

Suh Se Ok

September 8—October 27, 2018

536 West 22nd Street, New York

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Opening Reception: Saturday, September 8, 6-8 PM



People, 2000, ink on mulberry paper, 67.72 x 54.33 inches (paper), 172 x 138 cm. © Suh Se Ok. Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong.

New York, August 21, 2018—**Lehmann Maupin** is pleased to announce its representation of **Suh Se Ok**, and the artist's debut exhibition in New York. The 89-year-old South Korean artist will exhibit a number of works from *People*, his ongoing series of ink paintings produced between the 1960s and the 2000s. Made with extended brushes on large sheets of rice and mulberry paper, the works depict highly stylized human figures constructed from dashes and linear strokes that vary in scale, thickness, and tone. Each painting is made quickly, but only after an extended period of contemplation, and the result has a quiet but focused visual poetry that rewards repeated looking. **The gallery will host an opening reception on Saturday, September 8, from 6 to 8 PM at 536 West 22nd Street.**

As a classical technique, ink painting has long been distinguished by certain conventions. But beginning in the 1950s, Suh Se Ok began adapting the elements of what is known as “literati painting” called *Muninhwa*, derived from calligraphy and poetry and traditionally practiced by noble scholars. In this approach, Suh Se Ok developed a new, progressive and abstract visual language that refused the modernist spirit of heedless novelty in favor of one that also embraced and expanded on historical precedent. Suh Se Ok's initial approach to the medium was then disruptive, but was also marked by great sensitivity and intelligence. Neither was he alone in his emphases; in 1959, he formed a group called the *Mungnimhoe*, or Ink Forest Society, which strived for unique styles of experimental ink painting that had its roots in literati painting.

Stripped of all color, detail, and perspectival space, the radically restricted painterly practice that Suh Se Ok and his contemporaries developed allows for a broad range of interpretation. His paintings occupy the border between figuration and abstraction, and while the *People* series in particular clearly references the human form, the artist has also characterized the works as alluding to “shadows on the stage of life” (in Korean, *geu-rim-ja*)—its ordinarily invisible pains and pleasures. Some of his images also exhibit a similarity to Korean ideographs; as an erudite literati painter raised in a family of classical scholars, Suh Se Ok is an accomplished philosopher, poet, calligrapher, and seal engraver. There is even a political element to his works’ stark appearance—Suh Se Ok and the other Mungnimhoe artists grew up under Japanese occupation, and initially regarded their confrontational vision as an explicit challenge to the traditional Japanese *nihonga* painting dominant at the time.

Visually, while Suh Se Ok’s technique and medium are outwardly simple, the artist manages to produce a surprising variety of marks, while also allowing ink’s inherent qualities to guide his hand. Though his works of the 1960s often make use of the liquid’s tendency to spill and spread across the paper, those of the following decade reveal the artist’s increasing focus on planning and control, as well as an absorption in the potential of negative space. “I paint the forms that I find in the infinite space beyond objects,” he has stated. “What is there and what is not there are in a constant cycle.” In this, they also share a sensibility with the Zen painting of artists such as Mu-ch’i and Bada Shanren.

The ‘60s also marked the genesis of Suh Se Ok’s ongoing *People* series, in which the artist’s feeling for abstract mark-making is fused with a fascination with patterns and motifs of social interconnectedness. In the range of subjects and emotions they address, these paintings suggest a need to move beyond an either/or view of humanity and the world, and to acknowledge that our bodies are also part of the universe at large. The degree of stylization that Suh Se Ok employs makes it impossible to categorize his figures as any specific age, race, or gender; they transcend time and culture. Their positions and gestures are also open to interpretation, even within a single image. A group of dancers, for example (a favorite subject), could also be a crowd of protestors, or even—such is their degree of simplification—waves on the ocean or bricks in a wall. As the works in this exhibition demonstrate, Suh Se Ok has achieved—and continues to add to—a very rare artistic corpus, which is truly timeless.

About the artist

Suh Se Ok (b. 1929 in Daegu, Korea; lives and works in Seoul, Korea) received a BFA from the Oriental painting department of Seoul National University in 1950. Solo exhibitions of his work has been organized at National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul and Gwacheon,

Korea (2015, 2005); Museum of Fine Arts Houston, TX (2008); and Maison Hermes, Tokyo, Japan (2007). Selected group exhibitions and international biennials featuring his work include *College of Fine Arts Archives: Oriental Painting*, Museum of Art, Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea (2015); *Leeum 10th Anniversary Exhibition: Beyond and Between*, Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea (2014); *Then and Now: Celebrating 60th Anniversary of The National Academy of Arts of The Republic of Korea*, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Deoksugung, Korea (2014); *Closer to Contemporary Art II- Abstract Art Is Real*, Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art, Ansan, Korea (2013); *Busan Biennale Special Exhibition: ART IS ALIVE*, Busan, Korea (2008); 7th Biennial de Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo, Brazil (1963) among others. His work is in numerous international public and private collections, including Bergen Museum of Art and Science, Bergen County, NJ; British Museum, London, UK; Fukuoka Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea; Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Providence, RI; Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea; Sonje Museum of Contemporary Art, Gyeongju, Korea.

In 2012, Suh received the Order of Cultural Merit – Silver medal from the Korean government; he was also awarded The 52nd National Academy of Arts Award, Korea (2007); 13th Artistic and Culture Prize, The Federation of Artistic and Cultural Organization, Korea (1999); Imin Art Award, Seoul, Korea (1997); Honorary Doctorate, Rhode Island School of Design Fine Art, Providence, RI (1988); and the Prime Minister Prize at the 1st National Art Exhibition (1949).

About Lehmann Maupin

Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin founded Lehmann Maupin in 1996. The gallery represents a diverse range of American artists, as well as artists and estates from across Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, and the Middle East. It has been instrumental in introducing numerous artists from around the world in their first New York exhibitions. Known for championing artists who create groundbreaking and challenging forms of visual expression, the gallery prioritizes personal investigations and individual narratives. Lehmann Maupin prizes the distinct conceptual approaches that its artists offer on the essential matters that shape international culture today, including gender, class, religion, history, politics, and globalism. In 2013, with two locations in New York, significant interest in its artists abroad, and growing opportunities in new markets, Lehmann Maupin opened an additional location in Hong Kong, followed by Seoul in 2017. For more information on the gallery and its artists, visit www.lehmannmaupin.com

Current & Upcoming Exhibitions

Nicholas Hlobo, *Ulwamkelo*, Through August 25, 2018, West 22nd Street, NEW YORK
Gridology, Through October 24, 2018, Pedder Building, HONG KONG

LEHMANN MAUPIN

Nari Ward, *CORRECTIONAL*, August 28—November 17, 2018, 74-18, Yulgok-ro 3-gil, SEOUL

Marilyn Minter, August 30—October 27, 2018, Pedder Building, HONG KONG

Liza Lou: Classification and Nomenclature of Clouds, September 6—October 27, 2018, West 24th Street, NEW YORK

For more information on Suh Se Ok, or other Lehmann Maupin artists, please contact Kathryn McKinney at +1 212 255 2923 or kathryn@lehmannmaupin.com.