



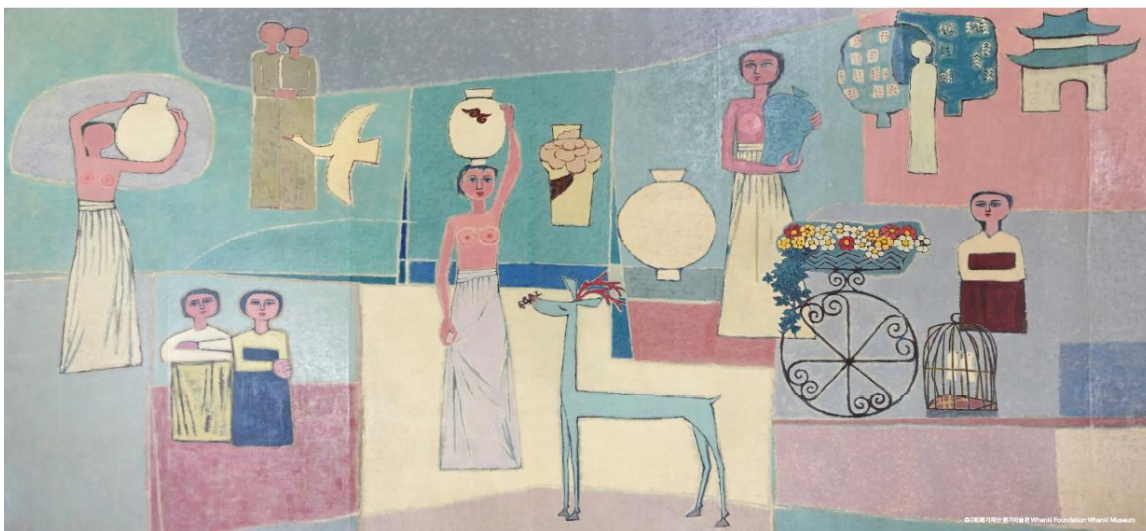
National Museum of
Modern and Contemporary Art
Korea

Communications and Audience Department
30 Samcheong-ro, Sogyeok-dong,
Jongno-gu, Seoul, Korea

mmcapress@korea.kr

MMCA 이건희컬렉션 특별전 한국미술명작

MMCA
Lee Kun-hee Collection
Masterpieces of Korean Art
2021.7.21. - 2022.3.13.



국립현대미술관 서울 National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul

이건희 컬렉션 특별전 MMCA Lee Kun-hee Collection Masterpieces of Korean Art, 2021.7.21. - 2022.3.13.

MMCA Lee Kun-hee Collection: Masterpieces of Korean Art

21 July 2021 – 13 March 2022

MMCA Seoul

The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA, Director Youn Bummo) presents **MMCA Lee Kun-hee Collection: Masterpieces of Korean Art**, from 21 July 2021 through 13 March 2022, at MMCA Seoul. The exhibition will serve as an opportunity for the extensive art collection of the late Samsung Group Chairman Lee Kun-hee to make the first public debut, and to ensure that such high quality works of modern and contemporary art are shared with the wider public.

Since its establishment in 1969, the MMCA has been acquiring artworks with the aim of contributing to defining Korean art history. The latest donation of Lee's collection, comprising of 1,488 pieces of artworks, which is being dubbed "the donation of the century" brings the scale of the museum's collection to over 10,000 works of art. Fifty-five percent of those were acquire through donations, which have helped to enrich the collection while overcoming the constraints of a limited acquisition budget.

The modern and contemporary art works donated by the family of the late Samsung Group Chairman Lee Kun-hee is the largest in terms of its size. It is also very significant in that it has enabled the artworks to be enjoyed by a wider public by adding enormous qualitative and quantitative advancements to the MMCA's collection. Its 1,488 works of art run the gamut of modern and contemporary art, including rare and major masterpieces of artists from home and abroad representing the 20th century.

The vast Lee Kun-hee collection comprises of 1,369 artworks by Korean artists and 119 overseas artworks. By genre, it includes 412 paintings, 371 prints, 296 works of Hangukha (Korean traditional painting), 161 drawings, 136 crafts, 104 sculptures, and 8 photographs and videos. It also includes works by Kim Hwanki, Park Sookeun, Lee Jungseop, Lee Ungno, Yoo Youngkuk, and Kwon Jinkyu.

The exhibition, which is where Lee's collection makes its first public debut, displays **58 representative works by Korea's favorite 34 artists**. Most of the works to be on display have been produced from the 1920s to 70s, and will be displayed under the following three themes:

First, **Adoption and Transformation**. Under the Japanese occupation, Korea adopted new forms of culture, which has also brought about new changes in art. The Western medium of oil painting made its first appearance, while new and unfamiliar terms have been coined, including "figure painting," "still-life," and "landscape painting." This period was also when changes were brought about in traditional Korean calligraphy. Under the theme, audiences can compare and contrast the characteristics of the East and the West through representative works including *Paradise* by Baik Namsoon (ca. 1936) and *Peach Blossom Spring* (1922) by Lee Sangbeom.

Second, **Shows of Individuality**. Shortly after being liberated from the Japanese rule in 1945, the Korean War broke out on the Korean Peninsula in 1950. Even amid this maelstrom of unrest, Korean artists continued their career as artists by opening exhibitions and seeking for new types of art. The unique artworks by artists like Kim Whanki, Yoo Youngkuk, Park Sookeun, and Lee Jungseop, whose lives were full of ups and downs, serve as the backbone of Korean art. Works from this period, including Kim Whanki's *Women and Jars* (1950s), Lee Jungseop's *Bull* (1950s), and Park Sookeun's *Woman Pounding Grain* (1954) make up a large proportion of the Lee's collection.

Last but not least, **Setting Down Roots and Seeking New Avenues**. Even during the period of continued unrest following the Korean War, many artists continued to explore their own unique artistic visions by settling in at home and abroad. Figures such as Rhee Seundja, Nam Kwan, Lee Ungno, Kwon Okyon, Kim Sou, Park Saengkwang, and Chun Kyungja increased their artistic activities abroad. Lee's collection includes many representative works by the aforementioned artists including Rhee Seundja's *A Thousand Years Old House* (1961) and Kim Sou's *Korean Women* (1959).

The works of Lee's collection are currently undergoing procedures of being registered as the MMCA's collections including close inspection on their conditions, investigation, imagery recording, discussion on copyright, and research, after which will be uploaded on the museum's webpage. The MMCA also plans to provide exhibitions and education sessions to shed light on the significance of donation by the late Samsung Group Chairman Lee Kun-hee and members of his family, while also enabling the public to continue enjoy the works of art.

Youn Bummo, director of the MMCA extended his gratitude to "the bereaved family of the late Samsung Group Chairman Lee Kun-hee for the vast donation of artworks with significant value in terms of art history, making this exhibition possible," adding "continuing on from this exhibition, the MMCA will grant more opportunities for the public to enjoy the high quality donated artworks and continue to expand the horizon of the research on art history by studying Lee's collection going forward."

For the images and related press materials, please download from the link below.

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MMCA Lee Kun-hee Collection: Masterpieces of Korean Art

Artists

BAIK Namsoon, BYEON Gwansik, CHAE Yongshin, CHANG Uc-chin, CHUN Kyungja, KIM Chongyung, KIM Chongtai, KIM Eunho, KIM Gyeong, KIM Junghyun, KIM Kichang, KIM Sou, KIM Whanki, KWON Jinkyu, KWON Okyon, LEE Chongwoo, LEE Daiwon, LEE Doyoung, LEE Insung, LEE Jungseop, LEE Sangbeom, LEE Ungno, MOON Shin, NA Hyeisuk, NAM Kwan, PARK Hangsup, PARK Rehyun, PARK Saengkwang, PARK Sangok, PARK Sookeun, RHEE Seundja, RYU Kyungchai, YOO Youngkuk, YUN Hyojong

Selected Works



BYEON Gwansik(1899-1976), *Guryong Waterfall of Mt. Kumgang*, 1960s, ink and color on paper, 120.5x91cm.

Byeon Gwansik (1899–1976) was active as a premier landscape artist among modern and contemporary painters. He provided a model for modern “real landscape” painting with his “Sojeong” style, a distinctive technique based on innumerable sketches of actual scenery and advancements in traditional texture methods. In 1957, Byeon gave up his seat on the jury for the National Art Exhibition (Kukjon) to focus on his creative activities outside of the mainstream. The high point of his artist work came during this time with images of particularly superb views of Mt. Kumgang, which have been categorized as exemplifying the Sojeong style. The chief characteristic of this style is the vertical placement of particular scenic elements on a tall canvas, maximizing the grandeur of nature through a “high-distant” perspective that gazes up from bottom to top. A

characteristic quality of these works is the way they convey a powerful impression and the sense of inspiration from nature through their common use of layers of different concentrations of ink on natural scenes (an approach called jeongmukbeop in Korean), or the “splashed stroke” approach in which thick lines and points are applied to break up areas where ink gathers. The men that Byeon places in these settings – travelers with their robes and canes – add a sense of objectivity and immediacy to the exquisite and beautiful scenery.

This particular work was painted at a time when Byeon’s Mt. Kumgang-themed Sojeong style had reached its zenith. What distinguishes it is the highly realistic depiction of Guryong Waterfall and its surrounding rocks. This puts it in contrast with other works in which the artist showed outstanding views of the mountain, including *Bodeuk Cave in Inner Mt. Kumgang* (1960) and *Jinju Pond in Inner Mt. Kumgang* (1960); there, the grandeur of nature and subjective sense of inspiration were typically heightened by the use of exaggerated expressive style. A bold vertical composition is formed on the canvas by the straight line of the falls and the man seen from behind as he stands facing it; the condensed energy of nature is conveyed in a realistic way by the use of layered ink and splashed strokes on the angular surfaces of the rocks to the left and right. A vivid sense of the spatial scale of the setting is provided by the two men observing the waterfall as though captivated by the scene, one standing and one seated on a broad rock in the foreground. The painting holds particular meaning in the way it shows another variation on the Sojeong style as Byeon generally eschews exaggerated expression, his canvas showing the creative attitude of an artist actually sketching from nature.



LEE Jungseop(1916-1956), *Bull*, 1950s, oil on paper, 26.5x36.7cm.

Lee Jungseop (1916–1956) first encountered Western painting at Osan High School in Chŏngju, North P'yŏngan Province (in what is now North Korea), through the husband-and-wife couple Lim Yongryeon and Baik Namsoon, both Western painters who had respectively studied art in the US and Europe. In 1936, Lee traveled to Japan, where he studied art in earnest at the Imperial Arts School and Bunka Gakuen. He married Yamamoto Masako (Korean name Lee

Namdeok), a fellow student whom he met at Bunka Gakuen, and it was while the two of them were raising their two sons in Wŏnsan that the Korean War broke out. He traveled to the South with his family, taking refuge on Jeju Island and in Busan before finally sending his wife and children to Japan. The work that Lee produced during this time was suffused with his feelings of longing for his family. He continued experimenting with new techniques and materials even as the war left Korea facing a difficult economic situation and an acute shortage of materials; a representative example of this was his “silver foil painting,” which he painted on the foil used for cigarette packaging. After the war ended, he devoted himself fully to his artwork, producing masterworks such as *Bull* and *White Bull*. In January 1955, he presented these works at a solo exhibition at Midopa Gallery in Seoul. His plan was to travel to Japan to see his family if the exhibition was a success; when this failed to pass, he was plunged into a deep despair. Tormented by a host of psychological conditions – including compulsion, germ phobia, and an eating disorder – he passed away in 1956 at the young age of 40.

Bull shows one of Lee Jungseop's favorite subjects. He had often painted bulls since his time studying in Japan; to Koreans, bulls were commonly seen as national symbols representing patience and endurance. Lee would go on to paint bulls even more frequently as Korea was liberated and the Korean War broke out. His powerful images of red bulls would begin to emerge at a time when the war had ended and Korea was faced with having to start everything anew. Most of Lee's paintings showing bulls and white bulls were produced in Tongyeong and Jinju between 1953 and 1954. Judging from the letters that he sent to his wife in Japan, he was intently absorbed in his artistic work during this time, filled with a great sense of ambition and confidence. The bulls were also self-portraits in a sense, offering a quite candid representation of the artist's psychological state and situation. This particular *Bull* is set against a powerful red background, the bull appearing solemn and grave with the furrows it bears from the vicissitudes of life. A common aspect of Lee's bull images is the way they evoke a sense of plaintiveness even amid their vigor. A total of four surviving works by Lee show the heads of red bulls; the one here first came to people's awareness in 1976. While it was reprinted into a collection of paintings by Lee published in 1990 by Kumsung, it has rarely been exhibited in the past. It has now been added to the MMCA collection through the donation of the Lee Kun-hee Collection.



PARK Sookeun(1914-1965), *Woman Pounding Grain*, 1954, oil on canvas, 130x97cm.

As someone who had not received a formal art education, Park Sookeun had no other means available to begin his career as a painter than by submitting his work to the Chosun Art Exhibition (CAE). He had his first work accepted there in 1932 – the year he turned 18 – when he submitted his watercolor *Spring Is Coming*. He would continue regularly submitting his work to government-organized events such as the CAE and National Art Exhibition (Kukjon) until his death. The paintings he submitted to the CAE typically showed women and farming landscapes, both of them motifs that would recur through his life. After he married his neighbor Kim Boksoon in 1940, she would

become an important model for his artwork. *Woman Drawing Thread*, *Woman Grinding Grain*, *Woman Milling*, and *Mother and Child* are all believed to have been made with Park's wife as a model.

Park Sookeun would continue throughout his life producing paintings showing women working on farms. *Woman Pounding Grain* repeats the theme of *Working Woman*, a watercolor submission by the artist that was selected for the 1936 CAE event. The image of the woman pounding grain with a baby on her back offers an excellent illustration of the difficult lives that women endured. It also bears ties with Park's body of work as an artist who sought to "be a painter like [Jean-François] Millet."

Produced in 1954, this artwork shows Park in flawless command of his characteristic color tone and *matière*. His unique form of stylization would unfold during the 1960s; this artwork offers a clear glimpse at the maturity of his skills and refinement of his techniques before then. He would produce another work with the same iconography in 1964, just before his death. In comparison with his late paintings, we can see the idiosyncratic, concrete rendering here of the figure's facial features and hand movements. The same painting appears behind Park in a photograph that he took with his family at their home in Seoul's Changsin neighborhood.



KIM Whanki(1913-1974), *Women and Jars*, 1950s, oil on canvas, 281.5x567cm.

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KIM Whanki (1913–1974) is a pioneering figure in Korean abstract painting. He traveled to Japan for his education in 1931, studying in the fine arts department and research division at Nihon University from 1933 to 1936. During his studies, he also took part in the 1934 establishment of the Avant-Garde Western Painting Institute. Along with Kil Chinseop, he was active in the Baekman Western Painting Association, which was organized by the group’s research students in 1936. He returned to Korea in 1937, but continued until 1941 experimenting with trends such as cubism, constructivist geometric abstraction, and surrealism as a member of a Tokyo-based avant-garde art group known as the Free Artists’ Association (renamed the Artistic Creation Association 40 years later). As Korea entered a wartime system, he briefly operated the Jongro Gallery, focusing on collecting old works of art as he shared in the classicist tastes of *Munjang*, a journal with artists such as Kim Yongjun, Lee Taejoon, and Kil Chinseop as guiding forces. After Korea’s liberation, he joined Yoo Youngkuk, Lee Kyusang, and Chang Uc-chin in founding the “New Realists,” a school that remained active through its third exhibition in 1953. Around this time, he began gaining a reputation as an artist who modernized a traditional aesthetic with his semi-abstract canvases and their stylized images of natural landscapes and folk motifs such as porcelain jars, the moon, deer, and cranes. Even when he departed in 1956 to devote three years to artistic activity in Paris, he would continue his semi-abstraction tendency of showing simplified natural elements and objects exemplifying Korean sentiments amid his Informel-influenced experiments with lines and material effects produced by thickly applied paint. Returning from France in 1959, he went to work as a professor at Hongik University. But with his 1963 participation in the Bienal de São Paulo in Brazil, he came to acutely sense the limitations of his environment. He promptly moved to New York, where he worked full-time as an artist until his death in 1974. While in New York, he perfected his characteristic pointillist style, which has earned him recognition as a pioneer of Korean abstraction. *Women and Jars* was commissioned as a large wall painting for a new house that was built on Seoul’s Toegy Road for chairman Jung Jaeho of the Samho Group, who had become Korea’s biggest textile conglomerate head with the acquisition of Chosun Textile in the 1950s. There is a pronounced, transcendent decorativeness, with stylized human and animal figures and objects arranged facing front or slightly to the side against a pastel-toned background. It features many of the motifs frequently used by Kim Whanki from the time of the New Realist exhibition in 1948 through the 1950s, including simplified trees; half-dressed women carrying jars on their heads or in their arms; porcelain urns; a crane and a deer; a crouching street vendor; a flower-peddler’s cart; and a bird cage. But the street vendor and the other figures alluding to the reality of the Korean War and the refuge that it forced people into are presented alongside a Joseon-era palace, rather than a shanty town of cardboard and tents. The women laboring to draw well water and catch fish are transformed into ladies dressed in fine fabrics, evoking an overall image of ornamental abundance. The natural, asymmetrical lines and the rough approach to the color field offer an excellent illustration of the aesthetic characteristics of work produced during this period by Kim, a great admirer of the formal beauty of Joseon porcelain. As the Samho Group went into decline in the late 1960s due to poor management, this work found its way onto the art market, where it was subsequently acquired by Samsung.



KWON Jinkyu(1922-1973), *Self-Portrait*, 1967, terracotta, 35 × 23 × 20cm.

Kwon Jinkyu (1922–1973) made the journey to Japan in 1948, before it had resumed official diplomatic relations with South Korea. He was admitted in 1949 to the sculpture department of Musashino Art University, from which he graduated in 1953. This means that he was studying sculpture in Japan at the same time that South Korea was embroiled in the Korean War. After graduating, he remained enrolled as a postgraduate as he focused on his artistic activities. At the same time, he cemented his capabilities as a sculptor as he presented his work at the non-mainstream *Nikaten* exhibition. He returned to Korea in 1959 because of family matters; in 1962, he built his own studio in

Seoul's Dongseon neighborhood, where he focused on his artistic work until his death in 1973. While in Japan, he had occasionally produced work in bronze and stone, but after his return to Korea he showed his commitment to carrying on tradition with a modern spin through his creation of sculptures in more traditional materials such as terra cotta and dry lacquer. The time of his activity during the 1960s coincided with a period when abstraction was very much in vogue in Korean art, but Kwon sought to achieve realism, feeling distaste toward abstract approaches that he saw as unconnected with Korea's traditional art. Yet the "realism" that he pursued was not realism in a visual sense – it was a relative concept vis-à-vis abstraction, and his work can be categorized as "figurative sculpture."

Depicted with a shaved head and no extraneous elements, this terra cotta *Self-portrait* exemplifies a form of self-representation that Kwon Jinkyu produced repeatedly from the 1950s onward. The raised head and distant gaze was an aesthetic feature often observed in his busts, from the same year's *Jiwon's Face* to the 1970 work *Self-portrait in Monk's Robe*. This could be seen as reflecting his own internal consciousness and its desire to move beyond the bounds of reality in pursuit of some ideal world. In addition to Kwon, Kim Chongyung (1915–1982) is another contemporary Korean sculptor who repeatedly sculpted self-portraits. While Kwon depicted himself relatively realistically amid his efforts to define "realism" within Korea, what sets him apart is the way in which he goes beyond external resemblance to capture an interior world.