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JEREMY SCOTT AND ROSSON CROW

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NATURAL INSTINCT

At Seomi International, contemporary artists explore the present while connecting to the past.

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY SAM FROST



A stool by Lee Hun Chung, 2015. Left: Dae-Sup Kwon's *Moon Jars*, 2009, Yunho Kim's print *A Snowy Path* and a piece by Choi Byung Hoon incorporating red oak and stone, 2012.

"These traditions have been in Korea for thousands of years.
And closeness to nature is in the culture."
—Linus Adolfsson

Seomi International occupies the famed-but-tiny Case Study House 21 by Pierre Koenig, tucked into the rustic hills of Laurel Canyon in Los Angeles. It's a unique place for a gallery, but their program of South Korean art and design fits nicely within the modernist confines. Particularly apt is their current exhibition, "Naturalism: In Modernization and Destruction," on view from April 25 through June 24. Linus Adolfsson, a partner at Seomi International, took us on a tour of the exhibition.

Why are a lot of Korean artists using naturalism at this time?

After the Second World War, many countries like Germany, Sweden and Italy had a renaissance of traditional handcraft. South Korea wasn't allowed that because of the Korean War. But these traditions have been in Korea for thousands of years. And closeness to nature is in the culture. We associate the handcraft to naturalism.

For instance, Bae Se Hwa made a bench piece that represents the mountains of Korea, which he replicates with steamed walnut. Choi Byung Hoon finds shapes in nature and produces them in marble and granite.

What Kim Jinsik is doing is providing a canvas for nature itself in his reflections—he makes his work from marble and polished steel. People see their work as beautiful handcraft. But put in the context of history, it makes even more sense. So many things today are made artificially and by machinery.

Do any of the artists connect Los Angeles with what they're doing?

Lee Hun Chung was just here. He comes frequently, and wants to create a studio here. The artists made their pieces independently of Los Angeles, but this is such a perfect place to do this—with the weather, the indoor/outdoor idea and also with people's creativity.

At Art Basel Hong Kong, I noticed that a lot of the work—from Korean artists to Olafur Eliasson—was about naturalism.

That's spot-on. When one artist explores something, more and more people get intrigued. For those of us who primarily work in the functional art and design market, it's been a very big trend for the last five years. Naturalism is a concept everyone can relate to, so it makes some sense to talk about it.