How did modern art and contemporary visual culture develop in Korea? We will discuss: the adaptation of oil painting as a modern medium in the late 19th and early 20th century, the rise of urbanism and artistic experimentation in colonial capital Keijo, the nation-building competition between architects in Seoul and Pyongyang in the immediate aftermath of the Korean War, the transnational promotion of South Korean monochrome paintings, the marriage of art and protest during the minjung pro-democracy movement, postmodern installation art, and the “survival” of art in the age of Hallyu. While the framework of the Korean nation-state provides a fruitful point of departure, the course will analyze works by artists who resist the interpretation of their art within the national boundary. The critical discourses of colonial modernity, cosmopolitan modernism, socialist utopianism, democracy, globalization, and post-modernism will be explored as an attempt to situate the specific case of Koreas within the global history of modern and contemporary art.

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