

California Series

By Young-Il Ahn

After spending my first eight months in America in New York City, I've lived continuously in Southern California for nearly half a century.

The Korea I left in 1966 was still suffering the after-effects of division and war, struggling to cope with the devastation and poverty that followed the nightmare of fratricidal conflict. It was a difficult time that offered scant hope of improved living conditions. This period of my youth was also a period of insecurity prompted by the tensions of the Cold War, a period in which individual freedoms took a back seat to the need for conformity, and this inhibited my ability to express myself freely in my art. So, in my early 30s as an aspiring artist struggling to even get a hold of painting supplies, I left my homeland to seek my art dream in California. When I beheld my new home with its incredibly vast spaces running along the deep blue Pacific, I felt a great sense of relief and joy. Everything seemed so completely different from the Korean peninsula where I had grown up.

Everything from the banquet of flowers blossoming throughout the year, to the nearby rugged, parched, desert with its array of exotic cacti and endless, open, horizons completely captivated me like magic. All of it was highlighted by the glowing California sun, throwing off its pure rays of light. I was moved with a spirit of joy and freedom to put to canvas, without inhibition, the free-flowing colors and shapes of nature—my spirit soared!

I have been deeply changed by living the past half century in California, and as long as I live I'll look to put on canvas ideas that reflect the transformation which California has made in me.

