

Thought on Jiha Moon's art, [Turbulent Utopia](#)

By Pamela Conrad

In the Mint's Newsletter, Ms. Moon was quoted as saying "I want to be a visual interpreter of the mixed cultural worlds of my generation."

To understand these cultural worlds she referenced, before I went through the exhibit I researched her background briefly and read about Far Eastern art, particularly the older art forms.

Jiha Moon was born in Korea. She received the Highest Honors in Art Education from Korea University in Seoul, Korea in 1996.

She got her Masters of Fine Arts from the University of Iowa in Iowa City, Iowa. She now resides in Atlanta, GA

While I am somewhat familiar with Western art, I know very little about Far Eastern, or Asian art. So I did some brief research to help understand the Korean part of Ms Moons "mixed cultural worlds."

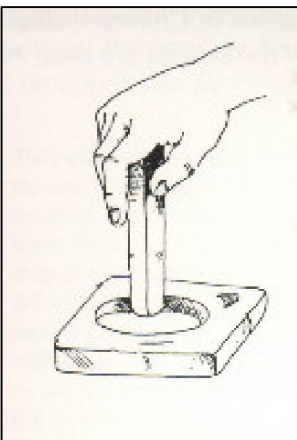
Painting in the Far East developed during the course of 3,000 years. Landscape painting in Korea depicted landscapes of Korea in addition to imaginary portrayals of China or Buddhist realms. Ms Moon uses these kinds of landscapes as her "starting" point in her paintings, although you won't see a literal representation of landscapes.

Ancient Asian art portrayed perspective in a different manner. Instead of using the basic principles of the horizon and the vanishing point for perspective, the landscapes in Asian art use positioning to portray perspective. There may be two fishermen in the scene. Both will be painted the same size. But one will be standing behind the winding stream while the other is in front, and

therefore the closer one. The closer would be lower in the painting. The movement created by the lines would guide the eye. Often this movement was created by a flowing stream or the flowing branches of a tree. You can see this is one of the plates in the Chinese porcelain exhibit. Artists in the Far East wanted to capture the overall mood and feeling of a scene, which is what Ms. Moon does.

Note – Images from this paper can be seen in the hard copy in the Mint Museum Library

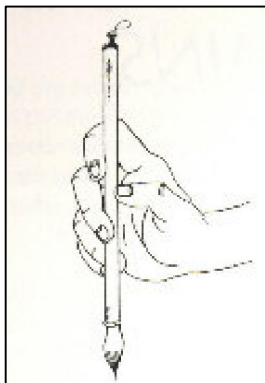
Ancient Asian art used the brush, inkstick, inkstone and paper, traditionally referred to as the Four Treasures. The limitations imposed by the materials used in Asian art were such that, once the artist had put brush to paper, it was almost impossible to make any changes.



Calligraphy inkstone and inkstick

Ms. Moon chose a very ancient form of paper for her painting. It is called Hanji paper, which was made 1500 years ago. It is hand made paper made from the bark of a kind of “mulberry” tree particular to the climate of Korea.. This paper has extraordinary strength and elasticity.

Ms. Moon also uses ink of calligraphy in her work. In calligraphy the brush was traditionally held in the middle or top of the handle in an upright position between the thumb and the index finger with the middle finger also touching the brush. Because the artist’s brush never rested on the work surface, the artist could rotate the brush through 360 degrees at the wrist, giving complete freedom of movement. As I looked at the swirls and movement of color in Ms Moon’s paintings I wondered if she held her brush this way in order to get the flowing lines of her landscapes.



While Ms Moon used the very ancient Hanji paper and black ink, she also leaps forward to use a very new form of paint – acrylics. Acrylics can be a difficult paint to use. Like Ink, it is difficult for the artist to “change their mind” once the paint is on the paper. Acrylics can dry very quickly. And they don’t always dry with exactly the same color as when they are wet. They can be darker. They can also be difficult to blend on the paper. So the artist has to have a very good command of what the paint will and won’t do and how the painting will look when it is dry.

I went through the exhibition of Chinese exported porcelain before I viewed Ms. Moon’s paintings. In the Chinese exhibit there are Chinese porcelain figures with what seems to be European Jewish dress but Chinese faces that were for

Europeans who had never seen China created by Chinese who may never have seen a European.

In contrast, Ms Moon has experienced both Korean and American cultures and consciously uses both to create something that is both but neither.

I'd like to describe my "walk" through the exhibit and what I saw and felt.

### Persica Route

A persica is a small tree with a crooked trunk that is native to China. It bears an edible juicy fruit also called a peach. This painting winds through a Korean mountain scene with the trees like weeping willows bending in the breeze.

Persica trees?

There seem to be "faces" in the mountains. The ancients believed the mountains to be "alive" and that there were spirits and dragons in the mountains, air, and water. These seem to float in this painting

### In the painting titled J Walk

Green and blues dominate, which are the fundamental colors of a landscape painting. In all the paintings, the colors are bright and bold. These are not the landscapes of an impressionist. Scattered among the colors are peaches of pink and white. Does the "hand" of the river reach to pluck a fresh white peach as it flows by? (Lower right)

The straight bright stripes at the bottom seem to be in jarring contrast with the rest of the painting. Is someone J-walking across the painting, violating the orchard and river?

### Mandala tree vs lumberjack

A mandala is a symbol of Buddhist religion. It is derived from the root "manda" which means "essence. It is used as a term for a chapter or a collection of mantras that are sacred sounds that contain the "genetic patterns" of beings and things. It may symbolize the mind and body of Buddha. If this is a mandala, is the lumber jack going to destroy it? Why? Is this a statement of concern for the environment? The first thing I see is the swirling green leaves of the tree. Then, is the lumberjack the "ghostly" figure are the right?

### The painting in Myth Series: Jelly Velly is a fun painting.

A blue and white stream flows among the swirls of white wind. The undulating greens suggest movement of branches. The bright colors are "jelly bean" colors. Standing among it all are sticks of orange and white "gum". This seems to be a fantasy world like Alice in Wonderland or Willie Wonka?

Another of the Myth series: White waterfall is one of my favorites with its Splashing water amid a mythical forest with floating images of flowers and birds. When you go through the Chinese porcelain exhibit, look at the blue birds on the porcelain from China. I think that they've migrated to Jiha Moon's painting.

Peach Heaven

Pink peaches flow in a sea of orange surrounded by bright light green. Even here peaches nestle and peek out. Are these from the Persica tree? The swirls and lines of purple seem to move as clouds above the orchard.

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Where are they (super Heroes)

Slightly above and to left of the organic flow and swirl of colors area are a series of bright, straight lines. Are these “beams” of light and color? If you are in the West, you read from left to right and the first thing that your eye sees is the straight lines. But if you are in the East, you begin at the Right. Here is the more mysterious swirls of color that your eye follows until it reaches the surprising contrast of the very straight lines. Among all this are miniature suggestions of the super heroes – a winged boot, a caped dog, a woman hero poised for flight. Maybe a dragon tail or wing, and a witch hat? What superheroes are these? Wonderwoman? Wonderdog?

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Myth Series: Possible Hand

As I viewed this painting I was reminded of a poem written by ee cummings that begins "spring is like a perhaps hand in a window.."

Here are puffs of white amid the stark black and red "leaves. " Is the brown object at the bottom the "possible hand?" If not, where is it? Or is it that a possible hand has arranged the colors of the painting?

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I also have a couple of slides of paintings that are not in the exhibit, but that I found on her web site that I like very much

DECAPITATED BUDDHA

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## A HUMBLE LIFE

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I think this exhibit is well worth your time and effort to view. Jiha Moon is an artist to watch.