

A practical and conceptual investigation into some aspects of East Asian and European  
traditions of flower painting, with two case studies

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## **Abstract**

I give a historical account of the broad similarities and differences between the Korean and the European art traditions, particularly in respect to still life type practice, and more specifically sub-genres of flower painting, with an explanation in detail some of the philosophical and technical differences. There is a focus on the mutual influence between East Asian and European art in the period of 'opening up' towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and on the recent period of an increasingly globalised art world. I present case studies of two artists, one from the European tradition and one from the Chinese, who attempted to fuse practices and ideas from both traditions in their work. There is a detailed account of how I attempted to embed cross cultural ideas, techniques and practices in my own work leading up to my MA exhibition, with a description, review and analysis of my exhibition work. I end with some conclusions and some directions for possible future work in this area, both practical and theoretical.

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## 1. Introduction

As I have worked as a florist both in Asia and Europe for the last ten years, I have always wondered how and what is different between the two traditions, especially in relation to flowers, whether alive or not. With this curiosity about flowers, I always enjoy visiting art exhibitions and galleries wherever I travel abroad, especially to see artworks that are related to flowers or plants.

I used to look at artwork only with a florist's mindset, focusing on technical skills such as how floral design was constructed, what kinds of materials or skills were used according to countries or cultures. My perspective of artwork had been limited to one viewpoint, but as I have studied this degree, MA Art and Design, I have been able to develop my artistic mind, seeing more deeply and having a better understanding of the artists' purpose and what they are trying to express.

Initially for the thesis, I wanted to compare Asian and Western art because I thought that they have completely different characteristics and styles. However, after researching deeply I realised that the boundary between Asian and Western art has blurred due to globalisation, and contemporary art has been connected all around the world. The world of art started to gather pace in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and then became a more integrated place at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; some Western artists tried to bring Asian techniques and ideas into their work. Equally, some Asian artists were inspired and influenced by Western arts or artists (Willis, 2016).

Along with this globalisation of art, there is a debate over whether there is a need to highlight the differences between any tradition at a time when globalisation has become widespread, which has blurred the boundaries of different cultures and regions since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This globalisation makes it somewhat more difficult to clearly distinguish between Asian and Western artists.

With the above in mind, the thesis focuses more on two case studies to express the globalisation of art, which is linked to my art project. I will be analysing two specific artists, 'Vincent Van Gogh' who has a European background and 'Wu Guanzhong' who has a Chinese background. Despite their different backgrounds, both artists attempted to fuse practices and ideas from each other's



traditions with their own in their work. The two artists undermined the general rules or art styles that come from their own tradition which the majority of artists followed at the period.

I will be adding this information in detail in the beginning of Chapter 2. Both artists were not afraid to try new things and experiments with ideas that they had never experienced from their own tradition. For example, many of Vincent Van Gogh's 19<sup>th</sup> century artworks were inspired by Japanese art, which was relatively different from his origins. Wu Guanzhong also had good impressions and inspiration from Western art, and he was willing to push the boundaries between both his tradition and other cultures.

By using various materials and techniques for my art project, I tried to create a kind of dialogue between the two artists' philosophies to understand how they are practically different. I anticipated in finding common ground they share. I conducted a practical and conceptual investigation of the flower paintings in the two case studies, which have always been a source of inspiration for my painting practices on both practical and conceptual levels. Studying these artists and understanding how they were able to fit and work together was also one of my interests for my exhibition. In the middle section of Chapter 2, I will be looking at the further details of some contrasting aspects of the two artists and why I was inspired by them for both my exhibition and thesis.

In the later part of Chapter 2, I will be exploring the background of art tradition and philosophy based on my personal background and experience. I grew up in Korean tradition, but I have studied and developed my interest in art linked to flowers, not only in the Korean tradition but also in other traditions. I wanted to show my work that combines my personal experiences with my cultural background. I also studied several Korean paintings from the specific period called 'the Joseon Dynasty period', which was a transition period that led to a more diverse themes and styles of art with fewer limits and rules. This was to have a clearer understanding of how Korean painting styles were affected during the period. Additionally, this information was helpful for me to improve various ideas when I practiced for my exhibition, as this transition of Korean art resonated with a turning point that I have personally experienced of my own.

Chapter 3 will be more about the process of my art practice, including techniques, materials and themes that I tried. My art practice was developed in many different ways, to some extent through trial and error, such as trying a variety of traditional techniques and materials when painting. I looked into three ideas of themes, based on the Korean philosophy of art tradition. However, I only selected two of them for the final artwork to make something harmonious with the other style paintings I made. For the trial artworks that I created before my final artwork, I attempted to find my own voice and style in diverse ways using a variety of artistic materials and techniques.

In Chapter 4, I will be showing my exhibited work, with the process of practices. The aim of my exhibition was to understand how the two case studies could complement each other without coming across as different. This helped me crossover between the boundaries the Wu's artwork and Van Gogh's artwork hold, allowing me to express myself with more freedom in an aesthetic manner. The combination of several traditions of paintings resulted in a unique style with specific artistic concept and themes of my own. The experiences were very valuable for me in broadening the artistic knowledge of my project.

In the later part of Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, I will be analysing and evaluating my artwork, in depth, based on my personal assessment and feedback from the audience after my exhibition. As a result, this evaluation has provided me a basis for future work, extending my experiments and has allowed me to attempt new styles and techniques using a variety of media and materials that I have never tried before. I will be also summarising with some conclusions and directions for a possible future work in this part, both practical and theoretical.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Globalisation of art

Before starting the two case studies in detail, it is important to begin with a general knowledge of the global history background. This is to have a better understanding of what had happened around the world and what influences were made especially on art background at specific periods.

There was a period of change, called the Industrial Revolution, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This historical background resulted in bringing a distinct genre of art, including painting. In the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Industrial Revolution and this led to an increased interest in material culture to a wider public, rather than being limited to the upper classes. This change occurred as a response to the radical changes of industrialisation and mechanisation.

Since then, people in the West have turned to public to recover humanism, and this increased their interest in the value of the commonplace and beauty of ordinariness and simplicity (Botton, 2002). People's deep interest of everyday life culture of common people became more definite since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

John Ruskin (1819-1900), who was a writer and an art critic in Britain, insisted that the Industrial Revolution maximised the gap between the rich and poor, and destroyed not only the beauty of nature, but also noble art or handicraft. He advocated an art that can express people's happiness and pleasure in their work. One advantage of the art form is that it allows an artist a great deal of freedom to express within the composition of a painting (Sterling, 1981).

William Morris (1834-1896), who was a representative of craftsman and an activist of the Arts and Crafts movement in Britain 19<sup>th</sup> century, inspired Ruskin. As a result, Ruskin had the dedication to revive art's value, which had mostly disappeared by the Industrial Revolution, and he continued informing people the artistic value of the nameless artists. He believed that an art, including paintings, should exist for the majority of the public, instead of the minority of highly-gifted artists (MacCarthy, 2010).

The influence of new style on paintings was able to survive into the 19<sup>th</sup> century throughout the rapid changes, as many artists were content to challenge the constraints of technique and subject issue. This challenge gave the advantage of allowing those who wanted to create still life with a degree of freedom, increasing art's availability to the majority of people (Clarke, 2010).

In conclusion, artistic styles have diffused more rapidly and widely, and long-distance travel has become easier since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Consequently, artists can have an immediate and wide-ranging influence on artists of other nationalities (Business Briefing, 2010). The mutual exchange of artistic influences has resulted in many global artists who were inspired by a different culture, using native art supplies and traditional art skills, as well as learning other country's attitude toward an art.

In the next section, I focus more on presenting case studies of two artists, Vincent Van Gogh and Wu Guanzhong. One of the main interests for my research and exhibition was understanding how these artists worked with a different tradition but still managed to create harmony. This research is highly linked to my art project, in which I wanted to show the inspiration I received from the two artists at my exhibition.

## **2.2 Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890)**

Vincent Van Gogh, a Dutch Post-Impressionist artist, is one of the most famous and influential figures in the history of Western art. He created about 2,100 artworks in over a decade, including still lifes, portraits and landscapes. His paintings have characteristics of bold colours and dramatic, impulsive and expressive brushwork, which contributed to the foundations of modern art (Jones, 2018).

In the same period, many East Asian artists had a similar attitude to his, and Van Gogh recognised this at a time when cultural exchanges were becoming very dynamic in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, Japan opened up to an international trade, and Japanese goods began to be imported into France in the 1850s. After this expansion of trade, by 1872, the French term 'Japonisme' emerged to describe the influence of Japanese art and design on Western culture, particularly visual arts (BBC, 2018). Consequently, the artistic relationship between the Europeans and Japan in the period was a huge cross-cultural flow. Van Gogh was one of the European artists who was inspired by Japanese art (Jones, 2018).

In his later career as an artist, he was inspired by Japanese art and realised there is no distinction between art and life. Therefore, he considered art and life to form a single unity, and nature was the key point of departure for his art throughout his life. He loved nature so much to say, "If you truly love nature, you will find beauty everywhere." Not only did he enjoy interacting with nature through his artwork but also being surrounded by it in his daily life. (Vincent Van Gogh Quotes, 2009).

Van Gogh regarded Japanese paintings as a model of pure artistic expression inspired by the natural world. In his mind, Japan was an entirely idealised realm, "a beautiful natural idyll". He enjoyed experimenting with their aspects in his own paintings, including the use of bright, flat colours and strong diagonals, the omission of the horizon, and the isolation of prominent object to give a beauty of empty space, rather than simply imitating Japanese prints.

This was especially seen in his vigorous, confident and very quick drawings using a reed pen, which he felt were the style of Japanese paintings. He painted flowers in minimum detail and simplified forms to make the object look more natural, inspired by the motif in Japanese art and its expanses of colour (Lee, 2017).

### **2.3 Wu Guanzhong (1919-2010)**

Wu Guanzhong is one of the most popular contemporary painters of Chinese origin. He painted various aspects of China, especially its architecture and plants, as well as many of its landscapes and waterscapes, which was inspired by impressionist painters of the early 1900s.

Also, Wu was full of ambition and energy and he travelled around the world to broaden his artistic mind and ideas. This is notable in his art style in the 1970s compared to what others were doing at the period. Wu kept working more extensively in Chinese ink in the 1970s in his mid career, turning to a traditional medium at a time when other Chinese artists turned away from it to see seek inspiration from Western art. He consistently tried to increase the public's understanding of how a traditional medium of ink can be made new for a new period.

His paintings have a sense of colour and formal principles of the Western paintings, with the spirit and tonal variations of ink that are typically used Chinese paintings. Natural scenery is reduced to its essentials: simple but powerful abstract forms. He said that "Abstract forms and beauty is the heart of the beauty of figurative art. It is a natural thing to which we all respond." His explanation of abstract beauty illustrates abstract art from his traditional Chinese art trainings (Heng and Wue, 2016).

Not only did he use a modernisation of Chinese ink paintings, but also his artworks became more widespread with the distinct synergy between Western oil painting and Chinese ink aesthetics. Artists from not only East Asia, but also from Western impressionisms influenced his unique synthesis (China Online Museum, 2018).

However, when he returned to China after studying Fine Art in Paris for three years, his works were underestimated and disparaged both before and during the Cultural Revolution in the middle of 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is because his oil paintings did not fulfill the political requirements of the time. Despite the difficulties, he did not stop painting nor creating artworks, but continued raising questions on the relationship between modernism and cultural traditions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Sullivan, 2010).

In conclusion, thanks to his countless enthusiastic effort, his works paved the way for younger generations of artists and continue to inspire many of this day. Wu's distinctive style fuses Western and Chinese art traditions, and set a new direction for modern Chinese art, well-known for his approach to Chinese ink and Western formalism.

With this information above, I will be comparing the two artists, respective to their cultural background. This is to have a greater understanding of, not only their art background, but also their paintings that are based on artistic techniques and philosophies of art according to their respective traditions.

## 2.4 Comparison between the two case studies

### 2.4.1 Historical Art background

It can be argued that Western and Asian art were less likely to have to share similarities because cultures are based on different histories and experiences. As the world of art is far too broad for only two artists represent their own art culture, I will only be introducing the similarities and differences that are closely related to Van Gogh and Wu.

In very general terms, Wu Guanzhong's main focus was on providing contextual information and emotions in their paintings as an East Asian artist. On the other hand, Vincent Van Gogh as a Western artist focused more on representing the world with a central perspective and he concentrated on the main objects in his paintings (Willis, 2016). Although there are many exceptions to the differences, it was useful to know their historical art background to understand how the two artists' styles, which that were affected by their own culture, used to be different.

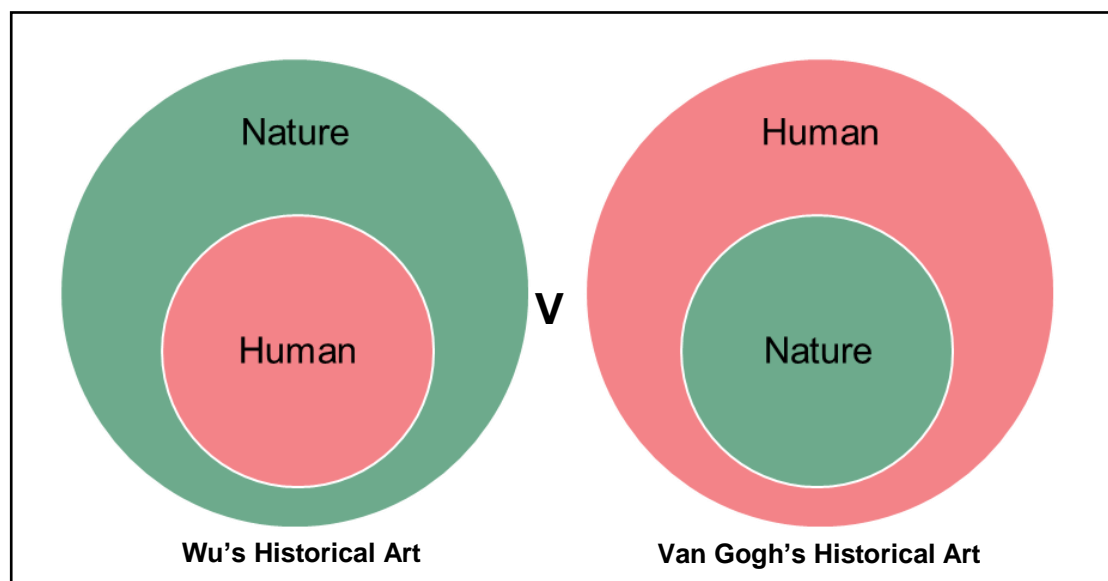


Figure 1. Generalised Comparison of Wu's and Van Gogh's Historical Art (Kubovy, 1986, adapted by author)

As can be seen in Figure 1, Van Gogh's historical art generally regarded nature as an object that humans need to overcome, suggesting human as the centre of the world (Kubovy, 1986). This idea influenced much of his early artwork. In order to understand deeply his art background, I will be explaining European art history briefly below.



During the Renaissance, between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, art was still idealised, which was globally true. Since the advent of the Baroque, the art style focused on a greater and less-idealised naturalism. The Rococo is called “Late Baroque”, and the style was more likely to be frivolous version of the Baroque. This style was shown by a striking and percipient naturalism of likeness with sensuous depiction of art: texture, colour, and decorative line. The Rococo movement first appeared in France and Italy and spread throughout central Europe in the middle of 17<sup>th</sup> century (Mitchell, 2017).

At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the European art world was still limited to its traditional style, depicting historical scenes and noble themes. Still life in the 17<sup>th</sup> century used to concentrate more on unique and rare style for the specific people’s needs to show off their wealth or desire. However, the image of paintings in the 18<sup>th</sup> century became to deceive the viewer’s eye by painting objects in such a realistic look that the viewer would easily mistake them for actual items (Borobia, 2010). Van Gogh’s early artwork was influenced and developed by some parts of these European historical art aspects and backgrounds.

On the other hand, Wu’s historical art background was quite different because it regarded nature as the most important aspect in his art tradition for a long time (Figure 1). In addition, the ancestors of East Asia in the similar periods, between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, considered human as an element or factor that is only a part of nature. Therefore, all objects designed and created by humans were seen as something that is part of the nature (Naver, 2011). This means that Wu’s art is not just about the object, but also about reflecting the soul and mind of the artist.

With the above in mind, the next chapter describes the two artists’ paintings, including the purpose of their painting and methods, which is linked to my exhibition.

### **2.4.2 Purpose of painting and methods**

The purpose of painting for the two artists' historical traditions was different. Before Vincent Van Gogh had an inspiration from Japanese artwork, he mostly painted for historical record and for house decorations, rather than for training of mind or expressing culture, which was the purpose of Wu's paintings (Willis, 2016).

With these different traditional values on paintings, they used different materials, based on their own art historical background; Van Gogh's materials were usually oil paints on canvas and Wu's materials were Asian ink on rice paper. As a result, the painting process of the two artists' art traditions was also different. For instance, Wu could not paint in layers because the rice paper is easy to tear and very delicate. It was very challenging to paint without mistakes (Song, 2005).

This was the reason why Wu had to keep practicing his drawing and painting for one final piece of artwork, repeating the same design several times. He regarded drawing and painting for mental training, rather than painting an accurate picture of an object (The Chosun Ilbo, 2009).

Because of the nature of the materials, rice paper and traditional Asian ink, Wu's paintings have developed to express with space and line, carrying meaning with the consideration of nature (Daum, 2016). As can be seen in Figure 2, the main objects (rocks) in paintings are not in the centre of the composition, therefore, making negative spaces in the other areas of the paper. The artist suggests the viewers to look at the painting from a distant view (Baiyuan Gallery, 2013).



Figure 2. Blossom Out, Wu Guanzhong, 1986 (Baiyuan Gallery, 2013)



Figure 3. Vincent's Bedroom In Arles, Vincent van Gogh, 1889 (Scott, 2018)

Conversely, when Van Gogh used oil on canvas, he was not required to practice as much as Wu Guanzhong, who had to paint on delicate rice paper. This is because paintings using oil on canvas can be changed by adding more paint whenever the artist wants to. While Van Gogh had opportunities to revisit and overpaint his painting on canvas, Wu Guanzhong could not overpaint his work due to the low durability of rice paper. In addition, overpainting several colours on the same area of a canvas can result in an uncountable artwork in a positive way, which would not be possible for painting on rice paper (Choi, 2003).

Also, before Van Gogh was influenced by Japanese art, he generally concentrated more on perspective and three-dimensional effect. In Figure 3, the painting of 'Vincent's Bedroom In Arles' is an example of a typical Van Gogh's painting, and this artwork particularly remains as one of the most valuable artworks, based on one point perspective (Scott, 2018). The strength painting on canvas using oil paints is that it allows the expression of diverse colours and shapes.

The differences between the two artists based on their art backgrounds mentioned above can be found in their painting methods as well. Wu Gaunzhong's paintings have no distinction between rice paper, representing nature, and the East Asian ink, representing the human act, which permeates into it. In Vincent Van Gogh's early paintings, however, it is possible to distinguish between the canvas as nature and oil paints as human act. From Van Gogh's point of view before the globalisation of art, oil paints plays its role just as a medium, which does not permeate the canvas (Figure 4).

Different materials when painting are clearly used in their art traditions. This means that the different methods and materials have a different nature-human relationship which is presented the resulting final paintings (ShinHanArt, 2017).

However, the difference in painting methods mentioned above can have exceptions. For instance, the two artists' paintings can be painted using a variety of materials that do not belong to the two painting methods, such as using watercolour on paper.

Therefore, for the thesis and my final artwork, I only focused on the methods using Asian ink on Korean rice paper, an inspiration from Wu's painting, and oil paints on canvas, which was inspired by Van Gogh's painting, for a clearer comparison.

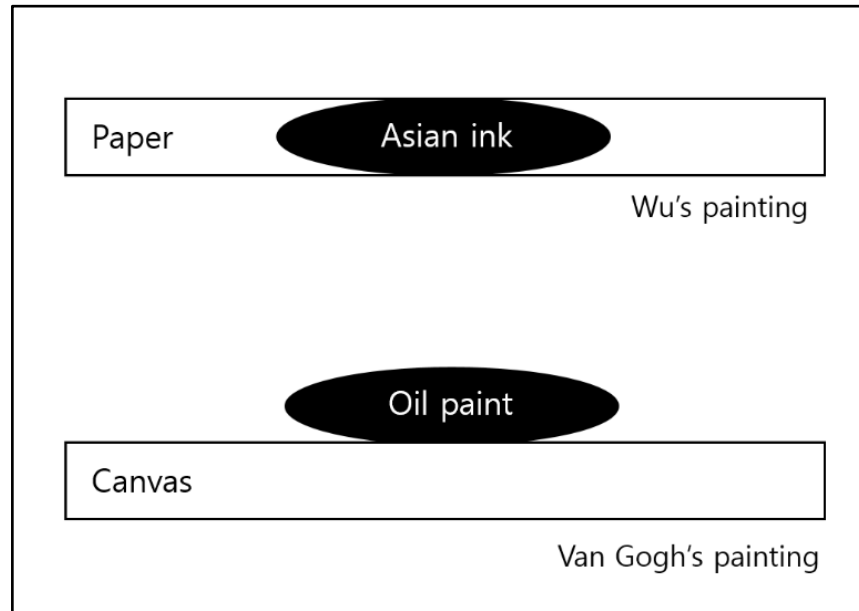


Figure 4. Comparison of Wu's and Van Gogh's paintings methods (ShinHanArt, 2017, adapted by author)

So far, I have outlined a few similarities and differences between the two artists' art backgrounds and the purpose of their painting and methods. The next section focuses on flower paintings of the two artists with the background of my own practice and subsequent research, in relation to my exhibition.

### 2.4.3 Flower paintings

Flower paintings were one of the main areas of research for my art practice as it was of great value in finding the skills and philosophies of the two artists' art traditions.

## Vincent Van Gogh

In Figure 5, Vincent Van Gogh had never painted the bright buds in such close-up and was not used to using the kinds of lavished colours on the glorious blossoms, but he encouraged himself to widen his art-world. Even though he was influenced by paintings from Japanese art, his painting does not look anything like the Japanese paintings. This is because he was keen on experimenting by adding something of his own style, such as the omission of horizon and the colour contrast method (BBC, 2018).

In comparison of the painting in Figure 5, Van Gogh painted the flower painting in Figure 6, based on European still life style, with an exuberant bouquet in the glory of full bloom. Although both the paintings were painted with oil on canvas in 1890, the techniques and composition of each painting seem to be of quite a distinct character.

The painting in Figure 5 was painted with relatively quick drawing and smooth brushwork with curved lines of stems, inspired by the technique of Japanese painting, but the floral still life in Figure 6 was painted with very thick paint and strong diagonals of brushwork in the background (Metzger and Walther, 1999).

Additionally, in Figure 5, the tree trunk was omitted so that viewers are allowed to freely imagine the omitted parts, instead of drawing a vase on a table like Figure 6, which seems more static. The composition of objects in the painting (Figure 5) was one of the key character of Japanese paintings, which is admiring natural object and painting as it how it as they are, rather than transforming it artificially.

In spite of the many differences, he considered all blossoming plants as a celebration of birth and renewal, as full of life. He did not use colour simply to imitate the colours of nature, but to express emotion. The emotional approach to nature allowed many artists to broaden their artistic backgrounds and reject being confined to a single culture, creating diverse influences and experiences globally (Van Gogh Museum, 2017).



Figure 5. Blossoming Almond Tree, Vincent van Gogh, 1890 (Van Gogh Museum, 2018)



Figure 6. Still life: Vase with Pink Roses, Vincent van Gogh, 1890 (National Gallery of Art, 2018)

## **Wu Guanzhong**

Wu Guanzhong was not afraid of using a variety of materials and brushstroke-techniques to express a variation in texture and an atmospheric effect. In Figure 7, he painted with oil on canvas with smooth touches and fluidity of lines. He was also interested in using the traditional Chinese medium of ink on rice paper for his work, with his own style that is essentially different from the tradition. For example, he used bright colours and radical compositions to show geometric beauty (Figure 8). In order to nationalise oil painting and to modernise Chinese painting, in his view these were two sides of the same face.

In terms of using those materials of painting, people often misunderstood the use of brush-and-ink as being the only option for Chinese painting, but Wu believed brushwork (brush-and-ink) is a technique to serve the artist's expression of his/her emotions. He kept in mind that whatever he paints with any materials, such as mountains, rivers, flowers, or trees, with any of materials it is most important that he paints with feeling. Therefore, he suggested that the materials do not have to be limited to Chinese painting.

With his countless experiments and beliefs in relation to the function of art, he blurred the boundaries of our understanding in how a traditional medium of ink can reach into the new century. However, he always kept in mind, as a Chinese artist, to focus on nature when painting, to get inspiration. He said, "There is no art that does not have a reference in nature, which is all around us" (Farrer, 1992).

In conclusion, in using both oil and Chinese ink, his artworks are representative examples of the creative fusion of arts, which have been inspired by traditional Asian art and expressions of modern Western art (*ibid*).



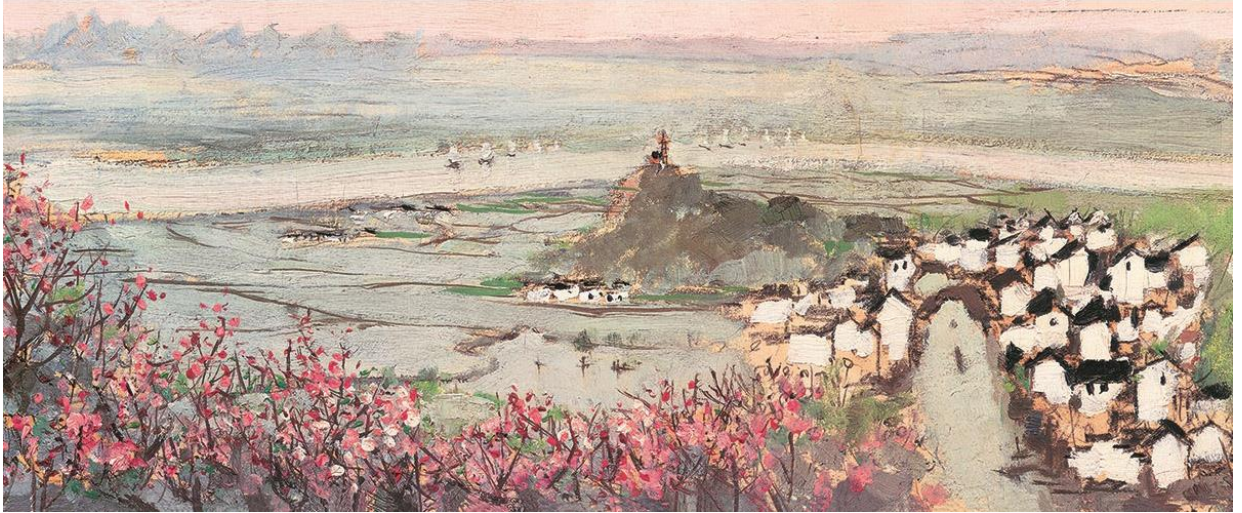


Figure 7. The Yangtze River, Wu Guanzhong, 1974 (China Online Museum, 2013)



Figure 8. Mountain, Wu Guanzhong, 1970s (China Online Museum, 2014)

#### **2.4.4 Summary of the two case studies**

In this section, I will be summarising comparisons between the two artists' paintings, with references that have been noted above (Figures 5 to 8). This is to understand more clearly which aspects have differences and similarities, depending on artistic skills as well as the philosophy of art in each tradition.

Vincent Van Gogh's early flower paintings were quite static with maximised flowers with bold colours, before he was inspired by Japanese tradition and painting. Also, the composition of flowers had the largest and almost fully opened flowers in the centre, whereas the stems and the smallest flowers lean over the edge of the vase to complete a visual balance (Meagher, 2008).

However, Vincent Van Gogh's flower painting that was inspired by the motif of Japanese art was prominent mainly the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. When compared with other types of still life he had painted, the rule of drawing or layout with natural objects was relatively unrestricted. He wanted to abandon the use of symmetrical balanced to depict objects more naturally, with free arrangements. In addition, techniques and composition of his flower paintings also transformed to be more smooth and simple, rather than describing flowers realistically (Figures 5 and 6).

On the other hand, Wu Guanzhong's flower paintings emerged from a relatively different starting point. He usually regarded nature, including flower, as the most important aspect in his tradition, whereas Vincent Van Gogh regarded nature as just one of the objects in paintings (Figure 1 'Generalised Comparison of Wu's and Van Gogh's Historical Art').

Furthermore, for Wu's painting, the rule of drawing or an arrangement with natural objects was also comparatively less restricted than Van Gogh's paintings. Wu's paintings abandoned the use of a symmetrical balance to portray a more natural style with free arrangement (Lim 1989). The brush technique was different as well, loose and smooth brushworks, instead of using sharp and pointed edge of brush like Van Gogh did.

In comparison with Van Gogh's brushwork, Wu's brushwork is looser; the flower and mountain were worked loosely and naturally. The brushwork and composition of his work give the painting a very contemporary style.

When Wu's paintings of Figure 7 and 8 are compared, the painting in Figure 8 has more abstract concept. He showed the intentions to illustrate states of being, emotions, and concepts of nature over more realistic representation. For instance, in Figure 7, he included buildings as a small part of the painting to show a long-view perspective. However, in Figure 8, he extracted geometric beauty and a structural rhythm, with a closer view of the object so the viewers could be fully immersed (Lee, 2009).

Wu also developed his style through limitless trials. For example, he added his own elements and style by mixing a variety of materials (oil paints and Asian ink), which creates a variation in texture and an atmospheric effect. The use of ink and oil was innovative in his solid art background of Chinese ink paintings, which widely used nature as main object based on the old traditions at the time.

There are many fine paintings that the artists have conveyed complex and meaningful messages in the types and arrangement of objects on display. Most features of their paintings were created to give people feel meditative and sensory image, implying a story or having a symbolic meaning. This aspect is one of the reasons why their paintings are still familiar and famous to the public.

So far, I have outlined a few similarities and differences between the two case studies. With the awareness of both artists' styles and techniques, I came to appreciate their paintings more, as they present artistic intentions and deliver spiritual messages.

The next section is about the background in art tradition and philosophy of Korean paintings. The research of the specific period ‘the Joseon Dynasty period’ was my starting point, because when I practiced art for my exhibition, I wanted to create and show emotion of Korean painting of that period as a person with a Korean background. This is to develop my own practice and conduct a subsequent research of theme for my exhibition.

## 2.5 Korean painting- Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910)

### 2.5.1 문인화 ‘文人畫’ (*Mooninhwa*)

In this section, I explore in depth about Korean historical art, which is related to my final exhibition work. I began by studying a style of Korean painting called *Mooninhwa*, painted widely in the early to middle period of Joseon Dynasty, which became relatively less popular in the end of period. Korea had a disparity within the social standings, from royalty to slaves. The gap was very unequal, so only upper-class people such as nobles and the scholar-gentry class were able to have a diverse experiences about art, paintings in particular. Most of the paintings had reserved beauty and controlled line with enough negative space on paintings. These paintings were highly influenced by the Confucian culture at the time (Smithsonian Gardens, 2017).



Figure 9. Four Gentleman, Kang, S.H., 14<sup>th</sup> century (Naver, 2017)

For example, the Four Gentleman paintings were painted by upper-class people in the early period of Joseon Dynasty, using mainly traditional East Asian ink and Korean rice paper, called *Hanji* (Figure 9). These kinds of paintings portrays the importance of painting composition and beauty of negative space. The Four Gentleman in Korea tradition refers to the four different seasons of the year from left to right: plum blossoms bloom in the early spring, orchids in summer, chrysanthemums bloom in autumn and bamboo in winter. Depending on artists, each painting's design was slightly different, but the meaning of the painting followed their ancestors' profound directions (*ibid*).

### 2.5.2 민화 ‘民畵’ (*Minhwa*)

The other style of Korean painting I studied is called *Minhwa*, which refers to Korean folk art that were mostly painted by unknown artists who had no formal training. This type of style could be practiced by anyone who wanted to be a painter, regardless of their social status, whereas *Mooninhwa* was painted by only upper-class people. The literal translation of *Minhwa* means "painting of the people" or "popular painting", because the artists were commoners who travelled from place to place, often following festivals, where they would paint for the locals. There are some particularly popular themes that were mostly from nature, such as the sun, water, rocks, birds, insects, trees and flowers. *Minhwa* art developed into its present form in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but became more popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Korea brand, 2011).

It might be thought ironic that the folk paintings flourished from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Joseon Dynasty was declining and Japanese colonisation was beginning. The feeling of common people was rather optimistic, despite the fact that the fate of the nation declined. *Minhwa*'s bright and cheerful artistic emotion gave people a glimpse of an ideal world beyond their reality. Bérénice Geoffroy-Schneiter, a French art historian, described *Minhwa* as 'the painting of love and belief' and 'a dream of nature'. In addition, one can say that *Minhwa* is 'pleasant' painting in the gloomy days (Chung, 2017a).

In comparison with *Mooninhwa* paintings, *Minhwa* was more likely to reject conformity and value diversity, such as using variety of colours and themes and fewer limits or rules. In addition, the movements of emotions are freely expressed in *Minhwa* (*ibid*). Yanagi Muneyoshi who was one of the most famous Japanese philosophers and founders of the folk craft movement in the late 1920s to 1930s, was deeply inspired by Korean folk art during his first trip to Korea. The trip led to the establishment of the Korean Folk Crafts Museum in 1924, and he expressed that *Minhwa* has incomprehensible beauty, which can never be explained from a contemporary aesthetic point of view. Also, in regards to folk art, he mentioned if a day comes where the Korean folk art becomes worldly known, the world will be immensely shocked by its novelty (Yanagi, 1989).

The paintings, *Minhwa*, work on a number of levels. They show figures from folk mythology and legends, symbols of happiness, wealth and health, and scenes of daily life (Yoon, 2000). There are typical paintings called *Chaekgeori*, which can explain the difference of the two paintings, *Mooninhwa* and *Minhwa*, even if the content of paintings is similar, having mainly books as a theme (Figures 10 to 12).



Figure 10. *Chaekgeori*, ten-panel folding screen, Lee, T.Y., 19<sup>th</sup> century (Tongil News, 2015)

*Chaekgeori* painting is one of the most popular paintings in Korea even at present. In order to understand the name of painting, '*Chaek-*' means 'books' in English and '*-geori*' means 'a kind of' or 'relating something' in English. Chung Byungmo of Gyeongju University of Cultural Heritage said that there are many paintings, which have books or personal items, such as vases, in China and the West, but Korea is the country where this genre has been most widely spread (Chung, 2017a).

In Korea, this genre has been popular since Jeongjo of Joseon in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, who was the 22<sup>nd</sup> ruler of the Joseon Dynasty of Korea (1776-1800). He is known as one of the most successful and visionary rulers of the Joseon Dynasty. The lecturer, Chung, believes that Korea has created a new painting genre, which has subject of books and this is a unique way of beautifying books. Joy Kenseth, lecturer at Dartmouth College, considers the painting as still life in Korea (Chung, 2017a).

The painting in Figure 10 from *Mooninhwa* has a 'code of luxury' to explain what kinds of objects were popular at the time. For instance, the objects painted on the painting, such as porcelain and vases of flowers with loud colours and fancy patterns, were all rare and precious. Most of the objects were imported from China and many unique pigments were imported from Europe through China. The upper-class people, who ordered the paintings from artists, wanted to show off rare and unique possessions through the objects on paintings.

In addition, at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> period, a new blue pigment, called aniline dye, was popular to use for background on this genre of paintings. The aniline dye is a synthetic organic chemistry colour, which was developed in 1856 in United Kingdom. According to the Korean history record, after they imported aniline dye from the UK, the new colour period started to raise vivid expression of art. This was the starting point to change bright and cheerful emotion from dignified and static feeling of brown colour. The enormous change of background colour can provide important information on chronological records of *Chaekgeori* paintings. Before the 1871, backgrounds were painted brown, but after that, the unique blue colour was used to paint backgrounds (Chung, 2017b).

These new international exchange movements were able to allow more diverse painting skills and colours to be developed in Korean painting at the period. The paintings from *Mooninhwa* still have controlled lines and composition of objects, although now it has diverse colours and fewer rules than the ones from early and middle of Joseon Dynasty period. The painting was limited to upper-class people, because the objects painted on the painting like porcelain and vases of flowers, excluding books, were objects that the commoners of the period could not own (*ibid*).

However, the other *Chaekgeori* paintings from *Minhwa* in Figures 11 and 12 were painted by unknown artists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The paper's size was smaller than *Mooninhwa's Chaekgeori*, so objects on a painting had to be compact with small spaces between each object and the next one. The painting in Figure 11 includes many other meanings, aside from books that projected their wishes for to study and have a successful career.



Figure 11 and Figure 12. *Chaekgeori* paintings, unknown, 19<sup>th</sup> century (Samsung Museum of Art, 2014)



The fruits and vegetables (strawberries, horned oranges, chilies and cucumbers) on the painting represent praying for fecundity, especially for a son. In addition, the painting in Figure 12 shows a combination of books, fruits, flowers and furniture.

Though the books' position shows that it is the main subject on the painting, the other objects have strong impacts as well. The fruit, watermelon with many seeds, was painted for the fecundity, and the peaches were painted with wish for longevity. The bird, pecking at the lotus flower on the right top corner, represents a success or getting through something (Figure 12).

The two paintings in Figures 11 and 12 do not only represent their desire to study, but also hopes for a good fortune. These type of hopeful themes are noticeable in *Minhwa's* paintings. While the purpose of *Mooninhwa's Chaekgeori* was focused more on decoration and objects for home, *Minhwa's Chaekgeori* included the expression of hope based on ordinary people's lives.

Furthermore, *Minhwa's* distinct feature is reinterpretation of objects from painter's boundless imagination, rather than describing them how they originally look. With this particular feature, *Minhwa* was known as the world of ideas and imagination, and not of vision and reality (Chung, 2017b). Therefore, in comparison with *Mooninhwa*, *Minhwa* represents the people's creativity, life styles and aesthetic sense, as well as reflecting significant historical features of the time.

### **2.5.3 Korean flower painting**

According to Chung (2018), flower paintings from *Minhwa* illustrate a romantic imagery naturally. This means there is a fewer rules of composition, when compared with a decorative painting for the royal family or *Mooninhwa*. Aside from limited rules, the flower painting was able to express a freer style and have a unique beauty in itself.

The common people in the Japanese colonial period used to obtain positive energy from the image of painting, and they tried to find fundamental principles for happiness in their lives. The positive emotion gives a fulfilled story about how people lived and what they pursued for their lives.

These aspects encouraged me to research the Korean traditions in depth, because I think of this folk painting as still life in Korea, which can play a role in describing Korean traditions generally, and as an instrument of connecting the past, today and the future (Yoon, 2000).

As shown in Figure 13, the flower paintings were one of the most common and popular *Minhwa* because of its strong lines, brilliant colours, unconventional layouts with enough spaces, as well as its usefulness in the home as a decorative piece. The line of stems connects the four individual paintings to form one piece of painting; even the next painting's stem was different type (Kim, 2014)

Birds within the flower painting are usually depicted as a male and female pair, which symbolises a peaceful home or conjugal harmony (Yoon, 2000). The free technique in the arrangements of flowers and the expression of optimistic spirit are used to combine philosophy of art and Korean tradition.

Each flower has its own meaning. For example, peony represents happiness, love and wealth, so the flower painting was best known and decorated for an important party or special occasion. The use of natural objects, such as a flower, animal, bird and insect, led to a creation of a new independent genre of painting (Choi, 2003). The early art form served a purpose as an ornamental pattern for daily utensils but later became more about describing symbolic and metaphoric elements in the background of figure paintings.



Figure 13. Flowers and birds, unknown, 19<sup>th</sup> century (Gyeonggi University Museum, 2014)



Figure 14. Flowers and birds, unknown, 19<sup>th</sup> century (Art Minhwa, 2018)

The other flower paintings in Figure 14 are also one of the best known Korean flower paintings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The paintings were painted on Korean rice paper, same as the paintings in Figure 13, but the composition of paintings in Figure 14 is simpler with pure and naive lines. The overall artistic techniques were used as a 'naive expression'.

In other words, the style of painting seems to be childlike but not childish. There are also various lines from geometric to natural curved. The repetition of rough lines can describe a minimal three-dimensional effect, creating visual texture diversities. In a two-dimensional composition, where no repeated brushstrokes are found, the visual texture would be quite flat. (Chung, 2018).

Some parts of the paintings adopted the elements of pointillism, which is a technique of painting where small and distinct dots of colours are applied in specific patterns to form a creative image. The skill used in the paintings (Figure 14) is distinguishable from other Korean flower paintings. The significant artistic techniques used in the painting can be found in contemporary style painting and the painting style is not far from the contemporary style. Korean flower paintings from *Minhwa* have developed its own attractive style as 'naive art' with plain and simple emotion, like a child's artwork. A skillful artistic technique is not necessary at this point (Chung and Ko, 2018). I believe that an expert technique is not a main evaluation point when appreciating artwork and deciding its value, even though the skill could be considered useful as a reference.

Moreover, the compositions of Korean flower paintings (Figures 13 and 14) were painted onto several pieces of rice paper and then combined together to create one form of art with repeated lines, shapes and colours. Korean flower paintings were created through a strong adherence to show the experiences of people's daily lives, encompassing various subjects and methods of expression.

Furthermore, *Minhwa's* value is known as an earnest and candid expression of people's lives during the period; an expression of freedom and escape from both politic and technical ideology, without any complex decorative skill and negative emotion (*ibid*).

As mentioned above, the Korean folk art, including the folk painting, *Minhwa*, is linked to common people's emotions and dreams with the flexible artistic mind and styles, rather than confining it to a royal family or a nobleman. In other words, the painting genre, *Minhwa*, entered the front of the stage of history when the medieval age transformed into the modern age.

The Joseon Dynasty's social rank system had been gradually collapsing as it reached its end and a new social order began to form. With all these social changes, *Minhwa* paintings occupied more public attention than before, because the paintings represented free and equal world of which the common people had dreamed (Chung, 2017b). This enthusiasm for Korean folk paintings has continued to the present, so the paintings have become one of the most popular art forms among other traditional Korean art culture, because it has not only a traditional attraction, but also a contemporary one.

With the merits and image of it, *Minhwa*'s flower painting allows maximising the originative layouts of painting with a free-style, so that viewers do not only enjoy the 'pleasures of thinking with their aesthetic senses' but also the 'joy of seeing and enjoying' (Chung, 2018).

*Minhwa* flower painting considers people's long-cherished desire to live healthy and beautify their living environment. Although Korean flower paintings seem to lack the sense of elegance and refined beauty of European floral still life, the paintings' humorous and unconventional layouts are one of the most important characteristics of the Korean aesthetic (Choi, 2003).

## 2.6 Influence on my work

Researching all background above was very useful and significant in broadening my artistic knowledge and having more creative thought, when trying to make new things that I had never done before for art practice. The two artists, Van Gogh and Wu, have informed and affected the way in which I have thought about my artistic works between the different cultures. After studying their works, I found that the both artists were representative artists who undermined the boundaries and lines of cultures' painting styles.

Vincent Van Gogh admired East Asian art, and he and his brother (Theo) collected hundreds of Japanese prints during the opening of trade between Europe and Asia in the 1850s. His interest in Japan and Japonisme extended beyond visual concerns, which informed his creative and idealistic ideas about artist and his world. In his view, the Japanese artists who live in nature were "wise, philosophical and intelligent"; the artist engaged in a close study of nature, as if they themselves were flowers and nature (Helvey, 2009).

This impact made him achieved a higher level of spirituality and artistic expression. While Van Gogh's culture regarded nature as an object that humans need to overcome, it might seem that Van Gogh unintentionally invented a new genre, which could be referred as 'a living still life'. This undermines the principle, shown in Figure 1 'Generalised Comparison of Wu's and Van Gogh's Historical Art'.

As he made his own unique genre, I wanted to create my own artistic style with following his borderless artistic mind and adventurous passion. These inspiration helped me to change my way of thinking such as 'What kinds of Asian art would I have interested in mostly about, if I were an European?'. I am Korean so I was not sure on how the Asian art was perceived by the Europeans and how the attractions of East Asian art are enhanced when compared to European Art. After researching his works that were influenced by East Asian art, I was given a brief guideline of how I should paint a harmonious art with different cultures' art styles.

Wu Guanzhong also helped me to grow my own style. For me, his paintings demonstrated the Western sense of colours with its formal principles in paintings, but also showed a spirit and tonal variations of ink that are typically East Asian. I thought his artistic background was similar to mine, because even I am a Korean, I have studied in England and I have got inspirations and experiences from both cultures in a positive way.

When researching Wu's work, I was specially inspired by his brushwork techniques with Chinese ink. He used the ink in a variety of ways not only for lines but also for bold shapes and forms, which was not a classic style for East Asian paintings at the period 1800s. Unlike some other modern East Asian artists, his work did not settle in one type of painting, therefore his work was exceptionally unique in casting aside the typical East Asian painting.

His artworks in oil were marked by a delicacy of brush touch and colour choices, a purity and fluidity of line, which was very attractive for me. He believed that its simple but powerful abstract forms are enough for painting its essentials, and he never confined his work or art world to a single genre or one country's culture and philosophy (Sullivan, 2010). He made his own genre and his works is also a good example of undermining the cultural aspects shown in Figure 1. I have learned that his studies of techniques and his artistic spirit have a vitality and freedom.

Wu's paintings were exhibited at the British Museum in 1992, which was the first for a living Chinese artist. He has had solo exhibitions in major art galleries and museums around the world. Unfortunately, I did not have a chance to attend his galleries or see his works in person, but his work still remains as giving significant impression of unlimited material choices and painting styles.

This was one of the main reasons I referred to his work for my work. When painting my work, I tried not to paint complicated lines or forms. I wanted to include the use of oxymoron in referring my work, as 'plainly decorative painting'. Also, as he did, I tried to paint in various styles, not only using art supplies, like brush and pencil, but also many different materials, such as a twig or cotton buds.

Among the Korean paintings that I researched, I was more inspired by *Minhwa* than *Mooninhwa*. The work that I wanted to show was more fitting with the flower paintings from *Minhwa*. This is because I believe that it expresses a freer style and have a unique beauty in itself, with unconventional layouts and enough spaces. When I applied the free technique in the arrangements of flowers and the expression of optimistic spirit to my work, it helped me combine philosophy of art with Korean tradition.

With this improved art knowledge for my work, Chapter 3 describes the process of my art practice with trials and errors that was inspired by the background research I had completed in Chapter 2. The whole process developed my artistic world and helped me overcome my artistic limitations.



### 3. The process of my art practice

#### 3.1 Developments of my art practice

##### 3.1.1 Design 1. Paintings on Korean paper



Figure 15 and Figure 16. Paintings on Korean paper (Author's own, 2017)

After the backgrounds I studied above, I realised that the artistic skill of each painting can differ, depending on its composition and brush handling techniques. For example, the balance and proportion of lines and dots (long or short, large or small) and the positioning of empty space. The beauty of movement is also created, depending on the rhythm and flow of the painting (fast or slow, strong or weak). I applied this knowledge to the paintings in Figures 15 and 16. The movement and the various shades of black ink resulted from my intention to express the endless possibilities of handling the brush.

### 3.1.2 Design 2. Paintings on canvas



Figure 17. Author's work on canvas (Author's own, 2017)



Figure 18. Abstract floral painting, 2017 (Author's own, 2017)



Figure 19. Abstract floral painting 2, 2017 (Author's own, 2017)

For my work on paintings on canvas, I wanted to experiment with various materials that I have never tried before. For example, I squeezed some acrylics paints and placed them randomly on canvas, and then I chose not to paint with a brush, but used many other things, like three different shapes of palette knives, straw, wooden stick, and cotton bud to see whether it works or not without a proper brush (Figure 17).

On the other hand, examples of my work using only brushes to paint acrylics on canvas can be seen in Figure 18. I tried to encompass Van Gogh's oil painting style and use as many bold colours as I could. This was to show contrast of colours by painting darker colours next to brighter colours.

There is one more flower painting, not only using acrylics, but using oil paint on canvas as well (Figure 19). I used oil paints for the base and then acrylics on top after the oil paint had dried. However, it was quite challenging for me to figure out when the oil paint was completely dry before painting with acrylics on top of it, so the details of petals were not expressed as well as I had first anticipated.

### 3.1.3 Design 3. Botanical Artworks

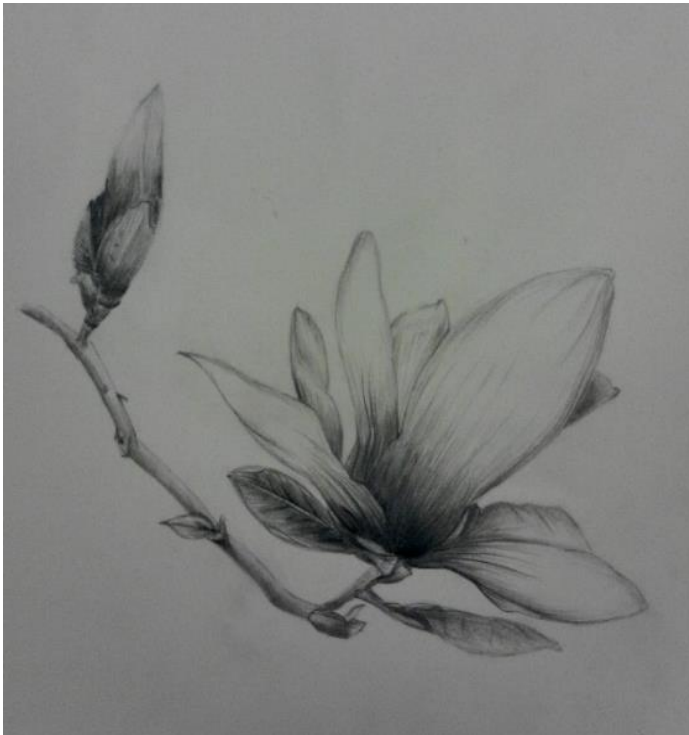


Figure 20. Magnolia (Author's own, 2017)      Figure 21. Wild Flower (Author's own, 2017)

As can be seen in Figures 20 and 21, these are my botanical artworks. The reason I drew and painted with just pencil or coloured pencils, instead of using watercolours, was to express each petal's line and pattern in a more sophisticated and realistic way. After completing the work, I realised that botanical art is closer to traditional art than contemporary art, but the experimental works were worth the chance to learn how delicate and fine the petals of flowers are.

### 3.2 Techniques and materials used

#### 3.2.1 Handling the Asian brush



Figure 22. Order of brush strokes (Author's own, 2017)



Figure 23. Orchid in Mountain (Author's own, 2017)

There are two basic strokes used in calligraphy with Asian brushes; the water-drop stroke, which is made by holding the brush in the slanted position. This type of stroke is suitable for painting petals, especially for sharp edge. The other stroke is the bone stroke, which is created by holding the brush vertically. This stroke has a benefit of painting different thickness of stems with different pressing. Each stroke requires one fluid movement: press down, stroke, and lift. One of the important techniques for caring the delicate cotton or rice paper is to hold the brush gently and gradually lifting it up at the end of its brushstroke (Wang, 2009).

I practiced the brush stroke methods of Wu's painting, keeping in mind each stem and petal of the flower has its meaningful order, not only for visual balance, but also for mental training purposes of the Korean art tradition (Figure 22).

After much practice, I figured out that unlike using the numerous and diverse colours in Van Gogh's oil paintings, Wu's painting requires relatively few colours. I believe that Wu's painting still has countless possibilities with only using East Asian ink and a limited colour palette along with their creative methods on how to approach the brushwork. My painting in Figure 23 was inspired by Wu's landscape paintings, using restricted colours on rice paper.

### **3.2.2 Colour mixing**

There are two methods I used for mixing colours on the brush: dipping and tipping. For dipping, I fully wetted the brush with the first colour I wanted to use, and then dipped the bristles halfway into the second colour. This way was useful for making a harmony of completely different colours to blend smoothly. For tipping, I touched only the tip of the bristles into the second colours.

For every brushstroke, I was able to apply colours varying in brightness, depending on different sides of the brush. This method is good for monochromatic painting when only using East Asian ink (Wang, 2009).

Through these colour-mixing methods, I tried to utilize different tools for my art practice. For example, I dipped a toothbrush in East Asian ink, and used it to paint a spiky visual texture. This skill added some rough strokes with the toothbrush, using empty space to give a smooth

impression in a specific section. Instead of using a toothbrush, a comb can be an excellent tool for creating rough textures for the next trials (Figure 24). A cotton bud was another tool I tried instead of brushes. I dotted at the pistils and stamen of flowers. I tried not to make the spaces between dots too even, because I wanted to give a more natural look. Choosing a cotton bud for the centre part of flowers was worthwhile as it gave another visual texture (Figure 25).



Figure 24. Techniques for visual texture (Author's own, 2018)



Figure 25. Techniques for visual texture 2 (Author's Own, 2018)

### **3.2.3 Traditional East Asian ink and Korean colour**

In the process of producing my artwork, I studied the materials I wanted to use: East Asian ink, Korean colour, Korean paper and canvas, in order to understand them deeply and make the best use of them.

Essential items for painting were brush, paper, ink stick, and inkstone. The production of traditional East Asian ink is very complicated and needs a variety of processes. Additionally, the steps of making traditional East Asian ink was not simple at all. Each of the tools needed to contain the “spirit of the craftsman” who made it.

For instance, it took about 150 manual labour steps to make the ink. In order to make top-quality ink sticks, the whole process required about 5 years, from the selecting proper stone to the final step. The hardest rock will make the best instones and therefore, occasionally only three or four inkstones are made from a one-tone rock (Finnanger, 2016).

Furthermore, I used an authentic traditional Korean water-based paint, called Korean colour, for Asian paper instead of watercolours or acrylics. Korean colour is similar to watercolours, but it is easier to mix and overlap naturally with East Asian ink or water, especially when applied on delicate paper.

### **3.2.4 Korean paper, *Hanji*.**

East Asian paper have their own characteristics, which are different from other Asian paper. There are some differences between Korean painting and Chinese or Japanese painting of a similar period. After paper was first imported from China, Ancient Koreans developed their own unique method of making paper, which has strong and durable fibers that are soft to touch.

For mass production, Chinese and Japanese people used ‘woodblock printing’ technique. On the other hand, Koreans painted one by one, mostly using a brush on a special type of Korean paper, called *Hanji*, which is particularly well suited for absorbing the traditional East Asian ink and reflecting its colours.



The traditional Korean paper has been known as an ancient Korean art form and is made from the inner bark of the mulberry tree, grown in the countryside where the water supply is very clean, and the production of this paper is divided into many stages. Even today, it is a valuable cultural heritage, so *Hanji* can be called a work of art itself (Finnanger, 2016). As a Korean, I believe the method of painting on *Hanji* increased the scarcity value of individual painting, when compared with the mass-produced paintings. This would have made Koreans to be proud of themselves. Therefore, I decided to use this material for my exhibition to give an example of Korean tradition and philosophy.

In order to see how different *Hanji* and canvas are to each other, I drew the same design of orchids on the canvas as I had drawn on the Korean paper, using the same East Asian ink. They look almost the same, but the orchid on canvas looks rougher, because of the different texture and thickness of the paper used. The most obvious difference was how much ink from the brush has permeated into the paper (Figures 26 and 27).



Figure 26. Orchid on Korean paper (Author's own, 2017)



Figure 27. Orchid on canvas (Author's own, 2017)

### **Unique properties of the paper, *hanji* and its fragility**

When I made the decision to use *Hanji* as specific medium of Korean philosophy and emotion for my exhibition, my first impression was that the paper was typically a weak and fragile material in contrast to other standard paper. However, after having trials and errors, I realised the paper has potential abilities for its strength and durability than I expected.

Furthermore, *Hanji* has remarkable strength of permeability for air and moisture and the ability to well-reflect and absorb all colours. This excellence of *Hanji* was one of the main reasons why I chose this material out of any other types of paper for my Korean painting visual work.

For instance, every piece of the same design with the same colours on *Hanji* were never identical, as different amount of East Asian ink was absorbed into the paper for every brush-touch, depending on my intentions. Based on the amount of ink or Korean colour I applied on paper, the expression of paper texture varied. When I wanted to give strong impact with bold lines or colours at some points, I soaked the brush fully so that the paper, in turn, would absorb paint as much as it could, bearing in mind the fragility of the paper.

*Hanji* is fragile and sometimes even creases but also flexible and resilient. This positive property of *Hanji* was helpful for me to play around with many things, using various colour mixing methods with a variety of tools (brush, cotton, spray and twig). However, the paper could not handle a twig tool, as the rough and sharp surface of a twig would tear the paper. In consideration of the fragile and delicate paper, I tried to overpaint on the same area as little as possible. Despite the limited brushwork, I thought *Hanji* showed an extraordinary effect on representing both Korean art tradition and philosophy that I intended to express for my exhibition.

For my art project, I wanted to use *Hanji* in a wide range of symbolic and beautiful items, to represent both Korean traditional and contemporary art. The whole process of using *Hanji* for the project was interesting and unpredictable, and the process allowed me to broaden my artistic perspective and the possibilities of my work.

Despite *Hanji's* prevalence throughout Korean history as art material, it remains globally undiscovered by the public. However, at the present time, awareness of *Hanji* has been growing even outside of Korea and the paper is internationally acknowledged as one of the major features in Korean paintings. I have no doubt that *Hanji's* unique properties will continue to inspire material industrial designers and artists to research the paper for new uses and interpretations. This approach will add a contemporary touch to traditional beauty (KOREA magazine, 2017).

### 3.3 Ideas behind the exhibition work

#### 3.3.1 Theme 1. Rose of Sharon, *Mugunghwa*: National flower of Korea



Figure 28. Rose of Sharon (Author's own, 2017)

The Rose of Sharon is the national flower of Korea, and it is a symbolism for a sincere heart, right-minded and integrity. The composition of this gamopetalous flower, a flower without any separated petal, is known as a symbol of harmony and combination. The symbol of the flower and the meaning of its composition were appealing to me, therefore I wanted to apply them in my visual work to show the harmony of the two traditions. I tried to illustrate each petal's darkness and shape differently, using one stroke brushwork method. In addition, depending on materials used, there were various ways to paint stamen located in the center of the flower, like cotton buds or East Asian brush (Figures 25 and 28).

### 3.3.2 Theme 2. Korean Alphabet, *Hangul*, in flower painting



Figure 29. Hunmin Jeongeum Haerye (Antique Alive, 2016)

For my final paintings, I wanted to add something more traditional to the design to show a more distinctive Korean style. The Korean alphabet, *Hangul*, is a relatively unusual writing system in the world, because both the name of founder and date of founding are known, unlike most writing systems. It was founded in 1443 by King Sejong (the fourth king of the Joseon Dynasty). He and his scholars invented *Hangul* for the following reason: “There are many, among our ignorant people, who are unable to express what wish to say, because the language of our nation is different from China” (Antique Alive, 2016).

At the time, Koreans used the Chinese writing system due to the fact that there was no Korean writing system. It was demanding for most commoners to learn the many and complicated Chinese characters. Therefore, the King Sejong invented the Korean writing system to make it easier for the uneducated public to learn (*ibid*).

The title of the book that explains the principles of *Hangul*, *Hunmin Jeongeum*, was also *Hangul's* original name. *Hunmin Jeongeum Haerye* manuscript is registered as a UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Memory of the World list in 1997 (Figure 29). This can be one reason why many linguistics scholars define *Hangul* as one of the most scientifically advanced and amazing alphabets ever created (Joan, 2016).

For my artwork practice, I wanted to describe the spirit of *Hangul*, which represents Korean culture well. Although not everyone knows what *Hangul* is, I thought the 14 consonants and 10 vowels would work as beautiful lines and shapes themselves (Figures 30 and 31). However, I chose not to paint the consonants and vowels for the final work, because it may create a large gap between the next painting on canvas, which was drawn right next to the painting on Korean paper for the final exhibition.



Figure 30. Consonants of Korean, *Hangul*, in floral painting (Author's Own, 2018)



Figure 31. Vowels of Korean, *Hangul*, in floral painting (Author's Own, 2018)

### 3.3.3 Theme 3: Calligraphy (the art of writing)



Figure 32. Calligraphy '꽃을 담다' (Author's own, 2018)

Instead of painting the consonants and vowels of *Hangul*, I added calligraphy in Korean at the bottom left corner of painting on the final work. Calligraphy in Korea is popular as a visual art reflecting the Korean tradition of artistic writing in *Hangul* (Figure 32).

In Asia, calligraphy is considered as a true gift of the artists' warm heart, which is created with their hands. This is related with Asian cultures, which means that calligraphy is not simply a technical exercise in handwriting, but a performance of training and disciplining the mind (Finnanger, 2016).

On the other hand, like Asian calligraphy, Western calligraphy regards letters as objects of artistic beauty, but Western calligraphy concentrates more on forming letters on paper in a clear way through pure aesthetic endeavour. However, the calligraphy of Eastern countries including Korea focuses more on a meaningful, delicate art form that designs the shapes and lines to express the calligrapher's intention and emotions. This is the reason why calligraphy in East Asia is regarded as more than just a technical exercise; it is an art form of mental training. Calligraphy artists in East Asia usually express classic citations, poem or well-wishing sentences in their work, and words are not only painted onto paper but were also engraved in their hearts (*ibid*).



With the above in mind, I wanted to include implicative words to stimulate viewers' curiosity into my work. From my calligraphy, '꽃을 담다' in Korean (Figure 32), I wanted to let viewers know two implied meanings of my intention for the exhibition; the first meaning was literally 'painted flowers', and the second one was a connotative meaning 'capture flower's heart here'.

The visitors who could not read Korean were also interested in those curved lines themselves, where the floral shape represented the 'ㅈ', a consonant of *Hangul*.

In accordance with the whole research and the process of my art practice written above, the next Chapter 4 goes into details about my exhibited work, from explaining my artwork to analysing them for improvements in future work.

## 4. The exhibited work

### 4.1 The final work for the exhibition

#### 4.1.1 Painting on Korean paper



Figure 33. Painting on Korean paper for the exhibition (Author's own, 2018)

For my painting on Korean paper, I have selected diverse materials and used different techniques, with ideas and philosophies from the Korean art tradition, but I added a small range of Van Gogh's art elements for combination of the both art traditions.

For instance, the reason I drew the two circles was to show the two separate styles of the Wu's and Van Gogh's art. The smaller circle represents Van Gogh's art philosophy, while the larger circle is a combination of Wu's and Van Gogh's art philosophies (Figure 33).

The choice of bold colours and lines was to show the difference between the two floral paintings at the edge of the work, but the circles were not made even to illustrate a midpoint between historical well-ordered Van Gogh's style and natural Wu's style.

The materials for the circles, shiny acrylic colours of silver and gold, were used to create a contrasting effect with the flowers, which used only Asian tools (Korean colour, East Asian ink, and brushes).

As mentioned earlier about the two artists' historical art background, Wu's paintings regard negative space more important than in Van Gogh's paintings. However, I wanted to include some sense of Van Gogh's emotion with bold lines and colours at least inside of the circle in the painting (Figure 33).

#### 4.1.2 Painting on canvas



Figure 34. Painting on canvas for the exhibition (Author's own, 2018)

In order to compare with the artwork that I painted on Korean paper, I painted the Rose of Sharon on canvas, using acrylics. This represented one of my themes that was mentioned above in 3.3.1 section.

Although I wanted to use Van Gogh's traditional painting style here, I employed a natural style composition instead. This is because natural objects, such as flowers, look more natural in nature than when stems are cut to be placed in a vase. For example, like the roses in Van Gogh's 'Vase with Pink Roses' painting (Figure 6), which is one of his earlier paintings. For my work on canvas, therefore, I chose to present my inspiration from Van Gogh's later flower painting ('Blossoming Almond Tree' in Figure 5), to express his art philosophy after he was influenced by Japanese art style.

I tried to paint using many different natural curved stems with diverse thickness. I chose a bright colour for the background to contrast the bold and darker colours of the main objects (flowers and stems), like Van Gogh used contrasting colours to painting the main object and background. When painting the background, I painted smoothly and horizontally to make another contrast of lines with the main object (the Rose of Sharon) that had diagonal and curved lines.

I illustrated using different brushworks for the background and the object to show diverse visual textures. Furthermore, the reason I chose to paint onto the three different sizes of canvas with space between them was to give diverse impacts on viewers through their eye movements.

#### 4.1.3 Displaying/layout for the exhibition



Figure 35. The final work for exhibition (Author's own, 2018)

I displayed the two different kinds of paintings on different side of walls in separate zones. There is no specific starting point in appreciating the exhibited work, but I wanted to add some eye movements, following the various lines of stems (Figure 35). The reason I divided into four pieces was to reflect stable balance, as even numbers represents harmonious and peaceful number in Korean art tradition.

I also tried to present some kind of dialogue between the two paintings to understand in practice where they differ, and to see how, perhaps, they might also find common ground. I wanted to express that not only each piece can be an artwork in itself, but they can also be viewed collectively as an installation. Other approaches involved using differing techniques and tools to show my technical and conceptual development.

#### 4.1.4 Supporting the paintings



Figure 36. Natural materials for support (Author's own, 2018)

I hung the painting without frameworks and drawing pins were required to hang the acrylic canvas. However, pins could not be used on Korean paper '*Hanji*' because of the properties of the paper, too delicate and thin. An alternative tool was needed, such as a long stick, to roll up the top of the paper and hang the stick on the wall.

I wanted to display a more natural look on this painting, so I decided to use natural materials, ivy trails and herbs to make the loop, which worked well with my intentions (Figure 36). The materials with leaves were also able to hide the pin that was used to hold the loop, and support the painting well, even after the leaves had withered.

## 4.2 Reflection and analysis of the exhibition

As mentioned in the Introduction section, with my personal background, studying floral art and design and working as a professional florist in various areas, I focused on balancing art and design in paintings on Korean paper and canvas for the exhibition in May 2018. My initial proposal started in relation to my professional background as a florist, but I focused more on floral painting, instead of natural flowers. Since I have had the experience of designing with natural materials, I believe that all materials have their own meaning and a reason why they have been developed that way. This belief was one of the main reasons that I kept in mind that my work should include each theme and purpose.

In the exhibition work, I started with the curiosity of how actual flowers are drawn and painted. I have learned that all stems or floral petals have their own identities, such as colours and patterns, even if it is the same flower. With this as a starting point, I wanted to include meaningful and emotional lines, colours and material choices, and the final paintings fulfilled my original intention. I am glad that I was able to combine the two different styles of painting well, while including different techniques and materials from the two artists' art background I researched.

After completing the painting on Korean paper, *Hanji*, I found that there were relatively different skills required for acrylics or oils. While acrylic paintings allow for many colours to be easily overpainted due to the quality of a canvas, painting on Korean paper required 'one stroke' skill because of the very delicate paper, which can tear easily if more than three strokes are applied over the same area. With this difficulty, I used limited acrylics and only painted on one part of a smaller circle area to show a mixture of different materials (Figure 33). I had many trials and failures because the paper was too thin and soft to be painted with acrylics and would tear easily.

For the next trial, I want to try 'one stroke' brushwork skill on Korean paper using oil paints and compare how the two materials work and how they differ from acrylics. This experiment would be similar to Wu Guanzhong's artworks (Figures 7 and 8). In addition, in consideration of the delicate paper, I could try other soft materials, such as feathers and animal fur, or materials that are easy

to handle and control, like hands, or even soft stones to create various visual texture.

For the exhibition, I also tried to bring ideas and philosophies from both Wu's and Van Gogh's art traditions and styles. I personally found this the most challenging part during the exhibition preparation, because my own boundaries had to go beyond my bias and preconceptions towards both traditions. I misunderstood that the Van Gogh's painting style would always focus on the three-dimensional effect and regard nature as an object to be overcome by humans. Additionally, I assumed that the Wu's painting style would always be painted with natural lines and enough space without any bold colours or decorative aspects. With this contradiction, combining the two art traditions to make one piece of artwork was far from easy for me.

However, after studying both styles of painting in detail and applying them in practice, I realised that the boundary between Wu's and Van Gogh's art tradition and style has blurred due to globalisation. From this perspective, my exhibition artwork resulted in my own individual interpretation of the combination of Van Gogh's and Wu's style paintings, combined with the Korean theme.

In addition, with my solid research on the two artists, I have come to believe that the individuality of an artist and the artist's own philosophy are keys in creating an artwork, regardless of culture. This means that the world of art is open to accepting and gathering diverse cultures, where artists can create their own colour and style. They respect differences and seek to pursue a variety of expressions from traditions and styles that they admire with curiosity. This experience has helped me develop my own personal artistic style, a contemporary fusion of these two art styles, and has enriched my knowledge and sense of their relationship that demonstrates how they can influence each other positively.

In conclusion, the whole process of working on my exhibition pieces has led me to become much more open-minded and adventurous beyond my personal background and training as a florist and Korean. Overall, I summarised my studies in Chapter 5, including potential future directions not only for my art vision but also for an improved research.



## 5. Conclusions and Future Directions

### 5.1 Summary

The main research was to investigate the differences and similarities between the two case studies of two artists, Vincent Van Gogh and Wu Guanzhong, mainly focusing on flower paintings, providing information on historical backgrounds and artistic techniques and materials. Before starting the main research, I studied their art background to interpret what kinds of aspects were historically different.

In the present days of ever more globalisation, the line separating the two different cultures or regions is becoming less visible with time, since more artists around the world are willing to learn other's traditional art and culture. This was the starting point of my research on the two global artists: Vincent Van Gogh and Wu Guanzhong. Both artists were inspired by philosophy of other art tradition and culture, and they did not stop in developing their own artworks with creative aesthetic ideas. Researching and understanding the artists' mind and artistic techniques was also very helpful for the development of my research and exhibition.

Van Gogh's culture used to regard nature as an object that humans have to overcome, but Wu's culture regarded nature as the most important aspect in the world, considering humans as a small part of nature (Kubovy, 1986). The purpose of paintings for the two historical traditions was different as well. While Van Gogh's early paintings were mainly used for historical record and for decoration, Wu's paintings were used for training of artist's mind and expressing culture (Willis, 2016). Not only did I research the two artists' art traditions and painting styles, but I also looked into Korean art traditions and paintings to understand its art philosophy and find out how they have influenced my art background as a Korean.

I studied mainly Korean paintings, specifically, *Mooninhwa* and *Minhwa* from the Joseon Dynasty period from 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In comparison with the *Mooninhwa* paintings from the early Joseon Dynasty period, *Minhwa* paintings from the middle and end of Joseon Dynasty period had more variety of colours and themes, and had fewer limits or rules.

Moreover, *Minhwa*'s distinct aspect was the reinterpretations of objects based on the artist's boundless imagination, rather than simply trying to capture a realistic look of an object. Therefore, the genre of *Minhwa* painting was able to represent not only the artist's creativity and aesthetic sense, but also common people's lifestyles, reflecting the times. With this philosophy of art, Korean flower paintings based on natural objects have been known as a mentally healthy way to express people's desires for their lives.

In order to achieve my artwork for the final exhibition, I tried many methods using diverse techniques, such as handling the East Asian brush and colour mixing. I studied traditional materials (East Asian ink and Korean paper, *Hanji*) and used these in order to result in a better combination with acrylics on canvas. During this process, there were other aspects to consider, beyond just artistic techniques, such as working on harmonising the traditional styles and themes of the two artists.

With my personal background as a Korean florist, I focused on flower paintings within the Korean philosophy of art tradition, especially influenced by *Minhwa*'s boundless and free expression. My concept for the exhibition displayed two distinct styles of flower painting: paintings on Korean paper and canvas. However, my paintings incorporated the two case studies' styles to show how well Wu's and Van Gogh's style match with each other, therefore indirectly blurring the boundaries between their cultures.

In order to achieve the concept for my final artwork, I tried three different types of themes (Rose of Sharon, Korean alphabet and calligraphy) to find out which themes would work better and be more suitable with both art traditions and philosophies. Among these ideas, I only chose the two themes: Rose of Sharon and calligraphy, because I thought the Korean alphabet (*Hangul*) would be lean towards Korean symbolism and background too much, and therefore be less likely to match well with the other tradition. The exhibition's concept was important to reflect on the boundaries and differences between both the philosophies behind each art tradition, but was also essential in showing how well they balance each other.

In working towards the exhibition, I tried to open out my personal artistic perspective limitations and attempted to achieve my own voice and style with a variety of artistic materials and techniques. I was inspired by Van Gogh's and Wu's art traditions and philosophy, and I tried to fuse them together to form a unique personal style.

In summary, the whole processes of researching and exhibition were result of my challenge to take myself as an artist beyond just floral art. I used to concentrate only on floristry skills and technical theories, but now I am able to express myself as an artist. As a result, the work developed along with my own development of artistic voice.

## **5.2 Ideas for future work**

I have various experiments yet to investigate for artwork that I have never tried. For example, I want to try using wet sponges with watercolours. After drying the paper, using a hairdryer or waiting a few minutes, drawing and painting flowers on the coloured paper would give different impacts with unique diverse layers. Furthermore, there is a variety of ways to make creative visual textures, but these could easily go wrong or be different to what I expected. Therefore, a lot of practice is required. I believe that the more I try techniques and materials that I have never used before, the greater the chance I have of attaining a stage with a greater assurance of my artwork.

Additionally, for the next artwork, I want to research and apply more deeply the theme 'calligraphy'. My personal poems or stories could be written using calligraphy as well, in order to link Korean traditional philosophy with people's emotions in my own voice and creative style. In an international contemporary art context, the ultimate purpose of my future work will be to express how a combination and fusion of other cultures can work together. This will also help me find my own voice and ideas to allow myself achieve higher creativity for the future visual activities.

In summary, I will keep designing a variety of floral paintings, with many skills and ideas. The possibilities of material choices and techniques will be countless for making a floral painting.

In order to make more reliable research, there are some suggestions and recommendations:

- Researching global artists inspired by different culture was not enough with only two, Vincent Van Gogh and Wu Guanzhong. In a next investigation, more global artists with various countries should be added to gain more reasonable investigation for comparison between each traditional art and how the boundary has been blurred with globalisation.
- Conducting a questionnaire for respondents from diverse nationalities may be a helpful way to collect and survey useful opinions about how different aspects of art, such as style, emotion and theme can be divided across cultures. However, if this were to be done, the number of respondents for each nationality should be around the same to obtain a reliable result.
- Last, but not least, having interviews with professional global artists in different countries might be a good way to have professional opinions about the comparison between the cultures' paintings. Also, it would be allowed to ask them how the globalisation affected them as artists. Diversity of nationality of interviewees would be very helpful to obtain more complete research for the main investigation of a global visual art. The method might be worth trying for a future study, even though there would be a lower possibility of answering data than expected (Thomas, 2011).

Therefore, with these suggestions and recommendations for a future study, this main research can achieve a more professional investigation to make further development with more valuable results.

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Figures 15 and 16. Author's own (2017) *Paintings on Korean paper*.

Figure 17. Author's own (2017) *Author's work on canvas*.

Figure 18. Author's own (2017) *Abstract floral painting*.

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Figure 27. Author's own (2017) *Orchid on canvas*.

Figure 28. Author's own (2017) *Rose of Sharon*.

Figure 29. Antique Alive (2016) *Hunmin Jeongeum Haerye*. [image online] Available at:

[http://www.antiquealive.com/Blogs/Hangeul\\_Korean\\_Alphabet.html](http://www.antiquealive.com/Blogs/Hangeul_Korean_Alphabet.html) (Accessed 17 July 2018).

Figure 30. Author's own (2018) *Consonants of Korean, Hangeul, in floral painting*.

Figure 31. Author's own (2018) *Vowels of Korean, Hangeul, in floral painting*.

Figure 32. Author's own (2018) *Calligraphy '꽃을 담다'*.

Figure 33. Author's own (2018) *Painting on Korean paper for the exhibition*.

Figure 34. Author's own (2018) *Painting on canvas for the exhibition*.

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