



**National Museum of
Modern and Contemporary Art
Korea**

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Road to the Antipodes, January, No. 4, 90, 1990, Acrylic on canvas, 150x150cm, Rhee Seund Ja Jinju Museum of Art Collection

Rhee Seundja: Road to the Antipodes

22 March 2018 – 29 July 2018

MMCA Gwacheon

The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA) presents the exhibition *Rhee Seundja: Road to the Antipodes* held at MMCA Gwacheon from Thursday, March 22 through Sunday, July 29.

Rhee Seundja: Road to the Antipodes is organized in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Rhee Seundja (1918–2009), and also as an effort to observe and

highlight Korean female artists who have been relatively overlooked. The exhibition, titled after the artist's representative piece, encompasses the traces left by the artist as well as the concepts within her works. To the artist, France and Korea represented two extreme ends of the world, elements of conflict, symbolic spaces that need accord.

Rhee Seundja eloped to France in 1951 and studied the fundamentals of painting, starting her career as an artist. She studied painting at Académie de la Grande Chaumière and traveled around to accumulate experiences and insights, continuously expanding the horizons of her work. Through 80 solo exhibitions and more than 300 group shows, Rhee mostly worked with oil paint in Paris; in printmaking at her atelier Rivière Argent (Eunhasu) in Tourrettes, southern France; and with ceramics back in Korea, constantly challenging herself with passion for more than 60 years.

Rhee was the only one without a fine arts degree among the Korean artists who relocated to France in the 1950s, and hence was strongly influenced by the French school of art in terms of technique and expression. Nevertheless, being in a foreign country, the artist clung all the more to subjects and materials related to Korea, which mainly derived from her childhood experiences and memories. Rhee intended to create new worlds by harmonizing incongruous elements such as the East and the West, mind and matter, or the natural and the artificial, which eventually settled as the main concept and philosophy running through her 60 years of work. Rhee emphasized that philosophy should be carried within each piece of art. Instead of expropriating the modernism of the French art schools at the time, Rhee was determined and followed her intuitions in selecting style and subject matter, imbuing her own attitude and belief into her work.

The exhibition is comprised of Rhee's representative works divided into four themes according to period, laterally displaying her paintings and her prints to allow the audience to simultaneously observe the transition trajectories in the artist's oeuvre. The works from the early 1950s are shown under the theme of "Exploring Forms," works from the 1960s under "Women and Earth," 1970s pieces under "Yin and Yang," and the works from the 1980s till her passing are shown under "Road to the Antipodes." The exhibition will also be a special showcase of her most recent work, the "Road to the Antipodes" series and the "Cosmos" series, which she worked on since her 1988 MMCA solo exhibition until her death. A special artist interview can also be found at the archive space modeled after her Tourettes atelier

Eunhasu, a studio the artist referred to as “a work of art in which I attempted culmination of my life.”

Bartomeu Mari, director of MMCA, notes, “The 127 pieces presented in this exhibition faithfully contain Rhee’s artistic journey and spirit, which underwent a series of changes and experiments,” and he expressed his hopes that “this exhibition will be an opportunity to broaden the spectrum of Korean art history from a multilateral perspective, within the international current.”

More details are available on the MMCA website (<http://www.mmca.go.kr>).

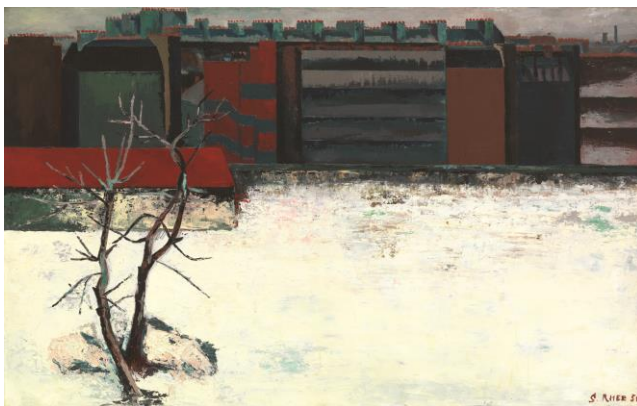
※ For general enquiries, please call +82-2-2188-6000 (MMCA Gwacheon)

RHEE Seundja: Road to the Antipodes

Introduction

The exhibition, *RHEE Seundja: Road to the Antipodes*, which marks the 100th anniversary of Rhee's birth, is organized as a part of special exhibition of the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea to focus on woman-artist, beginning with the exhibition, *The Arrival of New Women*, held in MMCA, Deoksugung. When many Korean artists dreamed of working in France in the 1950s, Rhee Seundja(1918-2009) was the first one to go to France by herself and learned the basic of painting. She was recognized as an artist in France earlier rather than Korea, and also her work was collected first by the French. She passionately spent 60 years, creating oil paintings in Paris, prints in Tourrettes, and ceramics in Korea. Rhee, only Korean who did not major in art before going to France at that time, among the artists leaving for France, followed techniques of French art, but she painted Korean motifs, based on her personal experience. She realized that modern Western art lacks philosophical base compared to material richness, so she tried to create the new artistic world that could coexist through the harmonization of opposites, including the East and the West, material and spirit, nature and artificiality, and Life and Death. This exhibition categorizes her oeuvre into the four periods; Exploring Forms in the early 1950s presents she learned the basics of painting and worked on abstract art at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris. In Woman and Earth she, as a mother of three children, painted the earth as if she farmed the land. Yin and Yang is that she expressed city of layered buildings. Lastly, in Road to the Antipodes, she depicted nature, cosmos and poles that she looked down in the airplane going back and forth between Korea and France. Through her interactions with Georges Boudaille(1925-1991), Henri Goetz (1909-1989), Alberto Magnelli(1888-1971), Michel Butor(1926-2016),and Sonia Delaunay(1885-1979) the viewer can deeply understand Rhee's works, and examine Korean art history from multiple perspectives.

Exploring Forms

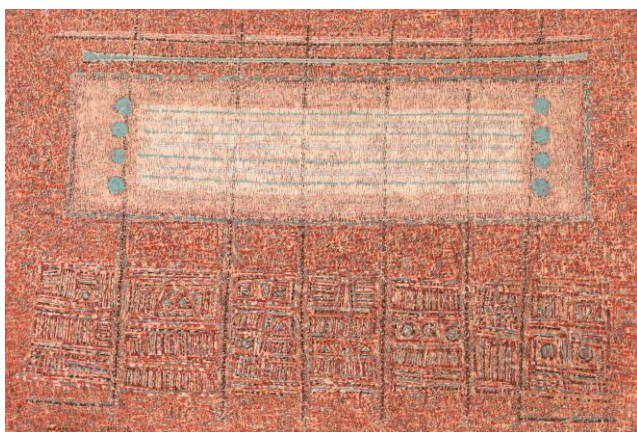


The Snow from Vaugirard Street, 1956, Oil on canvas, 73x116cm, Private Collection

“The joy and happiness, the tragedies were buried in the depth of the ocean. I have arrived in Paris in peace. I have nothing with me. I do not know even a word of French. I have nothing. I am nobody. I am going to be reborn, reborn in a foreign soil”

Exploring Forms belongs to the 1950s where Rhee tried various formative experiments, such as figurative and abstract painting, at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. She was able to have firsthand experience of modern art in France which was the center of international art at that time and developed her eyes through traveling in Europe. She was especially fascinated with abstract painting by the influence of Goetz. However, she left him two years later since her artistic style was incompatible with his extreme modernist style. In this period, she produced a lot of woodblock prints. Thus, these works have been believed as an essential genre as well as the oil painting in her oeuvre. She had childhood memories that she saw monks who used woodblocks for amulet and lotus pattern in the temple. Having been attracted by print, she felt nature by carving the woodblocks, and her prints have been changed paralleling with paintings. She considered yin and yang as moving relationship in a cycle, which is that the yang is the painting accumulating colors on canvas; otherwise, the print is the yin to carve out the wooden plate.

Woman and Earth



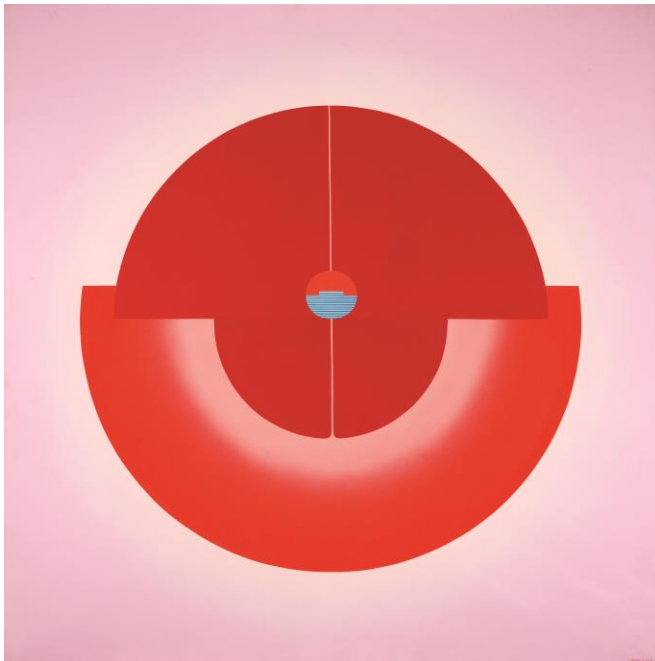
A Mother I Remember, 1962, Oil on canvas, 130x195cm, Private Collection

“The Occidental art lacks a philosophical base. Therefore, in order to tackle my subject Woman and the Earth which gives life to it, I take geometric symbols - Δ \square \circ , straight line, triangle, square and circle, universal signs that transcend the frontiers and the time.”

Rhee classified the works by characteristics of each period and named the 1960s as *Woman and Earth*. She said, “I am a woman, a woman is a mother, and a mother is earth.” She accepted her life as a woman and was proud of herself as a mother. Thus, the love for her mother, homeland, and

three sons was the reason why she painted and the purpose of life. Rhee, who always missed his parents, children and childhood home, was formally under the influence of the French art, but her theme was about mother's land. So she painted the earth as if she farmed the land. Georges Boudaille who was an influential critic had an interest in her distinguished oeuvre, and the work, *A Mother I Remember*, which was presented to *Ecole de Paris* attracted the attention of the French art scene. She was gradually recognized by having the solo exhibitions in prominent French galleries such as Lara Vincy and Chargentier gallery.

Yin and Yang



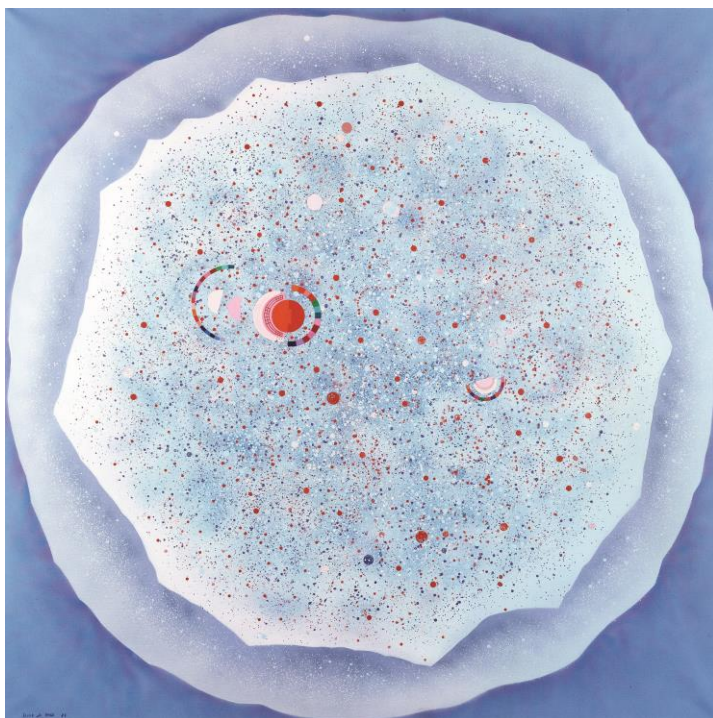
Yin and Yang, July, 75, 1975, Acrylic on canvas, 200x200cm, Private Collection

"I continuously raise questions of human and nature, human and machine, and nature and machine. I would like to create a geometric and figurative world on canvas."

Returning to homeland in 15 years, Rhee held a solo exhibition in 1965. Several years after she was reunited with family, her mother died so that she felt free from the land and her children. Traveling in New York, she was deeply impressed material affluence such as the skyscrapers and colorful lights, and began a new phase of her work. While the meticulous brush works were gone, unconstrained lines and circular figures filled the canvas. The material was also changed from oil to acrylic paint which is easier to be layered. With *Superposition*, she attempted to be diverse regarding materials and technique making the series of *City*, *Yin and Yang*,

and *Timelessness*. She depicted city in the form of circle and line that signify the possibility of unity which naturally leads to *Yin and Yang*. In *Timelessness*, attaching the 'tree' as an object on the two-dimensional surface painted by airbrush, she created a new screen which encompasses the opposing things: nature and geometry. At this time, she met Michel Butor, a French writer in the style of the *nouveau roman*, and collaborated with him in making prints.

Road to the Antipodes



A Night of Tourrettes, August, No. 2, 79, 1979, Acrylic on canvas, 150x150cm, Private Collection

“Fly to Paris in 1951 and to the antipodes... War and peace, the discovery of lost heaven and nostalgia – now I feel nostalgia for my homeland Korea while I am in France, and feel nostalgia for France while I am in Korea.”

From the 1980s through her death, her interest is toward nature, sky and cosmos. *The Road to the Antipodes* series illustrates the landscape of antipodes that she saw through the trip between Korea and France. The series of *Road to the Antipodes*, which is also the exhibition title, presents her specific interpretation of antipodes. In other words, in her view, Korea is halfway across the world in France, and France is also on the other side of the world in Korea. This series, which continued until 1994, was mentioned by Rhee as her illustrated diary of life traveling back and forth between East-West poles. The air route between France and Korea was

altered, and she extended her perspective to cosmos. Reconciliation of the opposites consistently appeared in the *cosmos* series. She pursued coexistence containing *Eastern philosophy and scientific thinking in her works, such as My Palace of Galaxies and My Hostels of Vega.*



Rhee Seundja

Chronology

1918	Her family settles down in Jinju after father retired
1927	Enters Jinju Ilsin girl's primary school
1931	Enters Jissen Women's College
1938	Returns and marries
1950	Korean War. Parts from her three sons following the end of her marriage
1951	Takes refuge in Busan and leaves towards France
1953	Studies painting at Académie de la Grande Chaumière
1958	Solo exhibition, Lara Vincy Gallery
1962	Solo exhibition, Synthèse Gallery host by Georges Boudaille
	Meets Gildas Fardel, Alberto Magnelli
1964	Solo exhibition, woodblock prints, Charpentier Gallery
1965	Comes back to Korea and meets her three sons
	Solo exhibition, Seoul National University Faculty Club
1968	Buys the house at Tourrettes-sur-Loup and builds the atelier for summer
	Solo exhibition, Charpentier Gallery
	Tour of New York in the Empire State Building at midnight on December 24th
	Death of her mother on December 28th
1969	Starts <i>Superposition</i> series
1972	Works on <i>City</i> series out of <i>Superposition</i>

1974	Solo exhibition <i>Superposition</i> and <i>City</i> , Hyundai Gallery
1975	Presents six works of <i>City</i> and <i>Yin and Yang</i> as a representative of Korea at the 13th Sao Paulo Biennale
1977	Meets Michel Butor Inspired by <i>Dancheong</i> under the rooftop of the temple emerging itself in the snowy landscape on the way to visit parent's grave in Jinju (* <i>Dancheong</i> is traditional multicolored paintwork on wooden buildings)
1979	The sky and stars appear on the works since <i>A Night of Tourrettes</i>
1980	Works on the series of the <i>Road to the Antipodes</i>
1983	Starts to make mosaic <i>Rivière Argent</i> at the entrance door at Tourrettes, and completes in a year
1985	Publishes the catalog at Youlhwadang and Michel Butor named her as <i>The Ambassador of Dawn</i>
1988	Solo exhibition, National Museum of Modern Art, Korea
1995	Works on the series of <i>Cosmos</i>
1977	Mentions <i>the Work Which Tries the Completion of My Life</i> with the opening of <i>Rivière Argent Atelier</i> in Tourrettes
2007	Solo exhibition, Gallery Hyundai
2008	Solo exhibition <i>Guichun</i> , Gyeongnam Art Museum
2009	Passed away