

# Korean contemporary artistic issue essay sample

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## Introduction

The long standing challenge to contemporary Korean art is to establish a historical claim for itself as it developed in the implicit absence of a time-honored norm of modern Korean art. The job of Korean artists now is to distinguish Korean art from those of other countries. This is because of the fact that contemporary Korean art has the characteristics of European art with broad Japanese influence. This presents a weak basis for a reasonable development or revolution from traditional to contemporary art in the history of Korean art, much less the institution of a distinct school of art.

After Korea's liberation from the Japanese empire, which was followed by the Korean War several decades ago, Korean artists saw the opportunity to abandon their shallow and old-fashioned notion of modern art and attempted to establish their own definition or understanding of contemporary art. The liberation from the Japanese occupation, as well as the Korean War served as a catalyst for Korean artists to develop Korea's first communal ultramodern art movement dubbed as " Art Informel."

The dramatic transformation of modern-day Korean art is usually categorized into four epochs— the Art Informel, which commenced from the late 1950s to mid-1960s; the Expansionist and Restorative Art, which developed from the late 1960s to mid-1970s; PanNaturalism or Post-minimalism, which extended from 1970s up to present time, and finally, New Imagism, which expanded from last 1970s to the modern-day period.

However, some experts admitted that this classification is comparatively subjective and have common characteristics to some extent. This

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characteristic, however, is not only present in Korean contemporary art but also in other countries.

### Contemporary Korean Art

Many believed that the historical background of the Art Informel is a lot similar to France's *apres-guerre*. This period in the history of Korean art started after the Korean war. Most also observed that Korea's abstract art movement is also closely related to Expressionism of France. This resemblance confirmed what observers concluded that Korean art was a compromised influenced of European art, or French art in particular.

In 1958, a manifesto expressed at fourth exhibition of Korean Contemporary Art Association read: " We must personally reaffirm the motivation for life within this present chaos" (International Cultural Society of Korea, 1995, p. 108). This simple declaration affirmed the common sensitivity Korea's first collective of modern artists and the European art.

The defining moment in the growth of contemporary Korean art took place during the Expansionist and Restorative period. This era characterized the development of aesthetics, as well as artistic leanings. This development was inevitable since the first period had introduced new artistic ideas that paved the way for the birth of the Expansionist period.

The distinctive characteristic of The Expansionist and Restorative period involved conflicting ideas, a situation which was mostly anticipated in the history of post-modern Korean art. Indeed, the presence of conflicting concepts triggered the dawning of a unusual epoch Korean ultra-modern art.

The Expansionist movement was mainly attributed to the development of artistic ideas and domains. This developed into Koreans ' everyday life. Also this approach has great influence on sculpture, and it paved the way for new possibilities by admitting the production of fragmentary art forms in preference to the finished structures of the past.

Korean ' objet art', the concrete form of Expansionism, is abstractly dissimilar from American and European objet art, which unprocessed, made-up, or artificial. It seeks instead to expose nature itself. This period commenced in 1968 with the first Joint Exhibition by Young Korean Artists who strived to reveal a different art form.

#### Contemporary Korean artists

One of the most notable Korean contemporary artists is Do-ho Su, whose artistic works earned his country great honor by giving it a distinctive art form. Do-ho Su was borne in Seoul in 1962, a period when Art Informel movement was at its peak. His sculptures vividly reveal scrupulously crafted architectural forms. The purpose of Do-ho Su artistic works is not to address the dynamic of public space versus personal space, but to construct site-explicit mechanisms that question the limits of distinctiveness.

Do-ho Su earned him the distinction of being part of Korea's contemporary artist collective. His works are architectural dimensions that exist in reality. The goal of his artistic style is to propose the issue of deception and reality, as well as duplicate and original.

One of his works is titled "Some/One," which shows phalanx of refined military dog tags. Suggestive of the manner an individual fighter is part of a bigger military collective, these dog tags distends to shape a concave, misty ensemble of protective covering at the midpoint of the room. Indeed Do-Ho Su's works endlessly question inquire into the identity of a person in today's ever-increasingly intercontinental, large-scale society.

In the realm of painting, among Korea's contemporary painters is Yun-Hee Toh. Like Do-Ho Su, Yun-Hee Toh also scrutinizes and makes remarks on nature and the people's discernment of it, yet in entirely dissimilar approach. Most of her work can be described as elegant and quiet, as they bring to mind old sceneries. One of her paintings is the 'Being-Forest,' which evokes hazy and ghost-like impressions. With their foggy finish over coatings, they look like antique and in some way expensive.

Most of Yun-Hee Toh works embraces intriguing and fascinating images and forms that convey to the beholder space and freedom for individual involvement and interpretation. However unlike Do-Ho Su, Yu-Hee To attempts to let the viewer make his/her own judgment of her paintings. Every image or shape on her canvass is open to interpretations, a characteristic that was influenced by Korea's period of Expansionism and Europe's impressionism.

Meanwhile, Park Seo-bo, who is called the father of Korean abstract painting, is popularly recognized for his inventive amalgamation of conventional Korean receptivity with European abstract act movements of Color Field

painting, Art Informel, and Minimalism. Just recently Park held a solo exhibition in New York featuring his “ Empty the Mind.”

In this exhibition, most of his works featured brilliant colored, monochrome abstract works. His style in abstract painting is to use multi-step, labor-intensive procedures to produce minimalist paintings conveying quite a few levels of hanji (mulberry paper), ink and acrylic paint. Before these levels dry, Park then uses a pencil or any thin object to carve thin matching lines across the whole canvass.

Park’s style in painting is to create what he calls ‘ breathing spaces’, which is characterized by leveled colors (Garcia, 2008). Minimalism movement, which greatly influenced Park, is considered the third period of Korean contemporary art. Minimalist art in Korea is characterized by its formative though, analytical logic, and transcendence of rational, which is associated with Korea’s original outlook of nature. This original outlook of nature is largely an Oriental idea that is founded on the concept that nature is the source of life and not the object of coercion, control and subjugation.

## Conclusion

The primary attribute of Korean art is that it is not naturalist based on the Western point of view. One critical issue in Korea is the problem which involves tradition. The aspect of tradition is almost absent in the history of Korean art, since it is largely influenced by Western and partly Oriental ideas. The main challenge lies in how Korean custom can be reinstated to contemporary life.

Thus, it can be said that contemporary Korean art is suffering from what is called 'identity crisis.' Despite the existence of this identity crisis, it would be pointless for contemporary Korean artists to look at traditional styles in this modern period. Their mission then is to try to restore the very source that instigated Korea's native conventional style.

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