

## Korean art lover takes initiative in US

By Ines Min  
Staff reporter

Robert Turley did not expect to fall in love with Korean art. In fact, the world-traveler had only come to the country on a whim 15 years ago, while doing a two-year stint in Japan.

"I used to travel a lot as a musician," Turley said in a recent phone interview with *The Korea Times*. "Every country I'd go to, I'd check out the art, the galleries and the museums. And of all the countries, Korea just grabbed me."

Years later and back in the United States, Turley took his passion for the local art and saw fit to establish the Korean Art Society in 2008 — which has since become one of the country's largest organizations focused on the subject. On June 25, the New York-based group will head to the Philadelphia Museum for Korean Art Day there, to explore an exhibition on porcelain from the Joseon Kingdom (1392-1910) and other cultural artifacts, previously displayed at the National Palace Museum of Korea last year.

Although a visitor anywhere can partake in a museum tour, the Korean Art Society offers unique opportunities through the many connections Turley has made over the years. The 1,200 member-strong non-profit organization manages to orchestrate curator-led experiences, collaborations with Korean museums and journeys into the storage rooms of such landmarks as the Brooklyn Museum — the first gallery to open a permanent Korean art exhibition outside of the native country.

Turley decided to establish the art society after he realized there was a dearth of outlets for American aficionados. Although there are U.S. branches of the Korea Foundation and Korean Cultural Service, he found that there was no group that emphasized solely on the promotion of the arts — and he decided to take matters into his own hands.

"There really needs to be someone focused on Korean art, and promoting it not only to specialists but everyone," Tur-



Robert Turley, president of the Korean Art Society, stands in his private gallery in New York. The organization plans to make a trip to the Philadelphia Museum in June for a curator-led tour of a Korean art exhibition. Courtesy of Robert Turley

ley said. He added that he would like to give members "a clear impression of what Korean culture and Korean art is. A better appreciation of it and what is unique about Korean art.

"It's not the same as Chinese or Japanese; it really has its own aesthetic, its own philosophy, its own look."

The Korean Art Society has captured the interests and attention of both art experts and beginner's as well as the young and the old, and Turley has even begun online distribution of a monthly journal, which focuses on Korean art history and exhibitions in Seoul.

Though the founder said the organiza-

tion has been "steaming along" and often collaborates with galleries in Korea — the musician visits the country two to three times a year — he wouldn't mind coordinating with local administration to get the word out there about national art.

"The Korean government does a great job of promoting Korean art in Korea. They really do have some fantastic programs, fun private museums," he said. "I just think a poor job is being done of promoting Korean art in America."

On his last trip here in March, Turley said he emailed the Korea Tourism Organization and others, in hopes of collaborating with them in promoting Korean art

in the future. Though his inquiries were left unanswered, he won't let it deter his own plans or give up.

"There's so much for Korea, to have their culture and art more widely known, and respected by other countries," Turley said in reference to recent attempts by the government to globalize the national image. "I think it's really culture and art that promotes your brand better than anything."

"It just takes the right attitude, that's all." For more information on events and tours by the Korean Art Society within the United States, visit [www.koreanartsociety.org](http://www.koreanartsociety.org).

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