

KUKJE GALLERY | PRESS RELEASE

Heejoon Lee Solo Exhibition *Heejoon Lee* at Kukje Gallery Busan

Press Conference: July 1 (Fri.), 2022, 12PM

Exhibition Dates: July 1 – August 14, 2022

Venue: Kukje Gallery Busan

Kukje Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition by Heejoon Lee from July 1 to August 14 at the gallery's Busan space. Heejoon Lee's abstract paintings combine painting and photography, taking images he gathers from his life from both his immediate surroundings as well as places he has traveled. The artist collects these images, editing and incorporating them into paintings that combine print media with a distinctive vocabulary of painted geometric shapes. The images of fleeting moments that the artist has compiled onto the canvas propose a new dimension of space through the layers of paint that don the artist's sentiments and experiences. The artist's first solo exhibition with Kukje Gallery will be comprised of 20 new paintings continuing his most representative series, *A Shape of Taste* (2018-) and *Image Architect* (2021-), alongside four sculptures that derive from his paintings.

Heejoon Lee's process starts from observation, as the artist records with his mobile phone the daily scenes, moments, and the surrounding spaces he encounters while walking or traveling. He returns to his studio or home, and looks through the photos until he finds an image that captures the same visceral sense experience he felt at the time. He then enlarges and edits the image and prints it onto paper that is then mounted directly onto the canvas so it functions like a ground. Gazing upon these spaces that embody the documented solid landscape, Lee tries to recall his first experience using all his senses, appealing to their tactility and visual gestalt, as well as their scent, which he then translates through his unique compositional method and palette. Lee's use of paint utilizes the thick *matière* of wet media, using it to render exquisite bands of color and precisely drawn small squares, teasing meaning from residual clumps of paint and a diverse vocabulary of dots, lines, planes, and curves. The abstract mixed media paintings that result from this intimate process, conjure up sensuous memory-rich space on the canvas.

A Shape of Taste, the heart of the artist's oeuvre since 2018, started upon Lee's return to Korea from studying abroad in the United Kingdom. He discovered that the familiar streets, stores, and the cafés he frequented had disappeared or changed dramatically in his absence. This dramatic shift in the landscape inspired the artist to view the multitude of colors and geometric shapes in the region he grew up in from a different perspective, utilizing photography as well as drawing and abstraction to record this feeling. *A Shape of Taste*, newly introduced for the first time in three years, translates the ever-changing experience of the street, paying attention to simple things such as changing rooftops, newly painted buildings, and jumbled staircases, translating them into charged metamorphic places. Alongside his new works, the exhibition will also feature three-dimensional works, which the artist has made since 2019 by dismantling, disassembling, and reconstructing his color-field paintings. The sculptures will draw contrasts and build harmony with the paintings, providing a rich narrative of Lee's language.

Serving as another significant pillar of Lee's art, the *Image Architect* series stems from the photo-collage works that were first introduced in his solo exhibition *The Tourist* in 2020. Heejoon Lee transcends his previous grammar of translating the everyday scenes into abstract paintings, and instead proposes a new methodology of more directly presenting the space that he has captured on the very forefront of the canvas. The scenes of the artist's memories that had previously been subtly embedded in the colors and planes of abstraction are here revealed as specific forms through the photo-collage. Here, the artist employs various colors, expressive lines, and geometric forms to divide and create new planes. Using his unique approach of painting on photographs, he engages the architectural space directly, covering it with opaque fields of color and geometric forms that emerge from the image, while at the same time directing the viewer's attention to

what remains. The thick application of paint on top of the black-and-white photographs reflects the sense of space and the time inherent to the process, recording the artist's memory through multitudes of layers that reveal and conceal simultaneously. The new photo-collage work included in the exhibition is an extension of the *Image Architect* series, as the artist shifts his focus from simple cityscapes to specific environments within architecture, moving beyond simply visualizing his experience and recreating it as abstract painting on canvas toward creating a spatial experience in which the architecture and painting coexist within the frame, proactively seeking an architectural potential of painting

Interested in architecture and his surrounding environment since his undergraduate studies, Heejoon Lee employs the tool of abstraction in his attempt to visualize the anonymous sensations of the city. It is through his persistent exploration of the medium of painting, the balance and rhythmic qualities of forms, the aesthetics that we naturally observe in our surroundings, and the sense of color and form he has acquired through his working process that he reinvents his two-dimensional frame. Referring to himself as a "builder," Lee has said that his process of laying paint on the space within the frame with a custom-made squeegee is akin to applying mortar to a brick wall. His meticulous observation of his surroundings comes from the artist's perception of architecture as a medium embodying contemporary society's values, along with daily scenes, food, fashion, and culture. For Heejoon Lee, the highly personal shapes and colors he adds to our cityscapes inform a pictorial gesture that not only expresses a personal relationship but articulates a candid and universalizing framing of daily life in constant flux.

About the Artist

Heejoon Lee (b.1988) works in Seoul, Korea. He received his BFA in Painting and Sculpture from Hongik University in 2012 and received his MFA in Fine Arts at Glasgow School of Art in 2014. Lee's solo exhibitions include *Image Architect* (2021) at Incheon Art Platform, *The Tourist* (2020) at l'espace71, *Emerald Skin* (2017) at Yeemock Gallery, *The Speakers* (2017) at Weekend, *Interior nor Exterior: Prototype* (2016) at Kigoja (Independent Arts Space Initiative), and he is currently in Artist-in-Residence at Seoul Art Space Geumcheon. Lee has participated in group exhibitions at distinguished institutions within Korea and abroad, including Art Sonje Center, Seoul (2021), Nam-Seoul Museum of Art (SeMA), Seoul (2019), Museum SAN, Wonju (2019), Sehwa Museum of Art, Seoul (2019), Artspace Hue, Paju (2019), Akureyri Art Museum, Iceland (2017), and Glasgow School of Art Showcase (2017). In 2021, he was selected as an Artist-in-Residence at Incheon Art Platform, and in 2019, he received the First Prize of the "New Hero" award, hosted by the monthly art magazine *Public Art*. His works are in public collections at the Seoul Museum of Art and MMCA Art Bank at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art.

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Heejoon Lee (b. 1988)

A Shape of Taste no.37

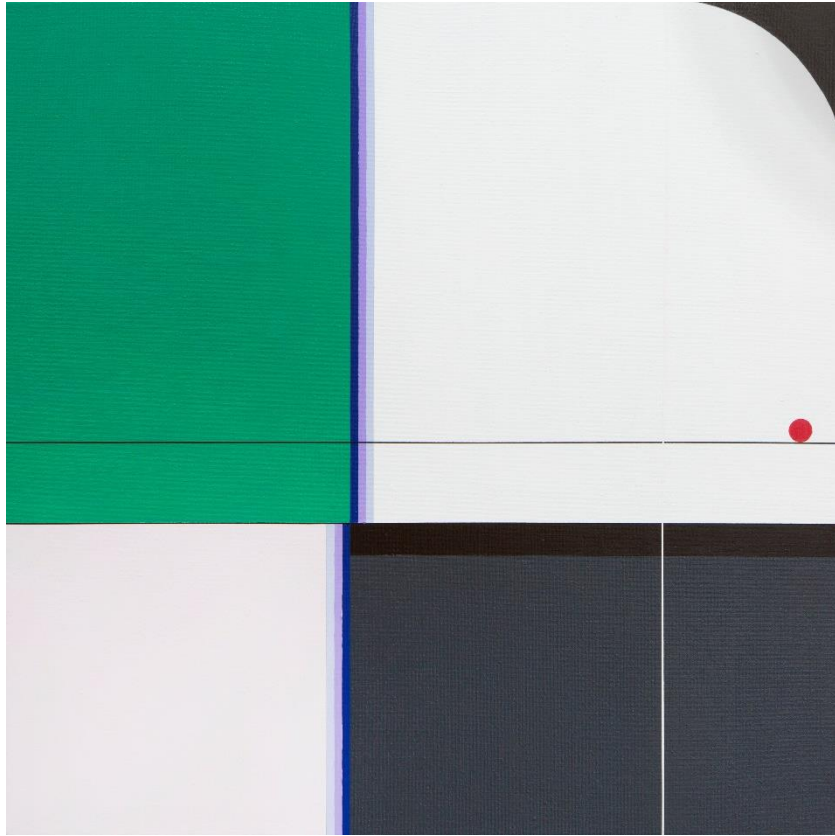
2022

Acrylic on canvas

53 x 53 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Heejoon Lee (b. 1988)

A Shape of Taste no.44

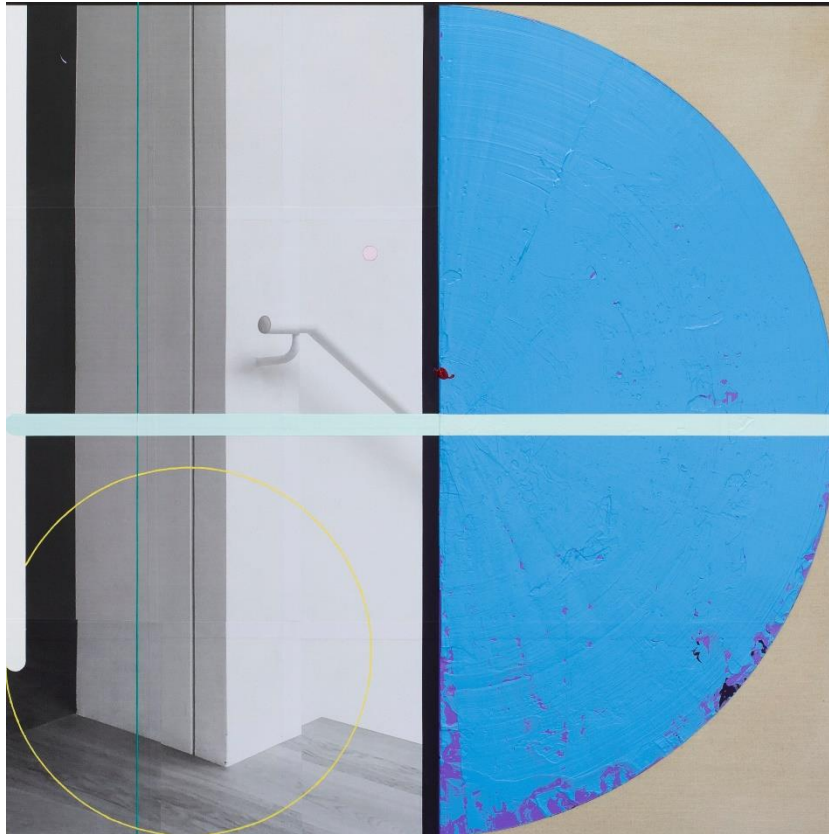
2022

Acrylic on canvas

53 x 53 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



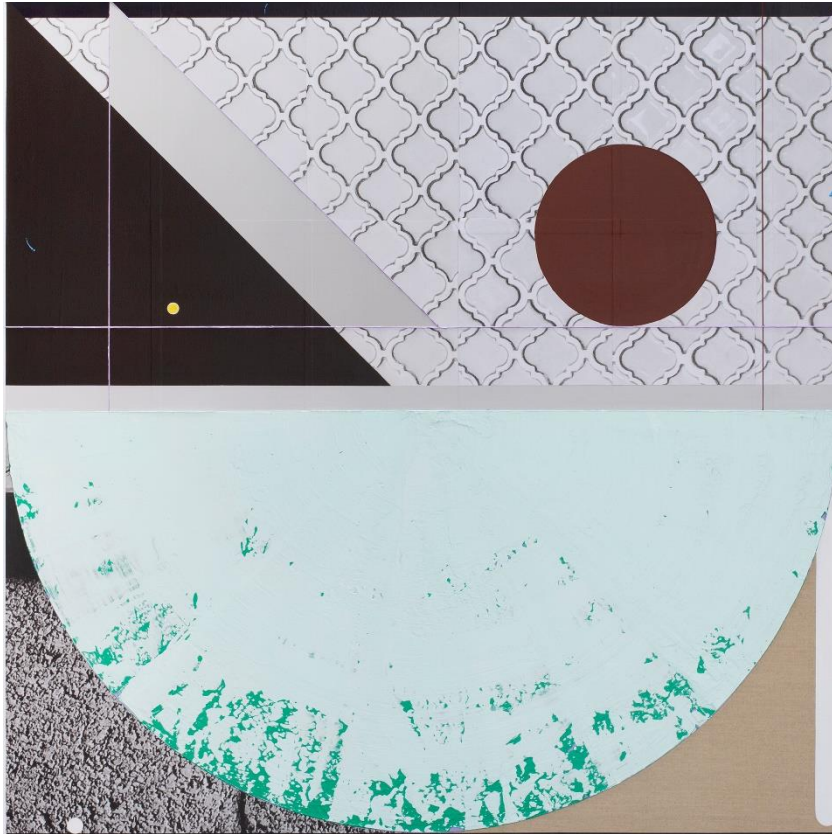
Heejoon Lee (b. 1988)

Handle

2022

Acrylic and photo-collage on canvas
100 x 100 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery
Image provided by Kukje Gallery



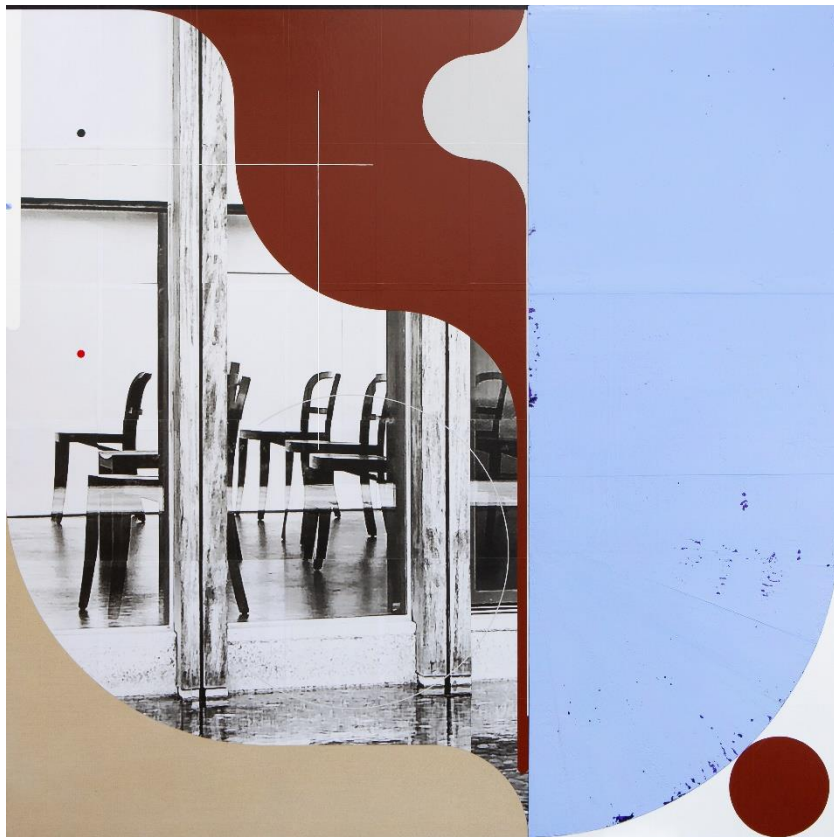
Heejoon Lee (b. 1988)

Jade and Brown

2022

Acrylic and photo-collage on canvas
100 x 100 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery
Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Heejoon Lee (b. 1988)

On Board a Ship

2022

Acrylic and photo-collage on canvas
160 x 160 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery
Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Heejoon Lee (b. 1988)

Salt, Palm, and Green

2022

Acrylic and photo-collage on canvas
160 x 160 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery
Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Heejoon Lee (b. 1988)

The Temperature of Barcelona

2022

Acrylic and photo-collage on canvas
160 x 160 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery
Image provided by Kukje Gallery