

KUKJE GALLERY | PRESS RELEASE

Lee Ufan Solo Exhibition *Lee Ufan* at Kukje Gallery

Press Conference: April 4 (Tues.), 2023, 12pm

Exhibition Dates: April 4 – May 28, 2023

Venue: Kukje Gallery K1, K2 2F, K2 garden

In the modern era we cannot function, as the world is haunted by the specters of 'God,' 'Man,' and now 'Information.' These ghosts shroud the whole world; the entire universe. Virtual reality cannot be made physical. It is unreachable and looks to be seen but is actually a closed world without substance or exterior. Humanity must be regenerated as one entity interacting with the external, moving beyond the ghost of the self-centered 'human,' so that to encounter that which is beyond us becomes most important. My work is extremely simple but has a unique physicality. It is neither object nor information. Rather it acts as an intermediary, an open gate, through which to see both sides. In short, my work is a place to encounter oneself and others, both the internal and the external; suggesting a new reality.

– Lee Ufan¹

Kukje Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of Lee Ufan on view from April 4 to May 28, 2023. This is his second solo show at Kukje Gallery, following his first exhibition in 2009, and the first time in 12 years that he is showing his work in Korea, outside of Space Lee Ufan at Busan Museum of Art founded in 2015. Across the gallery's K1 space, the second floor of K2 space, and the garden, this exhibition includes six sculptures and four drawings that range from the 1980s to new works. This body of sculptures displayed in each exhibition space is an extension of Lee's *Relatum* series that began in 1968, when he also began to take a leading role in the avant-garde movement of Mono-ha.

Rather than starting from a blank slate and creating expressions of self-representation in an objective form, Lee Ufan's works represent fragments of phenomena that interlock with reality and expressions that are open to exchange with others or the world. Although various aesthetic elements or intentions are inevitably added to the work by the artist throughout his practice, Lee endeavors to distill his ideas into the most concise and restrained forms and present them in neutral places, such as the white cube, to engage with everyday life.

Lee titles all his sculptures *Relatum* and often provides subtitles to hint at possible associations without giving a firm interpretation. *Relatum* signifies a relation that is different from the readily definable "relationship," but one that explores the artist's interest in how individual elements of a work are in a fluid relationship and where their context is constantly changing. In this way, the viewer, who directly intervenes in the space of the work as a *relatum*—along with factors such as the stone representing nature and the steel plate representing industrial society—feels a part of the conversation between the two objects or is led to reflect on the idea of co-presence by silently observing their conversation. Regarding this symbiosis, Lee has said, "A stone is a lump of time. It is older than Earth. Steel plates are extracted from stones. In other words, the stone and the steel plate are siblings to each other. The idea of my work is to hint at the future through the encounter of a stone and a steel plate, the dialogue between nature and civilization." It is in light of this focus on time that Lee's work speaks to the void—defined by resonance and energy born out of collisions that manifest variability and where the inner and the outer aspects communicate.

¹ Lee Ufan, *Space Lee Ufan* (Busan Museum of Art, 2015), 14.

Lee employs an anthropomorphic metaphor in *Relatum – The Kiss* (2023), installed in the rear gallery of the K1 space, capturing a moment of encounter. As can be inferred by its subtitle, two stones are making a point of encounter as if they are kissing, while two individual chains surrounding them overlap and cross each other, thereby creating a point of intersection. The center of the circular chains leaning towards the position of each stone seems to emerge from the force of this encounter. As a result, the work evokes a strong sense of motion familiar from Lee's painting series *From Line* and *From Point*. Similar to this work is *Relatum – Lover* (1986), in which two stones seem to attempt to overcome the division in between the two disjointed steel plates and come into contact, with the aspiration to be as close to each other as possible. The gesture Lee employs in these *Relatum* series is not only an aesthetic gesture but a factor of amplification wherein the sculpture functions as a device to awaken our sense of everyday experience by capturing a phenomenon of reality, imbued with the uncanny balance between the lifeless objects and the real-life event of the living.

Installed in the corner of the rear gallery of K1 is a series of four drawings on paper titled *Dialogue*. Drawn using acrylic and charcoal, these works relate to Lee's iconic painting series *Dialogue*. Each drawing appears as a sort of map depicting elements of different works; for example, the familiar stroke of paint in *Dialogue* is here done with acrylic and charcoal and is accompanied by some stark lines. In another, Lee has drawn some stones that sit placidly on the ground surrounded by white space. Standing in front of these simple spellbinding works, the viewer feels a palpable tension, encountering deep introspection and meditation as in front of *Relatum*. While different and more restrained in media than the *Dialogue* paintings, the drawing media still communicates that regardless of its form—whether it be a sculpture, drawing, steel, or a line—Lee is able to coax his viewers into a dialogue with the subject of infinity.

On the second floor of the gallery's K2 space is *Relatum – The Sound Cylinder* (1996/2023), consisting of a stone leaning on a hollow steel cylinder. From the five holes on the surface of the cylinder emerges the sound of the Emile Bell, also known as the Sacred Bell of Great King Seongdeok, the largest extant bronze bell in Korea, as well as nature sounds, such as birds in the woods, rain and thunder, and a mountain brook. Here, the artist once again invites the viewer to meditate on the effects aroused by the encounter of two individual objects by simply exposing the materiality of the juxtaposed natural stone and steel. Rather than making a direct interference, the "resonance" as an effect generated by such an encounter, corresponds to the nature of sound in that both forms of resonance are invisible. Playing on the medium of air, this work evokes how two distinct forms of resonance can form a *relatum*.

Installed on the same floor of the K2 space is *Relatum – Seem* (2009), which is composed of a stone facing an empty canvas. The empty canvas evokes minimalist predecessors such as *White Painting* (1951) by Robert Rauschenberg or the work *4'33"* (1952) by John Cage. However, Lee's empty canvas deliberately vacates any remark of statements that challenges the binary distinctions between music and non-music, or painting and non-painting, as explored in those works previously mentioned. Instead, the white canvas and the dimly lit stone standing in front simply remain silent and open, reminiscent of deep meditation that invites the viewer to join the foreign yet productive dialogue. In so doing, the work becomes a condensed version of a space where complex layers of interactions unfold symbiotically within the presence of the viewer. With a profound reflection on infinity embodied in every work, this exhibition invites the viewer to experience the grand narrative and theory that underlie the lifelong practice of Lee Ufan.

About the Artist

Lee Ufan (b. 1936) was born in Haman, South Korea and spent his childhood in Busan. He attended Seoul National University's College of Fine Arts during the Korean War but dropped out and moved to Japan, graduating from Nihon University in 1961 with a bachelor's in philosophy. Having been interested in French phenomenology, which was popular at the time, he has since pursued the connection between East Asian and European ideologies and has continued to consciously and structurally cross-reference Eastern and Western cultures.

Lee Ufan is one of the founding members of Mono-ha, a movement largely defined by the artist's seminal text from the late 1960s. The art movement revolving around materials and their properties soon entered the mainstream art movement in Japan by the 1970s and played a significant role in establishing a theoretical ground for modern art in Korea. Instead of representing a particular art movement or artistic

language, he created a language of universality by continuously questioning and examining the binary distinctions between the East and the West; nature and artificiality; spirituality and materiality; intuitiveness and logicity. It is through this way that he was able to work across the fields of painting and sculpture to art theory and criticism.

Selected awards include the UNESCO Prize in 2000 and the Praemium Imperiale for painting in 2001, as well as the National Order of Cultural Merit in 2013 for his contribution to the development of Korea's art and culture. His works have been exhibited in many solo and group exhibitions in major institutions around the world, including Berlin National Galerie, Berlin, Germany (1982); the Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels, Belgium (2008); Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA (2011); Château de Versailles, Versailles, France (2014); Centre Pompidou-Metz, Metz, France (2019); and Dia: Beacon, New York, USA (2019). Lee also respectively participated in the collateral exhibitions of the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007) and 14th Biennale de Lyon (2017), and held major retrospective exhibitions in Japan in 2022, at the Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Kobe, and the National Art Center, Tokyo. He currently lives and works globally, across Korea, Japan, and France.

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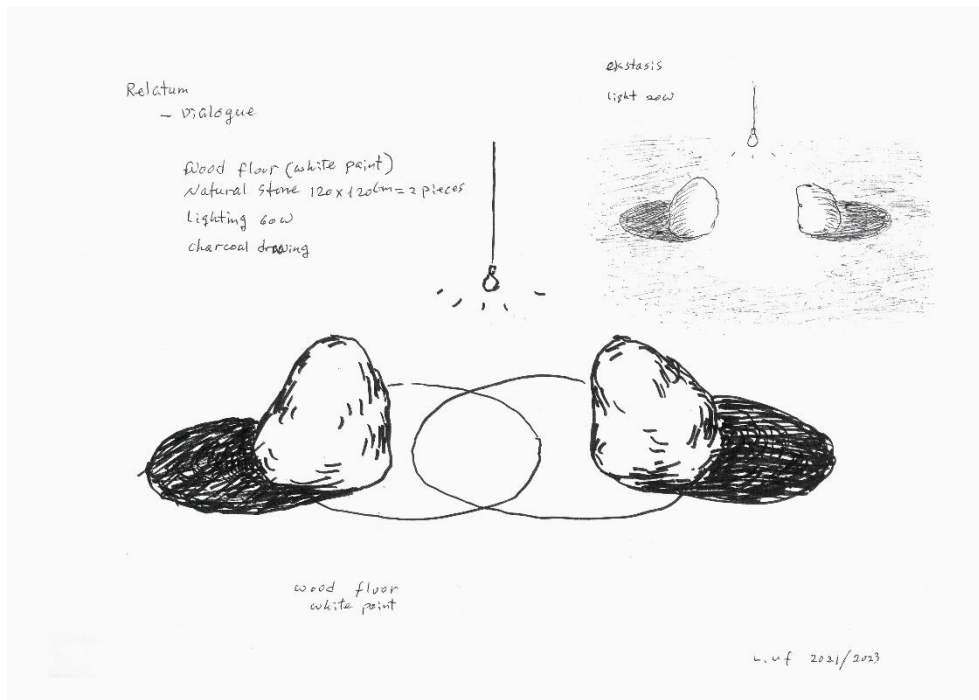
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Lee Ufan (b. 1936)

Drawing for *Relatum - Dialogue*
2021/2023

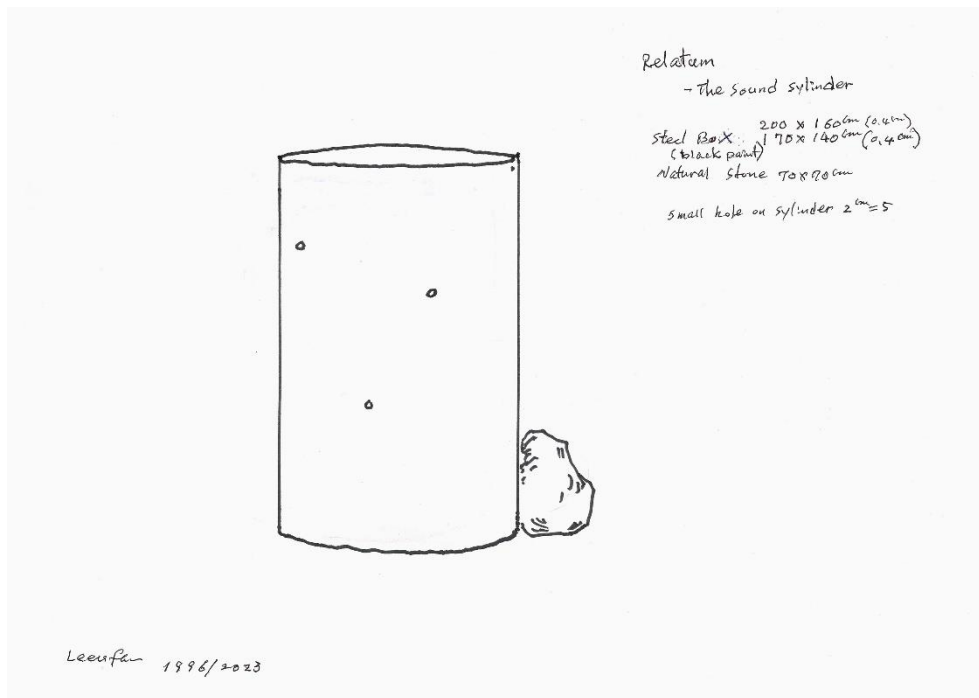
Wood floor, white paint, natural stone, light bulb, charcoal drawing

Natural stone: 120 x 120 cm (2 pieces)

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

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Lee Ufan (b. 1936)

Drawing for *Relatum - The Sound Cylinder*
1996/2023

Steel box, natural stone, black paint

Steel box: 170 x 140 x 0.4 cm

Natural stone: 70 x 70 cm

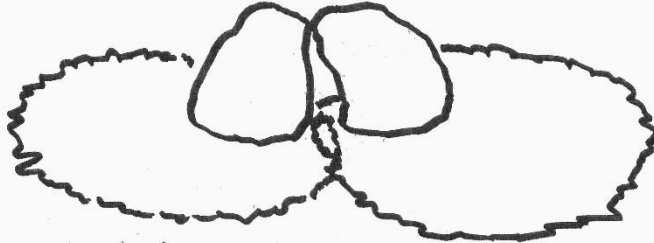
Small holes on cylinder (5): 2 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

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Relatum
- The Kiss



Natural stone 2 pieces, 100x70cm = 2
steel chain 2 pieces, 400x1cm = 2
(3rd)

Lee Ufan (b. 1936)

Drawing for *Relatum - The Kiss*
2023

Natural stone and steel chain

Natural stone: 100 x 70 cm (2 pieces)

Steel chain: 400 x 2 cm (2 pieces)

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

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