

KUKJE GALLERY

Press Release

Kwon Young-Woo Solo Exhibition *Various Whites*

Exhibition Date: March 16 – April 30, 2017

Venue: Kukje Gallery K2



Untitled, c. 1980s

Korean paper

100 x 80.5 cm

Courtesy of the artist's estate and Kukje Gallery

Image provided by Kukje Gallery

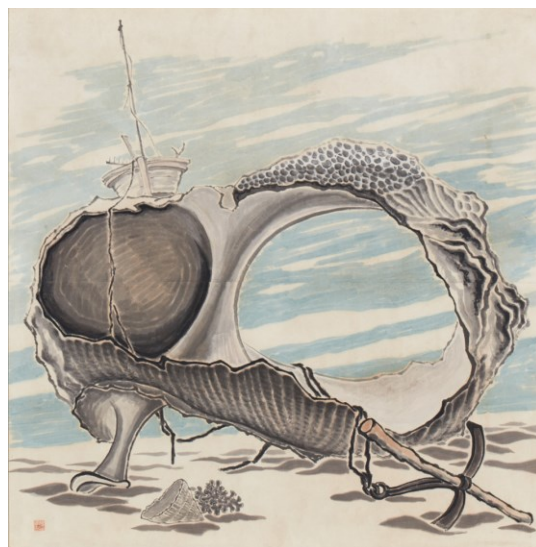
"I thought to myself, paintings are paintings – we needn't try so hard to make unnecessary distinctions like 'oriental' and 'western.' Whether it has been painted with oil or follows the western painting style, what I want to say is that if a painting emits an oriental essence, it is an oriental painting."

– Excerpt from artist interview

Kukje Gallery is pleased to announce *Various Whites*, a solo exhibition of work by Kwon Young-Woo, open from March 16 to April 30. The second show devoted to Kwon at Kukje Gallery since the first in 2015, the exhibition is centered around the artist's work in white *hanji* (Korean paper), from the 1970s and 1980s, many of which have never before been shown to the public. Complementing the exhibition is a comprehensive selection of archival materials scrupulously compiled for an extensive study of the artist, including video interviews with Kwon from the 1990s, handwritten letters, artist notes, and painting tools from the collection of his family. *Various Whites* provides an invaluable opportunity to examine the artist's personal and art historical trajectory, as framed both by the archive and his white *hanji* series—works that should be seen as a precursor to his subsequent involvement with Dansaekhwa.

Various Whites derives its title from the historic exhibition *Five Korean Artists, Five Kinds of White* held at the Tokyo Gallery in 1975—a show that became foundational for the greater Dansaekhwa movement. At this time Kwon's work with monochromatic *hanji* works had become fully realized, embodied by its use of layered paper and delicate textures that together create the three-dimensional surfaces and diverse rhythmic compositions that the artist is known for. Today, Kwon's use of *hanji* is praised for how it led to a reinterpretation of classical oriental paintings and established a new artistic vocabulary.

Kwon entered Seoul National University in the inaugural class of the College of Fine Arts, to study oriental painting. In the 1950s, Kwon's practice focused on figurative compositions and using Chinese ink. The artist departed from his use of this traditional medium around 1962 when he decided to use *hanji* as his primary material. The gallery will showcase this evolution, exhibiting work from his earliest oriental painting series and his first *hanji* works on panel from the 1970s, as well as his later selection of works in his white *hanji* series. Installed on the first floor of Kukje Gallery's K2 space, these distinctive bodies of work are meant to be seen separately yet still be in conversation with one another. One of the unique features seen in his mature *hanji* works, which were fully developed by the 1970s, is Kwon's technique of using his fingernails and other tools to cut, tear, and puncture the paper before arranging it in layers; this intensive technique shows how repetitive action and the materiality and tactility of the medium were at the forefront of his practice.



Seaside Fantasy, 1958

Color on Korean paper, 137.5 x 138 cm

Courtesy of the artist's estate and Kukje Gallery

Image provided by Kukje Gallery

Installed on the first floor, the archival section of *Various Whites* includes unprecedented historical materials, including rare footage of Kwon being interviewed and his studio tools, providing visitors with the opportunity to listen to the late artist explain his work and see firsthand how historical context shaped his practice. These unique reference materials will be displayed in tandem with artwork, providing a fuller picture of the artist's profound accomplishments. An example of this is ***Seaside Fantasy (1958)***, an important early work for which Kwon received the Artist Award from the Korean Minister of Education and Culture at the National Art Exhibition. This experimental composition diverges from the traditional canon of oriental painting, evoking a surreal, psychologically charged image that illustrates the artist's efforts to create a distinctive branch of Korean abstraction.

To coincide with the exhibition, Kukje Gallery will be mounting a companion exhibition of Kwon's archive and work at Art Basel Hong Kong, from March 22 to 26. Titled *Kwon Young-Woo Archive*, this exhibition will be a part of the Kabinett sector, a new initiative premiering in Hong Kong that highlights less well-known modern and contemporary artists. Kukje Gallery/Tina Kim Gallery, the only Korean participants among the inaugural nineteen galleries exhibiting, will showcase Kwon's painted *hanji* works dating from his years in Paris from 1978 to 1989. In addition, a smaller archive featuring an important artist collection of catalogues, leaflets, and articles, as well as handwritten letters and photographs will be shown. This Kabinett sector showcase will provide a unique opportunity to appreciate the development of Kwon's practice since the inception of the Dansaekhwa movement, along with a comprehensive art historical context. The collection of ephemera creates an invaluable foundation for future scholarships on the artist, and provides the opportunity to retrace the history of Dansaekhwa on an international stage.

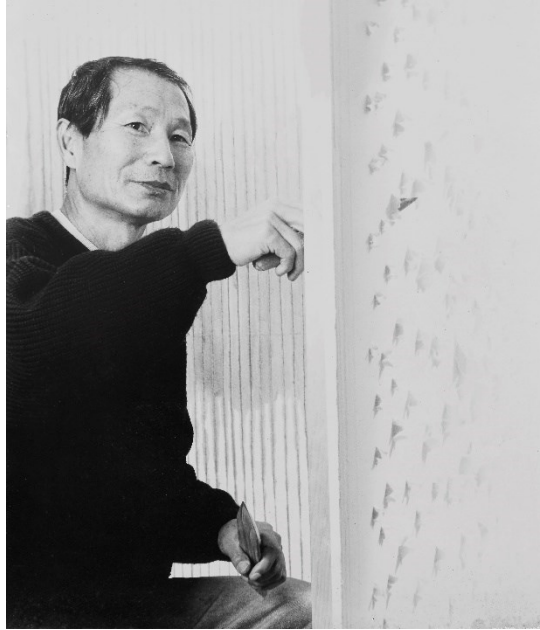


Untitled (P75-7), 1975

Korean paper on panel, 122 x 81 cm

Courtesy of the artist's estate and Kukje Gallery

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Kwon Young-Woo working in his studio, c. 1980s
Courtesy of the artist's estate and Kukje Gallery
Image provided by Kukje Gallery

Kwon Young-Woo (1926 – 2013) was part of the first class to matriculate into the College of Fine Arts, Seoul National University in 1946 and graduated with a BFA in Oriental Painting. In 1957, he graduated with an MFA in Oriental Painting from the same school. He served as a professor at the College of Art, Chung-Ang University, from 1964 to 1978, then moved to Paris, France, in 1978 to fully devote his life to art, living there until 1989.

Kwon's major exhibitions include the 8th Tokyo Biennale (1965), the 12th São Paulo Biennial (1973), *Five Korean Artists, Five Kinds of White* (1975) at Tokyo Gallery, a solo exhibition at Jacques Massol Gallery in Paris in 1976, 88 Seoul Olympics: International Contemporary Art Festival (1988) in Seoul, a retrospective at the Ho-Am Art Museum in 1990, the Venice Biennale collateral event *Dansaekhwa* (2015) at the Palazzo Contarini-Polignac, and *When Process Becomes Form: Dansaekhwa and Korean Abstraction* (2016) at the Boghossian Foundation in Brussels, Belgium.

The artist received the Artist Award from the Korean Minister of Education and Culture at both the 7th and 8th National Art Exhibitions for his works *Seaside Fantasy* (1958) and *Road to an Island* (1959), respectively. He was honored as the 1998 Korean Artist of the Year and awarded the Silver Crown Medal of the Order of Cultural Merit in 2001. Kwon's works are in the permanent collections of the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art; Seoul Museum of Art; Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art; and the British Museum in London. Kwon Young-Woo died in Seoul in 2013.

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For press enquiries, please contact

Zoe Chun | Communications Director

Tel: +82 2 3210 9885, +82 10 3570 8449

Email: zoe@kukjegallery.com

KUKJE GALLERY

ADDRESS 54 Samcheong-ro, Jongno-gu Seoul, 03053 Korea

TEL + 82 2 735 8449

FAX + 82 2 733 4879