**Korean Academic Realism**

Academic Realism refers to the mainstream style of Western painting from the Japanese colonial era (1910-1945), as exemplified by works shown at the Joseon Art Exhibition (1922-1944), the representative government exhibition in Korea. In the West, Academism is characterized by classical features, but Korean Academism was marked by a somewhat compromised blend of Realism and Impressionism. The style is ‘compromised’ because the Korean artists making Western paintings at the time had mostly received Academism through their art education in Japan. Two of the movement’s representative artists are Lee Ma-dong (1906-1981) and Kim In-seung (1910-2001), both of whom graduated from the Tokyo School of Fine Arts and became the major artists of the Joseon Art Exhibition. After Korean independence in 1945, Modernism and various experimental art forms emerged, and Academic Realism was heavily criticized for its conservative nature. However, it continued to exert its influence as the preferred style of the National Art Exhibition of Korea (Gukjeon)(1949-1981), and as a necessary skill for students hoping to enter art school.

Academic Realism was mainly practiced by artists who studied at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, and strongly supported by the Joseon Art Exhibition (1922-1944). The Western Painting Department at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts was established by Kuroda Seiki (1866-1924) in 1896, after he returned from France in 1893. The curriculum there placed a strong emphasis on Realist techniques, such as three-dimensional expression, drawing from objective observation, and creating very natural depictions of people. In France, Kuroda had studied in the studio of Raphaël Collin (1850-1916), a salon painter whose preferred style incorporated a blend of Classicism, Realism, and Impressionism. Kuroda brought this mixed style of Academism to Japan, and his introduction served as the basis of Western painting education at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. Kuroda’s brand of Academic Realism became the dominant style of the Western painting section of the Official Japanese Salon (Bunten), which was organized in 1907. Accordingly, Korean artists of Western paintings who studied at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts learned this version of Academic Realism.

Kim Gwan-ho (1890-1959), born into a wealthy family in Pyongyang, was one of the first Korean artists at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. His work *Sunset* (1916) was chosen as part of the special selection at the Official Japanese Salon. This work combined Realism with the classical nude, reminiscent of the work of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898), thus exemplifying the defining traits of the exhibition and the Western Painting Department at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. Kim In-seung (1911- 2001), who studied in Japan for five years starting in 1932, received the grand prize in the Joseon Art Exhibition with his *Nude* (1937). In fact, over the years, Kim won so many awards from this exhibition that he became known as the “nobleman of the Joseon Art Exhibition.” His works―with their classically posed nude figures, precise linear depictions, and highly stable composition―epitomize the style of Academic Realism. After Korean independence in 1945, Kim served on the jury of the National Art Exhibition of Korea, thus contributing greatly to the institutionalization of Academic Realism.

**References and further reading**

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