



Korean artist Lee U-fan's "Relatum — Dialogue X" displayed at the Versailles Palace in France in June. Lee was brought into the spotlight last year as "dansaekhwa," or Korean monochrome painting, was appreciated internationally.

Courtesy of Chateau de Versailles

Ups, downs in art world

Artist Lee U-fan up, MMCA director Chung Hyung-min down

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The year 2014 enlivened the dullness of the Korean art world after a long slump. "Dansaekhwa," or Korean monochrome painting, was re-illuminated internationally and fetched millions of dollars at auctions. Also, at the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale, the Korean Pavilion commissioned by architect Cho Min-suk won the Golden Lion award for the first time in the nation's history. However, the nation's flagship art museum was also stained by the corruption of its director, who was relieved of her post for allegedly hiring acquaintances.

'Dansaekhwa' revisited

Dansaekhwa refers to the art movement born in Korea in the 1960s. The movement refers to monochromatic paintings as the name of the school implies, but it captures the essence of simplicity.

Honam University professor Yoon Jin-sup, an expert in dansaekhwa, said Korean dansaekhwa represents self-discipline as a result of repetitive action. It embraces Korean traditional values as well as aspirations toward freedom, leaving the viewers to appreciate art in a wider way.

Last year, many exhibitions shed light on dansaekhwa both inside and outside the country. Kukje Gallery hosted a major exhibit

"The Art of Dansaekhwa" last fall, highlighting works of seven dansaekhwa artists including Chung Sang-hwa, Ha Chong-hyun, Park Seo-bo, Yun Hyong-keun as well as Lee U-fan.

Art collectors also eyed dansaekhwa artists and the price of their works skyrocketed last year.

Among them, Lee, 78, who is known for his monochrome paintings as well as minimalist sculptures using rocks and steel sheets, received a lot of attention from collectors.

His works set records at art auctions last year. In May, Lee's 1979 work "From Point" fetched 1.67 billion won (about \$1.6 million) at Christie's Hong Kong, exceeding its estimate, while "From Line No. 760219" was sold for \$2.17 million at Sotheby's contemporary art auction in last November, setting a record for Lee's artwork traded in New York.

Lee also held an exhibit at the Versailles Palace in France from June to November, adorning the luxurious place with profound sculptures exploring the relations between nature and industrialism.

Los Angeles-based gallery Blum & Poe hosted an extensive survey on dansaekhwa titled "From All Sides: Tansaekhwa on Abstraction" in September, while Park held a solo exhibit at Galerie Perrotin in Paris, France in November.

MMCA at crossroads

The National Museum of Modern and Con-

temporary Art (MMCA) had its ups and downs last year.

The nation's leading art museum opened its downtown Seoul branch in November 2013 and attracted over 1 million visitors in just one year, proving the need for a "good" museum in Korea. The MMCA's three branches, including Seoul, Gwacheon and Deoksugung, had a total of 2.33 million visitors, more than double the 1.18 million visitors of 2013.

The MMCA Seoul invited internationally famed artists such as Indian video artist Shirin Neshat, Danish artist Jesper Just and Argentine conceptual artist Leandro Erlich and highlighted the beauty of Korean through art in the exhibit "Korean Beauty."

The nation's top automobile company Hyundai Motor sponsored 12 billion won to MMCA until 2023.

However, MMCA director Chung Hyung-min, who successfully led the opening of the new Seoul branch, was accused of hiring her student as a curator of the museum. The Board of Audit and Inspection requested an investigation into Chung's corruption in the recruitment process as she is suspected of intervening in hiring her student in October.

It was the first time an MMCA director has been removed from a post and investigated by the prosecution in its 45-year history, revealing the dark side of factionalism in Korean art circles.

Currently, the national museum has Yoon



Chung Hyung-min, left, former director of National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), explains artworks to president Park Geun-hye at MMCA Seoul in this November 2013 file photo. Chung was relieved of post for allegedly hiring her acquaintances at the museum.

Yonhap

Nam-soon, its secretary general of planning and management, serving as acting director. A new MMCA director will be announced soon.

Growth in art world

Kim Chang-il, internationally noted art collector and gallery owner, opened four art museums last year, showcasing his life-long collection worth some 150 billion won.

In September, he opened Arario Museum in Space, which transformed the iconic Space Building in central Seoul. Kim maintained the building's structure as it is and displayed the best from his collection ranging from the world's most expensive artists to emerging Asian talents.

Later that month, Kim revealed three more museums on Jeju Island. He purchased a former movie theater building and transformed it into an art museum, displaying works of top class artists such as Kohei Nawa, Subodh Gupta, Zhang Huan and Sigmar Polke. Kim plans to open another art museum on Jeju Island this year.

Architect Cho Min-suk pulled the level of Korean architecture by curating the "Crow's Eye View: The Korean Peninsula," which reflects the history of architecture of South and North Korea, at the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale.

After winning the Gold Lion for the exhibition, Cho offered another architectural exhibit at Plateau in Seoul. Cho explores his principles in design at this mid-career survey titled "Before/After Mass Studies Does Architecture."