

HYUN-SOOK SONG

One brushstroke, the horizon of the world

Hyun-Sook Song (b. 1952, Damyang) presents a new series of paintings, *One brushstroke, the horizon of the world*, at Zeno X Gallery.

Song has been working since the 1980s on a body of work in which she reflects on a life between two cultures. She travelled from South Korea to West Germany as a guest worker in 1972. During this period, she kept notes and wrote letters home, developing a visual language of her own: she used the expressive nature of calligraphy to express her experience of Western modernity and her social isolation. This laid the foundations for a practice in which Song would link the traditions of East Asian painting and European modernism.

Each painting refers, on the one hand, to the transient nature of objects stored in her memory and, on the other, to the way new experiences can actualise those memories. *I also needed the foreign, the other, in order to become attentive at the highest level. How could I have ever dreamed of discovering the values I would like to know and see preserved in the useless things behind our house?* (Hyun Sook-Song in 'Where at Home - Paint or Die. An account of the life and work of the painter Song Hyun-Sook and the cultural background of her emigration', Hamburg, 2021, p. 131)

Central to her visual language is the brushstroke that invariably recurs in the titles of her works. A mental process precedes each brushstroke, but its execution is performed in one fluid movement, which must remain spontaneous, like a dance. Song knows in advance what motif she wants to paint, but not yet how exactly she will shape this image on the canvas. The number of brushstrokes is in part determined by the motif: a stick consists of one movement, a Korean shoe of three, and a pot of five, seven or nine strokes, depending on the size. Although her formal language is restricted, the execution is unique and the variations are therefore endless.

Song developed a very distinctive style and technique by using tempera, a type of paint made by mixing pigments with egg yolk. This technique was widely used in Western painting in the Middle Ages, notably because of the paint's opaque character. Song, by contrast, uses tempera in a way that is almost transparent. She prepares her brush by applying each pigment colour separately. The colours blend through the movement of the brush. The placement of the brush on the canvas, the pressure and rhythm of the action give each brushstroke a unique character. The second brushstroke builds on the first, but is applied with the same concentration, as if it were each time the 'one', the first.

Hyun-Sook Song lives and works in Hamburg (DE). She studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Hamburg between 1976 and 1981. In 1984 she returned to her homeland for a year to study Korean art history at Chonnam National University in Gwangju. Her work is part of the public collections of Kunstmuseum Bern, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Kunstpalast in Düsseldorf, Leeum-Samsung Museum of Modern Art in Seoul, Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Seoul Museum of Art, Gwangju Art Museum and Gyeonggi Museum of Art in Ansan.