

Press Release

Hyun-Sook Song

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Sprüth Magers, Berlin

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Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers are delighted to announce Hyun-Sook Song's first solo exhibition at Sprüth Magers, Berlin. The presentation features both new and existing large-scale paintings that give a comprehensive insight into her artistic oeuvre.

Song came to West Germany in 1972 with the intention of moving back to Korea after a few years of work. Instead she studied painting at the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg, where she developed a unique technique using tempera paint (a mixture of egg and colored pigment) that draws on the traditions of Western medieval art. Though she has lived in Germany for fifty years, Song's artistic approach is firmly rooted in Korean calligraphy and influenced by her relationship to nature and the body. In this way her work can be seen as both a product of the East and the West or a blend of neither; more than anything, it reflects an artist immersed in a world of her own making.

The characteristic style and expressive quality of a brushstroke have been considered a constitutive element of Korean art for many hundreds of years. Each brushstroke in Song's work marks a unique, intuitive movement that documents the artist's state of mind at a given point in time – an aspect that locates her work in the post-Dansaekhwa movement. The artist's practice embraces the act of painting as a physical-performative event that occurs in a state of complete concentration and meditation. The movement of a brushstroke, from its first contact with the canvas to when it lifts away, is executed without interruption or revision; while a single brushstroke demands the highest levels of concentration and calculation on the one hand, so does its release at just the right moment. The paramount importance of the brushstroke in Song's art also comes through in the titles of her paintings, which usually indicate the number of movements she needed to complete the work.

Though reduced in terms of coloring and formal vocabulary, the variations are endless. The works can be viewed from both an abstract-meditative and a figurative-symbolic perspective. Yet Song's paintings do not depict objects, and their titling further underscores the absence of a narrative – they are rather an expression of Song's memory of certain objects. The artist's painting technique translates it into brushstrokes that evoke associations with recurring forms from her homeland.

Song's painting, which began with an unleashing of calligraphic characters in the 1970s, remains an exploration of memory to this day. Her brushstrokes and the colors she chooses convey a sense of longing, give shape to memories of a homeland that no longer exists. These emotions are what allow her works, for all their formal reduction and concentration, to become unique, expressive pictorial spaces.

Hyun-Sook Song (*1952) lives and works in Hamburg. She studied art at the University of Fine Arts Hamburg between 1976 and 1981 and Korean art history at Chonnam National University in Gwangju. Selected solo and group presentations include those at Hamburger Kunsthalle; the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Seoul; Gwangju Museum of Art; Mediations Biennale in Poznań; the Leeum Samsung Museum of Art in Seoul; Mori Art Museum in Tokyo; the Asian Art Museum and the Berkeley Art Museum in San Francisco; and Deichtorhallen in Hamburg, among others. Song's works are in the collections of numerous institutions including Kunstmuseum Bern, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf, the Leeum Samsung Museum of Art, Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Seoul Museum of Art, Gwangju Art Museum, and Gyeonggido Museum of Art.

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