

KUKJE GALLERY | PRESS RELEASE

Na Kim Solo Exhibition *Easy Heavy* at Kukje Gallery Busan

Press Conference: May 8 (Wed.), 2024, 12pm at Kukje Gallery Busan

Exhibition Dates: May 8–June 30, 2024

Venue: Kukje Gallery Busan

Kukje Gallery is pleased to present *Easy Heavy*, a solo exhibition of Na Kim, at Kukje Gallery Busan from May 8 to June 30, 2024. Since 2011, the artist has continuously engaged the questions that arise when a designer adopts artistic terms or visual language. In this way, Kim has consistently challenged the boundaries between design and art and expanded the definition of each. Moreover, Na Kim persists in her self-referential practice—based on her own design work—continuing to redefine the language of visual arts and exhibitions. Marking the artist’s first-ever solo presentation at Kukje Gallery, the exhibition features nearly 40 works, including paintings, collages, hanging sculptures, and wall paintings, all of which explore the expressive potential and utility of graphic design elements within an exhibition space.

While working with brands like COS, Hermès, and museum art shops as a designer, Na Kim has focused on unique narratives that emerge when objects and materials are placed in an unexpected context. What potential effects might arise from rearranging elements inherent to familiar objects and events? This question, originating from a design perspective, confronts a new challenge within the context of contemporary art and exhibition. By reframing the question, Na Kim establishes a situation where design practice intersects with the system of art, resulting in an interrelationship and cross-contextual exchange between the printed page and the exhibition wall. As a result, she has created a conceptual practice in which visitors are able to discover new aesthetic possibilities in graphic design that evolves its functional role to act as an interpreter of culture. Additionally, her works generate layered interactions among diverse visual arts fields, such as art, design, architecture, and crafts.

“Easy Heavy,” the title of this exhibition, refers to a collection of objects that appear light but are far from superficial. Graphic design is often perceived as dispensable due to its role in production and advertising. However, Na Kim presents the role of image culture differently, through sampling and editing. She also utilizes images as a visual language that evokes various elements related to the exhibition environment, thus making them perform as a thought-provoking catalyst. The gallery is divided into two spaces: the front space showcases the artist’s representative series of works, while the rear introduces her more recent work that attempts new forms of conversation with everyday visual languages that have been re-edited.

The artist’s representative series include her *SET* series (2015-), *Piece* series (2020-) which transfer parts of the *SET* series onto canvas, and the *Found Composition* series (2009-) where the artist explores sketching as a way of training herself. *SET* is a series in which Kim imposes a new order on visual elements found in various media, regardless of whether they are individual works, commission projects, or exhibition pieces. Na Kim collected works she had been developing between 2006 and 2015, removed their respective contexts, and reclassified them according to their geometric criteria to create a sort of sample book entitled *SET*. Kim has also been presenting a series of works under the same title which reinterpret their geometrical components after summoning them back into diverse spaces. This involves transferring the surface of the sample book to the flat surface of the wall. Consequently, the book itself becomes an exhibition manual. In this process, the artist explores the distinction between design and fine art, challenging their separation as antiquated by unfolding her own reorganized visual language across various media. Furthermore, she strives to create a more comprehensive system that dismantles the boundaries between the working practices and forms of the two domains.

Upon entering the exhibition space at Kukje Gallery Busan, visitors first encounter *SET v.25: View N* (2024) installed on the wall. This piece represents a variation from the original *SET* series and a mural in which Kim

has altered the proportion of visual elements. This is in contrast to previous *SET* works that reproduce the proportions of the book's page, aligning the height of the book design and the wall. Additionally, *Piece 25-1* (2024), displayed alongside, is a painting where a part of the *SET* mural is transferred onto canvas. This creates an effect akin to viewing a segment of the mural in isolation, offering viewers the opportunity to engage with *SET* without any spatial constraints. In this context, *SET* serves not only as an autonomous artwork but also as a background composed of the same pattern as *Piece*. It prompts viewers to consider that the artist's experimentation, which began from a design perspective, intersects with the ongoing dialogue in the history of painting concerning the relationship between figure and ground, as well as the border between two- and three-dimensions. In this way, Na Kim's work illustrates a fluid journey from the "image" on the book page to the wall as a parallel plane, and then eventually to the traditional painting medium of canvas. In other words, it is her process of encoding the original and then subsequently decoding it by using the wall as a "medium."

Installed on the adjacent wall is the *Found Composition* series, which originated from the artist's habit of creating compositions using printed materials collected in A4 and A5 size formats. Using "found" everyday items such as stickers, wrapping paper, post-it notes, and envelopes, Kim engages with a daily practice of developing ideas, just as a painter produces sketches. At times, this practice becomes a part of preparatory work for a specific project. The works included in this exhibition belong to the latter case, as they are original images created for projects that have already been realized in the past. At once an archive and an independent work, the series encapsulates seminal aspects of Kim's work, including her artistic method based on collection and rearrangement, the process in which rules are developed, and the way in which a work serves not so much as the result of her practice but as an intermediary agent.

In this way, the exhibition is a kind of stage for the artist. Voluntarily assuming the role of a director, she carefully examines given structures or functional features of an exhibition space and installs works in a way that organically responds to the context, instead of following the conventions of an exhibition. This approach is exemplified in the second space of the exhibition, where the artist has engaged an easily overlooked structure encircling a pillar near the entrance. After spray painting the top part of the structure, Kim created a mural work that unfolds across the four internal walls of the exhibition hall at the same height. The work's title *H1276* (2024) reflects its actual height (127.6cm) as well as that of the marked structure. Elsewhere in her oeuvre, Kim has consistently employed the method of utilizing functional characteristics of architecture and incorporating them as basic units of her creative projects. Her use of small and large compositional units to determine the internal systems and disciplines of an operation of a space is not only a process by which Kim, as a designer and an artist, takes a step closer to an exhibition environment, but also an artistic practice of removing the pre-existing context of an exhibition while reframing it with new, autonomous rules.

Geometrical shapes, numbers, and letters are arranged in a disorderly manner on the top and bottom of *H1276* which spans the space. For these works, she first samples visual language that is mass-produced and easily encountered in everyday life, such as stickers or signs, through a process of abstraction. Then, she combines them with supports made of various materials including canvas, wool, acrylic, and gypsum. In fact, the artist has for a long time been obsessively collecting stickers full of graphic designs. The stickers, of course, hold Kim's personal memories and experiences; however, when an instruction or functional statement of the object is combined with an editing process or display that is completely unsuited to what the statement communicates, it successfully challenges its meaning. For example, *Final Notice* (2023), a phrase used to pressure urgent payment or certain requirements, is typically expected to feature bold colors and a glossy surface for heightened visibility; flipping the script, Kim renders it in cozy wool instead. Similarly, in works like *001110223* (2024) or *OP.QUS-TRVWX-Y-Z* (2024), the remaining blank space formed by untacking numbers and alphabets from a sticker sheet is expressed pictorially with acrylic paint applied. The geometric forms that depart from the existing context bring about unexpected effects within the exhibition space, showcasing their potential as a new language or 'medium' that reflects the surrounding environment.

Faced with the task of representation, rather than revisiting the traditional context of art history, Na Kim references various conditions under which an art exhibition is made, reinterpreting it within the language of design. By recontextualizing two-dimensional printed material within the exhibition space, a three-dimensional platform, she is able to deconstruct the relationship between an artwork and its spatial context. This radical methodology that lies beyond genres and media is only made possible by Kim's fluency in the worlds of both design and art. With this exhibition, Kim invites the viewers into an intriguing site for discussing

aesthetic values up until now unarticulated within the existing art historical language.

About the Artist

After having studied Industrial Design at KAIST, Daejeon, and Visual Communication Design at Hongik University, Seoul, Na Kim (b. 1979) graduated in Typography (M.Des) from ArtEZ Werkplaats Typografie, Arnhem in 2008. As an artist, she explores the complex interaction between the given structure and accidental discovery. In doing so, she persistently gathers everyday objects and happenings, continuously rearranging them in fiction forms. Na Kim currently lives and works in Seoul and Berlin, carrying out diverse projects as both an artist and a designer, and also runs a project space, LOOM in Berlin. Kim's major solo exhibitions include *TYVMXZU!!* (Efremidis, Berlin, 2023), *TESTER* (DOOSAN Gallery, Seoul, 2023), *OUTSIDE IN: FFC on 6, 7, 8* (ICA, Philadelphia, 2021), *Transitory Workplace, 56 (A to Z)*, Berlin, 2020), *Bottomless Bag* (Buk-Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, 2020), and *Found Abstracts* (Gallery Factory, Seoul, 2011). She has also participated in numerous group exhibitions and events, including Lisbon Architecture Triennale, Lisbon (2019); Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich (2017); National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (2015, 2013); Victoria and Albert Museum, London (2013); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2012); and Milan Triennale Museum, Milan (2011). Na Kim's works are included in the collections of the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea; Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris; and Die Neue Sammlung – The Design Museum, Munich.

The above press release is **under embargo** until the end of the relevant press conference.

Copyright and credit line **must be placed adjacent to or near** the reproduced images.

Images may be used solely during the relevant exhibition period for promotional purposes only, and **may not be edited** without prior permission.

High-resolution images are available for download via Webhard.

WWW.WEBHARD.NET | ID: kukjegallery | PW: kukje

KUKJE GALLERY | COMMUNICATIONS

T +82 2 3210 9807 | press@kukjegallery.com

KUKJE GALLERY

54 SAMCHEONG-RO, JONGNO-GU SEOUL, 03053 KOREA

T + 82 2 735 8449 | F + 82 2 733 4879 | WWW.KUKJEGALLERY.COM



Na Kim (b. 1979)

Piece 14-2

2020

Acrylic on canvas

53 x 45.5 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: UNREALSTUDIO

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Na Kim (b. 1979)

Home 2

2024

Acrylic paint, wood

25 x 75 x 9 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Dahahm Choi

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Na Kim (b. 1979)

194

2023

Gypsum, acrylic paint

27 x 27 x 1 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Dahahm Choi

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Na Kim (b. 1979)

Good Job

2023

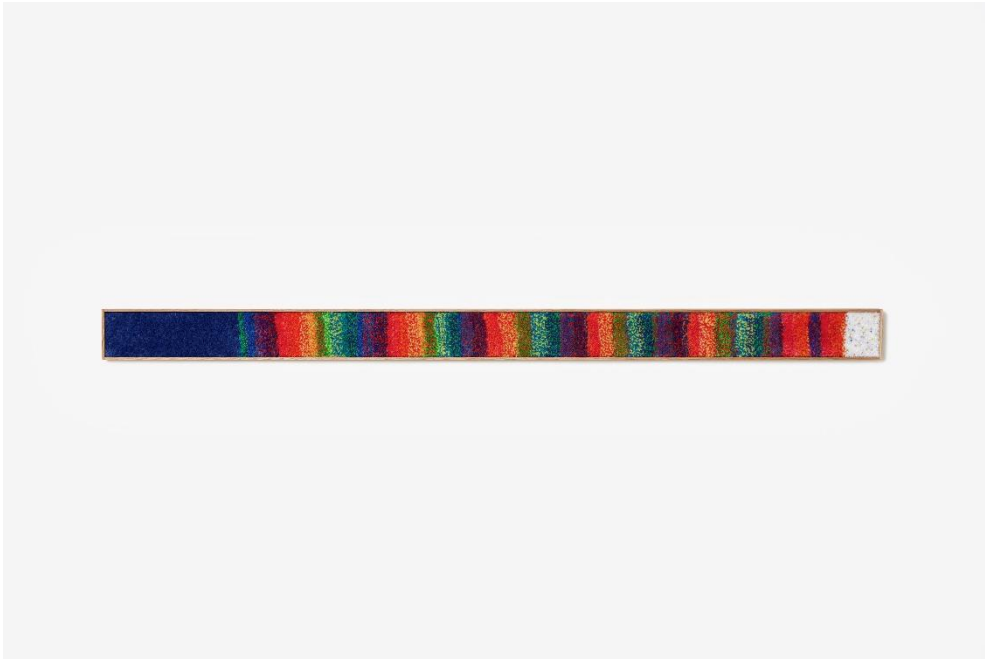
Wool, canvas, wood frame

60 x 61.5 x 3 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Dahahm Choi

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Na Kim (b. 1979)

Skirting S20-1

2023

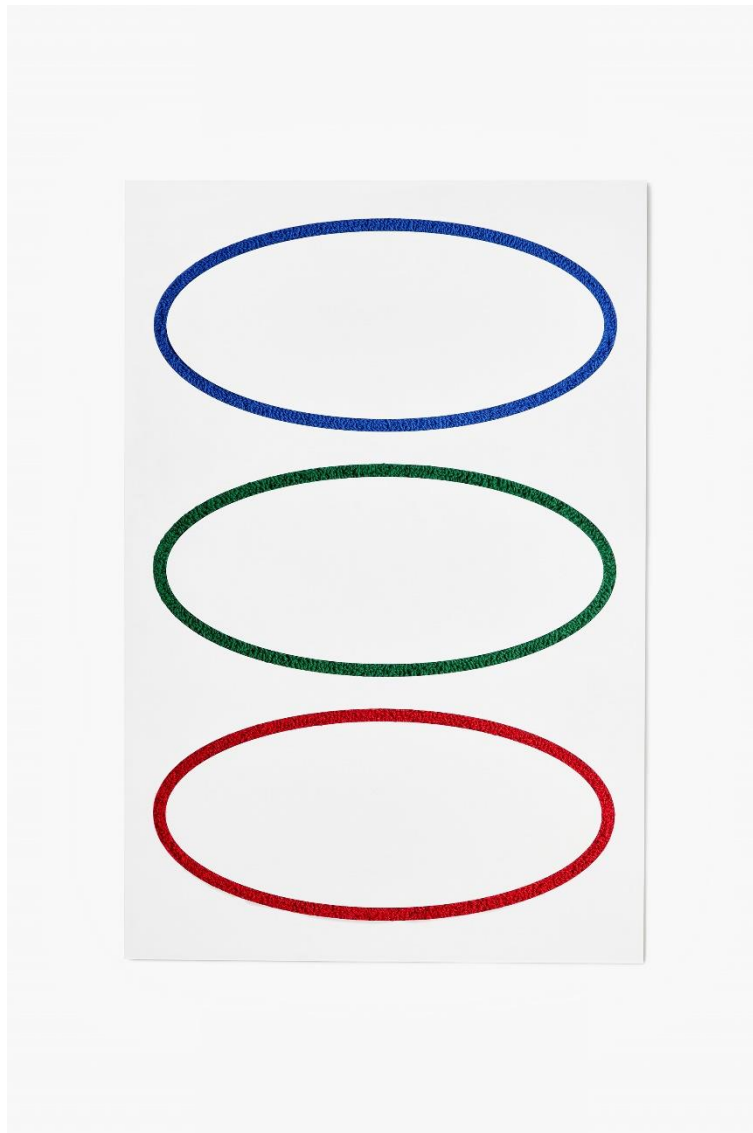
Wool, wood frame

10 x 150 x 3 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Dahahm Choi

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Na Kim (b. 1979)

Blank Halo

2024

Wool, acrylic paint, wood panel

120 x 80 x 4 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Dahahm Choi

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Na Kim (b. 1979)

Blank Sunset

2023

Wool, acrylic paint, wood panel

110 x 85 x 4 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Dahahm Choi

Image provided by Kukje Gallery