



"FAMILY" (MIXED MEDIA), 1997, BY YEO-HYUN KWON

## Ancient Traditions, New Forms

AS A FIRST TIME VISITOR to Seoul, Korea, I could not have anticipated the vitality and enthusiasm I would experience. By simply walking through the crowded streets, I was struck by the number of prominent galleries, some of which existed side by side, while others were apt to appear in the most unlikely places (such as a men's-clothing store). During my visits to the galleries, and as I spoke with artists in their studios, it became apparent that I was in the midst of a vibrant community that fostered a broad-based interest in cultivating and supporting the visual arts.

In a country that, throughout its history, has

placed great importance on culture, creativity, and achievement, this burgeoning art community represents just one aspect of the enormous pride Koreans take in what has been accomplished there during the last half of this century. Although much debate centers around Western influences *versus* the integrity of indigenous cultural traditions, the incredible diversity of style, subject matter, and technique in much of the work I was able to see demonstrated how these two seemingly distinct paradigms are woven into unique personal expressions.

As an American curator visiting an Asian country, I was hoping to define these "East/West" issues,

and to identify the concept of "Koreanness," or that unique component that would set this work apart. However, I soon came to the realization that these are specious exercises, since juxtapositions along these lines are deeply felt, almost intuitive responses on the part of the artist. Perhaps good art speaks for itself, about itself.

*The exhibition "Ancient Traditions/New Forms: Contemporary Art from Korea" is at the University of Hartford's Joseloff Gallery through January 20. The text above is by Zina Davis, the gallery's curator, from the exhibition catalogue.*