

The Creative Economy and Urban Art Clusters: Locational Characteristics of Art Galleries in Seoul

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창조경제와 도시 아트 클러스터: 서울시 화랑의 입지 특성을 중심으로 김학희*

Abstract : Culture and art are emerging as main components in the creative economy to enhance the competitiveness of urban centres in the global market by nurturing cultural or artistic industries. A range of research exists which investigates the role of artists and art museums in the process of urban regeneration in Northern American and Western European countries. Yet research into the geography of art galleries acting as an intermediary between art works and cultural consumers remain rare. Empirical research on gentrification and urban regeneration and their connection with spaces for cultural consumption in Asian cities is even less common. The aim of this paper is to show the rise and decline of art galleries in Seoul and the way that this reflects urban development process, historically specific conditions and the characteristics of artists' communities. The background of the locational agglomeration of art galleries is examined in connection with the human ecology of artists, art business and its implication for the global market. The location of art galleries in Seoul seems to be affected by commercial art business and public policy, rather than by artists communities embedded in local areas. The location dynamics of art gallery clusters in Seoul is examined in the context of rent increases, changes of consumers' taste and fluctuating market cycles.

Key Words : artist, art gallery, art cluster, creative economy, Seoul.

요약 : 도시 경쟁력 제고 수단으로 문화 및 예술에 대한 관심이 고조되고, 창조경제에서 문화 및 예술 산업의 중요성이 주목 받고 있다. 서유럽과 북미를 중심으로 도시 재활성화 및 젠트리피케이션 과정에서 아티스트 및 미술관의 역할에 대한 다양한 연구가 이루어졌으나, 예술 작품과 문화 소비자를 매개하는 상업 화랑들의 입지 패턴과 요인에 대한 경험적 연구는 거의 이루어지지 않았다. 특히 아시아 대도시의 도심 재개발 및 젠트리피케이션 과정과 문화 소비 공간 확산에 대한 경험적 연구는 부족한 상황이다. 본 연구에서는 서울시 상업 화랑을 중심으로 아트 클러스터의 성장과 쇠퇴 과정을 이해하고, 그 분포 특성을 도시의 역사성과 시대적 특성, 예술가 집단의 성격과 연결시켜 설명하고자 하였다. 이를 위해 런던과 뉴욕과 같은 대도시에서 아티스트 및 화랑이 클러스터를 형성하는 배경을 아티스트의 생태, 아트 비즈니스의 특성, 세계화의 영향을 중심으로 고찰하였다. 서울의 화랑 입지는 예술가나 문화적 요인보다는 상업적 논리에 의해 결정되고 문화소비공간으로 쉽게 전환되는 경향이 있으며, 화랑의 분포는 도시 개발 정책과 맞물린 지대의 상승, 문화 소비 취향의 변화, 국내외 미술 시장의 경기 변동에 따라 역동적으로 변화하는 입지 주기 순환 양상을 보인다.

주요어 : 아티스트, 화랑, 아트 클러스터, 창조경제, 서울.

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1. Introduction

What is the common characteristic of the cities and regions thriving in the global economy - places such as New York, London, Paris, Los Angeles and Hong Kong? They are not only the financial centres of the world economy but also the cultural paradises famous for their music and art-related facilities, various museums and theatres and their creative atmosphere. They are open, tolerant and attractive places where gays, artists, dreamers, bohemians and yuppies want to live (Florida, 2002). At the same time, public-sector politicians and entrepreneurs have long used art to promote a particular image of the city. Art and culture have become closely linked to the economic prosperity of cities in advanced capitalist societies (Scott, 2000; Vicario and Monje, 2003; Zukin, 1995).

But the art and art-related economy are rarely examined, possibly due to the fact that they are sometimes not regarded as a distinct subgroup categorized as such for discourse and statistical purposes (Galloway and Dunlop, 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Pratt, 2005). Even though the direct impacts on economic development as a generator of jobs and income may not be significant, the symbolic value of the art-related world is increasing explosively in terms of attracting other cultural industries and tourists or of bolstering the cultural image of a city, region and even nation. Recent research shows that art galleries and museums as well as prominent artists have made significant contributions in boosting the image of the city to attract foreign tourists and global talents (Evans, 2003; Lazeretti, 2003; Vicario and Monje, 2003; Plaza, 2006; Rantisi and Leslie, 2006). Can you imagine an art city such as New York without being

reminded of Andy Warhol and MoMA (The Museum of Modern Art)?

This paper aims to identify certain geographical characteristics of art galleries as agencies which play significant mediating roles in between artists, collectors, consumers and distributors of cultural knowledge. There has been considerable discussion on the role of art and art museums in the process of gentrification and urban regeneration (Biggs, 1996; Evans, 1996; Green, 1996; Lorente, 1996; Ross, 1999; Vicario and Monje, 2003). But the role of art galleries in the making of consumption spaces within urban areas is less examined. The background of agglomeration of artists and art businesses in London and New York will be examined in connection with the human ecology of artists, art business world and its implication for the global market. A micro-geography of artist communities and the art businesses in London and New York will examine conditions in the art clusters. This paper will also reveal the location characteristics of art galleries in Seoul, reflecting urban development processes, historical specificities and characteristics of Korean art communities.

The discussion will draw upon varied sources including semi-structured interviews, conducted with artists, art gallery owners, curators and critics in Seoul and London, surveys including the statistical data, the work of other researchers and the analysis of research data. Fieldwork within art clusters in Seoul and London will add some flesh to the theoretical skeleton showing some of the detail and complexity of texture within artist communities and art galleries.

2. Creative Economy, Cultural/Art Cluster and Gentrification

Many cities around the world have come to recognise the economic and social benefits that flow from the creative economy, and are implementing aggressive urban policies to nurture and promote creative and cultural activities (Chang, 2000; Miller, 2004; O'Connor and Xin, 2006; Peck, 2005). Creative and cultural activity enhances a city's quality as a place, helps to revitalise neighbourhoods and shapes a city's identity in the face of increasing competition for global talents (Rofe, 2004; Scott, 2006). Howkins (2001, 114-115) argues that cultural richness and embedded diversity is a crucial element for the creative space. It is also about producing new forms and ways of interactive creative editing, working from the existing cultural fabric in the society.

The concept of the creative city grew out of cultural quarter policies, fusing with tourism and other 'flagship projects' (Artfield, 1999; McCarthy, 2005a; Mommaas, 2004). The idea of the 'cultural quarter'¹⁾ has remained popular into the 2000s and has helped to produce the offshoot concept of the cultural cluster since the 1990s (Green, 1996; McCarthy, 2005b; 2006). Cities with successful cultural cluster developments will have a competitive advantage over rivals as these networks provide socially embedded knowledge, identity-formation and experiences of sharing. Proximity to these channels of social capital is good for collaborative work, which is characteristic of the creative industries. The circulation of the information capital, which Bourdieu (2001) also refers to as cultural capital, is vital to the creative, urban ecology. The

dynamism and vibrancy of the industries depend on these informal links in the soft infrastructure. But there is some controversy about whether these kinds of soft infrastructure and aspects of these creative sectors can be developed in the natural way in which Florida (2002) posits.

Cultural quarters or cultural clusters mean the areas that contain a high proportion of cultural uses related to cultural production or cultural consumption and further spatial concentration, is assumed to lead to 'synergy effects, agglomeration economics and minimization of amenity loss' (McCarthy, 2006). A mixture of cultural functions and activities, from theatre and the visual arts to pop music and the new media, are grouped together in a great variety of spatial forms. Cultural clustering strategies seem to use culture as urban regeneration sources, enhancing the interaction between cultural activities embedded in the urban infrastructure and a broader field of urban dynamics and linked in value chains. While some clustering strategies are restricted to genuine artistic/cultural activities, most of them also incorporate a great variety of consumption spaces such as restaurants, bars, clubs and health and fitness complexes (Zukin, 1998). However, there are growing concerns that these cultural clustering strategies could lead to a destruction or inflation of original artistic value and to commercialization of the spaces (Zukin, 1982). Artists and other creative people seem to be routinely priced out of areas that become prosperous due to the very creative activity that they helped to generate (Ley, 2003; Wedd *et al.*, 2001).

It has become increasingly clear that the gentrification phenomenon should not be seen as an individual, isolated outcome of residential rehabilitation, but as an integral part of a much

broader, deeper process of economic, political, social, cultural and spatial restructuring (Butler, 1999; Hamnett, 2003; Lees, 2000; Ley, 2003; Smith, 1996; Zukin, 1991). In many respects, the United Kingdom, Canada, USA, Australia, Spain and New Zealand have developed urban regeneration projects based not only on a recognition of the economic value of the cultural/creative industries,²⁾ but also the importance of the construction and defence of a national identity (Evans, 2003; Hartley, 2005; Oakley, 2004; Rantisi and Leslie, 2006). There have been several pieces of research on the micro-geography of artist-induced gentrification in European and American cities. Sharon Zukin, as a frontier ethnographic researcher on gentrification, investigated the process of transforming noisy, dirty and seemingly dangerous industrial spaces into a legendary artists' cluster in the SoHo district of New York City since the 1960s. Influenced by the research of Zukin (1982), Jackson (1985), Cole (1987) and Ley (2003) have also raised issues such as gentrification, redevelopment and regeneration in connection with the role of artists as urban pioneers and initiators of urban revitalization. While the cultural and creative industries have achieved much recognition from the policy groups (Chang, 2000; Hesmondhalgh and Pratt, 2005), the process of gentrification and the role of artists and art business have rarely been examined in Asian cities.

Meanwhile, the creative arts - literature, performing art and visual arts - are sometimes regarded as part of the cultural or creative industries and sometimes not. Software design is mixed with recording and painting. New café, fusion restaurant and clubs are merged with performance arts. Contemporary visual artists

even seem to have aggravated the confusing situation by blurring the distinction of art and media or art and performance intentionally (Quemin, 2006; Venkatesh and Meamber, 2006). In this situation, Galloway and Dunlop (2007) warns of the danger of weak theorization; as art and culture become subsumed in a creative industries agenda, some insights and policy implications could be at risk of being lost. Many of the above problems and tensions have been exacerbated by a lack of proper analytical attention to the cultural industries within academia. In this paper, art clusters as an agglomeration of visual artists and related art industries will be addressed, focusing on the distribution characteristics and location dynamics of art galleries of Seoul in East Asia.

3. Why do Artists and Art Galleries Cluster?

As modern art attempted to create a world for itself with greater independence and freedom from the patronage of the power elites such as the church, the court and the aristocracy (Ormrod, 1999), artists congregated in large modern cities such as Paris, London and Berlin, close to the art-related community, their market and, perhaps most important, 'close to each other' (Ley, 2003). Large cities can provide artists and their attendant community with a suitable environment in which to generate the networks, relationships, facilities and cultural spill-over effects within and across artistic communities (Bain, 2003; Becker, 1982; While, 2003). Various avant-garde movements have been closely related to urban life and so it remains even today in the western developed countries (Ley, 2003;

Grosenick and Stange, 2005). Geography matters because the production and consumption of art is often mediated by places and spaces.

1) The Human ecology of artists

Although a single artwork may be created by an individual's effort, artists have often clustered together to share ideas, offer mutual support, and provide a sympathetic audience for one another. The dynamics of rapid change in artistic styles in contemporary art have required artists who want to remain in touch with current trends and the latest developments to be close to important art galleries (Kostelanetz, 2003; Grosenick and Stange, 2005)

...As an artists' colony, SoHo became an educational arena where people were inadvertently teaching one another all the time. Living there, at least at the beginning, was an educational experience, simply from going to openings, walking through galleries, and listening to my neighbours talk. In my observation, visual artists more than poets or composers, say, need a professional social centre to learn what cannot be taught in art academies or learned from journalism about art (Kostelanetz, 2003, 39-40).

An example of this can be seen in the London context in relation to the Young British Artists' movement³⁾ which started from Goldsmiths College, the South London art school that most of the yBa's attended during the late 1980s (While, 2003). They seemed to enjoy the collective spirit and mutual stimulus as *avant-garde* artists sharing their ideas and artistic space. Moreover, the mythical status of the Goldsmiths' educational method which emphasizes the

professionalism of artists and their active engagement with the art market seemed to provide this group with a kind of springboard and direct access to influential dealers and critics (Stallabrass, 1999).

It seems so crucial for artists to have their own space to reside, work and exhibit. Kostelanetz (2005, 67-68) observed that the real-estate situation in which artists owned their lofts, or had a legally protected rental for their residence and work, facilitated the rise of SoHo in New York as an artists' hotbed. Artistic ideas were shared, enhancing the feeling that they were experiencing the crucial moment of contemporary arts through alternative spaces such as non-commercial galleries in their own lofts. Recognition for artist by artist seemed to be significant. The art galleries started to be located in this ideal situation following the famous artists.

...large open spaces were conducive to populous parties, especially in the wake of something requiring celebration, such as an art opening or a birthday. A loft with attractively high ceilings, an absence of partitions, is a wonderful space for artists who dared to endure chilly winter with broken heater, overnight noise of colleagues and dirty environment clogged with trucks and victory debris (Kostelanetz, 2005, 26-27).

Bain (2003) insists that artists display a remarkable attentiveness to the ways in which urban spaces are regulated and mediated by government and the commercial sector, including property development companies attracted to 'marginal niches' with cheap rents. In a desire to live authentic lives and share their experiences with artistic comrades, artists dare to live and work on the edge of the dangerous urban fabric

(see Figure 1, 2). They believe the social, economic, ethnic and architectural diversity or even chaos can spark artistic inspirations (While, 2003). For the aesthetic disposition, a commodified location is regarded as sterile and stripped of meaning (Kostelanetz, 2003; Wedd *et al.*, 2001). The suburbs and the shopping mall, emblems of a mass market and a failure of personal taste, are rejected (While, 2003). Artists tend not to want to live and work in a dull homogenous area that has been sanitized and gentrified to appeal to the commercialised tastes of urban middle classes.



Figure 1. Art galleries in London's East End located in an 'authentic' urban area full of derelict buildings with graffiti. (Photo Source: Author)



Figure 2. Artistic Cafe culture in London's East End. Cafe Macondo is located in the heart of East End artists' quarters. (Photo Source: Author)

The spaces 'colonized through commerce and the government sector' are often despised and ridiculed by the artists (Ley, 2003)

2) The competitive world of art business

Art dealing has taken place since antiquity. The middlemen between affluent art lovers and talented but impoverished artists have played an important role in the history of contemporary art and the modern art business (Ormrod, 1999). An international art system developed substantially after Peggy Guggenheim opened her first gallery in London in 1938 and her second in New York in 1943 and went on to open new galleries after the Second World War (Goetzmann, 1993; Grosenick and Stange, 2005). Under the international modern art gallery system, leading commercial art galleries and dealers from around the world have not only been successfully selling works of art to passionate collectors but through their work have left their mark on the style of contemporary art (Fopp, 1997; Watson, 1992). Art dealers and galleries tried to convince exhibiting institutions and art critics of the value of their artists. In contrast to the mere art shop, they present works by artists important to the age in their spaces and thus constantly supply the art business with vibrant impulses (Grosenick and Stange, 2005). The prime example in recent decades of this in the UK has been the dominant influence of Charles Saatchi in the contemporary art market combined with the institutional influence of Nicholas Serota at the Whitechapel Gallery and then at Tate Modern (Dexter, 2001; Wedd *et al.*, 2001; While, 2003).

After the rise of the modern international art market in the late nineteenth century, Western art's most influential art markets have become

increasingly concentrated in a few world centres. Dealing in Western high art is dominated by New York, Paris and London, as well as several second-tier international nodes such as Los Angeles, Tokyo, Zurich, Milan and Dusseldorf in the global art market hierarchy (Watson, 1992; While, 2003). Art markets differ substantially from commercial and financial markets (Venkatesh and Meamber, 2006). Art works are not very liquid assets, almost never divisible and transaction costs are high (Worthington and Higgs, 2004). To invest in art, collectors must acquire extensive knowledge of the art world and its history as well as of artwork itself and have massive capital to buy the famous artists' paintings and sculptures (Ormrod, 1999). Contrary to the common belief that the art market yields huge profit in comparison to other investment markets, the returns on artworks are generally much lower and the risks are much higher than conventional financial markets (Goetzmann, 1993). Risk to investors and collectors is increasing considering the physical risks of fire and theft along with the cost of insurance. The value of art works is so insecure because it is determined by the consensus opinion of the related agents - artists, critics, dealers, museum professionals, and art-interested people - through a complex mechanism consisting of subjective sets of belief about the past, present and future prices, changing individual tastes and cultural trends (Worthington and Higgs, 2004, 258-259).

The social contexts of art have become increasingly significant in recent art criticism. According to Becker's (1982) study of the art world, with its fellow artists, colleges and critics, its bars and hang-outs, buyers and patrons, galleries and museums, to a much tougher

critique of the social consequences, for some even the social purposes of art which may have much to do with the politics of displacement (Deutsche, 1996). Zukin (1982) emphasized the importance of the artistic mode of production that involves social relations between different players in the art world. Bourdieu (1993) regards the art work as a joint creation in terms that is not just the creation of the artist, other than in a crude material sense, for its value has to be evaluated and supported in an inter-subjective art world. Value should be understood as socially produced in an arena involving the artist, the art-world and also the social and geographical conditions producing the art-world. In this process, art galleries play pivotal roles as a cultural intermediary. Expensive work from new artists is thus primarily sold from dealer to collector. That is why reliable networking with other colleagues in an artist and art-related community is more crucial in visual art than in literature (Feldstein, 1991). Since the amounts of money passing from collectors to dealers are customarily kept secret, monetary value is necessarily established in secondary markets, such as auction houses specialising in contemporary art. The truth is that only commercial galleries with excellent reputations and reliable credit in the art communities can succeed in keeping its customers and attracting potential ones (Fopp, 1997; Kostelanetz, 2003).

The major international art cities have become the hothouses of the most influential art dealers, auction houses, critics and galleries attracting talented artists and aspiring dealers, who in turn further enrich the creative environment of art schools, galleries and artistic quarters (Montgomery and Robinson, 1993). There seems to be a great synergetic effect arising from the agglomeration of

artists and art business communities. This is especially the case with new artistic styles and trends which tend to be constructed around a critical mass of group activities (Grosenick and Stange, 2005). As one of the key nodes in global art markets, London already had a well-developed infrastructure of major contemporary art galleries and dealers centred on Cork Street and the surrounding streets in West London. The yBa benefited from the refined networks of dealers, galleries and collectors that emerged during the contemporary art boom of the 1980s, subsequently helping a number of innovative dealer-galleries to survive the recession of the early 1990s and stimulating a rash of gallery opening in London's East End in the late 1990s (While, 2003, 257). Shone (1997) points out that the key galleries also acted as a social meeting ground, 'often with an international flavour', mixing up different generations of artists and attracting curators, critics and collectors.

4. Locational Characteristics of Art Gallery Clusters in Seoul

Korean economic geographers conducted their research on the locational characteristics of cultural industries in Seoul. Kim and Lee (2001) found that the Korean record companies clustered in Seoul showing the spatial linkage with related industries, especially with broadcasting companies. Choo (2006) investigated the Gangnam area of Seoul as a new cultural cluster in the context of the development of the Korean film industry. He explained its recent Gangnam agglomeration in conjunction with the uniqueness of the film industry, such as uncertainty, project-based work, generation gap

between young and old filmmakers and the changing investment environment. But there have been few studies of art museums and galleries in Seoul, most of which were conducted in the field of art management and art history. Recent research (Lee *et al.*, 2005; Woo, 1999; Yang and Kim, 2005) in the field of architecture has investigated the spatial characteristics of the commercial art galleries focusing on the spatial configuration of individual galleries in order to understand the relationship between various functional spaces in each building. But this did not pay attention to the characteristics of the geographical distribution of art galleries.

1) Distribution of art gallery clusters in Seoul

According to the estimation of Kimdaljin Art research centre (Seoul Art Guide, 2005), there are 23 art museums in Seoul (66 nationally) and 254 art galleries around Seoul. Art museums in Korea are required to meet the specific regulations about exhibition spaces and facilities in order to get permission for them to open from government. On the other hand, art galleries do not have to meet other regulations in order to start up as a business and simple registration with the municipal office will make it happen. So it is extremely difficult to get exact data about the number or the distribution of art galleries (Personal interview with Daljin Kim). As of June 2006, regional agglomerations of art museums and galleries are categorized as six major art clusters in this research for the convenience of analysis. The reason for naming these agglomerations of art galleries as 'art clusters' lies in the fact that art galleries usually play significant roles as visible intermediary places in

Table 1. Distribution of major art (museum/gallery) clusters in Seoul

Art Museum & Gallery Cluster	1987	1993	2002	2006
Gwanghwamoon & Insa-dong Area	36 (81.8%)	78 (45.1%)	72 (49.0%)	78 (41.5%)
Sagan & Samcheong-dong Area	0 (0.0%)	19 (11.0%)	17 (11.6%)	41 (21.8%)
Cheongdam & Apgujung-dong Area	4 (9.1%)	48 (27.7%)	25 (17.0%)	32 (17.0%)
Shinsa-dong Area	0 (0.0%)	24 (13.9%)	12 (8.2%)	16 (8.5%)
Pyongchang-dong Area	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.6%)	12 (8.2%)	12 (6.4%)
Hongik-University Area	4 (9.1%)	3 (1.7%)	9 (6.1%)	9 (4.8%)
Sub-Total (calculated based on only six clusters)	44 (100%)	173 (100%)	147 (100%)	188 (100%)

Source: Art World (1987, 1993), Seoul Art Guide (2002, 2006)

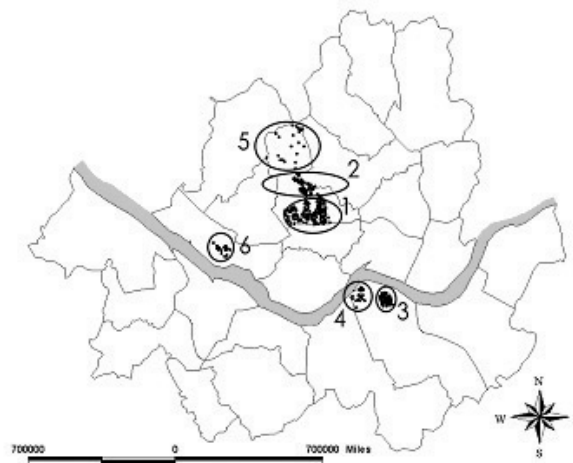


Figure 3. The location of major six art clusters in 2006

Source: Seoul Art Guide, 2006

1. Gwanghwamoon & Insa-dong Area 2. Sagan & Samcheong-dong Area 3. Cheongdam & Apgujung-dong Area 4. Shinsa-dong Area 5. Pyongchang-dong Area 6. Hongik-University Area

the art business. The criteria years -1987, 1993, 2002 and 2006- are selected purposely by the author to reflect the sharp changes in numbers of each art cluster.

The Gwanghwamoon and Insa-dong area is still one of the largest cultural clusters in Seoul. Gwanghwamoon accommodated many public art museums as a historic, cultural, political and

economic centre of Korea. Insa-dong retains its status as the largest art cluster accommodating interesting traditional art shops and contemporary art galleries and a combination of an exhibition space and café but many commercial art galleries in Insa-dong have lost their competitiveness in the art world mainly due to rapidly increasing rents. Konstelantetz (2003) showed that cheap space available in the 1970-1980s permitted a proliferation of commercial art galleries in SoHo. According to the Table 1, the location of art galleries in Seoul has seen several phases, suggesting a possibility of a location cycle theory in the urban and global context; Insa-dong Era in the 1970-1980s, Cheongdam-dong Era in the 1990s and Samcheong-dong Era in the 2000s.

2) Insa-dong era in the 1970-1980s

Since the nineteenth century, Insa-dong has been known as a 'centre of traditional Korean culture' or 'Mary's Alley' at home and abroad. Insa-dong rose as a traditional street with an agglomeration of antique shops and dealers that

had moved from the Myong-dong and Choomgmoo-ro districts due to the high rents which prevailed since the 1920s when Korean was liberated from the Japanese occupation (Kim, 2004: 31-32). Many Japanese who wanted to dispose of their possessions before leaving Korea, gathered there to sell their antiques, old books and art works. With the improved living standards, Koreans began to pay more attention to their traditional culture including art works. In the 1970s, Insa-dong enjoyed its heyday as a gathering place not only for the aging artists specializing in calligraphy or eastern painting but also for antique collectors and dealers. But a number of antique dealers left Insa-dong as government regulations regarding counterfeits and tax evasions became stricter in the mid-1970s. Even though it lost its monopolistic status as a *mecca* of Korean art, some vestige of the tradition can still be found. The Insa-dong district accommodates 40% of the national's antique shops as well as 90% of traditional stationery shops (Choi, 2005). When 12 traditional shops were at risk being cleared away, the president of

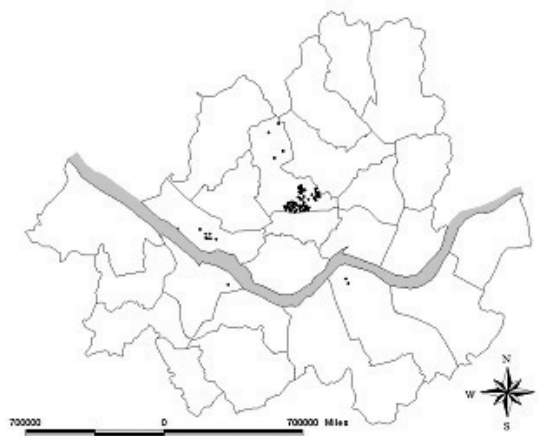


Figure 4. Distribution of six major art clusters in Seoul: Year 1987

Source: Art World

a successful fashion company decided to buy the space to preserve the unique atmosphere and constructed a building complex with 72 shops, including the 12 previous stores, galleries, traditional handicraft shops, furniture and household supplies stores. However it seemed to be losing the historic aura as many modern restaurants, art galleries and stores opened replacing traditional structures and cultural landscapes (Choi, 2005, 126-130).

According to research about the image of Insa-dong (Cho and Kim, 2002), antique shops, rare book stores, calligraphy shop, traditional tea house, traditional clothes shops including art galleries can be categorized as positive components in helping Insa-dong retain its identity and boost its image. But the area has increasingly become commercialised with modern restaurants, karaoke and fusion bars and has lost its distinct identity as a traditional art centre. As foreign tourists have flown in, it has become over-run with homogeneous shops selling tourists cheap art crafts or mass-produced souvenirs. Art galleries are also losing their

artistic leadership and just sub-renting the exhibition space for anonymous artists or art school graduates for their survival. Some art galleries moved to the neighbourhood such as Sagan-dong or Samcheong-dong seeking lower rents and larger spaces; some transformed their exhibition space into complex consumption space including art shop, café or bar. An owner of art gallery in Insa-dong complains:

Only certain galleries were designated for preservation because of their cultural heritage value... We contemporary art galleries cannot compete with restaurants or Karaoke in terms of profit structure. We can't afford the soaring rents in this area (Personal interview, January 2006, translated from Korean).

3) Cheongdam-dong era in the 1990s

Cheongdam-dong was a quiet place with relatively low rents in comparison to the traditional artistic centre of Insa-dong in Gangbuk and the immediate commercial area

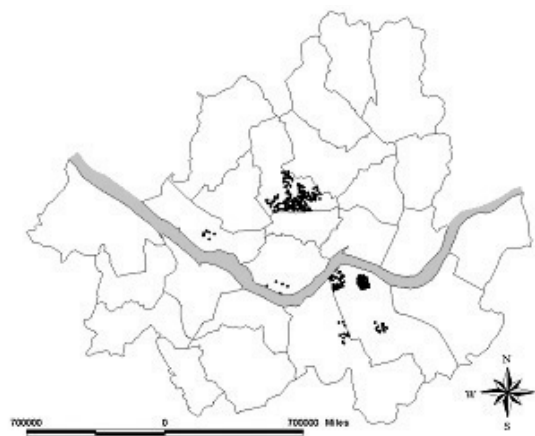


Figure 5. Distribution of six major art clusters in Seoul: Year 1993

Source: Art World

like Apgujung-dong in the 1980s. Cheongdam-dong had neither convenient public transportation networks nor other commercial/cultural facilities except several garment/furniture outlets. Chung-dam dong and Shinsa-dong had some advantages as emerging art gallery clusters as they could provide enough spaces for art exhibition and car parking for potential customers at relatively low rents in the 1980s (Personal interview, April 2006). Moreover, they were located near the large residential apartment communities for new rich and middle class residents in Gangnam. The Korean *nouveau-riche* and middle-class residents of Gangnam, who were hungry for cultural capital, started to show great enthusiasm for art collecting, fuelled by the profits generated from the property and stock market booms after the 1988 Olympic games (Art World, 1992). In this favourable environment for art, art galleries in Cheongdam-dong and its neighbourhood increased massively to meet the rising demands.

The Korean art market enjoyed its heyday in 1991 under the influence of booming global conditions.⁴⁾ Record-breaking sales in global art markets followed the stock market booms after the mid-1980s.⁵⁾ After the collapse of the international art market boom and continuous general economic depression in early 1990s, many of the new art galleries faced serious financial difficulties (Art World, 1992). To make it worse, property prices in Cheongdam-dong have been rising since it gained a reputation as the cultural consumption enclave for the yuppies. Since the late 1990s, the neighbourhood at Cheongdam-dong was flooded with all the luxurious retail chains, restaurants and bars due to an improved transportation network and the spread of commercial spaces in Apgujung-dong

and Galleria department (Hangyore21, 2003). The opening of 'Cheongdam' subway station around 2000 and construction of residential villas and apartments for wealthy people who could afford the expensive commodities and advanced cultural tastes aggravated the commercialisation of the area. Cheongdam-dong seems to keep its status as a venue as a conspicuous consumption spaces with top foreign designer-brand wear, luxurious jewellery collections, *haute-fusion* cuisine, wine bar and chic café culture.

But a number of galleries at risk were closed or priced out from the Cheongdam-area during the process. Only galleries with owners who were originally rich enough to have a building there or invested audaciously in property for exhibition space in its peak period - in addition to showing simultaneously showing excellent ability in positioning and promoting their art work in the rough terrain of the Korean art market - survived in Cheongdam-dong (Personal interview, April 2006). They are usually closed on Sunday and do not welcome public audience; they have their own list of rich collectors and invisible but secure connections with their business partners.

4) Samcheong-dong era in the 2000s

From the mid-1990s, the rapid economic growth of Korean society induced a re-evaluation about leisure and culture including the various arts. Pyongchang-dong emerged as a small art gallery cluster in early 2000s with little public transportation access. Major art galleries and auction houses are located there but seem to have limitations in achieving rapid growth as an art gallery cluster. They are already surrounded by luxurious residential houses and gated

communities with little commercial or open space for further development.

Samcheong-dong and Sagan-dong have started to accommodate a kind of emerging art gallery cluster since the early 2000s. The numbers of art galleries in Samcheong-dong and its neighbourhood has increased sharply from 17 to 41 since 2003 (Seoul Art Guide, 2006). Newspapers and magazines started to spotlight this area as an emerging art gallery cluster with unique ambience for Korean traditional houses, chic designers' boutiques, fashionable fusion



Figure 6. *Chic Cafe* in Samcheong-dong. It functions as a cultural consumption space for outsiders after renovated form a shabby Korean traditional house. (Photo Source: Author)



Figure 7. Recently opened commercial art gallery in Samcheong-dong displaying and selling art & crafts. (Photo Source: Author)

restaurants and decent wine bars (Kim, 2006). Samcheong attracted growing media interest as an alternative cultural consumption centre of Gangbuk (the northern area of Han River), a 'Cheongdam-dong of Gangbuk' (Joongang Ilbo, 2006). The locus of the art world shifted from Insa-dong to Samcheong-dong with the opening of several galleries a month. A case study of creative retail shops in Bukchon (Lee and Lee, 2006) showed many of the owners with creative minds and cultural capital opening their shops in the Samcheong-dong area attracted by the unique cultural environment of the neighbourhood. They also emphasized the role of art galleries to upgrade the cultural atmosphere and increase the economic value of the neighbourhood (Lee and Lee, 2006, 28-30).

Seoul Metropolitan Government has embarked on an ambitious urban regeneration project whose ultimate aim is to turn Seoul into a flourishing international hub of culture, tourism and business activities. These strategies have mainly called for 'flagship' development projects focusing on derelict inner-city sites near Samcheong-dong. The new mayor of Seoul expressed a rosy development plan making full use of the cultural and historical asset of Seoul following the success of urban regeneration policy such as the Cheonggye-stream renewal project orchestrated by the previous mayor. Here we can draw a crucial difference between developments in second-tier world cities such as Seoul and in top world cities. The city or state authorities in New York and London did not decide that SoHo, West Chelsea or parts of the East End should be the appropriate location for art world activities. In each case artists and galleries simply moved in, redefining the urban terrain long before city officials adjusted to the

fact of their being there (Kostelanetz, 2003, 215). Zukin (1995) also warned that all the cities could not succeed in cultural urban redevelopment policy following the cases of New York or London with an already-strong symbolic economy.

5. Artists and Art Clusters in the Urban Context

Are there any urban conditions for vivid artistic activities and creative innovation? To begin with, artistic communities need a flourishing economy and a major concentration of disposable wealth. From Florence, Rome and Venice at different stages of the Renaissance, to Paris and New York in the 20th century, cities with booming economies could be the backdrop of artists' works and activities and the major centre of artistic innovation (Ormrod, 1999; Quemin, 2006; While, 2003). Although art in theory can be made by an isolated artist in any place, the social and economic production of art needs a collective practice including complex interactions between artists and recognitions from various 'art world' actors such as patrons, dealers, critics, gallery owners, curators and collectors.

1) Artists and art galleries as the urban frontier

The modern gallery represents the interface between autonomous art and freelance artists and the capitalist market and its buyers - who mostly call themselves collectors. At the same time, the gallery also fills the gap left by the disappearance of prescribed representational tasks (Grosenick and Stange, 2005, 12) Are there



Figure 8. Legendary 'White Cube' gallery where artworks of yBa have been exhibited located near the famous Hoxton square. (Photo Source: Author)



Figure 9. Emerging art cluster on Leonardo Street near the Hoxton area. (Photo Source: Author)

any special conditions favourable to booming art galleries? Many art critics agreed that the real innovation of yBa lay in how and where it was presented (Artfield, 1999; Shone, 1997; Stallabrass, 1999; Wedd *et al.*, 2001). London's re-emergence as a centre for contemporary art in the 1990s was closely related to the opening of new galleries and alternative exhibition spaces in the artists' colony in the East End area in London (see Figure 8). There is a view that this process actually began in the 1980's. According to a former local politician, Steven Cowan, the St. Katherine's area of the old dockland in London

became a haven for artists before rising rents and property prices forced them out. Hoxton was two miles further north where by the mid 2000s the same thing has happened and high property prices and rents prohibit new and less-established artists from living and working there. The bohemian atmosphere of the area seemed to facilitate new artistic activities and interactions.

The mystery of the revaluing of the environment by artists and art galleries can be revealed through examining the process of gentrification. The frontier takes different forms in different places (Smith, 1996). In the art cluster scene in New York, the artists' community functioned as the centre for non-commercial art. The key institutions were the cooperative gallery and the alternative space, both of which were established primarily to exhibit the works of young or unknown artists (Becker, 1982; Montgomery and Robinson, 1993). The commercial art galleries also played a pivotal role in making New York the centre of the art world. It is in galleries that curators and critics, as well as collectors, students and other art lovers, discover hitherto unknown artists. New art movements are often formulated as such in galleries also in need of some space as complimentary partners of artists. Even the hardcore artists' colony, SoHo declined when its principal distinctive business, the art galleries were priced out. Kostelanetz (2003) shows how market forces squeezed out this art utopia, trading in on the allure of its unique character, to be replaced by a shadow of itself with the coming of trendy stores and restaurants.

Ley (2003) mentioned that 'artists seem to have some aesthetic power to transform a deserted place into a form of cultural commodity; from a junk to an artwork and then into an asset with

cultural value'. Often it is the locality of the artist that has a large influence on the art he/she creates. There seems to be a kind of symbiotic relationship between the art and the artist's neighbourhood. Artists tend to live in the inner city area because it is cheap, because it is a friendly environment and because of the richness of culture and artistic inspiration. Urban decay and physical disrepair can be understood as a creative potential which awaits artistic redefinition. Urban grittiness and ruggedness can be translated into a valuable resource or energy to stimulate artistic creativity (Bain, 2003).

In Seoul, Cheongdam-dong and Insa-dong art gallery clusters quickly became too expensive for new art galleries to keep their business as well as young artists to reside. They hardly became the productive artistic hotbeds such as SoHo in New York and East End in London. Recently emerging art galleries tended to be located instead on the Samcheong-dong and Sagan-dong area to the north of Insa-dong. Even commercial art galleries in Samcheong-dong may be at risk in the process of urban development or gentrification. Due to notoriously high property prices, there seems to be virtually no share of geographical spaces for artists in Seoul; Have Korean artists abandoned the forging of a united voice to resist commercialisation of the urban cultural spaces and instead, dispersed to the remote countryside?

2) Is there a 'real' art cluster in Seoul?

The structural problems of Korean art seem to be reflected in the location of the art clusters in Seoul. A study on Korean contemporary art and the artists' aesthetic and cultural values and beliefs, argues that predominant Western influences during the 20th century were

American-Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism (Mason and Park, 1997). In Korea, 'professionalism' in fine art is closely tied to the perceived quality of two fine art colleges located at Hongik and Seoul National Universities and interrogated with complex human and organizational connections.⁶⁾ A Korean-American artist Debbie Han came to Korea on an artist residency program and has been faced with unfamiliar experiences with art education in Korea. She criticized:

I got shocked after witnessing the Korean art academies scene. They teach arts in the extremely rigid ways focusing on classical Western rendering techniques. Many students were mimicking the same Greek statue repeatedly in the same place especially to prepare for college entrance examinations. I can't find any validity of this kind of education system killing creativity and individuality of art students instead of nurturing them. I'm very sceptical about the self-promoting system of art education. I think these ironic art education system also reflect how a baseless social structure of Korea driven by empty ideologies jeopardizes the spirits of individual. I'd like to challenge the conventional and stereotypical perspectives by my art works twisting them around (Personal interview, June 2006)

Hongik University is one of the prestigious art schools in Korea. It has enjoyed a special status in the field of paintings, sculpture and design for several decades. Its neighbourhood has located many cultural facilities such as clubs for independent rock bands or various music groups as well as small decoration shops, cultural planning, publishing or design companies. Several small multi-cultural spaces - combinations of art gallery, music cafe, restaurant, art craft

shop or book design companies- sprang up during the early 2000s with an intention of providing an alternative exhibition space for young contemporary artists. Recently this area is also facing pressure to commercialise. *Karaoke*, Korean saunas, bars and even motels are rapidly colonizing the cultural/ artistic spaces (Seoul Newspaper, 2006).

Kostelanetz (2003) investigated how a little-known industrial neighbourhood in New York unintentionally became a nexus of creative activity. Taking advantage of loft occupancy law⁷⁾ that allowed artists to reside where they worked, a band of enterprising people began settling in New York's SoHo in the 1960s, renovating derelict industrial spaces for artistic use (Zukin, 1982). Fuelled by the legendary reputation, the area soon grew to be a centre for artistic activity and a world-famous artists' colony. Artists in SoHo maximised the everyday life-worlds around them, fashioning their homes, their buildings and even their streets into the artistic space for makeshift exhibition and performance.

A snapshot of the recent booming of British contemporary art also shows the importance of artist communities. The success of yBa - 'Young British art', 'the new British art' or 'Brit Art'- brought about a rapid increase in the numbers of London galleries, pop-star status for the leading artists, growing media interest, and even urban regeneration/gentrification impacts on the deserted Hoxton/Shoreditch area in east London (While, 2003). YBa seemed to reverse the tendency for British art to lag behind its rivals like New York, Paris or even Dusseldorf due to the lack of the continuous artistic innovation and fresh ideas of artists as well as some structural weaknesses of the London art world including the conservative atmosphere of the art business

and its tendency to underrate avant-garde artists. This in turn led to the inattention of major wealthy collectors towards contemporary art works (While, 2003; Grosenick and Stange, 2005).

Can Samcheong-dong area be a 'real' art cluster with vivid artistic activities in Seoul? The neighbourhood, Buk-chon was home of many traditional craft artists and painters valuing the unique atmosphere of the traditional Korean house, *Han-ok*. In addition to the attractive cultural milieu of Samcheong-dong, political attention and urban policy also could play a crucial role in providing an attractive ground base as an artistic centre at home and abroad. But many contemporary artists who were interviewed do not want to reside and work in this area enduring the inconveniences or difficulties caused by the old structures and facilities of traditional houses. A contemporary artist residing in the area explains:

I was fascinated by the ambience of this village at first sight. I couldn't resist the attractiveness of this village, especially the beauty of traditional house, Han-ok. But living in here is different from looking from outside. The space is not so advantageous for my painting. I need enough space for painting and storage of my works and sunshine for my health. Moreover, the rising rents give me extra financial burden. I'm thinking about moving to another place. (Personal interview, July 2006, translated from Korean)

According to the research (Yang and Kim, 2005) most of the art galleries of Korea tend to concentrate on their commercial aspects rather than artistic aspects in spite of their cultural significance in Korea. Most art galleries in Seoul

are not embedded in the local environment and their location seems to be affected mainly by external factors beyond the control of the artist communities like consumers' convenience, art business trends and global art market changes, rather than the needs of artists (Misul Segye, 2001). Unlike SoHo in New York or the East End in London, art galleries in Seoul seem to produce few opportunities for artists to congregate and form a creative community for their mutual support, creative activities and learning. The saddest thing is that there is no visible and symbolic artists' community in Seoul. Several reasons could be advanced; Korean artists may not want to make considerable sacrifices of their housing quality⁸⁾. Or they may have lost the independent and pioneering spirit for challenging social customs and fighting for their space or freedom as artists. Or they may have failed to build an independent world resisting the convention of the art world having failed in this endeavour beforehand.

6. Final Remarks

The Korean art market has passed boiling point! In recent years the Korean art auction market set the highest bid price record auction after auction.⁹⁾ More and more bidders are willing to pay high prices for artworks created by relatively young artists in their 20s and 30s as well as by well-established artists. As more art auction markets value young artists' work as an attractive investment, galleries and art collectors are fiercely competing with each other to get them. According to the Galleries Association of Korea, the total volume of last year's art market was estimated at approximately 300 billion Won.

But many in the art world have raised concerns over the consequences of an overheated art market (Maeil Economic Newspaper, 2007). Chung Jun-mo, a 50-year-old art critic, said,

The recent price hike reflects investors' speculative intentions. More people are buying artwork because of their investment value, and not because they truly appreciate it. These buyers are bidding based only on rumors and how much a certain artwork was valued at in foreign auction houses. As a result, the prices of a limited few are defying gravity (Dong-A Newspaper, 2007, translated from Korean)

Art galleries also seem to enjoy the frenzied situation that arises from the booming art market in Korea. How long will the latest market boom continue? How sustainable will the sudden rise of art galleries in Samcheong-dong be? The location of art galleries in Korea has experienced several phases of rapid change affected by larger urban development, governmental cultural policy, global economic cycles and changes of cultural consumption tastes of consumers. Many from the art-related world insisted that the strict government taxation policy and tax investigations devastated the Insa-dong antique market in the 1970s and the fragile art gallery clusters in the 1990s (Art World, 1992). Additionally the stock market crash of 1991, the ensuing depression and the Gulf War seem to impede developing art gallery clusters in Cheongdam-dong and Shinsadong. In the 2000s, the successor to the art gallery clusters in Gangnam seems to be a Samcheong-dong cluster in Gangbuk (Hangyore21, 2003). Even the most successful and legendary Insa-dong galleries subsequently planned to move in Samcheong-dong or its

neighbourhood (Personal interview, July 2006). In a sense, Samcheong-dong may be a more propitious venue because it resembled Insa-dong in the 1980s or Cheongdam-dong in the 1990s as a booming site with many new galleries and art-related cultural spaces. But at the same time, rising rents and expanding commercial spaces could be a sign of doomsday.

The location dynamics of art gallery clusters in Seoul showed how increased rents, changes of consumers' taste and fluctuating market cycles are related to the rise and decline of art clusters in Seoul. The agglomeration of art galleries in Seoul seems to be affected by consumers' convenience, economic cycles and public policy rather than by artist communities embedded in local areas. What is the lesson from the art clusters on the cutting-edge of contemporary art? From all over the world, critics, artists, dealers, museum professionals, and art-interested people converge on the place where art is produced - even though it is a humble factory district- in order to see the most innovative works of the day. But ironically Korean art clusters seem to lack the major innovators of the art communities scene; the artists themselves.

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Notes

- 1) The notion of cultural quarters is problematic both in theory and in practice. Most fundamentally, there is a lack of agreement on basic concepts and aims. Even with an acceptance of the merits of clustering of cultural production, it may be argued that many types of sector synergies are only feasible within the context of large cities (Scott, 2006; Zukin, 1998). But this does not explain or justify the emergence of cultural industry quarters in smaller cities and towns. Furthermore, it is important to note that many of the more successful cultural clusters developed in a spontaneous and organic way not in a government-led project (McCarthy, 2005a).
- 2) The terminology currently used in cultural or creative industries/spaces seems to be inconsistent and even confusing. The terms 'cultural industries' and 'creative industries' are often used without serious theoretical debates (Galloway and Dunlop, 2007). Generally speaking, there is a shift to the term 'creative industries' from 'cultural industry' in policy groups.
- 3) The Young British Artists (called 'yBa,') are a group who are closely associated with their location around a part of London's East End the 'East End' of London called Hoxton. They are Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas, Gary Hume, Steve McQueen, Marc Quinn, Jenny Saville, and Gavin Turk (Stallabrass, 1999).
- 4) In May 1990, a Van Gogh painting sold for \$US82.5 million and a Renoir for \$US78.1 million, becoming the two most expensive pictures ever sold at auction. Demand for Modern and contemporary paintings in the 1980s was so strong that even works by living artists were often asking prices in excess of \$US10 million. As a result, the international market for auctioned art grew dramatically during the period, from less than \$US150 million in 1970 to more than \$US1.8 billion in 1997 (Worthington and Higgs, 2004, 258)
- 5) Goetzmann (1993) investigated the wealth effect link between stock and art markets and showed that booms in stock markets create booms in art markets.
- 6) Mason and Park (1997, 304) explained 'graduates from these institutions enjoy more advantageous positions to get awards at the annual National Exhibition or recognition from the powerful organizations such as the Korean Fine Arts Association and Korean museums.
- 7) 'In the early 1960s, an informal group calling itself the Artists Tenant Association petitioned the office of New York City's mayor at the time, Robert Wagner, whose brother was an artist, for permission to reside and work in a district not officially zoned for residential use or in buildings lacking a residential Certificate of Occupancy. It could be seen as a kind of preferential treatment of artists' (Kostelanetz, 2003, 11).
- 8) Even in affluent North America, the life of the artist is an invitation to voluntary poverty (Ley, 2003). There are surveys which show the minimal economic capital of the artist. Even today, many artists survive on incomes below every measure of poverty (Robinson and Montgomery, 2000, 525). A Columbia University informal survey made in the mid-1990s discovered that many SoHo residents had annual incomes scarcely above the official poverty level (Kostelanetz, 2003).
- 10) The oil painting "A Wash Place" by the late Korean artist Park Soo-keun was sold for 4.52 billion Won which was the highest local price for a single piece of Korean art. Kim Whan-ki's painting "Flower and Jar" was sold for 3.05 billion Won, fetching the highest price among his artworks. Another piece by Kim, "15-XII 72 #305 New York" which reappeared in the auction market in March, was sold for 1 billion Won, surpassing its previous price of 390 million won in 2000 (Dong-A Newspaper, 2007).

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