having studied at Ecole Nationale Superieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, introduced realist art movements that emerged in France before and after World War II. In the fall of 1981, he published a review of "Paris 1937-Paris 1957," an exhibition held at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris (May 28-November 2, 1981).[3] This exhibition began chronologically with the year 1937 when the Universal Exhibition was held in Paris and the Spanish Civil War broke out, and it ended with the year 1957 when the Soviet army invaded Hungary. Sung Wan-kyung emphasized that the year 1957 also marked the emergence of consumer society in France as a result of post-World War II economic booms. According to him, the most attractive point of this retrospective exhibition was that "it attempted to show the artists and their works in the context of

[2] Kim Yun-su helped establish the Seoul Art Museum and became the first director from 1981 to 1982. Critic Choe Min also worked there as curator. The Seoul Art Museum offered a number of solo and group exhibitions for young social realist artists including Lim Ok-sang and Shin Hak-chul in the early 1980s in particular, and also organized a joint show of South Korean social realist artists and French artists in 1983, which held in both countries. See Yim Se-taek, ed., Les Gens, Les Esprits; Pitnanŭn saramdŭl, pitnanŭnjŏngsindŭl, exhibition catalog, (Angoulême, France: Galerie Saint-Simon; Galerie de Séoul: Seoul, 1983).

[3] Sung Wan-kyung, "P'ari 1937-57ŭi sidaesanghwanggwa misulyangsik" [States of the Age and Styles of the Arts in Paris, 1937-1957] *Kyeganmisul* (Fall 1981), 103-122.

historical situations."[4] The exhibition's main purpose was, he also claimed, to show how Paris became the cultural and artistic center where numerous ideas were developed, received, and combined.[5]

The retrospective exhibition "Paris 1937-Paris 1957" featured not only French visual art from realism to abstraction but also French cinema, literature, and philosophy of the period.[6] In his review, however, Sung Wan-kyung, excluded the sections regarding abstraction. The exhibition included prominent abstract artists such as Yves Klein, Auguste Herbin, Nicholas de Staël, Hans Hartung, Pierre Soulages, Georges Mathieu, and Wols. At the same time, his discussion of French realism of the period illustrated some paintings done by André Fougeron, Fernand Léger, and Pablo Picasso, but never mentioned that they became members of the French Communist Party (*Parti Communiste Française*, aka P.C.F.). Sung Wan-kyung neither discussed nor illustrated Massacres in Korea (1951, fig. 42) on view at the exhibition, in which Picasso, as a member of P.C.F., represented the innocent victims of the Korean War. Throughout the review, he emphasized French realism as an anti-Fascist critique. By dissociating realism from Communism, Sung Wan-kyung suggested that Reality and Utterance's new art movement was not motivated by leftist ideology. At the same time, the author attempted to reject a mythic idea regarding Paris as the mecca of modernist art widespread in the contemporary South Korean art world. He claimed:

> To the changes of various conditions and the fast progression of history, how did artists and the intellectuals respond? At this point, the exhibition "Paris

[4] Ibid., 109.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Paris 1937-Paris 1957, exhibition catalog (Paris: the Centre Georges Pompidou, 1981).

> 1937-Paris 1957" offers us an invaluable opportunity to look back at the history from a distance of time longer than a generation. It is impossible to understand the arts of a period by remembering familiar artists, works of art, groups and trends like Surrealism, abstract painting, École de Paris. It is our reality, nevertheless, that this kind of knowledge has been generally accepted through textbooks and art-history books.[7]

Sung Wan-kyung also stressed the artist's role as an intellectual in responding to history, which was suppressed in the history of modern Korean art.

In this context, Sung Wan-kyung, emphasizing the importance of the artist's social engagement, discussed the famous debates on realism in 1936 at the Maison de la Culture organized by P.C.F. in Paris. In June of 1936, a few months after the Popular Front won the French national elections, the polemical discussions continued for three nights under the title "The Quarrel with Realism." Among those important writers, painters and architects who participated in the debates were Louis Aragon, Fernand Léger, Le Corbusier, Marcel Gromaire, Jean Lurçat, André Lhote. According to Sung Wan-kyung, the notion of "engagement," a key agenda of the great debates of realism in 1936, was extended to the artists' resistance organized in the form of the anti-German Popular Front during World War II, and to the debates on Socialist Realism during the 1950s.[8] However, Sung Wan-kyung did not elaborate further on the details of the debates in his review, and claimed that "considering our ability and situation, it is quite difficult for us to assess the situations and values of all the

[7] Sung Wan-kyung, 113.
[8] Ibid., 116.

debates as such."[9] He implied that the South Korean government, at that time, banned by law any public discussion of Socialist Realism.

At "The Quarrel with Realism" in Paris, three different key issues were raised: Louis Aragon's celebration of Socialist Realism; Le Corbusier's championing of abstraction as the appropriate form for the modern world; and Fernand Léger's articulation of an alternative 'New Realism' which straddled these two points.[10] Of these three, Sung Wan-kyung seemed to accept Léger's views on realism. In 1979, he published a monograph on Léger, and emphasized the French painter's explorations of painterly language communicable, like dialectics, to workers and the masses.[11] At the Maison de la Culture debates, Léger opposed the Stalinist doctrine of Socialist Realism (a romantic version of academic art in style and socialist in content), and suggested a new realism that would retain both formal elements of modern art and the artist's social vision. He stated that "The New Realism has its origin in modern life itself, in the influence of manufactured and geometric objects, in a transposition of the imagined and the real, which are joined and tangled up, but from which has been banished all literary sentimentalism, all drama that stems from poetic or bookish perspectives."[12]

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[9] Ibid., 116.
[10] See Louis Aragon, Pour un Réalism Socialiste (Paris: Éditions Denoel et Steele, 1935); Le Corbusier, "The Quarrel with Realism," in Naum Gabo, L. Martin and Ben Nicholson, eds., Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), 67-74; and Fernand Léger, "The New Realism Goes on," chap. in Functions of Painting (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 114-118.
[11] Sung Wan-kyung, Lejewa kigyesidaeŭi mihak [Léger and Aesthetics of the Mechanical Age] (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 1979), 38-39.
[12] Jean-Louis Ferrier, Art of Our Century: the Chronicle of Western Art, 1900 to the Present, trans. Walter Glanze (New York: Prentice Hall Editions, c. 1989), 346.

Léger's New Realism was an attempt to fuse social commitments of realism and formal concerns of avant-garde art, and was also close to the German playwright Bertolt Brecht's compromising views on realism. According to art historian Paul Wood, Brecht's ideas of realism "came to constitute the main left-wing opposition to Socialist Realism in the inter-war period."[13] Since Brecht's views on realism were discussed in Reality Group's Manifesto (1969), and germane to social realism in South Korea, a parallel may be drawn with Léger's New Realism or French realism between the Wars in general.[14]

In terms of style, South Korean social realism also shared a main point of Léger's New Realism. Whereas Aragon rejected montage, due to its roots in Cubism, as the right facture for realism, Léger extensively used montage techniques for his commissions at the Universal Exposition in 1937. His large paintings on panels were installed in the French pavilions, and one of them, The Transportation of Forces (1937, fig. 43) representing a spectacle of hydro-electric power was illustrated in Sung Wan-kyung's review article. The composition of this painting used a montage technique to juxtapose mechanical structures, pylons and plants, and flowing water on a same plane. Léger regarded conservative techniques in realism as an "insult" to the masses, claiming that "it is officially to pronounce them incapable of rising to the

[13] Paul Wood, "Realisms and Realities," chap. in Briony Fer, David Batchelor and Paul Wood, eds., Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art between the Wars. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 260.

[14] See Chapter 1.

level of that new realism that is their age."[15] As pointed out in previous chapters, montage was one of the prime techniques for social realist artists such as Shin Hak-chul in South Korea. But, if Arnold Hauser's idea of montage as a proper expression of modern reality, since its translation in South Korea in 1966, had been incorporated in the discourse concerning the formation of social realism, Sung Wan-kyung's discussion of Léger's New Realism seemed to be an attempt to legitimize the launching of the new art movement in South Korea in the context of the development of Western realism.

Sung Wan-kyung also featured André Fougeron as a leading artist throughout the realism debates in the inter-war period, and illustrated his two paintings done in a similar manner to Léger's New Realism. Fougeron extensively demonstrated a case of the fusion of modernist style and socially committed subject matter. The two paintings, Martyred Spain (1937, fig. 44) and The Street of Paris, 43 (1943, fig. 45) exemplify the nature of Fougeron's early paintings. Both are executed in a semi-abstract style: simplified and generalized forms, flat compositions, and colors applied through loose brush strokes. Tormented Spain suggests the sufferings of the Spanish people in the Civil War by representing a dead woman dramatized in a radical foreshortening and a dead horse (although the waving hairs of its mane and tail add an odd vitality to the scene). In The Street of Paris, 43, Fougeron represented occupied Paris as a city crowded with hungry people and abandoned children. Unlike the prewar painting, a surrealistic aura is created here by biomorphic shapes of naked

[15] Fernand Léger, "The New Realism Goes on," chap. in Functions of Painting (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 115.

human bodies in a more illusionistic space. Fougeron's combination of tragic subject matter and simplified images tend to generalize the fear and terror of the specific historical situation into a common human agony; he continued in this style up until 1947.

Fougeron and Léger, however, also demonstrated a substantial difference in their attitudes toward modernity. For instance, in The Transportation of Forces (1937, fig. 43), Léger emphasized through formal contrasts and fragmented composition an optical spontaneity of industrialized modernity. But Fougeron used a narrative style logically unfolding in a more unified space, and specifically addressed current social issues such as the Spanish Civil War. Unlike Léger's positive attitude toward modern technology and workers, Fougeron seemed to be more critical and skeptical, aware of the inhumanity that technology spawned.

Except for Léger's painting, nearly all of the works Sung Wan-kyung reproduced in his article were related to an anti-Fascist theme. In other words, these works, among the works then on view at the "Paris 1937-Paris 1957" exhibition, were allowed to be reproduced and discussed under the current socio-political conditions in South Korea. Sung Wan-kyung reproduced Fougeron's pre-war painting, instead of his post-war painting, in his review. In general, he illustrated no work related to French realism emerging after World War II, including Picasso's Massacres in Korea.

Despite its close connection with Korean history, this painting was never publicly discussed in South Korea before the 1990s.[16]

Knowing what was absent from Sung Wan-kyung's review helps characterize the ideological stance of Reality and Utterance or the social realist art movement as a whole in its early stage in South Korea. For this purpose, this section examines André Fougeron's fluctuating artistic career in relation to the P.C.F. Fougeron, from a working class background, started his career under the Communist patronage of realism. Before he officially joined the P.C.F. in 1939, Fougeron had shown his early paintings in the annual exhibitions of the Maison de la Culture from 1936 to 1939, organized by the P.C.F. How, then, did his anti-Fascist theme and modernist style correspond to pre-war (cultural) policies of the P.C.F.?

The emergence of the French Communist Party as a major political force before the outbreak of World War II was indebted to two historical events: the Popular Front and the Spanish Civil War. The P.C.F benefited most from the 1936 election victory of the Popular Front, the political unity of the Left against Fascism.[17] Although the P.C.F. gained the least number of seats, the Socialist Party and the Radicals, the P.C.F.'s representation in the Chamber of the Deputies leapt up from 10

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[16] See Kang Jun-man, "Han'guk Chŏnjaengkwa migŭgŭi p'ŭrop'agaenda" [The Korean War and the United States' Propaganda] *Journalism* (Seoul) (Summer 1991), 172-187; Jin Han, "Picasso's *Massacres in Korea* and *War* and *Peace*: Paintings in the context of the Postwar French intellectuals' Movements" (MA Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1994); and Chung Young-mok, "P'ik'sowa han'guk chŏnjaeng" [Picasso and the Korean War] *Sŏyanmisulsahakhoenonmunjip* Vol. 8 (Seoul) (1996), 241-257.

[17] David Caute, Communism and the French Intellectuals (1914-1960) (London: Ebenezer Baylis and Son Ltd., 1964), 114. See also Gerogi Dimitroff, The United Front Against Fascism and War (New York: Workers Library Publishers, 1935). Under the name of the Popular Front, the Left-wing political parties joined together, acknowledging their internal differences, to fight against Fascism. It was spelled out at the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International in Moscow, July 25 to August 30, 1935.

to 72 seats. And the P.C.F. was considered "the most powerful and highly organized" Communist party among other European countries.[18]

The Spanish Civil War, at the same time, "more than any other single factor," sustained the unity of the French left-wing groups.[19] Under the threat of Fascism, the European situation was indivisible.[20] Moreover, the Communists were perceived as "the stoutest defenders of civilization" against Fascist invasion.[21] Thus, in France, Communism started to be regarded as a generalized humanism against Fascism, rather than a factional political ideology of class struggle. Fougeron's visual critiques of the Spanish situation reflected not only the P.C.F.'s political demands but also the prevailing French impression upon the Party.

As demonstrated in the two-day discussions at the Maison de la Culture in 1936, the P.C.F. became one of the most influential institutions patronizing realism in art and literature. The Party's cultural policy, based on Socialist Realism, attracted many French artists and intellectuals. In 1934, Andrei Zhdanov, Stalin's cultural theorist, declared Socialist Realism the official Communist cultural policy. What seduced French artists and writers most was Zhdanov's idea that art could play an important role in fighting for revolution.[22] Socialist Realism, or "revolutionary romanticism," as Zhdanov himself called it, convinced these artists that "they would no longer be merely marginal figures as they were in bourgeois society, and

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[18] Ibid., 115.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., 116.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Helena Lewis, The Politics of Surrealism (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1988), 126.

intellectual life and revolutionary activism would no longer be in conflict."[23] With this romantic vision of revolution, many artists wanted to join collective social action.

The P.C.F. was then open to individual practices of realism. Despite the Party's cultural spokesman Aragon's praise for Socialist Realism, the 1936 debate at the Maison de la Culture subdued the propagandistic role of Communist art, yet emphasized the artist's role to speak to people.[24] Many artists including Léger and Le Cobusier were conscious of "a danger" embedded in Socialist Realism. [25] They were drawn to art's positive roles for reconstruction of the world after the end of World War I, yet still wanted to maintain autonomous expressions of art. For them, the ideal was the art in the service of collective well-being without sacrificing individual creativity. In this cultural ambience, they favored Leon Trotzky's revisionist view of Marxism allowing relative autonomy of art, rather than Zhdanov's orthodox Socialist Realism excluding all forms of modernism.[26] In 1938, Trotzky, along with André Breton, the founder of Surrealism, claimed in "Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art":

> In the contemporary world we must recognize the ever more widespread destruction of those conditions under which intellectual creation is possible. From this follows of necessity an increasingly manifest degradation not only of the work of art but also of the specifically "artistic" personality. The regime of Hitler, now that it has rid Germany of all those artists whose work expressed the slightest sympathy for liberty, however superficial, has reduced those who still consent to take up pen or brush to the status of domestic servants of the regime, whose task it is to glorify it on order, according to the

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[23] Ibid.
[24] Ferrier, 36.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Francis Frascina, "The Politics of Representation," chap. in Paul Wood, ed., Modernism in Dispute: Art since the Forties (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 77-169.

> worst possible aesthetic conventions. If reports may be believed, it is the same in the Soviet Union, where Thermidorean reaction is now reaching its climax.
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> The conception of the writer's function which the young Marx worked out is worth recalling. "The writer," he declared, "naturally must make money in order to live and write, but he should not under any circumstances live and write in order to make money. The writer by no means looks at his work as a *means*. It is *an end in itself* and so little a means in the eyes of himself and of others that if necessary he sacrifices his existence of his work…. *The first condition of the freedom of the press is that it is not a business activity.*" It is more than ever fitting to use this statement against those who would regiment intellectual activity in the direction of ends foreign to itself, and prescribe, in the guise of so-called "reasons of State," the themes of art. The free choice of these themes and the absence of all restrictions on the range of his explorations—these are possessions which the artist has a right to claim as inalienable. In the realm of artistic creation, the imagination must escape from all constraint and must, under no pretext, allow itself to be placed under bonds. To those who would urge us, whether for today or for tomorrow, to consent that art should submit to a discipline which we hold to be radically incompatible with its nature, we give a flat refusal, and we repeat our deliberate intention of standing by the formula: *complete freedom for art*.[27]

The Trotzkyite definition of art coincided with Fougeron's fusion of abstraction and realism, and the P.C.F. tolerated the revisionist view of realism in the inter-war period in order to appeal to many artists and intellectuals.[28] By reproducing Fougeron's prewar painting, Sung Wan-kyung embraced this kind of a revisionist view of realism.

On the other hand, Sung Wan-kyung did not reproduce any work related to postwar debates on realism in France, which were on view at the "Paris 1937-Paris 1957" exhibition. Why did he reject postwar realism? After France was liberated from the German Occupation until 1947, the P.C.F.'s revisionist view of art was

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[27] André Breton and Leon Trotzky, "Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art," trans. Dwight Macdonald *Partisan Review* (Fall 1938), 49-53. Republished in Herschel B. Chipp, Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 483-486.

[28] Ibid.

further popularized by the Party's successful recruitment of prominent artists.[29] The two most famous artists in the Party were Picasso and Léger; the former joined the Party in 1945 and the latter in 1944. Due to its unrivaled Resistance record and effective propaganda program, the P.C.F. successfully infiltrated post-war French thought. Fougeron's Picassoesque semi-abstract paintings from 1944-1947 including Italian Women (1946, fig. 46) mirrored the Party's ambitiously open policy and the intellectual comfort nurtured in the Party; his paintings of this time were replete with jubilant themes, as if they celebrated the optimism of Liberation or the public success of the P.C.F.

From 1947 on, however, Fougeron abandoned abstract elements, and his new figurative painting inflamed "The Battle between Realism and Abstraction," which dominated the discourse on art and politics until 1953.[30] This artistic battle was a revival of the prewar debates of realism and abstraction, but was much more violent, according to the Party's Socialist Realist painter Boris Taslitzky, to the point that artists from each faction avoided each other.[31] In 1947, Fougeron painted Parisian Women at the Market (1947-48, fig. 47), and first exhibited it at the Salon d'Automne, where many works of major French Communist artists were shown during the postwar period. In this painting, he fully modeled the figures, yet did not idealize their bodies; he emphasized the immediacy of everyday life. While the painting did not idealize or romanticize proletarian life, the representation of the

[29] Ibid., 129.
[30] Frascina, 132.
[31] Ibid, 133.

figures embodied Socialist Realism's dictum that art must represent the integrity of the human body.[32]

Fougeron's stylistic conversion to figuration gained an invaluable political significance, since it embodied the P.C.F.'s new cultural policy. In 1947, the Party fully introduced Zhdanovism as the official cultural policy, and rejected abstract art. Following the Zhdanovite line, Party leader Thores addressed the 1947 Party Congress: "To decadent works of bourgeois aesthetes, partisans of art for art's sake, to the pessimism without solution and the retrograde obscurantism of the existentialist 'philosophers,' we have opposed an art which should be inspired by Socialist Realism...an art which would aid the working class in its struggle for liberation."[33] Under the heated circumstances, different artistic forms represented different ideological identities; figuration for Communism, abstraction for Capitalism. In this context, Fougeron's change from semi-abstraction to figuration in style seemed to represent an example of one victory of Socialist Realism over abstraction.

The P.C.F. leaders exerted "every pressure to universalize" Fougeron's conversion to figuration.[34] They "elevated" Fougeron's figurative style as a role model for the majority of the Party's artists practicing a non-realistic style such as Picasso and Léger.[35] The P.C.F's cultural spokesperson, Louis Aragon, who had consistently advocated figuration since his defection from surrealism in 1932, also

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[32] See Vladimir Kemenov, "Aspects of Two Cultures," Voks Bulletin (Moscow), no. 52 (1947), 20-36.
[33] Quoted in Caute, 327.
[34] Caute, 327.
[35] Ibid., 340.

praised Fougeron's figurative style.[36] In his "Preface" to the 1947 catalogue of Fougeron's twenty drawings done from 1936-1947, Aragon claimed that he found in "each" of his drawings "the destiny of figurative art."[37]

In 1950, Fougeron created the series In the Country of Mines, which became his most famous work in relation to the P.C.F., but Sung Wan-kyung completely excluded it from his review. With financial support from Andre Lecoeur, a political leader of the P.C.F. and President of the mining syndicate (the Fédération Régionale des Mineurs du Nort et du Pas-de-Calais), Fougeron produced some forty paintings, drawings, and related studies depicting French miners' struggles with the government.[38] The majority of the works represented the miner's hard life, as seen in Cruel Lands (fig. 48) in which miners are agonizing over a dead comrade. In contrast, National Defense (1950, fig. 49) from the series represents a violent confrontation between the imposing miners and the police. After their expulsion from the government in 1947, the P.C.F. launched a nation-wide wave of strikes. Caute observed, "Three years of mounting frustration found an outlet in violence."[39] From January 13th-26th, 1951, the series were first exhibited at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune in Paris. Some 50,000 people visited the exhibition of In the Country of Mines, which also traveled Lens, Douai, Denain, Saint-Etienne, Marseille, Alès, Carmaux, and

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[36] For Louis Aragon's ideas concerning the relationship between figurative style and social action, see Louis Aragon, Treatise on Style, trans. Alyson Waters (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), which was originally published as Traité du Style (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1928).
[37] Louis Aragon, "Preface," in André Fougeron, Dessins de Fougeron (Paris: Les 13 Epis, [1947]), 10.
[38] Sarah G. Wilson, "Art and Politics of the Left in France, ca. 1935-1955" (Ph.D. diss., Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 1991), 316.
[39] Caute, 165.

Moneceaux-les-Mines.[40] Many of the viewers were from the working class and transportation was arranged for them.[41] Fougeron's figurative style and proletarian subject matter, however, made many party intellectuals "uncomfortable" and the Party "an object of ridicule" among many non-Communist intellectuals.[42] For instance, the surrealist leader André Breton cynically pointed out: "The shameful word of 'engagement,' which has become popular since the war, stinks of a servility which art and poetry abhor."[43] If Fougeron's semi-abstract style appealed more to the intellectual viewers, his figuration, representing the miners' "well-justified anxieties about injustice, injury and accident in a heroic—and highly recognisable--way," appealed to the working-class viewers.[44]

If it was unthinkable for Sung Wan-kyung to reproduce in the South Korean periodical Fougeron's post-war paintings associated with the P.C.F's radical leftist politics, smilarly, Picasso's Massacres in Korea could not be reproduced because of its powerful association with anti-Americanism. From 1944 to 1953, Picasso's Communist-related activities focused on the International Peace Movement sponsored by the P.C.F., and the painting's pacifist theme reflected the French intellectuals' support for the Peace Movement.[45] Along with its agitation of workers against the government, the P.C.F. started the Peace Movement with Soviet support in an attempt

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[40] Wilson, 321.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Irwin M. Wall, French Communism in the Era of Stalin: The Quest for Unity and Integration, 1945-1965 (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1983), 110.
[43] André Breton, Quoted in Judt, 218.
[44] Wilson, 321.
[45] Wilson, 351. See also Gertje R. Utley, "Picasso and the 'Parti de la Renaissance Française': The Artist as a Communist, 1944-1953." (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1997).

to escape its political isolation--the Party's expulsion from the French Government in 1947. Eventually, the pacifist campaign became "the most powerful non-military weapon that the Soviet Union set up to confront the North Atlantic Pact."[46] The Peace Movement, which held its first congress in 1948, represented French intellectuals' anti-Americanism.

In their quests for figurative style as a vehicle of narrative content, a parallel may be drawn with the extensive stylistic explorations done in the South Korean social realist movement. For instance, as discussed in Chapter 2, Kim Chŏng-hŏn, a member of Reality and Utterance, and Shin Hak-chul converted from abstraction to socially engaged realism. Social realist artists in South Korea never considered Socialist Realism as a correct mode of realism. Even after 1988 when North Korean art was legally allowed to be discussed and exhibited in the South, they saw a large gap between their art based on individual critiques of hegemonic powers and Socialist Realism as a state-sponsored art.[47] For this reason, Sung Wan-kyung reproduced none of the post-war realist works, including the ones done by Picasso and Léger, let alone those works associated with leftist radicalism or anti-Americanism.

Among South Korean realist artists, however, montage continued to be a major technique. But in 1953, Aragon severely attacked Fougeron's return to a montage-like style in Atlantic Civilization (1953, fig. 50). Despite its militant anti-American content, Aragon regarded the painting as a representation of ideological

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[46] Judt, 221-5.
[47] Yi Gu-yŏl, Won Dong-suk, and You Hong-jun, "Pundan ihuŭi pukhanmisulŭl malhanda" [A Discussion of North Korean art] *Kyeganmisul* (Fall 1988), 66.

betrayal, as he previously argued: "photomontage connoted Trotskyism."[48] Aragon's critique virtually crushed Fougeron's artistic career.[49] This incident clearly demonstrated different ideological natures embedded in South Korean social realism and postwar French realism.

In the next issue of the same art magazine, Choe Min, another art critic of Reality and Utterance, published an essay on Picasso's Guernica on the occasion of its return to Spain on October 25, 1981, after it had been on loan for forty-two years to the Museum of Modern Art in New York.[50] If Sung Wan-kyung featured the painting as one of Picasso's self-evident masterpieces representing anti- Fascist themes in his review of the "Paris 1937-Paris 1957" retrospective, Choe Min questioned the compatibility between the abstract element and the narrative content of Guernica. In a semi-abstract style, Picasso symbolically represented the bombing of the Basque town of Guernica by Spainish, Italian, and German forces in 1937.[51] Focusing on the agenda of art and politics regarding Guernica, Choe Min considered the painting not as a successful representation of political messages but as a great stylistic achievement. Choe Min claimed:

> Both negative and positive interpretations of Guernica have their merits and demerits, since the work stands at a crossing point of politics and art. The incongruence between social engagement and aesthetic success may be a characteristic mark of the art of our age.

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[48] Frascina, 137.
[49] Andrea Feeser, "The Recuperated Radical: Pablo Picasso and the Debate on Art and Politics in France, 1942-1962," (Ph. D. diss., Graduate Ctr, CUNY, 1996), 107.
[50] Choe Min, "Hyŏndaep'an sinhwa Guernica ŭi hwan'guk" [Guernica, a Modern Myth, and its Homecoming] *Kyeganmisul* (Winter 1981), 89-94.
[51] Picasso said, "Only the Guernica mural is symbolic." According to the painter, for instance, the bull in the painting symbolized "brutality and darkness." Interview by Jerome Seckler, "Picasso Explains," *New Masses*, LIV, II (13 March 1945), 4-7.

> The two elements hardly go hand in hand. We have to choose one from the two different stances. The first choice is a view that the coexistence of politics and art is impossible. In other words, it is a view that we must sacrifice one in favor of the other. The second is a view that we can harmonize them, although it is a difficult task.
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> Following the first view, Guernica is an aesthetic embodiment. Or, following the second view, it is an unsuccessful work of social engagement. The significance of social engagement regarding Guernica has been overly emphasized because of the incomparable fame of Picasso and the painting's title "Guernica," rather than the painting's appeal to the viewer as such…. It was also an effect multiplied by mass media.[52]

Choe Min seemed to be quite reluctant to accept Picasso's semi-abstraction as an appropriate style for social realism, and also revealed a subtle difference from Sung Wan-kyung's critical vision. Like Sung Wan-kyung, however, Choe Min also concealed Picasso's Communist affiliation. In his article, Choe Min cited American critic Jerome Sackler's interview with Picasso, without mentioning Picasso's statement on the relationship between his Communist activities and art.[53]

Choe Min: Ben Shahn and American Social Realism

In 1982, Choe Min discussed the American social realist painter Ben Shahn and American Regionalism in two articles.[54] Again, his discussions repressed left-wing affiliations with regard to American social realism and Regionalism. Whereas

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[52] Choe Min, 94.

[53] See Choe Min, 91, and interview by Jerome Sackler, 7. In the interview, Picasso stated: "Except in the Guernica. In that there is a deliberate appeal to people, a deliberate sense of propaganda…. I am a Communist and my painting is Communist painting …. But if I were a shoemaker, Royalist or Communist or anything else, I would not necessarily hammer my shoes in a special way to show my politics."

[54] Choe Min, "Ben Shahnŭi yesulgwa saeng'ae" [Ben Shahn's Art and Life] *Kyeganmisul* (Fall 1982), 66-80, and Choe Min, "Hyŏndaero iŏjin p'ungsokhwa jŏngsin" [The Spirit of Genre Painting Continued in the Modern Times] (Winter 1982), 45-54.

Sung Wan-kyung focused on the fusion of abstraction and figuration in style, Choe Min praised Ben Shahn's balanced embodiment of personal and social values in his art. According to Choe Min:

> Ben Shahn believed that the painting's true content was nothing but the artist's "self"…. He neither lost himself while fully attending to external environments and events, nor overlooked objective realities or the world of others while looking at the inward self. He was neither blindly obsessed with personal sensitivity and emotion nor with dry ideas and reason…. Ben Shan's art reflected the hope and anger of a moral man who believed that helping one another, we could make a better world.[55]

In his early career, Shahn emphasized the artist's ultimate rejection of French schools of modern art including Paul Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso, Raoul Dufy, and Georges Rouault, yet did not discuss the artist's affiliation with leftist ideology.[56] Shahn, a Russian-Jewish immigrant whose father was a woodcarver and active socialist, became aware of the corruption systematically interwoven into the fabric of capitalist society through leftist ideology. During his European trips in the 1920s, Shahn was also exposed to George Grosz's socially critical art. In Vienna, he saw Grosz's lithograph, Ecce Homo(1922, fig. 51), and bought a copy. In retrospect, Shahn said, "I almost dropped dead in excitement over it."[57] The lithograph represented a corrupted bourgeois life through lively charged, razor-sharp lines, and perhaps offered Shahn a model. But he was never drawn to the erotic themes that the German artist, well-known for his Communist activities, often represented in order to reveal bourgeois moral perversity. After Grosz came to the United States, Shahn visited him

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[55] Choe Min, 71.
[56] See Frances K. Pohl, Ben Shahn (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1993).
[57] Ben Shahn, Interview with Morris Dorsky, October 7, 1951. Quoted in Morris Dorsky, "The Formative Years of Ben Shahn: The Origin and Development of His Style," (MA Thesis, Institute of Fine Art, New York University, 1966), 9.

in 1933 and 1935, and Grosz gave him two drawings.[58] About Shahn's left-wing affiliations, art historian Deborah Martin Kao claimed:

> As a teacher at the John Reed Club School of Art, a member of the militant Artist's Union and Artists' Committee of Action, and an editor of the radical journal *Art Front*, Ben Shahn helped shape a revolutionary movement in American art during the early years of the Depression. He belonged to a cadre of leftist artists in New York City that included Stuart Davis, Hugo Gellert, Boris Gorelick, William Gropper, Louis Lozowick, Lou Block, Moses Soyer, Bernada Bryson, Stephen Dimitroff, Lucienne Bloch, and Max Spivak. Shahn and his peers, regarding themselves as members of the proletariat, sought to repudiate the conception of the artist as a bohemian who created hermetic imagery.[59]

On the other hand, Choe Min observed that Shahn embodied a balance between his personal anger and objective judgment in his first mature work The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti (1932, fig. 52). Shahn represented the trial of two anarchist Italian immigrants convicted of murder on flimsy evidence. According to Choe Min, the painting's incisive, jagged and brief lines, simplified colors, and flattened space helped immediately convey its narrative content to the viewer. Agreeing with critic Lincoln Kirstein, he did not regard Shahn as a left-wing artist, and characterized Shahn's representation of the controversial social agenda as"clinical" rather than as "factional."[60] But he observed that, despite their stylistic differences, American social realists including Shahn, Philip Evergood, Jack Levine, William Gropper, and Jacob Lawrence attempted to embody art as a means for social reforms. Choe Min,

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[58] Dorsky, 9.
[59] Deborah Martin Kao, "Ben Shahn and the Public Use of Art," chap. in Deborah Martin Kao, Laura Katzman, and Jenna Webster, eds., Ben Shahn's New York: The Photography of Modern Times, exhibition catalog (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 39.
[60] Choe Min, 76.

however, differentiated Ben Shahn's art from Soviet Socialist Realism.[61] According to David Shapiro, who edited an anthology on American Social Realism that was widely available in Seoul and would surely have been known to Choe Min:

> Social Realism and Socialist Realism are different from each other. Social Realism, opposed to the ruling class and its morés, predominantly selects as its subject matter the negative aspects of life under capitalism: labor conflicts, poverty, the greediness of capitalists, the nobility of long-suffering workers. Socialist Realism, as it has developed in the Soviet Union, supports the ruling class and the form of government. It selects as its subject matter the positive aspects of life under socialism: happy, cooperating workers, the beauty of factory and countryside, well-fed, healthy children, and so on.[62]

American social realism emerged in reaction to the Depression. American Social Realists considered the failure of American economy as a failure of capitalism, and saw socialism as a solution. They also believed that European Modernism was a cultural product of industrial capitalism, and "sought common cause with the workers."[63] Thus, Shapiro claimed, "Social Realism might never have become a major cultural force if it had not been actively promoted by Marxist artists, critics, and theoreticians."[64]

The style, ideas, and aims of American Social Realism were forged and published in articles by a number of left-wing groups including the John Reed Clubs, the American Artists' Congress, the Artists' Union, the United American Artists, and the Young American Artists. Among them, the John Reed Clubs were the first and led

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[61] Ibid.
[62] David Shapiro, "Introduction: Social Realism Reconsidered," in David Shapiro, ed., Social Realism: Art as a Weapon (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1973), 28. A copy of this book, for instance, was in the library of the Department of Aesthetics, Seoul National University, where Choe Min completed his master's degree in 1972.
[63] Shapiro, 15.
[64] Shapiro, 18.

the discussion and popularization of the concept of art as a weapon in the struggle between workers and capitalists and against Fascism.[65] The Clubs were the branches of the International Union of Writers and Artists, which met in Kharkov, a city of south-central European U.S.S.R., in 1929.[66] In 1932, there were eighteen clubs in various cities in the United States, including New York, Chicago, Boston, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Detroit, Newark, Seattle, Portland (Oregon), and Hollywood. The Clubs provided a meeting place for discussion regarding the compatibility of art and politics, exhibited relevant art works, published periodicals such as the *Partisan Review*, and opened the John Reed Club Art School in New York in 1932, where Shahn taught. In their extensive support for realism, the John Reed Club seemed like an American version of the Maison de la Culture which would be established later in France in 1936. In comparison to the flexible discussion of realism at the Maison de la Culture that embraced Léger's idea of New Realism, the John Reed Clubs leaned more toward the Soviet version of Socialist Realism. In the manifesto written in 1932, the John Reed Clubs revealed that they aimed "to create and publish art and literature of a proletarian character; to make familiar in this country the art and literature of the world proletariat, and particularly that of the Soviet Union."[67] Thus it was the radical side of American Social Realism that Choe Min or South Korean social realism could not accept. For this reason, Choe Min maintained a distance from Ben Shahn's art or American Social Realism in general.

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[65] Oakely Johnson, "The John Reed Club Convention," *New Masses* (July 1932), 14.
[66] Mike Gold, "Kharkov Conference," *New Masses* (February 1931), 14.
[67] Johnson, 15.

He also positively discussed American Regionalism, which David Shapiro included as part of Social Realism. Choe Min explained Regionalism, along with Social Realism, to be a continuation of the American tradition of realism including the Ash Can School.[68] He mentioned three Regionalist painters, Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry, and Grant Wood, and praised their representations of their own regional realities.[69]

After the end of World War II, the American government stopped employing artists; this weakened the left-wing cultural movements including Social Realism, which was soon challenged by Abstract Expressionism.[70] But in the late 1930s, Shahn already underwent a great change, in his own word, from "Social Realism" to "Personal Realism," which Choe Min stressed in his writing.[71] According to Shahn:

> There were the poor who were rich in spirit and the rich who were also sometimes rich in spirit. There was the South and its story-telling art, stories of snakes and storms and haunted houses, enchanting; and yet such talent thriving in the same human shell with hopeless prejudices, bigotry, and ignorance.[72]

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[68] Choe Min, 75.
[69] See Thomas Hart Benton, "American Regionalism: A Personal History of the Movement," *The University of Kansas City Review* 18 (Autumn 1951), 41-75.
[70] See Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 5-7. The New Deal, the reform program of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt during the period of the Great Depression in the United States, established the largest federal art project in American history. Between 1933 and 1943, the federal government hired and commissioned over ten thousand artists and these artists produced 100,000 easel paintings, over 4000 murals, 18,000 sculptures, more than 13,000 prints. In June 1943, because of the war effort, the art project was officially ended. See also Matthew Baigell, The American Scene: American Painting of the 1930's (New York: Praeger, 1974); Jonathan Harris, Federal Art and National Culture: The Politics of Identity in New Deal America (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Bruce Bustard, A New Deal for the Arts (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1997).
[71] Quoted in Pohl, 60.
[72] Ben Shahn, "Biography of a Painting," in The Shape of Content (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 41.

Later, in 1948, Shahn executed a series of works concerning miners, just as Fougeron would do three years later in Paris. Whereas Sung Wan-kyung reproduced none from the series of In the Country of Mines done by Fougeron, however, Choe Min reproduced Miners' Wives (1948, fig. 53) as one of Shahn's masterpieces.

In 1946, the monthly magazine *Harper's* asked Shahn to illustrate John Bartlow Martin's article exposing the story of a tragic mine disaster at Centralia, Illinois, which caused the death of one hundred and eleven miners.[73] Based on the photographs of the Centralia disaster, Shahn painted new works including Miners' Wives. On the works, Shahn stated in an interview:

> In one instance, I had to do a series of illustrations on a mine disaster. I have been quite familiar with mines (my wife comes from mining country and I have been down mines). It was a relatively easy thing, although I had never done anything like it before, but I was really eager to do this assignment. Even after I sent my drawings off to the editor I continued to draw the subject because it intrigued me so much. Over the following two years I made at least six paintings based on this subject.[74]

Miners' Wives shows two miner's wives patiently, yet hopelessly, waiting for their husbands to return. By representing two government officials dressed in black suits and disappearing into the distance, Shahn implied the bureaucratic indifference and incompetence then associated with the main cause of the tragic incident. Unlike Fougeron's In the Country of Mines, there is no sign of a collective and violent anti-state protest. Despite a strong anti-Americanism underlying South Korean social realism since its inception, Choe Min introduced an American prototype of social

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[73] See John Bartlow Martin, "A Mine Disaster," chap. in It Seems Like Only Yesterday (New York: William Morrow, 1986), 55-69.
[74] Ben Shahn, quoted in Howard Greenfeld, Ben Shahn: An Artist's Life (New York: Random House, 1998), 228.

realism, that is, Shahn's personalized expression of social agenda. Consistently emphasizing in his article that Shahn embodied a realism without following a certain ideological formula, Choe Min seemed to suggest for other members of Reality and Utterance the importance of the artist's true compassion and sympathy toward socially committed subject matter.

Choe Min's choice of Shahn was not irrelevant to Sung Wan-kyung's support for Léger's New Realism and Fougeron's pre-war eclectic style. Shahn's style was by no means a conservative style of realism, in Léger's view; it contained many abstract elements. From 1929 to 1931, Shahn reached his own mature style, in which photography played a crucial role.[75] In The Dreyfus Affair (1930), he first used published photographs in mass media. After this point, photographic sources offered him socially committed subject matter and abstract formal vocabularies such as reduced depth of field, cropped composition, flattened contours, abrupt changes of light and shade, and simplified, yet unselected details. For this reason, the Modernist critic Clement Greenberg pointed out that the "originality" of Shahn's painting was indebted to photography.[76] Thus, not only Shahn's compassionate expression of a social agenda but also his creative formal explorations of figuration must have appealed to Choe Min and other members of Reality and Utterance at the early stage of the social realist movement in South Korea. But it does not mean that those artists discussed by Sung Wan-kyung and Choe Min directly influenced South Korean social

[75] For a discussion of Shahn as a photographer, see Susan Edwards, "Ben Shahn: A New Deal Photographer In The Old South" (Ph.D. diss., The Graduate Center, The City University of New York, 1996).
[76] Clement Greenberg, "Review of a Ben Shahn Exhibition," *The Nation* (1 November 1947), 481-482.

realists; rather, the two art critics of Reality and Utterance attempted to identify their individualistic embodiments of social realism, and to situate them in an international context.

Gallerie de Séoul and Its Exhibitions of The French New Figuration

While preparing for his essay on Ben Shahn, Choe Min was also involved in important exhibitions which provided direct visual encounters between South Korean social realists and contemporary figurative paintings from France. In 1981, Yim Se-taek (b. 1945), a former member of the Reality Group (1969), founded Gallerie de Séoul or Seoul Misulkwan (The Seoul Art Museum). It was the first non-commercial private museum in South Korea, and not only supported social realist artists including the members of Reality and Utterance but also exhibited contemporary French paintings known as the "Nouvelles Figurations" (New Figuration) during the first half of the 1980s. Art critic Kim Yun-su became the director of Seoul Misulkwan and Choe Min worked there as curator. Now, they accepted contemporary figurative art in the context of their own social realism. The exhibitions of the New Figuration influenced younger artists in particular, who would join the social realist movement as the so-called second generation.[77]

In 1982, Seoul Misulkwan held two exhibitions showcasing the French New Figuration. The first one was titled as "Movements in the Contemporary European

[77] Yi Jong-gu, interview by author, 7 July 2002, Inchon, South Korea.

Art" (Onŭlŭi yurŏmmisul) held from April 24 to May 30, and the second was the "French New Figuration Painting" from July 10 to August 15.[78] The latter exhibition once again revealed the conservative nature of the established art world in Seoul. This exhibition was originally held at the Bridgestone Art Museum in Tokyo, Japan, on the occasion of the French president François Mitterand's official visit to the country. Considering its huge scale and importance, Yim Se-taek proposed an exhibition at the National Museum of Contemporary Art (Kungnip hyŏndae misulkwan), but it was turned down. Since the National Museum was established in 1969, under the presidency of Park Chung Hee, an established conservative artist had been appointed as the director every four years. The National Museum of Contemporary Art sponsored the annual *Kukchŏn* (National Exhibition), and consistently supported apolitical modern art including Academic realism and abstraction. Thus a daily newspaper demanded that the art world reconsider its high wall dividing abstraction and figuration, and change its reception of international trends of art in favor of abstraction.[79]

Along with Choe Min's article on Shahn, the art magazine *Kyeganmisul* published a summary of a lecture delivered at the "French New Figuration Painting" exhibition by art historian Chung Byung-kwan.[80] According to Chung Byung-kwan,

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[78] Yim Se-taek, ed. Movements in Contemporary European Art (P'ŭrangsŭŭi sin'gusanghoehwa), exhibition catalog (Seoul: Seoul Misulkwan, 1982) and Alain Jouffroy, French New Figurative Painting, exhibition cataloge (Seoul: Seoul Misulkwan, 1982).

[79] Kim Hŭng-su, "Segyemisulŭl ponŭn anmogi hŭrida" [A Cloudy View of World Art] *Chosunilbo* (Seoul), 24 July 1982. In 1994, under the first civilian government in over thirty years, the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Seoul organized the retrospective "*Minjung* Arts: 1980-1994."

[80] Chung Byung-kwan, "Hyŏndaehoehwasa munmaegesŏ bon p'ŭrangsŭ singusanghoehwa," [The French New Figuration Painting in the Context of the History of Modern Painting] *Kyeganmisul* (Fall

the show suggested new potentials of figurative painting different from conventional realism or Photo-realism, and proved a stimulus to the current South Korean art world dominated by abstraction.[81]

The French New Figuration emerged in the 1960s and represented social reality in free, figurative styles. Skeptical of the rise of the unprecedented mass society in France, the New Figuration represented a romantic desire for a return to nature. Chung Byung-kwan argued:

> The New Figuration focused on political agenda as subject matter in the beginning, but the intensity was getting weaker. Its landscapes in particular, in place of figure paintings, changed into an indirect dialogue, and furthermore, I think, escaped to the subject matter associated with [Jean Jacques] Rousseau's naturalist philosophy or Romanticist's eternal sky, water and land. Such a neo-Romantic tendency, that is, the New Figuration's paintings with water, mountains and the rivers became dominant in the late 1970s.[82]

In this way, the New Figuration rejected abstraction as well as Marcel Duchamp's idea of the ready-made. Chung Byung-kwan also differentiated the New Figuration from Pop Art. According to him, in their critiques of capitalist society, the New Figuration was more overt; "Pop Art, like the New Figuration, expressed the artist's view of industrial society, yet Pop Art's representation of industrial society was neutral as such, neither an indulgence in it nor a praise of it."[83]

Before he claimed that the works of the New Figuration on view, mostly from the collection of the Centre Georeges Pompidou, could represent French art of the 1960s and 1970s, however, he should have explained its relationship with the

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1982), 169-174. Chung Byung-kwan completed a doctoral degree in art history at the University of Paris in 1978.
[81] Ibid., 169.
[82] Ibid., 174.
[83] Ibid., 175.

Nouveau Réalism or Daniel Buren, which were better known trends of French art from the period.[84] He argued that the New Figuration became the fourth art trend critical of capitalist industrialism in the history of modern art, after Romanticism, Symbolism and Surrealism.[85] Chung Byung-kwan overlooked the whole history of European realism whose main target had been capitalist explorations. Rather, his lecture implicitly revealed the current South Korean academic condition, in which realism was a taboo subject. But he addressed the importance of figuration in the art world ruled by abstraction.

On the other hand, Sung Wan-kyung, along with Choe Min, discussed the New Figuration as realism. Prior to the exhibitions of the New Figuration at Seoul Misulkwan, he published an article chronologically tracing French contemporary art in the 1960s and 1970s.[86] In this article, he often cited French art critic Jean Claire's Art en France: Une Nouvelle Generation.[87] Sung Wan-kyung observed that Antonio Lecalcati (b.1938), Edoardo Arroyo (b.1937), Gilles Aillaud (b.1928) emerged as the important artists of the New Figuration at the "Salon de la Jeune Peinture" held in 1965.[88] According to him, these artists wanted to offer an alternative to both the limited manner of representation of realism and the overly refined, lyrical taste of the

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[84] See Alfred Pacquement, "The Nouveau Réalistes: The Renewal of Art in Paris around 1960," chap in Pop Art: An International Perspective (London: Royal Academy, 1991), 214-218, and Jean-François Lyotard, "Preliminary Notes on the Pragmatic of Works: Daniel Buren," *October* vol.10 (Autumn 1979), 59-67.
[85] Chung Byung-kwan, 171.
[86] Sung Wan-kyung, "Sŏgu hyŏndae misulŭi ttodarŭn myŏnmo" [Another Aspect of Contemporary Western Art] *Kyeganmisul* (Spring 1982), 127-166.
[87] Jean Claire, Art en France: Une Nouvelle Generation (Paris: Chêne, 1972). Sung Wan-kyung published his translation of this book in series in the seasonal magazine *Sŏn* (Seoul) from the issue of winter of 1981 to the issue of spring of 1984.
[88] Sung Wan-kyung, 140.

École de Paris, and for this purpose, refused to respect technical rules such as balance, harmony, and contrast, or generally accepted tastes of art as a whole. In this context, their themes ranged from caged animals to grotesque and exotic landscapes. Thus, their works were attacked as anti-art. In Sung Wan-kyung's view, moreover, they "contained a certain symptom leading to the event of May 1968, a prediction of the rejection and expression of all the constraints: the first signal predicting a rejection of formalism widespread in Western technocratic society."[89] Aillaud, Arroyo and Lecalcati also contributed to the critical or political figurative painting which would form an axis of the New Figuration in the 1960s and 1970s. But Sung Wan-kyung once again pointed out that their political paintings had nothing to with Socialist Realism. He argued:

> Whereas [Socialist Realism] adopted a realist style of the kitschified Western academic painting, [the New Figuration] reflected rich visual cultures of contemporary society, including mass media, Pop Art, cinematic images, cartoon, and so on. Although we have shown an allergic reaction to the word "political," being political was common and natural in the context of European culture and intellectual tradition. To put it differently, the New Figuration could not avoid becoming political in the late industrial society of European continent with a strong tradition of critical thinking.[90]

Compared to Fougeron's post-war works, for him, the New Figuration demonstrated realism in a more contemporary style, yet with less expression of Soviet Communism. His characterization of the New Figuration as a politically engaged art in the context of a European intellectual tradition might be another implicit attempt to dissociate South Korean social realism from Socialist Realism.

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[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid., 144.

Sung Wan-kyung's article stressed another important aspect of the New Figuration, which could find a parallel in the works produced by the members of Reality and Utterance. Aillaud, Arroyo, and Lecalcati rejected avant-garde art and its Duchampian absolute subjectivism. As opposed to "the artistic activity transcending time and space," the three painters supported art as the human activity corresponding to a specific "time and space (history)" through the power of figuration.[91] Thus they wanted to express themselves as individuals situated within time and space, and chose to provide critical subject matter, rather than to discover or create a new form of expression. In conclusion, Sung Wan-kyung clarified some differences between the French and South Korean art worlds. According to him:

> The two most distinctive aspects of French art, aforementioned, are: first, its critiques of Modernist formalism; second, its critiques of the ruling culture in contemporary technocrat society.
>
> This is the difference between our society and Western society with the tradition regarding the role of art as language. Modern Western society had a strong tradition, in which art functioned as a means of social and cultural communications. Our art has not accomplished such a modern tradition in art. This is, I think, the foremost reason that avant-garde art in our country became fruitless.
>
> The first task of our art is to draw itself into the field of values, that is, to make ceaseless efforts to produce social and cultural values, and to embody a way of communication in this regard.[92]

Sung Wan-kyung's critical vision consistently supported a mode of social realism, flexible in style and comprehensible in content, without the taint of Socialist Realism. Since this article was published in March 1982 and the first exhibition of the New

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[91] Sung Wan-kyung, 144.
[92] Ibid., 166.

Figuration opened in the next month, it was probably motivated by the upcoming exhibition.

For the exhibition in Seoul, a former member of Reality Group, Yim Se-taik, and the French poet Philip Sergeant chose eleven artists. Among them, Piotr Kowalski (b.1927), Daniel Pommereulle (b.1937), Matieu (b.1932), Erró (b.1932), Jacques Monory (b.1934), and Gilles Aillaud (b.1928) belonged to the New Figuration. French art critic Alain Jouffroy claimed that the New Figuration had established a dynamic foundation of "New History Painting" twenty years before.[93] According to him:

> The founder of the Metaphysical painting Giorgio de Chirico also looked at Renaissance painters, and in them rediscovered true masters, and Picasso, who achieved audacious aesthetics and revolutionary forms and embodied, with Guernica, the greatest history painting of the twentieth century, liked to <remake>, to repaint in his own style the paintings created by Vélasquez or by Delacroix. From the perspective viewing the painting as a continuing evolution-- this evolution manifested itself through successive contradictory revolutions, a true mental current existed in all kinds of researches accomplished within the domain of ideas and representations regarding our world, and I called the mental current: *revolutionary individualism*.[94]

Jouffroy considered revolutionary individualism to be a constructive reconciliation between "a coherent spirit of tradition" and "an intended disorder in revolution," and differentiated it from an anarchistic idealism.[95] Regarding the New Figuration painters as revolutionary individualists, he left room for symbolic representations of political or historical elements in his view of "New History Painting." For instance,

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[93] Alain Jouffroy, "Yurŏpŭi ch'ang, han'gukŭl hyanghae yŏdannŭn ch'ang" [A European Window, A Window Opening and Closing toward Korea], trans. Oh Saeng-gŭn, in Movements in Contemporary European Art, exhibition catalogue (Seoul: Seoul misulkwan, 1982), 20.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.

Aillaud, one of the three artists from the New Figuration, whom Sung Wan-kyung focused on in his article, suggested political subject matter, by representing animals in his paintings like Polar Bear (1975, fig. 54). "As a theoretician of New History Painting," he said, "I want to emphasize that history evolves obviously along with ahistorical facts." According to Jouffroy:

> Although the painter Gilles Aillaud has devoted all his paintings to representations of animals caged in the zoo and has given an impression that he escaped from human society, he only reflects upon the structure of our society while painting them; what matters to him is a <human theme>. He successfully completes a <political> work without directly representing political subjects…. For Aillaud, the painting unveils the essence of its society without saying it.[96]

Two of Aillaud's paintings were on view at the exhibition: Polar Bear depicts a bear looking down at the artificial pond in a quite bright and dreary interior space of a zoo, and Hagia Niki (1978, fig. 55) is a landscape of a suburban area with abandoned houses and dotted with a group of black birds drawn in a simplified manner. Both paintings show no trace of the artist's expressive involvement. In his works, Jouffroy observed, "Aillaud erased his presence as an individual, and became nothing but an eye gazing at a tragedy hidden in collective imagination."[97] This sort of subtle sensitivity laden with socio-political implication must have appealed to South Korean social realists.

At the French New Figuration exhibition opening in July of 1982, Jouffroy again expressed his view of the "New History Painting." As the organizer of the

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[96] Ibid., 35.
[97] Ibid., 37.

exhibition, he invited twenty-five artists, and wrote an article, "French New History Painting" for the catalog.[98] He argued:

> Who could say, who could believe, before 1960, that modern art which they then definitely believed to be only abstraction was again going to rediscover the world? There was nearly no one to do so….
>
> They did not have to oppose abstract art against figurative art, although art critics who are simple-minded and Manichaean still do so today. Rather, they should decipher abstract art as an arch bridge providing passage to the other shore. My dear Korean friends, I do not like to call it the New Figuration, I prefer to call it New History Painting. But I do not believe that abstract art is dead.
>
> I think that art is a collective international adventure allowing all the individuals freedom to meet, to talk, and to understand one another from afar, beyond the deceptive mass media. The young painters taking part in this incomplete exhibition are significant, vital, and challenging, thanks to their differences as such, and are the first generation that would no longer make a pedantic distinction between abstraction and figuration.[99]

Deeply involved in the exhibitions of French art in Seoul, Jouffroy supported a modern version of history painting and political works. More interested in historical content than in figurative style, he suggested an eclectic view of abstract and figurative art. In many ways, his arguments of figuration appeared to parallel Sung Wan-kyung's and Choe Min's revisionist views of social realism.

Furthermore, Jouffroy's selection of artists and works suggested an ideological stance in relation to the exhibition. Among the participating artists, Edouard Pignon (b.1905), along with Balthus (b.1907), Jean Helion (b.1904), and

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[98] Alain Jouffroy, "P'ŭrangsŭŭi saeroun yŏgsahwa" [New French History Painting], trans. Choe Min, in P'ŭrangsŭŭi sin'gusang hoehwa, exhibition catalog (Seoul: Seoul misulkwan, 1982), unpaginated. The invited artists to the exhibition are Balthus (b.1957), Jean Hélion (b.1904), Edouard Pignon (b.1905), Roberto Matta (b.1911), Martial Raysse (b.1936), Jacques Monory (b.1934), Gérard Fromenger (b.1939), Léonardo Cremonini (b.1925), Antonio Lecalcati (b.1938), Edoardo Arroyo (b.1937), Gilles Aillaud (b.1928), Dado (b.1934), Gérard Schlosser (b.1931), Christo (b.1935), Erró (b.1932), Peter Klasen (b.1935), Daniel Pommereulle (b.1937), Gianfranco Baruchello (b.1924), Aldo Mondino (b.1938), Hervé Télémaque (b.1937), Titina Maselli (b.1924), Lucio Fanti (b.1945), Jean-Paul Chambas (b.1947), Antoni Taulé (b.1945), and Christian Bouillé (b.1948).

[99] Ibid.

Roberto Matta (b.1911), did not belong to the New Figuration. Pignon, the son of a miner, was himself once a miner, and joined, along with Léger, the P.C.F. in 1945. Like Léger, Pignon also demonstrated a personal style as well as support of workers. For instance, Pignon's Dead Worker (1952, fig. 56) represented a strong proletarian theme in a loose brushwork and flat composition.[100] However, Jouffroy did not include Pignon's work representing proletarian subject matter in his discussion of New History Painting. Instead, Pignon's painting Ochre Landscape with Burning Olive Trees (1956, fig. 57), on view at the Seoul exhibition, appeared to be an almost abstract painting electrified with stormy brushworks. According to Jouffroy's explanation, this painting represented a forest destroyed by fire in Southern France.[101] In this way, Jouffroy's ideas of New History Painting or political works carefully maintained a distance from Socialist Realism.

Sung Wan-kyung's discussion of the pre-war French realism, Choe Min's articles on American Social Realism, and the two exhibitions of the French New Figuration in Seoul emphasized creative uses of figuration in works of art representing social, political, and historical subject matter. South Korean social realists were apparently drawn to eclectic modes of realism such as the semi-abstraction practiced by Léger and Fougeron before World War II, Shahn's compassionate expression of social reality, and Jouffroy's view of the French New Figuration as history painting. These attempts to situate South Korean social realism in the context of the international art world not only renewed the vitality of figurative

[100] Raoul Jean Moulin, Pignon (Paris: G. Fall, 1970), 12.
[101] Jouffroy, Ibid.

art but also implicitly clarified its political spectrum far away from socialist revolution. As discussed above in Chapter 2, South Korean social realists championed the notion of *minjung* as the historical subjects as opposed to domestic authoritarianism in conjunction with capitalist foreign powers under the guise of modernization, yet not in terms of the class struggle or socialist revolution based on Marxist ideology. Accordingly, they never considered Socialist Realism to be an appropriate style of realism capable of representing or mapping out personal existence and national identity entangled with the current global system.

Chapter 5

Nationalism and the Receptions of Photo-Realism

This chapter discusses ways South Korean artists received and modified Photo-Realism which originated in the late 1960s in the United States. In South Korea, Photo-Realism diverged into an apolitical *tromp l'oeil* realism and a branch of social realism. This divergence again had to do with different attitudes toward nationalism. Whereas a group of young painters, emphasizing its overall flat structure, represented select objects and natural scenes isolated from social reality, a social realist group Imsullyŏn, founded in 1982, used the Photo-Realistic mode of representation in order to represent concrete social data and agendas.

Minjŏn and Formalizing Photo-Realism

Photo-Realism became popular among South Korean young artists during the late 1970s and the early 1980s, after it had emerged in the United States in the 1960s.[1]

[1] The exhibition "Realism Now" curated by Linda Nochlin at the Vassar College Art Gallery (1968), showing the works of Photo-Realists, Robert Bectle, Malcolm Morley, and Richard Estes, along with the paintings of Alex Katz and Philip Pearlstein, has been regarded as the landmark exhibition for Photo-Realism. Other important founding exhibitions for Photo-Realism were "Directions II: Aspects of a New Realism" at the Milwaukee Art Center (1969), including the paintings of Jack Beal, Robert Bechtle, Richard Estes, Ralph Goings, and "22 Realists" at the Whitney Museum of American Art (1970), including the works of Robert Bechtle, Chuck Close, Richard Estes, Audrey Flack, and Malcolm Morley. In 1980, Louis K. Meisel defined Photo-Realism: "1. The Photo-Realist uses the

In 1972, a group of American Photo-Realists artists were invited to Documenta 5 (Kassel, Germany), whose general theme was about the notion of reality.[2] By the time, Photo-Realism was regarded as a major international trend and began to attract attention of art students in South Korea.[3] The "*Realismus*" section curated by Jean Christoph Ammann at Documenta 5 included John de Andrea (b. 1941), Robert Bechtle (b. 1932), Chuck Close (b. 1940), Robert Cottingham (b. 1935), Don Eddy (b. 1944), Richard Estes (b. 1936), Ralph Goings (b. 1928), Duane Hanson (b. 1925), Richard McLean (b. 1934), Malcolm Morley (b. 1931), John Salt (b. 1937), and Ben Schonzeit (b. 1942). South Korean art students obtained information on these Photo-Realists through foreign art magazines such as *Art International*.[4]

It was, however, not until the late 1970s that Photo Realism could be considered a sphere of influence in the South Korean art world. In 1978, the Jung-ang Daily Newspaper and the art magazine Kyeganmisul, both affiliated with the

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camera and photograph to gather information; 2. The Photo-Realist uses a mechanical or semimechanical means to transfer the information to the canvas; 3. The Photo-Realist must have the technical ability to make the finished work appear photographic; 4. The artist must have exhibited work as a Photo-Realist by 1972 to be considered one of the central Photo-Realists; 5. The artist must have devoted at least five years to the development and exhibition of Photo-Realist work. See Louis K. Meisel, Photo-Realism (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1980), 12-24. In accordance with his definition, Meisel included Robert Bechtle, Charles Bell, Tom Blackwell, Chuck Close, Robert Cottingham, Don Eddy, Richard Estes, Audrey Flack, Ralph Goings, Ron Kleeman, Richard McLean, John Salt, and Ben Schonzeit in his book Photo-Realism.

[2] The Chief Curator of Documenta 5 was Harald Szwwmann. See Documenta 5. Befragung der Realität: Bildwelten heute (Kassel: Verlagsgruppe Bertelsmann, 1972).

[3] Kim Bok-young, "70-80 nyŏndae sinhyŏngsanghoehwa: Kŭksasilhoehwaŭi giwŏn" [New Figurative Painting in 70s and 80s: The Origin of Photo-Realism], chap. in Sasilkwa hwanyŏng, kŭksasilhoehwaŭi sekye [Reality and Illusion, the World of Photo-Realist Painting], exhibition catalog (Seoul: Samsung misulkwan, 2001), 36, and Jean-Christophe Ammann, "Realismus," chap. in Documenta 5. Befragung der Realität: Bildwelten heute (Kassel: Verlagsgruppe Bertelsmann, 1972), unpaginated.

[4] "Jakka sŏlmun" [Interviews with Artists], chap in Sasilkwa hwanyŏng, kŭksasilhoehwaŭi sekye [Reality and Illusion, the World of Photo-Realist Painting], exhibition catalog (Seoul: Samsung Museum of Art, 2001), 162-165.

Samsung corporation, founded the annual Jung-ang Misuldaejŏn (art contest). Aiming to offer an alternative to the conservative state-sponsored *Kukchŏn* (national exhibition), the Jung-ang art contests led the recently established corporate-sponsored art exhibitions or contests such as Dong-a Misulche, collectively called *Minjŏn*, and supported new styles of figuration. In this regard, the Jung-ang art contests awarded a number of Photo-Realist works, and more than anything else, contributed to the popularization of Photo-Realism in South Korea. According to art critic Yi Il, who took part in the second Jung-ang art contest as a judge, Photo-Realist works dominated in number the section of Western-style painting.[5] On the popularity of Photo-Realism, the Korean art critic argued, "These young artists have experienced enormous difficulties in finding a solution in abstraction, since their senior artists worked out styles covering from *Informel*, through Pop Art and Minimal Art, to Monochrome."[6] In this second Jung-ang art contest, Kim Chang-young (Kim Ch'ang-yŏng, b.1953)'s Muhan [Infinity] (1979), a meticulous representation of numerous footprints on sand, was awarded the second prize. In the next Jung-ang art contest (1980), his Footprint 806 (1980, fig. 58), a sequel to Infinity, received the grand prize. Over the next decades, Kim Chang-young has filled up canvases with the images of traces, footprints or not, left on sand, and has been considered one of the major Photo-Realists in South Korea.

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[5] Yi Il and Kim Yun-su, "Chakp'umŭi kyŏnhyangkwa jejaksujun: Che 2 hoe jungang misuldaejŏn hup'yŏng" [The Works' Trends and Creative Levels: Review of the Second Jung-ang Art Contest], *Kyeganmisul* (Fall 1979), 191. The Jung-ang art contest consisted of three sections regarding Western-style painting, Korean painting, and sculpture.
[6] Ibid., 193.

Like his American counterparts, he used as a model the photographs he had taken of a scene, and copied not only all the details from the photographs but also embodied the painting's reductive composition parallel to the picture plane. For instance, Chuck Close stated:

> I took that alloverness from [Frank] Stella, the lack of hierarchy, the fact that no area is more important than any other area, and no area is approached with a different attitude or even a different technique than any other area. I wanted to make a painting in which every square inch was made the same way, had the same attitude or whatever. And I wanted to apply that lack of hierarchy—or having a different approach area by area that occurred in those Stella paintings—to a representational image.[7]

Despite its frontality, however, Close's John (1971-'72, fig. 59), a magnified view of a man's photographed portrait then on view at Documenta 5, demonstrates a three dimensional conception through different degrees of focus on the face. The photographic focus is on the figure's eyes, and other parts, in accordance with their distance from the pointed spot, are depicted out of focus. Kim Chang-young's paintings of footprints also show no hierarchy in composition, yet suggest a spatial recess into the distance by reducing the size of footprints in the background. But Kim Chang-young copied the photographed scenes on real sand pasted on canvas. If Close, transferring mechanically and chemically constructed images of the photography onto canvas, demonstrated an impersonal process as a new way of painting, Kim Chang-young, using photographs for a *trompe l'oeil* representation, emphasized an amazing technical mastery in a more conventional, mythic notion of artistic creation.

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[7] Robert Storr, "Interview with Chuck Close," chap. in Chuck Close, exhibition catalog (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 89.

Flat Structure, *Trompe l'oeil* Illusionism, and Idealistic Nationalism

Art historian Yun Nan-ji (b.1953) regarded the combination of flat structure and illusionistic depth as a distinctive element of Photo-Realism in South Korea. In this regard, she discussed, along with Kim Chang-young's sand paintings, Kim Cha-sub(Kim Ch'a-sŏp, b.1940)'s Triangle between Infinity (1976, fig. 60) depicting numerous pebbles, Ju Tae-suk (Chu T'ae-sŏk, b.1954)'s Ch'ŏlgil [Railway] (1980, fig. 61), Ko Young-hoon (Ko Yŏng-hun, b.1952)'s Tol, Ch'aek 8364 [Stone, Book 8364] (1986, fig. 62), Ji Seok-cheol (Chi Sŏk-ch'ŏl, b.1953)'s Panjakyong [Reaction] (1978, fig. 63) magnifying parts of a leather couch, and Lee Seok-ju (Yi Sŏk-chu, b.1952)'s Wall series depicting parts of brick walls parallel to the picture plane (1979, fig. 64). As discussed above, Yun Nan-ji's explanation of auto-referential aesthetic elements of Photo-Realism was by no means new. In addition to Chuck Close, for instance, Robert Bechtle, Tom Blackwell, Richard Estes, Richard Mclean, Stephen Posen, Don Eddy, and John Salt also acknowledged their stylistic affiliations with Modernism.[8] For instance, according to art critic Tom Wolfe:

> The Photo-Realists assure the collectors that everything is okay, all is kosher. They swear: we're not painting real scenes but rather, camera images ('not realism, photo systems'). What is more, we don't show you a brushstroke in an acre of it. We're painting only scenes of midday, in bland sunlight—so as not to be 'evocative.' We've got all-over 'evenness' such as you wouldn't believe—we put as much paint on that postcard sky as on that Airstream American Silver Bullet trailer in the middle. And so on, through the checklist of Late Modernism.[9]

[8] "The Photo-Realists: 12 Interviews," *Art in America* (November-December 1972), 73-89.
[9] Tom Wolfe, "The Painted Word," *Harper's Magazine* (April 1975), 92.

Other critics, including Barbara Rose, Kim Levin, and Hilton Kramer, also discussed Photo-Realism as a modernist movement.[10] In South Korea, Yi Il introduced this sort of apolitical interpretation of Photo-Realism.[11]

Two decades later, Photo-Realist works from the two countries were included in an exhibition organized in Seoul.[12] In the essay published in the accompanying catalog, art critic Kim Bok-young (Kim Pog-yŏng, b.1942) argued that South Korean Photo-Realism, unlike its American counterpart, often contained subjective or symbolic content.[13] For example, Kim Chang-young's sand paintings suggested a metaphysical symbolism thorough a representation of the fleeting existence of humanity in an anonymous place or in nature.[14] In this regard, Kim Bok-young defined South Korean Photo Realism as an expression of a desire for "New Figure" after two decades of dominance of abstraction.[15] Photo-Realism as "New Figure," which he also called "New Realism" in the context of Korean contemporary art, embodied a form of augmentation, rather than rejection, of abstraction. Elsewhere,

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[10] Barbara Rose, "Real, Realer, Realist," *New York* (31 January 1972), 50; Kim Levin, "Chuck Close: Decoding the Image," *Arts* (June 1978), 147; and Hilton Kramer, "Chuck Close—In Flight From the Realist Impulse," *New York Times* (4 November 1979), 33 and 36.

[11] Yi Il, "A Note on Hyper-Realism (1976)," in Yi Il Hyŏndae misulŭi sigak [A View of Contemporary Art] (Seoul: Mijinsinsŏ, 1985), 187-197.

[12] Sasilkwa hwanyŏng, kŭksasilhoehwaŭi sekye [Reality and Illusion, the World of Photo-Realist Painting], exhibition catalog (Seoul: Samsung Museum of Art, 2001). The invited artists from the United States are: Robert Bechtle (b.1932), Charles Bell (b.1935), Tom Blackwell (b.1938), Chuck Close (b.1940), Ron Kleeman (b.1937), Richard Mclean (b.1934), and Ben Schonzeit (b.1934); the invited Korean artists are: Ko Young-hoon (Ko Yŏng-hun, b.1952), Kim Kang-yong (b.1950), Kim Jong-hak (b.1954), Kim Tschang-Yeul (Kim Ch'ang-yŏl, b.1929), Kim Chang-young (Kim Ch'ang-yŏng, b.1957), Kim Hong-Joo (Kim Hong-ju, b.1945), Byun Chong-gon (Byŏn Jong-gon, b.1948), Seo Jeong-chan (Sŏ Jŏng-ch'an, b.1956), Song Yun-hee (Song Yun-hi, b.1950), Lee Suk-ju (Yi Sŏk-chu, b.1952), Cho Sang-hyun (Cho Sang-hyŏn, b.1952), Ju Tae-seok (Chu T'ae-sŏk, b.1954), Ji Seok-cheol (Chi Sŏk-ch'ŏl, b.1953), and Cha Dae-duck (Ch'a Tae-dŏk, b.1944).

[13] Kim Bok-young, 34.

[14] Quoted in Kim Bok-young, Ibid.

[15] Kim Bok-young, 22.

Kim Bok-young noted that the Photo-Realist styles developed in South Korea became "an important source that defined in a manner of figuration the essence of Korea or Korean national identity (han'guksŏng)."[16] Thus Kim Bok-young 's view of Photo-Realism ultimately paralleled Yi Il's critical formulation of *Informel*, Minimalism and Monochrome from the perspective of pan-naturalism.

Moreover, the popularity of Photo-Realism, as well as abstraction, was often attributed to the increasing number of commercial galleries during the economic booms in South Korea.[17] Throughout the 1970s, the price of Korean art works skyrocketed. The Hyŏndae Gallery, established in 1970, became the first commercially successful gallery in the history of Korean modern art. Along with it, the Tongsanpang Gallery (1975), and the Sŏn Gallery (1977) set up a commercial system in the South Korean art world. In the article quoted above, Wolfe also pointed out Photo-Realism's modernist formal quality as a sure indicator of marketable works of art. South Korean Photo-Realism also seemed to follow the path of Modernist abstraction, which, as the dominant style, had reconciled itself with capitalism.[18] Thus South Korean social realism's main target included the commodification of art works. Choe Min, an art critic of Reality and Utterance, attacked the mythification of art led

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[16] Kim Bok-young, "7-80 nyŏndae saeroun gamsusŏngŭi silhŏmgwa 'mulsanghoehwa': p'yosangŭi giwonŭl ch'ajasŏ" [Experimentation of New Sensitivity and 'Materialistic Painting' in the 1970s and 80s: Searching for the Origin of Representation], chap in "Han'guk hyŏndaemisul—hyŏngsang: 1978-1984" [Korean Contemporary Art—Figuration: 1978-1984], exhibition catalog (Seoul: Ga-in Gallery, 1994), 75-92.

[17] Yi Kyŏng-sŏng, "P'ung'yosoge iruŏjin joyonghan pyŏnhyŏk," [A Silent Change Accomplished in Economic Booms] *Kyeganmisul* (Winter 1979), 59. Choe Yŏl, Han'gukhyŏndaemisulundongsa [A History of Korean Modern Art Movements] (Seoul: Tolbegae, 1991), 158-161.

[18] Fredric Jameson, "Reflections in Conclusion," chap. in Theodor Adorno, and others, Aesthetics and Politics (London and New York: Verso, 1977), 196-213; republished as "Reflections on the Brecht-Lukács Debate," chap in The Ideologies of Theory, Essays 1971-1986 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) vol.2 Syntax of History, 133-147.

by Modernist art critics like Yi Il and Kim Bok-young as a theoretical attempt to reduce the work of art to a fetishistic object or commodity.[19]

A more fundamental difference between American and South Korean Photo-Realism, however, was endear in their choices of subject matter. Art historian Linda Nochlin, in her discussion of realism including Photo-Realism, defined realism as "a system of values involving close investigation of particulars, a taste for ordinary experience in a specific time, place and social context."[20] According to Nochlin:

> The dominant imagistic structure of realism is metonymy—association of elements through contiguity—as opposed to the domination of metaphor in symbolist or romantic works. Whereas the nonrealist may work through distillation and exclusion, the realist mode implies enrichment and inclusion. Realism has always been criticized by its adversaries for its lack of selectivity, its inability to distill from the random plenitude of experience the generalized harmony of plastic relations, as though this were a flaw rather than the *whole point of realist strategy*.[21]

But the South Korean Photo-Realists mentioned above idealized the images of select objects or natural scenes in their metaphoric content and completely dissociated them from social context. In her writing, on the other hand, Nochlin included Robert Bechtle and Diane Arbus as contemporary realists, and regarded their works as "an iconic reminder of mundane factuality" representing "the segment of contemporary reality chosen functions as a synecdoche for a larger but no less banal totality."[22]

Despite its Modernist formal quality, American Photo-Realism left room for a discussion of social content implied through its rich and concrete iconography. In her

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[19] Choe Min, "Misulŭn mulgŏninga" [Is Art a Thing?] *Munyejungang* (Fall 1981), 326-330.
[20] Linda Nochlin, "The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law (Part I)," *Art in America* (September-October 1973), 54.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Linda Nochlin, "The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law (Part II)," *Art in America* (November-December 1973), 102.

dissertation "Something Happened: A Cultural History of Photorealism," for instance, art historian Katherine J. Hauser analyzed Photo-Realism as a representation of "some of the most pressing social issues of the 1970s" in the United States.[23] According to her, Bechtle's paintings of his family reflected social issues regarding the American family of the period, Estes's paintings of New York critically posed "an ecstatic, never-ending consumer experience," and Audrey Flack's still lifes represented "a female subjectivity."[24] In South Korea, however, a group of socially oriented artists used Photo-Realism to represent political agendas in a far more direct manner.

Imsullyŏn and Politicizing Photo-Realism

In 1982, eight young painters founded the group Imsullyŏn 98,912 esŏ (From the year 1982 and 98,912 [Km²], aka Imsullyŏn), and held their first exhibition in October of the same year.[25] But there was no art critic among the members of Imsyllyŏn. It was the second social realist group to emerge following the foundation of Reality and Utterance, and it soon became a leading group in the social realist movement. As Imsullyŏn means the year 1982 in accordance with the lunar calendar and the number 98912 refers to the total area of South Korea in the unit of Km², the

[23] Katherine Jane Hauser, "Something Happened: A Cultural History of Photorealism," (Ph.D diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1996), ix.
[24] Ibid, 3-9.
[25] The members are: Pak Hŭng sun (b. 1952), Song Ch'ang (b. 1952), Lee Myung-bok (b. 1957), Lee Jong-gu (b. 1954), Chŏn Jun-hyŏp (b. 1953), Chŏn Gwang-ho (b. 1954), and Hwang Jae-hyung (b. 1952).

group emphasized the importance of "now and here" elements, or specific representations of facts in relation to historical and geographical data.[26] On the occasion of their founding exhibition, the Imsullyŏn members claimed:

> We are searching for a perspective through which we can see reality or hidden truth of the current era. It is about humanity, objects, or our pains, about a diachronic conception of history and a synchronic coexistence on the soil. We accept the products of the current era on multiple levels, but want to capture cultural contradictions in a specific and clear language, and visualize ambiguous transitional conditions in a straightforward manner.[27]

They were also conscious of negative byproducts of the ongoing trajectory of modernization and Westernization. According to their second manifesto:

> Affected by materialist cultures from the West and rapid modernization in society, our views of life have been distorted. Under this circumstance, we have to find our true selves; it is our generation's task.[28]

The emphasis on specificity in the manifesto also characterized the group's stylistic tendency. Most of the members worked in the manner of Photo-Realism, and among them, Hwang Jae-hyung (Hwang Jae-hyŏng, b.1952), Lee Jong-gu (Yi Jong-gu, b.1954), and Lee Myung-bok (Yi Myŏng bok, b.1957) won prizes from *Minjŏn*. From the fifth Jung-ang art contest, for instance, Hwang Jae-hyung's Hwangji 330 (1982, fig. 65) received the second prize for a photo-realistic representation of a miner's overalls on a huge canvas (227cm x 130.2cm). The title refers to the tag attached on the left side, meaning the coal–mining area in the Kang-won province, South Korea. On the right side is affixed the miner's photo identification with specific personal information. The painter represented all the parts and folds of the blue-jeans

[26] The brochure of Imsullyŏn's first exhibition in Seoul, October 29, 1982- November 13, 1982, unpaginated.
[27] Ibid.
[28] The brochure of Imsullyŏn's second exhibition in Seoul, November 8-13, 1983, unpaginated.

overalls, larger than life-size, and often depicted its worn-out patches with the canvas's bare fabric. Despite its detailed representation, Hwangji 330 emphasized a flat composition in which the miner's overalls are cropped and arrayed evenly close to the picture plane. The coupling of socially critical agenda and formal elements thus paralleled Reality and Utterance's flexible strategy regarding an embodiment of social realism.

Hwangji's winning of the second prize in the Jung-ang art contest, however, signaled a decline of Photo-Realism in South Korean art world. It was one of the two last paintings competing to win the first prize in the art contest. But the grand prize went to Kusŏg [Corner] (1982, fig. 66) painted by Lee Cheong-un (Yi Ch'ŏng-un, b.1950) who joined Reality and Uttrance in 1981. In an expressive, yet elliptical style, the painting depicted a crowded residential area in Seoul. According to Pyŏn Chong-ha, a well-known South Korean painter invited to judge the submitted works at the art contest:

> Lee Cheong-un, too, demonstrated a free use of colors, and also succeeded in representing an aspect of the present life with a powerful message. In case of Hwang Jae-hyung, however, such a style of art has been repeated a few years in the art world, and so Lee Cheong-un's Kusŏg was accepted as the fresh work.[29]

Even though Pyŏn Chong-ha was one of the canonical Modernist painters in Korea, he emphasized the importance of subject matter, and chose Lee Cheong-un's expressive figuration as a new direction in the art world. Having received the grand prize, Lee Cheong-un drew attention from the media as a promising painter. He only

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[29] Pyŏn Chong-ha, "Chigŭm yuhaenghandanŭngŏsŭn imihanmulgan yuhaeng" [A Thing In Fashion Now Is Already Behind the Fashion] *Kyeganmisul* no. 23 (Fall 1982), 216.

participated in Reality and Utterance's second annual show titled "City and Vision" in 1981, but often had joint shows with social realist artists throughout the 1980s. In 1989, he was included in the forty prominent national (*minjok*) artists chosen by the National Art Association (Minmihyŏp) established in 1985.

After 1982, the Jung-ang art contest awarded expressive and figurative works, which could be associated with the French New Figuration introduced through the Seoul Art Musem. The change of trends at the Jung-ang art contest from Photo Realism to free figuration was related to the rising social realist movement. Art critic Kim Yun-su, the foremost champion of social realism, joined Jung-ang art contests as a judge for the section of Western-style painting from 1980 to 1988.[30] As criteria for awards, he emphasized technical mastery, creativity, imagination, and "expressions, in the manner of contemporary sensitivity and language, of experiences and perspectives as well as consciousness and concerns regarding contemporary life."[31] The last criterion recalled the concept of national (*minjok*) art he had first formulated in Reality Group's Manifesto over a decade ago. According to him, however, most of the submitted works lacked in representing ideas about the contemporary world and focused only on the techniques and painterly effects. He called a work of art without suggesting a firm awareness of the contemporary world "a mere technician's work."[32] Kim Yun-su awarded the third prize to Hwang Jae-hyung's Hwangji 330 III (1983, fig. 67), a sequel to Hwangji 330, and the second prize to Chang 3.25m²-Sanghwang

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[30] "Joongang Fine Arts: Judges," http://fineart.joins.com/sub/sub/_06.asp (accessed March 3, 2005).
[31] Kim Yun-su, "Kugsasil hut'oe, P'yohyŏnjŏg kusanghwa nŭlŏna" [The Retreat of Photo-Realism, The Advance of Expressive Figuration] *Kyeganmisul* no.26 (Summer 1983), 158.
[32] Ibid.

[Ground 3.25m²-Situation] (1983, fig. 68) painted by Lee Jong-gu (Yi Jong-gu, b.1954), another member of Imsullyŏn. Lee Jong-gu's awarded painting was a subtle variation of his painting Spot 5.76m²-Sanghwang [Situation] (1982) on view at the group's founding exhibition. His paintings both depict an open manhole seen from above. They represent, in a photographic exactitude, rough and broken surfaces of the paved road, the powdery texture of the rusted iron lids, and the dark space unveiled between the open lids, all of which are painted parallel to the picture plane. The standing "danger" sign, rimmed in bright red and drawn in a shortened perspective, not only offers a pictorial accent but also implies unstable social conditions.

At the seventh Jung-ang art contest (1984), applying the same criteria he laid out the previous year, Kim Yun-su awarded the grand prize to Hong Chang-ryong (Hong Ch'ang-ryong, b.1959)'s Chŏnch'ŏl jŏnglyuso I [Subway Station I] (1983, fig. 69) representing a late night scene of a subway station located in a suburban area in Seoul. The painting's simplified colors, an architectural structure based on one-point linear perspective, and the strong contrast between light and shade are reminiscent of Edward Hopper's paintings of urban scenes at night. Like Hopper's heavy-colored cityscapes, Hong Chang-ryong's barren representation of the nearly empty station (with only a faceless old man standing alone and watching the train leaving at a rapid speed) suggested both psychological and social alienation embedded in the life of metropolitan Seoul. In this contest, Kim Yun-su saw an end of the dominance of Photo-Realism. He argued:

> This year, compared to the last year, the number of submitted works increased greatly, and their styles have become far more diverse. Diversity in

> this case also means a change in quality. Whereas a certain style of art, having lingered until the last year, completely disappeared, the 'New Figuration' is explored from various angles.
>
> The artists' interests in the 'New Figuration' and their examinations of it begun years ago, and have been surely influenced by the rising art movement, which has become more dynamic and passionate this year. I could read creative spirits, living spirits from them in search of their own visions in subject matter and style, different from the old attitude blindly following a certain trend of foreign art.[33]

Social realism firmly established its status as an art movement at this moment, and exerted influence on the sphere of *Minjŏn*.

Hwang Jae-hyung: Becoming a Miner/Representing the Miner's Life

Instead of submitting works to *Minjŏn*, however, Hwang Jae-hyung and Lee Jong-gu further related their subject matter to social totality, and integrated it into their own life. Long before he completed Hwangji 330 (1982), Hwang Jae-hyung had often visited the Hwangji mine country, and painted its landscapes and the miner's life there. Although the painting received the second prize in the prestigious art contest, he was not satisfied with the result. He thought that he represented the miner's life from a spectator's point of view. Event though he liked to visit Hwangji and befriended the miners, he thought that the miners treated him as "a spy."[34] In the meantime, a sad event happened to him. One day, he was invited to dine with the miners, but the table was so dirty that he suddenly vomitted. After this event, he made

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[33] Kim Yun-su, "Saeroun hyŏngsangŭi dayanghan sidodotpoyŏ" [Diverse Attempts on the New Figuration Is Remarkable] *Kyeganmisul* no. 31 (Fall 1984), 208.

[34] Yu Hong-jun, "Hwang Jae-hyŏng, Jindŭkhan salmŭi han'gaundero" [Hwang Jae-hyŏng, Toward the Center of the Sincere Life], chap. in 80 nyŏndae misulŭi hyŏnjanggwa jakkadŭl. [Art Scenes and Artists in the 1980s] (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 1987), 122.

up his mind to live with the miners. In September 1983, he moved to Hwangji with his family, and became a miner himself. In this way, the painter wanted to narrow the gap between the content of his painting and the truth of his life. When he was not working in the mines, he continued to create works related to the life at the Hwangji mine country.

Two months after he settled down at Hwangji, he showed a sculptural work Tosirag [Lunch Box] (1983, fig. 70) at the second annual exhibition of Imsullyŏn. It represents an old-style, simple and inexpensive, lunch box, nearly ten times larger than actual size, which many South Koreans used until the end of 1970s. During the 1980s, it was replaced by the ones with better designs and functions. But Hwang Jae-hyung turned the intimate object into a monstrous work referring to the miners' poverty. The lunch box is filled with small lumps of coal, and refers to the cooked-rice covered with the coal powder, which the miners ate in the pit. With this work covered with expressive painterly marks, Hwang Jae-hyung abandoned Photo-Realism. In Clock (1983, fig. 71), he represented two agonizing naked men (miners) imprisoned within a round clock. Representing the miner's repetitious life bound up with work shifts, the painter/miner wanted to reveal the instrumentalization of humanity under the trajectory of modernization. These two works apparently attacked both the geometric works of Minimalism and the free forms of Post-Minimalism.

When the miners saw Hwang Jae-hyung's works, many of them were reminded of their hard lives and some miners even cried.[35] But the miners at Hwangji

[35] Hwang Jae-hyung, Interview by author (by telephone), 12 March 2005.

did not seem to have a proletarian consciousness based on leftist ideology. Most of the miners had left their farms for Seoul to get better jobs, but ended up being miners at Hwangji.[36] Thus they felt themselves victims of modernization. Like Korean farmers, the miners were excluded from the economic boom of the time. In July 1984, Hwang Jae-hyung had his first solo exhibition in Seoul with the works representing the miner's life at Hwangji. Art critic Yu Hong-jun, one of Kim Yun-su's former students, described the works on view:

> Lonely faces of the mine country, children going to school, a bicycle standing in front of the office, a family in picnic, a bus climbing the hill, a bus taking miners back home at the sunset…, underground work at a mining pit, miners drinking water, carrying mine pillars, warming themselves over the fire, having lunch in a mining pit, smoking, and nosebleeding…, and the silent Ch'ujŏn station 800m above sea.[37]

Hwang Jae-hyung soon became an active member of the miner's community. For instance, he opened free art classes for the miners and their children in 1985. For over two decades ever since, Hwang Jae-hyung has been struggling to capture the reality of the miner's life, often challenging the boundary between art and life.

Lee Jong-gu's Representations of His Hometown and the Displaced Peasantry

After Hwang Jae-hyung left for Hwangji, Lee Jong-gu also underwent a significant transformation in his art. Although Lee Jong-gu continued to use the Photo-Realistic style, from 1984 onward he started to represent farmers among his

[36] Yu Hong-jun, 123.
[37] Ibid.

own family members and neighbors. Living in Inchon, close to Seoul, he often visited his hometown, Oji-ri, located at Sŏsan in Ch'ungnam Province, a Southern region of South Korea. The painter began with portraits of his father and uncles, using acrylic colors on burlap rice bags. On his representation of family members and his use of the material, Lee Jong-gu stated later:

> Although I was not sure if [a portrait of my father] reflected the reality of farmers in general, I did not have any other sociological weapon to awaken farmers. Even in socially critical works, I believe, critical consciousness ultimately results from personal emotions related to flesh and blood. The truth of a work is the truth of its object, and is not different from the artist's truth. Thus I have not incorporated symbolic iconography in my painting, but I like to use photographic images as an honest document.[38]
>
> As I launched the series…, I was quite reluctant to use canvas or fine paper. In order to represent the tanned and wrinkled appearance of my father, who labored in the fields all his life, I thought, it was appropriate to use materials laden with his sweat and the history of farming soil, and so I chose to use the rice-bag paper.[39]

On the bag are printed simple and large letters indicating "the Government Grains" (*Chŏngbu yanggog*), which referred to the grains the government bought from farmers at harvest-time, packed in the bag, and resold throughout the year. When he was a little boy, the rice-bag paper was also often used as wallpaper at his home. To Lee Jong-gu, thus, the rice bag had not only historical and sociological meaning but also traces of his personal memory.

Over the rice bag's original design, Lee Jong-gu painted several images, as if he pasted photographic images belonging to different sources. Thus he used photo-

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[38] *Jung-ang Ilbo*, 17 September 1990.

[39] Quoted in Yi T'ae ho, "Pŏrimpadŭn Jŏngjigsŏng, Mittungjallin salmŭi punno," [Rejected Honesty, Wrath of the Severed Life at Its Basis], chap. in Lee Jong-gu, Ttangŭi saramdŭl [People of the Land], exhibition catalogue (Seoul: Hagkojae, 1992), 77.

montage technique as well as Photo-Realism. The members of Imsullyŏn also wanted to expand the traditional meaning of realism in terms of style. Social realist art critic Yu Hong-jun associated the painter's use of the rice bag with the alienation effect:

> The grain bag, with letters, symbols and patterns printed on it, is sociologically connected with depicted figures in terms of meaning, but at the same time, they conflict with one another in terms of style, that is, a sort of the alienation effect happens so that each individual element becomes more independent.[40]

Although the art critic stopped his discussion here, Lee Jong-gu's use of rice bags and montage technique may be related to Reality Group's Manifesto (1969), in which art critic Kim Yun-su formulated the alienation effect and montage as effective styles for social realism.[41] According to him, "The alienation effect (*sogyŏkhyogwa*) of montage as a direct result of reflecting the total reality and of expressing the contradictions embedded in reality creates not only a basic familiarity of the object of contemplation but also a sense of alienation from it, and induces a critical attitude toward the same object."[42] It also recalled the Brechtian idea of the alienation effect (*Verfremdungseffekte*)--an artistic means aiming "to make the spectator adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism in his approach to the incident" represented in a work of art.[43] Thus the 1980s social realist artists embodied what was discussed in Reality Group's Manifesto.

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[40] Yu Hong-jun, "Chugŏganŭn nongch'on saraitnŭn nongmin" [Dying Farming Village, Alive Farmers—On Lee Jong-gu's Recent Works], chap. in Lee Jong-gu, Ttangŭi saramdŭl [People of the Land], exhibition catalogue (Seoul: Hakkojae, 1992.), 70.
[41] See Chpter 1.
[42] Kim Yun-su and Kim Chi-ha, *Hyŏnsil tong'in cheil sŏn ŏn* [Reality Group's First Manifesto] (Seoul: [], 1969), 18.
[43] Bertolt Brecht, "Short Description of A New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect," chap. in Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic, ed. and trans. John Willet (New

At Imsullyŏn's third group exhibition in 1984, Lee Jong-gu first showed his representations of farmers on the rice-bag paper. Sog, Nongjach'ŏnhajidaebon—Yŏnhyŏg [Part II, Agriculture Is the Nation's Foundation—Chronology] (1984, fig. 72) on display at the exhibition depicts the painter's uncle with his personal history. Two different images of the painter's uncle at different times of his life form a vertical axis of the painting's dominant geometric structure topped by the Korean flag. The old farmer, posing under the bright sun for his nephew, is depicted as the only three-dimensional image whose close distance to the picture plane or the rice-bag paper is suggested by his own coal-black shadow cast on it. The upper section shows a black and white photograph of the young farmer placed between the two letters of official commendations issued in 1947 and right below the Korean flag, the format of which apparently decorated his living room. The government awarded the prizes to the painter's uncle for his contribution to the increased production of salt. His hometown, a seaside region (Sŏsan-gun), was also famous for salt ponds. In the work's mid section over the old farmer's right shoulder, is painted an image of a happy farmer holding his rice crop, a widely circulated image along with the traditional slogan--"Agriculture is the nation's foundation."-- through the government's campaigns for an increased yield of rice. If the painter's young uncle, whose portrait in a formal dress is surrounded by the Korean flag and the official citations, represented a naive young farmer supporting conservative nationalism forged by the authoritarian governments, his old uncle, tanned and wrinkled,

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York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 136-147. This article was also translated in Korean and published in Kim Yun-su, ed., Creation of Art (*Yesulŭi ch'angjo*) (Seoul: T'aegŭkch'ulp'ansa, 1974), 319-330.

represented not only victims of modernization but also individual farmers as *minjung*, as historical subjectivity, capable of overcoming the dominance of capitalism.

Although Lee Jong-gu continued to use a Photo-Realistic style, his paintings of farmers recalled Kim jeong-heon who first explored the subject of farmers in social contexts. (In 1993, they would have a joint exhibition.[44]) Lee Jong-gu saw Reality and Utterance's founding exhibition in 1980, and it was not easy for him to accept the new approaches toward art:

> The works painted with loose brushstrokes, lacking in refinement and completeness, and their rough utterances revealing reality looked clumsy, and they also appeared to be filled with dissatisfaction, as if they mocked at our tamed emotions and desires for high-art cultures. I, too, sarcastically looked at the 'utterances' of 'reality,' which seemed to disrupt our order, but their consciousness of problems, like writhing in pain, obviously gave me a shock.[45]

With other painters who also viewed Reality and Utterance's founding exhibition, he started to discuss the agendas raised by the new group. And with them, he came to organize the group Imsullyŏn in 1982. According to Lee Jong-gu, most of them shared socially critical subject matter with the members of Reality and Utterance, but questioned the degree of a technical finish in their works.[46] He, however, admitted that Reality and Utterance was for them "a central point" or "a milestone" in Imsullyŏn's activities related to social realism.

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[44] See Ttangŭi hyŏnsiljŏn [The Land's Reality: An Exhibition], exhibition brochure (Seoul: Sŏinsarang, 1993).
[45] Lee Jong-gu, "<Hyŏnsilgwa Balŏn> gwa nawa <Imsullyŏn>" [<Reality and Utterance>, I, and <Imsullyŏn>], in Minjung misulŭl hyanghayŏ: Hyŏnsilgwa Balŏn 10 nyŏnŭi baljach'wi. [Toward *Minjung* Art: A Decade of Reality and Utterance] (Seoul: Kwahakkwa sasang, 1990), 525.
[46] Ibid.

But unlike Kim jeong-heon, he represented his family members and neighbors. For example, Lee Jong-gu's Abŏjiŭi so [Father's Ox] (1984, fig. 73) shows the painter's father with an ox depicted on an unfolded vinyl rice bag. Below the four large printed Korean letters meaning government grains, the painter's father is sadly looking at the ox pulled by someone outside the painting. The farmer and the ox are painted in an identical color, but they occupy only the lower area of the rice bag. This improper composition for a painting appears to suggest the farmer's marginal status in relation to the government's agricultural policies. On his father, Yi wrote in an exhibition pamphlet:

> He still does not use an herbicide in the fields since it might ruin the soil; He still grazes the ox in the fields on the mountain, avoiding the grass contaminated by agricultural chemicals near rice paddies, even after the price of the ox he bought at 1080,000 won three years ago has come down under 500,000 won; How could I understand his love and hope with my smart way of calculation.[47]

The fluctuating price of the ox, affected by the amount of imported meats, exemplified failures of the agricultural policies during the 1980s. In this way, an integration of South Korean economy into global capitalism greatly influenced the farmer's life in a small village.[48] The rise of oil prices in the international markets changed the prices of fertilizers and pesticides the Korean farmers most often used. Moreover, the painter's hometown, Oji-ri, was also swept by an industrial project. According to Lee Jong-gu:

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[47] Lee Jong-gu, "Ttangŭi saramdŭl" [People of the Land], exhibition brochure (Seoul: Kŭrimmadang Min, 1986), unpaginated.
[48] See Jeongman Lee, "The Generation of Sacrifice: Modernization and Korean Farmers" (Ph.D diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1991), 76-80.

> Just like any of our farming villages where hope disappeared long ago, new changes in Oji-ri have been relocating people to new jobs. Many young men have already left Oji-ri. Even my neighbors who have continued to work in their hometown could not but lay aside their love of farming.
>
> The construction of the Taesan industrial complex near the village also launched a storm of land speculation, and most of the land quickly left the hands of the farmers in Oji-ri. Having jobs at the complex, they do not take care of salt ponds, the fields, and rice paddies as they used to do.[49]

He wrote this text for his solo exhibition held in 1990 at a classroom in the elementary school in Oji-ri. Showing the Oji-ri people their own images represented in his paintings, the painter not only attempted to challenge the established art market equating the viewer with the consumer, but also emphasized the farmer's status as the subject of his paintings.

Lee Jong-gu's representations of his family members and relatives suggest the displaced South Korean peasantry as a whole in the course of modernization or Westernization. Thus his works parallel Fredric Jameson's idea of "national allegories" meaning that a private narrative represented in the third-world cultural product can be an allegory of the tormented situation of the society or a form of "mapping" of the social totality.[50] Jameson regarded national allegories as the equivalent to his own notion of postmodernism, "which describes the logic of the cultural imperialism of the first world and above all of the United States."[51] In fact, he viewed Photo-Realism as a postmodern art: "its objects were not to be found in the 'real world' either, but were themselves photographs of that real world, this last now transformed into images, of which the 'realism' of the photorealist painting is now

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[49] Lee Jong-gu, Oji-ri saramdŭl [People in Oji-ri], exhibition brochure (Seoul: [ ], 1990), unpaginated.
[50] Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text*15 (Fall 1986), 69-88.
[51] Ibid., 88.

simulacrum."[52] According to him, postmodernism presupposes new global space, and this multinational space "is not merely a cultural ideology or fantasy, but has genuine historical (and socio-economic) reality" as an expansion of an international market around the globe.[53] Ironically, Lee Jong-gu's Photo-Realistic painting, as a third-world national allegory, revealed a blind spot of first-world postmodernism, which is a totalizing vision of the global system. Put another way, the painter used the weapon of the postmodern enemy to fight against it. In this way, he embodied third-world nationalism as an expression of resistance against the standardizing ideology of multinational capitalism.

Lee Myung-bok: After the Korean War

If postmodernism, in Jameson's view, was the "superstructural expression" not only of the American economy, but also of American military domination throughout the world, South Korean social realists also represented the underside of the presence of American forces.[54] Kŭnal ihu [The Day After] (1983, fig. 74) painted by Lee Myung-bok, a member of Imsullyŏn, was the first work on the theme. The painting, on display at the group's second annual show in 1983, represented a *kijich'on* (camp-side town). Camp-side towns (*kijich'on*) developed near the American army and air force bases throughout the country. The painting shows a

[52] Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* no. 146 (July-August 1984), 75.
[53] Ibid., 88.
[54] Ibid., 17.

simplified representation of a street of Tongduch'ŏn, the largest *kijich'on* located between Seoul and the borderline with North Korea. The street scene seems closer in style to American Precisionism focusing on the representation of the object's underlying precise structure, than to the Photo-Realism the painter used in other works.[55] The precise contouring of the figures and the buildings is silhouetted against the bright ground and sky, and is visually contrasted with the subtle changes in brushworks and colors. The shifting contrast between architectonic structure and sensory movements maintains the painting's vital balance.

The nearly identical images of the two girls accompanying the tall American soldier suggest the whole scene was constructed like a photo-montage, which also could characterize the fabricated nature of the *kijich'on* itself. For instance, so-called *yanggongju*, prostitutes consorting with American soldiers, appeared during the Korean War. In the *kijich'on*, a number of the bars were open only to American soldiers, and were exempted from taxation by permission of the government. Since most of *yanggongju* belonged to these bars, the South Korean government implicitly encouraged their sexual business for the acquisition of foreign currencies.[56] Thus they were also the victims of the Korean War, the postwar poverty, lack of democracy, and the trajectory of modernization. In this sense, "it was not an exaggeration to see the

[55] For a discussion of Precisionism, see Gail Stavitsky, ed., Precisionism in America 1915-1941: Reordering Reality, exhibition catalog (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994).
[56] *Dong-a Ilbo*, 8 November 2004.

entirety of South Korea as *kijich'on*, the red light district surrounding the American military bases.[57]

More specifically, Lee Myung-bok's critical representation of the relationship between the United States and South Korea reflected the anti-American sentiment rising after the Kwangju People's Uprising (1980). Through the historical event, according to historian Namhee Lee, a "Copernican turn" happened to the popular perception of the United States; South Koreans came to realize "an unequal relationship" between the two countries.[58] For four decades, ever since the presence of the United States in the Korean peninsula from 1945 to the mid-1980s, South Korea had "been one of the most-pro American nations in the world."[59] Lee claimed:

> In the post-colonial imagination of the majority of the Koreans, the US was an embodiment of future Korea; democratic, free, and modern. The American influence was unlimited and dominated life of South Koreans ideologically and materially, through its three years of Military Government (1945-48), its involvement in the Korea War, and its extensive economic aid.[60]

However, Lee Myung-bok's <u>The Day After</u>, representing the tall, imposing and commanding white man walking with two short Korean girls, seemingly *yanggongju*, at his side. Like a national allegory defined by Jameson, this implies an "unequal" relationship between the United States and South Korea in military and economic power. Since 1954, the United States has controlled the South Korea-the United States Combined Forces Command (CFC) in accordance with the mutual

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[57] Namhee Lee, "Making *Minjung* Subjectivity: Crisis of Subjectivity and Rewriting History, 1960-1988" (Ph. D. diss., The University of Chicago, 2001), 88.
[58] Lee, 297-8.
[59] Daryl M. Punk, "The Continuing Cold War in Korea and U.S. Policy toward the Peninsula in the 1990s," in Doug Bandow and Ted Galen Carpenter, eds. <u>U.S.-South Korean Alliance: Time for a Change</u>, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1992), 116.
[60] Lee, 295.

defense treaty between the two countries, which General Richard Stillwell, a former commander of CFC, called "the most remarkable concession of sovereignty in the entire world."[61]

In this context, The Day After further referred to collective traumatic experiences among South Koreans in relation to the Korean War, which had been completely suppressed in public discussion by the authoritarian governments. Using the same expression as the painting's title by chance, a South Korean sociologist wrote as late as 2000:

> To those old people in Nogŭnni, Ch'ungbuk [in South Korea], who miraculously escaped gunshots from American soldiers who "came to help Korea," but never mentioned it for five decades for fear of "being accused as political offenders," the War has never ceased….
>
> Few miraculous survivors and the families of the massacred never disclosed it in public for fear of being accused as communists. None of the central and local governments or mass media has investigated the incidents. In February, I saw the old people at the village, and from their expressionless faces, I felt that the clock of history has stopped for half a century. They seemed unable to get angry and to recover their memories. 'The day after' at the village, nothing has happened. It was a period of cruel years in oblivion.[62]

Other social realist artists also started to represent the collective trauma associated with the Korean War. In 1984, the members of Reality and Utterance organized its annual exhibition under the title "6.25" referring to June 25th, the first day of the Korean War. Preparing for the exhibition, the members also visited the

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[61] Quoted in Lee, 301.

[62] Kim Dong-ch'un, Chŏnjaenggwa sahoe: uriege han'guk chŏnjaengŭn muŏsiŏtna? [War and Society: What was the Korean War to Us?] (Seoul: Tolpegae, 2000), 6. On September 29, 1999, the Associated Press first reported the Nogunni massacres of July 1950, and the South Korean government and the United States conducted a joint investigation nearly 50 years after the incident. The United States acknowledged that an unknown number of innocent civilians were killed or injured by American soldiers at that time, early in the Korean War. Recently, a fact-finding committee confirmed that 152 residents of Nogunni were killed by the United States troops. *The Korea Times*, 28 February 2005.

camp-side town, Tongduch'ŏn. Kim Yong-tae (Kim Yong-t'ae, b.1946), a member of Reality and Utterance, described the town:

> We arrived at the street with a sign saying "Off Limits to Non-Foreigners." Even in the daytime, the street was filled with loud music, to which moving their big bodies, a few black, white soldiers were passing by. Everywhere in the street, ladies exposing their shoulders and upper chests were walking around, or sitting and talking in groups, and some of them suspiciously looked at us.[63]

Among other things, a great number of color photographs displayed in the windows of photo studios impressed the members. They were portrait photographs taken in front of artificial backdrops at the studio, but the subjects were American soldiers, mostly African-Americans or other minorities in the United States, casually posed in civilian clothing. Kim Yong-tae collected the photographs, and displayed about 300 of them as a collective work called Tongduch'ŏn Photographs (1984, fig. 75) at his group's Korean War exhibition.

During the exhibition, the viewers showed great interest in the photographs. Sung Wan-kyung, an art critic of Reality and Utterance, explained the public reception of the photographs from Tongduch'ŏn.[64] He regarded them as rare historical documents showing the reality of the divided Korea. In this sense, Sung Wan-kyung even believed that the Tongduch'ŏn photographs functioned just like history painting. But the photographs did not idealize history like conventional history painting in

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[63] Kim Yong-t'ae, "Tongduch'ŏn gihaeng," in Hyŏnsilgwa Balŏn: 80 nyŏndaeŭi saeroun misulŭl hyanghayŏ [Reality and Utterance: Toward New Art in the 1980s], ed. Hyŏnsilgwa balŏn (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 1985), 112.

[64] Sung Wan-kyung, "Kim Yong-t'aeŭi jakp'ume puch'ŏ" [On Kim Yong-t'ae's Works], in Hyŏnsilgwa Balŏn: 80 nyŏndaeŭi saeroun misulŭl hyanghayŏ. [Reality and Utterance: Toward New Art of the 1980s] (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 1985), 118.

Europe, but represented the people from lower social classes from the United States and South Korea. At the same time, he also emphasized the photographs' personal contents--"expressions and gestures implying the individuals' brittle 'truths' which are soft like a cotton and naïve like an infant." Put another way, the photographs offered the viewer "the illusion of personal happiness that could not exist in the absurd structure" under a quasi-state of war in a divided country like South Korea. At this point, the viewer felt sad and pitied the figures appearing in the photographs. Through the emotions of "softness and pity," according to Sung Wan-kyung, "we are encountering the face of history."[65] In this way, Kim Yong-tae's photographs, like Lee Myung-bok's painting, represent private narratives related to the current global system.

In particular, Kim Yong-tae's photographs drew attentions from young viewers.[66] After the end of Reality and Utterance's Korean War exhibition, he submitted the photographs to a large-scale exhibition on the forty-year history of post-colonial Korea ["Haebang 40nyŏn yŏksajŏn], which opened in Seoul and traveled to other major Korean cities such as Kwangju, Taegu, Pusan, and Masan. A number of student organizations of universities including Chonnam University, Yonsei University, and Korea University also exhibited Kim Yong-tae's photographs on their campuses.[67] In February 1985, his photographs were invited to a joint show at the Moyer Art and Crafts Center in the United States Army base in Seoul. On the

[65] Ibid., 119.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Kim Yong-t'ae, 116.

first day of the exhibition, several photographs were removed from the wall at the request of some American officers and their Korean wives who considered the subjects' poses erotic. An American high officer left a brief comment: "This exhibition would not offer both Americans and Koreans any good impression concerning their mutual relationship."[68] The photographs, according to Kim Yong-tae, revealed a deep wound the divided country suffered for over three decades.[69] They also undermined the myth of Americanism forged in post-war South Korea.

Lee Myung-bok and the members of Reality and Utterance not only represented, but also contributed to, the early formation of anti-Americanism, which would eventually "explode in the late 1980s" along with the democratization movement in South Korea.[70] According to Lee:

> For anti-Americanism in South Korea in the late 1980s involved more than criticizing the US for its misguided or "unethical" policy, or laying blame on the United States for the ills of the Korean Society. It was also a process of unraveling the uneasy history of the United States-Korea relations of four decades, and a process of reassessing uncritical adoption of capitalistic development and its many consequences in all spheres of life in South Korea.[71]

In this context, social realist artists believed that South Korea's military dictatorship was connected with the dominance of American armed forces and the US-led multi-national capitalism. But they did not reject American culture as a whole; the members of Imsullyŏn, for instance, actively adopted Photo-Realism. Rather, their focus was on the reformation of domestic political authoritarianism. Social realist artists'

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[68] Quoted in Ibid., 117.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Lee, 295.
[71] Ibid.

representations of anti-Americanism thus paralleled the rising nationwide democratization movement of South Korea.

As discussed in this chapter, South Korean artists received and transformed Photo-Realism in accordance with their artistic preferences and ideological stances. A number of South Korean Photo-Realists, like abstract artists, emphasized reductivist formal elements isolated from social reality. Kim Chang-young's footprint series implicitly represent harmonious nationality based on pan-naturalism. On the other hand, the members of Imsullyŏn used the Photo-Realist styles in order to represent socially critical contents. The divergent receptions of Photo-Realism represented a microcosm of the South Korean art world divided into apolitical formalism and social realism.

Conclusion

Social Realism and the Democratization Movement and its Aftermath

The Foundation of National Art Association

Social realism emerging in the 1980s restructured the art world dominated by Modernism in post-war South Korea. The Korean Fine Arts Association (Han'guk misulhyŏhoe, aka KFAA), whose main objects were to promote "the nation's fine arts" and "the international exchanges of fine arts," had led the South Korean art world after its foundation in 1961.[1] Modernist painter Kim Whan-ki was actively involved in founding KFAA and became its second president in 1963. In the 1970s, Park Seo-bo, the first Korean abstract painter, became a leading member of KFAA, and was elected as the association's 10th president in 1977. KFAA's members formed the majority of the juries at*Kuk chŏn*, even before the government transferred the right to hold the annual National Art Exhibition to KFAA in 1986. KFAA also chose Korean artists, mostly among its members, to participate in various international art shows and biannual exhibitions. But socially oriented artists neither join KFAA nor submitted their works to *Kukchŏn*.

In July 1985, socially critical art became widely known to the public as *minjung* art. When the police interrupted an exhibition of young social realist artists,

[1] "Overview of the Korean Fine Arts Association," http://www.kfaa.or.kr/_newbie/eng/overview.htm (accessed February 23, 2005).

entitled “Han’guk misul 20 taeŭi himjŏn” [The Power of the Korean Artists in Their Twentieth] held in Seoul, mass media spotlighted this incident.[2] The police arrested eight artists and confiscated twenty-eight works on a charge of pro-Communist propaganda. A number of artists, writers, and actors issued a series of joint statements against the police’s charges. They insisted that there was no evidence that any of the works on view at the exhibition represented subjects supportive of Communism.[3]

After the incident of the “Power” exhibition, social realist artists realized that they needed an organization to cope with the government’s suppression. In November 1985, 120 social realist artists and critics founded the National Art Association (Minjokmisulhyŏpŭihoe, aka Minmihyŏp). In its founding manifesto, Minmihyŏp championed a national art that represents national reality and contributes to communal life, and thereby to offer an alternative to institutionalized art separating art and life.[4] Art critic Kim Yun-su led its formation. The members of Reality and Utterance and Imsullyŏn were also active in Minmihyŏp from its inception.[5] (Reality and Utterance disbanded in 1988, and Imsullyŏn, in 1987.) Minmihyŏp opened a non-commercial gallery Min in 1986 and sponsored numerous exhibitions including “T’ongiljŏn” [Exhibition for Reunification] annually until 1992. Since 1986, artists

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[2] “Sakkŏnhwadoen minjung misulŭi p’amun” [Sensationalism of the Spotlighted ‘*Minjgung* Art’] *Kyeganmisul* (Fall 1985), 49-53.
[3] Ibid., 91.
[4] Minjokmisulinhyŏphoe, “Minjokmisulhyŏpŭihoe Ch’angnip sŏnŏnmun” [Minmihyŏp’s Founding Manifesto], http://www.minart.org/ztm/min_led_02 (accessed February 20, 2005).
[5] Reality and Utterance’s painter Son Jang-sŏp was elected Minmihyŏp’s first representative; among other members of the group, Kim Jeong-heon, from 1989 to 1990, and Lim Ok-sang, from 1993 to 1994, also became representatives of Minmihyŏp. “Chwadam: <Hyŏnsilkwa Balŏn> 10nyŏnkwa misulundongŭi saeroun jŏmgŏm” [A Roundtable Discussion: A Decade of <Reality and Utterance> and Re-examination of Art Movements], chap. in Minjung misulŭl hyanghayŏ: Hyŏnsilgwa Balŏn 10 nyŏnŭi baljach’wi. [Toward *Minjung* Art: A Decade of Reality and Utterance]. ed. Reality and Utterance (Seoul: Kwahakkwa sasang, 1990), 62-63.

from Minmihyŏp also participated in the annual exhibition organized by The Japan Asia Africa Latin America Solidarity Committee (JAALA), a Japanese non-government organization against Japanese aggression in Asia before and during World War II.[6] The National Art Association eventually formed an axis of the South Korean art world, competing with KFAA.

Minjung Art and the Democratic Breakthrough in 1987

The National Art Association took part in the ongoing democratization movement. The June Uprising in 1987 that finally brought a democratic breakthrough in South Korea became a momentum for South Korean social realist artists to combine art and current politics. Artists from the National Art Association provided the protesters with anti-government posters, prints, murals, and banners. On March 1987, the Association organized "The Exhibition Against Torture" [Pan'gomunjŏn], which attacked the government's cover-up of the death of Park Chong-chul, a college student, by the torture of the Korean police. On June 9, another college student Yi Han-yŏl was hit by a tear-gas grenade during a protest rally and lost consciousness.[7] The two incidents unraveled and triggered nationwide demonstrations from the 10th of June.[8] On June 15, Choi Byung-soo (Choe Byŏng-su, b.1960), a member of the National Art Association, completed a large banner (10x7.5m) with a phrase written

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[6] "Profile of Japan AALA," http://www2u.biglobe.ne.jp/-jaala/profile_eng.htm (accessed February 20, 2005).
[7] He died on July 4 of the year.
[8] Ibid., 387.

at its bottom, "Bring Back Han Yŏl!" (1987, fig. 76) He drew the banner's image, based on a photograph published in a newspaper in which Yi Han-yŏl was bleeding from the head while his friend was holding him up. The banner was hung or carried through a number of demonstrations. In addition to several other versions of the banner painting, Choi Byung-soo also produced nearly ten thousand student portraits printed on paper and handkerchiefs, and distributed them to the protesters.

These kind of propagandistic works was commonly called "*minjung* art," rather than national (*minjok*) art, and Choi Byung-soo's works became the foremost example known to the public through mass media. His fame as *minjung* artist was in part indebted to the artist's social background; unlike other social realist artists educated in college, Choi Byung-soo belonged to the urban poor and only finished grade school. When he happened to join a project for a mural painting led by some college students in 1986, he was a carpenter. Thus art critic Sung Wan-kyung called him "a new model for *minjung* art."[9] Art critic Won Dong-suk defined *minjung* art as the art by the *minjung*, of the *minjung*, and for the *minjung*.[10] In this regard, Choi Byung-soo embodied an example of *minjung* art executed by the *minjung*.

The propagandistic works, however, soon raised issues regarding the crisis of art even among social realists.[11] Despite his consistent support for *minjung* art, Won Dong-suk did not accept its sacrifice of form for the sake of propaganda. He argued:

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[9] Sung Wan-kyung, "Two Cultures, Two Horizons," chap. in Min Joong Art: A New Cultural Movement from Korea (New York: Artists Space, 1988), 14.
[10] Won Dong-suk, "Minjung misulŭi nolliwa jŏnmang" [The Theory and Prospect of *Minjung* Art], in Minjok misulŭi nolliwa jŏnmang [The Theory and Prospect of *Minjok* Art] (Seoul: P'ulpit, 1985), 387.
[11] See Won Dong-suk, "80 nyŏndae misul undongŭi pansŏngkwa 90 nyŏndaeŭi kwaje" [Rethinking Art Movement in the 1980s and Its New Task in the 1990s] *Minjokmisul* (August 1990), 77.

> An art movement, championing *minjung*-oriented worldview and reformative spirit and practice, differs from a practice of social science and labor movement…. An art movement analyzes and synthesizes its own specific interests through the art medium, and progresses through an accumulation of specialized techniques and knowledge.[12]

Experiencing internal conflicts and divisions on this matter since the late 1980s, South Korean social realism demonstrated a constant process of bridging the gaps between art and politics.[13]

The Foundation of the Kwangju Biennale and Dangers of Multiculturalism

After the large-scale retrospective exhibition entitled "Korean *Minjung* Arts: 1980-1994" held in 1994 at the government-supported National Museum of Contemporary Art under the first civilian government in over thirty years, social realism was no longer a dissident art movement.[14] Critics and historians viewed the period between the late 1980s to the mid 1990s as the era of its popularization.[15] With the foundation of the Kwangu Biennale in 1995 in commemoration of the Kwangju People's Uprising, social realist artists and critics attempted to enter the sphere of the institutional system under the new political environment.[16]

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[12] Won Dong-suk, "80 nyŏndae misulŭi kyŏlsankwa kwaje" [An Account of the 1980s Art and Its New Task] *Minjokmisul* (December 1989), 10.
[13] For instance, Minjokminjungmisul undongyŏnhap (aka Minmiryŏn), formed in 1988, emphasized the importance of propaganda, and was actively involved in the democratization movement. See Choe Yŏl, Han'gukhyŏndaemisulundongsa [History of Korean Modern Art Movement] (Seoul: Tolpegae, 1994), 306-351.
[14] Minjung misul 15 nyŭn [Korean *Minjung* Arts: 1980-1994] (Seoul: The National Museum of Contemporary Art, 1994).
[15] Ibid., 259.
[16] "Minjokmisul 20 nyŏn" [Twenty Years of National Art], http://minart.org/ztm/min_led_04 (accessed February 20, 2005).

The Kwangju Biennale became a new stage where the Korean/Asian/third-world works of art colluded or collided with Western art in terms of an embodiment of national or cultural identities. From the inception, the Biennale proposed to embody the cultural pluralism marred by the previous authoritarian regimes.[17] According to the Declaration of the Kwangju Biennale:

> The Kwangju Biennale is rooted in the democratic spirit of the people of Kwangju and their artistic heritage. The Kwangju Biennale respects national culture and seeks to be a cultural center in the movements towards globalization. The Kwangju Biennale respects the unique diversity of cultures around the world, and strives to contribute to the creation of a balanced history of East and West, to the creation of a vital Asian culture in the 21st century, and the formation of a strong cultural community in the Pacific Rim.[18]

In this regard, the Biennale's targets were to "pursue globalization rather than Westernization, diversity instead of uniformity."[19] The Kwangju Biennale, as its ideal, aimed for a global culture or "globalization" that could embrace diverse national cultures without hierarchy or multiculturalism, and thereby to reject the West as the center or "Westernization."

The first and second mountings of the Kwangju Biennale, under the titles of "Beyond the Borders" and "Unmapping the Earth," emblematically demonstrated open ideas of multiculturalism. Each of the first and second Biennales attracted about a million visitors to the city only with 1.3 million citizens. The popularity implied that the Biennale and its standpoint of multiculturalism in commemoration of the

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[17] "The Foundation of the Kwangju Biennale," http://www.gwangju-biennale.org/www2002/last-biennale/2000/korean/about/make.htm (accessed February 23, 2005).
[18] "The Declaration of the Kwangju Biennale," http://www.gwangju-biennale.org/www2002/last-biennale/2000/english/kwdeclar.htm (accessed February 21, 2005).
[19] Ibid.

Kwangju democratization movement were also morally and politically widely supported among South Koreans.

The theme of "Beyond the Borders" pursued "common values beyond a State, race, ideology, and religion."[20] The main exhibition showed artworks and installations of ninety-two artists from fifty countries, who were selected by each of seven regional commissioners: Kathy Holbreich (North America), Sung Wan-kyung (South America), Jean de Loisy (Western Europe), Anda Rottenberg (Eastern Europe), Yu Hong-jun (Korea and Oceania), Oh Kwang-su (Asia), Clive Adams (Middle East and Africa). The special exhibition "The Spirit of Kwangju in May," curated by critic Won Dong-suk, was devoted to commemorate social realist works inspired by the democratization movement. In a similar vein, "Art as Witness," curated by critic Lim Young-bang, offered a traditional view concerning the close relationship between art and politics in the West from Pablo Picasso and Diego Rivera to Edward Kienholz. The Biennale's third section was "InfoArt" organized by the Korean-born video artist Nam June Paik and Cynthia Goodman, former director of the IBM Gallery in New York. According to the report of *The Art Newspaper*, "the resulting survey was of considerable interest, surpassing the Venice Biennale in geographic diversity, and equating it in terms of the quality, if not the scale, of the individual works."[21]

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[20] "Beyond the Borders," http://www.gwangju-biennale.org/www2002/05_pds/01_before_1.html (accessed February 21, 2005).
[21] Jason Edward Kaufmann, "Kwangju, Korea: Asia's Own Biennial," *The Art Newspaper*, no. 54 (December 1995), 9.

The first Kwangju Biennale received critical acclaims from a few international art critics emphasizing its standpoint on multiculturalism. For instance, Pierre Restany, a renowned European critic, claimed:

> For its first edition this world-oriented Biennale intended to present itself as the supranational forum of a world art engaged in seeking and fulfilling itself. The failure of ideologies and the great vacillation of values have engendered chaos in our post-industrial society. On the cultural side, the notions of center and periphery exists no more. The whole world is the workshop of a new culture that will develop as the effective and sensitive parameters of a global consciousness. The crisis of the West is creating a potential void and this is Asia's big chance. Korea is anxious to seize it, so as immediately to fix a date with the future.[22]

Elsewhere, American critic Eleanor Heartney also pointed out that the Biennale signaled "the now *de rigueur* rejection of notions of border, center and national identity, in favor of displacement and cultural hybridity."[23] Multiculturalism unveiled in the main show "Beyond the Borders" certainly predominated the special exhibition "The Spirit of Kwangju in May," or seemed to reduce it as an isolated component of the global culture.

On the other hand, the awarding of the grand prize to the young Cuban artist Alexis Leyva Kcho and of the special prize to South Korean social realist painter Kim Jeong-heon seemed to be the Biennale's self-critique of its support for multiculturalism. Kcho's To Forget (1995, fig. 77) consists of an old row-boat sitting atop a sea of empty beer bottles. The boat is inscribed with the three Korean words for "a watchman" (kamsiwŏn) with a nuance of secret police, "clean-up" (ch'ŏngso),

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[22] Pierre Restany, "The Kwangju Biennale 1995," *Domus* no. 779 (February 1996), 68-69.
[23] Eleanor Heartney, "Report from Korea: Into the International Arena," *Art in America* Vol. 84, no. 4 (April 1996), 51.

and "boat" (pae). Kim Jeong-heon's painting Disney at Panmunjom (1995, fig. 78) represents the site of P'anmunjŏm located in the Joint Security Area between the borders of South and North Korea. A pair of sickle and hoe symbolizing farmers is drawn at the center of the picture plane spotted with the stickers printed with Disney characters. The two works demonstrated the third world's socio-political reality bound up with the global system in sharp contrast with the Biennale's ideal of multiculturalism without center and borders.

Two years later, however, the second Kwangju Biennale's general theme "Unmapping the Earth" emphasized the harmonious coexistence of multinational cultures and the fluidity of globalization. According to the chief curator Lee Young-chul, "Globalization is obvious and subconscious at the same time, and also omnipresent."[24] In this regard, "Unmapping the Earth" meant a strategy searching for a void, instead of the center, as a space for ultimate freedom.[25] This abstract concept was divided into five sub-themes in accordance with Asian cosmology, "Water/Speed," "Earth/Becoming," "Fire/Space," "Wood/Hybrid," and "Metal/Power." The chief curator invited five commissioners to design each section: Harald Szeeman (Europe), Bernard Marcadé (Europe), Park Kyong (South Korea), Richard Koshalek (The United States), and Sung Wan-kyung (South Korea). Most of the invited artists such as Yves Klein, Josep Beuys, Bill Viola, and Bruce Nauman were already well-known in the West. For this reason, the second Kwangju Biennale

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[24] Lee Young-chul, "On 'Unmapping the Earth'," chap. in 97 Kwangju Biennale: Unmapping the Earth (Kwangju, Korea: Kwangju Biennale, 1997), 35.
[25] "97 Kwangje Biennale: Unmapping the Earth," http://www.gwangju-biennale.org/www2002/last-biennlae/2000/korean/bien97/main/main (accessed February 23, 2005).

was often reviewed as "a sister to the major exhibitions of the West" including the Venice Biennale, the Lyon Biennale and Kassel Documenta.[26] In this way, the Biennale's multiculturalism, implicitly or explicitly, leaned toward Western art, separating again the main show from special exhibitions on Korean art.

The decentered multiculturalism embodied by the second Kwangju Biennale failed to reflect differences and conflicts between Western/international culture and third-world/Asian/Korean/local culture. Or, only by doing so, could it construct such a spectacular multicultural space alienated from the totality of the global system. On this point, American Marxist critic Martin Jay, a participant in the international conference accompanying the second Kwangju Biennale, observed: "For at least a few months, in the once remote city of Kwangju in Cholla Province, South Korea, the global cultural world, or at least that associated with the artistic avant-garde, was 'unmapped' enough so that the center and margins were no longer as rigidly demarcated as before and the metropole and its province lost their absolute distinction."[27] Whether the Biennale's chief curator was conscious of it or not, the strategy of "Unmapping the Earth" literally and conceptually contradicted "an aesthetic of cognitive mapping" put forth by Fredric Jameson as "a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new

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[26] Roman Kurzmeyer, "Two Journeys to South Korea," *Parkett*, no. 52 (1998), 189. See also Helena Kontova, "Kwangju Biennale: Unmapping the World," *Flash Art* (January/February 1998), 70-72; Thomas Wulffen, "Kwangju," *Art Monthly*, no. 212 (December 1997/January 1998), 20-23; Robert Fouser, "1997 Kwangju Biennale," *Art Text*, no. 60 (February/April 1998), 87-90; Mary Anne Staniszewski, "On Kwangju and Johansesburg Biennales: Charting of Course," *Art Forum International*, Vol. 36 (September 1997), 79-80; Eleanor Heartney, "Letter from Korea," *Art Press*, no. 217 (October 1996), 34-54.

[27] Martin Jay, "Kwangju: From Massacre to Biennale," *Salmagundi*, no. 120 (Fall 1998), 19.

heightened sense of its place in the global system," which I applied to my conceptualization of South Korean social realism.[28]

In an article included in the handsome accompanying catalog, the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek raised a similar issue concerning a reinvention of the political space in the conditions of multinational globalization.[29] Here, Zizek analyzed multiculturalism as "the ideal form of ideology" for the current global capitalism in which a multinational company colonizes its mother-nation as another market.[30] His critical analysis pertained to the Biennale's promotion of multiculturalism financed to a great degree by South Korean global corporations such as Samsung.[31] According to Zizek, multiculturalism is not different from traditional imperialist colonialism in ways the former "respects" local cultures, without taking root in it, yet maintaining a distance tainted with Eurocentrist universalism.[32] Zizek even called multiculturalism "a racism which empties its own position of all positive content," and simultaneously "retains the position as the privileged *empty point of universality* from which one is able to appreciate (and depreciate) other particular cultures."[33] If the Eurocentrist universality underlying multiculturalism ultimately "conceals the fact that the subject is already thoroughly 'rootless'," as Zizek argued, the global project of the Kwangju

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[28] Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, no. 146 (July/August 1984), 92.
[29] Slavoj Zizek, "Multiculturalism or, The Cultural Logic of Multinational Capital," chap. in 97 Kwangju Biennale: Unmapping the Earth (Kwangju: Kwangju Biennale, 1997), 364.
[30] Ibid., 365.
[31] For the first Kwangju Biennale, Samsung Corporation donated 1.2 million dollars and the Kwangju-based Kumho Group, the owner of Asiana Airlines, donated 3.5 million dollars, among others. The Biennale's total budget was about 20 million dollars. See *Jungangilbo* (23 August 1995) and (4 April 1995).
[32] Zizek, 365.
[33] Ibid.

Biennale may be linked to the history of South Korean Modernist art that severed itself from both Korean cultural root and social reality, and represented a harmony between idealized national identity and cosmopolitanism. But Zizek, in his writing, did not offer an alternative to multiculturalism or globalization. The format of the Biennale consisting of the international main show and satellite exhibitions on Korean art has not changed, and this format seemed to represent a Eurocentric spectacle under the guise of multiculturalism.[34]

Social Realism in the New Millennium: Representations of the Iraqi War

While the Kwangju Biennale became a decentered multicultural space, South Korean social realist artists continued to represent current socio-political agendas linked to the United States-led global system in the new millennium. When the Iraqi War broke out on March 20, 2003, the South Korean government announced the following day that it would send Korean troops to the War. In April, the South Korean assembly approved it "for the future of the nation," while angry citizens and members of civic groups held demonstrations in front of the assembly, protesting the ongoing war and the government's troop dispatch plan.[35] Amid a series of anti-war protests across the nation, nearly 3,600 South Korean soldiers were stationed in the northern Iraqi town of Irbil by the end of September 2004, and South Korea became

[34] For instance, Frank Hoffman, an art historian in the field of Korean modern art, reviewed the 2000 Kwangju Biennale as "a kind of storeroom for the avant-garde" from every corner of the world. Frank Hoffman, "Monoculture and Its Discontents," *Art in America* (November 2000), 71-79.

[35] "Assembly Approves Troop Dispatch Amid Strong Opposition," *The Korea Times* (2 April 2003).

the second largest American coalition partner in Iraq after Britain.[36] The deployment of South Korean troops in Iraq, recalling tens of thousands of South Korean soldiers fighting in the Vietnam War in the 1970s, proved again a close alliance between the two countries.

Shin Hak-chul, Choi Byung-soo, and Lee Jong-gu, along with other social realists, produced works criticizing the Iraqi War. In December 2003, Shin Hak-chul had a retrospective that included two paintings on the subject of the Iraqi War.[37] Iraq chŏn [The Iraqi War] (2003, fig. 79) depicts in black tones against an unmodulated red background a mother holding a wounded child. The painting is visually invaded by an elliptical phrase, "The Iraqi War, (Who is) the Real War Criminal?" But the other painting on the same subject, Chinjjajŏnbŏm [The Real War Criminal] (2003, fig. 80), relates the Iraqi War to North Korea's probable possession of nuclear weapons. Across the painting, which was demarcated in three compartments like a comic-book panel and drawn in the style of Roy Lichtensteins's Pop Art, were scattered words like "The Iraqi War" and "Nuclear" and a phrase "North Korea is Next" in Korean and Chinese characters. Shih Hak-chul's painting suggested that sending troops to the Iraqi war could not bring forth a peaceful resolution with regard to the North Korean nuclear problem and that the North Korea would be the next target of American military invasion. The majority of South Korean politicians, however, underlined the importance of the South Korea-United States alliance in

[36] "Zaytun Takes over Operational Command in Northern Iraq," *The Korea Times* (1 September 2004).
[37] Shin Hak-chul, "The History of Modern Korea," (Seoul: Maronier Art Center of the Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, 2003).

peacefully resolving the North Korean nuclear issue, whereas social realist artists and other dissenters disagreed with them.[38]

In June 2004, six months after the end of Shin Hak-chul's retrospective, a tragic incident happening in Iraq shocked South Koreans. Abu Musab al-Zaquawi, a terrorist group in Iraq, abducted South Korean interpreter Kim Sun-il and demanded to halt deployment of South Korean troops.[39] He was beheaded immediately after the South Korean government rejected their request. South Korean news media broadcasted a videotape released by the terrorist group, in which Kim Sun-il repeatedly pleaded for his life. For anti-war demonstrations, Choi Byung-soo produced, using a wood-cut print, a portrait of blind-folded Kim Sun-il, and the portrait is inscribed with a phrase "I Want to Live!" (2003, fig. 81). The next year, after he visited Iraq as a member of a South Korean pacifist group, Choi Byung-soo painted a banner Nŏŭi momi kkoch'i doeŏ [Your Body Becoming Flowers] (2004) with a Pietà-like image depicting an Iraqi man holding and mourning over a dead child, and put it up at an anti-war festival (fig. 82).

In August 2003, Lee Jong-gu, along with other five social realist artists, also visited Baghdad preparing for a joint exhibition to open in Seoul on a pacifist theme against the Iraqi War.[40] They explored Baghdad city, interviewed the Iraqi people,

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[38] "Assembly Approves Troop Dispatch Amid Strong Opposition," *The Korea Times* (2 April 2003).
[39] "South Korean is Killed in Iraq by His Captors," *The New York Times* (23 June 2004).
[40] "Baghdad 551km" at the Jebiwool Art Museum in Seoul. http://jebiwool.org/01_Exhibition/02_Past_View.htm (accessed February 24, 2005). The participating artists were: Lee Jong-gu (b.1954), Yun Sŏk-nam (b.1939), Pak Yŏng suk (b.1941), Chŏng Bok-su (b.1955), Chŏng Wŏn-chŏl (b.1961), Choe Min-hwa (b.1954). But Lee Jong-gu had a brief one-man show with his works of Baghdad in Inchon (November 4-9, 2003), before he joined them. See Lee Jong-gu, "Chuinŭl ch'atsŭpnida" [Lost and Found] (Inchon: Sinsekye Gallery, 2003).

and collected on-the-spot information and objects in relation to the war. Their joint exhibition "Baghdad 551km" was open for two months from January to March 2004.[41] Among the works on view, Lee Jong-gu's Greetings from Iraq (2003, fig. 83) is a collection of portrait-photographs of the Iraqi people he took in Baghdad and several other photographs published by mass media of dead children in the war. According to him, most of the Iraqi people were kind and smiled when he took pictures of them. When he was in a mosque one day, a teenage boy came to the painter and shouted, "No Sadam, No America!"[42] Lee Jong-gu's Kongsŭpkyŏngbo-Baghdad [Air-raid Warnings--Baghdad] (2003, fig. 84), in which the American president and the former Iraqi leader are represented in a quite ungainly manner in which their faces are spotted with flies and insects, seemed to reflect the boy's statement. If the Iraqi boy reminded the painter of South Korea under the military regimes in the past, the painter now seemed to question South Korea's position in relation to the Iraqi War or the current global system.

In South Korea, social realism emerged in defiance with mainstream Modernism in the art world. South Korean Modernist art idealized a permanent, essential and metaphysical notion of nation and its harmonious relationship with the trajectory of modernization, or Westernization, of Korean society, which was first established by colonial policy during the Japanese occupation (1910-1945) and was continued by the combined forces of domestic political authoritarianism and

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[41] Ibid.
[42] Lee Jong-gu, "Chuinŭl ch'atsŭpnida" [Lost and Found] (Inchon, South Korea: Sinsekye Gallery, 2003), unpaginated.

multinational capitalism after the Korean War (1950-1953). Rising in the 1980s, however, socially critical artists started to represent the contradiction between the state-sponsored myth and the *minjung* (ordinary people)'s uprooted life with regard to the pursuit of Western values and materialism. South Korean social realist artists sought to re/locate historical positions of their personal identities and national identity in the face of the domination of Modernism in the art world and the rapid Westernization of Korean society in general. In this way, their representations of *minjung*-oriented nationalism anticipated, reflected, and participated in the nationwide democratization movement centered on the creation of historical subjectivity.

After the Kwangju Biennale was founded in 1995, social realist artists again offered, within and outside the Biennale, an alternative to an attempt to substitute the supposedly centerless multiculturalism and globalization for the old notion of Wesernization or modernization. In the face of the Biennale's massive showcase of multicultural spectacles concealing the Western center, social realist artists mapped out the center of the global system by locating South Korea's (sub)position with regard to the Iraqi War and the North Korean nuclear issue. In an increasingly ambiguous boundary between the global system and South Korea as its subsystem, the future of South Korean social realism, particularly in relation to the nation's most urgent agenda—the reunification of South and North Korea--remains to be seen.

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