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Notes by an Egyptian Resident Artist in Jung-gu 2 – ‘The World As We Know It’

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Incheon has been my home for almost two months now. Jung-gu, Incheon has had this effect on me that makes it hard to exit the area and roam around in other places, the nature of the architecture and elevation separates it from the surrounding areas and gives you the feeling that it is on top of the world, a fantastic small world. In Ancient Egyptian art making traditions; every artwork was made as a representation of the world. Meaning, you would have the earth line (‘Geb’ the Earth God) the Skyline (‘nut’ the sky goddess) and the pillars, to support the structure of that world, and together they conceive the world in between. Whatever existed outside the peripheries of such world did not matter as much. This is how I have come to perceive Jung-gu, Incheon thus far.

Any foreigner who comes to Korea learns immediately that eating out is much cheaper than cooking at home, thus comes my everyday experience with Korean food in Incheon. At first I used to pick from photos or order things randomly. Now, I am more acquainted with the local dishes and restaurants. I now get to pick and choose whether I feel like having Acorn noodle soup (Muk), cold Acorn soup with rice, Korean pie—which is also made out of acorn—Spicy Beef stew, Chinese food that was first invented in Korea such as the soy bean noodles. Janchi gooksoo noodles, bimbap, bibimbap or Grilled fish with so many side dishes that combined would make a full main dish. Unlike what I expected, coffee—in the western sense—is much more common in Korea than any other place I have visited before. Hence, I began to introduce residents of the area or visitors to my studio to Arabic coffee, which we also call Turkish coffee. This coffee, which we usually drink at local coffee shops in the streets of Cairo, consists of very fine coffee grind and cardamom spice. The reaction to the taste here has varied from really appreciating it to absolutely not. I then tell people while drinking it stories about how people, a few decades ago used to read the future of a coffee drinker in their porcelain cup or as we call it ‘Fengan.’ I also tell them about the five different names we have for the coffee as the amount of sugar changes.



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Ganghwa Noodles, Ganghwa Island, Incheon

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Dakmianga, Incheon

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Second visit to Ganghwa

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This time my visit to Ganghwa Island was to conduct a workshop of linocut on So-chang fabric at the So-chang experience center. Ganghwa island feels like a coastal city, always more relaxed than the mainland. But getting access to the island is very challenging, especially to a non-Korean speaker. Once I got there I was welcomed as usual by the very friendly residents, even though they were busy preparing for Sedaereul Itta festival, a festival that is part of a series of festivals taking place this year. We had a 3-hour workshop, during which the participants made a Korean and Arabic sign of the word So-chang surrounded by linocut designs of their own. The target of the workshop was to show appreciation for an old tradition that is worth maintaining, which is that of the So-chang. In my home country, what was once the best and most expensive cotton in the world has been replaced by imported cheap cotton and local farmers are sometimes forced into terminating their activity for the rich to make money off of imported goods. However, I feel there is still a chance to help save the So-chang fabric in Ganghwa Island. When introducing the history of the So-Chang fabric, the participants who all live on the island, were not totally familiar with it. Their only knowledge of it was of the fabric being used as baby diapers. I also learnt from them that it is mostly sold through the factories in large amounts, which makes it less accessible to the public.

Afterwards, the organizers took me for Noodles with anchovy soup (Janchi gooksoo) and then we headed to a place I was

looking forward to visit since I heard about its opening a month ago, the 'Joyang Bangjik' café. The oldest factory in South Korea, which was transformed into a coffee shop, which also happens to be a So-change factory.

The café was overwhelming as it is owned and ran by an antique collector, the detail in every corner and the size were breathtaking. The space had old sewing machines from the factory that still had their manuals in the drawers. Every part of it was well preserved and complemented with artworks and artifacts, within a contemporary setting



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So-Chang experience center, Ganghwa Island, Incheon

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조양방직, 갯마을, 조양

Joyang Bangjik, Ganghwa Island, Incheon

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Jooyang Bangjik, Ganghwa Island, Incheon

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Jooyang Bangjik

The Jooyang Bangjik is a traditional Korean sewing room. It is a place where women used to sew their clothes. The room is filled with treadle sewing machines and wooden chairs. The walls are made of mud plaster and are often peeling. The room is usually dimly lit. The Jooyang Bangjik is a popular tourist attraction in Ganghwa Island, Incheon.



동대문 시장, 서울

Dongdaemun Market, Seoul

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El-Ataba Market, Cairo

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