

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

YUN HYONG-KEUN



25 OCTOBER – 24 NOVEMBER 2018
PRIVATE VIEW: WEDNESDAY, 24 OCTOBER, 6 – 8 PM

Simon Lee Gallery is proud to present a survey of paintings and works on paper by Yun Hyong-keun. The Korean artist's second solo exhibition with the gallery examines the connection between his painting and drawing practices across the full breadth of a career profoundly connected with the history and culture of his native country. Yun is currently the subject of a retrospective at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), Seoul, Korea, the first major solo show of the artist at a national institution in Korea.

Amongst the leading proponents of the Dansaekhwa art movement, Yun's mature practice began in earnest in the 1970s. He had come of age during a prolonged period of injustice for the Korean people that saw them endure military occupation and civil war. Threatened with execution as a student in the 1950s and imprisoned while employed as a teacher in the 1970s, Yun developed an aesthetic that was capable of transcending the traumatic events he had suffered as a younger man. As Korea emerged from a period of international and artistic isolation, Yun became associated with a group of artists who cultivated their own approach to abstraction divorced from global trends and based on an engagement with the medium of painting, materiality and process. While his works of the early 1970s, in particular those on paper, had frequently incorporated diluted streaks of vibrant colour, the middle of that same decade marked a turning point in his artistic direction. A new palette of umber – the colour of earth – and ultramarine – the colour of water – combined in rectilinear compositions reminiscent of traditional ink-wash paintings, became the hallmark of his late practice. Repetition of these compelling abstractions would continue to occupy the artist both on paper and canvas until his death in 2007.

Tracing a line through Yun's works from 1975 to 2007, a distinct trajectory is apparent. In *Umbre – Blue* (1975), painted at the dawn of his late painting practice, the canvas is absorbed by an inky blackness, interrupted by linear passages of raw canvas that swim into focus. Encapsulating the refined palette and formal restraint that would come to define his oeuvre, a closer look at Yun's works from the 1970s reveal myriad differences between paintings based on such variables as the ratio of umber to blue, the amount of oil with which the pigment was diluted and the density and texture of the canvas. Although guided by the artist's hand, each painting reveals a large degree of self-determination, the natural process by which it was made allowed to develop organically. By contrast, Yun's later works are more controlled. Starkly defined lines, opaque colour and simple form are hallmarks of this period of his career. In *Burnt UMBER & Ultramarine* (2001) the surface texture has lost the aqueous sensibility of earlier works, while the composition has become near-architectural. By using a pencil and paper Yun

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was able to introduce a new sense of geometric accuracy. Perhaps as a result of this stringent approach to form and colour, the blackness that absorbs each rectangular shape is void-like. Having lived through one of the darkest periods in Korean history Yun carried with him a profound anger. Yet, rooted in the natural world and characterised by a sense of serenity and solitude, his works from the mid-1970s onwards express his journey towards overcoming trauma and accepting peace.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Yun Hyong-keun was born in Miwŏn, Korea, in 1928 and died in 2007. In 1947 he attended Seoul National University to study Western painting, but abandoned his studies after he was imprisoned for his involvement with the leftist student movement. He returned to his hometown, Cheongju, where he worked as a teacher. Eight months later, the Korean War (1950-53) broke out. Yun survived the war and in 1954 joined Hongik University where he met Kim Whanki, a renowned painter and his future father-in-law, and forged a close relationship with the art students who would be exponents of Dansaekhwa. He graduated from the Department of Painting, Hongik University, Seoul, in 1957. Solo exhibitions of his work have also been held in Korea, Japan, Germany, France and the United States, including currently at The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), Seoul, Korea, and formerly at Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Strasbourg, France (2002); the Judd Foundation, New York, NY (1993), and the Chinati Foundation, Marfa, TX (1994). His work has also been celebrated in landmark surveys such as *Dansaekhwa: Korean Monochrome Painting*, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Gwacheon (2012); *Korean Abstract Art: 1958-2008*, Seoul Museum of Art (2008); Gwangju Biennale (2000); Venice Biennale (1995); *Working With Nature: Traditional Thought in Contemporary Art from Korea*, Tate Liverpool (1992); and the São Paulo Biennial (1969, 1975).

This exhibition is presented in collaboration with the Estate of Yun Hyong-keun and PKM Gallery, Seoul.

Image: Yun Hyong-keun, *Burnt Umber & Ultramarine*, 1993, Oil on linen, 90.8 x 73 cm (35 3/4 x 28 3/4 in.)

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