

WHITE CUBE

Park Seo-Bo

Ecriture (描法) 1967–1976

Curated by Katharine Kostyál

23 November 2018 – 5 January 2019

White Cube Hong Kong

‘Art is no longer an act of fulfilment, but an act of emptying.’ – Park Seo-Bo, *Frieze*, 2016

White Cube is pleased to present an exhibition of paintings by Park Seo-Bo. Featuring rare, early works from the artist’s best-known ‘*Ecriture*’ series, the show marks his formal representation by the gallery.

Credited as one of the originators of the Korean *Dansaekhwa* movement (also known as the Korean monochrome movement), Park’s rigorous conceptual work is inextricably linked to notions of time, space and material. Rooted in Taoist and Buddhist philosophy, in particular the writings of Lao-Tzu and Chuang Tzu, this lineage is manifest in the process of repetitive action and a highly physical manipulation of paint and materials.

Dansaekhwa consisted of a loosely affiliated group of artists whose work centred on a minimalist pictorial language. While making visual parallels with Western modernist abstraction, especially Minimalism, *Dansaekhwa* differed in that it remained firmly rooted in Korean cultural traditions. Emerging in the late 1960s and early 1970s during a period of great social unrest resulting from the impact of the Korean war, these artists adopted an existential perspective and embarked on an exploration of tactility, spirit and performance. Park has said: ‘The concept of being minimal or conceptual is a Western dichotomous approach and outcome. *Dansaekhwa* should be regarded as a spiritual journey. The process of making the work is a tool for moral training, and the work is a residue of that ordeal.’

Begun in the late 1960s and ongoing for over 20 years, Park’s ‘*Ecriture*’ series can be understood in terms of a spiritual approach to the ‘drawing’ within painting. Also referred to by the artist as ‘*Myōbop*’, which loosely translates from Korean as the ‘law of drawing’ or ‘way of drawing’, this series eliminates expressive gesture, focusing instead on the ‘union of action, property and spirit.’ The works in this exhibition, which date from 1967 – 76, all feature delicate pencil lines incised into a grey or white monochromatic surface, applied in horizontal, diagonal, or vertical strokes and occasionally overlaid on a faint grid. Although ‘minimal’ in palette and composition, these highly tactile and active works connect with an altogether separate history: for example, in Korean culture white acts as a signifier of immateriality, and is often representative of the sun and light. The ‘*Ecriture*’ paintings reflect a sense of immediacy and totality that is closely tied

to both the practice of calligraphy and to a philosophical concept of emptiness.

Park has likened his working method to ‘a Buddhist monk’s chanting of a prayer, which is repeated to reach a state of nirvana.’ Working from an elevated platform with the canvas laid on the floor, his approach encourages the free-flowing movement of the hand; which can be likened to automatic drawing or the spontaneity of calligraphy. Fundamental to the meaning of Park’s practice as a whole, this meditative condition allows for energy flow and a diversion from conscious action. As Robert C. Morgan has remarked: ‘*Ecriture* is about strength and vulnerability in the same breath. *Ecriture* is a matter of allowing ideas to emerge within the surface of a painting – not through imposition or sentiment, but through a gliding sensation, a spiritual exercise of the mind.’

BIOGRAPHY

Park Seo-Bo graduated from the painting department of Hong-Ik University in Seoul in 1954. He became Dean of the University in 1973 and received an Honorary Doctorate in 2000. Park has been widely lauded for championing Korean art, and received the Art Society Asia Game Changer Awards in 2018 and Silver Crown Cultural Medal in Korea in 2011. His work has been exhibited internationally, including the Venice Biennale (1988 and 2015); Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul (2014); Busan Museum of Art, South Korea (2010); Portland Museum of Art, Oregon (2010); Singapore Art Museum (2008); Kunsthalles Wien, Vienna (2007); The Miyagi Museum of Art, Sendai (1993); Tate Liverpool, UK (1992); Brooklyn Museum, New York (1981); Expo’67, Montreal (1967); and his work is currently on view in the collection displays at Tate Modern, London and Museum of Fine Art, Boston. His work is included in the collections of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; M+, Hong Kong; Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, UAE; The National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, amongst others.

White Cube Hong Kong is open

Tuesday – Saturday, 11am – 7pm.

Admission is free.

WeChat: whitecube.hk

For further information please contact:

enquiries@whitecube.com

50 Connaught Road Central, Hong Kong

+852 2592 2000

whitecube.com