



Journey to discover South Korea's living history

Bukchon Hanok village, South Korea is a town where six hundred years of Korea's traditional residential architecture still exists. In March, 1977, the Department of Housing and Urban Development nominated this village as a Korean historical monument district in order to prevent its destruction. Unfortunately, regulation policy for Bukchon Hanok village preservation hasn't been properly followed and many traditional houses within it have already been destroyed or replaced with modern houses and business market places. Once, this Hanok village was the center of community life, but now as a tourist site with no permanent residents, it becomes a ghost town at night. Nearly 50 percent of Hanoks have disappeared since 1985 and the remaining spiritually inherited homes will vanish if attention and awareness is not established in the community.

My goal for the Mortimer Hays-Brandeis Traveling Fellowship is to research and document Bukchon Hanok village's current preservation condition and traditional architectural structure and function in relationship with the residents who still remain. I will then incorporate my observations into a public installation piece with the aim of demonstrating Hanok's value as a form of historical art and aesthetic in the landscape.

Historical Context

The origin of Hanok dates back to the founding of Korea. More than just buildings, these villages reflect the ancestor's way of life and social and political histories. They also currently serve as a dwelling place for descendants. The style of Hanok was modified and transformed as the country developed, and most remaining traditional Hanoks originate from 1392-1910 during the Joseon Dynasty period. Its name, 'Hanok,' was created to indicate Korea's traditional housing style in contrast with the western architectural style 'Yangok.' Challenges to traditional Hanok first occurred during the Korean War in 1950 and following colonization. During this period, constant regime changes destroyed many people's dwelling places and abated trust in the country's future. After these events, even though the building of democracy and establishment of residential development improved Korea's economy and led to a modern society, rapid growth weakened public interest in conserving the old traditional housing, Hanok. As of now, 50 Hanok villages remain and only seven of them are legally preserved.

Personal Interest

My interest in this project stems from the characteristics and philosophy of Hanok living, which has inspired me to explore Hanok as a historical sculptural medium and concept. After my childhood visit to a Hanok village, I can still recall their unique color, appearance and structure in comparison to modern houses. To me, Hanok represents the essence of South Korea. Traditional Hanoks were built by professional carpenters and teams of experts who invented the authentic method of construction using simple hand tools and without use of nails to maintain the integrity of the medium. Hanok materials, including red pine, mud, and straw, interest me because they indicate the ancestors' wisdom of not polluting the environment and their ability to access materials easily and economically. Furthermore, the division between rooms and location

of each space indicate the societal roles of men and women and Confucianism that deeply influenced Korean's social life and home. I am curious to learn how structural formation and manmade buildings can intertwine with nature and come together as one united landscape. I hope to understand different mediums' functional and aesthetic purpose within Hanok and the processes of obtaining material and creating structures, walls, and natural paints. Through field study documentation, this project will provide me fundamental information, which will become a vital part in my experimental art process.

Activities

My research is divided into two parts, on-site visits and archival research for six months. The first part of my research will start with visiting Bukchon Hanok village. I contacted David Kilburn who defends Bukchon Hanok village's preservation and works as an activist and journalist. He also watched and documented Hanok's destruction and demolition while living in Bukchon Hanok village. David will be imperative to my project because he can provide me first-hand information on the struggle to preserve Bukchon village, and he actively promotes the awareness of Hanoks by presenting a concert and art exhibition. Bukchon Hanok Village is not a familiar district for me, and he will acquaint me with the area and advise my historical research during my visit. Through interviewing residents who still live in these historical villages and are trying to protect their houses, I will learn substantial issues the villages encounter and what threats are posed to Hanok village. My research on Hanok is not limited to Bukchon Hanok village. I will visit seven other Hanok villages elected as Korean historical sites and preserved under the government in contrast to Bukchon Hanok village. Due to Korea's extensive transportation system and small size, traveling between sites will not be an issue. Among those seven Hanok villages, Andong Hahoe and Gyeongju Yangdong villages were designated as

UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2010, proving the distinctive characteristics and beauty of these villages present only in Korea. This field study to national heritage sites will contribute critical information to document changes and differences in preservation systems.

The second part of my research process will involve collecting documentation and journals related with Hanok's architecture, tradition, and role within the community and Korean society. I have contacted The Korea National University of Cultural Heritage to access documentations and resources on Hanok. Historical archives and journals will advance my understanding and bring more depth to my art work process. Moreover, being aware of the carpenters' thoughts and theory behind Hanok will support my interest on the material, color, shape, and structure as a sculptor. Auri National Hanok Center will be a resource to me throughout the project. They are an organization committed to an innovative direction of preservation, obtaining residents' active participation, and bringing awareness to Korea's historical sites. I will contact architectural scholars of these sites and study history and cultural customs related with the specific villages.

The final part of my project will incorporate my research into an art work which demonstrates the challenges faced by historical sites. I will experience and learn traditional Hanok making by participating at a local Hanok work studio. The studio classes offered in Hahoe and Yangdong villages will give me knowledge and experience with the materials used for Hanok. This studio participation will introduce me to different methods and expand my ability to incorporate these into my art process. As I acquire information and develop my understanding of Hanok, I will practice in the studio in South Korea where I can easily obtain and experiment with materials used for Hanok. This research project will offer a new approach for my art practice because I will learn not only the material and atmosphere of the villages, but

also the relationship between society and the history of Hanok. Going to the actual sites and identifying the village's challenges will be the foundation for creating my art work, while communicating with people about the Hanok villages will provide another layer to my project. I intend to integrate people's interviews, photo documents, and Hanok's medium into an artwork. My final outcome for this fellowship is to create a public installation piece that I can share with the audience in South Korea. I will submit my final art project to HONGEUN Art Creation Center and Seogyo Alt Laboratory Center in Seoul, South Korea where they will provide a public space under the aim of promoting community art activities and artist's innovative communication.

Preparation for Project

I was born in South Korea and lived there for 15 years. I still remember several field trips to historical sites that I took during school that have remained as valuable memories of where I came from. Although I haven't been back to Korea, I still keep in contact with people in South Korea who have offered and suggested places where I can stay and research. As someone raised under traditional Korean culture and traditions, I have knowledge of South Korean history, politics, and social issues. Korean is my native language, and I was a student teacher for the Korean language and culture program under the East Asian studies department at Connecticut College. Since I am a permanent resident in America, I can stay in South Korea without a visa for a year.

I majored in sculpture and studied various construction and installation processes with a conceptual theory based in contemporary art. My research has been focusing on the current status of the environment and how it deeply intertwines with our living place. Through this fellowship, I hope to gain more experience portraying my concepts into the artwork. My senior thesis, about supporting structures and their traditional role as a foundational frame of buildings,

also inspired me to study in Hanoks. The idea of supporting and holding is a concept that I have developed through my senior exhibition. I believe each part of a supporting structure plays a crucial role in order to function as one. Likewise, Hanok villages in South Korea reflect the value and impact of community that has been fading in today's world. Going to Hanok towns will bring a new perspective into my artwork and experimentation, and provide inspiration.

My professional goal is to further develop the field of public art and community art projects by concentrating on the concept of nature and structural function in our daily life. This fellowship will impart to me how to communicate through my work with the audience and how to share my discoveries about the disappearing Hanok villages through a form of art. This trip offers a chance to organize independent research in the real world and will teach me how to raise awareness in society through art, which will be my concentration as an artist. Additionally, this fellowship will give me a valuable experience to advance my study and practice for eventual entrance into a master's program in sculpture and installation.

Merit of Project

Along with the deterioration of Hanok villages will be the loss of South Korea's existing living history and distinctive cultural assets. This project will offer a meaningful experience to understand the current attitude towards the historical sites and their traditional value. Moreover, this trip to Korea will grasp and redefine society's ignored history. Hanok's value resides in people's minds, where one can tell a story of who they are and where they came from. It contains a story of Korean society where ancestors once cultivated and established Korea's ethnicity and identity. Throughout this fellowship, I will present Hanok's distinctive quality as a sculptural form and bring awareness of its beauty and the importance of its preservation.



Figure 1. Map of South Korea and eight Hanok villages that I will visit.

Travel route: I. Bukchon Hanok village—3,- 2. Asan Oeam village—3,- 3. Goseong Wanggok village 4. Andong Hahoe village 5. Seongju Hankye village 6. Gyeongju Yangdong village 7. Suncheon Nagan village 8. Seongeup village I. Back to Bukchon Hanok village