

THE FIRST SURVEY OF MINJUNG KIM TO OPEN AT THE HILL ART FOUNDATION



Mountain, 2014 ©Minjung Kim Photo by Matthew Herrmann

Minjung Kim

Minjung Kim opened in March, but was only on view for a short time before the shutdown due to Covid-19; it reopened in September 2020 and has been extended through February 2021.

The Hill Art Foundation is honored to present the first career survey of Minjung Kim, whose work merges the traditions of Korean watercolor painting and calligraphy with concepts of minimalism and abstraction.

The exhibition is a close collaboration between the artists and curatorial advisor Boon Hui Tan, the Director of the Asia Society Museum and the Asia Society's Vice President for Global Artistic Programs. Structured to include 37 paintings drawn from all major stages of Kim's career, the exhibition showcases the astonishing range of her exploration of the interaction between ink and paper.

Born in Korea in 1962, Kim studied watercolor and calligraphy under masters of the form in childhood and at university, developing an extremely controlled use of the brush, which "channels" energy and directs it onto the paper. In the early 1990s, she moved to Europe, where she studied at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera and was significantly influenced by concepts of the western avant-garde. Kim has since lived and worked in Italy, France, and, more recently, New York, and has continuously employed the traditional Korean material of Hanji as she reinterprets Korean aesthetics through a Western, contemporary lens.

Deeply rooted within Korean culture, Hanji is a strong paper made from the inner bark of the mulberry tree. Hanji has a tactile surface and wide fibers that allow for air and light to pass through. Besides ink and water, Kim employs fire and air to mark the material, burning the edges or center with an incense stick or a candle, and then layering the paper using a complex but delicate collage technique. Through the repetitive work of burning and layering mulberry Hanji paper, she conveys the process of emotional healing and meditation. The burnt sections of paper generate an effect of three-dimensionality, provide the viewer with a chronological dimension, and indicate layers of time symbolized by the layers of paper.

Working with limited materials—Hanji, glue, fire, air, and, occasionally, color—Kim nonetheless creates a varied body of work. In certain series, she dyes the Hanji or builds a tonal scale by precisely manipulating the absorption of ink, as in the *Mountain* series—monochromatic works composed of horizontal, undulating waves of black, blue, or red ink applied to Hanji paper in varying densities and shades.

“In the context of the current fascination with contemporary ink practice from East Asia, Minjung Kim’s practice is unique in its distillation of ink traditions and European painting practice. The artist apprenticed under an ink master and a watercolorist from when she was six years old. Her family’s origins are in Gwangju, where the old literati traditions were continued but at the same time, the birthplace of the struggle for a new contemporary artistic language and ethos aligned to the new emergent democratic Korea of the 1980s. During her later Italian art education, Kim was exposed to both classical and post-war Italian and European movements. Yet her defining aesthetic is rooted in East Asian literati traditions.

While post-war conceptualism in the West prioritized artistic concept rather than form as the defining feature of an artwork, Kim’s practice gives space and weight to the interaction of the materials of her art practice as an equal ‘creator’ of her works. Kim’s sensitivity and deep knowledge of how wet ink interacts in complex ways with the traditional mulberry paper that she uses is evident in her practice. As an artist she sets up an encounter between ink and paper, anticipating but not completely controlling the way her various grades of paper absorb the ink washes that she applies. Each work, therefore is a product of a level of unpredictability, producing the nuanced and sophisticated ink forms that we see in her work. Her practice can be seen almost like a fractal, where a limited group of materials work together in a staged encounter to produce an extraordinary range of visual forms and shades.”

– *Boon Hui Tan, curatorial advisor*

Minjung Kim was born in Gwangju, Korea in 1962 and lives and works in Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France, and New York. Following studies at Hong Ik University in Seoul, she moved to Milan in 1991 where she studied at Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera. She has been the subject of solo exhibitions at Musée des Arts asiatiques, Nice, France (2017); Hermès Foundation, Singapore (2017); OCI Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea (2015); Palazzo Caboto, Venice, Italy (2015); Oko, New York, USA (2014); Studio d'Arte Raffaelli, Trento, Italy (2014); and MACRO, Rome, Italy

(2012). She was included in the Gwangju Biennale (2004 and 2018). Her work is represented in numerous international public collections including the British Museum, London, United Kingdom; Musée des Arts asiatiques, Nice, France; Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, New York, USA; Asia Society, New York, USA; Fondazione Palazzo Bricherasio, Turin, Italy; and UniCredit Art Collection, Italy.

The Hill Art Foundation

The Hill Art Foundation is a public exhibition and education space that presents rotating exhibitions and ongoing arts education programs. Opened in 2019 in a custom-built 7,700-square-foot space in New York's Chelsea neighborhood, the Foundation is free and open to the public. Exhibitions include works on loan from the Hill Collection, as well as collaborative projects with leading artists, collections, and institutions. The Foundation was founded by J. Tomilson and Janine Hill, collectors and philanthropists based in New York. The Foundation offers year-round educational programming for New York City high school students through two unique programs, Teen Curators and Teen Educators at Hill Art Foundation.

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