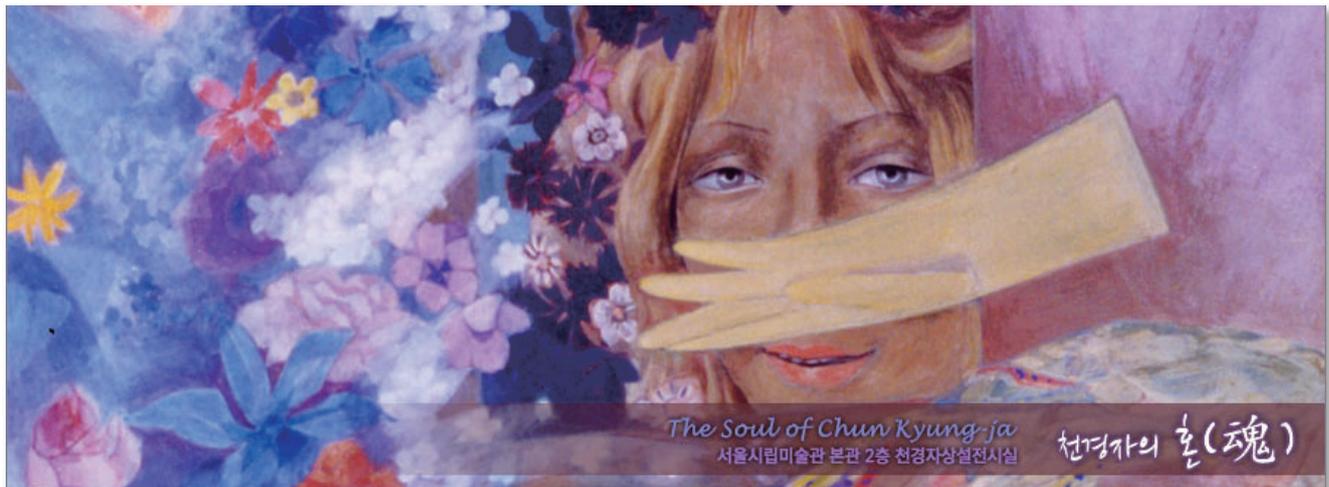


# THE SOUL OF CHUN KYUNG-JA

WORDS BY RAJNESH SHARMA



The Seoul Museum of Art is displaying a permanent exhibit featuring one of Korea's most talented artists, Chun Kyung-ja. This thought-provoking collection of paintings reflects Chun's dreams, regrets, aspirations and fantasies. A thorough examination of themes portrayed in her paintings provides an insight into her unique personality and abstract psychology.

The complexity of Chun's mind is revealed through her famous painting *Ecology*. The image depicts twisted and tangled black spotted snakes coiled together, concocting an atmosphere of hostility and chaos. The masterpiece was created in 1957 when Chun was struggling through a challenging period of hardships involving economic distress, the painful death of a child, a burdensome marriage and a taxing love life.

Several portraits of exotic women that Chun met during her travels also allude to her inner world. An Indian woman in a beautiful sari adorned with personal ornaments, women from Granada dressed in Bohemian style expressing their nomadic life, a woman in a bouquet of flowers, and even a portrait of Madonna transformed into a vase — all are meant to represent an aspect or alter ego of the artist.

For Chun, traveling was an indispensable source of inspiration that led her to create a unique world of art. Thus, the largest section of the exhibit is dedicated

to her cultural paintings, which were produced from the late 1960s to mid 1990s. There are 17 vibrant paintings that depict various themes of landscapes, animals, people, music, and rituals from around the world.

*Iguassu Waterfalls* (1979) illustrates the simplicity of nature, showing powerful streams and white waterfalls amongst the black rocks and green plants. In another splendid painting, the co-existence of people and animals peacefully occupying the same space is shown through a scene of Indians and cows at the Ganges River (India, 1979). Chun's views on music may be interpreted from *Black Jazz* (New Orleans, 1987). In this painting, through the use of vivid colors, she expresses the harmony between the African-American musicians and their instruments. Paintings of a bustling Peruvian market life of extravagantly

dressed women with babies wrapped in colorful cloth, the tranquil street scenery of Guam dominated by a wooden sculpture of a local deity, or a group of energetic men dancing near fire in a Pueblo village all reflect how Chun viewed the world.

At the end of the exhibition some of Chun's earliest artworks are featured. In 1941, as a freshman at Tokyo Women's College, Chun experimented with different styles and colors. Showcased are a picture design of a triangle divided using petal patterns and an exotic landscape of animals and flowers.

Upon leaving the exhibit, one can reflect on Chun's life as an artist by admiring an attractive display of her colorful paints, paintbrushes, and personal items. Chun's self-portraits, showing her working diligently within her studio, provide yet another personal touch to the whole display.



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