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The Publicness of Post-public: National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Petition 4 art, Commoning

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Sohyun Park studied journalism in college and receiving master degree in art history, museum studies, cultural policy and arts management, Park has continued research and lectures on the respective areas. While working at the Korea Culture and Tourism Institute, she became more interested in the re-regulation method of the nation, arts, politics and policies in the field of policy administration. As a contact point for all the areas of studies, Park continues her research in institutional critique, art movement and civil rights, bureaucratic system and cultural politics. In addition, she is also studying digital environment, cultural diversity and gender issues.

1. To whom does a museum belong?: A question about institutional closed-ness or the lost publicness.

In 1964, Hi-Red Center, of which the founding members are Jirō TAKAmatsu, Genpei AKasegawa, Natsuyuki NAKAnishi did a performance at the entrance of a gallery in Tokyo¹. They blocked the entrance door with wood and nails. This event that took place long time ago was not a protest against the gallery where it took place. It was a strong protest against what happened at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, which was founded and managed by Tokyo city. the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum was known for experimental works by young artists during the 1960s. It was the place for ‘Yomiuri Indépendant.’ But now it forbade the experimental works which established a part of modern Japanese art using the authoritative museum rules as excuses. The museum went ahead and drew in police force. Eventually the museum pushed the artists on to the streets. The performance of Hi-Red Center was an artistic action of protest against the museum. It was a silent reproach that a museum could be closed even with an open door, when it separated art from the society instead of connecting them. It is not difficult to imagine how embarrassed the

1 More detailed discussion of this issue can be found in Sohyun Park’s essay. “Genealogy of Anti-Museology or Cultural Revolution : The Invention of Gendaibijutsushi(History of Contemporary Art and the Institutionalization of Art)” *Journal of History of Modern Art*, 25, 2009.6, pp. 59-94

audience must have felt at the closed door of the gallery when they had been invited to come. I believe that Hi-Red Center expected that the surprise the audience felt at this physical closed-ness of the door would lead them to a realization of the ‘institutional closed-ness.’

In our everyday experiences, however, it is quite difficult to imagine a museum being accused of this ‘institutional closed-ness.’ From its birth, the modern museum opened itself to the public. And being open to the public is the very reason for its existence: because it is open to the public, it is ‘public.’ For this reason, at the heart of the relationship between a museum and the public as imagined by most people is the public ‘right to access’ to art housed by the museum. One of the important characteristics of modern state is that it gives its citizens, without discrimination, the right to access and enjoy art. Art is freed from exclusive ownership and isolation from public due to it. This right to access art is so important that it was registered in human right law in the mid 20th century. In this sense, a museum is a very special institution that represents what mankind have accomplished since the establishment of modern nations.

What is interesting is that the publicness or the human right, which the museums embody, has developed so far depending on the right to access art. I emphasize this because the right to access is not the same as ownership. And just as the concept of the right to access defines the idea of publicness, it is true that the question of “To whom does a museum belong?” has not been asked earnestly yet. For example, Le musée du Louvre, which appeared at the historical moment of French Revolution and the establishment of a modern nation, took its mission of education (or enlightenment) of the citizen, in order to control the public memory of the past of the nation and the Revolution.² This may be the historical evidence that tells us why the modern public museums prioritized the right to access art, and how it substituted the revolutionary subversion of private ownership of art with the question of accessibility. In spite of their beginning, however, the museums in the late 20th century have continuously faced the challenging questions like “Whose art is it?” or “Whose history is it?”

2 Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, University of California Press, 1994, p. 2.

being involved in court battles around the ownership of artworks. Along with the moral question of whether or not the ownership of relics or artworks which were obtained illegally or unfairly through colonization or pillage can be justified in the name of public accessibility, return law suits of relics or artworks are continuously being filed.

But I am not raising the question of “To whom does a museum belong?” to bring up the problem of the morality of the ownership of the artworks collected in museums. To me, the real problem is that museums have recently strengthened their existence through ‘institutional closed-ness’ except for the expansion of accessibility in ways that can be materialized in the number of the visitors. Especially, national museums as governmental organization or national institution have relied on the authoritarianism of the bureaucrats. This demands us to look back on how the concept of the ‘public’ works.

Junichi Saitō, quoting Hanna Arendt, suggests two political values related to public space: freedom and resistance against exclusion. Public space is a place where freedom is expressed through speech or action. Furthermore, just like Rene Char’s phrase “The chair remains empty, but the place continues to be set,” public space is where the ‘place’ for everybody, in other words, the place for freedom is set. And the word ‘private’ is used when life loses public space or publicness. Arendt, in *The Human Condition*, brings up the fact that the origin of the word ‘private’ is ‘deprived.’ She emphasizes that private life is a life deprived of the existence of Other. Those who are deprived of the experience to be seen and heard by others, those who have lost the possibility to be answered by others are displaced or expelled from public space. Therefore, freedom in public space is the political right not to be deprived of the right to action and the right to opinion. In the sense that public space is where the answers to autonomous actions and opinions are given, it represents the political value-the resistance to exclusion.³

When we consider the concept of ‘publicness’ or public space, we need to reflect on whether the laws and the administration of Korean public museums have worked in ways to empty and close down the space for freedom and the place for the right to opinions and actions,

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the access to which should be guaranteed to both audience and artists. Especially the frequent political scandals in the 21st century, in which national and public museums and their systems, including the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art(MMCA), were the main characters, give us all the more reason to seriously think about the issue. The controversy round the appointment of the director of MMCA, the debate round the authenticity of the collections, and the problem of censorship are a few examples of the situations that showed how museums had lost publicness. Certainly, to bring up these past situations now may look anachronistic when the concept of museum as commons is being explored. But the attempt to redefine a museum as commons may be the outcome of our positive reactions to the danger signal-the institutional closed-ness or the loss of publicness.⁴

2. Legal imagination and bureaucratic control of museums: museums as state/public property

〈Museums and Art Museums Promotion Act〉, which was first established in 1984 under the title of 〈Museum Act〉 and have been revised about 20 times so far, classifies museums and art museums according to the founding/operating body. This act categorizes museums and galleries as follows: national museums founded and managed by the state; public museums founded and managed by local government; private museums founded and managed by all other kinds of corporate body, group or individual; and university museums founded and managed by university. This act, by dividing museums according to the founding/operating body, seems to endow the ownership of museums to the founding/operating body based on the private ownership of the capitalistic society. National museums are national properties as defined by 〈National Property Act, public museums are public property of the local government according to 〈Public Property and Commodity Management Act〉. The law defines state property as “property owned by the state according to a charge on the state, contributed acceptance, legislations, or agreement.”

4 More discussions about the concept of museum as common land and its experiments can be found in these essays. Chaeyoung Lee, Sooyoung Lee, Sang Ae Park, Minwha Jo, Bora Kim and Soeyun Jang. “Curators’ Round Table Talk” *Art World*. 75, 2018.11, pp. 78-85
Sooyoung Lee, “Art Commons, Nam June Paik.” *Art World*. 75, 2018.11, pp. 66-67.

Therefore, the state as the founding and operating body of national museums is the owner as well.

Because the division of legal ownership is postulated in this way, the agent of management and disposal of national property is decided within a chain of administration: the president-Ministry of Strategy and Finance-the heads of the offices of the central government. Henceforth, all the right to decisions about the existence and management of national museums are easily considered to belong to the state-their owner. *«Museum and Art Museum Promotion Act»*, in fact, identifies the founding and operating body as the owner. This means that the state-the founding body and the legal owner-has the exclusive right to make decisions as to the management of MMCA. Furthermore, according to the item number 2 of *«Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism Organization»*, MMCA is an institution set up in order to “support the Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism in carrying out his duties.” In other words, MMCA is not an independent administrative institution, but an institution set up in order to ‘support’ the Minister’s business, therefore, located in a subordinate position within the organizational system. Thus the museum director must report all matters of personnel and budgets to the Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism and have them approved by him. Although *«National Property Act»* postulates the three principles of management and disposal of national property as the profit of the whole nation, the common value and the use value, and the transparent and effective process, in reality, the main agent who has the right to make decisions is the chief of the state’s administrative organ. When the law identifies the state both as the owner of and the agent to operate MMCA, there is always the danger for the national museums to be an exclusive property of the administrative organ which is in charge of its management. The legal concept of the owner-the state, in reality, is substituted by the governing institutions/ organization. In this sense, MMCA which is the only national museum in Korea, is fettered by the institutional imagination based on bureaucracy.

On the contrary, *«Library Act»* applies concepts and categorization different from those of *«Museum and Art Museum Promotion Act»*. In *«Library Act»*, the legal concept of ‘public library’ overrides the

principle of classification according to the founding and operating body or the user service of each library. Even when a new kind of library, founded and operated by a new subject, offers new user services, it is still a 'public library.' Naturally, 'Library Act' sees a public library founded and run by private fund as a public library as well. This act has stipulated in law 'the social responsibility and the role performance of the library'. And a 'public library' must realize this legal concepts. What 'Museum and Art Museum Promotion Act' does not have but 'Library Act' has is this very concept of 'public.' Can anyone say that the absence of the concept of the public in law and the actual function of the museums founded and operated by national or local government are not related at all? The fact that national and public museums, especially MMCA has neglected their communal roles but only claimed their public authority clearly shows the problem of institutional closed-ness and loss of publicness.

During the IMF crisis, the government introduced market principle into its organization, thereby hoping to improve administrative efficiency. Since then, bureaucratic dominance was all the more reinforced in MMCA, which was already under legal and administrative regulations. So called neoliberal administrative reform expanded the bureaucratic dominance over it. The Korean government adopted New Public Management, reducing the government spending and using the private sector management models in public sector. Also it adopted performance-based systems such as privatization of public institutions, performance evaluation based on competition principles, annual salary system based on performance appraisal, team system, and Executive agencies. In case of Executive Agencies, since the enactment of 'Establishment and Operation of Executive Agencies Act', a number of public institutions have been designated as Executive Agencies. MMCA was appointed as Executive Agency in 2006.⁵

The government explained that the advantages of MMCA

5 According to law, Executive Agency is "an administrative department, of which the head is given administrative and financial autonomy to make decisions about some of government-affairs that need to strengthen performance management due to professionalism or that are desirable to operate in accordance with the principle of competition while retaining publicness." (Item number 2)

becoming Executive Agency could be many. While maintaining its position as an administrative institution, it could now openly employ the head of the organization. And the head can run the museum in democratic ways, having the autonomy to plan the budget and to make decisions about personnel. Furthermore, it could undertake profitable business without recourse to government's cultural policy. It could increase entrance fee and space rental fee expecting short-term synergies. On the other hand, there were criticism and worries about designating MMCA as Executive Agency that it was simply for administrative convenience. Already within the existing system, the director's right to decide personnel and budget was quite limited. The government was sugar-coating the reality by advocating the advantages it alleged. Furthermore, the decision might cause the museum to be restrained in its role to establish the modern and contemporary art history. Also the rights of the low-income and underprivileged citizens to enjoy arts and culture might shrink. And other problems that might arise were: securing its own resources would be limited due to the nature of the museum; supporting artists' creative activities would become more difficult; it would ultimately cause the decline of fine art and inhibition of the balanced development of art.⁶

At the time, a lot of people found it problematic that the government had not discussed the issue with the party in concern.⁷ They brought up the question many times. In 2004, a task force was organized by the staff of MMCA. They stated that making MMCA Executive Agency was "an irresponsible action only for administrative convenience, without regarding the public opinion." Thus they opposed the government's decision.⁸ In the same year, Korea Professional Artist Association, Korea Gallery Association, Korea Art Critic Association jointly released a statement *Our Position about National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Becoming Executive Agency*, in which they demanded the government to have a conversation with and collect opinions from the artists when

6 Daljin Kim, "MMCA Is Executive Agency?" Kimdaljin Art Research Institute and Consulting. www.daljin.com/ 2005.

7 Joenghoen Kim, "Three Rumors about National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art." *OhMyNews*. 2004.7.26.

8 Task Force Opposing the Government's Decision to make MMCA Executive Agency. "Our Opinion about making MMCA Executive Agency." 2004.7.14.

they make arts policy.⁹ Criticizing the government's unilateral execution of policies, Jungheon Kim argued that the only possible interpretation of this situation is that the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs each slashed down the most powerless agency as recommended by each ministry. He strongly criticized that "Government's designation of MMCA as Executive Agency without consulting public opinions or ensuring the institution of full responsibility for operation violates the citizen's cultural rights" and "disrupts the communication between artists and citizens."¹⁰ In spite of these worries and criticism, the government went ahead and appointed MMCA as Executive Agency.

Simultaneously, MMCA was reorganized. In this process, Executive Office (Museum Policy Department, Education and Culture Department, Management Support Department), Curatorial Research Office (Investigation and Research Team, Exhibition Plan and Management Team) were newly established. At the same time, the organization of Deoksugung Palace Museum was reformed as well: Plan and Management Division (Museum Policy Department, Education and Culture Department, Management Support Department), Curatorial Research Office (Investigation and Research Team, Exhibition Plan and Management Team), Preservation and Management Office (Collection and Management Team, Preservation and Restoration Team). Thus the dual system of Planning and Management Division and Curatorial Research Office was completed. In the meantime, while the chief of Plan and Management Division set up in 2006 was senior civil servant (grade 3) dispatched from the higher level institution—Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the highest position in Curatorial Research Office was the Chief Curator (grade 4). The organizational hierarchy of administrative functions and curatorial research functions was asymmetrical. It signified that Executive Agencies system was intended to strengthen administrative

9 Korea Professional Artist Association, Korea Gallery Association, Korea Art Critic Association. "Our Position about National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Becoming Executive Agency," 2004.7.26.

10 Joenghoen Kim, Ibid.

and bureaucratic domination.¹¹ Later, the position of the chief of Plan and Management Division and the Chief Curator were upgraded. On the surface, it seemed that the hierarchical rank of the both parties were improved. On the other hand, however, the ranks of the chief of Plan and Management Division-Senior Executive Service (level 2) dispatched from Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism- and the director of the museum, appointed through the process of open competition were not differentiated. This is the reason why it has been urgently required to raise the position of the director upward since the first director Kyungsoo Lee.

What was worse was that, as a part of the reorganization, the curatorial staffs were to be paid as contract employees, and the curatorial staffs and the administrative staffs were now interchangeable. For this, Jeongheon Kim strongly criticized 'The Ministry of Culture and Tourism Reorganization Plan.' He argued that curators are professionals and should not be hired as contract employees and that if the plan should be carried out, the insecurity of their position will harm their performance. He also maintained that allowing the placement of administrative staffs as curators and vice versa was not different from elimination of the research function of curators.¹² In fact, when Myungbak Lee government took office, they began to discuss incorporating Executive Agencies. Then all institutions stopped hiring new full-time positions. As a result, when the Seoul branch of MMCA opened, all newly hired curators were contract workers. The government excluded the parties in concern such as MMCA or the artists themselves in the process of decision making. The government justified the policy forefronting 'publicness' but it turned out that

11 See *National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art White Book*.

As to the inverted hierarchy between the Planning and Management Division and the Curatorial Research Office, Sangsu Kim criticized that it was a "structure that fundamentally hinders the development of the museum" and "the greatest irony of the current institutional system of the museum." He added that the current system of the museum is "against the universal common sense when it comes to operating a museum. since it is a common sense that, in order to enhance expertise, Curatorial Research is at the heart of the operating system of a museum. It will only result in bureaucratization of the museum by making office functions more expansive, which is already a chronic illness of MMCA." (Kim, Sangsu. [Kim Sangsu Column] Talking about National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art ② "National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art does not have a 'heart.'" *Presian*. 2008.8.25.)

12 Joenghoen Kim, *ibid*.

they appropriated the term simply as their empty slogan. Bureaucratic dominance was strengthened overall and the function and the position of curatorial staffs within the organization were weakened, put under the bureaucratic control.¹³ Executive Agencies did not set up any ‘place’ for anybody. It deprived many people of the right to speak and act. Violently, it expelled them from the public space. Those who did not have a ‘place’ in public space were outcast into insecure existence, like the position of contract employee.

Finally in 2008, after the 10-year-long debate, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism gave up incorporating MMCA. Nonetheless, the status as Executive Agency and the trauma still remain in the institution. A research report published in the same year by the National Institute for Labor Policy and Research writes that organizations designated as Executive Agencies had limited operational autonomy due to the intervention of the higher departments and performance evaluation system. They became “subcontractors of the competent authority,” subordinated under bureaucratic control. Exactly the same thing happened with MMCA. If we call it a practice of ‘publicness’ when the legal provision of “state-owned property” based on the concept of private ownership monopolizes the decisions about National Museums’ operations, this kind of ‘publicness’ cannot coexist with public interest or public space aforementioned. So far the idea of open public space was beyond the reach of museums and artists, giving them experiences of frustration and helplessness. For public space to be truly open, we need to actively seek public interest in ways that surpasses the existent practice of ‘publicness.’

3. The citizens’ right to museums

While the debate about incorporating MMCA was going on, the suspicion was raised through a state audit of 2015 that the Ministry of Culture and Tourism changed the ‘Basic Operating Rules of MMCA’ in order to involve its overall personnel and operation. Congressman Jinhu Jung pointed out that the Chairman of Human Resources had been replaced from the director of the museum to the chief of planning

¹³ Youngjo Choi, “The problem of Executive Agencies and the choice of political alternatives.” *The Korean Government Employees’ Union Policy Institute*. 2018.7.

and operation department. The director of the museum and the chief curator were excluded from the Committee of Human Resources. He also paid attention to the fact that the chairman of collection committee was replaced from the director of the museum to an outside specialist while the director of the museum was excluded from the collection committee. Furthermore, the choice of the outside specialist should be consulted with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Concerning this, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism explained that the appointment of those above grade 5 is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and that the change was intended to reduce the multitudinous duties of the director of the museum so that he could focus on his creative works. In the same context, they explained that the planning and operation committee of MMCA took care of odd jobs, which the director of the museum did not have to concern about. In addition to this, Jongdoek Kim, the Minister of Culture and Tourism at the time stated that “the position of the director of the museum is just the same rank with a general manager of a bureau, it is quite strange that such minor thing became a hot issue.”¹⁴

These explanations clearly show how the Ministry of Culture and Tourism thought of MMCA and its director. In conjunction with the public recruitment of the director of the museum, the Ministry’s attitude raised severe criticisms. Hyunmi Yang pointed out that the current personnel system, which had the Minister of Culture and Tourism at its summit was the very reason why one could not expect long-term operational performance of MMCA. Kyehun Ha pinpointed that “it seems that the Ministry of Culture and Tourism thinks putting a seal on the decision of the committee is the same as the authority over personnel affairs. If one has a clear mind, he would not take the position of the director of the museum under the current operational regulation.” Furthermore, the possibility was suggested that the members of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism schemed it: They wanted the position of the director of MMCA to remain the second

14 “[Opening Tomorrow-Son Youngok] The Odd Jobs at National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art.” *Kukminilbo*. 2015.10.15. “What do we expect from a foreign director who does not have authority over personnel?” *Dong-A Ilbo*. 2016.12.5.

grade rank.¹⁵ Yeol Choi castigated, “In any institution, its ability comes out from the authority over personnel and budget. ... What is surprising is that the authority was taken away by the upper echelon. ... Beside, since the former director of the museum resigned, they have left the position empty for over a year.” Simultaneously, he suggested that the authority over personnel and budget should be restored to the director and Executive Agencies and incorporation should be nulled, and that the rank of the director of museum should be raised to that of vice-minister.¹⁶

And again it was pointed out as a problem that the government would not listen to the voices of the art world. Sunyoung Lee denounced that the fundamental reason behind the controversy over the open recruitment of the director of MMCA lied in that it was a competition among a small group of officials and professors at the power center, regardless of the opinion of the majority of the members of the art world. Someone resented that “they wasted 8 months recruiting the 2-year tenure position, and those who are responsible never apologize to artists. It is a total disregard.” In other word, the question was “why would the government not listen to the opinions of the art world?” Thus, people began to think that “the art world must strengthen its own capacity to collect public opinions about important issues and to put them into action”(Sunyoung Lee) and that “the identity of MMCA should be built through all artists’ autonomous expression of their opinions and participation(Jiyun Yang).”¹⁷ Soon, the public statement titled “Our Position on the Appointment of the Director of MMCA” signed by 831 artists was released and an open forum was held.¹⁸ It was a joint reaction of the artists to the news that the Ministry of Culture and Tourism was considering Bartomeu Mari Ribas, who was the president of CIMAM, as potential candidate for the

15 “[Munwha Hotong] The empty explanation of MMCA: ‘We do have authority over personnel.’” *Dong-A Ilbo*. 2016.12.6. “What do we expect from a foreign director who does not have authority over personnel?” *Dong-A Ilbo*. 2016.12.5.

16 Yeol Choi, “Dark future for the new director of National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art” Kimdaljin Art Research Institute and Consulting. www.daljin.com 2015. 12.

17 “Special Issue: National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Adrift—a Suggestion to National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art.” *Monthly Art*. 2015.7.

18 Jungwhan Park, “Why do they want a foreigner who is blamed for censorship for a candidate for director of National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art?” *Art1*. 2015.11.16.

position of the director of MMCA. He was notoriously involved in the controversy of censorship at MACBA. The artists asked for the rights to act and speak about important issues of MMCA and demanded responsible answers from the government. What they demanded of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism was as follows.

- The Ministry of Culture and Tourism and Bartomeu Mari should clarify their official position about Mari's attempt to cancel the exhibition *The Beast and the Sovereign*.
- The government should stop its bureaucratic administration that is in disregard of the reality of the art scene. Instead, they should create a space for open discussion about the issues such as the delay of the appointment of the director of MMCA and for public debate on the process of and criteria for selecting a new director.
- The total independence of public art institutions, including MMCA, should be fully expanded. Support but do not intrude.
- We are against all kinds of censorship and surveillance that destroy the autonomy of art. We will do everything to restore the freedom and independence of art.

Right after the publication of this statement, *Petititon 4 art* (The shortened term in Korean for “Our Position on the Appointment of the Director of MMCA”: Translator) held a forum, in which they made it very clear why they opposed Mari's appointment as the director of MMCA. They deprecated his appointment not because he was a ‘foreigner’ but because during his service as the director of MACBA he gave instructions to pre-screen the entries of *The Beast and the Sovereign* and eventually canceled the exhibition. Especially when three members of board of directors of CIMAM resigned, publicly announcing their distrust in Mari, it was all the more clear that Mari broke the code of ethics of curators. For these reasons, *Petititon 4 art* was against his appointment as the head of MMCA. What had been underlying in their actions were the critical consciousness that “censorship and bureaucracy is contaminating art world” and the hope that “*Petititon 4 art*'s statement would bring about an opportunity for public discussion, although the art world had kept silence during the series of events,” just as Hyegyung Yang points out. Hyunjin Kim states, “it is no coincidence that suspicions of censorship spread throughout

the art world. It has everything to do with the maintenance of the dominant power.” She emphasizes, “When the dominating power oppresses the leaders of institutions and threatens the autonomy of artists with the conformist leaders in the lead, that is when we artists should form one community and act together.”¹⁹

Following Chankyung Park’s suggestion that it was necessary to gain the sympathy of the whole art world and let the citizens know the seriousness of the situation for practical system improvement, they opened an account called ‘Petition 4 art’ on SNS and internet and let known their activities. Their page on Facebook called ‘Petition 4 art’ was a kind of platform and a storage that recorded and promoted artistic activities as citizenship behavior to create a public space. Soeyoung Joeng, here, related her experiences of anger and helplessness in the face of bureaucracy which was ignorant of and indifferent to how art was created, or the citizenship behavior or artistic activities of Petition 4 art.” The issue of the appointment of MMCA’s director is not unconcerned with the individual issues of numerous artists who have experienced the oppression of bureaucracy.”²⁰

This consciousness resulted in one-man demonstration in front of MMCA. Chankyung Park began one-man demonstration with a sansevieria leaf in his mouth in order to remind people of Mari’s censorship scandal. He criticized that the Ministry of Culture and Tourism did not react to the demand of Petition 4 art to explain Mari’s involvement in censorship. He also found fault with the fact that there were way more civil servants than curators in MMCA and that it reorganization was only to increase the authorial power of the civil servants.²¹ To him, suspicions of censorship was inseparable from the enhancement of bureaucratic control and authoritative administration which would not respond to the opinions of art world, let alone that of

19 After long discussion, the artists decided to continue collective actions. They demanded the followings: Mari’s official position about the cancelment of *The Beast and the Sovereign*; an public debate about the process and the criteria of selecting a new director of National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art; establishment of National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Reformation Committee, which includes artists; expansion of autonomy of public art institutions; abolition of censorship damaging the autonomy of art. (Park, Jungwhan. *ibid.*)

20 Soeyoung Jung, Petition 4 art’s Facebook Page. 015.11.16.

21 “The history of political censorship... can the freedom of expression guaranteed?” *Kyunghyang Shinmun*. 2015.11.27.

the citizens.

However, one-man demonstration could not elicit answers from the government. It was simply another opportunity for artists to experience violence and exclusion. Yejin Kim, after participating one-man demonstration, wrote on her Facebook page as follows.

I've seen demonstrations before but it was the first time for me to do one-man demonstration myself. Although we did not attempt to enter the museum or do any violent action, we were immediately surrounded by the administrators. They said to us, "Excuse me, but the thing you're carrying, is that something to do with our museum? You really shouldn't do this!" "Our museum!" But I was not included in that "we" here and I felt upset. Isn't MMCA a public institution? Certainly, I don't visit MMCA often, but I can always come and see the exhibitions. To the administrators of MMCA, I was a kind of enemy. To think that they treated me like someone that should be expelled from their world makes me angry.²²

On the panel Yejin Kim held up in her one-man demonstration was written, "MMCA under the control of Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Give MMCA independence and autonomy." The moment she wanted to exert her right to speech and action as a citizen toward the Ministry and the museum, instead of being a visitor to the exhibitions, MMCA changed from a place of service and welcome to a place of animosity and exclusion, Authoritative silence of government institutions was a clear sign of the government's will to hinder the formation of public space for discussion which the artists hoped for. And this kind of will could always turn to administrative or physical violence.

None the less, the artists who participated *Petititon 4 art* continued 'Poster Project,' which Yuli Yoon suggested. It was a relay project in collaboration with designers to have small voices heard. The

22 Kim Yejin's Facebook Page, 2015.11.29.
(*Petititon 4 art's* Facebook Page *quoted*, 2015.12.1.)

poster by Youngeul Kim and Jiyoen Yu²³ well shows that revealing the ‘limit’ of the politics of animosity and exclusion overwhelming MMCA and believing in the possibility of the artists to be political agents pursuing critical agreement were the impetus behind the solidarity of *Petititon 4 art*. They tried to create a public space, that is, “a better environment in which individuals can freely express their opinions, in spite of the risks of oppression, misunderstanding and conflict.”²⁴ For them, public space for discussion meant a place of resistance where they could raise questions in the name of citizens about the thick wall of the power, about the unilateral and closed administration of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism to choose the director of MMCA without giving any explanation. Youngeul Kim states that “for the subordinate to form a public space for discussion is not to complain to the dominant but to officially raise a question.” It is also an attempt to “openly put a brake on the government, regulations, and customs, which make it impossible for art to exist at all.” The public space for discussion would be generated by continuous discussions and interventions by numerous artists(or those who askwd what art was and who artists were) about what to do and how to do it in order to stop the bureaucratic administration by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.²⁵

As *Petititon 4 art* criticized the government for not answering to the voices of the citizens, and demanded a public space for discussion about the problems of authoritative bureaucratic system, the national museum began to be seen as a public space for discussion about civil solidarity. The Poster Project by Black Panther and Euteum Yang connected MMCA and Youngman who was sacrificed in the Sewol disaster. They stated that MMCA, as public space for discussion, was responsible for “remembering the boy’s ordinary but unique life, and for reflecting on the truth of this country, revealed through his innocent death.” They believed that a new public space for discussion could be created only on the base of solidarity among those who had not heard answers from the government, and maintained that

23 Youngeul Kim and Jiyoen Yu. Poster Project. *Petititon 4 art*'s Facebook Page. 2015.12.20.

24 *Petititon 4 art*. “Our Position on the Appointment of the Director of MMCA.” 2015.12.3.

25 Youngeul Kim, *Petititon 4 art*'s Facebook Page. 2015.12.23.

“Youngman’s mother calls me, and I call you. You need to call another you. We need to keep calling ourselves.”²⁶ As Charles Esche, the director of Van Abbe museum, wrote to *Petititon 4 art*, it was an effort to reestablish MMCA as “a place of deviation from and dissonance about all agreements made in the society” and “a space where we can freely and openly discuss and share all ideas and opinions of the minority.”²⁷

The citizen’s/artists’ action of *Petititon 4 art* was officially finished at the end of December in 2015 with ‘Greetings from the *Petititon 4 art* Working Group.’ In it, they stated that in their short but intensive activities, they did their best to unite the diverse powers of the participants into one and to produce an ideal result. In order to do so, they consciously avoided managing their activities and making decisions. Instead, while respecting everybody’s opinion as much as possible, they kept the value they expressed in their statement. They also proclaimed that they would not monopolize the right to decide on the 2nd and the 3rd citizens’/artists’ actions or the right to define its significance.²⁸ As to the serious question of how collective resistance movement should work, they set up an example by refusing to have a fixed identity as a group and maximizing the moral of public space or the space for public opinions.

Their strategy was not to shirk away from the discord and the tension rising out of many different voices. Instead they opened up a space for diverse voices. They also actively demanded responses from the state and its administrative institutions. More importantly, they carried out their strategies very sensitively round the state-owned property, that is, MMCA. Just as Yejin Kim’s question “Isn’t MMCA a public institution?” reveals, what *Petititon 4 art* did was to problematize the deprivation and exclusion that the citizens

26 Black Panther-Euteum Yang. Poster Project. *Petititon 4 art*’s Facebook Page. 2015.12.23.

27 Charles Esche’s message was translated and posted on *Petititon 4 art*’s Facebook Page by Hyunjin Kim. “Art is the most expanded sensation. And it has more than economic values. Art measures and releases social tensions. Cultural institutions must be a place of deviation from and dissonance about all agreements made in the society. In this way, they allow individual expressions and form conditions for evolvement and change of social values. If we do not protect the areas of dissonance, the tensions are restrained and positive social changes will be more difficult. Therefore, this indicates the interest in the space where we can freely and openly discuss and share all ideas and opinions of the minority. (*Petititon 4 art*’s Facebook Page. 2015.11.14.)

28 “Greetings from *Petititon 4 art* Working Group.” *Petititon 4 art*’s Facebook Page. 2015.12.24.

experienced when they were denied the joint ownership of public property against their rightful expectation. Their collective action started from the painful recognition that national/public museums could not be “the commons” simply on the general ground²⁹ that, “the national and public art museum is operated by tax, so it is a common place.”³⁰ Just like the phrase “There is no commons without commoning”, a state-owned property, as long as it is fixed in the material definition of ‘common resources’ based on the ownership of the state, does not allow room for citizens’ participation in its public ownership. Public ownership can be realized only through commoning, which is “an act of the public to produce common things in democratic ways.”³¹

Negri and Hardt hold that “what is common” is neither private nor public. In other words, it is “against the dominance of private ownership and the strategies of neoliberalism, on the one hand, and on the other, it is against the dominance of public ownership, that is, the regulation and control of the state.” What they mean is that the alternative of private ownership is not public ownership and vice versa. In spite of the differences between the two, they both systematically restrict the access to the common by monopolizing decision making process.³² Republicanism, which is founded on sacrosanctity and inviolability of the private ownership of property, therefore, excludes or subordinates those without means. This republicanism, in other words, the concept of the republic of property emerged after the

29 Chaeyoung Lee, “Curators’ Round Table Talk.” p. 83.

30 Commons is a concept that is defined and explored in diverse areas. For example, Hunkyo Jang suggests to use the term “(social) movement for common resources.” He defines the concept as a social movement for building practical systems for individual and collective progress. He translated the term ‘commons’ as ‘common resources system’ and defined the term as ‘a system to secure resources from which a multitude of individuals can profit and to sustain them.’ On the other hand, Pascal Gielen, agreeing with Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt’s political plan, applies the concept of commons to the museum. He redefines the museum as a ‘space where multiple voices and their opposing voices resonate together.’ “The emergence of common resources movement and its significance in Korea.” *Now, Here Commons’ 2018 Commons Network Workshop Source Book*. Jeju University Common Resources and Sustainable Society Research Institute-Seoul National University Asia City Center-Kyunguisoen Commons Citizen’s Action. 2018.5.2.-5.4, p. 20. Lee, Suyoung. “Curators’ Round Table Talk.” p.83.

31 Jung, Namyoung. “Commons Movement and Life Politics.” *Now, Here Commons’ 2018 Commons Network Workshop Source Book*. pp. 13-14.

32 Negri, Antonio and Michael Hardt. *Community*. Trans. Namyoung Jung and Youngkwang Yun. Sawol Ui Cheg. 2009, pp. 9-25.

modern bourgeois revolution and it combined law with capital. Negri and Hardt emphasize that ‘the republic of property’ as such was established through denying the power of people to constitute a new political system or political community spurred by revolution or through constraining mechanisms of autonomy expressed through new, dynamic and open political forms. Instead, it absorbed the constructive power or impulse into “something like the national hereditary property, or like the government property that the state is in charge of.” As a result, the constructive power was “blocked by the property right”, and “expelled from the everyday lives of citizens.”³³

Thus, within the ‘republic of property’ which is a modern political system founded on the priority of ownership, legal provisions of ‘state-owned property’ is the core concept that represents the political dynamics of MMCA. Furthermore, just like in Executive Agencies, the boundary between private ownership and public ownership since neoliberalism have radically broken. Negri and Hardts point out that in recent decades neoliberal policies have made cultural products private property, in an attempt to privatize what is public.³⁴ Privatization as such was manifested in bureaucratic dominance more strongly enforced in our lives.

The problem is that this republic of property—a world created through globalization—is what we all share and that it is a world without ‘exterior.’ Thus, Negri and Hardt maintain that we cannot resist it by taking refuge in an ‘outside’ or imagining an outside for our alternative. Instead, we need to focus on discovering or producing democratic social relations and institutional forms that can be realized in our given reality, or “the process of people learning the techniques of autonomy and inventing sustainable forms of social organizations.”³⁵ The process will be, on the one hand, a practice of public sharing through commoning the common resources that have been privatized by state or government agencies through bureaucratic domination.

Siwoo Jin and Hyunsong Lee dissected a photograph of Geunhye Park, the former president, into several pieces and combined only four

33 Negri, Antonio and Michael Hardt. *ibid.* pp. 36-39.

34 Negri, Antonio and Michael Hardt. *ibid.* p. 17.

35 Negri, Antonio and Michael Hardt. pp. 15-6.

pieces out of them in their poster project. By manipulating a face of power, they question the state power and the necessity of discussion and intervention, demanding us to think about how the constructive power works. According to Siwoo Jin, the constructive power of *Petititon 4* art was a movement like a small ember lit by artists' reflections on a chronic problem stemming from their compromise with the power and their actions to fix the problem themselves.³⁶ This small ember, however, has the capability to disassemble the power to broken pieces, which can never be restored to its original state. In this sense, the citizenship/artist behavior of *Petititon 4* art should be commemorated as an important practice of commoning--how they tried to reorganize and reestablish the power structure surrounding MMCA, its fixed bureaucratic control system and the legal concept of public property (state property), which supports the former two, by drawing them into a space of expanded solidarity.