

Exhibition: *The Space Between: The Modern in Korean Art*

Dates: September 11, 2022–February 19, 2023

Location: Resnick Pavilion



(Image captions on page 5)

(Los Angeles, CA – July 14, 2022) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *The Space Between: The Modern in Korean Art*, an exhibition that explores the development of modern art in Korea driven by artists' encounters with, and reinterpretations of, the foreign influences that came along to shape it. Covering the years 1897 to 1965, the exhibition spans the arc of European-influenced art via Japan in the Korean Empire (1897–1910) and colonial period (1910–45), explores American influences absorbed and experimented with during and after the Korean War (1950–53), and provides a glimpse into the beginning of the contemporary. The first exhibition of its kind in the West, *The Space Between* features over 130 artworks by 88 artists that reflect the incorporation of foreign-introduced new media, including oils, photography, and sculpture.

Curated by Dr. Virginia Moon, associate curator of Korean Art, *The Space Between* is the second in a series of exhibitions as part of The Hyundai Project: Korean Art Scholarship Initiative, a global exploration of traditional and contemporary Korean art through research, publications, and exhibitions. The Korean Art Scholarship initiative is a key element of LACMA's ongoing 10-year partnership with Hyundai Motor Company since 2015. The exhibition is co-organized with the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA).

"*The Space Between* brings to light an era of profound change in Korean art history, illustrating how encounters and exchanges with other cultures led artists to set out on new creative paths," said Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director. "It's exciting to be able to share this story in Los Angeles, which is home to the largest Korean population outside of Korea. We're grateful to Hyundai Motor Company for its commitment to presenting new perspectives on Korean art through our long-term partnership."

“This project is a rare opportunity to introduce people to the modern art of Korea by looking at the influences that drove its development,” said Dr. Moon. “The exhibition is a departure from most presentations of modern art in Korea by bringing together all the media that was introduced to the country at this time. These artworks, never before shown outside of Korea, show how Korean art broke traditional molds to introduce new and borrowed ones amid the grave challenges the country faced during this era.”

“Among the various initiatives of our partnership with LACMA, the Korean Art Scholarship program holds an important place in our hearts, as it enables Korean art to be revisited and shared with a global audience,” said Hyundai Motor. “*The Space Between: The Modern in Korean Art* sheds light on unexplored aspects of modernity and contextualizes them within a novel framework to foster fruitful conversations on Korean modern art.”

Exhibition Organization

When Korea reluctantly moved into an era of modernization during the early 20th century, the country developed a newfound nationalism in response to the imperialist intentions of Japan and the attempted erasure of its language and culture. In the art world, Western influences introduced via Japan brought about a period of interpretation and experimentation and the questioning of the future of Korean art. The works in *The Space Between* portray how modern art in Korea developed due to, and in spite of, foreign influences alongside the traumatic events of the Japanese colonial period (1910–45) and the Korean War (1950–53). Created during a time of great upheavals, these works reflect the embrace of new ideas as well as a dedicated resolve to persevere.

The Space Between is organized in five sections:

Modern Encounter

The drawings and photographs in this section point to encounters with the world outside of Korea and the reluctant but growing realization that the country should modernize. In 1897, the last two kings of the Joseon dynasty converted Korea into an Empire to signify its initial steps toward modernization, and photographers were brought to Korea from Japan at the invitation of the imperial family to document the changes. Photography remained in the country and affected the ways traditional ink painters approached their artmaking, as seen in Kim Eunho’s *Portrait of King Sunjong* (1923). The unfinished draft portrait was based on a 1909 photograph, resulting in the hyper realistic rendering of the subject’s face.

Modern Response

During the colonization of Korea (1910–45), though traditional art practices continued, access to art schools and new styles was only through Japan. Artists who could afford it learned modified Western styles of painting and sculpture, then returned to Korea to share new media of oils and other techniques with their colleagues. This section portrays the artists' response to unfamiliar materials and styles like oils and academic styles of painting. Self-portraits and new compositions pushed the boundaries of how figures and people were portrayed. Early Korean photography, not yet recognized as an art form, attempted to capture through the lens how life in Korea was seen by its people. Through the challenges of the colonial period, a sense of nationalism and activism emerged with purpose.

Modern Momentum

Representing what can be considered a peak of momentum in artistic creativity, the works in this section (which include all the mediums introduced during the modern era) reveal how artists became more comfortable with acknowledging the foreign influences with which they had been experimenting and began to infuse their art more confidently with ideas of their own. The different media introduced during this period strongly suggest the reality that the artists were conversing with each other to see how modern artistic ideas were being processed, regardless of medium.

The Pageantry of Sinyeoseong (New Woman)

Underlying the modern era was a new type of feminism that was initially centered around the education of women, an idea initiated by men, with the hope that they would educate their children in turn and strengthen future generations. Education created new opportunities for women to lead somewhat independent lives, and was accompanied by changes in women's outward appearance. The *Sinyeoseong* look is exemplified by Shin Nak Kyun's 1930 portrait of Choi Seunghui, who was the most famous female Korean entertainer during her lifetime. While the movement did not ultimately gain widespread acceptance as the revolutionary aspects of its ideas did not sit well with the predominantly male-oriented, Confucian-based society, this remains the most printed photograph in Korean history.

Evolving into the Contemporary

In 1957, a group of artists rebelled against the government-sponsored National Art Exhibitions (gukjeon), a prominent outlet for artists to promote their works. Frustrated with the elitist attitudes and continuing colonial practices of the National Art Exhibitions, these artists displayed their works across City Hall, along the walls of Deoksu Palace. The independent and strong-willed convictions that motivated this artist uprising were considered to be the characteristics of what it meant to be contemporary. The works in this final section reveal an evolution built upon earlier artistic developments and reflect a determination to expand what Korean art can be.

The struggles to make sense of and incorporate new artistic trends during the modern era continued into the contemporary, weaving the roots of identity, nationalism, postcolonialism, and modernity well into the late 20th century.

Exhibition Catalogue

The exhibition will be accompanied by an illustrated catalogue published by LACMA and DelMonico Books/D.A.P. and edited by Virginia Moon, with essays by Kim Inhye, Kang Mingi, Kwon Haengga, Mok Soohyun, Kim Yisoon, Joan Kee, and Virginia Moon.

Hyundai Project at LACMA: Korean Scholarship

The Space Between: The Modern in Korean Art is the second exhibition as part of The Hyundai Project: Korean Art Scholarship Initiative at LACMA. In 2015, LACMA and Hyundai announced a significant partnership supporting the museum's Art + Technology and Korean scholarship initiatives—the longest and largest programmatic commitment from a corporation in LACMA's history. Through the Korean Art Scholarship Initiative, The Hyundai Project will support three exhibitions and museum publications ranging from historic, traditional art forms to contemporary Korean art. The Korean Art Scholarship Initiative creates a new platform and a model for research focusing on key aspects of Korean art that have never before been explored on a global scale in either exhibitions, programs, or books published outside Korea. The partnership with Hyundai Motor Company also includes support of LACMA's Art + Technology program.

Credit

This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art with the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea.

Presented by



This exhibition is part of The Hyundai Project: Korean Art Scholarship Initiative at LACMA, a global exploration of traditional and contemporary Korean art through research, publications, and exhibitions.

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Justin Lubliner, Jennifer and Mark McCormick, Kelsey Lee Offield, Jen Rubio and Stewart Butterfield, Lenore and Richard Wayne, and Marietta Wu and Thomas Yamamoto.

About LACMA

Located on the Pacific Rim, LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of more than 147,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. Committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories, LACMA exhibits and interprets works of art from new and unexpected points of view that are informed by the region's rich cultural heritage and diverse population. LACMA's spirit of experimentation is reflected in its work with artists, technologists, and thought leaders as well as in its regional, national, and global partnerships to share collections and programs, create pioneering initiatives, and engage new audiences.

About Hyundai Motor's Art Projects

Hyundai Motor Company has been supporting art initiatives driven by long-term partnerships with global museums—the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA), Tate, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) since 2013, along with major partnerships for the Korean Pavilion at the 56th, 57th, 58th, and 59th Venice Biennale and the 20th and 21st Biennale of Sydney. The newly established Hyundai Tate Research Centre: Transnational encourages innovative ways of thinking about art and global art histories, and in partnership with global media group Bloomberg, Hyundai Motor Company connects international audiences with artists exploring the convergence of art and technology. Visit artlab.hyundai.com or follow [@hyundaiartlab](https://twitter.com/hyundaiartlab) #HyundaiArtlab to learn more about these projects.

Image caption: (L–R) Kim Eunho, *Portrait of King Sunjong*, 1923, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, © Estate of Kim Eunho, photo © National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea; Min Chung Sik, *Twelve Thousand Peaks of Mount Geumgang (Diamond Mountains)*, 1910s (Printed 2002), Jipyong Collection, Research Institute for the Visual Language of Korea, Seoul, © The Estate of Min Chung Sik, Digital courtesy Jipyong Collection; Shin Nakkyun, *Photograph of Choi Seunghui*, 1930, Jipyong Collection, Research Institute for the Visual Language of Korea, Seoul, © The Estate of Shin Nakkyun, Digital courtesy Jipyong Collection; Quac Insik, *Work*, 1962, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, © The Estate of Quac Insik, photo © National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea

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