

old newspapers and magazines piling up in their homes. A voice calls out, "No matter the amount, if you have any 100-yen coins, 100-yen notes or 1000-yen notes that you are using at home, you can exchange them with us for 0-yen notes!"

In April of that year, the Supreme Court had declared Akasegawa guilty in the "Thousand-yen Note Trial," but that did not dissuade him from making further provocations of paper currency. Next to the image of the B-52s is a tactically placed "0-yen Note Poster." Alongside details about exchanging 300-yen for a 0-yen note, the slogan "v narod," or "to the people," also appears. This is truly an appropriation of the propagandistic means for inciting the masses.

Moreover, as a kind of meta-text, phrases added to the margins of the illustrations self-referentially allude to the multi-layered and convoluted structure of fictionality which ultimately serves as an elaborate device for questioning the authenticity of journalism itself. The margin text on the page with the B-52s reveals Akasegawa's attempts to overthrow the system: "Yes, you too—scrape together all the money you've got and send it to the 0-yen printing office for 0-yen exchange. Get it while it's good! Get it while it's bad, too!"

The association of Vietnam War imagery and the attempt to invalidate paper currency carries with it a critique against Japan and the other Asian countries that enjoyed the economic benefits of the Vietnam War. Nor can it be denied that the stability of Asia was in some ways predicated on the war. Occupying mainstream media to perpetrate the intellectual "crime" of exposing the complicity between war and the capitalist system is a prime example of Akasegawa's unique strategy of media hijacking.

3 | Tomatsu Shomei: Asia as Archipelago

The photographer Tomatsu Shomei has left a major mark on the history of photography in post-war Japan. Among his diverse projects, the one that represents his work of the 1960s is the *Occupation* series, which elicits the reality of post-war Japan from both the U.S. military bases spread across the country and the Americanization of culture.

As part of this series, in 1969 Tomatsu finally made it to Okinawa. The only territory in Japan to experience a land offensive during the war in the Asia-Pacific—resulting in tremendous loss of life for its residents—Okinawa was partitioned from the country after the war and placed under U.S. administration. In the 1950s, U.S. military bases were

scattered across Japan. They gradually underwent reconsolidation and contraction through the end of the 1960s, but the expansion of bases only intensified on Okinawa, which was a critical pivot in America's Asia strategy.

The return of Okinawa's administrative rights became a serious political issue in the late 1960s. What caught Tomatsu's attention during his 1969 visit was, of course, the areas around the U.S. bases, and he focused his camera on the landscape of the bases in the midst of the Vietnam War, as well as soldiers, prostitutes, mixed-race children and demonstrations by the islanders. This work was collected in the photobook, *OKINAWA OKINAWA OKINAWA*, published that same year. Notably, the book's subtitle read, "It is not the bases that are in Okinawa—Okinawa is in the bases."

Tomatsu's photographs of Okinawa would change dramatically in 1971, when he visited the remote Hateruma Island. There, standing before the views of nature and island life of an Okinawa without U.S. bases, he discovered a completely different Okinawa that he had not been able to see through the bases. Even as he ruminated over ethical questions about whether it was permitted for a photographer who came from the mainland—which had forced Okinawa under many sacrifices—to turn his camera onto the islands, Tomatsu was mesmerized by the subject. He put upon himself the goal of shooting "photographs for Okinawa." It was already obvious that the "return" of Okinawa to Japan would be full of deceit, with the bases remaining as they were.

Having moved to the main island of Okinawa in 1972, Tomatsu subsequently moved to the remote island of Miyakojima, where he observed Okinawa from the viewpoint of a resident. A few years later, in 1975, he published his struggles with Okinawa as the photobook *The Pencil of the Sun*, a subtitle of which reads *Okinawa and S. E. Asia*.^{fig. 10} The 150 photographs in the "Okinawa section" in the book's first half are monochrome shots of the remote islands, and do not include a single shot of the main island.^{fig. 11} Nor is there a single motif that hints at the U.S. bases.

Tomatsu himself once explained, "more than being an 'occupation' zone, what is so enthralling for me about Okinawa is the powerful, broad, spiritual zone that continues to resist Americanization and has never yet been 'occupied.'"

The latter half of the book, the "Southeast Asia section," comprises 80 photographs, mainly taken on assignments to Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, the



fig.08
Tomatsu Shomei, *Miyako Island*,
from *The Pencil of the Sun*,
1972

fig.07
Tomatsu Shomei, *The Pencil of the
Sun*, 1975
photobook cover

Philippines and Indonesia. In contrast, here the photographs are shot in color, with the bright colors of the tropics and expressions of the people, so full of vitality even when their living conditions are hard-pressed, captured in square-format prints. ^{fig.09} Into this "Southeast Asia section," Tomatsu randomly intersperses photographs of Okinawa, including views of the areas around the bases on the mainland, which do not appear in the first half of the book. In his travels around the other islands of Okinawa, Tomatsu became aware of the culture's southern roots, saying that the islands suggested a kind of "land-bridge" (*jitsuzuki*) that one could follow all the way to Southeast Asia. What Tomatsu discovered after passing through the depths of Okinawa was the expanded "Southeast Asia" that extends across the Pacific Ocean.

We can interpret Tomatsu's editorial intent as follows: this photobook was made as a reaction to the return of Okinawa's administrative rights to Japan, and is an attempt to provide a new viewpoint for perceiving Okinawa. In other words, Tomatsu clearly aimed to sever its ties with Japan, and release Okinawa into the Pacific Islands. Even with regard to the connections between Okinawa and Southeast Asia, Tomatsu was not simply looking for atmospheric resemblances. He was surely also concerned with the historical experiences of colonization and the current postcolonial conditions they both shared. The vision at which Tomatsu arrived was the image of a cross-border archipelago network that would dissolve the rigidity of the nation system, as well as the vision of the solidarity of the people of Southeast Asia that would make this possible.

This shares overlaps with the oppositional world model proposed by the Third World discourse, as discussed previously. However, to that abstract idea, Tomatsu added the concrete, visual image of an Asian archipelago linked by the "sea." This photobook was produced as a response to the challenge Tomatsu set for himself of making "photographs for Okinawa," and it was also a gesture of reciprocation to the Okinawa that he loved to the very end.

4

Conclusion

These works are the rare cases in Japanese art that make direct reference to Asia. I am interested to see whether there are works from the other countries that could be

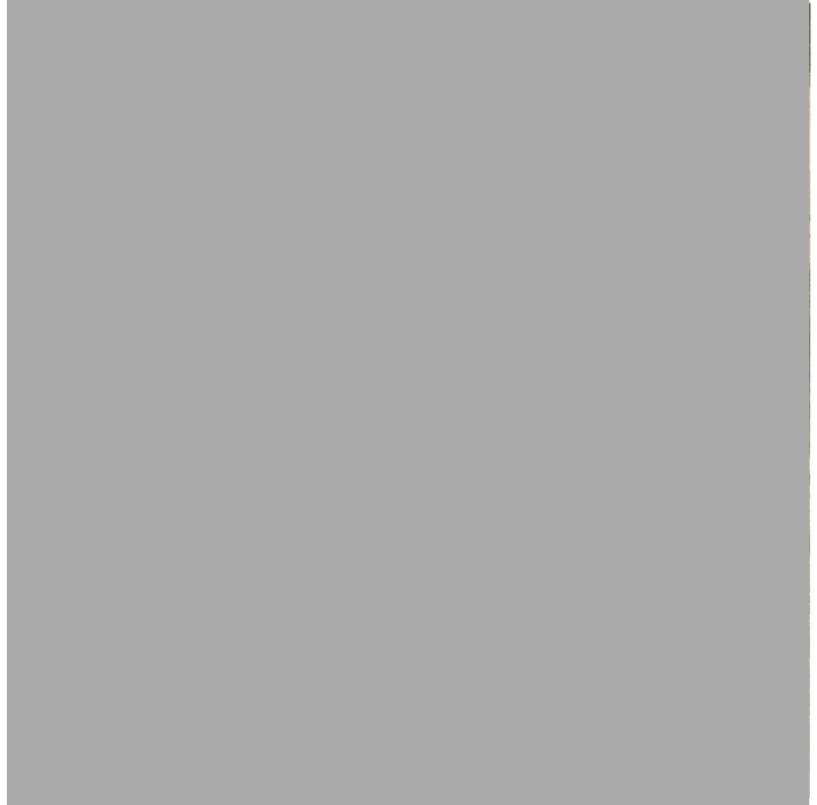


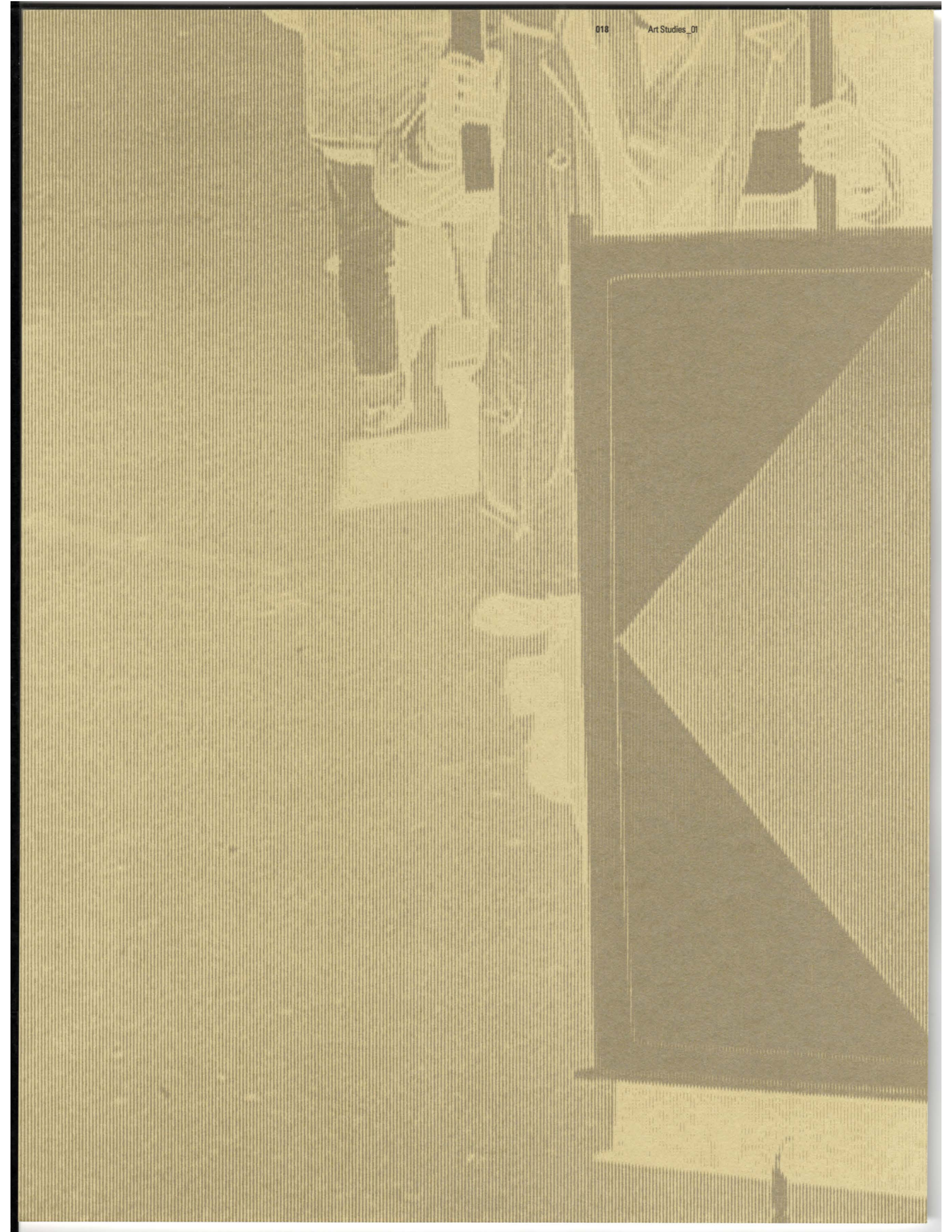
fig.09
Tomatsu Shomei, *Zamboanga, the Philippines*, from *The Pencil of the Sun*, 1974

considered their counterparts.

Apprehended from differing perspectives, Asia's reality can prove to be mutually illuminating for us, producing diverse encounters, comparisons and contrasts, and prompting the discovery and construction of a new, multi-dimensional subjectivity. In strategically theorizing this kind of "Asia" and "Third World" as a transnational referential axis, we can cast off Western theory's binary structure for measuring the Asian experience, and work toward a new theory from within a "Non-Western" practice. It is my hope that this seminar can be the first step in that direction.

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This paper could not have been completed without the guidance of Professor Marukawa Tetsushi of Meiji University. I am grateful for his generosity.

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Translated by Andrew Maerkle



Cultural Rebellion in Asia | 1960–1989

Day 2

Session I In the Case of East Asia

Moderator

Suzuki Katsuo

Pi Li

Right is Wrong: Chinese Art before 1989

Park Hyesung

Boundary Riders of Korean Art in 1960s–1970s

Lai Ying-ying

Art into Action: Taiwanese Activists from 1960s to 1980s

Hayashi Michio

Cultural Rebellion: Japan from the 1960s to the 1980s

Right is Wrong: Chinese Art before 1989

Pi Li

Sigg Senior Curator, M+

The No Name Group and Socialist Realism

In the evening of the last day of 1974, a group of young people in their 20s, wearing thick cotton jackets and nervous expressions, arrived at a room on the third floor of a Soviet-style collective housing complex on the west side of Beijing. Only with a special knock, agreed upon in advance, could they enter. The apartment belonged to Zhang Wei and his mother, a teacher of Russian. Later, in 1975, Zhang Wei would document the scenery outside the windows of this apartment in the markedly warm color palette of a landscape painted from nature.¹¹ A passionate depiction of the urban landscape, the work is notable because its line of sight is not exactly aligned with the framing of the window, but rather shifts slightly to the left, as if the painter were standing in the cool shade of the room and peeping out toward the warm sunshine beyond—an appropriate reflection of the “underground” to which these artists belonged. In those wild times, painting on the street without government approval would draw the suspicion of the “revolutionary masses.” This simple fact goes a long way towards explaining why the works of these artists often depicted bland scenery devoid of people, only occasionally manifesting human traces like traffic lights or signs. Nameless landscapes in a gray palette, these works diverged drastically from the garishly colored portraits drawn from revolutionary themes popular at the time. That modest apartment was filled with landscapes and sketches of this variety, none of them large, most similar in scale to the Little Red Book, *Quotations from*

Chairman Mao, present in every household at the time. Numbering around a dozen, the other artists were similar to Zhang Wei in age. It was only a single evening, but this gathering represented the first exhibition initiated by artists without the permission of the government since the founding of New China in 1949. Later, during their first public exhibition in 1979, the artists of this event would call themselves the No Name Painting Association.

Like most members of the No Name Group (无名画会), Zhang Wei's family was marked as wealthy or bourgeois in 1949 and therefore subject to criticism and discrimination. With the arrival of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 they would have experienced even more serious condemnation and exile, sent to factories or villages to engage in hard labor after their graduation from high school. This peripheral status generally caused them to linger beyond the grasp of collective life, either intentionally or unintentionally, and the lonely avocations of writing and painting were able to offer solace for the spirit. Due to their lives of labor, however, they were only able to paint in their rare stints of free time, and, because of the decentralized surveillance engendered by the household registration system, the details of their daily lives were constantly monitored by their neighbors. Outdoor sketching on the weekends made for a rare diversion, but, because of the military restrictions then in place across the country, this too had its risks. Young artists were forced to invent ways to escape the inspections of bands and militias organized by unions and work units. They produced tiny boxes which were the same dimensions as the Little Red Book for their canvases and paints, which they could then casually

¹¹

Zhang Wei, *Fusuijing Building*, 1975, oil on paper, 26 x 19 cm

carry in satchels or even in the pockets of their coats without attracting notice. That also explains, in part, the diminutive dimensions of most of the works that emerged from the No Name Group in the 1970s. Gradually, the practice of outdoor sketching became a collective behavior for marginal individuals of similar backgrounds, introduced through mutual acquaintances over time, forming a group of amateur artists active on the edges of the city. So when, in 1979, they came upon the opportunity of a space for their own exhibition, they proudly, if painfully, called themselves the No Name Painting Association, a name that expresses both a style that would otherwise be difficult to categorize and an identity simultaneously marginalized and ordinary. The Cultural Revolution had so fully obliterated the families and relations of these artists—teenagers at the time—that they were left as orphans in the city, while their covert painting gatherings functioned as a way to come together for warmth and comfort. In a time without freedom of expression, that a group of outsiders might organize an underground exhibition was a natural choice.

It was also a dangerous one. Since the 1950s, virtually all literary and artistic activities had been drawn into the scope of government management. Following the disappearance of the market economy, artists had been forced to affiliate themselves with institutions like schools, publishing houses, and painting academies in order to become eligible for social welfare benefits like salary and accommodation. Semi-official institutions like artists associations organized artists professionally in order to accept projects commissioned by the government, and exhibitions could only occur if they were organized and executed by the government. During the course of the Cultural Revolution initiated by Mao Zedong, even work in exhibitions orchestrated by the government was subject to critique. Because of the political risk inherent to artistic practice, many chose to give up public exhibitions in the interest of personal safety.

That the young people of the No Name Group decided to make their gamble in 1974 is particularly significant. From the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 until 1969 was a time of crazed violence during which the Red Guards were encouraged to destroy all social organizations and national institutions outside of the military. Beginning in 1969, young students were sent to villages in the countryside in order to engage in a militarized system of agricultural labor, with the twin goals of ending the reign of chaos in the cities and solving the

crises of unemployment and faltering production caused by violent struggle. In 1971, Mao's political partner in the Cultural Revolution, Lin Biao, fled suddenly under mysterious circumstances and was killed in a plane crash. A year later, Zhou Enlai was diagnosed with terminal cancer, allowing Deng Xiaoping to return to Beijing to assist the work of the central leadership. The bizarre death of Lin Biao changed the outlook of the hot-blooded youth of the moment seemingly overnight, forcing them to reconsider the rationality of this political struggle in the midst of their hardships in the countryside. Many would later become pioneers of the resurgence and liberalization of art and culture. More importantly, the military management of daily life and ceaseless political study began to loosen, allowing young people more time and space to themselves. Urban factories began to require a larger workforce with the resuscitation of the economy, allowing many artists to return to the city. However briefly, 1974 marked a pause during which ideological pressure dissipated, drawing forth independent thinking and, for many young people, the possibilities of reading, writing, painting, and photography.

If a careful art historical analysis might posit the work of the No Name Group as a practice of landscape sketching that synthesized stylistic influences from Japanese Impressionism and Soviet Eastern European Realism, it would nonetheless appear difficult to consider it in relation to the "avant-garde," "modern," and "contemporary" art to come. In order to appreciate its exigencies, one must first understand the question of style in Chinese art after 1949. There can be no doubt that the most important element in this field was Mao Zedong. In contrast to the utilitarianism of Deng Xiaoping that would emerge later, Mao believed in a romantic form of art that would play a significant role in the revolution of culture and construction of a new China, and that the core role of art would be to serve the people—to serve politics. As soon as it was assigned this function, the content of art was required to override its style. On the question of the revolution in culture, Mao diverged from Lenin. Lenin believed that any new culture necessarily splintered off of an older culture, for instance, that Marxism was a fragment of Hegelianism, and realism of classicism. Mao in his later years, on the other hand, held that only through the total destruction of old culture could a new culture in the service of the people be constructed. From the onset of the Cultural Revolution, the art academies were closed even as institutions such as the Children's

02

The “decisive moment” refers to a particular moment at which elements including form, conception, composition, light, and events all perfectly coincide. Henri Cartier-Bresson elaborated this phenomenon in *The Decisive Moment* which became a defining classic of documentary photography. In 1949, he executed a large number of photographs during the last six months of the Kuomintang rule on the Mainland and the first six months of power for the Communist Party. In Beijing, he both photographed the last eunuchs and witnessed the establishment of a new sovereign power. For this reason, the “decisive moment” became a lasting principle of both Chinese and global realist photography and photojournalism. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment* (New York: Simon & Schuster, New York, 1952).

Palaces, factories, and villages established a variety of artistic training courses. In line with the slogan “Let a hundred flowers bloom and a thousand schools of thought contend,” the art of the New China involved a process of the eradication of difference: what was eliminated first was the traditional literati style, which clashed with the “mass line,” followed later by the strands of modernism introduced to China in the 1930s and, after the break with the Soviet Union in the 1960s, the socialist realism of the 1950s. What was left was simply realism. Under the banner of nationalism and localization, this form of realism was transformed into a style described as “red, bright, and shiny,” all the better to serve the people. In order to fulfill the requirements of political movements, works in this style often focused on figurative portraiture and historical subject matter, expressing the revolutionary sentiment of the artist. In order to avoid criticism or misinterpretation—deliberate or otherwise—in the course of political struggles, a general procedure was followed: “Among characters, righteous characters prevail; among righteous characters, heroes prevail; among heroes, major heroes prevail.” After 1972 this collection of directives was codified in the form of the high socialist style. Zhang Wei and the other painters of the No Name Group clearly belonged to another category. Put simply, they rejected without pause the style of socialist realism. Their work contains neither dignified figures nor stirring events; to the contrary, their vast and silent landscapes pursue a sense of vitality, of rich spiritual transformation amidst a gray palette. In a highly militarized and politicized society, this speechless lyricism towards nature implied courageous resistance to the vulgar politics of both artistic practice and public life. This, then, is the logical point of origin for new art from China.

With the passing of Zhou Enlai in January 1976, spontaneous memorial events gradually evolved into protests and condemnations of the Cultural Revolution. Although these activities were quickly repressed and labeled “counter-revolutionary,” the Cultural Revolution finally came to an end with the death of Mao Zedong some six months later. It took Deng Xiaoping until the late 1970s to clean up the political inheritance Mao left behind and take the reins of power at the national level, which was ultimately symbolized by his official overturning of the Cultural Revolution and his retroactive recognition of the legality of the memorial activities of 1976. Commonly referred to as the “Beijing Spring,” along the lines of the 1968 Prague Spring, the last three

years of the 1970s saw the arrival of freedom of speech and association for the urban elite, a consequence of this brief period of transition amongst the leadership. Although the Cultural Revolution had ended, radical youths in the cities continued to express their positions through the anarchist “Big-character posters” posted on the street, drawing from a series of concerns marked by complaints of injustice, reflections on the Cultural Revolution, and considerations of totalitarianism. In order to apply pressure to the political successors designated by Mao and earn the support of public opinion during the early phase of his leadership, Deng Xiaoping tacitly consented to the persistence of these forms of resistance; as soon as he had consolidated power, however, he began to stifle commentary and protest.

Photojournalist Liu Heungshing, who came to Beijing on behalf of *Time* magazine, documented the cultural life of the street and the changing lifestyles of this era, photographs of which were collected and published as *China after Mao* in 1983 in the United States. Focusing on everyday life and unintentional moments, Liu’s attention to detail asks the reader to consider the relationships between ordinary behavior and social transformation. For this reason, his style differs fundamentally from the propaganda photography that took hold in China under the influence of Henri Cartier-Bresson’s concept of the “decisive moment.”²⁴ Liu’s photographs clearly record the bits and pieces that made up daily life during that special historical time: the fading of the figure of Mao from public spaces, the university lecture hall as education resumed, the Big-character posters on the street, the demonstrations of artists. In particular, he followed and documented the Stars Group exhibition in 1979, and his photographs of that infamous event have become the classics of 20th century photography.

The Stars Group and Revolutionary Romanticism

Although the artists of the No Name and Stars Groups (星星画会) were similar in age, the history of the Stars Group began at a later date. Its original incarnation was actually very closely related to the underground literature scene that had evolved out of the posting of Big-character posters: Huang Rui was art editor of the publication *Today*, which he founded with the poets Bei Dao and Mang Ke. He was later joined at the journal by Ma Desheng, whose early print works, influenced by German Expressionism and Käthe Kollwitz

in particular, were largely intended as illustrations. German Expressionism was introduced to China by Lu Xun in the 1930s, and was one of the few modernist styles to be retained after 1949 due to its associations with war and poverty. It became influential for artists of the Stars generation at least in part because their parents were leftist, cultured youths before 1949, and later became cultural cadres in the government of New China.¹³³ For families like these, their lives would have been smooth, even privileged, until the Cultural Revolution. In contrast to the long-term sensations of marginalization and inferiority experienced by the artists of the No Name Group, this meant that the fall from grace entailed by the treatment of their families during the Cultural Revolution would have seemed even more profound for the artists of the Stars, a difference that is not lost in the way their work reflects on (and, to some degree yearns for) power. In his sculpture, Wang Keping, for instance, works through power by means of symbolism, irony, and destruction.

At the initiative of Huang Rui and Ma Desheng, the Stars Group was founded in 1979 with an understanding of art that diverged from that of the No Name Group, concentrating instead on a strong notion of political and social intervention. Indeed, they clearly insisted that participating artists “must be independent artists or professional artists ideologically opposed to the system,” and that “the group will concentrate on questions of contemporary politics, culture, and art history.”¹³⁴ This also explains how the Stars Group could lack a unifying style: their uniting element was instead the decision to express clear and topical political views, while their methods tended towards the literary in an amalgam of various romantic styles. This is evident in Huang Rui’s oil painting: *5 April 1976*¹³⁵ documents the political protests held in Tiananmen Square that year, but his mode remains that of revolutionary romanticism, a style that appears again in *Yuanmingyuan*.¹³⁶ The title of this work refers to the Old Summer Palace, the imperial park burned down in 1860 during the Second Opium War, which became a gathering place for poets and artists during the Beijing Spring. At the time, *Today* was introducing Heinrich Boll’s *Trümmerliteratur* or “rubble literature,” and, for this generation of artists, the Old Summer Palace came to symbolize both Chinese history and the personal tragedies of the Cultural Revolution. For Huang Rui, these ruins appear as tree trunks struck by lightning or solitary wanderers imbued with a sense of German romanticism. Artists of the

Stars Group preferred symbolic material like the Monument to the People’s Heroes in Tiananmen and the ruins of the Old Summer Palace, two diverging subjects that seemed to stand, respectively, for the political future and the cultural past.

As many open-minded officials resumed their posts in 1977, cultural policy began to ease. When the No Name Group took the lead in organizing an exhibition in 1979, the Stars Group, too, requested equal treatment, but, because of differences in scheduling, the artists of the latter group instead hung their works in the garden around the National Art Gallery in Beijing. When the exhibition was shut down, the artists took to the street and protested in support of the freedom of artistic expression. Through the reporting of overseas media, the event came to be seen as a surge of democratic yearning. Despite the fact that the government was eventually willing to compromise, the Stars exhibition was moved to another public site. By 1980, however, Deng Xiaoping had consolidated his grasp on power and hoped to guide reform through authoritarian rule; no longer requiring the support of public opinion, he began to tighten control over freedom of expression. Big-character posters were outlawed, *Today* and other underground publications were shuttered, and the exhibitions of the painting associations were no longer granted official approval. Deng’s basic policy was the rapid restoration of the social order that had been disrupted by the Cultural Revolution, and it was precisely the resumption of social order that began to divide art collectives like the Stars and the No Name Group. As Zhang Wei began to study abstract painting through exhibitions outside of China, some members persisted in socially marginal positions while others entered the academy for their studies. Many others, like Huang Rui, moved abroad under political pressure.

From the Streets to the Campus: The 85 New Wave

Even as street culture and underground activities were banned, the universities began accepting students, international exhibitions began to be held in China, and a large number of philosophical and cultural texts were translated. As a result of these initiatives, the cultural core of the moment shifted from the street to the university campus. In the first half of the 1980s, a large amount of Western material on modern and contemporary art was introduced to China, and many professors who had been banished from the academy

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For instance, Wang Keping, the son of Wang Lin, and Ai Weiwei, the son of Ai Qing, were both leftist cultural figures who spent time with the Communist Party in Yan’an. Similarly, Zhong Acheng (Ah Cheng) is the son of the drama theorist Zhong Dianfei who was banished alongside Liu Xun, former chairman of the Beijing Artists Association, during the Cultural Revolution. This explains why Liu Xun visited the Stars Group exhibition and opened the possibility of exhibiting in Beihai Park.

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Huang Rui and Ma Desheng, *A Constellation of Stars, Huang Rui and Ma Desheng: Art Editors, 1978–1983* (Beijing: Hadrien de Montferland Gallery, 2013), p. 32.

135

Huang Rui, *5 April 1976*, 1978, oil on canvas, 120 x 89 cm

136

Huang Rui, *Yuanmingyuan*, 1979, oil on canvas, 55 x 70 cm

07

In that era, the National Fine Arts Exhibition was the only official exhibition occurring periodically every few years. After 1979, it was planned every fifth year. Only through applying to this exhibition could artists achieve official recognition. After the Stars Group exhibition, many artists of the early 1980s continued to harbor illusions about the national exhibition, and believed that their avant-garde style would be accepted for the 1984 iteration. In the end, however, hardly any of them were recognized, spurring the foundation of many artist groups and painting organizations, in addition to planting the seeds for the exhibition that would later become “China/Avant-Garde.”

08

Wang Guangyi, “Purging Humanist Enthusiasm,” *Jiangsu Pictorial*, Issue 10 (1990), pp. 17–18.

09

A theory of the schema developed by Gombrich in his linguistic research was brought into the sphere of art in his publication *Art and Illusion*. As he mentions in his memoirs, when he was employed for the surveillance of German radio during World War II, he discovered that understanding a muddle phrase required advanced familiarity with its subject matter, which led to his conclusion that understanding often relies on accumulated knowledge. Drawing this argument into visual perception and art, he discovered the role of the “schema” or mental set in artistic practices. As he writes in *Art and Illusion*, “the schema is not the product of a process of ‘abstraction,’ of a tendency to ‘simplify;’ it represents the first approximate, loose category which is gradually tightened to fit the forms it is to reproduce.” Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 73–74. Originally delivered in 1956 as the A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and subsequently published by Princeton University Press in 1956.

10

The Pond Society Manifesto, as quoted in Huang Zhuan, “An Antithesis to the Conceptual: On Zhang Peili,” *Zhang Peili: Certain Pleasures*, Venus Lau and Robin Peckham, eds. (Shanghai: Minsheng Art Museum, 2011).

11

See for example, Zhang Peili, *Untitled (Gloves)*, 1988, oil on canvas, 100 x 134 cm; Zhang Peili, *X? Series: No. 4*, 1987, oil on canvas, 180 x 200 cm.

12

Geng Jianyi, *The Second Situation*, 1987, oil on canvas, 170 x 132 cm each (4 pieces)

13

Zhang Peili, *Brown Book No. 1*, 1988, 11 archival documents and one pair of gloves, dimensions variable

returned to take up their positions. With the academy at its center, the art world brimmed over with an atmosphere of self-confidence and openness, and artists reiterated a century of history—from Impressionism to Abstract Expressionism—within the space of a few years. Such experiments continued to be seen as radical, and artists fancifully believed that their experiments were of a piece with the economic reforms instituted by the government. For the government, however, this cultural experimentation was “spiritual pollution,” and many works in emerging styles were rejected from the 1984 National Fine Arts Exhibition.⁰⁷ But, following Courbet’s exclusion from the Salon of the 19th century, many artists were then motivated to found their own artistic groups and collectives, again organizing their own exhibitions. These small art groups constituted a new scholarly community, forming within civil society a system that could contend with the official exhibition system. Artists influenced by Western styles began to refer to “new wave art,” which, in combination with that particular moment in time, came to be known as the “85 New Wave.” This was a movement that would engulf Chinese art: artists believed their struggle was a continuation of the 1919 New Culture Movement, and that their mission was to drive Chinese art into a phase of “modernization.” Strictly speaking, the 85 New Wave was not a stylistic movement but rather marked a time of liberated conceptual thinking, and for this reason its styles and ideas appear diverse. Insofar as the artistic movements of the early 1980s generally originated in suspicion towards the norms of realism, the New Wave could be seen as a continuation of the No Name and Stars Groups. For many artists, the weapons of choice for resistance to realism included abstraction, expressionism, and modes drawn from psychoanalysis and existentialism.

Following the uproar of the 85 New Wave, however, some artists gradually came to believe that an artistic movement relying on literary fervor would only be able to advance to a limited stage. By 1987 many had turned against its spiritual and romantic leanings, maintaining that the notion of enlightenment in the movement had become too strong and that it had become too literary in structure, neglecting to consider the nature of art itself and consequentially mythologizing art in an overly romantic way. The artist Wang Guangyi has called this form of enlightenment-esque mythology “humanist zeal.”⁰⁸ Modernist art movements since the Stars Group had functioned as a portion of a larger picture of

humanism, as opposed to considering art through the spirit of a rational, disciplinary lens. Wang, on the other hand, sought to strip away the passions of humanism, moving away from both classicism and modernism and in the direction of contemporary art. Under the influence of Ernst Gombrich’s concept of “schema and correction,” he adapted a technique of flat painting to alter well-known images in a supposedly systematic way, using numbers, grids, and blocks to express a “rational” spirit of analysis and critique.⁰⁹

Beyond the 85 New Wave

Artists Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi were able to progress further on the level of critical reflection. They rapidly rose to fame in the 85 New Wave for their existentialist painting, but by that time they had already moved on and were working with influences from Dada, Duchamp, and “Poor Theater.” Organizing the well-known artist group Pond Society, they began to reconsider and ultimately challenge the narrative and spiritual qualities of art. For this group, the core work of art was “to obliterate the sacred in art,” because “the sacred is something you cannot see” (Pond Society Manifesto, 1985).¹⁰ Aside from the activities of the Pond Society, Geng and Zhang also agreed to create a series of works without individuality in their personal practices; Zhang adopted medical latex gloves as his subject, hoping to complete (or perhaps “produce”) 100 such flat, monochrome paintings, identical in almost every way.¹¹ Geng Jianyi chose to paint a series of bald, laughing men; the paintings allow no way to determine their identities or emotions, but present only repetitive faces that become as ossified as masks.¹² By reducing the technical elements and compositional changes of painting to an absolute minimum, Zhang and Geng cast doubt upon modernist positions on the spiritual nature of art and the sublime role of self-expression. At this point their suspicions turned also to the spiritual and romantic in the 85 New Wave. After completing some dozen glove paintings, Zhang Peili started work on an instruction manual explaining how to carry out the production of similar works and began mailing fragments of latex gloves to random people, further emphasizing the hidden violence enacted by forms of control like “standards” and “restrictions.”¹³ Geng Jianyi, too, began working with photocopied images in his work. In their anti-visual perspective, both artists work opened up an era of conceptual art beyond the image-centered realism of Chinese art.

Meaningful shifts in concept and methodology occurred also in Xiamen, where Huang Yongping and other artists organized two exhibitions under the mantle of Xiamen Dada in 1986 and 1987. After one exhibition they collected all of the works in a square and set fire to the pile; after receiving permission for the other, they suddenly changed their proposal and brought all kinds of discarded materials from outside of the exhibition venue into the space. Huang was attracted to the destructiveness and capacity for chaos offered by Dada: his choice was for the temporary and provisional. He has consistently sought spontaneity within his work, using the turntable or roulette wheel as a tool to produce randomness by choosing colors, sectors of the canvas, brushstrokes, and numbers of repetitions based on the spinning of the wheel.¹⁴ In this process, spontaneity—rather than the dullness of concept—becomes the work, making the wheel “non-expressive” rather than “self-expressive.” Here the artist realizes his opposition to the sentimentalism, self-aggrandizement, and complacency of painting in the 1980s.

The 1989 “China /Avant-Garde” Exhibition

Since Deng Xiaoping consolidated his grasp on power in 1979, the government’s stance toward the cultural elite has vacillated: they are necessary to the rallying cry of the market economy, but they must not stray too far. It is for this reason that slogans opposed to bourgeois spiritual pollution continued to resurface: to warn artists when they went too far. This elastic political reality, while it continued to incite some artists, allowed the artists discussed above to rationally reflect on concepts of the production and creation of art. When, in 1984, a large number of artists were rejected from the National Fine Arts Exhibition, they attempted to organize an exhibition in Beijing that would accommodate all of their pioneering experiments: the “Chinese Modern Art Survey” exhibition, or “China/Avant-Garde.” Lacking both funding and venue, the exhibition was continually postponed all the way up to 1989, when it was realized at the National Art Gallery. The development of Chinese art had been expeditious: in 15 years it had progressed from an exhibition of landscape oils in an apartment to demonstrations in the street, and from there to an exhibition of “avant-garde” art in the institution that would later become the National Art Museum of China. Paradoxically, by the time this exhibition opened, advocating the legitimacy of New Wave art, the movement itself had

already witnessed the pioneering suspicions and critiques of artists like Wang Guangyi, Zhang Peili, Geng Jianyi, and Huang Yongping. Exigencies of the social realities of the moment had positioned both the New Wave and those who would bring it to an end in the same exhibition, after which point all of their differences and distinctions would emerge.

At ten in the morning on February 5, 1989, the exhibition “China/Avant-Garde” opened at the National Art Gallery, including the work of some 100 artists and organized by a group of art critics. None of the participants or organizers knew, however, that only an hour later Tang Song and Xiao Lu would fire two shots from a handgun toward their own work. The exhibition was immediately closed and reopened several days later. For many who had already come to reconsider the New Wave, this moment marked its conclusion. As critic Li Xianting wrote on that very day:

“China/Avant-Garde” has lost the vigor of the 85 New Wave, but neither does it make any claim to prediction for the future based on the current development of modern art. The exhibition is, in fact, a conclusive retrospective, and this eagerness to look back signifies a certain loss of vitality in Chinese modern art. In addition, the fact that neither the organizers nor the participants hesitated to compromise in order to meet the conditions of bringing their work into most hallowed halls of Chinese art reflects a considerably traditional sensibility. One particularly important phenomenon around the exhibition is this: the recent work of many important figures of the 85 New Wave shows signs of having exhausted their talent, and these two gunshots served as the curtain call of the movement. The two shots fired by Tang Song and Xiao Lu brought on the “critical point” of the New Wave yet another moment earlier. This “critical point” marks the outer limit of the new concepts and forms avant-garde artists seek to impose upon society. This is, in itself, a spirit of modernity, as well as a unique phenomenon of Chinese modern art.¹⁵

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See for example, Huang Yongping, *Six Small Turntables*, 1988, mixed media, 50 x 40 x 16 cm.

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Li Xianting, “Two Gunshots: The Curtain Call of New Wave Art,” *What Matters is Not Art* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House, 2000), p. 254.

Boundary Riders of Korean Art in 1960s–1970s

Park Hyesung

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Introduction

In December of 1967, a crowd of young artists held a street demonstration in the middle of Seoul picketed with signs that read, “National Art Exhibition Only with Images of Seated Women,” “Art Works after Abstraction,” “Artists in Action,” “Contemporary Arts Are Intimate with the Public,” “National Development Starts from an Active Art Development Policy,” and “Korea without Contemporary Art Museum” and so on. ^[fig. 01] They were arrested by the police on the spot. These were the members of the Zero Group, the Origin Society, and the New Exhibition Group who had opened “The Coalition Exhibition of Young Artists” on the same day at the Central Public Information Center. They defined their activities as a

rebellion against the systemized art world with National Art Exhibition as a center of those days:

The established art world of Korea has been stuck in the recession of Informel. We should carry out a new movement without being left behind the times (contemporaneity)... In contrast with Informel that was rather the product of personal emotions, our avant-garde art should try to close distance with the public. In areas where Informel aims at anti-mechanism and humanism, the avant-garde art acknowledges the machine (or civilization) in which it can find human beings.

From the seminar of the Coalition Exhibition of Young Artists held in May of 1968.

It was only after the early 2000 that these short-lived activities of the young artists were given more focus and attention. Instead of being interpreted merely as a bitter criticism against established art, their activities have now been relocated in the context of politics, economy, and culture. Diverse practices of each artist have been introduced instead of being generalized with the collective labels. ^[2] The exhibitions and researches deconstructed the macro-narrative of chronological development of Informel from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, along with Monochrome paintings of the 1970s and Minjung art (political art for the grass-roots) movement of the 1980s. However, the activities of the young artists with wide latitude of value and meaning were still left with diverse layers of interpretation. It is necessary to examine their practices from the perspective of national category such as Korea, Japan, the United States, and Europe, thereby

fig. 01
Street demonstration of young artists, 1967.



reconstructing the original hybridity or polyphony of their practices from a view of “locality.” I am sure the international exhibition based on this seminar will be a catalyst for this trial.

I will examine Korean arts in the 1960s and '70s to focus on some issues mentioned from the announcement of this presentation. “Contemporaneity” that the young artists requested in the announcement is ambivalent because it doesn't only refer to a kind of obsession from non-Western countries' desire not to be left behind the international art trends after the enlightenment period of 19th century, but it also addresses a critical attitude against the prevailing surveillance and violence in Korean society during that time. It is involved with the next issues of the announcement; that is, the communication with the public and the relationship between civilization and human.

Anti-Informel/Post-Informel: Activism of “Action”

It was the Informel artists who had appeared as “the first avant-garde of Korea” 10 years ago. These young artists who also addressed themselves as “the avant-garde” showed resistance. The young artists one generation prior had found the model of improved culture in the Western avant-garde at a time when Korean society started to accommodate the principles of democracy and capitalism after experiencing colonization (1910–45), liberation (1945), war (1950–53) and national division. They revolted against authorities and the conservatism of the Korean National Art Exhibition, which they regarded as a product of Japanese colonial system and enthusiastically embraced the internationally prevailing “hot abstraction” of Informel style. Since the Korean War, artists were exposed both directly and indirectly to the American arts with the support of the United States and began to model their works after American Abstract Expressionism while abandoning the academic style of realism and lyrical semi-abstraction influenced by Japan. But the French term *informel* was selected to refer to this new style. Informel showed the complex geopolitical conditions of Korean culture and offered some important frameworks for understanding a variety of experimental art practices of the 1960s and '70s in Korea, for which I cannot help but examine first.

Michel Tapié (1909–87)'s visit to Japan in 1957 created a great sensation of Informel in Japan and also waked the echoes in Korea while abstract art had been developing as avant-garde. He extended the boundary of

Informel by including American artists as well as European ones. He defined it as “*Un art autre* (An Other Art)” that was against Cubism and geometrical abstraction and he praised individualism, authenticity, aggression, violence, and violation based on the legacies of Nietzsche and Dadaism.¹¹ It is well known that his ideas were closer to that of Harold Rosenberg (1906–78) who insisted on the integration of art and life through action on the arena of canvas and the negative spirit of Dada than that of Clement Greenberg (1909–94) who approached abstract art with the concept of aesthetic autonomy. His ideas were accepted by the members of the Gutai Art Association (1964–72) who had explored the body and action with Yoshihara Jirō (1905–72) as a leader. Their concern switched to the “materiality” on the canvas from “action” that was extended out of the canvas; this can be seen in the works of Shiraga Kazuo (1924–2008) and Murakami Saburō (1925–96). After their early “action” was forgotten, they were criticized for having lost their avant-garde spirit in confronting reality. Some young artists that belonged to Neo Dada Organizers and Hi Red Center in the 1960s situated their anti-art against Informel.

In Korea, Informel appeared both as a universal visual language that expresses the existence and free will of the generation who had gone through war and also as a manifestation of the spirit of resistance against the established system. The young artists in their early 30s labeled themselves as a combat unit of aesthetics by announcing the “anti-national exhibition” during the late 1950s. This was when political and economic crisis was rampant in every corners of society. Even though the issue of their originality was constantly given doubt, their attitude was seen as a predicative of the 4.19 revolution (1960).¹² They understood the canvas as an arena of action. However, they focused too much on the spirit of the time, materiality from brushstrokes, and textual expression rather than pioneering actions of early Gutai. In the early 1960s, the Informel style was accepted by traditional painting groups as well as the national exhibition system, and became mainstream.

It was against the authorized Informel that the young artists of the late 1960s were showing resistance. They developed some practices of post-flat surface or genre deconstruction in reaction to “a doctrinaire spirituality of *matière*.”¹³ They appeared in the art world claiming a “return to reality” in a dead end of abstraction art, and paid attention to the possibility of performance art such as events and happenings by chance from which they

¹¹ The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA) highlighted the conceptual arts, experimental arts, installation arts, and performance arts from the 1960s to '70s in the 2001 exhibition “Korean Contemporary Art from the mid-1960s to mid-1970s: A Decade of Transition and Dynamics” to shed light on the activities which had not been paid proper attention in the history of Korean modern art. This exhibition—focusing on small groups such as the Coalition Exhibition of Young Artists (1967), the Korean Avant-Garde Association (AG, 1969–75), the 4th Group (1970), and ST (Time & Space, 1971–81) that were short-lived but clearly claimed to advocate the avant-garde—restored lost works to their original sizes based on thorough research, and introduced hitherto unknown materials. It paved the way for stressing the necessity to situate such movements in their appropriate positions both in the genealogy of art history and art criticism. Six years later, in 2007, the MMCA historically examined the performance arts in the “Performance Art of Korea 1967–2007” exhibition. In addition, the Art Center of the Korean Culture & Arts Foundation held a series of solo exhibitions such as “Lee Seungtaek” (1997), “Park Hyunki” (1998), “Lee Kuryong” (1999), and “Kim Kulim” (2000).

¹² Michel Tapié, “An Other Art,” *Art in Theory 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds. (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993), pp.619–620.

¹³ The 4.19 revolution is a student revolt against political corruption, which removed the dictator from power.

¹⁴ Nakahara Yūsuke quoted in Park Sohyun, “Translocality of Korean Informel,” *Reading of Korean Contemporary Art*, Yoon Nanji et al. (Seoul: Noonbit, 2013), pp.77–78.

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The Japanese art critic, Miyakawa Atsushi, stated that the dialectics between material and human action in contemporary paintings entailed a kind of conceptual shift of what constitutes "expression," going beyond its merely formal dimension. The collapsing of the expressive action onto expression itself, in Informal, meant a self-objectification of expression. He also stated that Informel was an anti-art because the process of expression was re-conceptualized as every-day objects.

Miyakawa Atsushi, "Anforumeru ikō" [After Informal], *Bijutsu Techō*, No. 220 (May, 1963).

In Korea, however, various attempts of experimental art after Informel have been read only as anti-Informel.

found a new art form.⁶⁵ They were able to expand their action into activism to criticize the social and political system together with the artistic system. But it seemed like they were unable to fulfill this potential.

Young artists that belonged to small groups such as the Origin Society (Seo Seungwon [1941–], Choi Myungyoung [1941–], Lee Seungjo [1941–90] and Ham Seob [1942–]), the Zero Group (Choi Boonghyun [1941–], Kim Youngja [1940–] and Moon Bokcheol [1941–] so on) and the New Exhibition Group (Chung Chanseung [1942–94], Kang Kookjin [1939–92] and Chung Kangja [1942–] so on) made the artworks of Op art (geometrical abstraction), Pop art and Neo Dada. But they sparked many events after the coalition exhibition. What was produced in the late 1960s had a voice of criticizing the whole society after the 5.16 military coup (1960). They presented a number of unstable social symptoms: harmful consequences from abruptly developed economy, threatened democracy, and suppressed personal freedom in the face of the conflict between the South and North, and the repetition of demonstration and proclaiming of martial laws after the Korean-Japanese Treaty (1965) with ready-mades such as abandoned waste, medical appliances for surgery, broken containers, rubber gloves, skeleton masks, gas masks and so on. During this time, Lee Taehyun displayed a series of *Order* (1967) with gas masks and military backpacks [fig. 02](#); Choi Boonghyun produced *Human being 3* (1965) with black vinyl elements and mingled intravenous lines, and *Human being 5* in which he wrapped a mannequin with linen clothes and ropes. These works used metaphors to portray not only the existential death of human beings

but also depicted death-like life under the military dictatorship. Such attempts, however, could not last long due to the indifference of the art world and the lack of understanding by the public. Even the participants of *Happening with a Vinyl Umbrella and Candlelight* (1967) regarded these works as something new in Korea, which art critics from the latter generation read as signifying elements for criticizing civilization, denying the socio-political meaning while only emphasizing its aesthetic contingency.

Since then, they started to aggressively announce the death of the established art system and assumed activist aspects. Kang Kookjin, Chung Kangja, and Chung Chanseung buried themselves in the earth under the Han River's bridge. They crawled out by being dashed with water to expose themselves to journalists and the public. They put on clothes made of vinyl written, "cultural crooks," "cultural blinds," "cultural dodgers," "cultural illegalities," "cultural peddlers," "cultural acrobats" and so on, read them, then put them on fire before finally burying them. *Murder at a Side of Han River* (October 1968) [fig. 03](#) was a protest against social contradiction and habitual routines of the established art world. The 4th Group that was formed in 1970 also performed mime on street (July 1970) and *Funeral for the Established Culture and Art* (August 1970) in the period of surveillance and punishment before the October Revitalizing Reforms (1972). Kim Kulim (1936–), Chung Kangja, Son Ilkwang and Kang Kookjin proclaimed liberation of Korean culture at Sajik Park and celebrated the 25th anniversary of independence from Japan and read aloud a declaration to call forth a funeral for the established culture and art. They departed from the park with a white flag, along with a coffin decorated with flowers and the Korean flag, planning to cremate them at the riverside. But they were arrested in front of the National Assembly building and got a summary conviction. Some artists were expected to hold "The Incorporeal" exhibition to make spectators tense by blowing an abrupt siren in a dark and dry-iced space. This was to accuse the society as a source of confusion, but the show was closed by the government on the opening day. These happenings became rare after the 4th Group was dismantled. It was only after some years that another happening of a funeral was carried out at a graduation ceremony of Hongik University, *Hong family in mourning* (February 1975).

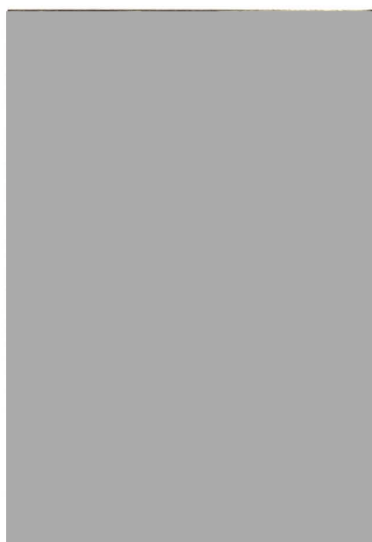
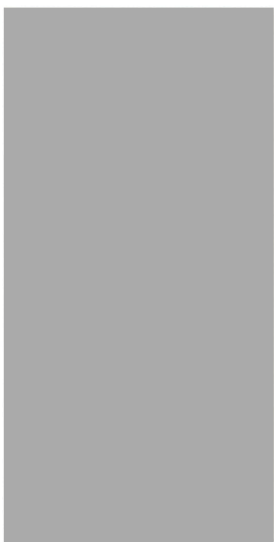
These activities were similar to those of Japanese anti-art groups like Zero Dimension that resulted in progressive political

fig. 02

Lee Taehyun, *Command 1*, 1967, gas mask, knapsack, 140 x 70 x 14 cm

fig. 03

Kang Kookjin, Chung Kangja and Chung Chanseung, *Murder at a Side of Han River*, 1968



happenings such as funerals on the street to criticize the Vietnam War. Nevertheless, although the activities of Japanese artists were stopped by the police, they were finally accepted in the name of art at the crest of economy and culture in Japan. In contrast to Japan, experimental arts in Korea as a channel for opinion on artistic or social freedom were prohibited because they posed threats to the military government. The regime wanted to maintain its power and forced the artists to turn from their direction of activism.

From Activism to Conceptualism

A society which doesn't allow political freedom doesn't allow personal freedom. A society which doesn't accept the contents doesn't accept the forms.

Kim Sooyoung, *Poem, Spit*

Performance arts began in the late 1960s and had developed until the early 1970s. But the artists couldn't help realizing the powerlessness of their activism when their performances were prohibited and suppressed as being labeled as a decadence or rebellion. From the middle of the 1970s and onwards, they started to focus only on the artistic concepts and logics, deconstruction of boundary of arts, or the reason of the existence and way of art.

The 4th Group was dissolved in less than one year because of government suppression, but artists from diverse areas such as fashion design, film-making, music, literature, drama, journalism, and religion, with Kim Kulim as their leader, announced unification of politics, economy, society, and culture into the level of arts under the idea of "Incorporeal (無體)."¹⁶ Kim Kulim produced the first avant-garde film *The Meaning of 1/24 Second* (July 1969)¹⁷ before organizing the 4th Group. Made of edited black-and-white 16mm films, it consisted of hundreds of meaningless and inconstant 1-second scenes and showed both boredom and violence of daily life in the developing country. He also ridiculed an old way of communication by mail in *The Relics from Mass-Media* project (October 1969). *Love Affair on a Piano* (September 1970), designed by Nam June Paik (1932–2006), was a kind of total art which united body and action, art and life, and time and space dramatized potential desire underneath the modern civilization. They were not new; similar works had been done by Fluxus or Hi Red Center in the West and Japan, but they were the first trial to overcome the boundaries of the established environment in Korea.

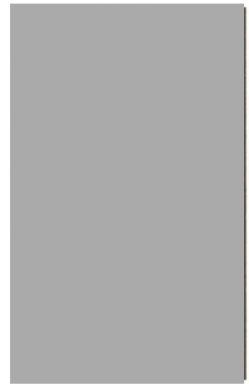
The Korean Avant-Garde Association (AG) advocating a Korean way of avant-garde approached artistic issues in a more conceptual fashion instead of simply criticizing absurdities of society. The association had artist members from various genres such as geometrical abstraction, installation, and happenings, which did not lead to a strong unity within the group. They embraced the Western trends of arts with agility while realizing the special condition of Korea of the time, and art critics Lee Yil (1932–97) and Oh Kwangsoo (1938–) provided them with a theoretical basis. They published four magazines and held four exhibitions (the 1st exhibition titled "Mechanism of Reduction and Expansion" in 1970, the 2nd "Reality and Realization" in 1971, the 3rd "The World Free from Conceptualism" in 1972, and the final 4th in 1975). They were disbanded when monochromatic paintings turned the tide, but they provided a missing link crossing the rupture of Informal, Monochromatic paintings and Minjung art.

At the 1st AG exhibition, Kim Kulim presented *From Phenomenon to Trace* to deal with issues of time, place, and space together with paintings by other artists reflecting the industrialized city. His works showed the change from a solid matter (ice cube) to fluid and finally to it evaporating in the flow of time. It was not based on the premise of immediate experience, but exposed both the "phenomenon" which demonstrated a single action and "trace," as a necessary result of the phenomenon with the time difference. Lee Kunyong (1942–) installed ladders and dust (*the Body 71-12*) and Shim Moonsoo (1942–) also presented pieces of trees in the gallery (*Combination of the Relationship*) at the 2nd show.¹⁸ At the same show, Seo Seungwon presented *Simultaneity* that was made with white Korean traditional paper instead of his usual geometrical abstraction paintings. This change can be regarded as a trial to find local characteristics from tradition through universal language. It was in 1975 that the exhibition of "Five Korean Artists, Five Kinds of White" was held in Tokyo Gallery.

Such trials can be found in the works of Lee Seungtaek (1932–) who has produced immaterial sculptures searching for the identity in traditional folk culture of Korea. From early on in his artistic career, he tried to solve the dilemma between Korea and the universe through tradition. It was the act to "tie" or "knot" that he thought as one of Korean unique experiences. "Tying" or "knotting" is a very familiar act with Korean *bojagi* (cloth-wrapper) culture, with which everything can be wrapped regardless of size and shape of the content. It is very flexible compared with usual

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These artists asserted that the theory of the "incorporeal" was borrowed from the Taoist philosophy of "leaving nature as it is," and rejected the separation of mind from materials. Cho Sujin, "The Whole Story of the 4th Group: Challenge and Frustration of Happenings," *Magazine of Art History*, Vol. 40 (2013).



17

Kim Kulim, *Meaning of 1/24 Second*, 1969

18

It can be assumed that both Lee Kunyong and Shim Moonsoo were familiar with the works of Japanese artist, Takamatsu Jirō, which were presented one year ago.

08

Yi-Fu Tuan, a humanistic geographer, differentiated “place” and “space.” The former is specific, familiar, finite, and experiential, while the latter is more abstract, unfamiliar, infinite, and free. He states, “place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other.” Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p. 3.

09

Lee Kangso presented *Untitled 75031* at the 9th Paris Biennale in 1975. There, he constructed a post in the middle of the exhibition space, laid chalk powder around it, and attached to it a rooster by its legs with a cord. As the rooster wandered in the frame of space created by the artist, however limiting, it left impressions of its movement on the exhibition space floor. After the three-day event, Lee photographed the space filled with the indexical imprint of the rooster, and displayed them on the walls of the space, alluding to the relationship between “reality” and “image.” Lee oftentimes made spectators participate in his works such as in the “Extinction” (also known as the “Tavern Project”) exhibition at the Gallery Myungdong, Seoul, in 1973.

10

“Events” originated from the performance arts of Fluxus. John Cage (1912–92) and his followers called their events “musical happenings” so as to separate them from Allan Kaprow (1927–2006)’s happenings which are known to be the first of its kind. Art historian Kang Taehee guessed that the term “event” came from Japan, because Lee Kuryong conducted events after he heard about the Japanese trends from Kim Kulim who had studied by himself in Tokyo. The events of Tokyo Fluxus were more sensational and dramatic than those of Fluxus. Kang Taehee, “Performance Art in 1970s: on the Works of ST Members,” *Study of Contemporary Art History*, Vol. 13 (2001), pp. 8–10.

fig. 05

Lee Seungtaek, *Boards Carried Away by Flood with Being Caught on Fire*, 1964

fig. 06

Lee Seungtaek, *Wind Action*, 1971

packaging. Since the late 1950s, he has been consistently giving shape to the concept of “tying” or “knotting” through works such as *History and Time* (1958), *Tied Stones* (1958), *Installation with an Old Tree* (1965) and *Life and Death* (1968). After 1960, he started to search the immateriality in *Smoke* (1960), *Cremation* (1964) and *Boards Carried Away by Flood with Being Caught on Fire* (1964), [fig. 05](#) and finally reached the whole series of *Wind*. [fig. 06](#)

Introduced at the 2nd AG exhibition, the *Wind* series was a shapeless sculpture which criticized the art system and the art market where the artworks were sold as a mere commodity. The motif was supplied from Shamanism that was losing its ground in the industrialized society, such as patches of cloth fluttering in the wind in a shrine to the village deity or a divinized old tree in a country, or in a ritual for a big catch of fish. His works were collections of visualization of the invisible, meeting of matter and non-matter, and revelation of situation. His artworks were free, flexible and anti-artificial. The concept of wind “as it is” uncontrolled by human being shared the issues of time, space, and place of contemporary arts. His uniqueness was based on his view of Taoism, East Asian traditional philosophy in which nature included human beings in a way that was not objectified. Lee aspired for a postmodern space of nature or “a space that expands endlessly.” His intent was to convert vague space into a more mediated place. [15](#)

At the 3rd AG exhibition, the number of works exploring materiality, process, and concept increased. Kim Kulim tied a lump of mud with linen cloth and untied it in his *From Phenomenon to Trace*; Lee Kuryong made a stone tied to a pillar of the gallery faced with another one laid on the floor in his *Relation Term*; Lee Kangso (1943–) showed a stuffed white-painted rooster, its footsteps scattered on the floor, and displayed nine dried fish tied with rope on a black coffin. [16](#)

At the last AG exhibition, during which

only four members joined, Lee Kuryong did events like *Logic of Place*, *Threading a Needle*, *Hello, There* and so on. The two former artists dealt with the logical measuring of a place. The latter and another event, “Eating Hardtack” presented in the same year, metaphorically criticized the sense of reality where the body was restricted by external conditions. Since then, he named his works “event” or “logical event” in which he solved the relationship between the world and an accident logically. He differentiated them with impromptu and accidental happenings and socio-critical happenings. [17](#) In *Logic of Place* he revealed the concept of place by drawing circles and showed the placeness of *Here and There*. He sought to achieve accidents and concrete concepts by making the relationship between the body of a subject who drew circles and place. After playing *Cutting and Connecting Tapes* (August 1975) he wrote an article to point out that the conceptual art of the time was confined because artists opted out of direct relationship with the world only dealing with information and knowledge, and he stated that those artists couldn’t realize the world objectively because they focused only on the action itself. He said that his events were logical accidents overcoming these shortcomings and this is what Asians had desired.

Lee Kuryong had been realizing these concepts with the group of ST (Time & Space) from 1970. Except for Seong Neungkyung who displayed newspapers by cutting out all socio-critical articles and leaving out commercial advertisements and photos, all members, including critic Kim Bokyoung (1942–) and Lee as leaders, studied the issues of concrete experiences and the place where such experience was made. Lee introduced *Corporal Term* [fig. 07](#) at the 10th Korean Art Society exhibition in 1970 and at the 8th Paris Biennale three years later, where it was appraised that it demanded to pay attention to the underground life and the geographical

