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Notes by an Egyptian resident artist in Jung-gu1

Welcome to Jung-gu

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I arrived to Jung-gu a little over a month ago to the beautiful architecture of Incheon art platform. Since the first day, I encountered a familiar yet foreign feeling. Perhaps the familiarity stems from the similarity I find in some of the customs we have in Egypt. Or perhaps in the visuals I came across in the contemporary household in Korea, or the images I saw in the museum of culture in Jung-gu. The foreign feeling however, I believe comes from the Language barrier. It is the first time I visit a place where I can't read the alphabet. All countries I visited before either spoke Arabic, which is my first language, or used Latin alphabet.

The other reason for those foreign feelings stems from the serenity I detect here. Egypt for as long as I can remember has been filled with suppressed anger due to the deteriorating living conditions. While Canada, which is my current place of residence, seems to burden its residents with an unjustifiable stress pattern, especially in the city of Toronto, where I reside. However, Incheon for me is the definition of a peaceful environment.

I find comfort in being in a culturally rich and historical place such as Jung-gu. It provides layers and layers to explore and encompass the space with warmth, something that I really miss in Canada. When I take a walk up Freedom Park and look at the port or when I take a walk down Jemullyang-ro which I now know by heart, new details catch my attention every time and stir thoughts in me. I now walk around and greet people, I first stop by the chicken noodle place around the corner, then the café opposite from it, then the traffic policeman across from the flower shop and the bar owner and her daughter who made me a beef stew the first day I arrived, and afterwards I head to my destination. Each one of them has become part of my life here in Jung-gu.



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## 인천 차이나타운

인천 차이나타운은 인천의 대표적인 관광지 중 하나입니다. 이곳은 다양한 중국 음식점과 기념품 가게가 즐비하며, 전통적인 중국 건축 양식을 볼 수 있습니다. 특히, 인천 차이나타운의 가장 큰 특징은 바로 '인천 차이나타운'이라는 이름입니다. 이곳은 매년 수백만 명의 관광객이 방문하며, 특히 여름철에는 더 많은 사람들이 찾아옵니다. 이곳은 인천의 대표적인 관광지 중 하나이며, 많은 사람들이 이곳에서 즐거운 시간을 보냅니다.

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## Incheon and the open port

I wanted to learn about the culture in Incheon, to get a better understanding of what I am lacking because of language,

but I was unable to find any English literature about the city. So, I began to read the city and the culture through the visuals and through talking to the few people who speak English. There is a sense of humbleness that I feel here, which I believe comes from the fact that this place has witnessed so much history.

I have this connection to water that compels me to seek the view of the sea, ocean, lake or river, wherever I am. My father is from a city of the Mediterranean, and I grew up in Cairo where the image of the Nile River while crossing the main bridge above Cairo was a daily encounter for me. However, the port here seems so close yet so far away, inaccessible to me till now. Still, I am in search for a clear and close viewing point.



인천의 차이나타운 근처에 있는 장난감 가게  
Toy store near Chinatown, Incheon  
©LamisHaggag

## So-Chang fabric

So-Chang fabric, a traditional Korean fabric made from 100% cotton, is a symbol of the region's heritage. It is a soft, breathable fabric that has been used for centuries. In 2000, there were about 10 factories left out of 200 that have carried on from one generation to the other.

Suri, a coordinator from Cheongpoong team (a team that organizes cultural events and promotes the work of Ganghwa Island artisans) guided and accompanied me throughout the whole trip. First, we began at the salted fish market, where I was treated to a tasty Japanese Sardinella(UM) Pizza, which reminded me of the salted fish we eat in Egypt (usually in celebration of Spring time as per the Ancient Egyptian calendar.) Then we visited the So-Change experience center, where I played with stamps they have of local birds and products on the fabric and watched a documentary about the history of So-Chang. Then after having 'Mugwort' tea (ssook)

## A trip to Ganghwa Island

I began to compose a visual story for my project at the residency about Jung-gu specifically and Incheon in general. I was in search for fabric that is made in the area, and I found out about the So-Chang fabric, a 100% cotton fabric, that is local to Ganghwa Island. With about 10 factories out of 200 left that have carried on from one generation to the other. The So-Chang industry, defies time and our modern consumerist patterns.

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and given so many souvenirs (Seon-mool.) I was driven to the factory, where the center gets their So-Chang. The factory has been working for four generations. The meticulousness of the steps of production, the visual of the beautiful well-crafted machines along with the surrounding landscape and the eagerness of the residents to tell me about the many uses of the So-Chang fabric was overwhelming. I returned back to Incheon Art Platform with so much fabric for my project at the residency.



인천 강화군에 위치한 소창체험관  
So-Chang experience center, Ganghwa, Incheon  
©LamisHaggag



인천 강화군에 위치한 소창체험관  
So-Chang experience center, Ganghwa, Incheon  
©LamisHaggag



인천 강화군에 위치한 소창공장  
So-Chang Fabric Factory, Ganghwa, Incheon  
©LamisHaggag

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### Images from Jung-gu

My experience in Jung-gu is based mostly on simple interactions with the people and on a variation of visuals that I will not forget. Sitting in the subway reading Han Kang's, 'The Vegetarian' and walking around to select my next dining experience. Exploring the Korean cuisine and the

different fusions. Listening to the street vendors calling for their merchandise and thinking of the Robabekya (old furniture) vendor that I have so many times woken up to in the morning in Cairo. Talking to the people with my hands and one or two English words that they know and appreciating their patience in dealing with a non-Korean speaker. Watching the fishing net hung between the trees on my way to the subway station and remembering the image of fishermen weaving their nets between the trees in Alexandria. All those memories and many more shall become part of my thoughts and future reminiscences.



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