

LEE UFAN

Response

8 June – 23 July 2022

5 rue du Pont de Lodi
Paris 6

“Habiter le temps”, “Marking Infinity”, “Au-delà des souvenirs”, “Pressentiment”, “Dissonance”, “Résonance”, “Requiem”: the titles Lee Ufan chooses for his solo exhibitions emphasise the seriousness and spiritual depth of his artistic process. It would be greatly inadequate to see this as one engaged in mere abstraction, with everything this term carries in Western aesthetics. It would be just as much of a mistake to see his sculptures as nothing other than derivations from Far Eastern tradition, even though Lee Ufan has necessarily been marked by his cultural origins and his training. His art is universal, it reaches far beyond our contemporary time. It is characterised by a stylistic autonomy that while imbued with modernity, eschews the imperious gesture and the dictatorship of the ego that have often accompanied this. This art of slowness and silence aims to situate itself in our relationship to the world, in dialogue with nature, the elements, the body. It emerges out of a philosophical reflection that he has also developed in his many writings. His two faces, painting and sculpture, have in common a language of emptiness, a formal economy that only makes the impact of the painted trace on the blank space of the canvas and of natural stone placed on a sheet of steel all the more intense.

Lee Ufan has been practicing this visual style for half a century, but it's far from fixed. Rather, it continues to amplify. Exemplary in this respect, the sculpture *Relatum* (1968), initially entitled *Phenomena and Perception B* in homage to the eponymous essay by Merleau-Ponty, is frequently revisited. It shows a confrontation between stone, a product of nature shaped by time and erosion, and an industrially produced sheet of steel cut to order. Lee Ufan calls this relating doing to non-doing. The materials and the configurations can vary but the concerns remain similar, including when other ingredients such as cotton, electric light, etc. intervene. The same can be seen in his paintings, which have gone through successive evolutions from the complete covering of the surface (in the *From Point, From Line* series) to a broad, often single brush stroke leaving the greater part of the canvas untouched. With the last series, entitled *Dialogue* and *Response*, a subtle multicoloured aspect is introduced to the formerly grey brush stroke but this in no way compromises on the absolute concentration that the application of these successive layers of colour requires.

The exhibition "Response" is accessible from Tuesday to Saturday from 11 am to 7 pm at 5 rue du Pont de Lodi, Paris 6.

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Lee Ufan regularly insists on the dynamic relationship between the interior and the exterior. ‘If I want to accentuate the part connected to consciousness, I use paint. When my consciousness is only working at half capacity and I want to draw more on the exterior, I tend towards sculpture. You have to see my works as a balance between the world as it relates to my personal consciousness on the one hand and the exterior world I can’t control on the other.’¹ In one of the many texts that he has published (including working notes, philosophical reflections, and commentaries on other artists), Lee Ufan evokes the sparse space of a Japanese house, without furniture or decoration. A single flower stuck in a vase in a corner of the room is enough, he says, *to let the space breathe*. This is how one of his exhibitions should be approached. His works only reveal themselves completely in relation to the space in which they are situated and which will each time cause them to appear different, in a new, richly meaningful encounter, like with the exhibiting of “Requiem” in the ancient Alyscamps necropolis in Arles, an exemplary case of a work in dialogue with the site.

— Alfred Pacquement

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LEE UFAN was born in Korea in 1936 and moved to Japan in 1956, where he studied philosophy and art. He held his first exhibitions at the end of the 1960s. At the time, he was close to other Japanese artists who were also rethinking the foundations of sculpture and belonged to the group *Mono-Ha* (The School of Things). Lee Ufan became their chief theoretician. He first left Japan for the 1971 Paris Biennale. This was the beginning of an international career that would see his work regularly shown in Paris and Germany, then throughout the world. At the same time, he was publishing many theoretical texts and studies of other artists. In 1977, he set up a studio in Paris, where he began to live and work for part of the year. In 2001 he was awarded the prestigious Praemium Imperiale prize. A number of major art institutions have hosted solo exhibitions of his work, including the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Seoul (1994), the Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume in Paris (1997), Kunstmuseum in Bonn (2001), the Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts in Brussels (2008), the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York (2011), and the Centre Pompidou in Metz (2019). He has also been invited to exhibit at the Palace and the gardens of Versailles (2014), the Couvent de la Tourette (2017), and the Alyscamps necropolis in Arles (2021-22). His work is on permanent display at the Lee Ufan Museum in Naoshima (Japan), at Space Lee Ufan in Busan (South Korea), and at Lee Ufan Arles in the Hôtel Vernon, which opened in 2022.

A major retrospective of his work will take place in the summer of 2022 at the National Art Center, Tokyo.

Lee Ufan lives and works in Kamakura (Japan) and Paris.

1. Interview with Lee Ufan by Jean-Marie Gallais, exhibition catalogue, “Habiter le temps”, Centre Pompidou-Metz, 2019.