

FAAM Collection X  
Ⅲ *Artist in Crossing: Quac Insik and Ryu Kyungchai*

September 23 -December 25, 2021 Asia Gallery

In this exhibition, we feature two artworks created in 1962 by two artists: Ryu Kyungchai, who contributed to Korea's art scene after studying art in Japan, and Quac Insik, who was active in Japan's art scene after immigrating to Japan. This corner also reviews the art scenes of both countries at that time through their careers.

### 1. Korean Abstract Art

In the 1910s, during the early period of Japan's colonial rule of the Korean peninsula, oil painting techniques were introduced to Korea via Japan. Thereafter, Fauvism and Abstract expression influenced by Cubism became popular in Korea's art scene in the 1930s. In September 1945, right after the end of the Pacific War, a government-initiated *Korean National Art Exhibition* was held and it led to the institutionalization of Korea's art scene. After experiencing the Korean War, many artists questioned old values and made a commitment to Western abstract art as a way of expressing a free spirit.

Art informel, an art movement that prospered mainly in France, had a significant impact on Korean artists in the 1960s. By the 1970s, although under the influence of Japan and the West, the new artistic styles of Korean abstract art, such as "Dansaekhwa", Korean monochrome painting, and material-oriented expressions, developed with the times.

### 2. Quac Insik (1919-1989)

Quac Insik was born in Gyeongsangbuk-do, Dalseong-gun (now the western part of Daegu Metropolitan City), in 1919. He came to Japan and enrolled in Nihon Fine Arts School in 1937. In 1940, his work, *Modern Girl*, was accepted by the *10th Exhibition of the Independent Art Association*. However, he returned to Korea due to concerns about the Pacific War and held the first solo exhibition at Minakai Department store in Daegu.

Quac smuggled himself to Japan on a boat in 1949, then he was active to exhibit his work in various publicly sponsored exhibitions. After the outbreak of the Korean War, his elder brother was slaughtered by the government troops because he participated in the movement to unify North and South Korea and his uncle was also executed on suspicion of being a communist. These blood-ridden incidents made his decision not to return to Korea by 1982. With the aim of devoting himself into the Ethnic Reconciliation Movement, in 1961, he joined the 2nd Coalition Exhibition, which exhibited pieces from the Korean Residents Union in Japan and the General Association of Korean residents.

After 1965, Quac participated in many exhibitions at home and abroad and ensured his career as an artist. He created his own artistic expression that treats things in their original state and repeatedly explored new experimental style based on his identity. Although Quac never belonged to any art groups or organizations and took a distance from the contemporary art market, his work has started to be featured and re-evaluated in recent years.

### 3. *Work 62-505*

During the rapid economic growth in the 1960s, buildings with large glass walls symbolizing the industrialized society were built across Japan. Under these social circumstances, Quac released a series of works created by breaking glass from the early 1960s. Quac uses wire glass for a fireproof installation as a material in his work. According to the artist, this idea came from high skyscrapers around the Shinjuku station. This piece cracked by a hammer has two scratched holes like spider webs on its surface. The artist intended to visualize the act of breaking glass and entrenched its process by attaching the clacked glass on hemp cloth.

Breaking glass with a hammer contains his criticism against industrialized society. At the same time, this action implies the artist's strong will to imprint his being as a Korean resident in Japan, having been invisible in Japanese society, on the material.

### 4. Ryu Kyungchai (1920-1995)

Ryu Kyungchai was born in Hwanghaenam-do, southwestern part of the Korean Peninsula (now Democratic People's Republic of Korea), in 1920. To become an artist, he decided to go to Japan to study modern western art at Rokuinsha Art School.

He exhibited *Near the Abandoned forest* at the first *Korean National Art Exhibition* held in November 1949 and won the Presidential Award that was a turning point in his artistic career. However, after the outbreak of the Korean War, he served as one of a war artist in the Republic of Korea Armed Forces for a living.

After the Korean War's cease-fire in 1953, government-sponsored art exhibitions gradually resumed, Ryu started to build his career as a painter by constantly exhibiting his work. He established the *Exhibition of Chang Jark Fine Arts* in 1957 and actively participated in exhibitions nationally and internationally. In 1985, he also set up the *Asian International Art Exhibition* with Mr. Akiyoshi Sukeo, a painter lived in Fukuoka.

Ryu was a painter who was active mainly in the government-funded art exhibitions during his lifetime. He also taught at Seoul National University College of Fine Arts and was dedicated to training the young, and expanded his activities even in politics to develop the Korea's art scene.

### 5. *Season*

The surface of this piece is inlaid with colors, ocher reminiscent of dry and cold winter in Korea, red and green. In the lower part of the painting, three stone-like objects are depicted on the ground, followed by a colored surface reminiscent of the outer wall of a building. In the upper part of it, organic and dancing lines associated with plants are also drawn. The artist used a painting knife, not a hard brush, to draw the painting. His bold strokes moving around the canvas suggests an influence of Art Informel in that the artist pursued a non-finite form of a subject.

### 6. Conclusion

Quac Insik and Ryu Kyungchai, who both produced works between Japan and Korea throughout their lives, can be referred to as the "Artists in Crossing." While Japan entered the period of rapid economic growth and rushed to build the social infrastructures in the preparation of the Tokyo Olympics in 1962, Korea was under a dictatorship due to the military coup. Against a background of Japan and Korea, two artists also reflect the light and shadow of them. While Ryu Kyungchai gained high acclaim as an artist in Korean society, Quac Insik was not thoroughly evaluated during his lifetime. In this sense, they would also embody a contrasting situation as an artist at that time.

### References

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