

# Expressionism Soars in Korea

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Ku Ji Hoy, the Suncheon artist who has mastered watercolor and takes viewers on flights of fancy via playful twists of perspective and knowledgeable use of blank space, offers a vast wonderland in his latest work. It takes years of practice to be able to make an expressive pass with a watercolor brush, knowing it will succeed in capturing not just the emotions of the moment, but a subject suitable to inject characters into.

In watercolor there are no second chances. Unlike oils, or many other media, such as acrylic, any attempt to edit a watercolor turns to muddy brown in a hurry. The delicate details Ku achieves are not from careful brushwork, but by expressing his innermost feelings. He confidently approaches each sheet of rice paper like an emotive calligrapher.

If art catches our eye, we need not know why or how the work was created. It's better to make our own stories about the art than to have interpretations forced on us by art historians or, God forbid, critics. As such, these works compel us to slow down, enjoy the simple things in life, and reflect upon parts of nature we may miss in our urban travels.

A giant expressionist tree towers over a man and beast who admire a temple feature; two cranes fly through a valley that could just as easily be the edge of bamboo trees; an insect with oddly human legs dances under a branch and abstract storm. The images make you wish you could jump in and escape the grind by drinking tea with a frog or learning the language of the grasshopper or crane. Ku's artistic expertise match his medium well as strong ink splotches give way to soft watercolors, major tempests subside under the spell of the flying crane. Later, entire birds are made from flings of ink, filled with random color splotches that further attest to the faith Ku has that, no matter the expressive beginning, a successful end is always attainable.

This is rare in the small but powerful genre known as abstract expressionism. In the beginning, artists like Jackson Pollack and Al Held experimented, but did not attain expressionist perfection, because they were too precise in their drippings and splotches. Here we have an artist who holds nothing back, let's emotion rule the moment, and still creates lasting images and complex stories. Ku's work is admirable from the point of view of traditional watercolor art and contemporary expressionism. This combination is rather rare, even in Korea, a country packed with talented painters. My favorite is the small, rotund artist toasting a well-thrown splotch: it is self-reflective humor and pure expressionism at the same time.