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Museum Visitors' Experiences of Viewing Korean Art

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Museum Visitors' Experiences of Viewing Korean Art

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Abstract

Museum Visitors' Experiences of Viewing Korean Art

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This research focuses on revealing the entrance narratives that visitors bring into the process of viewing Korean art. This qualitative case study is based on the Arts of Korea gallery at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Using semi-structured interview as the tool, I gathered narratives related to the Korean artworks on display from sixteen visitors as well as the curator in charge of the gallery. The analysis of the responses shows how visitors' personal interest, taste, experience, and cultural background affect the viewing of Korean art. The study corroborates the notion that visitors engage with works of art on a very personal level by entering the museum with their own prior knowledge and experience, which could relate to the objects (Falk & Dierking, 1992, 2000, 2009; Hein, 1998, 1999; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, 1999). Using visitors' entrance narratives as negotiation points in the gallery will foster a more dynamic interaction between visitors and Korean art. Furthermore, acknowledging what visitors bring into the Korean gallery could serve as a platform to learn what they take away from the exhibition.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Diversity” has many implications in the field of Art Education. Among the many issues of cultural diversity, I have narrowed my focus to the representation of the Korean culture through the display of art and how this cultural identity is received by museum audiences. While it is important to study how museums represent Korean art to the public through their curatorial practice, we should also put equal weight on examining the audience’s experience of viewing the art through an educational perspective. The focus of my research lies on the audience’s interaction with Korean art. It examined what the audience actually experiences when they interpret works of Korean art at a Western museum and identify varying interpretive strategies that they engage in the meaning-making process. The questions derived from this issue also include how Korean art is received by the audience and how their different cultural backgrounds affect the interpretation of Korean art. For this study, it is also necessary to examine how the representation of Asian art is performed within a Western context, followed by a study of how Korean art is portrayed within the context of Asia as a whole. By studying how the artworks are received by the audience, I present implications for enabling both authentic and dynamic understandings of Korean art.

The site for my research was the Arts of Korea gallery, which opened to the public in 2007, at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The opening of a permanent gallery exclusively focusing on the art of Korea was the first of its kind in the southwest. With the exception of a few objects that have been acquired by the museum, most of the

displayed artworks are from the Korean ancient and classical age and are on long-term loan from the National Museum of Korea.

CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What interpretations of Korean art and culture are made by visitors to the Korean gallery of an American art museum? How do the visitors' entrance narratives influence their interpretations of Korean art? In what ways do visitors' entrance narratives interact with Korean cultural knowledge and information in interpreting the objects in the Korean gallery?

PROBLEM STATEMENT

There have been a number of studies focusing on how museums present elements that define a certain culture as a whole (Geertz, 1973; Karp & Lavine, 1991; Karp, Kratz, Szwaja & Ybarra-Frausto, 2006; Khan, 2000). There is relatively little research that focuses exclusively on the representation of Korean culture through the display of art. Within this broad topic, I narrow my scope of research to the audience's interaction with Korean art. I realized that it would be difficult for museums to engage visitors in meaningful interpretation of Korean art without knowing the visitor's motivation for visiting a Korean art gallery and the extent of their prior knowledge.

Thus, I wish to fill this gap by learning what visitors actually experience when they interpret works of Korean art at the museum and what varying interpretive strategies emerge as they engage in the meaning making process. The questions derived from this

issue also include how Korean art is received by the audience and how their different cultural backgrounds affect the interpretation of Korean art.

PERSONAL MOTIVATION FOR RESEARCH

My personal motivation for this research originates with two different sources. Studying the audience experience of viewing Korean art is meaningful to me since I had the opportunity to take part in the process of developing the Arts of Korea gallery at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH) in 2007. Also, I was engaged in postmodern art theories during my years of prior education and I have constantly felt the urge to study these in more depth, especially in relation to the field of museum education.

My connection to Korean art display began when I started my professional career in the art world at the National Museum of Korea (NMK) in 2007. During my year at the museum, I was based in the international relations and exhibition team, and the main focus of my work was facilitating cultural exchange with other countries. One of my primary projects that I was involved in was the permanent installation of the Arts of Korea Gallery at the MFAH. The NMK lent more than thirty objects to the MFAH for this project. While participating in the process of displaying Korean art in an American museum's gallery, I became curious regarding how this culture of "others" would be uniquely experienced in connection with the cultural identity and personal backgrounds of the American audience.

In 2009, I came to Austin, Texas and started another academic journey the following year. Over the three and a half years I spent in Austin, I was able to visit the

MFAH several times. As the number of my visits to the Arts of Korea gallery at the MFAH increased I have become aware of a change in my way of viewing the gallery. I began to develop a genuine interest in the visitors who came to see the objects. On my initial visit to the gallery, I was excited by the simple fact of its existence. Starting a new life in a different country, I was merely glad to see artworks that reminded me of home, let alone my first job at a museum. My desire to learn about the responses of non-Korean visitors toward the Korean artworks deepened as I began to study in America and communicate with Americans. Also, transferring my Master's program from Art History to Museum Education empowered me to put an emphasis on the "audience." Through the graduate courses that I joined at school, I cultivated a passion to engage with museum visitors and to learn what goes through their minds when they look at works in an art museum.

Also, I realized that new questions had emerged for me in relation to the audience. On my very first visit to the gallery, my impression of it was largely derived from the material features—such as the setting, connection between the objects, and display method—of the gallery. By putting an emphasis on the "audience," however, I began to see beyond the surface. I sharpened my vague curiosity towards the visitors by asking: How would the visitors engage with the Korean art objects?

With this general concept in mind, I began to develop in-depth questions related to the visitors' interpretation of the objects: How is the Korean cultural sensibility delivered by the objects and the gallery setting? Would the visitors be able to perceive and receive this sensibility? If so, how? Would there be a way to enhance this process of

understanding? What would the viewers notice first when they look at the objects? What would follow in relation to this impression? What do they want to know? Or do they even want to know at all? Is their preference for appreciating the objects for their sake or learning about the culture? What is the unique cultural experience delivered by Korean artworks? How would it be different from listening to Korean music, attending a performance, eating Korean food, or something else that involves senses in addition to “vision”?

These questions also made me reflect back on myself: How do I look at artworks from other cultures? How does my own established knowledge interact with the process of looking at those artworks? How much cultural information do I absorb through art? These are some of the questions that encouraged me to study a topic related to Korean art and its audience and helped me generate the final research questions for my thesis.

My additional motivation for examining the audience’s active meaning-making process in the art museum stems from my previous thesis, conducted in Korea. During my graduate school years in Seoul, I became fascinated by postmodernist theories that examine the diverse factors that foster cultural production. I became curious about the relationship between the artist and viewer and the diverse possibilities of interpretation in art. My interest in these areas motivated me to write my master’s thesis, “The Characteristics of Allegory in Postmodern Art.” In this thesis, I studied Craig Owens’ allegorical method, which presents postmodern art as containing the “allegorical impulse” and considers that meanings are developed by layering texts. I explored this method as a way of explaining the multifaceted meanings of postmodern art and as a way

of reflecting social and cultural reality. The method also affected my approach towards examining how the visitor constructs meaning of the object and enabled me to hold a social constructivist perspective when developing my research question. This perspective was derived from my previous study of postmodern art and theories, which shaped my view of understanding visitors based on the assumption that they perceive art through their individual contexts. This subsequently leads them to develop subjective, varied, and multiple meanings from the objects. The studies done in Korea also spurred my interest in the specific cultural settings in which the visitors engage with life so that I am able to understand the place from which those meanings are derived.

PROFESSIONAL MOTIVATION

My previous experiences have fostered my interest in the social, cultural, and political contexts surrounding the museum as a vital part of the social system. These experiences prompted me to learn how education performed in the museum can empower the audience to ponder notions of representation and cultural identity. My professional motivation for research rests on this continuum. I was curious about how to enable visitors to gain an authentic experience when viewing the arts of Korea. The meaning of “authentic” can be derived from two different aspects (Crew & Sims, 1991). Visitors can have an authentic learning experience of Korean art through participating in culturally sensitive education programs. On the other hand, it also means the visitors can have an authentic experience on an individual level by putting on their own lenses when viewing Korean art and involving their personal backgrounds in the interpretation process. Thus, I

wanted to find possible ways to empower visitors to acknowledge and think about their own identity and gain a more full understanding of another culture at the same time.

In addition, I was motivated to conduct this research since I believe this will be of beneficial value when I go back to my country and work as a museum educator. I expect my experiences and the results I gain from this study will particularly be helpful in my future work, which would focus on delivering Korean art to foreign countries. Based on the results from this study, I hope to be able to suggest more efficient ways to introduce this art to audiences coming from various cultural backgrounds. By investigating the reciprocal activity between the museum and the audience, I believe my research will contribute to broadening the understanding of Korean culture through art.

SPECULATION ABOUT THE INVESTIGATION (BEFORE EMBARKING ON THE RESEARCH)

Through this study, I expect to find that the foundation of visitors' interpretations of Korean art is based on their personal backgrounds. Through my research, I assume that the visitors will actively integrate their personal, social, and cultural backgrounds, derived from memories and past/current experiences in the process of viewing Korean art. I also speculate that their extrinsic contexts will affect the interpretation of the objects. I hypothesize that their interpretation of the art will be based on the didactic and contextual information presented to them by the museum. By using these materials as stepping stones, however, I anticipate that each visitor will go further in this process by bringing their own unique experiences of making meaning from the objects. I expect to discover common themes and topics that emerge from their interpretation process by

studying the experience of visitors who do not come from a Korean background. This might reveal what the visitors perceive the elements of Korean culture to be and the factors that affect their interpretation of the culture.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I conducted qualitative research by adopting case study as my primary methodology for this investigation. I selected the site of my research as the Arts of Korea gallery at the MFAH and framed the case to encompass the individuals' unique experience of viewing Korean art. I adopted case study as my research method because the understanding of the situation of the site was fundamental to my research (Creswell, 2009; Stake, 1995; Swanborn, 2010; Yin, 2012). Since I believed gaining background knowledge about the Arts of Korea gallery is essential to addressing my research problems, I attempted to interweave contextual information into the explanation of visitors' viewing process to identify the case and gain answers to my research questions.

I conducted a semi-structured interview with the visitors of the Arts of Korea gallery at the MFAH and also with the Curator of Asian Art who was in charge of the gallery installation (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2009). I categorized the data collected from this process into seven themes. The interconnection of these themes built a coherent framework that helped me answer my research questions.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Cultural dynamic: Shared experiences, beliefs, customs, and values that influence the visitors' interpretations of the object.

Entrance narrative: What individuals already know when they enter the Arts of Korea gallery. This knowledge is associated with the visitors' prior experience, personal memories, and emotions. The examination of the visitors' entrance narrative is conducted under the assumption that visitors enter the Korean gallery usually because they already have some level of interest in Korean culture and some knowledge about it (Doering & Pekarik, 1996; Stainton, 2002).

The Arts of Korea Gallery at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH):

Individual display rooms located at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, which exclusively and permanently display collections of traditional and contemporary Korean artworks. The gallery was opened to the public in 2007 and is the first Korean art gallery installed in the southwest United States.

Personal dynamic: An awareness of personal needs, interests, and abilities that influence the visitors' interpretations of the object (Falk & Dierking, 2000).

Social dynamic: The combination of social interaction, structure, and positioning that influences the visitors' interpretation of the object. (Falk & Dierking, 2000).

LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

My research approached the visitors' experience at the Arts of Korea gallery by focusing on their individual backgrounds. Therefore, I did not categorize the demographic of the audience group based on their ethnicity, age, gender, education level, income, or occupation. Also, since my interviewees represent only a small portion of the general

museum visitors at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the analysis and result of the data might not apply to other Korean art galleries at other various museums in the U.S.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study introduces the multifaceted aspects of the entrance narratives of the Arts of Korea gallery visitors. The information includes personal and cultural issues from the individuals who decided to enter the gallery specializing in Korean arts. The findings from this research could be included in the museum education field in order to develop programs that represent diverse cultural identities and to facilitate diverse interpretations and communication methods.

OVERVIEW OF THE FOLLOWING CHAPTERS

The following chapters focus on delineating the visitors' experience at the Arts of Korea gallery at the MFAH focusing on their individual backgrounds. Chapter 2 explores the literature framing how the museum integrates the concept of cultural diversity and discusses aspects of contextual learning in museums. Chapter 3 discusses in detail the methodology I adopted for this research. Furthermore, in this chapter I define my role as a researcher in this study and elucidate the tool for gathering and analyzing data. In Chapter 4, I illustrate my own story related to the research site and present the story from the Curator of Asian Art at the MFAH as well. The remainder of the chapter unfolds the themes developed from my interviews with the Arts of Korea gallery visitors. Chapter 5 concludes the thesis by explaining my findings from this research. I present an in-depth

perspective on the visitors' entrance narratives and interpret how they affect the viewing process of Korean art.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

REPRESENTING “CULTURES” IN THE MUSEUM

My research is grounded in an examination of how the museum encompasses the concept of cultural diversity and also how exhibiting art in a museum broadens the visitors' understandings of culture and its value. Thus it is crucial to first investigate the underlying principles and values of exhibiting non-Western cultures, and how these exhibits have affected multicultural museum practices. A number of publications provided me with insights into the concept of representing culture in the museum (Geertz, 1973; Karp et al., 2006; Penny, 2002). These publications were helpful in familiarizing me with the increased presentation of varied ethnic identities in cultural institutions. They convey strategies and examples of how the cultural ideas and practices, particularity of non-Western identities, can be effectively represented to the public. I discovered that the majority of the literature takes an anthropological point of view and mostly focuses on representations of African art as ethnographic objects. However, some of these ideas and perspectives can also be adapted to the specific conditions of exhibiting Asian art. The following writings in particular assisted me in forming the framework of my general concept of cultural representation.

Exhibiting Cultures, edited by Karp and Lavine (1991), focuses on the problems and issues entailed in multiculturalism in the museum. The authors do more than simply evaluate the narrative of museum practice that contains problematic issues of cultural representation. They present an overview of the distinct methods that are used by the

museum to represent non-Western cultures and take a closer look at the aspects of these cultures emphasized in this process. The writings also investigate how the extrinsic contexts of the museum affect this process. The logic that controls a culture's portrayal in a museum primarily puts emphasis on the culture's otherness and difference (Karp & Levine, 1991).

For example, Karp (1991) defines an exhibiting strategy called "exoticizing," in which the "other" is "represented primarily as different" (p. 375). Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1991) explanation of "in context," which "entails particular techniques of arrangement and explanation to convey ideas," supplements this method of "exoticizing" (p. 390). The "in context" approach assists viewers to construct a theoretical frame of reference by presenting didactic materials such as long labels, maps, charts, and tours. Since this approach asserts the "power of classification and arrangement" over the objects, it enables the museum to have more control and authority in constructing the display (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1991, p. 390).

However, Karp (1991) adds that museum exhibitions can take an opposite stance by adopting an "assimilating" strategy. This method enables the visitors to "assert that the people of other cultures are no different in principle than the producer of the image, or that the differences that appear so great are only surface manifestations of underlying similarities" (p. 375). The Arts of Korea gallery at the MFAH demonstrates such a strategy of assimilation. The gallery emphasizes "similarities between the aesthetic that is involved in appreciating the object in a museum and the aesthetic assumed to have been involved in its making" (p. 376). For example, the gallery encourages visitors to

concentrate on the aesthetic features of the artwork by using independent cases made of non-reflective glass to highlight certain objects and avoiding the presentation of extensive information.

The “assimilating” practice is one way of categorizing the Arts of Korea gallery; Marzio’s (1991) perspective on exhibiting art from minority cultures is undoubtedly applicable. Marzio (1991), the MFAH’s former director, who oversaw the Korean gallery installation in 2007, questions “how much interpretive information should be provided and how should [it] be presented” (p. 125). He claims that the MFAH tries to encourage the visitors to “focus on the works of arts themselves” by excluding long labels that “explain” the art (p. 125). This is to prevent visitors’ from believing that non-Western art needs some sort of “anthropological or sociological interpretation” (p. 126).

Gurian (1991) brings a more audience-centered approach to this topic. She presents exhibition strategies of content presentation, chosen by the exhibition producers, that will enable museum visitors to feel more empowered in learning about other cultures. Such strategies should be based on the museum’s acute understanding of visitors’ prior knowledge. Developing the tool to empower visitors to connect their background to the Korean objects, therefore, should not be based on the museum’s “unexamined belief about the visitors’ capacity to learn.” Instead, museum professionals should generate methods that encourage interaction between viewers and the objects. As Bourdieu (1984) describes, “a work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded” (p. 3). In this sense, it is crucial to detect what this “code” is for the visitors to the Arts of Korea gallery. Also it is

necessary to examine how their process of “encoding” is accompanied and facilitated by the museum’s exhibition strategy.

Although there are a few contemporary artworks in the Arts of Korea gallery, the majority of the objects are categorized as ancient and traditional. The celadons and porcelains adorned with auspicious symbols, the Buddhist sculpture, and many other items once had ornamental or religious functions. Stocking, Jr. (1985), in *Objects and Others*, discusses the aesthetic dimension of the objects in relation to this aspect of the material culture. Due to the utilitarian function of the artworks,

their aesthetic element could only be isolated by abstraction, [and] have often had their functions transferred to the products of Western technology. . . . Thus objects of ‘material culture’—which in traditional contexts often had spiritual value—are respiritualized (in Western terms) as aesthetic objects, at the same time that they are subjected to the process of the world art market. (p. 6)

Therefore, objects from non-Western places can be classified as either a cultural artifact or fine art. According to Clifford (1985), even though the names of individual artists (or craftsman) are unknown, in the art museum an object is “identified as the creation of an individual,” “its place in everyday cultural practices is irrelevant to its essential meaning,” and “[the object] is primarily ‘beautiful’ or ‘original’” (p. 242). Likewise, the majority of the objects displayed in the Arts of Korea gallery are detached from their original context and placed in a different time and space. To some extent, they are also intended to draw attention to the surface and be appreciated in terms of their physical attractiveness and creativeness.

Lastly, *Museums and Difference*, edited by Sherman (2008), suggests a perspective of exploring the relationships of different cultures in the museum. The essays

discuss cultural difference in relation to “identity,” and suggest that the very activity of representing cultural diversity could promote cross-cultural understanding. By regarding the museum as the site of negotiating “difference,” the case studies show the museums’ attempt to embrace “differences of disciplinary and professional background, differences among the authors’ position in relation to museums, differences of voice, tone, [and] of approach” (Sherman, 2008, p. 16). These cases exemplify how museums broaden the range of interpretations of its collections and reflect the societal diversity by incorporating various exhibition developments and by embracing the audience based on the diversity agenda. It is the responsibility of the present day museum to support these experimental forms of art and become more dynamic instead of merely displaying objects on the wall in the traditional format of the white cube and remaining in its passive state. Cases of critical self-examinations show that museums of the present define themselves through the complex layering of different modes of representation.

THE FIRST EAST ASIAN ART EXHIBITION IN THE U.S.

For my research, I have consulted various books and journal papers in order to study the introduction of Korean art to the United States within the context of East Asia as a whole. I have examined the integration of East Asian art to the U.S. within this broader context to gain a multi-dimensional understanding of the history of East Asian art exhibitions. This approach is especially important in an encyclopedic museum such as the MFAH, which places the Arts of Korea gallery side by side with other East Asian galleries such as the Arts of China and the Arts of Japan gallery.

I referred to numerous books as well as articles from newspapers and art magazines to track the initial route of East Asian art's introduction to the mass audience in the U.S. and discovered that this took place at the 1876 International Exhibition in Philadelphia, or in short, the Centennial (Giberti, 2002; Ingram, 1876; Leslie, 1876; Post, 1976; "The Centennial Exhibition X", 1876; "The Centennial Exhibition XI", 1876). Chinese and Japanese art were first introduced to the American public through the Centennial prior to Korean art's arrival in the U.S. Among the displayed objects from these countries, the ones that received much attention from the audience were porcelain, lacquer-ware, bronzes from Japan and ivory works from China. However, the audience did not view these artworks in the same context in which they appreciated Western European art. The vocabulary that was frequently used in describing artworks from East Asia included such terms as "curious," "quaint," "bizarre," "droll," and "grotesque." For example, one of the objects on display at the Centennial, which was described as "grotesque" was a Chinese Engraving of an open wooden cabinet. An article from *The Art Journal* ("The Centennial Exhibition X," 1876) described the object as "hideous looking monsters which are twined around the outer columns show[ing] the taste of the Chinese for grotesque rather than beautiful forms" (p. 308). Likewise, Leslie (1876), in his book *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition 1876*, employed this word in introducing Japanese art by noting that the "grotesque" in art "seems to be a part of the very nature of the Japanese, is displayed in the most marvelous conceptions imaginable, not only in the dragons and other unknown creatures delineated, but in caricatures of domestic life which are exceedingly comical" (pp. 249-250). Ingram

(1876) also explained that the Japanese department will attract lovers of “the curious and the bizarre” and of “delicate and intricate workmanship” (p. 475). Through events such as the U.S. Centennial celebration, Americans came to view the cultures of East Asia as “exotic ways of life.” Since most Americans were unacquainted with the culture and its products, they viewed the exhibits with immense curiosity. They were quaint objects that mystified the audience. Aesthetic evaluations perhaps then worked at once to celebrate and alienate Asian art.

Apparently, the audience did not retain an appreciation for the works of Asian art in much the same way that they comprehended the works of Western art. A passage found in an article from *The Art Journal* (“The Centennial Exhibition XI,” 1876) states that “methods of expression by which we principally know the Art of Eastern Asia, the supreme excellence is found in workmanship, rather than in conception—in representing the lower and inanimate forms of Nature, rather than the passions and aspirations of man” (p. 338). The fact that Asian art was not included in the Memorial Hall, which contained the “objects illustrating efforts for the improvement of the physical, intellectual, and moral condition of man,” but instead given a space in the Main Building reinforces this perspective (“The Centennial,” 1876). Here were displayed artworks along with anthropological materials such as exploitable raw materials and natural resources, customs, and implements for cooking and eating from various countries.

In this light, it is apparent that Asian art was not regarded as art in the same perspective of viewing Western art. The presentation of the objects had to conform to the preexisting structure of classification, and this way of categorizing Asian art affected the

viewers' formation of knowledge about Asian culture in general. The Centennial administrative department's decision of choosing the objects to be collected and displayed and organizing and arranging these objects constructed the intellectual frameworks through which those objects and the cultures that produced them should be interpreted. And, the framework sustained the understanding of Asia through terms such as "primitive," "exotic," and "anthropologic," in relation to the era dominated by industrialism, nationalism, and imperialism (Conn, 2000).

The Centennial was the first event in which East Asian art was presented to a mass audience; therefore, studying how it was received by the Western world enabled me to estimate how Korean art fit into the preconceived aesthetic framework of East Asian culture. Although it was difficult for me to find resources that delineate the audience's response to early Korean art in America, I was able to assess the cultural assumptions that might have been made by the audience in relation to the museum's approaches to exhibiting Korean art in the U.S. through this research.

THE HISTORY OF PRESENTING KOREAN ART TO THE U.S.

I was able to gain supplementary information focusing on Korean art exhibitions in the U.S. from *Exhibiting Korean Art* (National Museum of Korean, 2006). Published by the National Museum of Korean, the document contains essays from the 2006 International Symposium on Korean Art. One of the main points delivered by the essays was that discussion of the history of Korean art in the U.S. needs to be understood within three evolving and interrelated contexts (Wilson, 2007). One of the contexts is perceived

through Japan, which influenced “both domestic and foreign notions of Korean identity as well as art and culture” through its colonization of Korea of over thirty years (Wilson, 2007, p. 246). Supplementary information on this perspective can be found in Munroe’s (2007) discussion of Korean art from the same publication. She describes that “the Japanese ‘construction’” of Korean art history was biased for “political” reasons. In order to justify Japanese rule over Korea, the colonial state government promoted Korean culture as “minor” in relation to China and Japan (Munroe, 2007). This perspective built a foundation that affected future research on Korean art and its appreciation by the Western world. Consequently, as “American museums accumulated Korean objects (frequently through Japanese dealers), scholarship and connoisseurship did not advance at nearly the same pace as that of Chinese and Japanese art” (pp. 280-281).

In addition, Wilson (2007) discusses the second context under the umbrella of developing awareness of the influential roles of missionaries and diplomats who introduced American audiences to Korean art and culture. For example, Horace Newton Allen, who arrived in Korea on Protestant missions, and Gregory Henderson, who worked at the U.S Embassy in Korea in the late 1940s until early 1960s, are representative figures of this role. Their enthusiasm in introducing Korean art to the U.S. was based on their direct experience with the culture (Wilson, 2007). Moreover, the Korean War, which lasted from 1950 until a truce was negotiated in 1953, became a platform in which Korea made direct engagement with America. Senior Korean experts from the U.S. arrived in Korea through their military, diplomatic, or NGO experience, including the peace corps (Munroe, 2007). While the Western world’s view of

understanding East Asia was dominated by the prevalence of Chinese and Japanese art, these missionaries and diplomats promoted the emergence of Korean art as an independent entity to some extent.

The final context that affects understanding the history of Korean art's influx to America comes from Korea itself, in terms of both quantity and representation. Korea has made continuous efforts to build a national infrastructure for the arts in the U.S. after going through devastating historical events such as colonization and the Korean War (Wilson, 2007). It was after the war that the South Korean government organized traveling art exhibitions "that were intended to strengthen official ties with the West and introduce Korean culture to museum-going audiences, thereby also bolstering popular foreign support for the regime" (Wilson, 2007, p. 245).

The catalogue essays of the exhibition *Korean Art from the United States* (National Museum of Korea, 2012) introduces the early traveling exhibitions of Korean art that were held after the war. The *Masterpieces of Korean Art* exhibition, held in the U.S. from 1957 to 1959, was the first major traveling exhibition that aroused the American museum's interest in Korean arts, which toured eight U.S. cultural institutions. Another momentous traveling exhibition that toured seven major American cities was the *5000 Years of Korean Art*, organized by the National Museum of Korea in 1979 and hosted by the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. These exhibitions prompted the U.S. museums to purchase or receive donations of more Korean art from local communities in the U.S. and "[set] the stage for systematic exhibitions and research on Korean art in the United States" (National Museum of Korea, 2012, p. 185).

The public's recognition of Korean art in the U.S. was rapidly heightened after the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston opened a Korean gallery in 1982. This was followed by the installation of the first independent Korean art department in America at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco in 1989. Subsequently, in the 1990s and 2000s, the number of Korean galleries in American museums increased dramatically due to the support of various Korean cultural organizations. Currently, there are thirty cultural institutions in the U.S. that have either an independent Korean gallery or a separate section dedicated to Korean art within a general exhibition space, including the Arts of Korea gallery at the MFAH (National Museum of Korea, 2012).

CONTEXTUAL COMMUNICATION IN THE MUSEUM

In the Arts of Korea gallery of MFAH, visitors experienced the museum from diverse conceptual frameworks that were developed on personal levels. The arguments made by the authors included in this section enabled me to understand the nature of individualized museum experiences and aspects of learning in museums based on contextual communication between the museum, object, and visitor.

The traditional practice of museum education was to display civic virtue and to heighten their visitors' tastes by exposing them to high art. The most important point in the modernist framework is the experience of pure aesthetic emotion that is enabled only when the artwork is detached from its extrinsic context. In the modernist museum, the viewer is expected to concentrate solely on the intrinsic aspects of the artwork. Levi (1985) argues that the concept of the art museum as an exclusive assemblage of

masterpieces makes the viewer consider the work of art for its own sake and thus places the pure aesthetic experience outside of space and time. In this light, O'Doherty (1999) defines the space in the modern museum as the clean, neutral, and artificial "white cube," where the artworks are isolated from everything that interferes with their own autonomous status, and also makes the viewer erase themselves from the space. The viewer is not allowed to interpret the artworks in relation to their surrounding contexts, but is only permitted to perceive them in terms of visibility. In relation to education, Hooper-Greenhill (2000) describes the modernist museum's task as "the production and dissemination of authoritative knowledge" (p. 126). She further explains that "during the modern period, objects were viewed as sources of knowledge in themselves, which through their 'proper arrangements' would reveal the basic structures of natural history, history, science or art" (p. 127). This argument is valid in relation to the display of Asian art at the Centennial discussed in the earlier section; the moral standard that governs the production of meaning of objects and information is the practice of classification. The meanings that Asian art acquired from its Western audience derived from the institutionalized ideas and knowledge that became recontextualized through the perspectives of the exotic Orient.

However, the postmodernist museum's objective is to reflect the viewer's subjective experience, reproduce their modes of thinking, and foster dynamic interaction by embracing people's everyday life. The museum's new role as a communicator was on the rise as we entered the post-modern era. Since the 1984 report of the American Association of Museums' Commission on Museums for a New Century, which noted that

learning is essentially informal, spontaneous, and individual, was announced, many museums have tried to underline the learning experience itself and social interaction made in this process (Zeller, 1989).

Today's museum functions as an instrument that reflects the confluence of multiple voices and provides a forum for exchange (Weil, 2002). According to Hein (2006), "museums are materially dependent on and must be responsive to subjective judgments that have generated new objective realities" (p.136). This occurs when museums take the role of mediators and assist these visitors to experience others' cultures while also acknowledging their own identities. What was perceived to be the main task of the museum—collect, preserve, and exhibit—has been broadened so as to actively engage with the public. In this light, objects displayed in the museum do not speak for themselves, but are given meaningful voices by the public. Accordingly, the museum opens a portal to explore the diversity of human experience, which empowers multicultural voices to participate in constructing a more dynamic role for the museum.

In this light, the reciprocal communication between museums and visitors functions as a way to produce and reproduce culture (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). Hooper-Greenhill's (2000) discussion about culture relates appropriately to the meaning-making activity in the post-modernist museum:

Culture is not a set of things, but is made up of processes, sets of practices. Culture is concerned with the production and exchange of meanings—"the giving and taking of meaning." Signifying practices are those practices which make things mean. . . . culture is "the social production and reproduction of sense, meaning and consciousness". . . . Culture, therefore, is deeply implicated in interpretive and learning processes and practices. (pp. 12-13)

Therefore, “interpretive practices” in the museum occur through cultural perceptions. In other words, diverse interpretations are produced from this process of constructing meaning, which is carried out by participants coming from different historical and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, what visitors choose to see and read from the objects differ because their various sociocultural positions affect the interpretation process.

The arguments of Hooper-Grennhill (1999) in *the Educational Role of the Museum* provide a detailed explanation of the mode of this cultural communication in the museum. She explains how the visitor’s interpretation of an object is “shaped through a process of continuous negotiation, which involves individuals in calling on their prior experiences to actively make their own meanings,” thus forming communication in the museum as an approach towards “sharing, participation, and association” (p. 16). Based on constructivist learning theories, this activity assumes that knowledge, created through lively interpretation experiences, can be fluid and plural. However, it is possible to identify a shared interpretative strategy among the visitors since “individual strategies for making sense of experience are enabled, limited, and mediated through our place in the social world” (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, p. 49). In other words, social structure and cultural movements affect the construction of knowledge practiced in the museum.

If this is so, then what goes through the visitors’ minds when they stand in front of a Korean art object and try to understand it? What is the actual process of their interpretation of the object? By examining the literature that focuses on the concept of conversation in the museum and the process of interpretation, I approach questions of how the cultural aspects of Korean art relate to what the visitors already know and how

this knowledge brings out their memories and associates the art with things that they remember.

Stainton (2002), in *Learning Conversations in Museums*, describes how museum visitors arrive with their own “entrance narrative” (p. 213). This narrative encompasses the breadth of visitors’ backgrounds—their knowledge, experience, and memories—which enables them to make meaning from the objects in the museum. Falk and Dierking (2000), in *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experience and the Making of Meaning*, include prior knowledge in the “personal context” that influences the process of learning. Along with other aspects such as self-motivation, a combination of emotional, physical, and mental action, and an appropriate context from real life in which to make sense of the interpretation, prior knowledge becomes the foundation for learning in a museum (Falk & Dierking, 2000). The acknowledgement of the visitor’s entrance narrative by the museum plays a crucial role in helping visitors to make personal connections with the information and interpretation provided by the museum. This is particularly pertinent to my study since I am interested in examining the Arts of Korea gallery visitors’ entrance narratives and determining how this influences their construction of the meaning of Korean art, as well as what they take away from the exhibition as a whole.

Stainton (2002) focuses on how conversations can serve as a way of informal museum learning by illustrating how conversations reflect and change a visitor’s identity and knowledge. While discussing the “sociocultural context” of learning, Falk and Dierking (2000) also explain the role of narrative and sharing “sociocultural information” in making social interaction with peers and groups (p. 48). By negotiating meanings of

the artwork with social groups and peers and by sharing personal and cultural beliefs while relating the object to their own background and knowledge, visitors turn the act of viewing objects into a collaborative learning experience. I attempted to make social interactions with the participants through the use of a semi-structured interview method at the MFAH. By interacting with the visitors through having conversations, I hoped the participants would express what they see, remember, and experience in relation to the objects of their interest. While Stainton (2002) and Falk and Dierking (2000) mainly focus on the interaction between peers and groups in their theories, Hooper-Greenhill (1999) uses the word “conversation” to describe the internal dialogue between the viewer and the objects, claiming that it can take “a number of forms and range across a spectrum of intellectual and everyday fields” (p. 21). In addition to having a conversation with the visitors myself, I also hoped the participants would repeat their mental conversations with the Korean art objects by verbalizing them in my presence.

In addition to the aspect of prior knowledge and social interaction, the physical dimension of the museum also plays an important part in the process of learning. Falk and Dierking (2000) define this as the “physical context” of learning. According to Falk and Dierking (2000), “how an individual behaves in these physical spaces, what they observe, and what they remember are also strongly influenced by the physical context; much of this impact occurs subtly and/or subconsciously” (p. 57). Through the interview with the curator of Asian art at the MFAH, I gathered information about the design and layout of the gallery. By observing how the visitors’ acknowledge the gallery

environment, I hoped to examine how the learning is “bound to the environment in which it occurs” and influenced by the “awareness of place” (p. 65).

CONCLUSION

What makes visitors become interested in certain aspects of an object but not others? What is the context in which the visitors make meanings? How is the visitor’s experience at the gallery constructed? Examination of the mode of communication in the museum suggests that we should acknowledge the multi-dimensional aspects of the visitors to the Korean gallery in order to discuss these questions that guided my literature review.

Chapter 3: Methodology

QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

For this study, I conducted qualitative research by adopting case study as my primary methodology. Qualitative research upholds a holistic perspective of the phenomena, and regards the case as unique as well as common at the same time (Yin, 2009). Using this approach as my guideline, I attempted to depict a comprehensive portrayal of the viewers' mental interactions with Korean artwork and the meanings that the viewers attribute to them.

As explained earlier, I identify the site of my research as the Arts of Korea gallery at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), and limit the case to the museum visitors' unique situations of experiencing Korean art. The case was designed to study the visitors' behaviors, thought processes, and characteristics in this particular situation.

Acknowledging the importance of the site of the phenomenon made me choose case study as my research method. By studying how the site affects my research, I attempted to gain an exhaustive understanding of the phenomena that would help me answer my research problem. Yin (2009) defines case study as “an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., a ‘case’), set within its real-world context—especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). The reason why I adopted case study as my research method is because the understanding of the phenomenon within the lived world was fundamental to my research. I wanted to put nearly equal weight on both context, which is the background information related to the site, and phenomenon, which is the meaning-making activity of the visitors in the site,

since gaining knowledge about the context is essential to addressing my research problems. I understood that the contextual information must be interwoven into the descriptions of the phenomenon in order to generate a thorough explanation of the case.

MY CONNECTIONS TO THE RESEARCH SITE

One of the main reasons why I chose to conduct my research at this gallery is because I already had extensive information regarding the installation goals and process of the gallery based on my previous experience at the National Museum of Korea (NMK). When I was nearly completing my Master's program in Visual Art Studies at Ewha Women's University in 2007, I was given an opportunity to work as a contract researcher for a year at NMK in Seoul. Being based in the International Relations and Exhibition Team, my job was to facilitate various projects related to cultural exchange that required the museum's participation. The most important and large-scale project that I participated in was to assist in the development of the Arts of Korea gallery at the MFAH. My main job was to communicate with the curators in Houston, assist in the transportation process, and translate the catalog entries to English. This was an invaluable experience since I had the opportunity to observe and be involved in this substantial project from beginning to end.

Five years later, I was able to build another strong relationship with MFAH by working as a graduate intern jointly for the Education Department and the Asian Art Department of the MFAH during the summer of 2012. My experience as an intern enabled me to observe the process of developing various education programs for the

museum visitors. My main task at the museum was to compose Art Cards focusing on the artworks of Korea. Art Cards, which are double-sided sheets that contain text describing the artist, subject, style/technique of an artwork, are primarily used by school teachers, although anyone has free access to them. Working as an intern enabled me to gain easy access to my thesis research site. I spoke with the museum's curator of Asian art about my research topic and she was genuinely interested in learning about my findings. While working at the MFAH from mid-June to mid-August of 2012, I also found enough time to collect the data for my study at the museum's Arts of Korea gallery. Since I was at the museum three days a week, I was able to make frequent observations of the gallery, standing there and monitoring the flow of traffic and finding out which objects drew more interest among the visitors. My previous connections with the research site reveal my potential bias towards the study. The bias and subjectivity of my research is more to be disclosed while I describe my own entrance narrative and illustrate a physical description of the Arts of Korea gallery in Chapter 4.

MY ROLE AS A RESEARCHER IN THE STUDY

I understood that the key to answering my research questions can only be delivered from the participants of my study, in other words, the visitors of the Arts of Korea gallery at MFAH. Creswell (2009) explains that the researcher should “focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue” instead of applying “the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or writers express in the literature” (p. 175). At the same time, however, I acknowledged that my role as a

researcher was the main agent of the study since I was conducting qualitative research. I understood that qualitative research uses me as the researcher as its main instrument of interpretation by drawing on my ability to interpret and reinterpret what I observed. For this study I have developed my own protocol to gather information that would respond to my research questions. I recorded the interviews and transcribed them, reviewed all the data, and tried to decipher the obscure meanings embedded in them.

My role as a researcher is an “observer as participant” (Merriam, 2001). In the case of my research, I regarded that being a “participant” means to participate in the process of viewing artworks, in other words, becoming a viewer of the displayed Korean artworks. Before approaching the visitors for an interview, I was part of the ordinary audience of the Arts of Korea gallery. I walked around the gallery, viewed objects, and jotted down my own impressions and thoughts about the artworks and the gallery setting. The visitors did not seem to be disturbed by my presence. I revealed my role as a researcher and temporary museum staff when I approached my potential interviewees to participate in my research. It was only after asking them to be interviewed face-to-face on site that I made the visitors become clearly aware of my goals and intentions for being in the gallery.

DATA COLLECTION

VISITOR OBSERVATION

Through observing the visitors, I tried to establish a record of what was happening in the gallery. I took field notes whenever I made a visit to the gallery to select my

participants and jotted down the visitors' behavior inside the gallery (Creswell, 2009). The record includes details of the visitors' flow—identifying from where they enter the gallery, which direction they take to make a full circle around it, which objects made them stop and look, how much time they spent in front of the didactic panel about the historical context of Korea, and which exit they choose in leaving the gallery. I also recorded my own thoughts about the gallery to reflect my personal experience of the physical environment and thoughts about the objects.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH VISITORS OF THE ARTS OF KOREA GALLERY

The most appropriate way to explore the shared meaning held by the visitors was to interview them. For my study, I conducted semi-structured interviews to obtain rich and extensive data. This flexible interview format enabled the participants to convey their lived experience in an effective way (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Prior to my data collection, I went through The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board (IRB) process during April 2012 in order to obtain approval of my research involving the behavioral study of humans. I also obtained the “Site Letter of Agreement” from the Curator of Asian Art at the MFAH, which granted me access to my research site (Appendix A). After earning approvals from both sources, I made five visits to the Arts of Korea gallery and conducted a semi-structured interview with sixteen people during the two-month period of my stay in Houston.

I selected my potential interviewees from visitors who were visiting the gallery by themselves, although some of them initially entered the gallery with their friends or a

family member. The selected interviewees for my research were visitors who entered the gallery and spent more than approximately three minutes making a full circle to look at the displayed objects. As they were heading towards either of the two exits to leave the gallery, I approached my potential interviewees and asked for their participation. When a visitor was interested in being interviewed after listening to my brief explanation of my research and agreed to participate in the interview, I asked them to read the consent form and sign it (Appendix B). The form informed the participants that the content of the interview would be audio-recorded. By printing their names on the form, interviewees allowed me to use their real name in my thesis. I organized a tentative list of questions and developed a general format to follow during the interview. Although the questions were formed upon a loosely established structure, I was able to tailor them according to the participants' varied responses.

As Creswell (2009) claims, “the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites that will best help the researcher understand the problem and research question” (p. 178). After observing visitors' behavior and action, I selected visitors who spent more than three minutes in the gallery as my potential interviewees. These were visitors who would spend a considerable amount of time to walk around the gallery in a full circle and observe the majority of the collection, instead of those who just happened to pass through the gallery on their way to another location. I also interviewed people who were coming individually to the gallery. Since I wanted to explore each visitor's “personal” experiences, I did not want them to be affected by others' responses.

The potential questions for the interviewees, which helped me clarify the answers for my research questions, are as follows:

1. Tell me about your time at the museum today. Which galleries have you visited before coming to the Korea gallery? And what brought you here today?
2. Where did your interest in art come from? Where did your artistic taste come from? How often do you visit a museum?
3. Which object(s) attracted or interested you most in this gallery? When you look at them, what goes through your mind? Does this object remind you of anything related to your past experience?
4. If you were to tell your experience of this gallery to others, what would you include in that story?
5. Will you be doing more in the museum today before you leave? What might that include?

Since I had to talk directly to people, I also had to hone interpersonal skills in order to gain meaningful up-close information. Stake (1995) suggested that a qualitative researcher must possess the ability to ask good questions and to interpret the responses, be a good listener, be adaptive and flexible so as to react to various situations, have a firm understanding of the issues being studied, and be free of preconceived notions. I understood that following these suggestions was important in order to genuinely engage the participants in my research.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW WITH THE CURATOR OF ASIAN ART

Stake (2010) claims that contextual information contributes to the understanding of the main effects in qualitative research:

“Context” tends to be thought of as rather stable, something that does not change much from day to day. “Situation” is a more immediate background, the things that are going on right now behind the main activities of study. Often, there will be no clear boundaries between what is foreground and what is background; they blend into each other. (p. 52)

While the “situation” of my study involves the daily influx of visitors to the gallery, the “context” is related to the already established setting—the site of my research. As a qualitative researcher, I wanted to draw an interpretation rooted in a holistic understanding of the surrounding conditions, the context and situation. To attain this understanding I conducted an additional semi-structured interview with the Curator of Asian Art at the MFAH after obtaining the curator’s consent and audio-recorded the content of the interview (Appendix C). I asked questions to the curator based on the following guideline:

1. What did you want the Arts of Korea gallery to represent?
2. How does (or does not) the gallery reflect your aims?
3. How was the project initiated?
4. How was the project planned out?
5. Who do you perceive your audience to be and how is the gallery received by them?

The purpose of this interview was to raise questions about the context and probe deeper into the background in order to increase my knowledge of the case. I wanted to know how the curator perceives the visitors would influence the development of the gallery setting, which includes not only the physical conditions but also the tools that might affect the visitors’ interpretation of the objects. Also, I wanted to know to what extent the visitors’ perceptions of the gallery align with the idea constructed by the curator, and furthermore, with my own.

DATA ANALYSIS

The aspect of interpretation plays a major role in qualitative data analysis. According to Stake (2010) qualitative research is sometimes even defined as interpretive

research and the interpretations of qualitative research put emphasis on human values and experiences (p. 37). As a qualitative researcher I understood that “[I] must work in and through interpretations—[my] own and others’—layered in complex hermeneutic circles” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 2). As the participants made interpretations of the artwork, I also made my own by interconnecting their interpretations to mind my findings.

The purpose of my research was, in essence, to examine how the visitors’ prior knowledge and experience act as an intermediary and influence the interpretation process while looking at Korean art objects. It was an investigation of annotating and elucidating the meaning of the phenomenon observed. To identify the theme, interpret the meaning of the material and elucidate my findings, I used coding as the tool to perform content analysis for my data. This process was adopted in the analysis since it is “systematic, comprehensive (searching all the data until the categories are saturated) and cumulative, gradually building understanding or explanations” (Simons, 2009, p. 121).

After transcribing the audio-recorded interviews, I read over the text again and again. I broke down big and small ideas. I dissected and reassembled the material into unified themes and categories to connected them into meaningful parts. The interconnection of these concepts yielded a coherent framework that helped me answer my research questions.

CONCLUSION

Implementing qualitative research strategies was important because this approach is nondeterministic and supports a constructivist perspective (Stake, 2010). Instead of

seeking a cause-and-effect explanation of the case, I focused on grasping the personal experiences of the visitors, identifying the context of the setting, and figuring out the meanings that are embedded in them as a whole. The following chapter presents the themes and concepts developed from the data.

Chapter 4: Data Presentation

In this section of Chapter 4, I introduce the Arts of Korea gallery at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH) by describing the installation and its physical environment. I supplement my illustration of the gallery with the responses given by Christine Starkman, Curator of Ancient to Contemporary Asian art at the MFAH, during the semi-structured interview conducted in August, 2012. In addition, I present my own story related to the Arts of Korea gallery. The primary purpose of this chapter is to present the narratives provided by the visitors to the Arts of Korea gallery at the MFAH, which will follow the installation narratives.

THE ARTS OF KOREA GALLERY AT THE MFAH

THE INSTALLATION OF THE GALLERY

Before the Korean gallery was opened to the public in 2007, the museum included the Korean artworks that the MFAH had acquired over the past fifteen years in a single gallery space devoted to general Asian art. From the interview with Christine Starkman, I learned that Peter C. Marzio, then director of the MFAH, expressed his will to install a Korean gallery in the museum, and the Arts of Korea gallery project was inaugurated the following year. This was announced shortly after his trip to Korea in 2004, which spurred his interest in both traditional and contemporary Korean art. This permanent gallery, focusing exclusively on the art of Korea, was the first of its kind in the Southwest.

With the exception of a few objects that the museum has acquired, most of the displayed artworks from Korea's ancient and classical age were on long-term loan from the National Museum of Korea (NMK). The NMK initially made a tentative list of the objects to be displayed in Houston. Based on this list, the two museums later worked together to coordinate the final selection. When the MFAH requested to borrow the objects from the NMK for the gallery installation, Starkman explained that she first had to earn the NMK staff's trust and make sure that they would be comfortable with their decisions. Besides partnering with the NMK, she also sought support from the Korea Foundation, which is an organization promoting cultural exchange in affiliation with the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Starkman also brought in Korean professionals who could give advice on the project, and tried to involve Houston's Korean community in the installation process.

The objective of the juxtaposition of ancient *Goryeo* and *Baekjae* ornamental art, porcelains and Buddhist statues from the classical *Joseon* period, and also contemporary art from the digital age was to enable the viewers to appreciate the culture of Korea across generations. In thinking about how to represent Korean culture, Starkman underscored the importance of relating the culture to the present. Therefore, the gallery's inclusion of Korean contemporary art presents a unique approach. She explained that the overall concept that directed the installation of the Arts of Korea gallery was to make a dynamic approach towards Korean culture. She devised a way to represent Korea in relation to the current age while avoiding the use of overly didactic and anthropologic methods in the informational materials, which are methods conventionally employed with

Korean art exhibitions in the West. In order to avoid the stereotyping of Korean art and perpetuating its characteristics as “exotic,” she broke the boundaries that distinguish Asian art from Western art. By bringing the “contemporary moment” into the gallery, she challenged the assumption that “you only learn about the past in Asian galleries.”

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The Arts of Korea gallery is at the Caroline Weiss Law building, one of the two buildings on the main campus of the MFAH. It is situated among other Asian art galleries, such as the Indonesian, Indian, Japanese, and Chinese art galleries. The gallery is located behind one of the reception desks where visitors purchase admission tickets. A short staircase leads the visitors to the “Changing Exhibition Gallery.” From here, visitors can reach the cluster of Asian galleries behind the big wall that borders a side of this space. Visitors can reach the Arts of Korea gallery through one of the two entrances. One leads directly to the Arts of Korea gallery, while the other brings them to the gallery via the Indonesian gallery. The Arts of Korea gallery then connects visitors to the India gallery, followed by the Chinese and Japanese galleries. Since the Asian galleries are quite close to the main entrance of the building, they tend to be either a visitor’s first or last stop on his or her museum tour.

In addition to housing Asian art, the Law building contains another large section that mainly holds changing exhibitions, and a separate space that accommodates Native American, Oceanic, Pre-Columbian, African, Islamic art, and Modern and Contemporary art. The Wilson Tunnel on the lower level connects visitors to the Audrey Jones Beck

building where collections of Antiquities, American and European painting and sculpture, photography, decorative arts, prints and drawings are displayed. In relation to this “encyclopedic” context of the museum it is also important to think about the conceptual location of the Arts of Korea gallery, which combines both traditional and contemporary artworks. Since the objects in the Korean gallery pertain to both “Asian” art and “modern/contemporary” art, the curator has to consider where this art will be situated in relation to its institutional context.

In narrowing the focus to the aspects of the Arts of Korea gallery, Starkman also explained that she tried to concentrate on the intangible qualities that can be found in Korean culture. In developing the Arts of Korea gallery, she and the exhibition designer made numerous trips to Korea in order to “capture the Korean sensibility.” She explained that she evoked this “environment through the use of color, wall finish, and other subtle elements that are specifically attributed to Korean culture.” She tried to achieve the “sense” not in a “literal and stereotyped” way, but in a more “subtle” manner.

For instance, she associated the wall panel color with fabric of *Hanbok*, the Korean traditional costume. The color of *Hanbok* is saturated with pigments extracted from natural sources. A deep and subtle tonality is expressed through this color, which is developed from a long and complicated process of dyeing. By incorporating a subdued purple into the panel design, Starkman attempted to represent the smooth and elegant characteristic of the *Hanbok*. To achieve a consistent sensuality, the wall is finished with Venetian plaster, which creates a soft and matte surface with depth.

Also, Starkman described that she tried to encourage the viewers to concentrate on the objects. Instead of devising “traditional and standard didactic panels about Korean art” that outline “big concepts such as Buddhism or Confucianism,” she tried to delineate the “specifics” on the panel that directly relates to the objects on display. Another way to entice the viewers to look closely at the objects was the use of special glass cases that “really make the objects come out.” By employing glass that has a non-reflective surface, she wants the visitors to feel that they are directly “looking at the objects.”

Starkman wanted to represent the country’s cultural identity by bringing the experience and sensation she had in her trip to Korea into the process of designing the gallery. She tried to convey her “sense of immersion” into Korean culture by focusing on the “details” of the physical aspects of the gallery. In her case, the cultural ideal and value of Korea is expressed as “subtle” and “elegant.”

MY OWN STORY AS A VISITOR TO THE ARTS OF KOREA GALLERY

For me, visiting the Arts of Korea gallery at the MFAH for the first time in 2009 was a dream-come-true. While I was participating in preparing the “Arts of Korea gallery” project at the National Museum of Korea (NMK) in 2007, I always wondered what the end-product would look like. After the final list of long-term loan objects was sent to Houston, specific plans for the gallery design were being made by the MFAH. The museum’s exhibition designer and curator were visiting Seoul to have meetings on the installation design as well as general curatorial plans. Nevertheless, it was difficult for me to envisage a complete and detailed picture of what the gallery would look like. I had

never been to the MFAH before. Thus I could not imagine the way the Arts of Korea gallery would be presented within the museum's comprehensive framework that embraces arts from diverse cultures. Although I was able to see photographs of the gallery later from the NMK's curators who attended the opening in Houston, I wanted to grasp the intangible quality that the gallery conveyed.

I never imagined that I would get a chance to visit the gallery myself. However, about a year after I left the NMK I moved to Austin to join my husband living in Texas. Before getting married to my long-time friend who was (and still is) studying in Austin, Houston seemed so vague and distant in my mind. In May 2009, I made my first trip to the Arts of Korea gallery at the MFAH with my husband. In fact, this was my first visit to a Korean art gallery at any American art museum. I was very excited to search for the gallery in the huge museum and to finally step into the space where the objects, all so familiar to me, were on display. The last time I had seen these objects was when they were being carefully wrapped in the NMK's storage to be transported to Houston. There we met again in a different time and space after a long journey from home.

When I revisited the Arts of Korea gallery to interview visitors for my research in the summer of 2012, I first noticed that the majority of the collection had been changed. The original collection was replaced with new objects, which were also on loan from the NMK. After the previous long-term loan period expired, the MFAH brought in new collections from the NMK under a new contract. The type of objects, however, was basically the same. The gallery displays an array of pottery, Buddhist sculpture, and bronze artworks. The museum also added newly acquired Korean contemporary artworks

to the gallery. The color of the panels that presented didactic information about Korean history and art was changed from light blue to purple.

The gallery is warm and inviting. It does not have an overpowering feeling. I assume the use of wood flooring is associated with the traditional houses of Korea, *Hanok*, which uses wooden structures. The white color and the matte texture of the wall have a calming effect. It somehow seems as if sound is muffled in here; it feels like the wall absorbs sound. The words that pop into my mind are “pure,” “clean,” “silent,” and “decorous.” I associate these words with Korean art. When I think of traditional Korean ceramics, I relate it to words like “refined,” “sophisticated,” “balanced,” and “transparent.” When I think of other types of Korean art, such as paintings, Buddhist scrolls and sculptures, metal works, and stone works, the expression gets diversified. Some of them are flamboyant and lavish, while others are simple and reserved. It is quite difficult to compress them into one sensibility. But I am sure that my own sensibility of Korean culture is not solely acquired by the sense of sight; the process must involve all five senses—the organic contact points of the mind and body—to form and collect knowledge about my own culture. It is created from the remnants of my past shaped by both intellect and sense.

In the gallery, however, there is also contemporary art. In this case, I think the gallery functions as a “white cube.” I am not sure if the curator had this dual function—conveying both a Korean sensibility and a modernist view—in mind when designing the gallery. But with the contemporary works in front of me, I think the gallery design aligns with the modernist perspective of viewing art. Standing in the quiet gallery space

enclosed with white walls, I notice there are no other elements that distract me from looking at the objects.

The atmosphere of the gallery is certainly different from the neighboring galleries. The Indonesian Gold gallery, adjunct to the south entrance of the Arts of Korea gallery, oozes a very powerful ambience. The entire wall is colored in bright red, presenting a stark contrast with the artworks in pure yellow gold. The lavish gold ornaments are very elaborate and intricately designed. The east entrance from the Arts of Korea gallery connects to the Arts of India gallery. The size of the Indian gallery is bigger than the Arts of Korea gallery and the atmosphere is much darker as well. While the wall is colored in dark indigo, the objects stand out from the surrounding due to the lighting. Therefore, when I enter the Arts of Korea gallery from either of the two galleries, I experience a very different feeling. The experience is a transition from vigorous to mild and from dominant to amiable.

The manageable size is another feature that keeps the gallery from feeling overwhelming. Although the space of the gallery is not large, the period of time that it encompasses is extensive. The artworks date from the Neolithic age and culminate in the present. The display, however, does not follow this chronology. As a Korean who has knowledge of Korean art and history as my entrance narrative, I am able to conceptualize an invisible timeline as I follow along the collection. However, I assume that a general audience would tend to focus on the objects as independent entities, rather than looking at them in relation to their historical context. The objects are displayed along the wall of the

gallery in a full circle. Two individual glass cases highlighted porcelains from the *Joseon* period.

While more than half of the collection could be categorized as ancient and traditional, a few contemporary artworks adorn the gallery. Among them are video art by Nam June Paik, a crystal bead object by Lee Bul, and a reinterpreted Buddhist sculpture coated with blue sequins by Sang-Kyoon Noh. I am aware that most of the ancient and traditional objects are on loan from the NMK. The contemporary objects, however, are from the MFAH's own collection or on loan from a different source. Back in 2007, I did not gain much information about the contemporary artworks that were to be displayed among the ones from the NMK. Although I knew they would be there, physically being at the gallery enabled me to gain a better sense of the amalgamation seen in this exhibition. As I am standing in the gallery, I notice that this combination presents a fresh perspective; it conveys the feeling that Korean art is not a relic of the past and is still in the process of evolving.

As I was observing the Arts of Korea gallery at the MFAH for my research, I became even more eager to speak with the visitors who will come to see Korean art. After I was finished with my initial observation of the physical aspects, I began interviewing visitors who entered the gallery.

COLLECTING NARRATIVES FROM THE VISITORS

PREPARATION FOR INTERVIEWING

After obtaining the participant's consent, I began my interview by turning on my audio recorder and asking them my first question: "What brought you here today to the museum?" My initial question was followed by questions asking why they decided to visit the Arts of Korea gallery and where their interest in art came from. The main part of the interview was asking the participants about the object(s) that interested them most. While the visitors talked about their intention of visiting the museum and visiting the gallery, we usually stood together beside one of the entrances where I initially approached them. As I asked the participants if there was any object that especially attracted or interested them in this gallery, I also asked them if we could go and stand in front of that object as we talk about it. The participants gladly took me to the object, and therefore, the remainder of the interview was conducted in front of an artwork of their choice.

An equal number of men and women participated in this research, and all of my sixteen subjects were adults. While ten participants resided in Houston, the rest were visiting the museum from other states in the country. The participants were coming from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, which included European-American, Asian-American, African-American, and Mexican. While two of them were revisiting the Arts of Korea gallery, fourteen were entering the space for the first time.

VISITORS' INTENTIONS IN ENTERING THE GALLERY

Before delving into the section of introducing the visitors' narratives, I will first delineate the visitors' motivations of entering the Arts of Korea gallery. The first question for all of the participants was asking about their reason of visiting the gallery. I was curious what the visitors were expecting to see and how this played into their intention for the visit. Most of the new visitors to the Arts of Korea gallery, however, were not aware of the Korean art collection before they came to the museum. For example, Justin told me that he "didn't come here to specifically look at Korean art, or even Asian art," since he "just wandered in here and didn't know it was here before coming in." Lucy was actually on her way to see an artwork projected on a wall when she discovered the gallery.

Some of the visitors were trying to view the museum's entire collection and visiting the Arts of Korea gallery was part of that effort. Shanon also explained that she was "following the entire path of the museum because she wanted to get a chance to see everything." Jeanette was among the people who decided to enter the gallery after visiting an array of other Asian art galleries:

I was exploring the museum and I have not explored Korean art so far. I've walked through the Indian gallery and the Chinese gallery and when I thought I was about to leave, I saw the sign. So I decided to walk in.

However, there were a few visitors, such as Charlie, who explained that:

I like this gallery because it also combines a contemporary view. You have an installation like the video piece there and more contemporary sculptures. And coming from the show that they have right now, the traveling Japanese art exhibition upstairs, I was compelled to see the whole Asian art galleries again. I've always been attracted to minimalism and I see it is represented in Asian art often.

While most of the visitors stepped into the gallery unexpectedly, Charlie was one of the two visitors who were aware of the existence of the Korean art gallery in the museum. He was interested in the formal and conceptual aspects of Asian art in general and had a clear intention of viewing the art.

CATEGORIZING THE VISITORS' NARRATIVES

The first step in analyzing the interview with the visitors was to break up the data into correlated parts. After numerous close readings of the transcribed interviews, I noted the similarities and differences between the visitors' responses. I found that various segments related to similar themes, which enabled me to sort the data into seven different categories.

- Looking at the surface
- Knowing the techniques
- Connection to art-making activities
- Relation to personal history
- Thinking about different cultural aspects
- Adding one's own perspectives
- The influence of the physical space

These are clusters of concepts which are forged through a connection of similar ideas embedded in the visitors' meaning-making process. When ideas coming from different participants' responses overlapped with those of others, I presented these ideas as a theme. I established a theme when more than approximately half of the statements

fell under the same concept through the coding process. Therefore, themes were developed based on the numerical frequency of the ideas that emerged from the visitors' narratives.

Since the analysis should be "carried out from the angle of the research questions and research purpose," I constantly referred back to check if the segments were relevant to answering my research questions (Boeije, 2010, p. 76). As the analysis progressed, I reassembled the categories by finding explanations for the visitors' responses and searching for the hidden relationships between them to provide an in-depth perspective of the visitors' meaning-making activities.

Looking at the Surface

The first aspect of the objects that seemed to attract the visitors' attention was its aesthetic features. Nearly all of the participants started their story by sharing their impression of the color, shape, or pattern of the object. The formal aspects elicited specific expressions from the visitors when they described the object. When talking about the incised decoration and transparent greenish tint, also called "jade color," of a *Goryeo* celadon, Marie used vocabulary such as "graceful," "harmonious," and concluded that "everything is done so subtly that it communicates a very peaceful effect." Also, Juanita described the blue and white porcelain adorned with dragons as "fluid and elegant."

Concentrating on the aesthetic features also functioned as an access point for viewers who were unaware of the object's context. Alex, who has a dual degree in art

history and sociology and has enjoyed visiting museums since her childhood, selected a plain white porcelain from the *Joseon* period as her favorite object in the gallery. She described her impression of the piece this way:

This piece is eye-catching. I like really clean things than things that are more detailed. Some of the pieces in the building are in-between and have big drawings on them, but I think I like more meticulous looking things...things that look totally clean. I've always liked very clean looking things. Someone might think that it's really boring, but appreciating just the simplicity can be really nice because it has the most serene feel. It makes me wonder if there is a process of ideology behind this piece.

Alex was attracted to the formal characteristics of the object; she focused on its simple and refined shape, soft surface, and the cream color of this basic type of *Joseon* porcelain. The fact that the porcelain's formal attributes corresponded well to her taste invited her to contemplate the piece longer. Color was also the feature that caught Dione's attention in a contemporary reinterpretation of a traditional Buddhist sculpture. She noticed "the color, first of all" and then was able to "see the way the artist put it together."

Alex and Dione focused on the formal aspects as a stepping stone to a deeper understanding of the object. Viewers such as Lucy, however, maintained an "objective" viewpoint to appreciate the artwork's beauty:

I've seen a lot of Buddhist sculptures. I don't always appreciate looking at those pieces. I think some of it is because [of] religion...just letting myself to be in that barrier. But this time, it didn't feel religious and because of that I was able to appreciate the other details with a more objective eye. It's like when you strip the emotion from something, you kind of view it more objectively. I was able to view the actual piece more objectively because I think some of the other parts were stripped away from me. It's just the aesthetics of Buddha itself. Then I was thinking, "Oh, now I understand why it's peaceful. I understand why people would want this in their homes." But I think I've built up a bias of what I would normally expect to see, and today there were pieces that I haven't seen. They were

new, they were fresh, and they didn't feel manufactured. It didn't feel like this experience was pre-set for me. I was able to view these objects with fresh eyes.

Lucy is a full-time theater teacher at a school and she explained that this “allows [me] to indulge [my] passion for art a little more.” She took a modernist approach in considering the work of art for its own sake by intentionally rejecting the context. She purposefully isolated the artwork from everything that interferes with its autonomous status, and also absented herself from the context. Instead of interpreting the artworks in relation to its historical and religious aspects, she attempted to perceive it only in terms of its visuality. This enabled her to have a purely aesthetic experience with the object.

Knowing the Techniques

Many times, focusing on the aesthetic features of the artwork triggered an interest in the process of production as well. Seven participants mentioned the word “technique” as they explained why a certain object attracted them most. However, the visitors’ interest in the technique only pertained to one type of artwork—ceramics. Visitors wanted to know the process of shaping and painting the white-and-blue porcelain, the celadon, and the *Buncheong* wares. One of those visitors was David, who is a college student majoring in computer science. He enjoys visiting museums, but this was his first visit to the MFAH. During his time at the Arts of Korea gallery, David admired the porcelains with an underglaze iron painted design as well as an array of *Buncheong* ware; he then became curious as to how it was made:

It seems like they pioneered some techniques for painting. They used “this technique” to paint this item. Actually this is my first time I picked up on the

ways the techniques have evolved. I don't know why I have never picked up on that before. Especially with those bowls—all of these are using the same technique. Creation—that's interesting to me.

His first visit to the Arts of Korea gallery at the MFAH elicited his curiosity for the techniques that constructed the Korean ceramics. To learn about the techniques, David had to move on and read the label describing the construction process. He was fascinated by the process of its development and the fact that the technique was original. Charlie, who claimed that he did not know much about Korean ceramics, also pointed out that the technique used in the *Buncheong* ware drew his interest:

I was interested in the techniques of this particular style with the white slip. And just seeing how it almost went out of production in the 16th century is also interesting. Look how it creates this kind of a milky appearance—the paints. Also that it's not necessarily perfect—they're not like a machine made object and they're hand-made—so they have a character of their own. The stylized fish and these are peonies, which I think is fantastic. I look at some paired down minimalist approach to nature.

Although Charlie's description was initially sparked by his interest in the technique, his reflection contains other aspects as well. Charlie's interest in the technique made him notice the “milky appearance” and “stylized” design, which refers to the aesthetic features of the object as well.

Charlie is a practicing artist who majored in studio art. He explained that his interest in ceramics was probably influenced by his grandmother, who was a ceramist. He visits the MFAH almost once a week and often includes the Korean gallery in his tour. While David was fascinated simply by the technique, Charlie's case shows how he was interested not in the technique itself, but in how this was used to create an idiosyncratic work of art. Therefore, David's perception of uniqueness was rooted in the originality of

the technique, while Charlie's idea of uniqueness pertained to what is produced as a result of the technique.

Some visitors were also interested in the production stage of the porcelain, but presented different viewpoints by relating the technique to their own experiences. For example, Jino, who is also a studio art major and a practicing artist, told me that he has “done a lot of reproduction” and he liked the duck-shaped vessel from the *Silla* period because he “knows and appreciates the process that it took to achieve the glazing technique and wood-fire technique of the piece.” Jino was attracted to the object because of his familiarity with the technique. For Juanita, however, technique was an aspect that made her reflect on her everyday life: “I was thinking that these days I’m so busy with everything, but then they had time to spend hours and hours to make this quality, this beauty and this figure.” Imagining the complicated technique that completed the porcelain made Juanita reflect on her own situation. She acknowledged that the completion of such artwork would have taken extensive time and labor, which she did not have time to do herself.

Connection to Art-making Activities

The Korean art objects also caused visitors to reflect on their own memories of making art or knowing someone else engaged in the activity. Six participants developed connections to art-making activities when they talked about ceramics. The ceramics displayed in the gallery are excellent examples of hand-made quality, which are distinctively different from ones that are mass produced. Features such as slight

symmetrical imperfections and uneven brushstrokes on the surface add depth to the handcrafted artworks.

The plain, white porcelain reminded Alex of a roommate in college who learned to make ceramics in high school and extended the experience to her college years. She admitted, “What little I know, I know from her. It was introduced to me by her.” Her knowledge of ceramics, in general, was transmitted by her friend, which might have further aroused her interest in the object. The simple, white porcelain also brought up for her another memory related to art-making:

We have this fundraiser at my college, Juniata, it’s called “Empty Bowls.” What happens is that people volunteer to make bowls, glaze them, and restaurants will donate soup. So people come to a dinner and they buy a bowl and eat soup and all of that goes to charity. And this piece reminds me of a series of bowls that were there—bowls with simple white glaze.

Juniata College, where Alex studied art history and sociology, is known as a liberal arts college which actively engages community outreach programs. The “Empty Bowls” project that took place at her college is an ongoing international project that aims to fight hunger. It seeks participation from local artists and community organizations to create bowls and serve a meal in it. People would make donations for the meal and the bowls. Looking at the full-shaped porcelain brought back the warmth Alex experienced at the charity project, creating an affectionate feeling towards the artwork.

Likewise, Charlie assumed that his interest in porcelains “came from [his] grandmother who was a ceramist.” Charlie’s knowledge about ceramics was formed during his childhood by observing his grandmother’s “skills and artisanship.” His knowledge and interest became richer as he developed his own taste and interest towards

the art form. It was his childhood experience that influenced his disposition towards the medium.

Justin, a college student who visited the museum with his friends, told me the porcelain inspired a memory that “takes [me] back to when [I] did this in elementary school.” He added that he enjoyed making pots out of clay when he was a child because he was able to “play around with [his] art.” He recalled feeling “great” when he was creating his own artwork and seeing the culmination of his effort. Although he was not currently engaged in any art-making, looking at the hand-made porcelain made out of clay reminded him of the actual feeling of creating art in the past.

Relation to Personal History

Six people spoke about personal experiences the displayed objects brought up. These memories were first triggered by looking at the objects. The visitors, however, went further by bringing up other memories that were not directly related to the objects but were triggered by the objects’ specific features, such as the shape, characteristics, and the producer. These memories were not about “art” itself, but related to some part of their personal history.

One example is the story of Juanita, who is originally from Mexico and has been living in Dallas for over ten years. She was on a trip to Houston with her son and they decided to make a stop at the museum before they left the city:

I’m a Mexican and especially with the water pots, in Latin small towns, we used to use it. That [object] made me think about it because we had something similar—same color, shape, decoration. And we still use them. I have one at my

own house in Dallas. Sometimes when I use it, [it] reminds me of my childhood. My kids like it, too.

She thought of her childhood when she noticed the formal similarities between the displayed *Buncheong* ware dipped in slip and the ones from her own cultural background. Although the label of the object did not indicate its functional purpose, she assumed that the displayed object was a “water pot” based on her own culture and experience, although it was not.

Alvin’s story is another example that contains personal history. Alvin was a college student majoring in communication studies. He enjoys visiting general museums, but he does not visit art museums as often as other types such as a natural history museums or science museums. He shared his story of learning American Sign Language for the hearing impaired while standing in front of three Buddhist gilt-bronze sculptures from the *Joseon* period:

When I was looking at the three Buddhas over here, I was guessing the hand positions of these must be very important. It reminded me of my mom and sister learning American Sign Language when I was younger and I also learned about fifty words to say in American Sign Language. So I was wondering what he is trying to say. What he could be saying in American sign language which obviously is not the case. But perhaps he’s saying something still. But why in sign language? Maybe it’s more kind of a universal language.

The viewing experience encouraged him to take notice of the sculpture’s distinctive hand sign, which also brought back memories of his experience related to this specific feature. Alvin assumed that knowing the meaning of the hand sign, or *mudra*, of the Buddhist sculptures plays a critical role in interpreting the artwork. Being unaware of the different meanings assigned to the *mudras*, he tried to apply his knowledge of sign language to

make sense of the object. This attempt brought up memories of learning to communicate in sign language with his family. Being a communication studies major, Alvin was interested in both making personal communication through sign language and learning about communication across cultures through art. Those two “languages” are based on the use of symbols, which Alvin attempted to interrelate.

For visitors like Kendra, who is pursuing a Master’s degree in Art Education and also works as a middle school art teacher, the subject of memories was more directly associated with the artwork being observed. A contemporary video artwork by Nam June Paik provoked her memories of watching a documentary film about the artist. She explained that she learned about him from a program called *Art 21*, which she “watched in college.” Building on this experience, she stated that she is “interested in New Media art” since wrote an article focusing on the role of the artist in virtual reality and art education. Her familiarity with the artist brought up an immediate flashback of learning about the artist and his oeuvre as well as writing about the genre, which was all tightly related to her academic background.

Thinking about Different Cultural Aspects

When observing the Korean artworks, many visitors were inclined to think within a cultural framework. A total of nine participants expressed that their interest lay in grasping cultural aspects that were different from their own. Also, they tried to compare the attributes or meanings of Korean art with other cultural products. On some occasions, the visitors’ comparisons were not directly related to the objects; the visitors brought the

comparison to another level by expanding the subject to encompass his or her everyday life.

Dione was a participant who enjoys visiting museums and often makes “scarfs, bracelets, and crochet,” which she described as “craft.” She was one of the visitors who was interested in seeing something unique; she “likes to look at things that are different.” Judging from Dione’s explanation, the term “things that are different” is equal to “the distinct elements that make things artistic and intriguing.” At first, I observed that her distinction of “different things” was solely based on the formal elements of the artworks. However, Dione later added that she “noticed Buddhism was prevalent during the early history of Korea,” and also “learned that the different aspects to the different statues actually emulate different things like healing, safety, and purity.” Her consistent use of the word “different” revealed her excitement in finding something new other than her own culture. Even though her initial perception was based on the visual characteristics of the artworks, she later broadened her approach to learn about the context as well.

Likewise, Justin was trying to figure out how the artworks encapsulate the Korean culture as a whole:

I just wanted to spend some time just being surrounded by “culture.” Not just enjoying the beauty and the aesthetics of the pieces, but I try to find the ways the different cultures express themselves through art. That’s fascinating—the different mediums that different cultures use.

While observing the objects, Justin attempted to go beyond the aesthetics by questioning the reason why a certain culture used different mediums and methods to make art. David is another visitor who enjoys how art makes him envision the world with a new

perspective. Being a computer science major, he is attracted to art since he believes it is “such a foreign thing” to him, while it also makes him “think in a different way and enables a more creative thought process.” He especially likes to see artworks that come from a different cultural background than his own because he enjoys “trying to understand what the artists’ were doing by stepping into their persona.” He added that he is “trying to understand the world slightly differently” through this process. In David’s mind science and art are not located at extreme ends. Similar to how he conducts “programming” by writing programing codes, artists create beauty and express ideas that can be shared across cultures. He was trying to decode the ideas of the culture by attempting to find a common ground. Although he acknowledged that art may seem irrelevant to his field, he found their common point—they both use universal languages.

Several visitors brought up stories related to their knowledge of art produced from their own cultural foundation. While looking at a *Buncheong* ware with stylized and abstract patterns, Jino pointed out that he realized “a lot of correlations” between those and “the old potteries that he saw at a Native American reservation out in a desert.” Also, Charlie suggested a comparison between a *Buncheong* ware and an underglaze iron painted design and ancient Greek vases:

I was probably thinking of Greek art while looking at the black and white incised pottery. I think it’s mainly because of the incision. I think it’s because the ceramic is creating this feeling because it looks like black and white Greek pieces. I guess I was constantly searching for similarities and differences. Yeah, I think we always do that. We’re always trying to find a way to understand something by doing that.

Charlie did not go deep enough to elucidate the comparison, yet his understandings resulted from this aesthetic juxtaposition and it is clear that his attempt to comprehend the objects was kindled by making a cultural comparison.

Jeanette observed the objects in relation to Western culture, a context more familiar to her. Her knowledge of Korea pertained mostly to South and North Korea's geopolitical situation, while she never viewed Korean artworks before she entered the gallery. She took several art history courses focusing on Renaissance and Baroque periods during her college years. She was trying to understand "the [Korean] art's ongoing development, art processes, and artistic styles in relation to the Western timeline of [art history]" because she knew "so little about the [Korean] art." Using her prior knowledge of Western art as background, she constantly compared the two cultures by acknowledging that "a change was happening here when there was a little bit of the evolution happening there." She was also aware of the potential pitfall of this reasoning: "you can't grasp a whole lot of it in detail because you just go very quickly through several centuries."

William, who was visiting the museum with his daughter and explained that he makes numerous business trips to the Asian region, stated that the formal attributes initiated a comparison between the Korean ceramics and those from other countries:

I recently took a business trip to Hong Kong and I saw similar artworks there. I don't know if it was a conscious connection or a just a subconscious connection that I made. Other than that I guess it was just related to my past experience. I don't know if it was the pattern that reminded me of this. As I was looking at the potteries, I was wondering if those little upside-downs had to be just ornamental or if these were letters that have some message in it. This also made me think of some of the features I've seen from Mexico. They write messages—day of the

dead kind and things. Pieces that were part of their everyday life. There were familiarities. What was also different struck me as well.

He remembered his past experience of traveling to a different Asian city and seeing objects sharing similar traits. It is worth noticing that he stopped to contemplate why this connection has been made. By assuming that this connection was derived from the formal attributes, he was able to follow the thread and recollect another memory of different cultural objects.

William's reflection on cultures first started with artworks, however, it was not limited to the boundaries of art. He stood in front of a burial urn and talked how about the size of it struck him because "our modern urns that contain the ashes of our cremated relatives and friends tend to be much smaller." The size made him wonder if "it was just for one person or for families," and also if "they were stored in homes or common burial urns." In order to find the answer to his questions, he "looked at the burial urn and the patterns on it" and "read the description." He added that "this new kind of art was worth learning about." Looking at a burial urn with a stamp design, he made a cultural comparison to his own time and developed questions about the object based on the connection, which spurred him to read the label.

Adding One's Own Perspectives

Several visitors also expressed a desire to add their own perspectives while viewing the artworks. Seven participants explained that they tried to put on their own lenses and rely on their own tastes and preferences when they viewed an object.

While looking at a blue-and-white porcelain with a dragon design, Shanon followed her eyes along the smooth surface and explored the various patterns adorning the object:

Whatever I want to see, that's what I see. You might see a dragon, you might see a tree, you might see just a whole lot of different things whatever you want to see. That's what I do. The description says this is a dragon and I just saw it. But as you can see, you might envision it to be something else. See more than what they say it is.

Alvin, a communication studies major, also asserted that he wanted to “look at the beauty that other people portray” through “his own eyes.” He was attempting to combine the maker's aesthetic choice with his own personal inclination as he appreciated the object. Justin also expressed a similar idea. As he was looking at a porcelain with an abstract design, he imagined how the potter would have “built and constructed it into a shape” and Justin later imagined “adding design and art of his own choice” in addition to the applied decoration.

Several viewers considered that making meaning of an artwork occurs in a reciprocal process. For example, David, a student studying computer science, told me that while looking at the objects he was able to feel “an impulse to speak through another language” and believed that this was “another form of communicating.” Kendra also upheld the strong role of the viewer in the meaning-making process:

I think I have more of an interest in the conceptual meaning and ideas behind it as opposed to the technical. By “technical,” I mean installing the work and understanding how it works. I'm also interested in the role of the viewer because a lot of times, it can be interactive. Seeing how my ideas interact with the artist's. Seeing how this produces kind of a “third” meaning.

Through this process of interaction, they were accepting the meanings of the artworks as well as actively adding their own to it.

The Influence of the Physical Space

Six visitors also took into account the gallery atmosphere and the way the objects are arranged when looking at the artworks. Their reflections were not solely based on the objects, but also on a holistic experience of the gallery. This included the physical dimension of the gallery or an overview of the display method. The Asian art galleries at the MFAH are relatively smaller than the galleries holding European and American art. The Arts of Korea gallery currently displays forty-five items. In David's case, the size of the gallery affected his experience in a positive way:

I like that it's not a huge space, but rather a smaller room and has a more cozy feeling. Some of the museums I've been to just have huge rooms and if you walk into a huge room, there are [objects] everywhere. This is much less overwhelming.

By being in closer proximity David was able to develop a more intimate feeling towards the artworks. The manageable size of the gallery also encouraged him to explore the objects in detail. David spent approximately ten minutes in the gallery before I asked him for an interview. In contrast to the majority of casual visitors who strolled through the gallery less than three minutes, David was obviously deeply engaged with the artworks.

In Jeanette's case, however, the small size of the gallery functioned as a negative factor. She expressed her desire to see more by saying that "the art is not given as much space as it deserves." She also added that the "size of the gallery doesn't convey the

sense of quiet and solemnity that you normally see in an art gallery.” Jeanette visited the gallery on a Saturday, one of the busiest days in the week, and the gallery was crowded with people. While the gallery was relatively quiet during the weekdays, except Thursday when admission is free, Saturdays rarely provided a tranquil atmosphere. Jeanette’s response reveals that external factors beyond the art object could influence the visitors’ experience at the museum.

For Kendra, who was interning at the Education Department of the MFAH over the summer, the curatorial aspect of the gallery affected her way of looking at Korean art. The juxtaposition of traditional and contemporary artworks caused for her a “disconnect.” Kendra explained that she felt she “start[ed] over there and then got here all the sudden.” She knew that the number of objects in the gallery cannot delineate the five thousand year history of Korea, and she certainly sensed the gap between the periods represented by the collection. However, she added that this “sharp contrast” of traditional and contemporary is also an “interesting placement” because it creates “tension” between objects that have different styles and express different concepts.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I introduced the installation process and physical environment of the Arts of Korea gallery at MFAH to present a contextual background. I narrated my own story related to the gallery to illustrate how my focus has been enlarged in relation to the gallery. My research questions have evolved under the influence of both my past and present experiences. The reason for presenting my own story has a dual intention. As a

qualitative researcher, I recognize the importance of acknowledging and delineating my background related to the setting that would possibly affect the process and result of my research. I wanted to show how excited and passionate I was to start this research, which is directly connected to my previous working experience and cultural heritage; at the same time, however, I needed to reveal my bias towards the setting derived from my sense of ownership.

The major element of this chapter has been the analysis of the visitors' narrative. The key concepts elaborated in this chapter are the elements that became the foundation of generating an integrated explanation of my findings. Through this, I build a theoretical framework that answers my research questions in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Findings

I conducted this research to examine visitors' various interpretations of Korean art and culture made at the Arts of Korea gallery at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH). I wanted to explore how the visitors' entrance narratives interact with their process of viewing Korean art and how these affect the shaping of their knowledge of Korean culture. To answer these questions, I observed the visitors who entered the Arts of Korea gallery at the MFAH and selected sixteen of them to participate in a semi-structured interview. The interviews with the visitors elicited responses from their memories and prior experiences that were aroused by the Korean art objects that attracted them most. Another semi-structured interview was done with curator Christine Starkman, who is in charge of the Asian Art exhibitions at the MFAH. From this interview, I learned about the installation process and the physical elements of the gallery, which served as a contextual background for my research.

Along with narrating my own story related to the Arts of Korea gallery, I categorized the data from the interviews and observations of the visitors into seven different themes, which present the visitors' way of looking at Korean art. In this final chapter, I attempt to recombine and integrate the data to structure an explanation of my research questions, and present in-depth perspectives of the visitors' meaning-making activity at the Arts of Korea gallery as my findings.

THE ENTRANCE NARRATIVES OF THE VISITORS TO THE ARTS OF KOREA GALLERY

My desire to know what the visitors conceptually bring to the Korean art gallery was the initial force that propelled my research. Falk and Dierking (2000) claim that a visitor's entrance narrative not only "affects how individuals approach and solve problems," but also "significantly influences how people perceive an event or what part of a situation is attended to in the first place" (p. 28). Since visitors do not visit the museum as "blank slates," I explored how their entrance narratives resonate with the experience of the Korean gallery.

In Chapter 4, I elucidated the stories of sixteen participants who visited the Arts of Korea gallery. The question from my interview asking about the object that interested the visitors the most functioned as a stepping-stone to focus on the displayed artworks. As the visitors selected their favorite object in the gallery, we moved to stand in front of it and began to talk while viewing it together. I gave the visitors free choice to select and talk about their thoughts regarding the object, and the object functioned as a catalyst that encouraged the visitors to frame their experiences in the gallery.

Since objects "act to ground abstract experiences, can enable recall of knowledge, and can arouse curiosity," museum learning focuses on the objects (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, p. 21). The analysis of the data supported this notion that visitors actively tried to make sense of the objects by blending their prior knowledge, experience, skills, beliefs, curiosity, and interests with these objects. Elements of the aesthetic aspects, art techniques, and purpose of the objects served as starting points for the visitors to make sense of the objects and draw personal meanings out of them. These aspects merged with

each visitor's entrance narrative to spur the viewer to further explore the artworks. The language and thoughts incorporated in their stories structure their experiences and become the framework of their meaning-making process. Through their stories, I was able to learn that the visitors tried to acknowledge various aspects of the objects to make connections with what they were familiar with.

An important point in relation to visitors' expectations and goals should be addressed as well. Most of the visitors who participated in my research did not have a clear intention regarding what they were about to see in the gallery. Although I did not ask all the visitors about their reason for visiting the MFAH, I did ask them why they chose to stop by the Korean gallery during their tour of the museum. Only two of sixteen participants told me that they had visited the Korean gallery before, while the others explained that they arrived at the gallery without any specific reasons. They were not previously aware of a gallery dedicated to Korean art. Sometimes, the gallery was simply included in their itinerary as an effort to cover most of the collections in the museum. Most of the visitors did not have a clear agenda planned for the Korean gallery; however, I can only speculate that their overall motivation and expectations for visiting the museum as a whole encompassed and affected the viewing experience of the gallery as well.

INTERACTION OF VISITORS' ENTRANCE NARRATIVES WITH KOREAN ART

The entrance narratives of the visitors enabled them to gain a personalized way of learning. The memories and experiences evoked by the objects created a close connection

between the viewers and objects. Since viewers are looking at Korean artworks that are displayed away from their origin and removed from their purpose, viewers tried to recontextualize it according to their own time and space. Objects, ideas, and people converged to form a narrative that represents the past and recreates the present (Crew & Sims, 1991). The visitors at the Korean gallery were trying to make sense of the objects by conceptually placing them in an intersection where cross-cultural encounters occur, which I believe is part of an important process of learning in the gallery.

Visitors' interpretation processes have many commonalities with constructivist theory. According to Hooper-Greenhill (1999), "knowledge emerges through the interpretation of experience made by the knower, and is not an objective body of facts that can be transmitted" (p. 49). Therefore, the "knowers, or learners, or interpreters" play an active role in both the interpretation process and constructivist theory in the course of "making sense of experience" (p. 49). Triggered by their own entrance narratives, the visitors were able to frame their experiences by engaging with the objects on a personal level and by building interpretations directly out of their own lives. I agree with Falk and Dierking's (2000) idea that it is essential to acknowledge that "what individuals learn depends upon their prior knowledge, experience, and interest; what they actually see, do, and talk and think about during the experience; and equally important, what happens subsequently in their lives that relates to these initial experiences" (p. 153). The visitors built upon their entrance narratives to form a new experience at the Korean gallery. The visitors were not merely regarding Korean art as a cultural product of the "others." By blending in their own cultural background to the surface manifestations of art, the visitors

were trying to recognize both the differences and similarities between the Korean culture and their own on a very personal level.

For example, David was attracted to the *Buncheong* wares because of his curiosity regarding the technique. Likewise, Charlie explained that the “technique of this particular style” was the reason why he chose the *Buncheong* wares, but unlike David, it was because of his own interest. Jino also picked the duck-shaped vessel because of his interest in the technique. Charlie and Jino were the two visitors who told me that they were familiar with the pottery-making technique and material. In addition, Alex selected a plain and simple white porcelain as her favorite piece in the Korean gallery according to her artistic “taste.” However, taste was not the sole factor in this case; the “warm emotion” she felt during a charity event that involved plain white bowls was aroused in the viewing process and created an affectionate feeling towards the artwork. For visitors like Juanita and Alvin, prior experiences related to the visitors’ cultural background or education linked them closer to the artworks. They expressed their curiosity to see something different from what they are familiar with, while some visitors drew upon their knowledge of artworks from different cultures to compare it with Korean art.

Stocking (1985) situates the museum, the foundational setting of this research, as a three-dimensional space that encompasses both objects and viewers. The objects preserved in the museum are from the past, so that “the observer experiencing them in three-dimensional space must somehow also cross a barrier of change in time” (p. 4). The physical aspects that construct this “three-dimensional space” as a whole were another factor that affected the visitors’ process of viewing the object. While the visitors failed to

mention their impressions of the specific environmental elements of the gallery, such as the wall, floor, lighting, panel design, they acknowledged that the general physical aspects of the space affected their viewing of the artworks. For example, David mentioned that the manageable size of the gallery encouraged him to explore the artworks in depth while explaining how some museums have huge rooms, which were “overwhelming.” Jeanette, however, stated that the small size of the gallery “doesn’t convey the sense of quiet and solemnity that you normally see in an art gallery.” Her past experiences at art museums left a more positive impression than her current experience at the Korean gallery since the small gallery was crowded with visitors on the day of her visit. Kendra, who already knew that Korea was a country with a long history, remarked that the small collection displaying both ancient and traditional objects and contemporary artworks caused a “disconnect” and a “stark contrast.” Although I initially assumed that the built environment only serves as an immediate factor that would influence the visitors’ impression on the gallery, the visitors related their impression of the physical aspects of the gallery to their prior experience by comparing the space with other galleries that they visited before.

TOWARDS A DYNAMIC AND AUTHENTIC LEARNING OF KOREAN ART

While my research questions started from discerning the entrance narrative of the visitors, it is equally important to recognize and understand the further effect of their entrance narrative on the process of learning about Korean art and culture. Falk and Dierking (2000) claim that visitors’ entrance narratives “affect not only what and how

visitors interact with educational experiences but also with what meaning, if any, they make of such experiences” (p. 79). Therefore, while it is important to examine how the visitors’ entrance narratives blend with Korean art, it is also crucial to identify what they learned and took away from the exhibition.

This study was initiated to examine the importance of acknowledging visitors’ entrance narratives and their implications. Studying what visitors bring to the museum would be a starting point and foundation to support what should be done in the next step. Exploring the visitors’ fresh experience was meaningful as a beginning to enable effective learning in the Korean gallery. However, based on the findings of this research, I realized that a leverage needs to be provided to the visitors in order to enable dynamic and authentic understandings of Korean art.

The responses from the visitors were multi-layered perspectives developed from individual experiences. Each of their responses were unique since they were idiosyncratic in nature. The personal background of visitors, however, could also function as a barrier that limits a culturally sensitive understanding of Korean art. Although the visitors’ entrance narratives became the connective point that led them to think further about the artworks, this did not necessarily guarantee a deeper understanding of Korean art and culture. Through the stories, I was able to discern what the visitors were interested in and how they attempted to make sense of the artworks in their own terms. For example, Charlie compared a Korean porcelain with a Greek vase based on his prior knowledge of Western art history. Likewise, Juanita related another porcelain to a Mexican water pot, which she derived from her personal history. They were all using their entrance narratives

as valid points of negotiation. However, they did not extend their thought process far enough to reach an authentic understanding of Korean art. While they were trying to assimilate the Korean art objects into their own background, no further attempt was made in order to accurately compare the differences between the artworks they already knew and the Korean arts they now encountered. In addition, even when the visitors brought up their interest and taste in viewing the objects, I was unable to detect their desire to catch the unique sensibility, which pertains only to Korean art.

The visitors' entrance narratives indicate that they were trying to bring the objects conceptually closer to themselves; however, this necessarily does not mean that they were gaining an authentic learning of Korean art. From the observation of visitors and also from the interview with them, I noticed that the visitors were not very interested in reading the didactic information provided by the museum as much as they focused on the objects. Based on this study, however, I learned that a different approach could enhance the visitors' understanding of the art.

The Arts of Korea gallery was formed by experts who strove to convey the unique perspectives of Korean culture. In order to successfully channel these perspectives to the visitors the values and uniqueness expressed of Korean art in the gallery should not be imposed upon them, but should be shared with them instead. In the case of viewing Korean art it is essential to maintain balance between the power of the museum (the provider of the exhibition) and the audience. Diverse ideas related to the artworks could be produced through a negotiation and sharing between these two entities.

Therefore, I realized that the visitor's act of verbally sharing thoughts and ideas related to the artwork with the providers of the exhibition could become a valid way to strengthen a dynamic understanding of Korean art. Relating the artworks to the individual visitors' entrance narrative is a constructive way to amplify their interest in the objects and desire to learn more. However, since the visitors' entrance narratives are so diverse, I propose that the role of a facilitator, who could encourage interaction between the viewer and the objects through conversation, would assist the visitors' learning process to a great degree.

Since my role as a researcher was to ask questions while encouraging the visitors to give shape to their own experiences, it was difficult to distinguish our interactions as a "conversation." By participating in the research and sharing their thoughts about the artwork, however, the visitors voluntarily forged a social interaction with the researcher. Also, I was surprised by the fact that the majority of participants had a valuable idea to add to the meaning-making process. If this social interaction could be performed in the gallery between the docent or an educator and the individual or a group of visitors, agreed-upon knowledge of Korean art could be forged in a collaborative way. The premise of this kind of teaching and learning is that the facilitator should be knowledgeable enough in Korean art to make connections between the visitors' entrance narratives with the objects and between various ideas expressed by multiple individuals. The facilitator should not assume the role of transmitting information, but assist the visitors' journey of interpretation in a way that is subtle and nuanced, which is also the very nature of this gallery and the objects displayed in the space.

In this way, the act of sharing the process of interpreting art within a sociocultural perspective can promote interactivity and bring new voices forward that are derived from multiple identities with different life experiences. Learning through conversation could become a way to acknowledging this diversity that constructs visitors' identities and further help to bring out the nuance and subtlety of Korean art in a collaborative way. The entrance narratives shared by various visitors could operate as a connective point leading them to a journey towards dynamic and culturally sensitive learning. Knowing the visitors' entrance narratives, helping the visitors to connect those with Korean art, and also assisting them to get out of the box to extend their understanding are all important points to enable culturally authentic learning and should be done at the same time and be based on constructivist learning theory.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The visitors' narratives are evidence of the diverse interpretations that can be added to art objects. Understanding the visitors' interpretation process, which is based on the entrance narrative of each visitor, will help the museum to explore the visitors' individual unique experience. The museum will also be able to develop new methods of representing the beliefs and values of Korean art. However, I did not extend this research to identifying how the interpretative strategies could vary according to groups of visitors classified by age, gender, education, or cultural background. Future research related to this study could examine how the various aspects of Korean art and culture can relate to the different interpretative strategies adopted by varying "interpretative communities,"

and assist the viewers in understanding the significance of what they are viewing (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, p. 49). Therefore, developing educational programs introducing diverse interpretative strategies that refer to these varying communities would be a practical way to foster multicultural art education.

This study focused on visitors' experience of Korean art and culture in museums suggests further research problems. Since I conducted my research at an encyclopedic art museum where Korean art is displayed along with objects from various cultures, I realize that the visitors' interpretations of the Korean artworks can vary because of their experience within this broad museum context. In other words, artworks can generate different meanings according to their relationship with other departments and artworks in the museum. Accordingly, I believe that a study that examines visitors' experiences of Korean art from a museum that displays Asian art exclusively might show how the visitors interpret the Korean art objects differently from how other artworks are viewed. Hooper-Greenhil (2000) describes that "museums can make new meanings which are produced through new equivalences. . . museums thus have the power to remap cultural territories, and to reshape the geographies of knowledge" (p. 21). One could further research the varying display strategies and the different conceptual location of the Korean gallery in an encyclopedic art museum and an Asian art museum and compare what the visitors take away from each of them. The research could verify if the visitors' viewings of the traditional and contemporary artworks in the gallery are performed within an independent framework of "Korea," or if it is forged rather through a complex perspective resulting from a general overview of the museum.

BENEFITS TO THE FIELD OF MUSEUM EDUCATION

This study underscores the importance of acknowledging visitors' entrance narratives and suggests that this aspect should be used as a fundamental foundation to foster an authentic and dynamic understanding of Korean art. Since this investigation provides information on visitors' perceptions of Korean art, this study also contributes to the museum professionals' efforts to develop educational practices to enhance visitors' experiences at a Korean art gallery. Overall, this study opens up a place for discussion that explores the ways to integrate the concept of cultural diversity in the museum. The study also affirms the importance of encompassing art forms that represent diverse cultural identities and the need to facilitate diverse interpretations and communication methods in the museum.

CONCLUSION

Museums are places that have the potential to transform personal and subjective experiences of individuals into communally meaningful forms. Therefore, the museum educator's role is to stimulate the natural flow of this interaction between the artwork and the audience and to promote the reciprocal action of constructing meaning between different viewers as well. By creating a forum for discourse through engaging diverse visitors, museums place art at a crossing of representations of identity and social life.

One way to assist this practice in the Korean art gallery is to encourage the audience to actively link their own experiences or thoughts to the ones made by the artist or other viewers. Through this process visitors do not obtain objective and factual

information about the artwork, but rather they gain the ability to contextualize the artwork within a personal, social, and cultural sphere.

Fostering the audience's ability to critically assess the current museum culture based on this new approach empowers the audience to question the notion of representation and cultural identities. Multicultural art education performed in the museum should assist this process, in which the audience makes personal connections with the various contexts that surround the artwork. I believe every moment will turn into a unique experience for the audience and it is these individual experiences created by individual viewers that complete the meaning of an artwork as a whole. Without doubt, acknowledging visitors' viewpoints aligns with the postmodern perspective of museum education.

In this research, however, I also learned that it is crucial to balance the weight of personal experiences and authentic information of the art in the learning occurring in the Korean gallery. The act of making personal connection becomes the initial platform in the learning process for the viewer. Although these activities seem to be a beginning, visitors' interpretation process could be completed by further providing understandings that accurately represent Korean art. In this way, I believe that teaching and learning conducted in Korean art galleries will effectively broaden an understanding that acknowledges individual visitors and the value of Korean culture at the same time.

Appendix A: Site Letter of Agreement

MFA H

*The Museum of Fine Arts,
Houston*

May 10, 2012

Dr. James Wilson, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
P.O. Box 7426
Austin, TX 78713

*Christine Starkman
Curator of Asian Art
Ancient to Contemporary*

Dear Dr. Wilson,

The purpose of this letter is to grant Eunjung Choi, a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin, permission to conduct research at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The project, "Museum Visitor's Experience of Viewing Korean Art," entails interviewing approximately 20-25 numbers of visitors who enter the Korean art gallery during early June to mid-August, in order to examine the visitor's perception of the Korean art and their interaction with the objects. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston was selected because the institution has a permanent gallery exclusively focusing on the art of Korea. Eunjung will serve as an intern at the museum during the summer of 2012.

I, Christine Starkman, do hereby grant permission for Eunjung Choi to conduct her research on examining the visitor's interpretation of Korean art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Sincerely,



Christine Starkman

*Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
1001 Bissonnet, Houston, Texas 77005
PO Box 6826, Houston, Texas 77265-6826*

*Telephone 713/639-7344
Telefax 713/639-7399
Email: Cstarkman@mfab.org*

Appendix B: Consent for Participation in Research (Visitors)

Consent for Participation in Research

Title: Museum Visitors' Experiences of Viewing Korean Art

Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will answer any of your questions. Read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your consent.

Purpose of the Study

You have been asked to **participate in a research study about the process of visitors' interpretation of Korean art object. The purpose of this study is to learn how diverse interpretations are produced from visitors to the Korean gallery, influenced by their different historical and cultural backgrounds. Participants must be 18 years old or more to Participate in this study.**

What will you to be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to

- **Tell the researcher your stories of Korean art and culture in relation to the objects on view. The participant will be asked to relate their experiences and perspectives to their viewing of Korean art objects.**
- **This study will take about 15-20 minutes, and will include approximately 25 study participants.**
 - Your participation will be **audio** recorded.

What are the risks involved in this study?

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, your participation will contribute to developing ways to effectively represent diverse cultural identities and facilitate the ways of communication within the field of museum education.

Do you have to participate?

No, your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate at all or, if you start the study, you may withdraw at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect your relationship with The University of Texas at Austin (University) in anyway.

Will there be any compensation?

You will not receive any type of payment participating in this study.

What are my confidentiality or privacy protections when participating in this research study?

- If you wish to participate but remain anonymous, please indicate so on the consent form and not fill out the name segment.
- If at any point you wish to withdraw the information you gave to the researcher, please contact researcher to have the information removed and destroyed.
- If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and only the research team will have access to the recordings. To make possible future analysis the investigator will retain the recordings of the interviews.
- The data resulting from your participation may be used for future research or be made available to other researchers for research purposes not detailed within this consent form.

Whom to contact with questions about the study?

Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher **Eunjung Choi** at **512-589-0401** or send an email to **islet103@gmail.com**.

This study has been processed by the Office of Research Support and the study number is 2012-04-0070.

Whom to contact with questions concerning your rights as a research participant?

For questions about your rights or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Office of Research Support by phone at (512) 471-8871 or email at **orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu**.

Participation

If you agree to participate please sign this form and return it to the researcher. You will receive a copy of this form.

Signature

You have been informed about this study’s purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

Printed Name

Signature

Date

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, procedures, benefits, and the risks involved in this research study.

Print Name of Person obtaining consent

Signature of Person obtaining consent

Date

Appendix C: Consent for Participation in Research (Curator)

Consent for Participation in Research

Title: Museum Visitors' Experience of Viewing Korean Art

Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will answer any of your questions. Read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your consent.

Purpose of the Study

You have been asked to **participate in a research study about the process of visitors' interpretation of Korean art object. The purpose of this study is to learn how diverse interpretations are produced from visitors to the Korean gallery, influenced by their different historical and cultural backgrounds. Participants must be 18 years old or more to participate in this study.**

NOTE: For studies registered on ClinicalTrials.gov you must include the statement:

A description of this study will be available on <http://www.ClinicalTrials.gov> as required by U.S. Law. This web site will not include information that can identify you. At most, the web site will include a summary of the results. You can search this web site at any time.

What will you to be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to

- **Tell your experience of representing specific cultures and the aspects that you emphasize in this process.**
- **This study will take about 15-20 minutes.**
- **Your participation will be audio recorded.**

What are the risks involved in this study?

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, your participation will contribute to developing ways to effectively represent diverse cultural identities and facilitate the ways of communication within the field of museum education.

Do you have to participate?

No, your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate at all or, if you start the study, you may withdraw at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect your relationship with The University of Texas at Austin (University) in anyway.

Will there be any compensation?

You will not receive any type of payment participating in this study.

What are my confidentiality or privacy protections when participating in this research study?

- If you wish to participate but remain anonymous, please indicate so on the consent form and not fill out the name segment.
- If at any point you wish to withdraw the information you gave to the researcher, please contact researcher to have the information removed and destroyed.
- If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and only the research team will have access to the recordings. To make possible future analysis the investigator will retain the recordings of the interviews.
- The data resulting from your participation may be used for future research or be made available to other researchers for research purposes not detailed within this consent form.

Whom to contact with questions about the study?

Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher **Eunjung Choi** at **512-589-0401** or send an email to **islet103@gmail.com**.

This study has been processed by the Office of Research Support and the study number is 2012-04-0070.

Whom to contact with questions concerning your rights as a research participant?

For questions about your rights or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Office of Research Support by phone at (512) 471-8871 or email at orssc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

Participation

If you agree to participate please sign this form and return it to the researcher. You will receive a copy of this form.

Signature

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

Printed Name

Signature

Date

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, procedures, benefits, and the risks involved in this research study.

Print Name of Person obtaining consent

Signature of Person obtaining consent

Date

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