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| Japanese-Korean Artistic Exchange (20th Century) |
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| Japan was the most active among the East Asian countries in embracing Western civilisation during the late nineteenth century. At the same time, the 500-year-old Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910) of Korea remained highly conservative. While Japan emerged as the dominant power of the region, Korea eventually collapsed, falling into Japanese colonial rule for 35 years (1910**-**1945). Due to these political conditions, Japanese art was highly prevalent in the work of Korean artists during this time, and Western art was mostly filtered through Japan. Korean artists nurtured a curiosity and passion for modern culture during the colonial era. Painters began using Western materials such as oil paints, and Western-style sculptures also emerged. In addition, a modern system of art exhibition was implemented. In previous eras, artisans working with paint, stonemasonry, carpentry, and metal casting were somewhat scorned, and therefore had a very low social status. However, as new cultural changes took hold, people working in these media gained a newfound respect as artists. |
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However, as new cultural changes took hold, people working in these media gained a newfound respect as artists.  Art classes were included in middle and high school curricula during the colonial period, although most teachers were Japanese. There were still no schools dedicated to art in Korea, so most young people who aspired to become artists had to travel to Japan in order to study. Korean artists who studied in Japan during the 1910s included: Ko Hui-dong (고희동, 1886-1965), Kim Chan-young (김찬영, 1893-?), Kim Gwan-ho (김관호, 1890-?), and Na Hye-seok (나혜석, 1896-1948), the last of which is recognised as the first female Korean artist. Korean art students continued to pursue their studies in Japan throughout the 1930s, attending both government schools, such as the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, and private institutions, including the Imperial Art School (*Bunka Gakuen*). Most of these students eventually returned to Korea to pursue their artwork, thus providing the foundation for the development of modern art in Korea.  Whether studying at public or private Japanese art schools, Korean artists initially received education and training that was based heavily on European Academism. By the 1920s, however, various experimental branches of European art — including Fauvism, German Expressionism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Russian Constructivism, and Abstract Art — were introduced and incorporated into the Japanese art field. Nonetheless, there were still very few Korean painters, and they had almost no opportunity to directly view the original works of these various genres. Thus, Korean artists practicing Western-style painting predominantly produced the nudes or figures in the filtered style of Academism and Impressionism that they had been exposed to in Japan, or else made landscape paintings that featured some elements of Impressionism or Fauvism.  While female nudes, self-portraits, and scenes of daily life were new subjects for art in Korea, landscape paintings in the Impressionist style were more familiar and thus easier to accept for modern Korean artists. Painters like Oh Chiho (오지호, 1905-1982) and Kim Ju-gyung (김주경, 1902-?) began to observe outdoor landscapes at different times of the year, painting the natural scenes with a kaleidoscope of vibrant colours. Under the influence of Impressionism, painters not only captured famous scenic spots such as Mt. Geumgang — a favoured subject of traditional Korean paintings — but also the seemingly mundane landscapes of their everyday surroundings and modernised urban spaces.   Artists such as Kim Whanki (김환기, 1913-1974) and Yoo Young-kuk (유영국, 1916-2002) played active roles in 1930s Japanese art with their experiments in various types of abstract art. They primarily focused on works of geometric abstraction, and often exhibited in participation with a Japanese group called the Association of Free Artists. However, abstract art was heavily criticized by mainstream artists, including Oh Chiho, and furthermore, did not receive much attention from the Korean art field.  Some Koreans interested in ink painting also went to Japan to study *Nihonga*, (modern Japanese painting). Kim Un-ho (김은호, 1892-1979), who pioneered a new style characterised by highly elaborate works and the use of fine, flat colours, is representative of such painters. Yi Sang-beom (이상범, 1897-1972) and Byeon Gwan-sik (변관식, 1899-1976) incorporated a Western perspective into their traditional ink wash paintings, implementing real observations from daily life to depict the natural ambience of ordinary rural landscapes. After Korea achieved Independence, however, Kim Un-ho and his students were disparaged for their *Nihonga* style. Thus, since the 1950s, Eastern paintings in Korea have primarily consisted of ink wash landscapes.  The introduction of Western art trends and movements into Korean modern art via Japan resulted in several interesting phenomena. First, the majority of art terms, including many that are still in use today, were first translated into Japanese and then transferred to Korean. Second, a clear division arose between Western-style paintings and Eastern paintings. Typically in the West, paintings are categorised strictly by materials: oil paints, pastels, frescoes, etc. In Korea, however, traditional paintings are categorised as Eastern paintings, while oil and watercolour paintings are categorised as Western-style paintings. This mode of categorization originates from Japan, where *Nihonga* paintings were classified independently from *Yoga* (Western-style paintings). Third, in both Korea and Japan, interest in Post-Impressionism and Fauvism was relatively strong and persistent, while Cubism never became influential. Surrealism, however, was very popular in Japan, but virtually non-existent in the Korean art field. The reasons for this are unclear, but it is worth noting that Surrealism was introduced to Korea in the late 1930s, at the same time that the Pacific War was beginning. As a colony of Japan, Korea was called on to aid the war effort, so most cultural activities were put on hold during this period.  Direct artistic exchanges with European and American art only became possible after Independence in 1945 and the Korean War in 1950. Only then did Korean artists begin studying and exhibiting their works in Europe and the U.S., and thus became more widely and deeply assimilated into the flow of international art. |
| Further reading:  (Youngna)  (Youngna, A Brief History of Korean Modern Art)   (Youngna, Artistic Trends in Korean Painting During the 1930s) |