

Jung Tak-young and the Making of Abstract Ink Painting in Postwar Korea

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Mounted in a single horizontal line on a wall at the 1971 São Paulo Bienal were eleven square panels, each spaced from the other at regular intervals (Figs. 1, 16). A work by South Korean artist Jung Tak-young, *Work 71* might have gone unnoticed in the sea of abstraction featured at the Bienal were it not that its creator was a self-identified ink painter. Consisting of the fibrous paper ordinarily used for ink painting and calligraphy, each panel resembles a white monochrome when seen from a distance. Closer inspection, however, reveals how paper covering each panel was torn in parts to produce a surface that toggled between creamy, almost opalescent smoothness and light-deflecting roughness. In deliberately forsaking the very materials and tools that defined his training, Jung appeared to circumvent ink painting's accumulated rhetorical baggage, a necessary step toward thinking more specifically about how and where ink painting might fit in a contemporary art world newly recalibrated in light of the expansion of existing media and the emergence of new forms.

When *Work 71* was exhibited in the São Paulo Bienal, ink painting struck even its most ardent champions as hopelessly estranged from the contemporary art field, a perception that persists even today. In the January 1970 issue of the well-known contemporary art journal *Art International*, the art historian Sherman Lee claimed that “nothing would be more humiliating to the artist than to ‘explain’ his work as a decorative or thematic complex, as a document of history or as an illustration of tortured philosophizing.”¹ The challenge, he implied, was finding a way to consider ink painting and modern art as equals and complements rather than as symptoms of ineffable cultural difference. Save for works by artists like Paris-based Zao Wou-ki or the Philippine painter Fernando Zobel that plausibly affirmed the dominance of gestural abstraction, ink painting seemed fated to languish in an ideal time perhaps best characterized as extrahistorical. In South Korea, where abstraction (*ch’usanghwa*) quickly became a foundational term for reflecting on Korean art’s place in the world and on artistic engagement with Euro-American approaches to depiction, the equation pairing ink painting and abstraction often veiled deep anxiety toward the asymmetry of political and economic power between Korea and its industrialized allies. To a small but dedicated group of ink painters belonging to the first generation of postwar Korean artists, however, abstraction became an implicit catalyst for exploring new approaches to painting based on aporia and incommensurability rather than as symptoms of received external influence. If artists like Jung Tak-young, Suh Se-ok, Song Su-nam, and An Dong-sook deserve critical attention, it stems from how they envisioned ink painting and abstraction as mutually enabling practices that collaborated to set painting free from taxonomic structures and, ideally, the histories and agendas these structures represented.

Born in 1937, Jung belonged to one of the most conflicted artistic generations in the history of Korean art. Shaped by systems of knowledge production introduced during Japan’s colonial occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945, this generation was also tasked with disassembling those very systems. Artists born in 1930s Korea also bore firsthand witness to the brutal devastation of the Korean War from 1950 to 1953; even those, like Jung, too young for the draft were appallingly close to the destruction euphemistically described by former US State Department official and Rockefeller Foundation officer Charles Fahs, in connection



1 Jung Tak-young, *Work 71-9*, detail, 1971, hemp and Korean paper, 35 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 35 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (90 × 90 cm). Museum of Art, Seoul National University (artwork © Estate of Jung Tak-young; photograph provided by the Museum of Art, Seoul National University)

with the precarious situation of the National Museum of Korea, Seoul, as a “general shortage of buildings.”² At the same time, Jung’s generation was among the first in his country to receive a modern university education, which empowered artists to play an unprecedented role in shaping a new visual identity for an independent South Korea eager to join the international order of nations. Jung produced his most important works between 1967 and 1975, when “experimental art” (*sirhöm misul*) began to emerge and overlap with efforts by cultural workers to examine how creation might intervene in, or compromise, the authority of institutional norms, including the calcified division between figuration and abstraction. Yet Jung’s arc of experimentation also drew from a vast reserve of ink painting knowledge that in South Korea was defined as much by sociological concerns as it was by materials and techniques. Resembling a family business or a guild, the ink painting community implicitly required its members, for the sake of discipline and moral self-improvement, to follow models set by preceding generations—a sharp contrast to how oil painters benchmarked their progress by references to overseas developments and episodes of rebellion. Reticent even with his peers, Jung seldom discussed his views. Nevertheless, his works conveyed an unspoken intention to mobilize ink painting and abstraction as opportunities for interrupting, rechanneling, and destabilizing entrenched habits of attention that might sabotage the inflexible certitude encumbering both art and politics of a deeply uncertain age.

PAINTING FOR AN INDEPENDENT KOREA

Both ink painting and abstraction emblemized the interface between form and ideology that profoundly defined twentieth-century art in Korea. The very idea of ink painting (*tongyanghwa*) as a discrete medium category was a by-product of imperial Japan's efforts to consolidate its hold by appropriating all cultural production to itself via logistical and naming structures. Literally translated into English as "Oriental painting" or "Eastern painting," *tongyanghwa* was exported to Korea along with an entire political and cultural infrastructure intended to integrate artistic production throughout the Japanese Empire under the rubric of "Asia."³ *Tongyanghwa* encompassed brush painting, calligraphy, and *nihonga*, an approach to painting developed in late nineteenth-century Japan, in explicit response to the rising popularity of Western oil painting, that paired traditional brush painting materials with composition techniques freely borrowed from a wide range of media. *Tongyanghwa* entered the Korean artistic lexicon in 1922, when the Japanese colonial government irrevocably changed the Korean art world by establishing categories for the Sōnjōn, its annual juried salon: Western-style oil painting (*sōyanghwa*), "Oriental" painting (which included ink and brush painting), and calligraphy.⁴ As painting was made to yield under these categories as part of a new political order, a corresponding urgency to consider how artists might shape these new epistemologies rose in kind. Even if paintings were legible through the words or worlds of others, could painters make their own subjectivities visible? The question was freighted with serious political implications in the final years of World War II, when Japan struggled to defend its empire. In 1940, a small but influential number of Korean oil painters, Kim Whanki and Yoo Youngkuk among them, exhibited organic abstract and Cubist-inflected works.⁵ The works of this generation of Korean artists, like those of their contemporaries and former colleagues in Japan, were subject to negative scrutiny by a fascist state that regarded abstraction generally as an unnecessary self-indulgence at best and politically subversive at worst.⁶

The problem of the interface between form and ideology assumed a different, but no less pronounced guise during the early years of reconstruction following the Korean War. Artists making their professional debut between the end of Japanese colonial rule and the years immediately after 1953 faced the epistemic challenge of having to envision a contemporary art for an independent and divided Korea. The desire to rid Korean ink painting of Japanese influence gained particular momentum on both institutional and individual registers. Contrary to the organization of Japanese art schools around the division between Western-style oil painting (*yōga*) and *nihonga*, Seoul National University merged the formerly separate departments of *tongyanghwa* and *sōyanghwa* into a single department of painting (*hoehwa*). Students could focus on ink painting or oil painting within the department of painting during their third year of undergraduate study, but all enrollees in the painting department received instruction in both.⁷ Perhaps conditioned by their early training, Korean artists active during the colonial era nevertheless insisted on the segregation of media, save for calls to retire the word *tongyanghwa* in favor of *han'guk'wa* or even *Chosŏnhwa*, both literally meaning "Korean painting."⁸ In response to the inaugural edition of the Kukchŏn, the annual juried salon established by the South Korean government in 1949 and modeled after the Sōnjōn, the painter Kim Hwagyŏng stated that such renaming exceeded mere semantics: "a basic step in the construction of a national art is to first eliminate the color of *nihonga*" and produce work that reflected a "national consciousness."⁹ The members of Paekyanghoe, a group of midcareer ink painters formed in 1957 to protest the Kukchŏn's uncritical resemblance to its Sōnjōn predecessor, described their works as "contemporary ink painting" (*hyŏndae tongyanghwa*), "new ink painting" (*sin tongyanghwa*), or even "national painting" (*kuk'hwa*).¹⁰



2 Park Rae-hyun, *Owl*, early 1950s, ink and color on paper, $31\frac{1}{8} \times 22\frac{3}{8}$ in. (81 × 57 cm). Korea University Museum, Seoul (artwork © Estate of Park Rae-hyun; photograph provided by the Korea University Museum)



3 Lee Ungno, *Forest*, 1950, ink and color on Korean paper, $52\frac{3}{8} \times 24\frac{3}{4}$ in. (133 × 63 cm). National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (artwork © 2018 Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York/ADAGP Paris; photograph provided by the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea)

Purging Korean art of Japanese influence in practice often meant forgoing the use of bright color typical of *nihonga* painting and abstaining from the kind of mimetic figuration that dominated *tongyanghwa* production in the colonial era. Jung Tak-young, for example, recalled *nihonga*-style ink-and-color painting being omitted from the university painting curriculum in favor of monochrome ink painting.¹¹ Yet even amid efforts to purge traces of *nihonga* from ink painting in the early to mid-1950s, Park Rae-hyun, a 1944 graduate of the *nihonga* department of the Tokyo Women's College of Art, repurposed *nihonga*'s preoccupation with flatness and pattern to steer painting toward broader questions of form unchained to inherited artistic discourses. In the fraught years after 1953, when ever-present signs of recent death still occluded speculation about the future, the driving question for Park turned on what forms life could take. If leading oil painter Yi Pong-sang lauded Park's keen "sense of the contemporary," it was because she recognized how an "awareness of form" was as necessary to postwar reconstruction as physical rehabilitation, especially as national psychology now turned from the campaign for Korean independence to imagining what an independent Korea would look like.¹² Likely painted in the early 1950s, when Park shifted her focus away from "realistic" depiction to the composition of forms, *Owl* is most convincing as a set of flat planes of steel gray, muted blues, and grayish purples that merge and collide, a ready example of her interest in what she characterized as "the specific form of an integrated pictorial surface realized through changes in color" (Fig. 2).¹³

Celebrated in the 1920s and 1930s for his images of typical literati painting subjects, particularly bamboo and pine trees, Lee Ungno also came to abstraction gradually, through acts of conscious deformation. Never quite convinced of the illustrative capacity of lines, he took frequent advantage of the discrepancy between illustrative representation and mark making. In *Forest*, figural certainty escapes the viewer just to the point that a mass of lines seems to cohere into an image of branches (Fig. 3). Lee grids pictorial space

using perpendicular lines that are successively layered onto each other to both produce the illusion of spatial recession and reinforce the flatness of the physical support. Though hardly susceptible to the false dream of literati aristocracy cherished by others of his generation, Lee Ungno relied on skill to make his case. The line externalizes his dexterity, calling attention to his ability to completely make the brush do his pictorial bidding. A review of Lee's solo show at the Central Information Center in downtown Seoul in June 1962 described the works not just as "abstract ink paintings" but as attempts to "create a comprehensive world of painting that transcended the category of ink painting."¹⁴ In his retreat from figuration, Lee aimed to reorder sensory experience to counter imperialist systems of knowledge organization and production. But this move was equally legible as a different approach to innovation based on recursion, or the intentional rehearsal of routine procedures to achieve different ends.

Influential for oil as well as ink painters, Lee bridged the different temporalities underlying the introduction of abstraction in postwar Korea. His highly publicized move to Paris reinforced interest in Informel painting initially galvanized by translated writings and reproductions of representative works in late 1950s Korea. The existentialism of Informel's key advocates gained a strong Korean following. Michel Tapié's *Un art autre* (1952) appealed to Korean artists and critics, in part because of how well it resonated with the ideological, social, and physical chaos marking the last years of an extraordinarily turbulent decade. On a related front, Abstract Expressionism was closely imbricated with rhetorics of freedom, particularly as examples were accessed through magazines displayed in US Information Agency offices or through the auspices of the US State Department.¹⁵ Korean receptivity to Informel painting was primed, however, by the Francophilia of a lettered Japanese urban elite to which an affluent generation of Korean artists and critics belonged, or may have aspired to belong.¹⁶ In the wake of rampant anti-Japanese sentiment that became the affective substrate on which the idea of an independent Korea grew, the Japanese origins of the sources used to discuss Informel painting were carefully obscured.¹⁷

The deliberate turn to abstraction in ink painting belonged to a somewhat different and longer time line, one set in motion by the Japanese occupation. Suh Se-ok recalled being intensely motivated by a desire to challenge the insistence on figuration, and particularly on the representation of beauty through portraiture and landscape painting that so dominated ink painting in Korea before 1945.¹⁸ Yet never did the concept of tradition bear so heavily on artistic shoulders as it did in the years just after the Korean War. At this moment, tradition was understood not so much as a set of techniques or methods as instead the overwhelming sense that it was somehow necessary to sustain a certain legacy of vision in order to develop a genuinely contemporary Korean art. For artists like Suh, however, the more timely question was how tradition could produce its own ecologies of thinking by artists recombining, rather than reproducing, learned habits of mark making and spatial conception. In 1959 Suh founded the Mungnimhoe, a major ink painting group that played a pivotal role in the shaping of the early postwar Korean art world.¹⁹ Composed mostly of his students at Seoul National University, Jung Tak-young among them, the group created some of the first intentionally abstract paintings using only traditional brush painting tools and materials. Among its core strengths was its indifference to epistemological certainties; where Korean Informel painters approached abstraction as a vehicle for giving full expression to inchoate feelings, Mungnimhoe artists fielded the concept of abstraction as an unknown constant. An Dong-sook, perhaps the most experienced of the Mungnimhoe members other than Suh, became one of the first ink painters in Korea to deliberately attempt full abstraction by turning to geometry. For the seventh Mungnimhoe exhibition in 1963, An exhibited



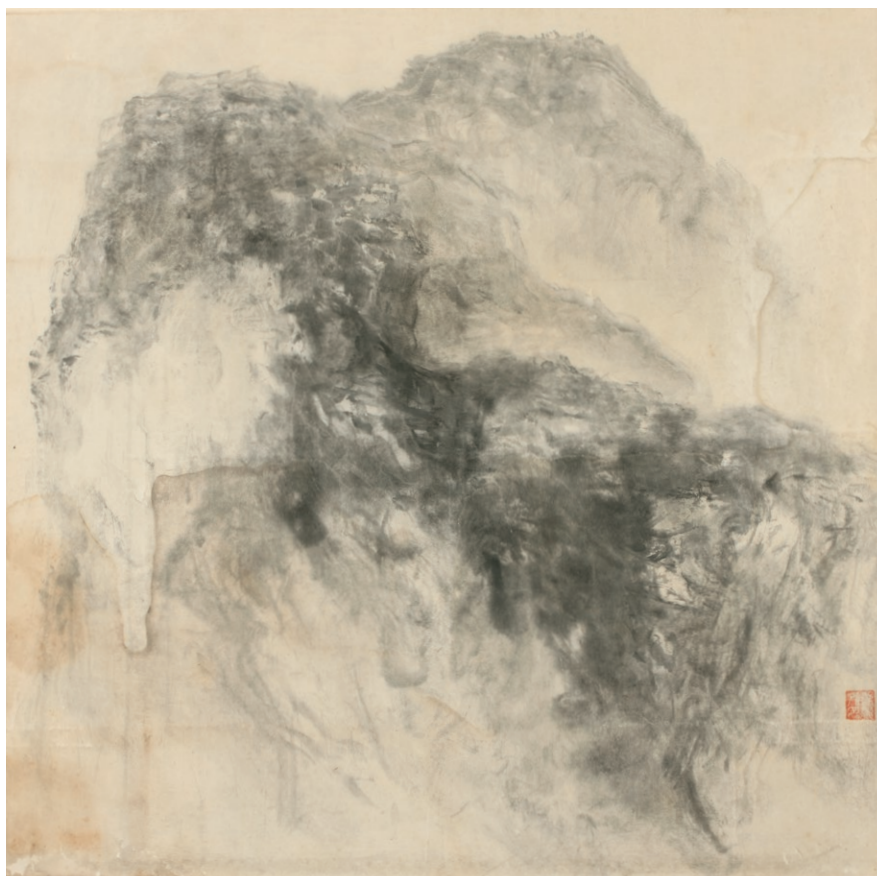
4 An Dong-sook, *Untitled*, ca. 1950s, ink on Korean paper, 46 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 44 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (119 × 114 cm). National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (artwork © Estate of An Dong-sook; photograph provided by the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea)

5 Suh Se-ok, *Untitled*, 1965, ink on linen, 35 × 33 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (89 × 84.5 cm). Collection of the artist (artwork © Suh Se-ok; photograph provided by the Hyundai Gallery)

a work in which he fitted circles and ovoid forms in reciprocal relation with rectangular forms framing the curvilinear ones (Fig. 4).²⁰ Although An frequently described his works as examples of *pyŏnhyŏng*, a word whose most literal translation is “a change in shape or form,” his Mungnimhoe paintings suggest that it in fact referred to the dynamism of uncertainty generated by using one set of materials while simultaneously being aware of other approaches to image formation.²¹

ON THEIR MARKS: THE RACE FOR CONTEMPORANEITY

Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, the act of mark making for both oil and ink painters was suspended between calls to unearth suppressed trauma through gesture in the name of freedom and instrumentalist attitudes toward materiality forged in the crucible of postwar reconstruction. The ability of marks to function as citations had been imperiled since the early 1960s, when Mungnimhoe members destabilized their perception as either intelligible references or embodied traces of personhood. Suh Se-ok experimented with wash techniques by diluting ink in a large, wide dish, thus giving it the properties of water (Fig. 5). In some works, ink appears to randomly float and even disappear into a watery surface, a sensation the critic Oh Kwangsu described as the “destruction of bold forms,” which referred less to actual erasure or dissolution than to the creation of indeterminacy through chance.²² Against a context in which ink painting was encumbered by an excess of intention, with everything from the placement of the brush to the choice of seal color scrutinized as possible indices of a person’s mental and emotional state, the introduction of chance signaled a profound skepticism toward the primacy of intention in the making of vital action. As the first artists’ group in Korea organized around a conscious recognition of ink painting as a contemporary artistic medium, the Mungnimhoe quickly became the standard-bearer for a potential alternative to the definition of avant-garde painting established by its oil painting counterparts.²³ Group



6 Jung Tak-young, *Mountain*, 1960, ink on Korean paper, 35 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 35 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (90 × 90 cm). National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (artwork © Estate of Jung Tak-young; photograph provided by the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea)

members, including several women, actively pursued exhibition opportunities in Korea and abroad.²⁴ Mungnimhoe artists numbered among those sent to represent South Korea in the expanding international biennial circuit, such as Jung Tak-young, who participated in the Manila International Exhibition in 1962 and the Tokyo Biennale in 1967.

Then a fledgling artist with very few opportunities for professional advancement, Jung felt “lucky” to be part of a formal association that enjoyed genuine recognition yet also provided a space within which to “break away from the frame of tradition.”²⁵ Exchanging his brush for sand and other materials, Jung adapted himself to a different kind of time structured by new conditions of mass production that made available a different set of material goods and tools. Orientation also became a critical source of exploration; he frequently painted both sides of various supports to learn “how to draw the surface with a different language and grammar.”²⁶ For the second Mungnimhoe exhibition in 1960, Jung showed *Mountain*, a work whose title suggests a traditional mountains-and-water landscape (*sansuhwa*) but whose actual subject was representation’s arbitrariness (Fig. 6). Jung presents an image that plausibly reads both as a mountain within the context of depiction and as a diffuse constellation of ink. Pictorial space is just shallow enough to cast doubt on whether the forms read only as mountains. Far from a timeless, solid edifice, the mountain registers as unsteady and even nebulous. Part of this effect stems from Jung’s preference for square formats rather than the rectangular hanging scroll supports favored by his Mungnimhoe colleagues. The choice distanced him from the presumption of spatial recession such formats implied, namely, how spatial distance in traditional hanging scroll landscapes is commensurate with physical distance from the bottom edge of the support.

By 1967 Jung’s fealty to the materials of brush painting waned further, possibly because rhetorical posturing displaced the once-visceral connection between medium and materials that energized early Mungnimhoe production. Jung in fact had left the group,



7 Jung Tak-young, *Work 67-8*, 1967, ink and color on Korean paper, 35 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 35 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (90 × 90 cm). National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (artwork © Estate of Jung Tak-young; photograph provided by the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea)

due to alleged interference from older colleagues, a coded reference to an internal need to escape a collective that replicated the structures of the very hierarchy it claimed to reject: a hierarchy that recognized painting only after it paid sufficient and legible deference to a given authority.²⁷ A former caricaturist and graphic designer, Jung was familiar with a variety of materials, including pencils and oil, which led him to think across media rather than only within the categorical confines of ink painting. In this he joined An Dong-sook, who declared his primary contribution to the Mungnimhoe as rooted in the search for a “broader world” of possibility founded on the employment of a variety of materials: “there is no need to insist that ink painting is an art of line . . . or ink.”²⁸ In *Work 67-8*, Jung created a dense thicket of marks that draw from earlier accumulations of line (Fig. 7). Formed by a multitude of vaguely straight horizontal and vertical lines, it appears to stand on its own, but the lines cascade downward, the result of the support being propped upright before the ink dried completely. Especially notable is the appearance and placement of the seal, the traditional mark of authorship or ownership in ink painting. Usually carved from stone or wood and impressed onto the painting surface with an oily vermilion ink paste, it commonly occupies an inconspicuous part of the painting to avoid diverting attention from the brushwork and the image it depicts. An accomplished seal carver, Jung was especially inventive when it came to determining what roles the seal could play. Here, he inverts the order by placing the seal at the very center of the painting. Acting as the pivot around which pictorial activity revolves, the seal visually counters the downward flow of brushwork. Seasoned viewers of ink painting might expect to read the characters of Jung’s name, but these have been effaced, correspondingly erasing the symbolic function of the seal as a marker of authorial presence and the prestige associated with possession.

Work 67-8 was made for the inaugural exhibition of the Korean Painting Association, or Han’guk’wahoe, a group Jung helped found with his Mungnimhoe colleague Song

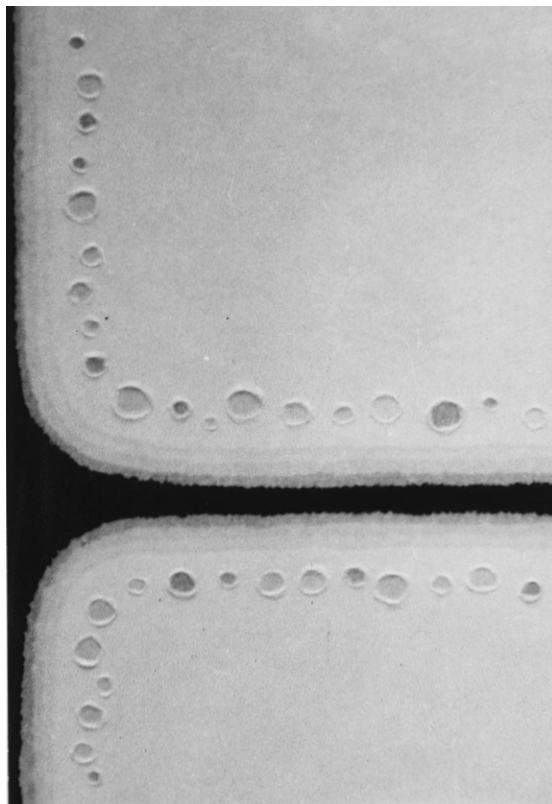


8 Jung Tak-young, *Window-A*, 1967, ink and color on Korean paper, 35 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 35 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (90 × 90 cm). National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (artwork © Estate of Jung Tak-young; photograph provided by the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea)

Young-bang.²⁹ But if participation in the Mungnimhoe was what allowed Jung to properly imagine himself as a distinctly “contemporary” artist, it was because of how it tried to nudge ink painting toward a new sociality of form.³⁰ The literalism its members displayed toward materials, the recursive use of basic compositional ideas such as point and line, and the refusal of complex technique brought ink painting in direct communication with a host of other works outside the medium. Jung’s ability to facilitate this sociality may explain why he was invited to participate in key exhibitions of contemporary art, the 1968 Tokyo Biennale and the Contemporary Artists’ Invitational Exhibition among them, which in the first half of the 1960s had displaced the Kukchön as the premier exhibition for avant-garde art in Korea.

For the final edition of the Contemporary Artists’ Invitational, Jung exhibited *Window-A* (Fig. 8).³¹ A moderately large square support of paper takes center stage, its color and texture made particularly noticeable by the scratches, spotting, and rips that pock the painting surface. The focus on paper recalls that of Jung’s predecessor, Kwon Young-woo, a contemporary of Suh Se-ok who reversed the figure-ground relation to explore how paper supports, rather than ink, might enable mark making. A resounding example of the potential for ink painting to redeem abstraction’s promise of infinite multiplicity, the works Kwon exhibited in his first solo show at the Sinsegye Gallery in Seoul in 1966 primarily featured paper, including coarse brown paper for packaging and glossy black photographic paper as well as *hwasōnji*, the white paper made from mulberry bark fiber traditionally employed for ink painting and calligraphy.³² Most of the compositions, consisting of plywood supports covered with fragments of cut paper, presented their own internalized structures, with sections of paper pasted to form linear rows or gridlike configurations (Fig. 9). In his review, the critic Yi Ku-yōl expressed doubt as to whether Kwon’s creations were sufficiently complex: “most of his paintings are merely odes to the whiteness of paper.”³³ Yi’s disappointment might also be read as a kind of self-doubt, as if he had difficulty believing that Kwon’s emphasis on

materiality was intended to render ink painting legible without telegraphing to viewers a sure grasp of ink painting's histories and protocols.



9 Kwon Young-woo, *Untitled*, 1966, Korean paper on plywood, dimensions unknown. Location unknown (artwork © Estate of Kwon Young-woo; photograph provided by Kwon Ohyp)

Kwon's 1966 exhibition set an important precedent for Jung in how the exhibited works foregrounded the physicality of labor and the obstinacy of materials. Jung thwarted any chance of systemic resolution at the level of facture by deploying a disparate selection of tools and materials. Instead of a brush, he employed a fine-point felt-tip marker used for underlining text and drawing charts. Manufactured as part of the light industry boom in Korea during the early 1960s, such markers (*ss'ainp'en*) became an office staple by the time Jung executed *Window-A* and *Window-B* (Fig. 10).³⁴ In both paintings, lines are drawn with a straightedge, handiwork conditioned by industrial production enabled by heavy investment in foreign technology.³⁵ Yet Jung defied the tip's promise of precision by occasionally pressing against the surface or lingering just long enough to bleed small pools of color. The ink of these felt-tip pens offers an interesting counterpoint to *mōk*, the dense black ink of calligraphy and ink painting, made by grinding an ink stick composed of soot and animal glue against an inkstone. Where the extravagant, even profligate application of *mōk* was acceptable and even desirable in the context of painting, marker ink was seen as a potential danger to be contained in daily life, with users worrying constantly about ink leaking, seeping, and spoiling personal items.³⁶ Jung capitalized on what might be called the treachery of ink, applying it to punctuate pictorial space in all the wrong places. More challenging still was creating an opportunity where paper itself might, in Jung's words, "enter" into ink.³⁷ Rather than the traditional expensive paper for ink painting, he used rough brown packaging paper as well as laminated paper lacquered with oil utilized for flooring. These substitutions allowed him to move decisively away from the tendency

of some of his peers to seek refuge in the presumed sublimity of materials as well as from the primacy of technique. Jung's intention was not to denigrate technique but only to point out that the knowledge required for effective mark making was no longer channeled exclusively through the lens of mastery. The marks volatilize the surface of ink painting, consequently undermining the integrity of the paper and its ability to act as a physical support.³⁸

Jung's harnessing of paper's fragility may have been further prompted by a desire to more explicitly force abstraction into an encounter with the unseen ruins and detritus that continued to define the nature of daily life, even in mid-1960s Korea. Actively incorporating damage as an integral part of the creative process, Jung intentionally disrupted the operation of making, in turn calling attention to procedures necessary to the realization of painting but that are ordinarily invisible. In *Window-A* (Fig. 8), seals are repeatedly imprinted to generate a virtual horizontal border that reinforces the division that also pits materiality against image. The seal is visible primarily as a square, that is, as a shape rather than as a symbol or a trace. In this work, the goal was to sever the hold analogy continued to exert over composition. Jung was not entirely successful—after all, he named the work *Window-A*, as if to allude to Renaissance ideas of vision—but he nevertheless developed a catalog of marks that bore little relation to either the histrionic gesturalism that characterized the kind of abstraction flooding Korean universities and galleries in the mid- to late 1960s or the brushwork techniques he internalized from his school years copying ink masterworks.

Even more significant than the marks was how *Window-A* and its counterpart *Window-B* were mounted, the crucial step in which an image painted on a surface is made ready for display. Mounting techniques fascinated artists like An Dong-sook, who, according to master mounter Yi Hyo-u, often attached to his paintings an extra board to make the picture appear to "pop out" and avoid looking "enclosed in a cage."³⁹ For both *Window-A* and



10 Jung Tak-young, *Window-B*, 1967, ink and color on Korean paper, 35 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 35 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (90 × 90 cm). Museum of Art, Seoul National University (artwork © Estate of Jung Tak-young; photograph provided by the Museum of Art, Seoul National University)

Window-B, Jung first produced an initial painting on unsized paper, which was then glued to a sized sheet attached to an unframed wooden panel. Before the glue dried, the initial painting was torn in various places with a variety of implements; Jung even scratched ovoid bits of paper with his finger to reveal the dark brown paper underneath. The ruptured seal in the lower half of the work signals a denial of the seal's ability to visually hold a multipart image together. Seals were sometimes impressed on the edges joining one section of a work to another. Here, the seal was broken, the rip siphoning whatever authority the intact seal might have formerly possessed. The stream of miniature dents, stains, and scratches parading across the surface not only mimics the inadvertent, unintended damage that might result from poor storage or handling but also suggests nonchalance toward even the most basic rules of process. Negligence, or the deficit of attention, was a source of creative possibility. In order to avoid wrinkles, an ink painting must be glued to its mount before it dries completely. Yet the paper puckers toward the bottom right-hand corner, with fold lines rippling fanlike from the corner, signal that Jung waited until the painting fully dried before attaching it to its backing. The rippling further indicates that Jung spread the glue from the edges toward the center of the painting, in direct opposition to the correct procedure of working centripetally from the center outward. By making aberration central rather than incidental, Jung asked how painting could transform attention into purposeful forms of distraction.

READING BETWEEN THE LINES OF ABSTRACTION

Anarchic as his painting might have looked, however, Jung was no rebel. Unlike his Seoul National University contemporary Yu Hwang, he never staged protest exhibitions outside

museum walls nor boycotted the Kukchön.⁴⁰ The disorder he orchestrated was an attempt to free painting from its excessive dependence on the fraught histories to which it seemed inextricably bound, including an emerging history of abstraction dominated by discussions of foreign influence, exchange, and anxieties concerning formal similitude, which Oh Kwangsu pronounced in 1968 as a “state of stagnation.”⁴¹ Without naming specific names, Oh implied the many previous examples of abstraction that failed to properly take up the burden of historicization. If abstraction was a key justification for thinking about a specifically contemporary art, then its creators, he argued, should also be tasked with developing a view of history based on more than the identification and mapping of influences. It was not enough, for example, to track a history of abstraction from the 1930s, when Korean artists studied

Western-style oil painting in Japan, or from 1957, when the first Informel-style oil paintings made their public debut.⁴² Oh found both hypothetical points of origin inadequate, commenting that they still fell within the long shadow of Western and Japanese influence.⁴³ Only through “continued experimentation” and its resistance to the development of lineage and hierarchy could a more layered history be possible.⁴⁴

The call to experiment for the sake of producing a different kind of historical trajectory was eagerly taken up by younger ink painters, by those outside the powerful Seoul National University network as well. Among them was Song Su-nam, in 1965 a recent graduate of Hongik University, whose art school competed with Seoul National University for precedence in the Korean art world. One of his early paintings, *Chaunyŏng Flower Patch*, deftly illustrates how a self-consciously abstract ink painting emerged in the mid- to late 1960s at a time when prior techniques of mark making reflected different epistemological frameworks for art (Fig. 11). A monochrome ink painting constructed around the piling of horizontal lines, its marks do not reinforce patterns of knowledge via purposeful nods and citations but instead redistribute them along different circuits. Lines that under other circumstances represent horizon lines, branches, or waves now exist to emphasize the planarity of the surface. Toward the middle, lines are blurred and smeared, which in another painting might register as lapses of creative attention from which the artist might seek

to divert the viewer. Song has the line perform erasure, the opposite of the work it ordinarily does in ink painting. But the blurring fosters a sense of texture that makes pictorial space perceptually accessible via touch as well as sight.

Among the few ink painters who regularly showed work alongside artists in other media, Song belonged to the “Post Artists” (*Ihujakkahoe*), a group of painters, sculptors, and critics founded in Seoul in 1965. Its self-described agenda was to catalyze the formation of movements “post-abstraction”: to its members, abstraction was nothing but the “reproduction of an ‘ism.’”⁴⁵ The group echoed the sentiments of Bang Geun-taek, a critic who initially made his reputation by championing Informel-style painting in the late 1950s, only to lament what he saw as the demise of the Kukchön in 1963 as a mere harbor for “opportunistic abstraction.”⁴⁶ From 1961 the nation’s oldest exhibition devolved into a “student arena” overflowing with second-rate gestural oils Bang derided as “abstraction in haste.”⁴⁷ Bang argued that the Kukchön should remain the preserve of what he called “traditional figuration,” with abstraction safely quarantined under the rubric of “avant-garde” in shows like the Contemporary Artists’ Invitational or in international exhibitions.⁴⁸

“Post-abstraction” rang strangely at a time defined by a collective obsession with the future. Did “post” foretell an end or, more likely, signal that grappling with ends, including



11 Song Su-nam, *Chaunyŏng Flower Patch*, 1968, ink on Korean paper, 65 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 51 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (166 × 130 cm). Private collection, Seoul (artwork © Estate of Song Su-nam; photograph provided by Park Duck-hyum)

death, was needed to properly activate the present? Certainly, the choice of the word “post” indicated an intention to question existing artistic language. While “nonfigurative art” (*pigusang*) was extensively used, “abstraction” was invoked with considerable trepidation, particularly with regard to ink painting. Subject to warring truth claims, abstraction was argued on culturalist and ideological grounds: either it was imported from outside, and thus inseparable from authoritative narratives developed elsewhere, or it was already part of the Korean artistic vocabulary via the conduit of “Oriental” or “Eastern” thinking, to which ink painters were especially privy. *Panch’usang* seemed a compromise, but a very incomplete one at best. To Song, who continued producing abstraction well after the premature demise of the Post Artists, abstraction was most convincing as a platform for approaching painting as a set of procedures aimed at undoing the claims that had ossified abstraction into a subject category.

Jung implicitly explained his turn toward nonfiguration when he later remarked that “artistic creation . . . had to extend beyond contemplating surface appearance.”⁴⁹ Painting, he added, was more than evidence or theater; it was not enough for artists to simply “restage” or “record.”⁵⁰ In repurposing the materials and protocols of ink painting, Jung tried to ask new questions of painting without being encumbered by existing language, a formidable challenge given how terms like “abstraction” had become yet another metric for a bureaucratic system that cataloged artists according to media, age, and institutional affiliation. “Figuration” and “nonfiguration” became less descriptive than binding after the Kukchŏn established a separate category for nonfigurative ink painting in 1970, thus forcing artists to work against the history of ink painting qua abstraction.⁵¹ Rather than align himself with such false taxonomies, Jung eschewed any mention of abstraction or nonfiguration even when discussing works classified as such. His works reflect abstraction as a specific approach to form whose value lay in its terminal provisionality.

In *Window-A*, lines perform different functions. They divide, produce images, affirm the hand of the maker, and create various spatial relations between compositional elements. Jung’s attraction to the line stemmed from his early engagement with drawing and especially portraiture, while his participation in the Mungnimhoe encouraged him to consider line in noninstrumental ways. The flexibility of Jung’s line reflects the looseness of language commonly employed for the painting process. *Kūrida* and *kūtda*, the words most often called into play when describing lines in action, have multiple definitions; the former can mean “to draw,” “illustrate,” or “paint,” while the latter refers to drawing or scratching. As a visual analogue to this linguistic flexibility, *Window-A* might be read as a counterresponse to the static terms of *tongyanghwa* and *sōyanghwa* used to chart artistic production along culturally essentialist coordinates. But Jung also openly questioned whether a painting could remain such even when its support is undermined or destroyed. It was as if he was preemptively responding to the charge levied by an unnamed critic in the *Kyŏnghyang Sinmun* newspaper who claimed that the biggest challenge facing ink painters was their “inability to discard completely” the technique or materials long associated with the medium.⁵² Unlike his oil painting and sculpture colleagues, who enjoyed a certain measure of autonomy thanks to a new avant-garde rubric, ink painters existed in a dialectical relationship with a collective realized through the idea of national reconstruction. Such a relationship folded personal subjectivity into larger concerns for a shared community generalized as “Korea” or “Koreanness.” Jung, it would seem, was trying to encourage a different language for discussing ink painting.

If the medium was most alive when its practitioners could alienate themselves from it, then artists like Jung also had to embrace the possibility of failure. Jung had some experience with failure from his Mungnimhoe days, when critics faulted the group for failing to produce work that could live up to its lofty aspirations to embody the new and innovative.⁵³

In *Window-A* and *Window-B*, Jung literally made fallibility part of the picture. Marks resembling flaws disclose the possible inattention of the maker and, by extension, the fallibility of the authorial hand. Both works run counter to the idea of mastery central to traditional ink painting but also to a type of gestural abstraction whereby the mark was regarded as a trace of self and genius. By emphasizing marks that were outwardly un- or even antiheroic, Jung thwarted viewing habits conditioned to prioritizing virtuosic, or at least bold mark making. The underlying argument he proposes is that the survival of ink painting may in fact depend on how willing its practitioners are to let paintings diminish or even disintegrate. Given the fierceness with which ink painters believed in the moral function of painting, such a claim was nothing short of heretical. But if Jung's unspoken goal was to unmoor ink painting in order to guarantee its survival, realizing this claim was vital.

INK PAINTING WITHOUT INK

The fallibility of materials clarified an artistic problem that was tacit in both *Window-A* and *Window-B*: How might painting be contiguous with the world as defined by its physical surroundings and the material references of the viewer? Kim Byunggi, a leading commentator whose own forays in abstraction attracted local and overseas notice, argued that the potential of contemporary ink painting was rooted in how well specific works responded to the physical circumstances of display. Dismissing claims that ink painting was unsuited for museum or gallery display, Kim stated that the whiteness of *hwasŏnji* and the thick flow of ink complemented the bright lights and scale of “modern spaces.”⁵⁴ The task of ink painting, he said, was to “consciously strive to reduce the distance” between its techniques and subjects and “the sensibilities of present everyday life.”⁵⁵ Jung raised the stakes in *Work 71* by rephrasing this question as a self-directed challenge: Could he abstain from using ink, the very material that appeared to legitimate his artistic identity, and still produce ink painting (Fig. 12)? The first iteration of what eventually became a series of thirteen works appeared at *Painting, Today's Korea*, a group show of artists mostly in their thirties. Held in 1971 at a rental gallery in the bustling shopping district of Myongdong in central Seoul, the exhibition took an unusually expansive view of painting, such as Ha Chonghyun's manipulation of everyday objects and video works by Kim Tchasup.⁵⁶ For each painting later classified under the general title of *Work 71*, Jung first attached sheets of *hanji* to a hempen support, then selectively tore the sheets to produce rough, jagged triangular patches. The remaining paper was left to adhere to the surface, as were traces of the glue adhesive Jung used to bind the initial layer of paper to its support.

In reference to *Work 71*, Jung spoke of his need to “reduce as much as possible the presence of gesture,” an intention he called his “minus technique.”⁵⁷ That he spoke of gesture rather than abstraction—now little more than a genre category—suggested an attempt to evade the deadening taxonomization of contemporary Korean art challenged by emerging unofficial artists' groups like those participating in the Union Exhibition of Young Artists (Ch'ŏngnyŏn chakka yŏllipchŏn) of December 1967. Organized outside institutional frameworks, the “Union Exhibition” featured mostly younger artists producing work in contradistinction to their training; a striking number of oil painting majors, for example, engaged in performance and installation-like works.⁵⁸ Ironically, the absence of ink painters reflected how entrenched medium taxonomies precluded recognizing like-minded or sympathetic practices, including Jung's.⁵⁹ Working against the orthodoxy of his own traditional education, Jung claimed that he had reached a point where “there was nothing more to do than to paste paper and remove it.”⁶⁰ The “minus technique” may have been his way of taking up the experiment aborted by the Mungnimhoe on its dissolution: Rather than align ink painting with modernist



12 Jung Tak-young, *Work 71-3*, detail, 1971, hemp and Korean paper, 35 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 35 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (90 × 90 cm). Museum of Art, Seoul National University (artwork © Estate of Jung Tak-young; photograph provided by the Museum of Art, Seoul National University)

conceptions of innovation, what would happen if the medium followed an inverse teleology in which progress was measured by acts of voiding, diminution, or destruction?⁶¹

Yet while Jung appeared to be moving toward the absolute void as his painterly goal, he also harbored genuine misgivings about its value. Critic Pak Yŏng-t'aek has speculated as to whether Jung was motivated by a conviction that it was somehow “more effective to work with *hanji* in a three-dimensional way.”⁶² *Work 71* makes this abundantly clear through its contrast of textures, size, and response to its immediate physical surroundings. Forsaking brushwork in favor of engaging with edges as a primary rather than secondary focus, Jung called attention to questions of objecthood that resonated profoundly with Korean artists self-identifying as avant-garde, namely, the group of painters and sculptors known as the A.G. This Seoul-based group, in existence from 1969 to 1974, consisted of artists, Ha Chonghyun, Lee Kang-so, and Lee Seungtaek among them, committed to producing unconventional arrangements of mostly common, everyday objects, including rushes collected from a muddy riverbank, long rectangular strips of fabric tied to a rope placed on the ground, and a salvaged tree trunk implanted in a cube formed out of earth.

Work 71 inhabits the same register as the kind of experimental artworks increasingly popular in Korean artistic circles from the late 1960s. “Experimental art” referred to artworks that fell outside traditional genre and medium categories: performances, conceptual art and installation-type arrangements of objects, and, especially, works that dispensed with the customary materials and formats of an established medium like painting or sculpture.⁶³ In 1970, A.G. member Suh Seungwon, with whom Jung showed work in a group exhibition of thirty-something painters at Korea’s primary venue for experimental art, the Myongdong



13 Suh Seung-won, *Simultaneity*, 1971, installation view, Korean paper on wood board, 14 panels, each $35\frac{3}{8} \times 35\frac{3}{8}$ in. (90 × 90 cm). Private collection, Seoul (artwork © Suh Seung-won; photograph provided by the artist)

14 Suh Seung-won, *Simultaneity* 13, 1971, Korean paper on wood board, $35\frac{3}{8} \times 35\frac{3}{8}$ in. (90 × 90 cm). Private collection, Seoul (artwork © Suh Seung-won; photograph provided by the artist)

Gallery in Seoul, completed a work he called *Simultaneity* (Fig. 13). Made of *ch'anghoji*, paper intended for windows, screens, and doors in a traditional home and more durable than the *hwasŏnji* typically used for ink painting, the work consisted of sheets glued to fourteen square supports mounted upright and installed sequentially on two adjoining walls. Suh successively pasted more sheets onto each support until the final support resembled a wilting sheaf of leaves about to succumb to gravity's downward pull. What began as material flattened and pasted down as a monochrome ends up folded over onto itself to create both volume and a sense of interiority. Shadows cast on the papered support draw attention to a picture plane unfurling that appears to reveal a hidden interior (Fig. 14). Chance and control compete for precedence in both *Simultaneity* and *Work 71*, subsequently generating a tension that exemplified the promise of the encounter that their mutual friend, the Japan-based Korean artist and critic Lee Ufan, discussed in his seminal essay "In Pursuit of Encounter." Published in 1970 in the *Bijutsu Techō*, the Japanese art magazine that for many Korean artists was a major source of information about international art, Lee's essay described how two different entities could be transformed by each other on meeting. The encounter "permits the world of direct, interactive contact to become specific."⁶⁴ A close friend of Jung from their days at Seoul National University, Lee encountered *Work 71* at the Hyundai Gallery on one of his trips from Japan to Korea. He recalls being struck by its timely alignment with international currents, namely, in how it framed painting as a dynamic between additions to the pictorial surface and how the additions transformed said surface into a load-bearing support: "in pasting and tearing paper, Jung was not simply painting a picture, but instead attempted to think about paper before picturing begins."⁶⁵

Both *Work 71* and *Simultaneity* reflect how makers and materials exert commensurate force on each other. When in contact with the eyes, hands, bodies, and accumulated knowledge of the artist, the materials may thwart, diminish, or redirect artistic control, depending on their properties, including weight, tensile strength, color, transparency, and

shape. That Suh and Jung employed different kinds of paper having distinctly separate applications and properties also reads as an oblique rejoinder to the cultural essentialism endorsed by the South Korean state via its wholesale designation of all paper used by ink painters as “Korean paper,” or *hanji*.⁶⁶ In *Simultaneity*, the way the glued paper folds over onto itself makes shadow as much the medium as paper. Inert, sagging, and fragile, the later panels are the abject counter to the first, modernist monochrome panel. But the measured spacing of squared supports imparts volumes about the enduring hold dreams of modernity and its presumptions of order and legibility exerted over artists like Jung. The rips in *Work 71* act as signs of destruction and containment. Jung has exerted only moderate control over the height and width of each tear, so that each rip oscillates between appearing to be made and unmade. Jung spoke at length about two different modes of experience, *kyōnghōm* and *ch’ehōm*.⁶⁷ Both referred to what he called “an encounter between myself and reality,” although he conceived of the latter to suggest something along the lines of embodied knowledge and the former to indicate lived experience generally.⁶⁸ In *Work 71* this translated into an attempt to strike a balance between form and formlessness in order to tease out the mechanics of how objects and viewers experience being present in relation to one another.

Most striking of all was Jung’s abandonment of ink, the very material that for a generation of Korean artists and critics justified the argument to replace *tongyanghwa* with *han’guk’wa*. We might turn here to Jung’s former Mungnimhoe and Korean Painting Association colleague An Dong-sook. Jung became close to the older artist after he began to teach part-time at Ewha Womans University, where An was a professor.⁶⁹ Like Jung, Suh Se-ok, and Min Kyung-gap, An was among the select number of ink painters who routinely showed work in the context of other media.⁷⁰ But he also replaced ink with nontraditional materials, as in *Composition*, one of the most startling interpolations into a nascent history of contemporary Korean art (Fig. 15). The result of three years’ experimentation with a variety of nonink materials and equipment, from rollers to oil paint, *Composition* extended An’s earlier interest in geometry as a basis for organizing painting. Perhaps the most radical detour any ink painter took from the traditional materials of ink painting, *Composition* was made by first stretching coarsely woven linen over an aluminum frame. An then collaged geometric sections cut from traditional rush mats (*hwamunsōk*) sourced from markets in Kanghwa Island, not far from Seoul. Recalling his early interest in how precise geometric fit could carry an



15 An Dong-sook, *Composition*, ca. 1970s, mixed media, 63 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 50 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (161 × 127.5 cm). Hampyeong Museum of Art, Hampyeong, Korea (artwork © Estate of An Dong-sook; photograph provided by the Hampyeong Museum of Art)

entire picture, triangular and circular forms are tightly wedged together with thin aluminum strips glued directly to the fabric support acting as a median divider.

Oh Kwangsu read these works as evidence of An’s frustration with how enclosed ink painting was within the materials of paper and ink as well as with the use of the brush.⁷¹ The first ink paintings without ink to be shown internationally, they represented, An implied, an attempt to “shed exhausted techniques and compositional forms in order to participate in a global art world.”⁷² Refusing what he insinuated was complicity with a hidebound past was a small price to pay for access to an expanded network of references, demographics, and temporalities. By using *hwamunsōk*, whose own status was divided between that of pseudo-art and mass-market novelty, An bluntly reminded audiences of contemporaneity’s diachronic dimension, which gave traditional objects and practices as much claim to being present as those of very recent provenance.⁷³ Yet An guarded against interpretations that might brand the work as a nostalgic recuperation of tradition through his choice of title and the rigid geometry of his

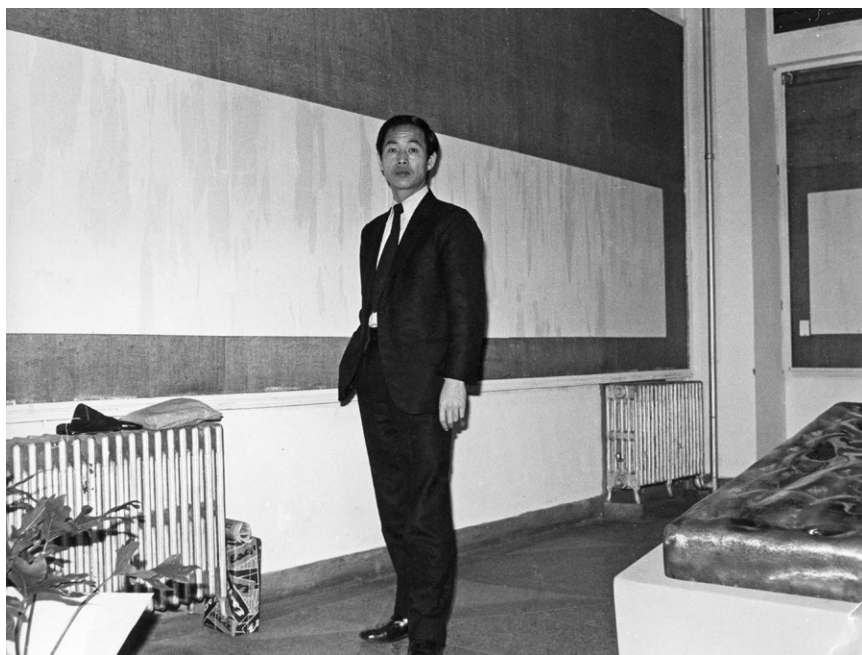
work, which one critic later read as an expression of structure.⁷⁴ Displayed upright on a wall like a painting, *Composition* precipitates a shift in the attention of viewers more accustomed to sitting on mats than beholding them from a respectful distance.

Professor at one of the country's most prestigious universities and a longtime Kukchön juror, An could afford to work against the parameters defining ink painting.⁷⁵ Jung, conversely, was a relative unknown who had little to lose by way of social prestige or commercial gain. Still, An's woven mats set a precedent that made Jung's flight from ink easier, or at least more acceptable to an audience that had more specific expectations from ink painters than they did from artists specializing in other media. An's surrender of ink emphasized the inseparability of painting with a material world increasingly distinguished by the muddling of hierarchical boundaries separating ink from oil or art from craft. Jung nudged An's tacit agenda further by directly aligning his works with the color and texture of the walls on which they were shown. *Work 71* dissolves into the wall, underlining its inseparability from the physical world. Recent installations, however, showed the work against a high-contrast background, ostensibly to call attention to the work more directly, but which utterly defeated the uncertainty fundamental to the painting's ability to demand from viewers a higher grade of attention.

Ten additional iterations of *Work 71* were selected to represent South Korea at the 1971 São Paulo Bienal, which continued to be regarded by Korean artists as a significant career milestone despite an international boycott staged by numerous artists to protest the Brazilian leader Emílio Garrastazu Médici's dictatorial regime.⁷⁶ Subject like their Brazilian colleagues to authoritarian rule, artists like Jung had few opportunities to exhibit their work internationally owing to a government that zealously limited overseas travel for its citizens.⁷⁷ In 1971, the São Paulo Bienal was touted in the Korean press as a showcase for "established experimental art," and Jung's selection was nothing short of a ringing endorsement of the contemporaneity of his work.⁷⁸ His *Work 71*, numbered from *Work 71-II* to *Work 71-20*, represented the single largest contribution by any Korean artist. Lee Yil, by then Korea's leading advocate of avant-garde art, briefly discussed the rationale behind the Korean delegation, which deliberately fea-

tured fewer artists than usual.⁷⁹ The intention, he stated, was to maximize the impact of presentation rather than simply enumerate a list of names: "we merely present them [the works] to the public as such, because it is to the public that the works address themselves directly, without prejudice and without any unwelcome pretension."⁸⁰ More sculptors than painters were tapped for the Korean delegation, some of whom produced work that visually referenced Euro-American Minimalism—or, often interchangeably, hard-edge geometric abstraction and even Op art—but without engaging with it.⁸¹ This may have been partly due to how local discursive focus had shifted to formulations of Koreanness rather than integration into a world order. Nevertheless, the artistic establishment recognized enactments of seriality and the repetition of identical objects as a major trend.⁸²

This is not to suggest that Jung absolutely embraced the idea of painting as object. There is perhaps no greater proof than the work's resistance to the camera (Fig. 16). When the work is photographed in direct light, the rips are apparent only when set against a dark wall; against white walls typical of gallery venues in the 1970s, the paintings were likely to dissolve into



16 Jung Tak-young stands in front of an installation view of *Work 71*, 1971, hemp and Korean paper, 11 panels, each 35 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 35 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (90 × 90 cm) (photograph provided by Chung Kwang-hwa)

the blankness, especially if the resulting images were reproduced in black-and-white. Similar to how *Composition* became a space to consider the confluence of ink painting, sculpture, and craft, *Work 71* provided viewers with an opportunity to look at ink painting synchronically through the optics of photography and sculpture. Such confluence became an initial step toward recasting the act of painting as itself a metaphoric commons, or a pooled set of resources to which artists could freely contribute and use, unencumbered by either institutional background or medium affiliation. Years later, Jung reflected on wanting to “pursue, through an experimental mindset, a new order and world of form. . . . I want to speak freely using ink, or from time to time, dirt and paper.”⁸³ His emphasis on newness and freedom coincided with an equally pointed evasion of words like figuration and nonfiguration that by the early 1970s firmly belonged to a lexicon of regulation masquerading as institutional structure.

INK POLITICS

Why, then, did Jung continue to identify as an ink painter? In the same reflective essay where he enthused about new worlds and experimental mind-sets, Jung added that he wanted “to preserve traditional techniques of using brush and ink.”⁸⁴ A more practical reason was the marketability of ink paintings; like many of his contemporaries, Jung earned his living teaching and selling highly conservative figurative works.⁸⁵ Another was the pressure to perform Koreanness in light of redoubled government control over cultural production throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Yet it may have been equally important that ink painting offered Jung a discursive frame for his aesthetic priorities unavailable elsewhere, regardless of notions like “experimental art,” which tended to emphasize the contest between ephemerality and objecthood, often in the name of pursuing contemporaneity, or the state of being contemporary with overseas artistic innovations. Even when encumbered by nationalist rhetoric that perhaps edged too close to that of an authoritarian Korean state anxious for international validation, ink painters mostly eschewed language that might encourage comparison between Korean and non-Korean art. Ink painting still represented a space where the historicity and vagaries of painting could enjoy recognition.

Nonetheless, ink painting was hardly immune to the pressures of a reconfigured contemporary art field. Suh Se-ok tried to press an ethical advantage by stressing ink painting as a regional aesthetic vernacular, as opposed to the national-versus-international framework that helped shape what came to be known as contemporary Korean art. Before the opening of a major exhibition of Taiwanese ink painting at the National Museum of Modern Art in Seoul in 1975,⁸⁶ Suh Se-ok interviewed Taiwanese artist and critic Yao Menggu, who bemoaned what he regarded as the erosion of specificity. Yao declared his colleagues guilty of pandering to “Western expectations.”⁸⁷ Suh replied to Yao’s remarks by speculating on how ink painting might serve as the basis of an “Asian-centric system of depiction.”⁸⁸ The first step, Suh claimed, was to redefine terms commonly used to describe paintings generally, such as “line,” “picture,” “image,” and “gesture.”⁸⁹ His declaration pointed to a nascent view of contemporary Asian art as situated between the belief that the concept of “Asia” could never properly refer to all of Asia and the conviction that a “contemporary” period in Asia could be realized only by imparting to Asia the same discursive value accorded to the “West” or, more specifically, “Euro-America.” The division would have been clear to both Yao and Suh, ink painters who understood how their medium was mostly championed as a form of artistic production irreducible to Western artistic media.

But for Suh it was also crucial to recognize how locality made it difficult to imagine a consensus view of ink painting that could support the idea of a pan-Asian art. In his 1977

work *Where Clouds Disperse*, he dotted the edges of a sheet of paper with ink so as to produce half-moon-like blots at regular intervals (Fig. 17). This inverts the center-versus-periphery approach to composition, an action he called dispersion. At the same time, the interspersed



17 Suh Se-ok, *Where Clouds Disperse*, 1977, ink on Korean paper, 50 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 39 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (128 × 100.7 cm). Private collection (artwork © Suh Se-ok; photograph provided by the Hyundai Gallery)

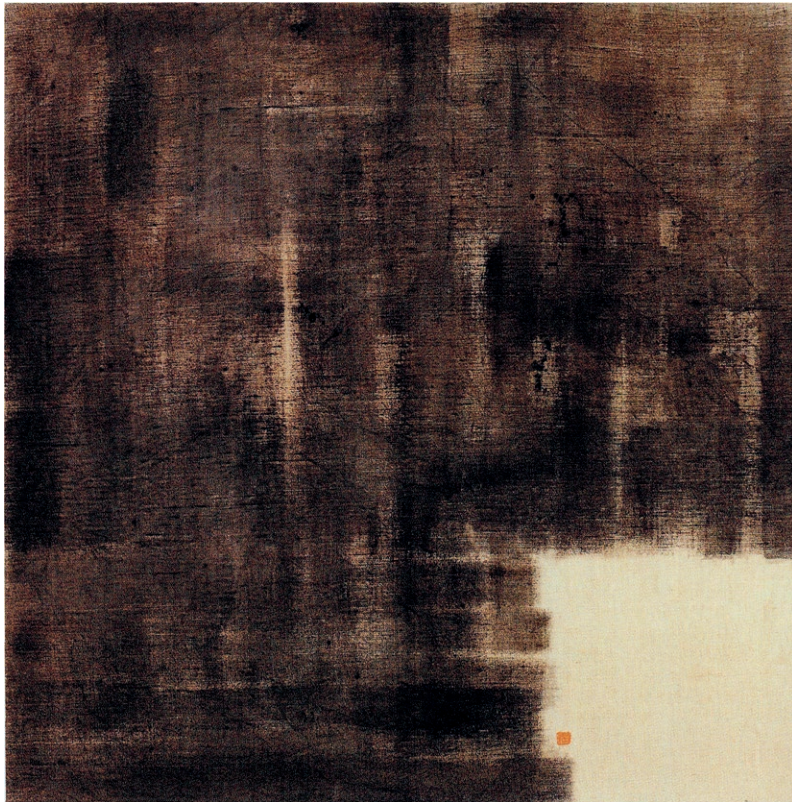
marks keep pictorial space permeable, not only to affirm the presence of what might otherwise be mistaken as blank space but also to underline the continuity of the picture field. Marks activate the permeability of the picture by bleeding off the edge into an untapped space of potential. The work also figures as a response to the question implicitly raised when nonfigurative ink painting became a Kukchön category: What are the values of this new category of judgment? For Suh the challenge lay in keeping painting sufficiently provisional so as to avoid the kind of excessive intentionality he regarded as endemic to acts of representation. Such representation, he averred, offers viewers “no other option” but to see what the artist wants them to see.⁹⁰

In a 1978 interview, Suh estimated that more than half of all ink painters produced some type of abstraction.⁹¹ Nonetheless, ink painting’s divorce from contemporary art seemed inevitable. In 1981, Seoul National University officially divided Oriental and Western painting into separate departments. That same year the National Museum of Contemporary Art (known since 2013 as the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art) held a massive group show, *Contemporary Korean Ink Painting*, of more than 180 works by sixty ink painters, including Jung Tak-young and Suh Se-ok. Selected by artists Lee Jong-sang, Song Su-nam, O Tae-hak, the critic Oh Kwangsu, and Yun T’ak, then the director of the museum, and motivated in part by the cessation of the Kukchön, the show mostly featured landscapes, the use of ink without color, and a return to “traditional techniques,” sug-

gesting a return to earlier models of value based on apprehensions of lineage, in this case, on the resemblance between present works and Chosŏn literati painting. Its unspoken premise was that the historicity of ink painting might soften the blow of the medium’s exclusion from the purview of the contemporary. But the museum’s contrived historicity by way of its rather blatant efforts at canon building was compromised by the waning commercial status of ink painting. Only a few months before *Contemporary Korean Ink Painting* opened, the Dongsanbang Gallery in Seoul, the most important commercial gallery in Korea specializing in ink painting, announced its expansion into oil painting, a dramatic turnaround from a decade earlier, when galleries owed their very survival to sales of ink painting.⁹²

The mid-1970s saw a growing rift between artists supporting the integration of ink painting with a broader aesthetic landscape and those heavily invested in the conceptual integrity of ink painting as a critical means of establishing an operative sense of cultural or regional solidarity. Consider *Work 75-5*, a painting by Jung from 1975 (Fig. 18). Unlike *Window-A* and *Window-B*, where the surface is enlivened or even provoked into being by tears, dents, scoring, and impressions, in *Work 75-5*, wide bands of black ink emphasize the flatness of the surface by appearing to fade into the hemp fibers. It demonstrated what Oh Kwangsu later described as Jung’s predilection for a “world that is absent of ink even when it is present.”⁹³ Here, ink is diluted so that it appears as a grayish-black wash that neither covers the pictorial surface fully nor poses enough of a contrast against the brownish hemp. It forms a virtual surface coterminous with, but not identical to, the literal plane of the woven support. *Kyŏnghyang Sinmun* culture desk editor Ch’oe No-sŏk asserted that genuinely Korean experimental art untethered from foreign influence was “actionless work [*muwi chagŏp*]” rather than painting to “constantly fill the space known as the canvas.”⁹⁴ In *Work 75-5*, the

bottom right-hand corner is left completely unmarked save for Jung's seal, which commands its own space à la *Work 67-8* (Fig. 7).



18 Jung Tak-young, *Work 75-5*, 1975, ink on hemp, 47¼ × 47¼ in. (120 × 120 cm). Museum of Art, Seoul National University (artwork © Estate of Jung Tak-young; photograph provided by Museum of Art, Seoul National University)

Broad bands of ink run perpendicular to one another, yet the presence of the hand is less visible than the aggregate effect of the brushwork. It appears to numb viewer attention and thus internalize a sterility that resonated with the deadening stupor of everyday life in 1975, three years after Park Chung-hee declared martial law. The suppression of civil liberties, including freedoms of the press and assembly, was accompanied by the shuttering of universities that were ground zero for both antistate protests and the development of contemporary art.⁹⁵ The popularity of words like “nature” and “chance” in mainstream art criticism, while used primarily to scaffold the validity of essential cultural difference to legitimate contemporary Korean art at home and abroad, also redirected attention from personal agency, whose exercise could have dangerous consequences in a highly precarious time. Even experimental art was folded into discussions urging artists to “show nature as it is” per ancient Chinese philosophy that predated the recent colonial past, thereby neutralizing artist intention or the possible social implications a given work might impart.⁹⁶ An Dong-sook described his collaged work as a return to “nature,” or a “refusal of the artificiality of lines or images,” but the invocation of nature had more serious political implications.⁹⁷ After triumphing at the 1969 Kukchön, An was granted a rare opportunity to travel abroad.

What he found most impressive about Europe and the United States was that he could communicate freely “under any circumstance, in front of anyone.”⁹⁸ In a thinly veiled reference to the authoritarian Korean state, whose leadership justified its rule by citing Confucian values, An lamented how “Confucian ethics” silenced younger artists, preventing them from openly voicing their opinions to their older colleagues and, by extension, those with institutional and political clout.⁹⁹ The urgency lay in developing ink painting without having to defer to the authority of preexisting norms. He implied as much in his “declaration of abstraction” in 1976: “before ink painting is ink painting it must be a painting and before it is a painting it must be form [*chohyöng*] and before it is form it must be a state of mind [*chöngsin*].”¹⁰⁰ The attitude presaging even the conception of the work mattered most, and it could be expressed without having to ponder whether it fit within the category of ink painting.

The critic Kim Bok-young tried to position ink painting within a budding history of experimental art, which he played a significant role in promoting.¹⁰¹ Known for his participation in the S.T. (Space and Time), a study-cum-artists’ group founded in 1970 and composed of artists and critics particularly interested in Conceptual art, the role of language in artistic production, and translating overseas artists’ writings into Korean, Kim urged ink painters to preserve a sense of “spontaneity,” which lay in exploiting how nonfigurative depiction coexisted uneasily with the history of ink painting.¹⁰² Applauding instances of incongruence such as could be found in the works of Kwon Young-woo and An Dong-sook, Kim refuted the traditionalism of critics such as Lee Jong-suk, who held that the greatest challenge facing ink painters of his generation was how best to compete with their oil painting colleagues.¹⁰³ Lee had expressed reservations about showing ink painting with other artistic media in the same physical space, observing that viewers were likely to be either unfamiliar with the vocabulary

of ink painting or inclined to have preconceptions about what such painting should look like.¹⁰⁴ For An, and also Jung, abstract ink painting was built on the paradox that a work could be ink painting while also disclaiming the very ideas and materials responsible for its creation. Abstraction represented to them a model of a more sustainable artistic enterprise

where participation meant disregarding the boundary function ascribed to the concept of artistic medium in Korea. In this they were joined by another contemporary, Chung Chang-sup. A member of the first generation of postwar abstract oil painters and a fellow Seoul National University graduate, Chung mined the materials and techniques of ink painting to broaden his engagement with abstraction.¹⁰⁵ In *Return*, he articulates the edges of rectangular pieces of *hanji* attached to a support using dotting techniques characteristic of brush painting (Fig. 19). Such mark making reinforces the integrity of the edge and its capacity to frame and contain pictorial space. Yet the uneven spotting and bleeding compromise the straight edges of the paper, consequently drawing attention to the unmarked interval bisecting the painting.

The mutual enabling of abstraction and ink painting yielded some of the most compelling and necessary thinking about the difficulty of form in postwar Korea. Neither a zero-sum game forged in the crucible of modernism nor a style that could be indexed to other nonfigurative works, the self-consciously abstract ink painting that emerged became a platform on which to rebuild painting as a relay operation. As the

experimental works of Jung Tak-young demonstrate, ink painting was most effective when its creators used and reused learned procedures in order to give painting, and perhaps even art generally, a fighting chance of surviving the discursive and symbolic burdens it was tasked to bear.

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NOTES

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1. Sherman Lee, "The Water and the Moon in Chinese and Modern Painting," *Art International* 14, no. 1 (January 1970): 58.

2. Charles B. Fahs, "Trip to the Far East," April 26–June 23, 1954, 21, RG 12, F–L, Officers' Diaries, FA392, Rockefeller Foundation records, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY.

3. *Tōyōga* was also used in Taiwan, most notably in the Taiten, the Taiwanese analogue to the Sōnjōn, Korea's annual juried salon established by the Japanese colonial government in 1927 and modeled after Japan's official salon, the Teiten. Unlike its Korean counterpart, however, the Taiten excluded calligraphy and literati ink painting in order to showcase *nihonga*, a nineteenth-century response to Western-style painting. Jason C. Kuo, *Art and Cultural Politics in Postwar Taiwan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 32–61.

4. The decision to establish an annual government salon was made in 1921 by the Government-General of Korea, the official body established by the Japanese Empire to rule colonial Korea. "Misul chōllam kyehoeok" [Plans for an art exhibition], *Tonga Ilbo*, December 27, 1921, 2. It involved discussion at the very highest levels, including a meeting at the Government-General that included Yi Wan-yong, perhaps the most significant pro-Japan politician of his day, who signed the official treaty placing Korea under Japanese rule,



19 Chung Chang-sup, *Return*, ca. 1979, ink on Korean paper, 17 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 17 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (44 x 44 cm). Youngeun Museum, Gwangju (artwork © Estate of Chung Chang-sup; photograph provided by Estate of Chung Chang-sup)

and the scholar and activist Pak Yŏng-hyo, an enthusiastic proponent of Japanese-style modernization who became a leading adviser to the Government-General. Possibly to give the proceedings the appearance of genuine outreach to the Korean art world, a handful of Korean artists, Kim Kyu-jin among them, was also invited, although they were outnumbered by their Japanese counterparts. For an informative account about the establishment of the Sŏnjŏn, see Igarashi Koichi, “Chosŏnmisuljŏllamhoe ch’angsŏl kwa sŏhwa” [Painting and calligraphy and the establishment of the Sŏnjŏn], *Han’guk kŭnhyŏndae misulsahak* 12 (August 2004): 342–58.

5. The first exhibition of abstract art in Korea took place in October 1940, when works from the Jiyu Bijutsuka Kyokai, an artists’ group formed in Tokyo in 1937 by painter and art historian Hasegawa Saburō and a leading proponent of abstract works, were shown in Seoul at the Keijō Public Hall. Among the featured works were Yoo Youngkuk’s wooden geometric reliefs, which even fellow group member Kim Whanki caustically dismissed: “My only reaction was that it was a painfully trendy thing resembling interior decoration.” Kim Whanki, “Kuhadŏn ilnyŏn,” *Munjang* 2, no. 10 (December 1940): 183–84. Abstraction was also criticized as being out of touch; see Kim Youngna, “Artistic Trends in Korean Painting during the 1930s,” in *War, Occupation, and Creativity: Japan and East Asia, 1920–1960* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2001), 135. Leading abstract painter Yamaguchi Takeo allegedly taught art briefly at Keijō Imperial University (ibid., 124).

6. “Kokubō kokka to bijutsu: Gaka wa nani o subekika?,” *Mizue* 434 (January 1941): 129–39. Until 1943, however, some latitude was given to abstract painters in exchange for their participation in the war effort through the production of propaganda. Michael Lucken, *The Japanese and the War: Expectation, Perception, and the Shaping of Memory*, trans. Karen Grimwade (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 39.

7. Art historian Kim Hyesin contends that the former structure of art school departments echoed how Japanese institutions of higher education were organized around the division between Western-style oil painting (*yōga*) and *nihonga*. Kim Hyesin, “‘Kūndae ilbon’ kwa ‘ilbon misul,’” *Sŏyangmisulsa hakhojeip* 11 (1999): 187–207. Song Young-bang, with whom Jung studied at Seoul National University in the late 1950s, recounts that all students in the department of painting received the same training, including courses in oil painting and drawing. Song Young-bang, interview by Mun Jŏng-hŭi, conducted September 22, 2008, in *Han’guk kŭnhyŏndae yesulsa kusulch’aerok yŏn’gu sirijū* (Seoul: Arko Arts Archive, 2009), <https://www.daarts.or.kr/handle/11080/5901>, 279–329.

8. Eventually disappearing from South Korean art writing after 1950, *Chosŏnhwa* would be exclusively used in North Korea to refer to ink painting that “displayed outstanding qualities of the unique style of painting specific to Koreans.” Kim Jong-il, *Kim Jŏng-il misullon* (Pyongyang: Chosŏnnodongdang ch’ulp’ansa, 1992), 97.

9. Kim Hwa-gyŏng, “Tongyanghwarosŏ ūi hanhwa,” *Kyŏnggyang Sinmun*, January 14, 1950, 2. Kim also used “chosŏnhwa,” a word initially used by the Sŏnjŏn to describe non-*nihonga* ink paintings. Choe Yol, *Han’guk*

kūndae misul ūi yŏksa: Han’guk muisulsa sajŏn, 1800–1945 (Seoul: Youlhwadang, 2015). That Kim Hwa-gyŏng used this term suggests that the ideological divide between North and South Korea had not yet crystallized.

10. Kim Kyung-yeun, “1950 nyŏndae han’gukhwa ūi sumukch’usangjŏk kyŏnggyang,” *Misulsahak yŏn’gu*, no. 223 (September 1999): 69.

11. Jung Tak-young, interview by Mun Jŏng-hŭi, conducted September 19, 2009, in *Han’guk kŭnhyŏndae yesulsa kusulch’aerok yŏn’gu sirijū* 139 (Seoul: Arko Arts Archive, 2010), <https://www.daarts.or.kr/handle/11080/5854>, 181–220.

12. Yi Pong-sang, “Mihyŏpjŏnpy’ŏng,” *Tonga Ilbo*, June 19, 1956, 4.

13. Park Rae-hyun, “Tongyanghwa ūi ch’usanghwa,” *Sasanggye* 154 (December 1965): 202.

14. “Kyŏngk’woehan saekch’a wa hyokkwajŏgin hwamyŏn,” *Tonga Ilbo*, June 13, 1962, 4.

15. For a general overview, see Chung Moo-jeong, “Ch’usangp’yohyŏnjuŭi wa han’guk aengp’orŭmel,” *Misulsa Yŏn’gu* 15 (December 2001): 247–62.

16. Lee Yil, “The Influence of French Art on Korean Art,” *Korea Journal* 26, no. 6 (June 1986): 46–49.

17. Chung Moo-jeong, “Chŏnhu ch’usangmisulgye ūi esūperant’o, ‘aengp’orŭmel’ kaenyŏm ūi hyŏngsŏng kwa chŏnggae,” *Misul Sahak* 17 (2003): 26–33.

18. Suh Se-ok, interview with Kim Youngna, “Sanjŏng Sŏ Se-ok kwa ūi taedam,” *Space* 19, no. 9 (April 1984): 136.

19. For a discussion of the group’s founding, see Kim Ch’ŏl-hyo, “Mungnimhoe hwagadūri malhanūn mungnimhoe,” *Han’guk kŭnhyŏndae misulsahak* 22 (December 2011): 112–18. The first published mention of the group appeared just before its first exhibition, March 22–31, 1960, when the newspaper *Segye Ilbo* reported on the Mungnimhoe’s formation; discussion concerning the group began in December 1959. Pak P’arang, “Tongyang hwadan ūi ch’usang,” *Misul Sahak*, no. 24 (August 2010): 94–95.

20. For the seventh Mungnimhoe exhibition, An submitted three works, of which one he claimed was “his first attempt at full abstraction.” However, there is no photographic evidence as to what this work looks like; An’s interviewer Kim Ch’ŏl-hyo (“Mungnimhoe hwagadūri malhanūn mungnimhoe,” 129–30) speculates that it was the monochrome ink painting I discuss here.

21. An Dong-sook, *Chŏngt’ŏng tongyanghwa kibŏp*, vol. 1 (Seoul: Mijosa, 1981), 35.

22. Oh Kwangsu, “An ūi kusŏng, t’umyŏngghan ūisik,” in *Jung Tak-young* (Seoul: Korea Culture and Arts Foundation Gallery, 1997), n.p.

23. Ibid.

24. The Mungnimhoe was arguably the most integrated Korean artists’ group of its day. Of the twenty-five artists who participated in its seventh exhibition held at the Donghwa Gallery in Seoul in the summer of 1963, eight were women.

25. Jung, quoted in Kwak Ūn-hŭi, “Hwasil t’ambang: Jung Tak-yŏng; Mŏgi sūminūn umjigim gwa yŏbaek,” *Sŏn Misul* 23 (Winter 1984): 55.

26. Jung, in *Han’guk kŭnhyŏndae yesulsa kusulch’aerok yŏn’gu sirijū*, 202.

27. Ibid., 192–93. Song (in *Han’guk kŭnhyŏndae yesulsa kusulch’aerok yŏn’gu sirijū*, 202) claimed that the group disbanded after participants entered work in the Kukchŏn. While some members were chosen or awarded prizes, others were not, leading to jealous outbursts and clashes of opinion, resulting in the group’s eventual demise.

28. An, quoted in Hŏ Yŏng-hwan, “Odang An Dong-sook ūi yesul segye,” in *Ihwa yŏdae pangmulgwan kijŏng chakp’umjŏn Odang An Dong-sook*, by An Dong-sook (Seoul: Ewha Womans University Museum, 1999), 9.

29. Other members included Im Song-hŭi and Taegu-based Kim Wŏn-se. Like the Mungnimhoe, the Korean Painting Association fell apart because some members tried to turn it into a formal collective. With Song Young-bang, Jung eventually left the group. Jung, in *Han’guk kŭnhyŏndae yesulsa kusulch’aerok yŏn’gu sirijū*, 192–93. The group’s first show took place at the Press Center in downtown Seoul in May 1967.

30. Oh Kwangsu, “An ūi kusŏng, t’umyŏngghan ūisik,” n.p.

31. *Window-A* was originally named *Work G-6*. Kwak, “Hwasil t’ambang: Jung Tak-yŏng,” 52.

32. Yi Ku-yŏl contends that Kwon, who had begun to produce collage-type paintings in 1964, was likely influenced by the collages of Lee Ungno, exhibited in Seoul in 1962. Yi, “Hwasŏnji ūi tūrama,” *Kyŏnggyang Sinmun*, June 25, 1966, 5.

33. Ibid.

34. “Munban’gu polp’en sainp’en suyo kyesok nŭrŏ,” *Maeil Kyŏngje*, April 9, 1968, 4.

35. “Bonghwangsangŭl t’an i sangp’um ūi t’ŭkjingŭn! (14) Monami bol-p’en,” *Maeil Kyŏngje*, May 12, 1967, 2.

36. “Ingk’ū” [Ink], *Maeil Kyŏngje*, February 4, 1967; and “Hwalgaech’inūn pulyangsangp’um,” *Tonga Ilbo*, March 13, 1971, 4.

37. Jung, in *Han’guk kŭnhyŏndae yesulsa kusulch’aerok yŏn’gu sirijū*, 203.

38. Kwon may have borrowed from Jung’s rips in the work Kwon was invited to exhibit in the 1971 Kukchŏn. The work, 71-10, is reproduced in the catalog, *Kukchŏn torok* (Seoul: Munhwagongbobu, 1971), 77.

39. Yi Hyo-u, interview by Kang Min-gi, conducted June 24, 2008, in *Han’guk kŭnhyŏndae yesulsa kusulch’aerok yŏn’gu sirijū* (Seoul: Arko Arts Archive, 2009), accessed June 12, 2017, <https://www.daarts.or.kr/handle/11080/5917>, 295–342, at 303. Born in 1941, Yi was trained in traditional mounting techniques in the 1950s. In 1970 he established his own mounting services firm, Nagwŏn P’yogusa, and continues to be active today.

40. Among the most celebrated events in postwar Korean art history, the *Wall Exhibition* of 1960 was organized by a group of Seoul National University art students who protested the conservatism of the Kukchŏn by hanging mostly abstract paintings featuring heavily textured surfaces that resonated with the rough-hewn stone walls surrounding the National Museum of Modern Art (now the Tŏksu Palace branch of the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art) in Seoul. At the time

it was against university rules to display work outside a recognized exhibition venue. Yu Hwang was the only ink painting specialist of the group. For an evaluation of its context and impact, see Kim Milyung, “Pyōkjōn e taehan sogo: Han’guk aengpo’rūmel ūi chōngae kwajōng e taehan ūimun,” *Han’guk hyōndae misul tasi ilkki IV—ch’ōgi ch’usangmisul ūi pip’yōngjōk chaejomyōng*, vol. 3, ed. Oh Sanggyel (Seoul: ICAS, 2004), 463–76.

41. Oh Kwangsu, “Misul 1968 nyōn: Segae ūi yuhyōng,” *Space* 3, no. 12 (December 1968): 71.

42. The first Korean references to Informel painting appeared between 1956 and 1958. Chung Moo-jeong, “Ch’usangp’yohyōnjuūi wa han’guk aengp’orūmel,” 254–55.

43. Oh Kwangsu, “Misul 1968 nyōn,” 71.

44. Ibid. Oh might have considered Kwon Young-woo’s paintings a good example of necessary “experimentation.” As Yi Ku-yōl’s review demonstrated (“Hwasōnji ūi tūrama”), they catalyzed a cross-cultural, cross-temporal, and even contradictory view of history that included references to Soviet Constructivism via the white-on-white works of Kazimir Malevich to premodern Asian thought that Yi argued was monochromy’s true source.

45. “Ihuchakkahoe ūi t’ansaeng,” *Kyōnghyang Sinmun*, June 30, 1965, 5.

46. Bang Geun-taek, “Ch’usang kwa pulli toeya handa,” *Tonga Ilbo*, September 25, 1963, 5.

47. Ibid.: “kūpjo ch’usanghwa.”

48. Ibid.

49. Jung, quoted in Kwak, “Hwasil t’ambang: Jung Tak-yōng,” 53.

50. Ibid., 54.

51. Eighty-five entries were submitted for consideration by the Kukchōn jury, chaired by Kwon Young-woo, for nonfigurative ink painting. Fourteen were selected, a significantly lower acceptance rate than for the category of figurative ink painting, where out of 141 entries, 34 were selected. The number of nonfigurative ink painting entries was dwarfed by the 365 entries submitted for the oil (“Western”) painting equivalent. Only 30 of these were eventually displayed. *Kukchōn*, vol. 19 (Seoul: Ministry of Culture and Communication, 1970), 1.

52. “Chōnt’ongmi wa hyōndaemi,” *Kyōnghyang Sinmun*, April 3, 1968, 5.

53. The lukewarm reception of the inaugural Munghoe exhibition is discussed in Pak P’arang, “Tongyang hwadan ūi ch’usang,” 99.

54. Kim Byunggi, “Tongyanghwa wa hyōndaesōng,” *Tonga Ilbo*, April 16, 1960, 2. Although *hyōndae* can be translated as either “modern” or “contemporary,” I choose the former, as the English term “contemporary” was not yet commonly used in Korea.

55. Ibid.

56. *Hoehwa, onūl ūi han’gukjōn (3odae ūi ōlguldūl)*, 1971.

57. Jung, in *Han’guk kūnhyōndae yesulsa kusulch’aerok yōn’gu sirijū*, 15.

58. The most reliable firsthand account of the exhibition stressed performance works. “Haedonghanūn hwaga’ dūl

ch’ōngnyōn chakka yōllipjōn kaech’oe,” *Hongdae Hakbo*, December 15, 1967, <http://hiupress.hongik.ac.kr/news/articlePrint.html?idxno=1728>.

59. Consisting only of Hongik University graduates, the show also reflected deep institutional divisions that continue to affect the Korean art world. In 2014, the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, helmed by Seoul National University professor Chung Hyungmin, was accused of favoring the acquisition of works by Seoul National University graduates over their Hongik University peers. Hyōn-u, “Kungniphyōndae misulgwān, Sōuldae ch’ulsin chakka p’yōnae 2bae nūrōtda,” *Han’guk Ilbo*, September 18, 2014, <http://www.hankookilbo.com/News/Read/201409180456557668>.

60. Jung, in *Han’guk kūnhyōndae yesulsa kusulch’aerok yōn’gu sirijū*, 194.

61. The blankness of *Work 71* may have also been part of a deliberate, if coded response to the criticism Jung previously received for his “earnest” but inadequate works exhibited at the Korean Painting Association. Conversely, those of his friend and colleague Song Young-bang had been praised for making the most of the “beauty of the void.” “Chōnt’ongmi wa hyōndaemi,” 5.

62. Pak Yōng-t’aek, “Jōng T’ak-yōng ūi chagōp, han’guk hyōndae tongyanghwa ūi yōjōng,” in *Jōng T’ak-yōng* (Seoul: National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, 2015), 48.

63. One of the first uses of the term “experimental art” was made in reference to the video artist Paik Nam June, whose exploits were tracked by the mainstream Korean press. “Chōnja misul,” *Kyōnghyang Sinmun*, February 18, 1967, 5.

64. Lee Ufan, “Deai o motomete,” *Bijutsu Techō* 324 (February 1970): 23.

65. Lee Ufan, unpublished interview with Chung Kwang Young, October 8, 2014.

66. Kim Chōng-hūi, “Hanji: Chōngi ūi mihakhwa” [The aestheticization of *hanji*], *Hyōndaemisulsa yōn’gu* 19 (2006): 197.

67. Jung, quoted in Lee Jong-suk and Huh Young-hwan, “4odae tongyanghwaga e taehan kidae wa munje,” *Hwarang* 8, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 33.

68. Jung, quoted in *ibid.*, 33.

69. Jung taught literati painting, emphasizing the “Four Gentlemen” (pine trees, bamboo, plum blossoms, and orchids), to Western painting majors.

70. Important examples were the official delegations to international exhibitions like the São Paulo Bienal and *Contemporary Korean Paintings*, a large group exhibition at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris in 1971 that featured the works of Suh Se-ok, Kim Ki-chang, Lee Ungno, and An Dong-sook alongside those of the painter Park Seobo, the sculptor Quac Insik, and leading Korean Informel artist Kim Tschang-yeul.

71. Oh Kwangsu, “Hoehwaesō chohyōngūro: An Tong-suk ūi chohyōngjōk yōkjōng,” in *Odang An Tong-suk*, by An Dong-sook, exh. cat. (Seoul: An Tong-suk, 2012), 12.

72. An Dong-sook, quoted in “An Dong-sook ssi Kukchejōn e ch’ulp’um ch’oeh’o ūi mulgamōmnūn-

tongyanghwa,” *Kyōnghyang Sinmun*, April 19, 1969, 5: “chōnsegye ūi hwadan.”

73. By the late 1960s *hwamunsōk* was promoted in government exhibitions as elevated forms of craft, approximating what art historians like Choi Sunu, director of the National Museum of Korea, referred to as *chakp’um*, the same term used for artworks. See Choi, “‘Chōnt’ong’, hyōndaehwa t’uryōt,” *Tonga Ilbo*, June 28, 1969, 5. At the same time, the mats—once a rare specialty item—were being actively marketed to the general public.

“Kanghwado hwamunsōk,” *Maeil Kyōngje*, May 9, 1970, 4. The production of woven mats in particular may have also been influenced by heavy government investment in the promotion of traditional culture and folk art, which from 1974 to 1978 accounted for 70 percent of total government expenditure on culture. Haksoo Yim, “Cultural Identity and Cultural Policy in South Korea,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 8, no. 1 (2002): 40.

74. Kim Yun-jo, “Odang An Tong-suk sōnsaeng kwa ch’usange irūnūn kil,” in An Dong-sook, *Odang An Tong-suk*, 149.

75. As the title of articles like “Idang munhasō suōp, kat’ūn chuje e chipch’ak” (*Chosōn Ilbo*, October 27, 1972, 5) suggests, it may have been An Dong-sook’s status as a protégé of (Idang) Lee Eun-ho, considered a founding father of twentieth-century Korean ink painting, that gave him the most credibility.

76. On the various international campaigns to boycott the São Paulo Bienal, see Isobel Whitelegg, “The Bienal de São Paulo: Unseen/Undone (1969–1981),” *Afterall* 22 (Autumn–Winter 2009), accessed June 1, 2017, <https://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.22/the.bienal.de.so.paulo.unseenundone.19691981>. The importance of the São Paulo Bienal is indicated by the amount of public subsidies requested by the Korea Fine Arts Association, the non-governmental organization responsible for artist selection. To cover the cost of shipping works to the 1971 São Paulo Bienal, the association requested 600,000 won, against 200,000 won for the Paris Biennale. “9wōlbūt’ō p’arisō han’gukmijōn,” *Kyōnghyang Sinmun*, March 1, 1971, 5. Competition to be selected as a national delegate to bienales in general was ferocious; critic Oh Kwangsu criticized artists who would do anything to “acquire the title of a ‘Biennale artist.’” Oh Kwangsu, “Kukchejōn ch’amyō ūi pulsūn,” *Tonga Ilbo*, April 23, 1971, 5. The complete absence in Korea of any criticism of the São Paulo Bienal for political reasons was perhaps due not only to increased censorship of the press but also to the similarities between the Brazilian and South Korean governments. If anything, Park Chung-hee’s government may have been more repressive than that of Médici; as political scientist Jorge I. Domínguez notes, Park “moved away from subtle authoritarian rule (Brazil, Mexico) toward the more primitive exercise of power (Argentina, Chile),” especially after the Park regime suffered considerable losses in the 1971 parliamentary elections. Domínguez, “The Perfect Dictatorship? South Korea versus Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico,” in *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*, ed. Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 588.

77. The South Korean Ministry of Culture and Information made the final decision to send an official delegation to the São Paulo Bienal, beginning in 1963.

78. “Ha In-du ssi, Kannü hoehwaje ipsön,” *Kyönghyang Sinmun*, September 23, 1971, 5.

79. The decision to include fewer works may also have been prompted by the modest space apportioned to the Korea delegation. While traditional Bienal mainstays like Great Britain, Italy, and Germany were given generous spaces on the second floor of Oscar Niemeyer’s Matarazzo Pavilion, lesser-known countries such as Spain and South Korea (along with India and Taiwan) received a space on the top floor that was about one-third of that allotted to larger countries. For a map of delegation placements, see *XI Bienal de São Paulo* (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 1971).

80. Jean Lee-YLL (Lee Yil), “Coreia,” in *XI Bienal de São Paulo*, 73.

81. “20 dae üi sae p’ung’o ‘hoehwa 68’ chon” [A new landscape for twenty-something artists, “Painting-68”], *Kyönghyang Sinmun*, March 27, 1968, 5. In Korea, Minimalism would be discussed in earnest beginning in the early 1980s. The critic Lee Yil sought to map Tansakhwa, the name he coined to describe a body of Korean abstract paintings that gained prominence in 1970s Korea and Japan, within a broader art historical field, which to him was most legible through comparisons between Korean art and established overseas artistic movements. Lee Yil, “Pömjayönjuüi wa min-imöllijüm,” originally published in 1980, reprinted in *Han’guk misul, kü onül üi ölgul* (Seoul: Konggansa, 1983), 183–87. A younger critic, Kim Bok-young, also expressed interest in Minimalism, misreading it as an offshoot of Conceptualism, in which the idea superseded the “physical content” of a work. Kim Bok-young, “70 nyöndae segyemisul üi hürüm kwa han’gukmisul üi hyönhwang e taehaesö,” *Chöngnyön misul* 5 (1980): 77.

82. At the 1971 Kukchön, Shim Moon-seup’s *Relationship-Gathering*, a freestanding work consisting of vertically stacked boxes, won the National Assembly Chairman’s Prize.

83. Jung Tak-young, “Saeroun chohyöng üi ch’angjoro yönün maüm üi ch’angmun,” *Munhak Sasang* 365 (March 2003): 8.

84. Ibid.

85. Ink paintings, especially in the boom year of 1973, generally sold better than oil paintings, with established ink painters commanding significantly higher prices than their counterparts in oil. Jung was able to purchase his first home based on commissions he received in the early 1970s from galleries like Hyundai, Jean, and Dongsanbang. The majority of these were for portraits and pastoral scenes featuring children and livestock. Jung, in *Han’guk künhyöndae yesulsa kusulch’aerok yön’gu sirijü*, 47. See also Lee Jong-suk and Huh Young-hwan, “40dae tongyanghwaga e taehan kidae wa munje,” 36. While collectors favored landscapes or bird-and-flower paintings, rarely was there an interest in abstraction, which happened “about as often as finding beans during a famine.” Song, in *Han’guk künhyöndae yesulsa kusulch’aerok yön’gu sirijü*, 213.

86. The show, *Modern Art from the Republic of China*, displayed works by Huang Chun-pi, who had a particular following in Korea, lauded by artists like Kim Ki-chang

for his handling of spatial distance. Kim Ki-chang, “Tokch’angjögin sae kiböp,” *Tonga Ilbo*, October 23, 1971, 5. Such cultural exchange reflected the cordiality of relations between South Korea and Taiwan, born of a close friendship between Park Chung-hee and Chiang Ching-kuo as well as shared military and political interests buttressed by United States security interests in East Asia, undiminished by the growing rapprochement between the United States and the People’s Republic after 1972. Douglas H. Mendel, “Taiwan Adjusts to Isolation,” *Asian Affairs* 3, no. 1 (September–October 1975): 64–65. Taiwan recognized South Korea as the true “Korea,” with Park’s government reciprocating by acknowledging Taiwan as “China” (the People’s Republic was referred to as “Communist China”). Other exhibitions of Taiwanese artists included a solo show of oil painter Wu Long-Rong at the Central Information Center in Seoul in 1972, a group exhibition of modern Chinese ink painting at the Publishing Cultural Center in 1975, and a solo show of Zhou Cheng at the Hyundai Gallery in 1978.

87. Yao Menggu, interview by Suh Se-ok, “Hanjung hwaga üi taedam: Tongyang misul jöngp’yörül ch’an-nünda,” *Kyönghyang Sinmun*, November 13, 1975, 5.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid.

90. Suh Se-ok, quoted in Kim Yö-ok, “Hwaga Sö Se-ok,” *Pp’urigip’un namu* 24 (February 1978): n.p.

91. Ibid.

92. “Tongyanghwamanüron hwarang kyöngyöng öryöwö,” *Kyönghyang Sinmun*, May 9, 1981, 10. A 1976 survey by Pak Mu-il for the general interest magazine *Sindonga* indicated that while a small number of ink painters, including Kim Eun-ho, Suh Se-ok, and Song Su-nam, consistently sold work, the vast majority of ink painters did not. Pak Mu-il, “Rüpp’o Han’guk yesulga üi hyönjuso,” *Sindonga* 146 (October 1976): 130–46. Local demand was supplemented by foreigner demand, a by-product of the state’s efforts to encourage tourism. Gallery commissions to artists, however, were modest at best: 30 percent of a sale, or, when a discount was given, 20 percent. T’üljap’hyöganün hwasang,” *Kyönghyang Sinmun*, August 28, 1970, 5. Originally a purveyor of art supplies and later a well-respected framing and mounting shop in the Chongno District in central Seoul, the Dongsanbang Gallery was founded in 1965 by Pak Chu-hwan, who was particularly known for the mounting of screen paintings. In 1976 the firm opened the gallery with an inaugural show of twenty-one midcareer ink painters. Other shows hosted by the gallery included a major solo exhibition in May 1976 of An Dong-sook’s abstract paintings, featuring works made with oil paint and rollers; the gallery also commissioned Jung to produce work for its clients.

93. Oh Kwangsu, “An üi kusöng, t’umyöngghan üisik,” n.p.

94. Ch’oe No-sök, “Sirhöm misul, kü silsang kwa hösang,” *Kyönghyang Sinmun*, July 12, 1977, 5.

95. Some universities reopened, but the culture of distrust and heightened surveillance would continue, even among friends and colleagues. On being employed at Kangwon University in 1978, Jung (in *Han’guk künhyöndae yesulsa kusulch’aerok yön’gu sirijü*, 211) recounts how a rival tried to oust him from the department by reporting his alleged

mishandling of funds to the National Security Council, a government agency charged with protecting national security. Jung was eventually exonerated of all charges.

96. Ch’oe No-sök, “Sirhöm misul, kü silsang kwa hösang,” 5. Laozi and Zhuangzi were cited as influences.

97. An Dong-sook, “Na üi 70 nyöndae,” *Hwarang* 26 (Winter 1979): 30.

98. Ibid.

99. Ibid. An’s son, An Chu-ch’ang (interview with the author, March 18, 2018), has stated that this comment resulted in official censure by the government.

100. An, quoted in “An Dong-sook: Tongyanghwa üi sae kyöngji sönboin An Dong-sookjön,” *Chosön Ilbo*, November 5, 1976, 5.

101. For a description of key activities and exhibitions, see Kang Tae-hi, “Uri nara ch’ogi kaenyöm misul üi hyönhwang: Ch’ogi S.T. chönsi rül chungsim üro,” in *Han’guk hyöndae misul 1970–1980* [Contemporary Korean art, 1970–1980] (Seoul: Hagyönmunhwasa, 2004), 25–44.

102. Kim Bok-young, “Ch’ögük ül wihan pangböpjök kungmyöndül: Saeroun modül rül ch’ajasö,” *Space* 16, no. 1 (January 1981): 13, 16.

103. Ibid., 16.

104. Lee Jong-suk and Huh Young-hwan, “40dae tongyanghwaga e taehan kidae wa munje,” 39.

105. Other artists initially trained in Western-style oil painting and sculpture using ink painting materials in their work included Jung Yung-yul, who from 1978 used *hanji* as a support for acrylic, as a collaging material, and for paper casting, as well as Kim Soungui, one of the very few Korean female Conceptual artists. Based in France since 1971, she experimented with the speed and flow of ink on *huwasönji*. For an overview of Jung’s *hanji* works, see Kim Yejin, “Kyönggye üi hoehwa: Chöng Yöng-yöl üi ‘chöngmyöl’ yönjak yön’gu,” *Kungnip hyöndae misulgwon yön’gu nonmun* 6 (2014): 27–31; on Kim’s works, see her interview with Park Jung-ja, “Misul üi sigansöng kwa önsöng,” *Space* 12, no. 9 (September 1977): 81.