OUTSIDE ART: BAGGAT AND THE HISTORY OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART IN KOREA

by

Jean Kyung Choi

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

(Art History and Theory)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

August 2015

© Jean Kyung Choi, 2015
Abstract

The Baggat Art Group formed in South Korea in 1981 and continued until today. It is a loosely formed collective dedicated to participatory practices in the outdoors and site-specific works, depending on the years in question.

This thesis aims to rethink the significance of the Baggat Art Group through the lens of “ritual,” as theorized by the anthropologist Victor W. Turner. The project is structured around a long historical introduction and two case studies: Exhibition of History and Environment in 1997 and Abandoned Island, Mountain of Healing in 2002. These two exhibitions demonstrate instances when Baggat Art, positioned at the margins of the art field and society, functioned as a site of negotiation for sociopolitical issues. I propose that an observation of how the Baggat Art Group has continued to rewrite itself into dominant narratives of art allows for a more comprehensive understanding of modern and contemporary art in South Korea. This project therefore adopts and attempts to support the group’s objective of incorporating what is outside into the inside, transcending the limitations of existing boundaries, and to expanding the category of art by realizing what resides at its borders.
Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Jean Kyung Choi.

The Romanization of this thesis follows the Revised Romanization of Korean, proclaimed by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of South Korea in 2000. Korean names are rendered according to the East Asian convention (surname first). The Romanization and ordering of the names of individuals based or active outside South Korea follow their preferred identification.

All translations from Korean are mine, unless noted.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. ii

Preface ................................................................................................................................................... iii

Table of Contents .................................................................................................................................... iv

List of Figures .......................................................................................................................................... v

Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................... vi

Introduction ............................................................................................................................................. 1

  1.1 Festivals: Opening a *Pan* .................................................................................................................. 9
  1.2 Baggat Art as Ritual ......................................................................................................................... 14
  1.3 “Collective Body Performance” ....................................................................................................... 21

Chapter 2: *Exhibition of History and Environment* (1997) .............................................................. 25
  2.1 History as Experience ....................................................................................................................... 25
  2.2 The Formation of the Baggat Art Association ............................................................................... 28
  2.3 Rewriting Baggat Art .................................................................................................................... 33

Chapter 3: *Abandoned Island, Mountain of Healing* (2002) ............................................................ 39
  3.1 The Site-Specificity of Baggat Art: Environment as Experience ................................................. 39
  3.2 Baggat Art in the Outside .............................................................................................................. 44
  3.3 Extending Baggat Art .................................................................................................................... 47

Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................... 51

Figures .................................................................................................................................................... 54

Bibliography ........................................................................................................................................... 56
List of Figures

Figure 1. Documentation of the Opening Ceremony to the 1986 Winter, Daeseong-ri Exhibition, 1986. Photograph © The Baggat Art Association, 2015. ................................................................. 54

Figure 2. Nam Chul Shin, Baram—Sori [Wind—Sound], 1997. Photograph © The Baggat Art Association, 1997. ........................................................................................................ 54

Figure 3. Soo-hyun Choi, Juk-eun jari-e kko-eul [Flowers to the Place of Death], 1997. Photograph © The Baggat Art Association, 1997. ................................................................. 54

Figure 4. Woonyoung Choi, Taoreuneun bulkkot [The Flare], 2002. Photograph © The Baggat Art Association, 2002. .................................................................................................. 54

Figure 5. Dong-hwa Jeon, Uriga mandeun Pyramid [The Pyramid That We Made], 2002. Photograph © The Baggat Art Association, 2002. ................................................................. 54

Figure 6. Ha-eung Jeong, Ttangui sumsori [The Sound of the Earth Breathing], 2002. Photograph © The Baggat Art Association, 2002. ........................................................................... 54

Figure 7. Kwang Woo Kim, Nanjido yeonkkot [Lotus Flowers of Nanji Island], 2002. Photograph © The Baggat Art Association, 2002. ................................................................. 54

Figure 8. Sung-yeol Choi, Saengtaeyeu jeehang [Resistance of the Ecosystem], 2002. Photograph © The Baggat Art Association, 2002. ................................................................. 55

Figure 9. Dong-hwan Lee, Saessak [Sprout], 2002. Photograph © The Baggat Art Association, 2002. ...................................................................................................................... 55

* All images are listed but not reproduced. Copyright permissions not granted.
Acknowledgements

I am sincerely grateful for the support of my professors and colleagues in The Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory at UBC. I want to extend my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Professor Catherine M. Soussloff, for generously guiding me throughout the process and offering invaluable advice and comments, especially while putting together the theoretical framework for my thesis. I would also like to sincerely thank my first reader Professor Ignacio Adriasola for his expertise and exceedingly perceptive contributions to my project. This thesis would not have been possible without the helpful assistance and considerable guidance of my thesis committee.

To the many colleagues and friends who have supported me throughout this process and shared their ideas and criticisms, including in particular Gloria Bell, Margaret Stern, Eva Tweedie, Siwin Lo, Anyse Ducharme, Jamey Braden, Jessica Gnyp, Michelle Weinstein, and Anton Lee, thank you for your intellectual energy and ongoing enthusiasm.

I am also indebted to the Baggat Art Association for their valuable support and sustained help. I sincerely thank artists Choi Woonyoung, Kim Yong-min, and Ha Jung-soo for their assistance in this project.

I could not have completed this project without the enthusiasm of my friends and family. To Suzy Yoon, thank you for always being positive and supportive. To Anna Hyunsook Kim, Sung Sub Choi, and Michael Choi, I am sincerely grateful for your love, patience, and understanding, as well as for encouraging me to pursue this path. Thank you for always believing in me.
Introduction

Thirty-one participants from various artist groups first gathered under the name of Baggat Art in 1981. These artists, supported by critics and friends, were in search for an alternative venue in response to what is often dubbed by scholars as the “dark age for democracy” of the nineteen-seventies and eighties, under the successive political regimes of Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan. The Korean art field during this period, according to critic Kim Kyung Suh, primarily focused on practices that were approved by a handful of critics and institutional competitions, representatively the Korean Fine Arts Association. Many young artists, however, perceived mainstream art institutions as becoming increasingly restrictive, especially under the direct influence of governmental censorship. They wished to exist outside the category of art that was set by mainstream institutions, as well as the restrictive sociopolitical boundaries enforced by the government; they strived to exist in the outdoors, in the baggart. Rivers and fields became an open space for exhibition, providing these artists with possibilities...
to engage in experimental forms of art that were often excluded from institutionalized spaces in Seoul.\(^5\) What began as an enthusiastic conversation between fellow artists at a local bar quickly blossomed into their first exhibition in January of 1981 by the riverside of Daeseong-ri, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea.\(^6\) The five-day long event consisted of site-specific installation or performative artworks, musical and mime performances, plays, and concurrent lectures and seminars. This occasion marked the beginning of the annual Baggat Art exhibitions, with participating artists loosely associated as the Baggat Art Group until the official formation of the Baggat Art Association in 1992.\(^7\)

Although the exhibition in 1981 began, as Kim Kyung Suh recalled, in the form of a loose, clumsy, and unfocused gathering, it provided young artists with possibilities anew to produce art outside of institutional and governmental boundaries.\(^8\) Baggat Art exhibitions provided them with a means to voice their rejection of painterly abstraction and the so-called “Korean modernism”—both represented by Dansaekhwa—that dominated the Korean art world

\(^5\) During the nineteen-seventies and eighties, mainstream art practices in South Korea were centered on Seoul, as the nation’s cultural infrastructure was rebuilt with the city as its economic center. The act of moving away from Seoul thus gained significance as an expression of resistance against dominant discourses. Yatoo artist Yi Eungwoo, for example, explained that Yatoo was formed to launch a local art movement based in the city of Gongju that would stand against the mainstream art field exclusively based in Seoul. Yi explained that their activities were intended to foster an alternative movement based upon the local characteristics and rural culture of the area. Eungwoo Yi, personal communication with Hong Kyu Koh, quoted in Hong Kyu Koh, “Art Critiques and Ecological Perspectives of Contextuality, Equity, and Harmony: Recommendations for Korean Art Education,” Ph.D. diss. (Pennsylvania State University, 2013), p. 59.

\(^6\) Following its independence from Japan, the Korean peninsula was divided into two nations between 1945 and 1948: the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. In this thesis, terms such as “Korea” and “Korean” are used to address specifically the Republic of Korea, or South Korea. When using the word “Korea” or “Korean” to address the country prior to 1945, however, I am referring to the pre-divided nation as a whole.

\(^7\) Daeseong-ri was the primary venue for the annual winter exhibitions until 1992. After six more events in 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002, the group relocated to Jara Island, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea, where they have been exhibiting annually since 2005.

\(^8\) Kim Kyung Suh speculated that the group initially gathered around artist Choi Hyun-soo and Kim Jung-sik, as the latter occupied a studio near Daeseong-ri. Kim, Gamchugi, Deureonaegi, Itgehagi, p. 17.
of the nineteen-seventies and eighties. Artists participating in Bagga Art events collectively emphasized active engagement, systematic attempts to support aesthetic experimentation, anti-elitist and anti-institutional expressions, and critiques of the sociopolitical situation. The Bagga Art Group, seeing mainstream narratives to be too exclusive and selective, thus focused on expanding the category of art by integrating what existed outside of the rigidly defined boundaries—namely, the everyday.

Existing outside of institutional and governmental boundaries, however, also meant existing outside of dominant discourses of art. Bagga Art has consequently been largely excluded from the writings of modern and contemporary art history in South Korea. Critics and scholars have often criticized the group for using nature as an escapist retreat, mainly because they physically distanced themselves from the sociopolitical scene of the nineteen-eighties. In response to such criticisms, a recurring theme of Bagga Art has been to theorize its practices as a collective effort as well as to establish its position within dominant narratives of art history. Members have debated the parameters of a solid framework that would encompass the numerous artists and artworks placed under the umbrella of Bagga Art. The group initiated the rewriting of Bagga Art in order to argue that their desire to exist in the outside was not solely to oppose the inside and deny connection to it, but instead to expand the category of art generally and its

9 Dansaekhwa refers to a prominent movement in South Korea from the mid-nineteen-sixties to the mid-nineteen-seventies. With a strong focus on abstract paintings, this loose constellation of Korean artists was largely promoted in South Korea, Japan, and France, launching a debate on the parameters of the Korean art field. For a historical overview on how scholars came to crown Dansaekhwa as the epitome of the so-called Korean modernism, see Joan Kee, Contemporary Korean Art: Tansaekhwa and the Urgency of Method (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

10 Kim began his overview of the group by noting how Bagga Art has existed outside the dominant discourses of art history in South Korea. Kim, Gamchugi, Deureonaegi, Itgehagi, pp. 12-5.

11 For instance, critic Kim Bok-yun wrote that Bagga artists would eventually return to their “ateliers,” and that the Bagga Art exhibitions were temporary means of escape. Ibid., p. 30
boundaries. Through various seminars, workshops, and roundtables, the Baggat Art Group has strived to create an understanding of their practices outside the confines of a binary between nature and culture, with the most notable case being critic Kim Kyung Suh’s 2006 publication, *Gamchugi, Deureonaegi, Itgehagi [Hiding, Revealing, and Letting Be]*. Such events and publications, however, have been mostly limited to periodic considerations of the group or reviews that only account for each particular and individual exhibition. What currently lacks, and thus what I aim to articulate, is a historical overview of the Baggat Art Group and its shifting roles in relation to the larger social, political, and cultural landscapes of post-war South Korea.

This thesis is a study of the Baggat Art Group, active since 1981 in South Korea, through the lens of “ritual,” as suggested by the anthropologist Victor W. Turner (1920-1983). Drawing upon the early twentieth-century work of Arnold van Gennep, Turner articulated a concept of “social drama” that consists of four main phases: breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration. Within such a process of social drama, he highlighted ritual as a redressive activity that has the capability to transform the fixed social and cultural systems of the everyday world. Ritual, according to Turner, does not simply restore social equilibrium, nor does it enforce the status quo; instead it partakes in the ongoing process by which society continuously redefines

12 Kim Kyung Suh, a longtime supporter of the Baggat Art Group, covered a general history of the group in his 2006 publication which records important dates and moments of change in its history. Hong Kyu Koh’s doctoral dissertation in art education also provides an overview of both Yatoo and Baggat Art practices through substantive interviews with artists. Koh’s project, however, does not address the overall history of the Baggat Art Group, as it is more focused on specific case studies in order to answer to art educational issues in South Korea.

13 According to member Kim Yong-min, the group has lost most of the material that documented exhibitions prior to the nineteen-nineties. The group has been gradually collecting and reorganizing the lost material; a collection of seminar presentations and critical accounts can be found at the official website of the Baggat Art Group. The Baggat Art Association, “Baggat Art.”

and renews itself.\textsuperscript{15} I turn to Turner’s idea of ritual as a transformative activity that can exceed the given social categories and create structural ambiguity in order to transcend the limitations of the nature/culture binary that often frames the understanding of Baggat Art. Ritual is central to Baggat Art practices, and thus Turner’s idea that it can serve as a vehicle for social change can provide insight into the interpretation of Baggat Art as actively responding to its social structure, instead of expressing disinterest, isolation, or lack of professionalism.

I also propose that the outside of Baggat Art functions as a means of border-crossing, based on Turner’s articulation of ritual. Turner identifies ritual as a process, a transitory space experienced at the margins of a society at large. Ritual activity, however, alternates with the normal social structure, rather than completely denying or discarding it. In lieu of perceiving Baggat artists’ interest in nature as one that opposes culture, I focus on and utilize their own argument that the “outside” of Baggat Art is not one that opposes the “inside.” According to member Ha Jung-soo, their concept of the “outside” encompasses and \textit{includes} the “inside” within its range.\textsuperscript{16} As Baggat artist Kim Kwang Woo also explained:

\begin{quotation}
The important thing about what we [Baggat artists] do is not only the fact that we [create and exhibit our artworks] in nature, but [that] we try to bring [in] site-specific things happening in the place regardless of whether it is nature or society.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quotation}

Kim clarified that Baggat Art is concerned with not only the physical and geographical environment called “nature,” but also the related network of cultural, social, and political


\textsuperscript{16} Jung-soo Ha, personal communication with author, November 13, 2014.

\textsuperscript{17} Kwang Woo Kim, personal communication with Hong Kyu Koh, quoted in Koh, “Art Critiques and Ecological Perspectives,” p. 72.
interchanges. The position of being outside can therefore be understood as being in the margins of society, where they are not confined by conventional rules and norms but still remain in communication with the social structure. By focusing on the site-specificity of Baggat Art and its emphasis on ritual, I therefore aim to “redress” the understanding of Baggat Art. Baggat Art exists at society’s borders not as an exclusion, but as a means of generating transformative possibilities for reorganizing the social structure as well as the writings of modern and contemporary art history in South Korea.

In order to do so, I examine two case studies in relation to the early years of the Baggat Art Group: *Exhibition of History and Environment* in 1997 and *Abandoned Island, Mountain of Healing* in 2002. I selected these specific exhibitions as moments when the Baggat Art Group significantly shifted their primary focus. They demonstrate instances in which Baggat Art—positioned at the borders, margins, or thresholds of the art field and society—functioned as redressive activity, or what Turner’s work would call a site of negotiation for sociopolitical issues. The first chapter is a discussion of the early years of the Baggat Art Group, during which artists were in pursuit of freedom, both physically and conceptually, from an oppressive regime. The second chapter observes how the group’s focus shifted in 1997 to an engagement with historiography, leading to the formation of the Baggat Art Association. The third chapter discusses how the group became increasingly concerned with ecological and environmental issues, interests that manifested in the 2002 exhibition at Nanji Island, Seoul. Finishing with a glimpse into today’s Baggat Art practices, I thus seek to provide insight into how and why the group’s goal has shifted over the years in response to social, political, and cultural conditions.

My interest in the Baggat Art Group first began at an exhibition titled *Korean Beauty: Two Kinds of Nature*, held in 2014 at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in
Seoul, South Korea. The exhibition showcased how the concept of nature is embodied in the works of Korean artists as a common theme and the essence of “Korean beauty.”18 It featured artists such as Lee Ufan and Quac Insik, who are representative of Dansaekhwa and the so-called Korean modernism. Through the works of such artists, the exhibition attempted to write a continuous narrative of Korean modern and contemporary art history in which nature was its central theme. Yet, despite placing the concept of nature at the center of the history of Korean art, the discussion was primarily based within the studio, physically distanced from the natural environment. The following search for artists who were active outside of this category of “Korean art” led to my encounter with the Baggat Art Group.

The fact that the group, albeit being active since 1981, has been marginalized from dominant discourses of art exemplifies how certain practices, which do not readily fit into pre-made categories, continue to be excluded by mainstream articulations of modern and contemporary art history in South Korea. Such narratives are problematic; while they provide a consecutive account of art for the post-war nation, they simultaneously eliminate diversity in favor of homogeneity and exclude many artists from the recognized category of Korean art. I therefore think that by examining how the Baggat Art Group has continued to intervene in and rewrite itself into such narratives of continuity, it is possible to open up the category to include more artists and artist groups under the umbrella of modern and contemporary art in South Korea. This project thus adopts and attempts to support the group’s objective of incorporating

what is outside into the inside, transcending the limitations of existing boundaries, and expanding the category of art by realizing what resides at its borders.

1.1 Festivals: Opening a Pan

A photograph of the opening ceremony to the 1986 Baggat Art exhibition at Daeseong-ri records a ritual that a number of artists performed (Fig. 1).\(^{19}\) The image presents the artist upfront as reading a ceremonial prayer. Such a ritual format of the opening, performed in order to commemorate the event and legitimize it as being intimately connected to the natural environment, was repeated in each and every Baggat Art exhibition and continues to be performed to this day. Each exhibition began with a prayer to thank the land and the spirits of nature for allowing the event to be held.\(^{20}\) The opening of an exhibition was, through the ceremony, tied to that of a ritual; each exhibition became a ritual. The artists themselves, following the ritual format of Baggat Art exhibitions, also relied heavily on the language of ritual when discussing and organizing their artworks in relation to the overall theme of each event.

A later example of Baggat artists drawing upon such language is a collective piece titled Giwon-ui tap [The Tower of Prayer], which was installed in 2004 at Bukhan River. The river flows through Daeseong-ri and was the primary venue for early Baggat Art exhibitions. The

\(^{19}\) The photograph records the main participants of the ritual as dressed in hanbok, the traditional costume of Korea. The figure to the left of the image is seen carrying a janggu, a traditional instrument used in pungmul, or farmers’ instrumental music. The appearance of hanbok and janggu are reminiscent of Minjung artists’ attitude towards them as symbols of resistance. The Baggat Art Group maintained an ambiguous relationship with the Minjung movement which actively utilized traditional elements such as pungmul. Throughout the nineteen-seventies and eighties, traditional objects such as hanbok were highlighted as representing the common people of Korea. For instance, Minjung artist O Yun’s Tongildaewondo (1985) and Lim Ok Sang’s To Become One (1989) presented figures clad in hanbok, which art historian Yun Nanjie read as a “rhetoric of unification” and “stances against the West or against capitalism.” Nanjie Yun, “The Identity of Contemporary Korean Art History,” in Elastic Taboos: Within the Korean World of Contemporary Art: an Exhibition by Kim Seung-Duk & Franck Gautherot (Nürnberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst; Wien: Kunsthalle, 2007), p. 181.

\(^{20}\) Kim, Ganchugi, Deureonaegi, Itgehagi, p. 84.
piece consisted of several wooden structures—pieces of wood and twigs tied together in the shape of a cone—which were covered with a large number of ritual dolls used during jeung. Jeung refers to one of the seasonal customs held on Daeboreum (Great Full Moon), a Korean holiday that celebrates the first full moon of the year in the lunar calendar. The traditional belief is that one can transfer his or her bad luck onto another person through a ritually prepared doll. Giwon-ui tap invited the audience to participate in the making of these dolls, which were tied onto the wooden structures and later burnt collectively as bonfires. In this work, however, jeung was meant to wish good luck to participants, and to whom they prayed for, instead of sending away bad luck to others as the tradition goes. The work exemplifies how a Baggat artwork itself functions as ritual activity, and how Baggat Art exhibitions at large functioned as ritual experience.

The incorporation of ritual and everyday activities has been essential to annual Baggat Art exhibitions since the very beginning. The first Baggat Art exhibition in January of 1981 consisted primarily of site-specific installation or performative works. Collectively titled as Field Work, the pieces were meant to be based on, address, and physically interact with the surrounding environment. Artists were invited to work on-site and initiate a wide variety of activities with the given environment as their material. Kang Yong-dae hung gunnysacks, stones, and ropes to six trees by the river and titled it as Jayeon-gwa jayu [Nature and Freedom]. The work was a manifestation of his personal encounter with the natural environment at Daeseong-ri, a visualization of how his body had physically engaged with the trees while producing the work.

21 Ibid., p. 126.
22 Although I use the term “site-specific” as a means of identifying their practices, I do not mean to fold them into the larger movement of site-specific art that emerged in the United States during the nineteen-seventies.
Kim Gwan-soo buried nine coffins in the frozen ground; he then placed mirrors inside eight of them so that the audience could see their faces being reflected amidst the surrounding environment. The coffin in the center contained bones and old books instead of a mirror. Kim’s work meant to provoke viewers to think about the meaning of death and subsequently reflect upon life. Others engaged in artworks that involved, for instance, incantations and Buddhist prayers being played from a space constructed with vinyl while the artist simultaneously drew onto the vinyl walls, tying two hundred flags onto trees on the riverbed, or throwing newspapers onto the riverside before sweeping them with a broom.

A detailed account of January 17, 1981 by artist Suh Young Sun, who participated in and recorded the activities, provides insight into the first Baggat Art exhibition, *Winter, Daeseong-ri: Thirty-One Artists:*

A young man and woman are sitting on a table. They are clad in everyday clothes. They each hold a notebook and are staring upward. The audience, as if drawn into their gaze, gradually quiet down. The young man begins speaking, breaking the silence. He reads out loud the society section from the morning edition of *Hangeok Ilbo*, January 17. The young woman subsequently begins to read the same section in a different tone. The young man reads the advertisements. The audience begins to laugh, all at once. “Maid servant wanted, allowance provided.” “Short term dance course, call at OOO.” From behind the audience group, another participant begins reading the articles on the front page of the edition. The three, each reading the articles in different tones, is reminiscent of the climax of an orchestra. The young man playfully swears to the laughing audience. Audience members from here and there respond back. The young woman walks around like a possessed shaman, stamping her feet and shouting out loud. The actor and the audience all feel as one within this *pan.*

Here, Suh identified the space of the work as *pan.* A traditional concept in Korea, *pan* refers to the various spaces in everyday life where all kinds of events such as meetings and festivals take place.

---

23 Ibid., p. 20.
24 Gwan-soo Kim, quoted in ibid., p. 21.
25 Ibid., p. 20.
26 Young Sun Suh, quoted in Kim, *Gamchugi, Deureonaegi, Itgehagi*, p. 22.
place. A *pan* can be either social or personal, physical or conceptual. What is commonly phrased as “*pan-eul beol-ida,*” the act of “opening a *pan,*” allows for the happening of any form of engagement within the space of *pan:* from drinking or gambling to community gatherings and to even life itself. The most notable activity held in a *pan* is *pungmul,* or farmers’ instrumental music, which often marked the opening of Baggat Art exhibitions. Sociologist Hagen Koo, in his account of how the *Minjung* movement also adopted the concept of *pan* for student protests, explained that for performances happening on a *pan,* from masked dances to *pungmul,* “there is no fixed stage, no separation of the performers and audience, and no strict following of the written script; and actually there is no clear genre distinction among these cultural forms”:

> Throughout the performance, participation by the audience is not only encouraged but is regarded as essential, and the end of the performance breaks down this separation completely, as the performers and the audience join together to dance with a heightened spirit of joy and release. Participation, spontaneity, naturalness, and a communal feeling of solidarity are all features that clearly distinguished *minjung* culture from that of the upper class, which stressed individual technique, refined performance, serenity, and the sharp separation of performer and audience.

*Pan* therefore exceeds the definition of a geographical location to account for both physical and conceptual spaces. In light of such a consideration, the interpretation of Baggat Art exhibitions as an act of “opening a *pan,*” within which any form of activity can take place on equal grounds

---

27 *Pungmul* was frequently performed within the traditional village as *madang nori,* a traditional form of masked dance-drama in Korea, and would often be described as “*pan-eul beol-ida,*” or “opening a *pan.*” For a detailed analysis on the various usages of *pan* in traditional Korean society, see Heung Ju Park, “*Ttorang-gwangdae*-wa ‘*pan*’ui sangwanseong yeongu - Gyeonggi-bukbu-jiyeku jungsimeuro [The Study about Interrelationship between *Ttorang-gwangdae* and *Pan*: Especially about *Ttorang-gwangdae* in Gyeonggi-do Northern Province],” in *Folk Studies,* Vol. 29 (Andong, Gyeongsang-bukdo: The Center for Folk Studies, Andong University, 2014).

28 Hagen Koo also explained that the young intellectuals of the *Minjung* movement adopted the communal and collective spirit underlying all forms of *minjung* culture, which they saw as an effective means of demonstrating an authenticity of Korean culture and arousing consciousness among the masses. Hagen Koo, *Korean Workers: The Culture and Politics of Class Formation* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 145. The adoption of *pan* by both *Minjung* and Baggat also alludes to the close but ambiguous relationship that they maintained during the nineteen-eighties.
without discrimination, allows for an understanding of how the artists moved fluidly through different activities—from singing to dancing and to installation—as a means of conversing with each other rather than functioning separately. Furthermore, Kim Kyung Suh also recalled that at the site of the 1981 exhibition, there was no separation between artist and audience. Participants were not limited to the thirty-one artists listed for the event, instead including everyone who entered the space of the exhibition.⁵⁹ Suh recorded that the artists set up their works amidst three-hundred audience members on the first day of the event.⁶⁰ These artists and visitors thus created works alongside each other within and upon the pan, transcending not only the distinction between different forms of art but between artist and audience as well.

Moreover, the early Baggat Art events at Daeseong-ri were often dubbed as chukje (festival) rather than exhibitions.⁶¹ I highlight the usage of this word instead of the term junshi (exhibition) as indicating a desire to exceed the limitations of an art exhibition. The group wished to engage in a broader conversation with the everyday life of the public, to incorporate nonart issues and practices into their works.⁶² The Baggat Art “festivals” thus involved a wide range of activities—from reading and walking to praying—that were easily approachable and relatable for their audience, that is, the larger, general public outside of the art world. Their practices did not readily fit into the category of art that was defined by mainstream institutions, and thus only made possible once outside of such boundaries.

---

⁵⁹ Kim, Gamchugi, Deureonaegi, Itgehagi, p. 19.
⁶⁰ Young Sun Suh, quoted in ibid., p. 22.
⁶¹ The word chukje translates into ritual celebration in Korean.
⁶² A similar example can be found in art historian Miwon Kwon’s discussion of site-specific art, in which she explained site-specific practices as “the pursuit of a more intense engagement with the outside world and everyday life—a critique of culture that is inclusive of nonart spaces, nonart institutions, and nonart issues.” Miwon Kwon, One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2004), p. 24.
1.2 Baggat Art as Ritual

The catalogue preface for the 2010 Jara Island International Baggat Art Exhibition articulated the goal of Baggat Art:

Art in the context of environmental art and Land Art, through which we enjoyed and experienced the outside and shared living spaces with natural creatures, have been seriously distorted. So-called outdoor art has taken on problems concerning preservation, deconstruction, artistry, consensus, and scale. What is significant here is not to set up biased theories, but to appreciate artworks in harmony with all creation in open space. Baggat misul [art], or exterior art, is an outgrowth of an act to call out to nature and an invaluable process to nurture our natural mind.\(^{33}\)

For Baggat artists, their works are a means of *deframing* art, of releasing art from its frame by incorporating all that surrounds a work, including notions of time and space. Everything, from the flow of the wind or water, to the weather and temperature, to conditions of the soil, became part of each and every work. In producing Baggat Art, artists often incorporated self-destructive materials in order to have their works come from nature and then return to it. A large number of Baggat artworks involve material that were gathered on-site, which were later left to decay or be burnt. The focus of a work is thus neither the individual artist nor his or her artistic talent, but rather the dialogue that occurs during one’s interaction with nature itself.\(^{34}\) As a result, especially during the nineteen-eighties, works were often documented without titles or the artist’s name. Baggat artworks function as not a product but an experience, and thus can never be reproduced nor resituated in a different location or context.

\(^{33}\) The Baggat Art Association, quoted in Koh, “Art Critiques and Ecological Perspectives,” p. 92.

Baggat artists’ emphasis on physical engagement and subjective experience can be traced to its emergence during the nineteen-eighties. The Baggat Art Group, along with others such as the Minjung movement, was formed in response to the Fifth Republic of South Korea under Chun Doo-hwan.\(^35\) The propaganda that shaped the cultural climate of the nineteen-eighties at large was termed as the 3S Policy (Sports, Screen, and Sex).\(^36\) During this period, the regime held direct control over the nation’s cultural development, promoting state ideologies while simultaneously repressing any form of disagreement. Large scale festivals, such as the 1986 Asian Games, were promoted by the government as evidence of Chun’s successful leadership.\(^37\) The 3S Policy was further combined with anti-communist propaganda towards North Korea in an attempt to convey the idea that South Korea, unlike its counterpart, had succeeded in gaining international recognition.\(^38\) During this period, both public and private spheres were closely monitored and regulated by strict censorship laws put forth by the government. Permission to produce cultural events and publications were also granted exclusively to those who did not

---

\(^{35}\) The phrase “dark age for democracy” commonly covers the nineteen-seventies and eighties, during which the nation was under the successive dictatorships of Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan. Minjung artists most notably reacted to the cultural sphere during this period. They were concerned with issues such as capitalist structure, government policies, the everyday life of farmers and city laborers, and the national division and subsequent tension between North and South Korea. The aim of Minjung artists was to provide an alternative interpretation of history, one which would speak to the reality of the people. Young Na Kim, “A Brief History of Modern Korean Art,” in *Korean Eye: Contemporary Korean Art* (Milano: Skira Editore S.p.A., 2010), p. 54.

\(^{36}\) Repressing any form of expression that confronted state ideologies, Chun’s regime promoted a trend of mainstream media that saw a surge of erotic and exploitation films. Historians and critics have retrospectively argued that the proliferation of exploitation films was supported by the government in order to divert the public’s attention away from national and military politics. For an example of such discussion, see Hyung-sook Lee, “Between Local and Global: The Hong Kong Film Syndrome in South Korea,” Ph.D. diss. (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 2006), pp. 37-8.

\(^{37}\) Professional baseball games were established in 1982, major sports events such as the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games were held as national festivals, and numerous international sports leagues were initiated throughout the country.

violates state ideologies or security laws. Historian Hyung Il Pai explained that under such circumstances, all forms of public information, from elementary textbooks to mass media, functioned in favor of the idea that the government was leading a national struggle against communist enemies. Such propaganda was further facilitated by a group of leading academics who were generally handpicked by the regime for their support of government policies, which strived to glorify national prestige, justify authoritarian rule, and compete for international recognition with their counterpart, North Korea.39

Artists who responded to the restrictive atmosphere with an increased sociopolitical awareness, including Baggat artists, denounced governmental censorship and strived to produce work that would speak for the agony of the common people. These artists also criticized mainstream art institutions, namely the Korean Fine Arts Association, and their large scale promotion of Dansaekhwa. For artists engaging with sociopolitical issues, “Participation [in public struggles] was preferred over purity, social trend over autonomy, [and] direct images over abstraction.”40 These artists corresponded with the perspective that, for instance, art historian Yun Nanjie retrospectively framed Dansaekhwa with: “the silence of the pictorial field left no room for any critique of the system, thus enabling such painting[s] and their artists to survive what was then a political situation based on intense public scrutiny.”41 Whereas Dansaekhwa works consisted mostly of large-scale minimalist paintings, Minjung artist Choi Byeong-soo’s 

Hanyeol-ireul sallyeonaera [Return Hanyeol] (1987), for instance, depicted the death of student

protestor Lee Hanyeol during Chun’s dictatorship. Choi’s work came to symbolize the democratic uprisings of the nineteen-eighties and the spirit of resistance against oppression that was declared by student protestors. As tension increased between artists, the Korean art world was subsequently divided into largely two camps: one that pursued what they saw as universal and international art, and one that advocated local and social realist art.\textsuperscript{42}

The Baggat Art Group was formed in close connection with the latter party, which many artists and intellectuals joined in pursuit of democratization.\textsuperscript{43} According to Choi Woonyoung, a founding member of the group, the Baggat Art Group was initially formed under the leadership of A.G. (Avant-garde Group) members. A.G. launched the exhibition \textit{Indépendent} in Seoul for the first time in 1972, which provided an opportunity for young artists who were against painterly abstraction to converse with each other. Many participants of the \textit{Minjung} movement and early members of the Baggat Art Group were involved in A.G. exhibitions, and a number of \textit{Minjung} artists moved on to partake in early Baggat Art exhibitions as well.\textsuperscript{44} For the most part, however, Baggat artworks tended to avoid directly confronting the issue of democratization or delivering messages of sociopolitical critique. As a result, receptions and responses to Baggat Art during the nineteen-eighties often criticized it as escapism or simply wishing to gather

\begin{itemize}
\item With the large-scale facilitation of an art market, Dansaekhwa was produced and marketed as a high-value product with its image being mass-advertised through galleries, art magazines, and mass media. For an in-depth argument on how Dansaekhwa functioned as a symbol of Korean identity, see ibid., p. 180.
\item Artists who emphasized locality, regionalism, and independence promoted a popularist realism that focused on social awareness and political participation. \textit{Minjung} artists were a major player in this camp, and criticized South Korea’s economic, military, and cultural dependency on the U.S. as a new form of imperialism. These artists also aimed to overthrow the academic system of art through the operation of independent art schools, where they taught popular art forms such as cartoons, tapestries, woodcut prints, and other traditional crafts. Yun, “The Identity of Contemporary Korean Art History,” p. 25.
\item Active during the nineteen-sixties and seventies, A.G. engaged with experimental practices such as performance art, installation, and happenings. They criticized the institutionalized art field which was heavily centered on \textit{Gukjeon}, a governmental art competition organized and censored by Park Chung-hee’s regime. Koh, “Art Critiques and Ecological Perspectives,” pp. 93-4.
\end{itemize}
experience in the outdoors, in nature, in order to return to mainstream art institutions. Baggat Art exhibitions were often called attractions or spectacles, and media coverage tended to describe them as fun, neighborhood, or apolitical festivals. Responses to Baggat Art especially emphasized their unusualness when compared to mainstream art exhibitions, and often criticized the group for their lack of engagement with politics, for simply escaping to nature as a retreat from culture.

In contrast to such criticisms, however, I agree with Kim Kyung Suh’s argument that the group’s social significance should not be disregarded because of the fact that Baggat artists did not physically participate in the democracy protests of the nineteen-eighties. Baggat artworks were not expressions of escapism; rather, they were inherently concerned with and born out of their sociopolitical reality. As a means of understanding the significance of Baggat Art practices within such context, I turn to the work of anthropologist Victor W. Turner. In his study of the Ndembu tribe in central Africa, Turner developed the term “social drama” in order to account for the villagers’ process of conflict and crisis resolution. He later expanded this concept to include ritual performance, which I wish to adopt for the interpretation of Baggat Art practices.

According to Turner’s model, each social drama consists of four main stages. First there is a breach in a conventional norm, which then leads to a crisis in the community that increases as factions are formed. What follows is a “process of redress,” “as formal and informal mechanisms of crisis resolution are employed.” Finally, the social drama concludes with a

---

46 Ibid., p. 38.
process of reintegration, which often includes either an adjustment to the original social structure or realization of a permanent division between social groups. Turner identified ritual as emerging within such procedure as a “process of redress,” a “redressive activity” that functions as a means of social change, with the capability to transform the fixed social and cultural systems of the everyday world. He argued that the process of social change requires an unstructured community experience, in which all participants are placed on equal grounds, in order for the given society to adjust to the changes in the social structure.

Turner further proposed that ritual, as redressive activity, is achieved through the creation of liminality, a condition of “being-on-a-threshold” through which ritual becomes a means of border-crossing. Liminality refers to ritual’s transcending of social categories and creating of a transitory space, where the old social category loses its grasp and the new one has not yet arrived. Within this condition, participants fall into a position that is neither this nor that, and are placed on equal grounds upon which they can engage in spontaneous, direct, and egalitarian interchanges with each other. The liminal state therefore provides temporary separation from the cognitive rules and behavioral norms of everyday life, allowing members of a community to process social crises and subsequent changes. Liminality, for Turner, represents the possibility of transcending not only one’s own social status, but all social positions in order to formulate a potentially infinite series of alternative social arrangements.

52 Ibid., pp. 46-7.
53 Ibid., pp. 273-4.
54 Ibid., pp. 13-4.
purpose of ritual is therefore to produce this temporary experience in order to transcend and reconfigure structural limitations.\textsuperscript{56}

The concept of ritual that Turner proposed allows for the understanding of each Baggat Art exhibition as providing redressive experience for its participants, through which they could exceed the limitations of conventional boundaries and generate alternative possibilities for the social structure. Baggat Art can therefore be interpreted as a means to process sociopolitical issues from a marginal space, instead of confronting the structure from within as, for instance, the \textit{Minjung} movement functioned. Furthermore, the state of liminality that Turner's ritual achieves alternates with the normal social structure as social changes are processed and adjusted. Baggat artists also specified that the outside of Baggat Art is not one that opposes the inside. Stating that they have been coloring \textit{with} nature, Baggat artists approached the natural environment as not an object but a subject, perceiving nature as an artist that co-produced works.\textsuperscript{57} Their purpose was never to “install” or “build” a work, as they perceived such practices as objectifying nature and enforcing an individual artist’s vision upon it.\textsuperscript{58} They strived instead for art to exist as part of the landscape itself in an attempt to restore the relationship between nature and culture that was lost with binary divisions.\textsuperscript{59} I therefore argue for an understanding of the outside of Baggat Art as a liminal state, in which it gains significance as partaking in the larger process of social change—for example, the process of democratization during nineteen-eighties in South Korea—rather than denying culture, the inside, by escaping to nature, the outside.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{56} Alexander, \textit{Victor Turner Revisited}, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{57} Kim, \textit{Gamchugi, Deureonaegi, Itgehagi}, pp. 101-5.
\textsuperscript{58} This is one of the reasons that Baggat artists often deny to be defined as installation art or Land Art. Ibid., p. 99.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., pp. 101-5.
\end{flushright}
1.3 “Collective Body Performance”

Another concept central to Turner’s notion of ritual is indeterminacy. Emphasizing the spontaneous and experimental nature of liminality, Turner stated that “[ritual is] not primarily…rules or rubrics”:

…Rules may ‘frame’ the performance, but the ‘flow’ of action and interaction within that frame may conduce to hitherto unprecedented insights and even generate new symbols and meanings, which may be incorporated into subsequent performances. Traditional framings have to be reframed—new bottles made for new wine.60

Within ritual, all participants are suspended on equal grounds upon which egalitarian interchanges are enabled. This condition of indeterminacy, from which infinite possibilities are born, was what Baggat artists wished to achieve in the 1981 exhibition, especially through what they called “jipdan sinche haengwi,” or “collective body performance.”61

Suh Young Sun’s account of January 20, 1981 described the presence of 23 participants, a few “outsiders,” and 200 audience members engaging in a collective body performance:

…[With the beginning of our collective body performance,] we threw ourselves onto a field covered with nothing but snow, as if we were animals, but what were we supposed to do? All we had were our own bodies…we aimlessly walked with our hands in our pockets. We tried plucking weeds and mindlessly kicking at the ground. We tried throwing our bodies onto the snow-covered field…We own nothing but our bodies. What have these audience members gathered to see? If they have only looked at us as if looking at a flat surface within a gallery, then we would feel nothing but disappointment. But if they have realized that our bodies are nothing when standing in front of Mother Nature—that we are powerless—then we have succeeded at the least. Within this shit called collective body performance, the truth that we are ‘standing in front of nature with our bare bodies’ is hidden like a gem.62

60 Turner, Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors, p. 79.
61 My translation.
62 Young Sun Suh, quoted in Kim, Gamchugi, Deureonaegi, Itgehagi, p. 23.
Suh’s account of collective body performance exemplified how Baggat Art incorporated everyday activities as art. All activities that occurred for the duration of the performance were included as part of the work at large, including the simple acts of plucking weeds and kicking at the ground. It created a temporary space within which anyone could become an artist and produce art on equal grounds, with the only requirement being the bare body. Collective body performance therefore emphasized subjective experience that could be achieved through physical engagement with the natural environment.

Artist Choi Hyun-soo, one of the main players in the group’s formation, further argued that the performance functioned as a means of recovering a lost relationship with nature, and between one another, outside of “manmade ideologies.”63 The practice was, for Choi, an attempt to exceed all artificial and planned elements as well as any products of civilization including language. He stated that Baggat artists aimed to approach and interact with the natural environment through the infinite possibilities of the body itself, instead of relying on artificiality and theatricality. The question that they artists raised was: “How are we to accept the infinite openness that the body entails?”64 In order to answer this, they wished to conceptually strip everything away and leave only “existence itself,” or, in Choi’s words, “the trees and water that exist before language.”65

Collective body performance was yet another attempt to create a condition of liminality. In order to incorporate the everyday in their works, the artists generated a space within which participants could transcend conventional boundaries and produce unlimited possibilities for the

63 Hyun-soo Choi, quoted in ibid., p. 24.
64 Ibid., p. 24.
65 Ibid., p. 24.
production of art. The only decisive factor involved in collective body performance was that every participant should start and finish at the same time. Each performer was otherwise free to choose how to participate and what to perform, without being regulated by the crowd or other artists. Participants could perform either individually or in conjunction with others, depending on the nature of each performance. Choi emphasized that collective body performance should not function in an oppressive or regulative manner. It should be reminiscent of the cycle of life, in which only birth and death are decisive, with life itself free for the individual to live through.

The goal of the performance can be extended to that of the exhibition as well, in which Baggat artists invited artists and visitors alike to “live” through the event. Similar to collective body performance, the only planned elements of the 1981 exhibition were its beginning and ending. Those participating in the event were free to produce works and engage with one another as they wished, with the natural environment as their given material. The artworks resultantly incorporated a wide range of activities, from walking to praying to painting, regardless of the depth of artistic consideration. Kim Kyung Suh, for instance, recalled that some pieces lacked originality or seemed unfinished, while several others were even questionable as works of art.

The purpose of the exhibition was thus, as Choi stressed in his explanation of collective body performance, to “reveal” oneself rather than to produce aesthetically refined works of art.

The freedom that the Baggat Art Group strived to achieve was not only a sociopolitical one, hence a desire for democratization that was shared with Minjung artists. It was also a

---

66 Ibid., p. 25.
67 Ibid., pp. 24-5; Choi Hyun-soo also emphasized that collective body performances were not happenings, although many artists were drawing from and looking to happenings in their practices. For more of Choi’s attempt to distinguish the practice of Baggat Art from that of happenings, see Choi, quoted in ibid., pp. 24-5.
68 Ibid., p. 20.
69 Hyun-soo Choi, quoted in ibid., pp. 24-5.
physical one, an impulse to directly engage with the natural environment, as well as a conceptual one, a wish to transcend the limitations of the definition of art as confirmed by mainstream art institutions. By incorporating ritual and everyday activities, the artists engaged with a diverse audience in various ways, therefore arguing that anything could, and should, be art. Anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff stated, however, that freedom achieved by the construction of ritual has its consequences:

   Freedom is the other side of loneliness and isolation. When we take our own lives into our own hands, we make ourselves, author our own stories. To whom else should we commend ourselves, or look to for a better spirit, a deeper vested interest, fuller understanding, or an attitude of genuine celebration?\(^7^0\)

Baggat Art exhibitions constructed a ritual space in which participants could exceed the boundaries of the restrictive social structure. Artists and visitors gathered in order to express their desire for both conceptual and physical freedom, to become the authors of their own stories. This, however, resulted in the exclusion of Baggat Art from the larger “story” of modern and contemporary art history written by mainstream institutions in South Korea. The following chapter addresses how the group began to respond to this omission by engaging with historiographic questions.

Chapter 2: Exhibition of History and Environment (1997)

2.1 History as Experience

*Exhibition of History and Environment* opened in May of 1997 at the outdoor exhibition space of the National Folk Museum of Korea in Seoul. Shin Nam Chul’s *Baram—Sori [Wind—Sound]* (1997) (Fig. 2), placed by one of the gateways to the site, consisted of two poles, one painted in bright orange and the other in sky blue. The work allowed the spectator to, when leaning close to the work, hear the sound of the wind passing through the many small holes drilled into the upper part of each pole. As a Baggat artwork, everything surrounding it, from the flow of the wind to each visitor passing by, became part of *Baram—Sori*. Here I propose that, within the context of the exhibition, the piece was in conversation with an environment that could be extended to include history as well. Shin’s piece invited the spectator to realize and experience the presence of something that could not be seen or held, drawing attention to their position in relation to it. Through the 1997 exhibition, the group wished to generate a space within which environment and history could be understood in relation to each other. I therefore argue that Shin’s work not only incorporated and drew attention to the flow of the wind, but the flow of history as well.

Baggat Art, since its very beginning, aimed to break down the division between artist and audience. The group encouraged their audience to be participants rather than viewers, to engage with Baggat Art alongside the artist. In Shin’s work, the sound of the wind moving through the

---

71 The National Folk Museum of Korea, meant to preserve and exhibit historical artifacts, is located inside Gyeongbok Palace, which was the main royal palace of the Joseon dynasty.
small holes could only be heard when each spectator physically stood by the poles instead of simply walking by without realizing the work’s presence. The piece thus presented the passive act of listening as an active means of engagement. The position of the spectator, however, remained as “listeners,” since neither the artist nor spectator were capable of commanding or maneuvering the flow of the wind. I present such relationship as how the group wished to engage with art history as well, to become active “listeners” by realizing its presence. The Baggat Art Group of 1997 was neither inside nor outside of the writing of modern and contemporary art history in South Korea initiated by dominant discourses. I therefore argue that the exhibition demonstrated an instance of Baggat Art functioning as ritual, a redressive activity through which artists engaged with the larger “story” of art history from a marginal position.

Kim Kyung Suh explained that the sudden appearance of the term “history” as a central concern to Baggat Art indicated an attempt to engage with the historiographical debates in art history as well as to redefine its earlier relationship with the Minjung movement. The Baggat Art Group, according to Kim, defined history as collective and participatory experience. Here I turn to Turner’s articulation of ritual again in order to understand the group’s approach to history. I propose that the 1997 exhibition also aimed to create a condition of liminality, within which history became a shared experience rather than a continuous narrative. As exemplified in how Baram—Sori emphasized an interaction with history as active listeners, the group highlighted an engagement with history as equal participants rather than being “written into” dominant discourses. What the group wished to achieve can therefore be interpreted as not to be

---

73 Ibid., p. 62-3.
74 Ibid., p. 66.
included into the inside, the mainstream narrative of modern and contemporary art history, but instead to expand the discussion of historiography so that Baggat Art could become active participants as well.

In addition to the works of forty-two artists and two performance pieces, the exhibition included a *pungmul* performance (*samul nori*), a traditional dance performance by Soon Lee, and various projects with emphasis on audience participation.® Baggat artworks in the 1997 exhibition continued to actively draw upon the language of ritual, through which the event became a redressive activity within which participants could interact with each other on equal grounds. Choi Soo-hyun’s *Juk-eun jari-e kkot-eul [Flowers to the Place of Death]* (1997) (Fig. 3), for example, invited the audience to participate in a ritual experience. The artist installed a grave-like structure covered in soil, with a gravestone placed in front of it stating: “Oyeomdoen hwangyeong-e uthaeseo sarajyeogan modeun saengmyeongche-ui neokseul giripnida [Prayers to all the lives that have perished following environmental destruction].”76 Three coffin-like objects were aligned behind the structure, each of them tilted slightly to face different directions. A flower bouquet was placed on a platform in front of the gravestone, in memory of “all the lives that have perished.” The audience were encouraged to participate in this prayer alongside the artist; for instance, a group of children on a field trip to the site were invited to plant offerings, made out of brightly colored paper, into the soil (Fig. 3). Each offering was placed without any means to distinguish its owner, placing them all on equal grounds within the larger collective

75 *Samul nori* (Four objects play) refers to a genre of Korean percussion music performed with four traditional musical instruments (*pungmul*; *kkwaenggwari, jing, janggu*, and *buk*).
76 The text was engraved onto the gravestone in Korean.
prayer. Choi’s work, as a ritual experience, was meant for and completed by participants engaging with the work regardless of social status or position.

Such an emphasis on audience participation was further reinforced with the significance of the exhibition site, the National Folk Museum of Korea located in Gyeongbok Palace, as a historic landmark and popular field trip destination for students of all ages in South Korea. Just as the early Baggat Art events at Daeseong-ri were dubbed as chukje (festival), indicating their desire to exceed the limitations of an art exhibition, so too did the 1997 exhibition emphasize engagement with a broader audience. The group stressed that art should be shared with the public at large, rather than remaining exclusive to a particular audience or geographical location.⁷⁷ As former member Kim Jung-sik later stated in 2006, “Baggart Art is not art for artists. …We need to think over our purpose of living [as artists by]…picturing the public engaging in Baggat Art [together and] harmoniously.”⁷⁸ Upon entering the site, anyone could participate in Baggat Art by listening to the sound of the wind, as with Shin’s work, or by planting offerings, as in the case of Choi’s piece. The production of art was extended to simple, everyday activities, therefore reinforcing the group’s emphasis on expanding the recognized category of art.

2.2 The Formation of the Baggat Art Association

Although the group had occasionally exhibited in urban venues, the 1997 event marked the first instance that a Baggat Art exhibition was organized in close conjunction with major

---

⁷⁸ Kim Jung-sik, quoted in ibid., p. 93.
governmental institutions. The Korean Federation for Environmental Movement and the National Folk Museum of Korea co-hosted Exhibition of History and Environment, with its sponsors including the Ministry of Environment and JoongAng Ilbo. Kim Kyung Suh explained that in response to such ties to environmental organizations, the concept of “environment” was highlighted as a primary concern to Baggat Art for the first time. Such a newfound interest in the concept of “environment” indicated an important change in the group’s goal. During the early years of Baggat Art, the group had avoided engaging with, for example, institutionalized spaces, major urban venues, and governmental occasions, focusing instead on exhibiting in the outdoors. For the artists, the natural environment functioned as a possibility for freedom outside of governmental and institutional boundaries, or what I identify as a site that allowed for the performance of ritual. Baggat Art had engaged with the natural environment as a means of achieving freedom from conventional limitations, instead of expressing interest in the ecosystem or the physical conditions of a given location. As Kim noted, questions of sustainability and ecology had not been central to early Baggat Art practices. The 1997 exhibition was thus a pivot when the Baggat Art Group began to approach the notion of environment as more than just a spatial concept, hence responding to environmental issues.

Such process of change began with the establishment of the Sixth Republic under President Roh Tae-woo, which saw dramatic changes in the political, social, and cultural

---

79 Two notable exhibitions that were hosted in urban venues are the 1993 exhibition in Sinchon and the 1995 exhibition in Yangjae. For more information on these two events, both hosted in Seoul as chukje (festival), see Kim, Gamchugi, Deureonaegi, Itgehagi, pp. 47-50.
80 Ibid., p. 58. The Kyoto Protocol was adopted later in December of 1997, which may be one of the reasons behind the government encouraging artists to address the questions of ecology and sustainability.
82 Ibid., p. 59.
landscapes of South Korea. Critic Lee Namhee argued that following the formation of the democratic government, public focus shifted from minjung, the common people, to simin, the citizens. Lee explained that the focus was no longer on the collective power of the working class and its revolutionary potential, but rather on each and every person’s individual rights and freedom. Furthermore, according to art historian Sun Jung Kim, the liberation of overseas travel at the individual level and the demilitarization of the government granted artists with opportunities to engage with social issues that had previously been neglected or repressed, such as questions of ecology, feminism, and homosexuality. With such shift in the sociopolitical atmosphere, artists were allowed to pursue experimental forms of art within urban venues and institutionalized spaces. The Baggat Art Group was thus no longer in need to physically leave the city in order to produce works that had formerly been subjected to governmental censorship and institutional regulations. Baggat Art was thus faced with the urgent question of how to adapt to, and not be dissolved by, this critical moment of sociopolitical change.

---

83 The Sixth Republic was established in 1987 and is the current republic of South Korea in 2015.
85 Sun Jung Kim explained that new opportunities, artist groups, and venues emerged thanks to an increase in public funds: “the political changes of the nineteen-nineties induced more international exchanges. …In this sudden increase of international activities, more government funding became available to the artists and coordinators who were internationally active, as a way of national promotion.” Additionally, the art field saw various developments: a sudden increase of curators following changes in the academic system, a larger role of institutions with the establishment of museums such as the Artsonje Center and the Samsung Museum of Art, and the emergence of alternative spaces which encouraged the formation of various artist groups. Kim stated that “Overall, all private museums with the sole exception of Samsung, tended to concentrate on special exhibitions rather than permanent collections. This means that the private museums were eager to define their own identities by being sensitive to what is current and new.” Sun Jung Kim, Secret Beyond the Door: The Korean Pavilion, the 51st Venice Biennale, June 12-November 6, 2005, eds. Sun Jung Kim, Heejin Kim, and Jang Un Kim, trans. Hyun-Seok Seo (Seoul: Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, 2005), pp. 19-22.
86 Minjung artists were faced with the question of adaptation as well; following the settlement of the new social structure, the movement rapidly dissolved. The urgency that Baggat artists voiced may also be in response to witnessing the Minjung movement come to an end.
During its early years, the group was loosely formed with neither a manifesto nor an official structure, mostly devoid of obligations in order to emphasize freedom. The title of the Baggat Art Group vaguely referred to artists participating in Baggat Art exhibitions who could come and go as they wished. Kim Kyung Suh explained that the group encountered a problematic lack of a thematic and theoretical framework that would encompass the constantly changing number of artists.\(^8^7\) As the social and cultural atmosphere changed, these artists began to demand for a more organized basis upon which they could function. This was also partially in response to an increasing dispute between how the mass media portrayed Baggat Art exhibitions, mainly as uncritical attractions, and what the artists thought of their own practices. Artists argued that the group was losing its original purpose of encouraging experimental forms of art and becoming increasingly passive in their approach; they problematized certain members as having repeatedly produced formally and thematically similar works every year. Moreover, in regards to the annual Baggat Art exhibitions, the artists explained that the repetition of time (winter) and space (Daeseong-ri) had resulted in less originality and critical approach.\(^8^8\) Another problem for the group involved property claims on Daeseong-ri following the site’s development into a park. The acquisition of exhibition permits and financial support became increasingly complicated for the group, and the idea of hosting their exhibitions on private property collided with the group’s goal to exist in the outside.\(^8^9\) Furthermore, a large number of artists gradually abandoned Baggat Art as the social and cultural atmosphere shifted, leaving the group in dire need of reformation and reorganization.\(^9^0\)

\(^8^7\) Kim, *Gamchugi, Deureonaegi, Itgehagi*, pp. 36-42.
\(^8^8\) Ibid., pp. 51-2.
\(^8^9\) Ibid., p. 31.
\(^9^0\) Ibid., p. 52.
The Baggat Art Group responded to such demands by slowly adopting a more formal and organized structure, beginning with the formation of the Baggat Art Research Group in 1986. In 1992, the group officially announced the dissolution of the Baggat Art Group and the subsequent establishment of the Baggat Art Association.\(^{91}\) While continuing with the annual exhibitions at Daeseong-ri, the association began to reach out to various other locations.\(^{92}\) The Baggat Art Group had occasionally exhibited outside of Daeseong-ri since 1985, but launched a relatively more systematic expansion of venues following 1992 in order to establish a solid ground for its members to function upon.\(^{93}\) The group’s activities, however, were relatively stagnant during this period of change, with 1995 remaining as the sole year that the group was unable to host any events.\(^{94}\) Kim Kyung Suh explained that following such development, *Exhibition of History and Environment* functioned as a means of reaffirming that the group was responding to its changing social and cultural conditions by establishing new goals, hence the introduction of the terms “history” and “environment.” He emphasized that the significance of the exhibition was that it provided a site of negotiation for artists to critically assess their position within the rapidly changing social structure as well as discuss the parameters of Baggat Art.\(^{95}\) I therefore present an understanding of the 1997 exhibition as a redressive activity through which the group was able to generate alternative possibilities for its future, especially in relation to the writing of modern and contemporary art history in South Korea.

\(^{91}\) In order to avoid confusion, this thesis addresses the Baggat Art Association as the Baggat Art Group as well.
\(^{92}\) For example, the Baggat Art Association exhibited at Namhan River in 1993, Sinchon, Seoul in 1993, Jaebu Island in 1999, and Pocheon, South Korea in 2001. Ibid., p. 46.
\(^{93}\) The first exhibition held outside of Daeseong-ri was the event at Songnae, South Korea in November of 1985. Ibid., p. 26.
\(^{94}\) Ibid., p. 50.
\(^{95}\) Ibid., p. 66.
2.3 Rewriting Bagat Art

A recurring theme throughout the group’s period of change was to theorize its practices as a collective effort as well as to establish its position within dominant narratives of art history. In need of a solid framework that would encompass the numerous artists and artworks placed under the umbrella of Bagat Art, the artists initiated the rewriting of Bagat Art through various seminars, workshops, and roundtables. This was to argue that their desire to exist in the outside was not solely to oppose the inside and deny connection to it, but instead to expand the category of art generally and its boundaries. The group, albeit being active since 1981, had been marginalized from dominant discourses of art, exemplifying how certain practices, which do not readily fit into pre-made categories, were excluded by mainstream articulations of modern and contemporary art history in South Korea. Such narratives are problematic; while they offer a consecutive account of art for the post-war nation, they simultaneously eliminate diversity in favor of homogeneity and exclude many artists from the recognized category of Korean art. Here I approach the question of historiography through the work of historian Hyung Il Pai, who provided a historical overview on the writing of history in post-war South Korea.

Pai argued that the dominant narrative of post-war Korean history was led by the School of Nationalist Historiography which strived to write “a new racial history of Korean independence” as a means of opposing the imperialist historical framework established by Japan.\(^\text{96}\) She articulated that the ultimate purpose of nationalist historiography was to construct a

---

\(^{96}\) Pai, *Constructing “Korean” Origins*, p. 1. According to Pai, the School of Nationalist Historiography traced its intellectual heritage to the beginnings of the anti-Japanese independence movement, with its theorists and leaders influenced by late nineteenth-century Euro-American ideals focusing on nationhood and independence. As part of
historical framework which would explain the origins of Korea, especially in terms of racial heritage, a mythical past, and the process of state formation. According to Pai, such narrative was a manifestation of the school’s emphasis on independence, sovereignty, and national solidarity, with its development paralleling the nationalistic propaganda machine that ran for more than three decades of authoritarian rule.\textsuperscript{97} She argued that the national spirit of Korea and its ongoing history of struggle defined the national identity of Korea as a homogeneous race; in other words, a unified state with an indigenous culture clearly distinguished from those of China and Japan. Pai discussed that such a constructed sense of racial and cultural superiority over other East Asian nations was promoted through historical works that focused on a belief that external forces had continuously failed to suppress Korea’s national spirit of resistance: including Chinese emperors, nomadic invaders, Japanese colonialists, and Western foes. She concluded that the school thus forged a national identity of Korea out of a history of suffering, which aimed to instill a collective awareness of the nation as a victim of superpower politics and foreign invasions.\textsuperscript{98}

Pai explained that such narrative was intimately tied to governmental politics. She argued that prior to the military dictatorship of Chun Doo-hwan, Park Chung-hee’s Fourth Republic had already sought to justify martial law through a construction of an indigenous cultural identity and a sense of tradition. Selected bureaucrats and academic members of the

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., p. 271.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., p. 2. Pai also pointed out, however, that this notion of “prehistoric Korea” was a colonial product that originated from Japanese studies in colonial Korea. She argued that this formation of racial identity paralleled the Japanese colonial administrative efforts of dōka, which refers to the process of assimilating Korean people through an educational enforcement of Japanese language, history, and culture. Ibid., p. 251.
Office of Cultural Properties were granted authority over who and what would be designated as cultural properties in the process of creating, preserving, and promoting national monuments, customs, and heritage.\(^9\) Pai argued that the promulgation of The Act for Cultural Property Preservation resulted in generating arbitrary systems of value and cultural meaning; this further enabled certain members in the academia and government committees, including the School of Nationalist Historiography, to exercise power over the public’s perceptions about what should be considered as authentic, original, and historically valuable to the nation.\(^{10}\) Through such process, the government achieved status as the authority over an “authentic domain of identity.”\(^{11}\)

According to Pai, nationalist historiography therefore presented a narrative of continuity:

In order to reconstruct an unbroken national lineage of one’s own distinctive past, frequently “historical continuity” had to be invented by creating an ancient past either by “semi-fiction” or “fabrication.”…Even invented traditions, served as a legitimation for action or a cement for group cohesion; frequently the act of rewriting of history turned into the actual symbol of struggle. In this way, a people’s past—their tradition of revolutions, heroes, and martyrs—became universal themes for postwar nationalistic historians….The sense of cultural and racial continuity and national unity as well as reverence for the past is still a powerful motivating force in the formation of contemporary East Asian civilizations.\(^{12}\)

Such language of continuity was also evoked by certain artists. For example, artist Lee Hyun Ok, participating in the 1991 Baggat Art exhibition, argued that Baggat Art emerged as a

---

\(^9\) Ibid., pp. 4-5.
\(^{10}\) Established in 1961, the Cultural Properties Administration, now the Cultural Heritage Administration, first promulgated The Act for Cultural Property Preservation in the following year. Revised several times, the act classified the cultural properties of South Korea into five categories: tangible cultural properties, monuments, intangible cultural properties (artisans with distinct skills such as musicians and ritual specialists), ethnological materials, and natural scenic monuments that included indigenous plants and animals. For a detailed discussion of the act, see ibid., pp. 4-5.

\(^{11}\) Pai explained that the government controlled this “authentic domain of identity” by “encoding symbolic national meanings of the past and future in museum objects, restrictive cultural laws, monuments, and restorations—all of which are influenced by nationalist politics. Therefore, all cultural property is defined, defended, appropriated, and reappropriated to maintain identity.” Ibid., p. 13.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., pp. 11-2.
collective effort which reflected the country’s history of resistance against “invaders”: from the colonial era under Imperial Japan to the Korean War and to the subsequent division of Korea. She articulated that just as the country had continuously battled with external forces, so too was Baggat Art attempting to overcome the mainstream discourses of art that were heavily influenced by the so-called West. Lee’s interpretation of Baggat Art, as partaking in the country’s history of resistance, ironically placed it within the larger framework of nationalist historiography by evoking the school’s narrative of continuity. Such historicist approach is problematic, as it placed Baggat Art within the very boundaries of governmental and institutional discourses that the group struggled to transcend. The rewriting of Baggat Art should therefore be understood in terms of the group’s emphasis on history as experience, rather than the notion of history as a continuous narrative.

*Exhibition of History and Environment* provided the Baggat Art Group with an opportunity to adjust to its changing social and cultural conditions, as well as to respond to the historiographic debates in art history. The exhibition nevertheless functioned in two different ways for the group. On one hand, it exposed Baggat Art to a broader audience, enabling diverse conversations with the public at large. On the other hand, the group’s emphasis on existing in the outside held relatively less significance, as the event was held on governmental and institutional grounds. The latter, however, gains importance when interpreting the exhibition based on the argument that the outside of Baggat Art includes the inside instead of opposing it. The event must be understood outside the confines of a binary between nature and culture that often frames

---

the understanding of Baggat Art. Such discussion allows for a consideration of Baggat Art as neither attempting to be assimilated into mainstream discourses nor completely opposing them, but instead to expand the boundaries of the homogeneous narrative so that more artists and practices can participate in the writing of modern and contemporary art history in South Korea.

Baggat Art is concerned with not only the physical and geographical environment called “nature,” but also the related network of cultural, social, and political interchanges. This perspective was reinforced further with an exhibition in 1999 on Jebu Island, a location popular for having wide tidelands around it. Artist Choi Woonyoung recalled that the event pushed the group to reconsider the notion of site-specificity on a more intimate level. The Baggat Art Group, having planned an exhibition meant to engage with the island’s local history and ecology, arrived at the site for research after acquiring permission to exhibit from the government. They were, however, faced with strong opposition from the local community which refused to have the tidelands ruined, especially as the tidelands were their primary source of living. Choi explained that after several lengthy conversations with the local people, the group realized that:

“[We] were ignorant to people in this area [by] just thinking about…Jebu Island and its tideland. It was a good opportunity to realize that [we must consider the social aspects of a place, the actual people who are living there].”

---

104 Unlike other artist groups that identify their work as “nature art,” namely Yatoo, the Baggat Art Group denied such categorization as it would confine their work to being strictly about nature. Kim, *Gamchugi, Deureonaegi, Itgehagi*, pp. 94-5. The Korean Nature Artists’ Association, or Yatoo, was formed in 1981 in the city of Gongju, South Korea, with most of its members coming from the area. They continue to annually host a Nature Artist Residency Program and several “nature art” exhibitions. Lim Dong-sik, a member of Yatoo, stated that: “Nature Art is art that represents pure images of nature in nature itself through diverse artistic expression, unlike other types of art that represent the beauty of nature through artists’ alteration.” Dong-sik Lim, quoted in Koh, “Art Critiques and Ecological Perspectives,” p. 62.

105 Ibid., p. 72.

106 Woonyoung Choi, personal communication with Hong Kyu Koh, quoted in ibid., p. 72.
Such awareness suggested that the rewriting of Baggat Art was constantly faced with problematic and contradictory discourses. Different artists and critics continued to challenge earlier theorizations in search of a more suitable framework for the group’s practices. The rewriting of Baggat Art should therefore be understood as an ongoing process, a collective effort for redefinition and readjustment, instead of an attempt at constructing a singular and continuous narrative.

The 1997 exhibition marked the beginning of the group’s interest in issues of environmental destruction, sustainability, and ecology. The group, critical against human intervention of nature, perceived the government’s rapid industrial and economic development to have resulted in dire consequences to the ecosystem. In their perspective, the natural environment could neither be controlled nor directed, just as Shin was only able to capture the sound of the wind and not the wind itself. Such concerns, which steadily grew over the years, led to the opening of an exhibition in 2002 that focused on environmental crisis and the consequences of urban development. Whereas the 1997 exhibition introduced the term “environment” as a central concept to the Baggat Art Group, the 2002 exhibition demonstrated how the group shifted towards a more didactic and educational goal that directly confronted and engaged with ecological issues.
Chapter 3: *Abandoned Island, Mountain of Healing* (2002)

3.1 The Site-Specificity of Baggat Art: Environment as Experience

Amidst the excitement of the 2002 FIFA World Cup, which took place in South Korea and Japan, the Baggat Art Group gathered for the duration of the international event at Nanji Island, Seoul.\(^{107}\) The island, which was originally named after the orchids and redroot gromwells that grew on it, became the official landfill site of Seoul in 1978. Over the course of 15 years, the site became a massive mountain of waste materials and thus came to stand for the consequences of rapid industrialization in South Korea. The location was shut down in 1993 when it reached its containment limit and was subsequently converted into several ecological parks, by covering the mountain of trash with layers of soil and plastic sheets.\(^{108}\) The site, newly named as the World Cup Park in order to commemorate the international event and the new millennium, currently consists of five parks: Pyeonghwa (Peace) Park, Haneul (Sky) Park, Noeul (Sunset) Park, Nanjicheon Park, and Hangang Riverside Park. Between Haneul Park and Noeul Park, a power plant was built to convert the gas produced by underground waste into electrical power, in addition to facilities meant to purify the precipitation from the waste. The exhibition *Abandoned Island, Mountain of Healing* was located in Haneul Park, where the artworks were carefully placed above the coverage, roughly sixty-centimeters thick, drawing attention to both the gas still bubbling under its thin cover and nature’s attempt to recover.\(^{109}\)

---

\(^{107}\) The Seoul World Cup Stadium was constructed in and currently resides at Nanji Island, Seoul.

\(^{108}\) Ibid., p. 141.

\(^{109}\) Kim, *Gamchugi, Deureonaegi, Itgehagi*, pp. 74-5.
Choi Woonyoung’s *Taoreuneun bulkkot [The Flare] (2002) (Fig. 4)* criticized the government’s restoration project that aimed to develop a new ecosystem for Nanji Island.\(^{110}\) The work consisted of hundreds of slim figures, covered in colored pieces of cloth and planted to the ground, which swayed in the wind. The figures were colored in orange and shaped after flames, also mirroring the surrounding field of *Miscanthus sinensis*, a plant native to East Asia including Korea. Reflecting the natural environment that it was placed within, *Taoreuneun bulkkot* was meant to be a prayer for the environment to recover from its damage, with the figures’ swaying presented as a spiritual gesture towards nature’s effort to heal.\(^{111}\) Choi described the figures as “purifying flames” that were meant to burn away all residue and waste left by economic development, through which the work became a ritual experience.\(^{112}\) Scattered across the field, these figures further drew attention to the native plants’ capability to emerge out of the artificially formed ground and mark their presence amidst what was once a barren landscape.\(^{113}\) Compared to prior exhibitions that encouraged the audience to freely respond to artworks as they wished, the 2002 event was relatively more didactic and instructional in nature. The exhibition directly commented on the environmental destruction that Nanji Island, and the city at large, suffered from. *Abandoned Island, Mountain of Healing* was thus a manifestation of the Baggat Art Group’s concerns about the physical conditions of the natural environment, reflecting an interest in ecological and environmental issues that had developed over the years.

As an active member of the group, Choi Woonyoung continued to produce site-specific works that spoke to the native ecosystem. For example, his 2005 work titled *Saeropge*  

\(^{111}\) Kim, *Gamchugi, Deureonaegi, Itgehagi*, p. 75.  
\(^{112}\) Woonyoung Choi, quoted in ibid., p. 77.  
\(^{113}\) Ibid., pp. 74-5.
taeconan eun geot deul [Things Being Born Newly] incorporated wire nets to create spiritual representations of willow trees, which used to reside at the site of Jara Island but were cut down during development. Presenting a ghostly scenery that stood in place of what was lost, the artist attempted to visualize the spirits of the trees and the natural environment at large. In 2010, he produced a work titled A Bird with Broken Wings, through which he addressed the deforestation of Jara Island following governmental development. The artist had witnessed construction workers bringing in heavy equipment to drill and bail soil out of Bukhan River, even during certain Baggat Art exhibitions. Choi’s feelings of resentment and miserableness took form as a sculptural piece, shaped as a bird. The wings of the bird were made out of wood and burnt as part of a ceremony, leaving the bird “with broken wings” and unable to fly. The piece functioned as a metaphor for how human involvement had left the natural environment in a state of immobility, which was, for the artist, an irreversible result of development.

As Choi’s piece demonstrated, the 2002 exhibition consisted of site-specific works that spoke directly to the conditions of Nanji Island. Artist Jeon Dong-hwa, in Uriga mandeun Pyramid [The Pyramid That We Made] (2002) (Fig. 5), connected large aluminum pipes to a gas collector on-site in order to amplify the vibration of the gas rumbling underneath the ground. The work was an attempt to raise awareness about the ongoing presence of the mountain of garbage, which lay right below the thin layer of soil that the audience stood on. Just as Shin’s Baram—Sori in 1997 had drew attention to the wind, which could not be seen or held, so too did Jeon’s

114 Koh, “Art Critiques and Ecological Perspectives,” p. 95.
115 Ibid., p. 68.
116 Kim, Gamchugi, Deureonaegi, Itgehagi, p. 75.
work highlight a presence that could no longer be witnessed visually, but was still capable of being realized through amplified sound and vibration.\textsuperscript{117}

Jeong Ha-eung, another artist in the exhibition, produced a work called *Ttangui sumsori* [The Sound of the Earth Breathing] (2002) (Fig. 6). The piece involved forty earthen pillars placed across the site, each of them approximately two-meters in height. The pillars were emptied in the center, resembling straws, through which they produced a whistling sound when the wind blew through them.\textsuperscript{118} These orange cylinders also transmitted the rumbling of the earth which they were placed on, caused by the mountain of garbage that lay beneath its cover, offering an audible and tactile experience to the audience.\textsuperscript{119} Jeon and Jeong both encouraged subjective and personal experience, urging visitors to physically engage with the natural environment through the works.\textsuperscript{120} Both pieces spoke directly to the site, specifically referring to its history of environmental destruction and the ongoing physical conditions of the natural environment. The artists therefore demonstrated how the relationship between the concepts of environment and history, which the 1997 exhibition first introduced to Baggat Art, had developed over the years into site-specific practices that were made about the site, by the site, and for the site.

According to artist Kim Kwang Woo, Baggat artworks should be as harmonious with their surroundings as possible, often to an extent that they are difficult to notice at first sight or

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., p. 81.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., p. 74.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., p. 83.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., p. 75.
distinguish from the natural environment. He stressed that in order to achieve such a sense of harmony, an intimate relationship between the artist and site must be formed:

Before making my artwork, [I] research about the exhibition place such as [the] local people and [the] history of the town…[by] meeting with a researcher of the place or visiting the cultural center of the town for about two weeks. I consider the relationship between my work and the place as the most important thing.

The artist argued that works in a Baggat Art exhibition, instead of each piece functioning independently as separate works of art, should collectively provide avenues for the audience to engage with the given site. Similar to how collective body performance had encouraged interdisciplinary engagements, I interpret Kim’s approach as also presenting Baggat Art as ritual, in which all participants were placed on equal grounds for egalitarian interchanges. As site-specific practices, Baggat artworks invited artists and visitors alike to participate in a conversation about the site, one which encompassed questions of both history and environment.

The site-specific works in Abandoned Island, Mountain of Healing aimed to facilitate an understanding of Nanji Island, in terms of both its history and natural environment: what it was before, what it suffered, and what should be done to resolve the consequences. The works incorporated and reflected, both visually and conceptually, the characteristics of the site, hence inseparable from the island. I therefore argue that the 2002 exhibition, as ritual experience, functioned as a site of negotiation upon which participants could experience the natural environment, both physically and conceptually, as well as its history. Furthermore, the artists continued to understand the environment as the “outside,” as a concept that referred to both the physical and geographical location as well as the related network of cultural, social, and political

122 Kwang Woo Kim, personal communication with Hong Kyu Koh, quoted in ibid., p. 147.
123 Ibid., p. 118.
interchanges. Albeit exhibiting within the city of Seoul, Baggat Art continued to be in the outside, at the margins, where they could expand the recognized category of art to the everyday.

3.2 Baggat Art in the Outside

Open to the public, the site of Abandoned Island, Mountain of Healing, Haneul Park, attracted diverse visitors to the exhibition. A wide range of people, from nearby residents to art enthusiasts, encountered the works placed across the park. Even visitors who accidentally engaged with Baggat Art, unaware of the exhibition until strolling past one of the pieces, became the audience. The artworks were meant to merge into the everyday of the public, presented as part of the public park’s natural environment, so that anyone passing by could participate in Baggat Art. Such approach continued with the incorporation of the term chukje (festival) during early Baggat Art exhibitions. Located right by the international sports festival, the 2002 FIFA World Cup, the group hosted their own “festival” that wished to be easily approachable and relatable for the general public—namely, the people who would walk and rest by the artworks.

Baggat Art not only existed amongst the public, but actively encouraged them to participate in its ritual experience. Audience participation continued to be crucial to Baggat Art, as exemplified through Kim Kwang Woo’s site-specific piece, Nanjido yeonkkot [Lotus Flowers of Nanji Island] (2002) (Fig. 7). Kim’s participatory work invited the audience to partake in a ritual act of purification. The piece consisted of a table-like structure made of soil, on top of which the artist placed a number of small white cups. Next to the structure, Kim buried an onggi, a traditional Korean earthenware often used as storage containers, into the ground. The onggi

---

124 Kim, Gamchugi, Deureonaegi, Itgehagi, pp. 74-6.
contained water purified from precipitation, which was a reference to the water facilities constructed nearby as part of the government’s restoration project for Nanji Island. White sculptural pieces, shaped to represent the blooming of lotus flowers, surrounded the table-like structure.\textsuperscript{125} Visitors were invited to dip one of the white cups into the onggi and pour the water onto the lotus sculptures as a ritual act of purification. Kim encouraged the audience, by participating in this ritual experience, to partake in a collective prayer for the bees and butterflies to return to the ecosystem of the island.\textsuperscript{126} The work was produced for, and completed by, audience participation, through which the artist shared a didactic message concerning the environmental and ecological issues of Nanji Island.

Whereas the Bagtag Art Group was often criticized, especially during its early years, as being apolitical and disinterested in politics, they became increasingly vocal in expressing their dissent for the government following the 2002 exhibition. Years of working with and within the natural environment gradually fueled a disagreement with the government’s pursuit of rapid development. Chung Hye Ryung’s \textit{Jarada [Growing Up]} (2011), for instance, expressed a desire to revive the trees that were damaged when the site of Jara Island was converted into a public park. Jara Island was an abandoned island, existing without an official name until 1986, which was relatively untouched by development until 1998. The island went through major governmental development in 2008 as part of the nationwide project called “The Four Major Rivers Restoration Project.”\textsuperscript{127} In order to address this history of the island, Chung first located a stump on-site, the remainder of a tree that was cut down during the site’s conversion into a park.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., p. 80.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., p. 75.
\textsuperscript{127} Koh, “Art Critiques and Ecological Perspectives,” p. 68.
The artist then attached branches and twigs onto the stump, which collectively formed the shape of a tree. The resulting work was shaped as if a tree had grown out of the stump, reaching out to the frozen water by which it stood.\textsuperscript{128} Chung’s site-specific piece not only spoke to the physical conditions of the geographical location, but addressed its sociopolitical history as well.

Artist Kwon Minchul also problematized governmental involvement in a work titled \textit{Heulkeun heulkiyo heulki anida [This ‘Soil’ is ‘Soil,’ not ‘Soil’]} (2007). Drawing upon Jara Island’s history of development, the artist aimed to represent an opposition between nature and culture. During the site’s conversion into a public park, large amounts of soil had been imported from other locations in order to construct paths and recreational grounds. Kwon explained that:

\begin{quote}
Jara Island has been changed. [People] made paths and empty lands with soil that used to belong to other places over the original ground that nature made. …I want to peel off the human-made ground in order to see nature’s ground.\textsuperscript{129}
\end{quote}

The artist, in order to do so, collected the soil that had covered the site of Jara Island prior to development, creating human-shaped figures out of it. Kwon then placed these figures, colored in orange with arms and legs outstretched, where the soil that they were made from originated. As an act of returning the soil to its place of origin, the work questioned whether people have any right to alter and modify the natural environment.\textsuperscript{130} As Chung and Kwon’s practices both demonstrated, the environmental and ecological concerns that were highlighted in the 2002 exhibition continued to be of primary interest to the group’s practices.

Since the beginning of Baggat Art in 1981, Baggat artworks functioned as not a product but an experience. Baggat Art incorporated everything surrounding it, from the flow of the wind

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Ibid., p. 120.}
\footnote{Minchul Kwon, quoted in ibid., p. 95.}
\footnote{Ibid., p. 95.}
\end{footnotes}
or water to conditions of the soil; in the 2002 exhibition, every aspect of the environment at Nanji Island became part of each and every work. Although Baggat artists often incorporated self-destructive materials for the production of their works, however, the 2002 event was one of the few cases in which certain works remained at the site after the exhibition ended. Choi Sung-yeol’s *Saengtaegyeui jeohang [Resistance of the Ecosystem] (2002)* (Fig. 8) and Lee Dong-hwan’s *Saessak [Sprout] (2002)* (Fig. 9), for example, remained at Nanji Island as representations of nature’s ongoing effort to heal. Choi’s piece consisted of a large number of sculptural figures, made from mixed media and shaped as large spikes, planted into the ground. Placed amongst the plants growing at the site, the work represented nature’s struggle to rise out of its damaged condition. The decision to leave these works at their initial location reinforced the site-specificity of the exhibition, in which art was produced to partake in the history and environment of the island. *Abandoned Island, Mountain of Healing* marked another significant shift in the group’s focus, this time towards a didactic and direct engagement with issues of environmental destruction and sustainability. Such an increased interest in ecological debates has remained as a primary concern for Baggat Art ever since, especially following the group’s relocation to Jara Island for their annual exhibitions.

### 3.3 Extending Baggat Art

Choi Sung-yeol’s *Saengtaegyeui jeohang [Resistance of the Ecosystem]* served as one of the few examples of a Baggat artwork being reinstalled within a gallery. The Gyeonggi Cultural Foundation hosted an exhibition titled *Space—Response* in 2006, which was organized as a

---

131 Kim, *Gamchugi, Deureonaegi, Itgehagi*, p. 75.
collaborative event between members of the Baggat Art Group and Sponch, an artist group focusing on the reinterpretation of abandoned spaces. Baggat artists, including Ha Jung-soo, Choi Sung-yeol, and Choi Woonyoung, participated in the exhibition by reproducing earlier works, which were initially placed in the outside, within the gallery. Choi Sung-yeol, as an intervention into the institutional space, created an alternative version of his earlier artwork at Daeseong-ri, which he retitled as *Resistance of the Ecosystem: Outside and Inside* (2006).

The piece was part of Choi’s series of works, which shared the same title of *Resistance of the Ecosystem* and were each placed at Daeseong-ri in 2001, Nanji Island in 2002, and The Gyeonggi Art Gallery in 2006. The artist altered the work each time in order to respond to the given environment and convey messages about the particular location. In 2006, Choi placed the spikes on the gallery floor, in front of two large photographs that hung from the wall. The photograph to the left displayed how the work had originally been installed in 2001 by Bukhan River, Daeseong-ri. He explained that the spikes, planted onto the riverbed, aimed to represent how the natural environment, in face of danger and an urgency to survive, adopts a form meant for both attack and protection—that of a hedgehog’s spikes. The image to the right was an enlarged version of the same photograph, but with the colors inverted. By contrasting different versions of the same work with each other, with one set in the outside and the other in the inside, Choi’s work weaved the two spaces together as a collective, total environment.

Kim Kwang Woo’s emphasis on the natural environment, especially as a defining factor for Baggat Art, can become problematic when considering such works that were relocated to

another location. I argue, however, that although the intimate relationship with the natural environment may be lost in such cases, the group’s attempts to transcend the inside/outside and culture/nature binaries can be reinforced when Baggat Art conceptually addresses the outside while physically existing in the inside. These practices of extending Baggat Art into the gallery space also demonstrated how the group continues to search for new possibilities. Members of the Baggat Art Group agreed that, in order to function as a collective, they required a formal structure and solid foundation, hence the establishment of the Baggat Art Association. The association, however, was never to restrict or regulate individual practices according to a decisive mandate. The group’s primary emphasis remains in allowing its members to achieve freedom outside of restrictive boundaries and their limitations, including those of the group itself. The history of Baggat Art is therefore composed of a wide variety of perspectives, practices, and attitudes which are difficult to be comprehended within a single framework, as anyone can participate in, and anything can become, Baggat Art.

In recent years, however, governmental investments in the commodification and reification of the question of locality have become increasingly intertwined with Baggat Art, especially following the group’s relocation to Jara Island. Both the Baggat Art Group and Yatoo are faced today with governmental requests for monumental, permanent artworks allowing for the facilitation of so-called “art parks,” which would function as year-round tourist attractions.\textsuperscript{134} The government, while hosting events and activities throughout the country in order to promote

\textsuperscript{134} Choi Woonyoung answered to such governmental requests by stating that: “There have been some struggles between the local government and us [the Baggat Art Group] because they want us to make some monumental and permanent artworks. However, as artists who love the place, [and] we do not want to create any artworks that alter or visually dominate the original environment of the place.” Woonyoung Choi, personal communication with Hong Kyu Koh, quoted in Koh, “Art Critiques and Ecological Perspectives,” p. 120.
local communities, also continues to urge artists to produce “enjoyable” works rather than raising sociopolitical controversy. The Baggat Art Group has unfortunately been unable to be completely free of governmental and institutional influence, and continues to struggle with problems arising from the decrease in financial support from the government. Thus the question of experimental art practices entwining with the tourist and cultural industry has become an ongoing issue to consider as well for the future of Baggat Art.

135 Ibid., p. 120.
Conclusion

The framing of Baggat Art as ritual and what Victor W. Turner defined as redressive activity that responds to processes of social change allows for an understanding of the Baggat Art Group as inherently interested in the sociopolitical reality of South Korea and its limitations. Prior responses to Baggat Art practices as expressions of escapism, disinterest, and apolitical pursuits of entertainment are essentially short-sighted, as the goal of Baggat Art has never been out of rejection or denial. Over the course of its history, the group has focused on the inclusion and incorporation of what resides outside or at the margins of conventional categories. Baggat artists have expanded the category of art to account for the everyday, transcended urban boundaries to produce art in the outdoors, and extended the role of the artist to the audience, inviting them to participate in the production and experience of art. Contrary to existing criticisms of the group based on the inside/outside and culture/nature binaries, the approach I have proposed here recognizes the group’s desire to dissolve said boundaries by existing outside them.

This thesis is in line with what the Baggat Art Group has striven to achieve throughout the years; namely, to expand conceptual categories by realizing what resides at the borders. Just as the group’s focus has been to incorporate what exists outside of the definition of art into it, so too does this project attempt to incorporate the Baggat Art Group into the narrative of modern and contemporary art history in South Korea. Such an approach is also in agreement with the group’s goals and its underpinning philosophy, which has been actively concerned with the writing of art history since the nineteen-nineties.
I wish to clarify here that although this thesis has focused on the rewriting of the Baggat Art Group, expanding the boundaries of art history is not limited solely to the group. Rather, I hope that this project can function as a beginning—an opening ceremony, as a Baggat Art exhibition would begin—to a process of redress for modern and contemporary art history in South Korea. Many movements and artists groups have been omitted from the dominant narrative due to the fact that they were or are unable to fit into institutional and governmental boundaries, despite deserving attention for their active participation in the development of the post-war South Korean art field. With the Baggat Art Group as a pivot, I wish to raise awareness of what exists at the margins of what is currently defined as “Korean art.”

As Turner said:

Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise.  

Baggat Art, rather than functioning as a denial of the social structure, should be understood as suggesting new possibilities for the understanding of art history. Baggat Art functions as ritual by being in the outside; their significance comes from the very fact that they exist at the margins of the art world and at the borders of society. What is required, therefore, is a consideration of their significance within such a position, instead of setting them apart from what is happening in the inside of the Korean art field and urban venues. The “outside art” that the Baggat Art Group proposes, which includes the inside instead of opposing it, allows for a more comprehensive

---

understanding of modern and contemporary art in South Korea, one that transcends conventional limitations and generates a multitude of possibilities for future practices.
Figures

*Figure 1 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was an image of the work listed below.*

Figure 1. Documentation of the Opening Ceremony to the 1986 Winter, Daeseong-ri Exhibition, 1986. Photograph © The Baggat Art Association, 2015.

*Figure 2 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was an image of the work listed below.*

Figure 2. Nam Chul Shin, Baram—Sori [Wind—Sound], 1997. Photograph © The Baggat Art Association, 1997.

*Figure 3 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was an image of the work listed below.*

Figure 3. Soo-hyun Choi, Juk-eun jari-e kkot-eul [Flowers to the Place of Death], 1997. Photograph © The Baggat Art Association, 1997.

*Figure 4 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was an image of the work listed below.*

Figure 4. Woonyoung Choi, Taoreuneun bulkkot [The Flare], 2002. Photograph © The Baggat Art Association, 2002.

*Figure 5 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was an image of the work listed below.*

Figure 5. Dong-hwa Jeon, Uriga mandeun Pyramid [The Pyramid That We Made], 2002. Photograph © The Baggat Art Association, 2002.

*Figure 6 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was an image of the work listed below.*

Figure 6. Ha-eung Jeo, Ttangui sumsori [The Sound of the Earth Breathing], 2002. Photograph © The Baggat Art Association, 2002.

*Figure 7 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was an image of the work listed below.*

Figure 7. Kwang Woo Kim, Nanjido yeonkkot [Lotus Flowers of Nanji Island], 2002. Photograph © The Baggat Art Association, 2002.
Figure 8 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was an image of the work listed below.


Figure 9 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was an image of the work listed below.

Bibliography


http://www.baggat.net/default/02/01.php?com_board_basic=read_form&com_board_idx=4&com_board_search_code=&com_board_search_value1=&com_board_search_value2=&com_board_page=4&.

http://www.baggat.net/default/02/01.php?com_board_basic=read_form&com_board_idx=35&com_board_search_code=&com_board_search_value1=&com_board_search_value2=&com_board_page=&.

http://www.baggat.net/default/02/01.php?com_board_basic=read_form&com_board_idx=33&com_board_search_code=&com_board_search_value1=&com_board_search_value2=&com_board_page=&.

http://www.baggat.net/default/02/01.php?com_board_basic=read_form&com_board_idx=21&com_board_search_code=&com_board_search_value1=&com_board_search_value2=&com_board_page=2&.


