

KUKJE GALLERY | PRESS RELEASE

Wook-kyung Choi Solo Exhibition *Wook-kyung Choi*

Press Event: June 18 (Thurs.), 2020, 11AM – 1:30PM at Kukje Gallery K1

Exhibition Dates: June 18 – July 31, 2020

Venue: Kukje Gallery K1

My experiences, as a woman and a painter, serve as a daily source for the creative inspiration necessary for my work. My paintings are collaged bits of time from my past and present experiences. Each work has its own life as the forms grow and I convey my feelings into a visual language. My paintings are about my life but I am not simply telling stories. I am trying to express, visually, my experience of the moment lived. I hope to share, to communicate, and to create an empathy for the experience.

– Wook-kyung Choi

Kukje Gallery is pleased to announce a solo exhibition of Wook-kyung Choi (1940-1985), an artist known for her bold abstract paintings and works on paper whose practice signaled a timely intercultural exchange between the United States and Korea. This inaugural show of Wook-kyung Choi's work at Kukje Gallery's newly renovated K1 building marks the artist's third exhibition at the gallery following shows in 2016 and 2005. On view from June 18 through July 31, 2020, and covering the two exhibition spaces on the ground floor of the building, the exhibition provides an opportunity to survey Choi's groundbreaking experimentation evident in her paintings and collages, with respect to her black and white ink drawings produced from the 1960s through 1975.

The first of the two adjacent gallery spaces in the K1 building showcases Choi's signature use of color and abstraction as well as her innovative approach to collage, while the latter focuses on her black and white ink drawings. The first room exhibits a body of small paintings that serve as an extension of the diverse experimentation the artist undertook with the formal characteristics of black and white mediums. Initiated when she was a student at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Choi's abstract paintings powerfully illustrate her unique approach to expressionistic gestures and line employing oil paint and acrylic, in addition to charcoal, conté, oil pastel, and ink. While this body of paintings clearly evokes Willem de Kooning's incisive brushwork and Robert Motherwell's abstract yet meditative pictorial planes, the collages, exhibited in tandem with the paintings, display the influence of pop art. For the artist, incorporating newspaper clippings and other media allowed for a direct response to the pressing social issues at the time; in this way, Choi engaged with the methodology of combine paintings which incorporated everyday objects affixed to the canvas. These two discrete but related bodies of work demonstrate the artist's strong commitment to personal expression and social commentary through brave exploration of form and content, and how she chose her own path instead of blindly following or adhering to a single artistic movement.

In the second gallery space, a comprehensive selection of Choi's drawings and prints showcase her broad use of mediums including ink, charcoal, conté, and paper, while displaying the artist's frequent use of abstract lines and text. The ink drawings evoke not only works of yet another abstract expressionist Franz Kline, whose signature use of broad black strokes against a white background introduced a unique strain of gestural abstraction, but also the traditions of East Asian calligraphy, wherein the stark contrast of the characters (positive space) and background (negative space) connotes a rich spectrum of meanings. While the artist did utilize Korean calligraphy ink, many of the drawings were subsequently done on coated printing paper, effectively merging two distinctive traditions—drawing by hand versus printing with machinery. This hybridism, deeply engrained in Choi's practice, becomes even more apparent when viewed alongside her prints. The artist's unique formal sensibilities, forged by rigorously exploring and internalizing

discrete mediums, led her to employ a form of abstraction where "the existence of the subject can be recognized," setting her apart from mainstream American abstract expressionists whose gestural abstraction was founded on an incorporeal space that broke away from traditional elements and narrative. This willingness to reveal herself in the work and specifically implement language on the canvas can also be attributed to Choi's interest in writing, as she authored multiple essays and published a collection of poems.

It is within this context that Choi's friend and fellow painter Michael Aakhus, who first met Choi in 1976 for a ten-month residency under the auspices of the Roswell Museum of Art, reminisced that, "She came to our country as a young woman and grew up between two worlds, unable to feel comfortable in the States or in her own country." During the 1960s and 1970s, the Korean mainstream art world was dominated by Dansaekhwa, along with the Korean Avant-garde. Caught between her ambition to reach beyond these culturally specific movements in Korea and the social protest against patriarchy and racism in the United States, coupled with Choi's position as a foreigner and a woman, made it imperative that she confront the crux of such pressing themes by charting undiscovered paths and new genres. Indeed, this sense of urgency and her unique status bridging the East and West led Choi to create a new formal language that remains to this day profoundly topical. It is only in retrospect that we can recognize the innovative work that Choi created during her lifetime, and under current circumstances can appreciate her influence on subsequent generations who continue to challenge the conservatism and male-dominated history of Korean modernism and postmodernism.

About the Artist

Wook-kyung Choi graduated from Seoul Arts High School in 1959 and the College of Fine Arts at Seoul National University in 1963. Choi then moved to the United States where she continued to pursue her studies, earning Masters of Fine Arts from Cranbrook Academy of Art and Brooklyn Museum Art School. After receiving her degrees, she was offered a position as an Assistant Professor at Franklin Pierce University from 1968 to 1971. Upon returning to Korea in 1978, Choi became an Associate Professor in the Painting Department at Yeungnam University and went on to become a Professor in the Western Painting Department at Duksung Women's University in 1984, devoting herself to mentoring subsequent generations of artists along with developing her own practice. Wook-kyung Choi held solo exhibitions at Shinsegae Gallery, Seoul (1971), Roswell Art Museum and Art Center, New Mexico (1977), the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Gwacheon (1987), and Ho-Am Art Museum, Seoul (1989). She also participated in important group exhibitions including the Annual Invitational Exhibition in New York sponsored by the Skowhegan School Foundation (1967-1968), the Invitational Exhibition of Korean Contemporary Artists in Tokyo (1972), the 16th São Paulo Biennale (1981), and Korean Drawings Now at the Brooklyn Museum (1982-1985). Her works are housed in the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Gwacheon, Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, and Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, New York.



Wook-kyung Choi (1940-1985)

Untitled

1974

Ink and pen on paper

28 x 25 cm

Courtesy of the artist's estate and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Chunho An

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Wook-kyung Choi (1940-1985)

Untitled

c. 1960s

Ink on paper

24 x 32 cm

Courtesy of the artist's estate and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Chunho An

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Wook-kyung Choi (1940-1985)

The Raven of Death and Resurrection

1975

Acrylic on canvas

85 x 85 cm

Courtesy of the artist's estate and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Chunho An

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Wook-kyung Choi (1940-1985)

Untitled

c. 1960s

Acrylic on hardboard

34 x 40 cm

Courtesy of the artist's estate and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Chunho An

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Wook-kyung Choi (1940-1985)

Untitled

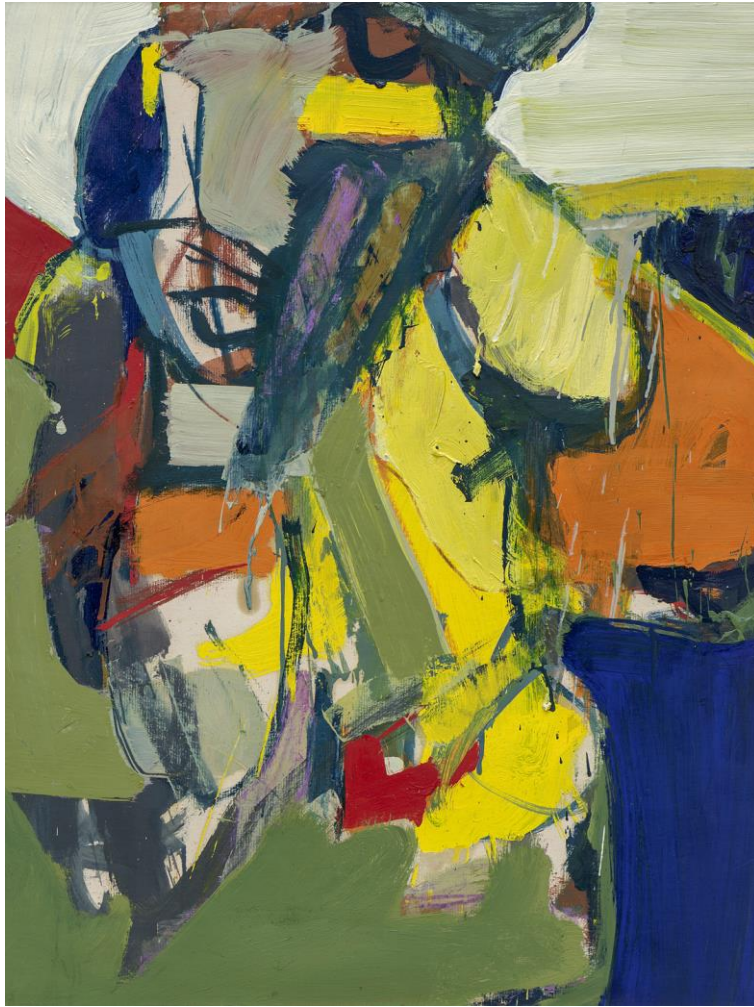
c. 1960s

Paper collage, acrylic, and oil pastel on paper
25 x 32.5 cm

Courtesy of the artist's estate and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Chunho An

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Wook-kyung Choi (1940-1985)

Untitled

c. 1960s

Acrylic and oil pastel on paper

62 x 47.5 cm

Courtesy of the artist's estate and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Chunho An

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