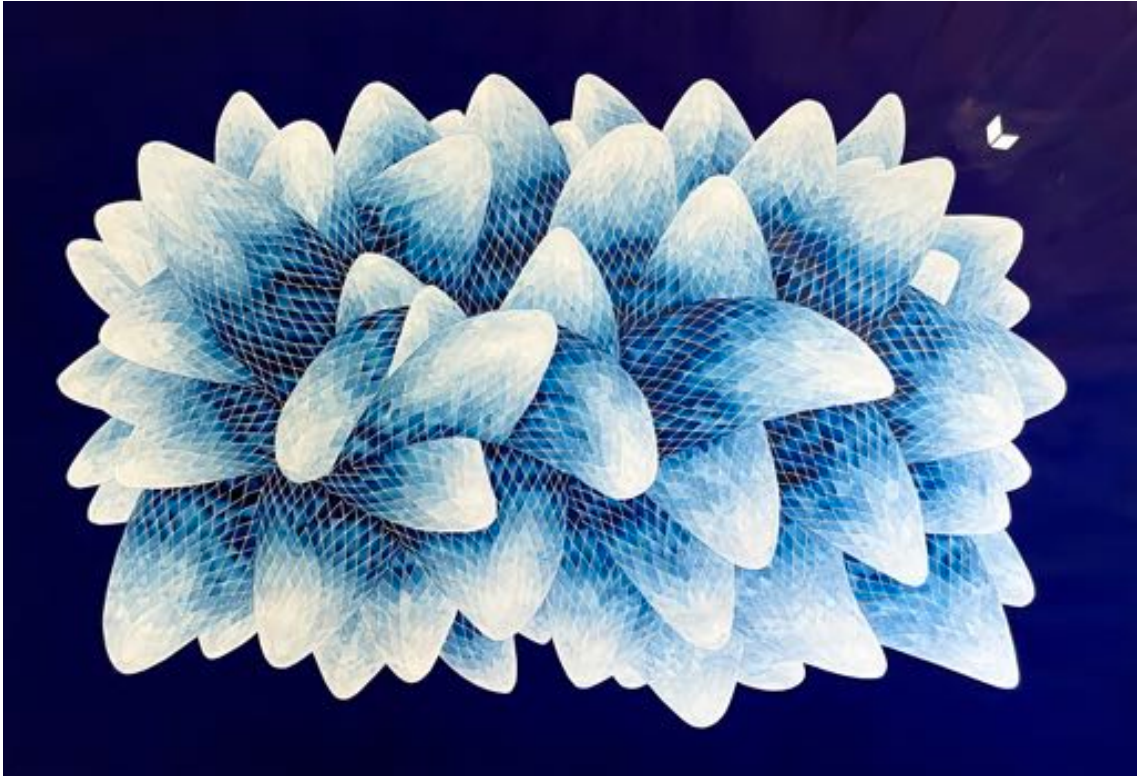


Sabrina Amrani is pleased to present 'SanToki, Tokiya', Timothy Hyunsoo Lee's fourth solo show at the gallery.



SanToki, Tokiya presents the latest body of work by Korean-American artist Timothy Hyunsoo Lee and features a range of watercolors, cyanotypes, soft sculptures and works on paper. The exhibition is titled after a well-known Korean children's song about a mountain hare and as the artist shares, is commonly the first song learned by Korean children. Universally, language is a learned experience – the repetition of songs and our parents' words become embedded and retained within us. For many, that foundation is built upon, expanded and nurtured. What does it mean when one's connection to that language, and related community, is abruptly cut off by migration and movement? Questioning the lasting impact of this rupture and disconnection are at the crux of Lee's practice. A multimedia artist, he explores both personal and collective histories of immigration and the subsequent experiences of how one's identity develops when they belong neither to one's mother country nor adopted home.

For this exhibition, Lee abstracts and queers the traditional genre of Korean *SanSuHwa* painting, literally translated to water-mountain landscape painting. At the center of the artist's exploration is specifically depictions of mountains, which feature prominently in this historical genre. Mountains, both as subject and metaphor, loom large in the Korean cultural identity and are revered for their majesty, immovability, and protection. At the same time, they can represent danger, isolation and forced division. The artist's marks and forms throughout are visceral and evocative of light and dark, joy and longing, permanence and volatility. Lee demonstrates a keen sense of control over material and imagery while utilizing new methods and materials to conceive the compositions featuring his signature diamond-shaped cells. Formally inspired by Lee's background in biology, this motif is a serial meditation of the artist's multiple identities that could never be fully expressed in his reality.

In his series, *성 (seong)*, meaning castle, Lee equates the typically Western fortified structure built by nobility with the mountains across the Korean peninsula, embracing the duality of protectiveness and inaccessibility. Lee's mountains, seemingly solid and straightforward, are composed of individual marks that fade into a mesmerizing landscape that is sublime and tempting. These narrow lines of porosity in between each diamond-shaped cell is a moment of movement and

escape. There is hope embedded within this physical mass. The closely spaced pattern altogether creates a sense of fullness to the mountains – they are soft and organic, in contrast to the jagged, sharp environs typically seen in historical Korean landscape painting. This watercolor series is at once a continuity and rupture from the historical genre.

In recent years, Lee has expanded his practice to include cyanotypes. One of the earliest forms of photography, this camera-less method consists of exposing UV light on iron salt-treated paper to result in stunning white and Prussian blue negatives. Each composition in the *TrueView (Overexposed)* series depicts a flurry of Lee's signature diamond cells. The overlapping shapes and areas of overexposure create a sense of movement and dynamism as viewer's eyes jump across the canvas. The palpable restless energy in this work is an impression of the artist's own psyche – at times calm and composed, at others, anxious and frenetic. This evolution in Lee's practice parallels a groundbreaking shift in Korean landscape painting – the title, *TrueView*, nods to the eighteenth century when Korean scholars began depicting grandiose scenes true to actual topography while also imbuing psychological meaning, signifying a major break from the previously dominant Chinese approach to painting.

In his installation *kaedduk (for Ungnyeo)*, Lee sculpts mugwort plants using collected Korean silk and cyanotypes of treasured family photographs. Mugwort is considered an invasive species along the eastern coast of North America due to its ability to grow and thrive in unfavorable environments. In East Asia, by contrast, it is a loved and commonly used mountain herb in traditional medicine and cuisine. Specifically in Korea, this plant is celebrated for its qualities of resiliency and bounty; it even plays a critical role in the foundational folktale of the first Korean dynasty. Lee's usage and fabrication of mugwort alludes to the collective significance of this plant to Korean identity, as well as his personal connection to the plant as one of the few familiar things he experienced as a new immigrant to New York City.

Lee's imagined mountainscapes and representations of nature are part of a long lineage of Korean landscape painting. Like artists before him, his compositions are imbued with nostalgia for a place that is not one's home, yet there is longing for it. His works tell multiple stories of the collective and individual identities across the Korean diaspora, embracing the notion that to move forward, one must acknowledge the foundations of the past.

- Doris Zhao

SanToki, Tokiya
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