

KUKJE GALLERY

PRESS RELEASE

Chung Chang-Sup Solo Exhibition

Exhibition Date: February 26 – March 27, 2016

Exhibition Venue: Kukje Gallery K1 & K2

Press Conference: Friday, February 26, 2016, 2 PM



Meditation 91108, 1991, Tak (best fiber) on canvas, 110 x 200 cm

Courtesy of the artist's estate and Kukje Gallery

Image provided by Kukje Gallery

Kukje Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of Chung Chang-Sup, one of Korea's most celebrated Dansaekhwa masters and historically important abstract painters. Using traditional Korean paper pulp or *tak*, Chung's work expresses a distinct Korean sentimentality and ideology, founded on his attempt to unify material and gesture. Installed throughout K1 and K2, this exhibition will be comprised of thirty major artworks that span his entire life's practice; the exhibition provides a comprehensive introduction to the artist's ideology of "unity between

the thing and the self."

When I first found tak paper in the 1970s, I did not think "I might just try this," but it immediately made sense to me so naturally that I felt as though I had known tak paper all along and something in me clicked. No sooner had I found it then I found myself absorbed in it. [...] Maybe that was the reason why I felt so comfortable and familiar with the paper when I chose it as an agent to express material-hood. It simply had a feeling, and it was coming towards me.¹

Chung Chang-Sup's unique body of works began with his attempt to rediscover Korean traditions. When he began his art practice, Korea was in social turmoil following the Korean War and in a major transition toward modernization. The Korean art scene, which was centered around the Korean National Art Exhibition (*Kukjeon*) at the time, was adopting Western modernism without any of its ideological foundation. At first Chung followed the trends of *Informel* and other Western art movements of the 1960s, and he joined the abstract movement initiated by a younger generation of artists who were looking to challenge institutional art practices. During this period he used oil paint to create a suffused effect, investigating Eastern ink-and-wash painting. In the mid-1970s Chung was introduced to the Korean paper *hanji*, which became a major turning point in his practice.

Hanji is a material commonly and widely used in Korea for everyday utilitarian needs such as furniture, calligraphy, and fans. *Hanji* is also used as a translucent window covering, known as *changhoji*, in traditional architecture. *Changhoji* is a material that acts as a filter, effectively becoming a symbol for combining the duality that is "in" and "out." The artist began using *hanji* because of this strong association, and to connect to the important Korean traditions that were being lost.

¹ *Chang-Sup Chung Retrospective*, Seoul: National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea, 2010, p. 21.

This can be seen clearly in Chung's *Return* series, where he attached *hanji* to the canvas and let the natural permeation of ink-and-wash bleed through the paper. This series powerfully investigates Korean identity, and at the same time evokes the traditional sentimentality lying dormant inside us.



Return 77-M

1977, Mixed media on canvas
197 x 110 cm

Courtesy of the artist's estate and Kukje Gallery
Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Tak 86921

1986, Tak(best fiber) on canvas
152 x 72 cm

Courtesy of the artist's estate and Kukje Gallery
Image provided by Kukje Gallery

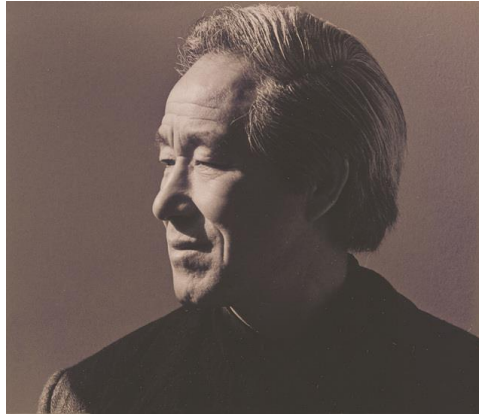
In the 1980s, in order to overcome the limitation of paper becoming a mere background material, Chung Chang-Sup began to explore *tak*, the raw material of *hanji*, resulting in the *Tak* series. In this body of work, the artist first soaked *tak* in water and kneaded it into a thick paste before applying it on canvas and sculpting subtle folds with his hands. The results of this technique, once dried, exposed various delicate, diagonal lines and revealed the unique rhythm and structure of the fibers in the paper. For the artist, this approach was based on his effort to remove his own ego, a process where he waits for the innate characteristics of the *tak* to naturally surface. Instead of using a brush, the artist used his hands to mold and apply the *tak*, a process that became an important element of the artist's work

where his actions, identity, and soul integrated with the material. In this way the artist himself was able to permeate into the material transforming the large canvas into paper.

In the 1990s, Chung started his *Meditation* series, a body of work consisting of orderly grids and deep colors. Combining burgundy, indigo blue, and brown to the wet *tak* paste in order to achieve a darker palette, the artist created an optical effect, mirroring an endless abyss of color. The solid square surface of the grid is reminiscent of the partitions found in traditional Korean windows, which was where Chung found inspiration for their use, and the *hanji*, contrasts with the rich textures of the fibrous *tak*. For Chung, this dynamic interplay between the various material textures embodies his desire for "paintings that *hanji* paints by itself."

Beginning in the 1990s, the *Meditation* series was simplified to an ascetic black and white monochrome palette, a mood that evoked a state of absolute silence. Reducing his aesthetic to reflect humble materials and a simple Korean sentimentality, the raw muted colors in this later series, produced until 2010, reflect the artist's deepening identification with Korean aesthetics and traditions.

Chung Chang-Sup's works embody his strong pursuit of the ideal of removing the ego. This practice emphasizes a return to fundamental form in order to express an abstraction of Korean consciousness, where, in the artist's words, the "artwork depicts a world without depiction" through *hanji* and *tak*. The artist has said that "*tak* paper, as the symbol of national sentiment, mediates the process of acclimatization of my existence and the material-hood of *tak*. I want my works to be the truthful reflection of myself and our contemporary society." This exhibition explores deeply Chung Chang-Sup's artistic vision and philosophy highlighting his interest in returning to nature and the ideals of Korean cultural identity.



Chung Chang-Sup

Image provided by Kukje Gallery

Born in 1927 in Cheongju in the North Chungcheong Province of South Korea, Chung Chang-Sup graduated from the Department of Painting, College of Fine Arts, Seoul National University in 1951. He made his debut exhibiting in the 2nd Korean National Art Exhibition in 1953, with his work *Sunset*, a work inspired by *Cubism's* deconstruction and analysis of objects. The artist was also influenced by *Informel* which was developing in a more radical circle of younger artists such as Park Seo-Bo and Young-Whan Kim. Despite his interest however, Chung did not involve himself formally with any movements and instead pursued his individual practice. From the late-1960s, Chung explored Eastern ink-and-wash aesthetics combining them with oil paints. In his *Circles* series, he articulated ideas of circulation and the circle, core concepts in Korean aesthetic consciousness. He was a professor from 1961 to 1993 at the College of Fine Arts at Seoul National University, and was granted the title of Honorary Professor upon retirement.

Beginning with his participation in the inaugural *Modern Artists Association Exhibition* in 1957, Chung Chang-Sup exhibited widely establishing his place as a vital member of the Korean art scene. He participated in major international exhibitions such as the 2nd Paris Youth Biennale (1961); *Actual Exhibition*, Seoul (1964); São Paulo Art Biennial (1965); *Working with Nature : Traditional Thought in Contemporary Art from Korea* at Tate Liverpool (1992); *Dansaekhwa*, official

collateral event of the 56th Venice Biennale (2015); and the 12th Sharjah Biennial (2015). The artist's major solo exhibitions include Duseon Gallery, Seoul (1984); Tokyo Gallery (1994); a major retrospective at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Gwacheon (2010). Chung's works are in major collections including the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Gwacheon; Seoul Museum of Art; Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul; Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum; Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art; M+ Museum for Visual Culture, Hong Kong; and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. The artist died in 2011.

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