

KUKJE GALLERY



Kukje Gallery Presents:

Ha Chong-Hyun
(Korean, b. 1935)

September 17 – October 25, 2015
Kukje Gallery, K1 & K2

Press Conference:
September 17, 11am

www.kukjegallery.com

September 10, 2015 (Seoul) – Kukje Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of Ha Chong-Hyun, one of the leading members of the seminal art movement Dansaekhwa. This exhibition provides a comprehensive overview including works from Ha's more than fifty years of painting. The exhibition includes new works made specifically for this show. This historic exhibition is installed in both K1 and K2, framing the artist's unique vocabulary and distinctive use of materials that tie him so closely with Dansaekhwa. Ha's mastery of *matière* is particularly evident in his *Conjunction* series, where he uses burlap as canvas and pushes paint from the obverse of the canvas to create visceral new surfaces.

Since the 1970s, Ha Chong-Hyun has continuously explored his technique of utilizing both sides of the canvas. This unconventional method of pushing paint through the picture plane illustrates the artist's defiant attitude towards pre-existing modes of painting, a critical stance that has made him a celebrated voice of Dansaekhwa and an important avant-garde figure in Korea. According to Joan Kee, Professor of Art History at the University of Michigan, Ha's contributions can be understood best as embodied by his emphasis on materiality rather than the genre of monochrome painting.¹ The modes of expression in Ha Chong-Hyun's practice of "Dansaek" can be seen as

¹ Joan Kee, *Dansaekhwa*, Collateral Event of the 56th International Art Exhibition - la Biennale di Venezia catalog, August 2015.

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54 Samcheong-ro, Jongno-gu, Seoul, Korea 110-200 T+82 2 735 8449 F+82 2 733 4879 kukje@kukjegallery.com www.kukjegallery.com

experimental research, investigating the way performance combines with material choices to complete a composition.

The Dansaekhwa that Ha Chong-Hyun has pursued for half a century does not try to signify or define a certain aesthetic strategy, but can be expressed through the artist's physical action and interaction with the canvas. It is also born out of the belief that the most modest expression or application of color can activate a painting.² This emphasis on the performance of painting can be seen clearly in Ha's use of soot in his most recent work. According to the artist, a new color is born when a work that has been painted white is subsequently saturated with heavy char smoke. For Ha, this unique process produces an unprecedented natural color that cannot be artificially created. Rather than being a performance, this physical process again showcases his interest in research methodology and his ability to discover more natural ways of expression by investigating the properties of materials.

Ha's approach creates natural color on the canvas, effectively representing a phenomenon of aging or the patina of weather. The earthen colors and his use of black not only possess a specific tonal range, but also resemble traditional Korean roof tiles that grow discolored due to rain and the passage of time. This emphasis on familiar colors and material specificity is of particular importance to the artist. Within the philosophy of Dansaekhwa, color can exist as a specific object, and from this perspective, a work results in a synthesis between its evocation, paint, and action. The American critic Robert C. Morgan has observed that Ha's consistent use of the title "Conjunction" to name his series of works is a clue to understanding his work. He argues that the title proposes a type of aesthetic experience and suggests the merger suggested by the title describes a narrative theme and also refers to a collision between the spiritual and the secular.³

This exhibition, the artist's first comprehensive solo show with Kukje Gallery, provides an invaluable opportunity to both review his historic contribution to Dansaekhwa and to further extend the conversation about the role of painting in post-war art. Still active and making exceptional works of great subtlety and beauty, Ha Chong-Hyun continues to add to his legacy as one of Korea's most important contemporary art masters.

ABOUT HA CHONG-HYUN

Ha Chong-Hyun's method of pushing thick paint from the obverse side of stretched hemp canvas forms his own unique sculptural process, similar to Lucio Fontana's definitive method of puncturing the canvas and Frank Stella's method of emphasizing the outline of the support. Concise and tranquil, Ha's most well-known series

² Roundtable Conversation, organized by Yongwoo Lee, Kukje Gallery, Jan 22, 2015.

³ Robert C. Morgan, Ha Chong Hyun: The traces on the wall, Ha Chong Hyun catalog, March 2008.

Conjunction explores various unorthodox and traditional materials such as newspaper, paper, barbed-wire, and the empty grain sacks used to send USAID food following the Korean War. While seemingly prosaic everyday objects, these materials embody the social consciousness of that time. Considered in their historical context, they allow the viewer to connect to the artist's childhood and the way Ha's artistic evolution mirrors the changing values of the latter part of the 20th century. Throughout his career, Ha has focused on oil painting, treating paint as a substance. His unique method of pushing paint from the back of the canvas represents the repressed pain and anger that resulted from Korea's rapid industrialization and complex socio-political issues that continue to shape the country.

Ha Chong-Hyun has lived and worked in Seoul since graduating from Hongik University in 1959. Awarded an honorary doctorate degree from Hongik University, he served as the Dean of the Fine Arts College from 1990-1994. From 2001 to 2006 Ha was the Director of the Seoul Museum of Art. He was the subject of a major retrospective at the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea, Gwacheon (2012). In 2014 Ha mounted a critically acclaimed solo exhibition at Blum and Poe Gallery, New York. Ha has exhibited both nationally and internationally at venues such as Palazzo Contarini Polignac in Venice (2015), National Museum of Indonesia, Jakarta (2014), Daegue Art Museum in South Korea (2011), Prague Biennale 4 (2009), Busan Biennale 5 (2008), and Mudima Foundation of Contemporary Art in Milan (2003). His works are included in public collections at prominent institutions including Museum of Modern Art in New York, Art Institute of Chicago, M+Museum in Hong Kong, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum in Japan, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea, Seoul Museum of Art in Seoul, and Leeum, Samsung Museum of art in Seoul.

ABOUT KUKJE GALLERY

Founded in the center of Seoul in 1982 by Hyun-Sook Lee, Kukje Gallery is widely celebrated as a leader in shaping Korea's cultural landscape. Over the past three decades, the gallery has introduced world-class artists to Korean audiences, including Frank Stella, Joseph Beuys, Anish Kapoor, Bill Viola, Jenny Holzer, Eva Hesse, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Julian Opie, and Paul McCarthy amongst many others. Kukje Gallery has also played a vital role in supporting the careers of some of the most significant Korean artists such as Lee Ufan, Haegue Yang, Kibong Rhee, Jae-Eun Choi, Gimhongsok, Yeondoo Jung, Hong Seung-Hye, U Sunok, Sungsic Moon and Kira Kim.

As part of Kukje's mission to promote Korean artists abroad, the gallery participates annually in premier art fairs such as Art Basel (Hong Kong, Miami Beach and Basel), The Armory Show, Frieze & Frieze Masters and FIAC. Additionally, Kukje has spearheaded a tradition of scholarship and educational programming in the region

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through publishing museum quality catalogs to accompany their exhibitions and, more recently, by building an auditorium underneath its newest gallery space, K3, which hosts weekly lectures and film screenings for the local community.

In addition to the gallery's three exhibition spaces in Seoul, Kukje is also affiliated with Tina Kim Gallery in New York, which presents works by emerging Korean and international artists. The two galleries regularly collaborate on organizing exhibitions and also share booths at all major art fairs.

Image Credit: Ha Chong-Hyun, *Conjunction 15-04*, 2015, Oil on hemp cloth, 194 x 259cm.
Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery, Seoul.

MEDIA CONTACTS:

FITZ & CO:

Liza Eliano, liza.eliano@fitzandco.com, 646-589-0921

Nicole Rumore, nicole.rumore@fitzandco.com, 646-589-0928

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