‘Korean art shouldn’t be politicized’  
*German-born professor pioneers Korean art teaching in US*

By Jane Han

NEW YORK — In the lecture room, she’s a passionate professor and Korean art expert. In Koreatown, she goes by the name “Ji-hye,” shopping for that just-ripe kimchi. Meet Burglind Jungmann, the first person to teach Korean art history in the U.S.

The German-born professor at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) pioneered introducing Korean art in an American university in 1999. Now, more than 600 students have received a master’s degree in the study.

“The interest in Korean art history among students was high from the beginning,” Jungmann said in an interview with The Korea Times. “From the beginning, students were always astonished that I was the only person in the United States teaching exclusively Korean art.”

“They all, whether Korea-related or not, thought that Korean art deserved its own place in the curricula of art history,” she said.

And that is what’s slowly happening.

Korean galleries have been established at major museums in the U.S. and other universities are making plans to introduce Korean art history to their students.

---

From Page 1

Art

“The late start of Korean art history in the U.S. is mainly due to the late start of the field in Korea itself — due, of course, to the historical circumstances of colonization, wars and dictatorship,” Jungmann explained, adding that the language barrier was also an obstacle.

If you want to do Korean art history, you have to learn all three East Asian languages (Korean, Chinese and Japanese) in order to understand historical sources and literature.

For Jungmann, who is fluent in all three languages, it wasn’t just her love of art and language skills that made her an expert in the field. It was her deeply-rooted passion for Korea.

She visited Korea as an exchange student right after high school in 1973 and it was love at first sight.

“I lived with a Korean host family for a year, learned Korean, took courses in calligraphy and traditional painting, did taekwondo, and traveled a lot with friends,” recalled Jungmann. “What I found was a very poor country, extremely kind and hospitable people, a beautiful countryside and a rich culture.”

She later returned to Korea to study at Seoul National University, and since then, her connection with Korea continues to this day.

Jungmann tries to return to Korea at least once a year to teach and research. But sometimes, she'll also just travel a short distance to Koreatown for a taste of home.

“It is sometimes more old-fashioned than Seoul, and I like this feeling of nostalgia,” says Jungmann, who is a regular at Korean sauna, beauty salons and supermarkets.

On promoting Korean art overseas, the professor says “ politicization” is a problem.

“Many visitors to foreign galleries think that the Korean art objects on exhibition have been stolen from Korea. This is not the case,” she says.

Many objects were either purchased in the 19th and 20th centuries by travelers and diplomats, often paintings and ceramics were given to foreigners as gifts.

“I think Koreans should be proud of being represented by good collections in important museums all over the world,” said Jungmann, stressing that countries such as China and Japan have been represented in the U.S. and European museums since the late 19th century.

“If Korea can host the Olympic Games and World Cup soccer tournament, and can be famous for manufacturing and selling electronic devices all over the world, it should also be represented in the world community with its art objects,” she says.