

## Press Release

### Hyun-Sook Song

November 15–December 20, 2024

Public Reception: November 14, 6–8pm

Sprüth Magers, New York

Sprüth Magers

On the studio floor lies a canvas, with wooden blocks on either side balancing a plank. Equipped with a wide brush, the artist moves intently along this narrow bridge as she performs a dance she describes as “thinking with her hands.” The paintings of Hyun-Sook Song demand this specific set-up, absolute physical control and a particular kind of meditative focus. Taking long, slow, deep breaths, she readies herself for the flow of methodical movements that translate into carefully placed, distinct brushstrokes. Hyun-Sook Song’s singular style and technique that blends the ancient medium of egg tempera with deliberate lines and forms that draw on East Asian calligraphy have come to define her decades-long practice. Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers are pleased to present the artist’s first solo exhibition in the US at the New York gallery.

Hyun-Sook Song’s works do not rely on linear perspective; any sense of space and depth is achieved through paint application alone. The monochrome and luminous or deep-black canvases feature only a few recurring motifs: ribbons of cloth tied around wooden posts, gauzy veils, bamboo canes and clay pots can just about be made out. Her pictorial world has been shaped by the memories of her rural upbringing in South Korea, and yet her objects are decidedly detached from context. Take, for example, the pole obscured by diaphanous curtains of white paint in *Brushstrokes-Diagram* (2024); it floats in a liminal space, reminding us of the elusiveness of images and the fragility of the material world. As with most of Song’s works, the painting both indicates and comments on its own conditions, with its thin veil of wide brushstrokes parting in one place to show the primed canvas. Moments of deliberate omission serve to highlight the center of interest: the mark of the brush.

All other works on view are entitled after the limited number of brushstrokes needed to complete them, emphasizing the artist’s economy of gesture and material, as well as prompting the viewer to identify and trace each measured line that represents a unique motion. The title of a work such as *7 Brushstrokes over 1 Brushstroke* (2023), which shows a wooden pole concealed by a gradation of color, underlines the immediate connection between object and sign. The placement of each mark is defined in preliminary studies,

and paintings are never reworked; she rids herself of unsuccessful attempts by wiping them clean and re-grounding the canvas to begin anew.

On the studio wall hangs a note: “Discipline, concentration, endurance,” reads the neat handwriting. Equipped with one of her trusted brushes coated with tempera saturated with various pigments, the artist positions herself not in front but above her canvas. The plank underneath her bare feet sways softly as Hyun-Sook Song holds her breath – and executes a single brushstroke.

Hyun-Sook Song (\*1952, Damyang, Jeollanam-do, South Korea) lives and works in Hamburg. Her work is currently prominently featured in the group exhibition *Isa Mona Lisa* at Hamburger Kunsthalle, which runs through October 18, 2026. Selected solo and group exhibitions include National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul, Gwangju Museum of Art, Poznan Biennale, Leeum Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, Berkeley Art Museum, San Francisco, Deichtorhallen, Hamburg. Hyun-Sook Song’s work is included in the collections of institutions, such as Kunstmuseum Bern, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf, Leeum Samsung Museum of Modern Art, Seoul, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Seoul Museum of Art, Gwangju Art Museum, and Gyeonggido Museum of Art.

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