

KUKJE GALLERY | PRESS RELEASE

Park Seo-Bo Solo Exhibition *PARK SEO-BO*

Press Conference: September 15 (Wed.), 2021, 11AM at Kukje Gallery K1

Exhibition Dates: September 15 – October 31, 2021

Venue: Kukje Gallery K1

Kukje Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of Park Seo-Bo, on view at the gallery's K1 space from September 15 through October 31, 2021. This is the artist's second solo exhibition at Kukje Gallery since 2010. Over the past decade, Kukje Gallery and Park Seo-Bo together have promoted Dansaekhwa on an international stage, organizing significant group exhibitions at Kukje Gallery (2014), the 56th Venice Biennale (2015), Boghossian Foundation, Brussels (2016), and Powerlong Museum, Shanghai (2018). Park, whose work embodies a unique balance of formalism and Asian aesthetics, is regarded as a pioneer of Korean modernism. Despite his prominence, the artist has dedicated himself to experimenting with new ways of working, asking the fundamental question "Why paint?" It is in this context that the artist will introduce sixteen recent works from his late-*Écriture* (or color-*Écriture*) series. This seminal exhibition presents a diverse grouping of works that will simultaneously create a healing space of vivid, colorful paintings inspired by nature, as well as those completed in more subdued colors synonymous with cityscapes.

Park's *Écriture* (描法, *myobop*) series is often divided into three phases: the early-*Écriture* (or pencil-*Écriture*) of the 1970s, mid-*Écriture* of the 1980s, and late-*Écriture* (or color-*Écriture*) beginning in the 2000s. If the artist focused on emptying and disciplining himself through repetitive action through his early-*Écriture* series, his late-*Écriture* series seeks unity with nature by creating compositions defined by symmetrical reliefs modeled directly on the canvas, instead of emphasizing the traces of his hand. These elements consist of three layers of traditional Korean paper *hanji*, which has been soaked in water for more than two months. Built up on the canvas in concise but organic furrows, Park then draws lines with a thick graphite pencil before the surface dries. As a result of these line-drawings, the wet *hanji* is pushed from side to side to form symmetrical sculptural elements, reminiscent of the ridges between rice paddies. When the *hanji* dries, the artist adds acrylic paint to the surface to embody the natural scenery that inspires him. Through this repetitive action, the completed works manifest accumulated time, creating a rhythm where Park's philosophy and vision are interwoven.

Colors have always played a pivotal role in revealing Park's innermost thoughts and intentions. The artist primarily used black for his *Primordialis* series (from the early 1960s) to express feelings of anxiety and ambivalence following the rapidly changing postwar era. Then, he applied the Korean *obangsaek* (traditional Korean colors of white, black, blue, yellow, and red) in his *Hereditarius* series (from the late 1960s) as he began to think about his practice in relation to the Western geometric abstraction. Park deliberately chose white for his early-*Écriture* series (from the 1970s to the mid-1980s), in which he explored the idea of "emptying" and sought to curtail his attention to color. Ultimately, the artist began using intense, vivid colors after 2000—this radical departure was in part a response to the fear he felt in the face of digital technology. Despite this massive shift in social values and media, and Park's observation that digital culture marked a universal change, the artist could not help but lament that he could not "catch up with the pace of rapid change." In other words, Park was confronted by the harsh reality that art was at a crossroads and, in response, he considered putting an end to his practice. Instead, this conflict led to another breakthrough, again characterized by color.

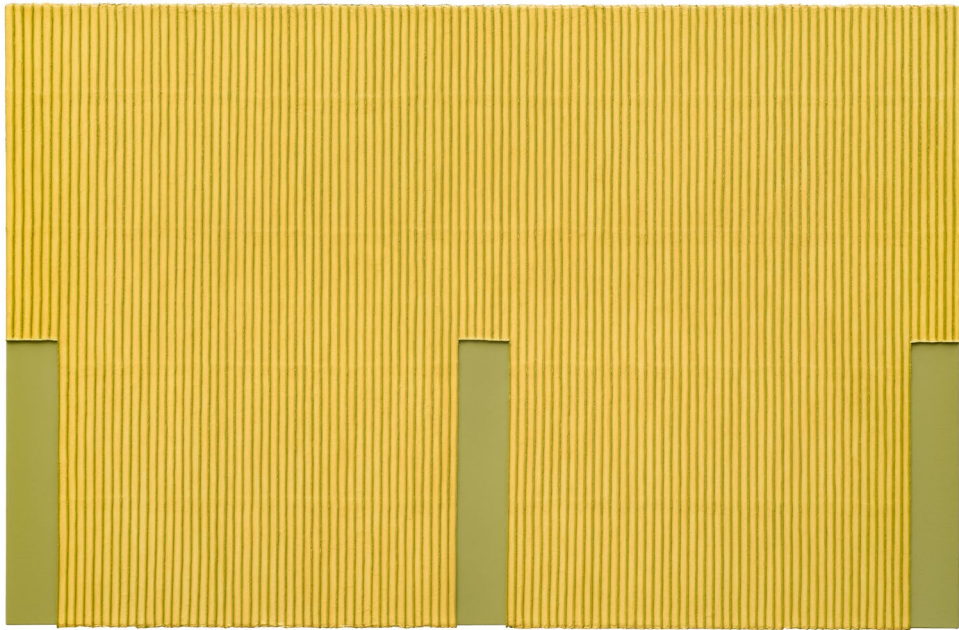
Park's late-*Écriture* paintings were born through a process of redefining the role of painting in an era where images proliferate and painting no longer functions as a tool for self-expression. Instead of forcing a message or controlling the viewing experience, Park creates work that absorbs the viewer's stress and anxiety—instilling meditation and rhythmic vitality on the canvas. This absorption underscores the fact that the artist calls his paintings *heup-in-ji*, or blotting paper. This focus on a new kind of painting can also be seen in Park's definition of Dansaekwha as consisting of three attributes: the futility of action, the infinite repetition of action, and the spiritualization of the traces (materiality) created in the process of action.

Park Seo-Bo is known as the "father of Korean contemporary art," a status framed in part by his claim that art is a "methodology," a radical departure overturning traditional painting philosophies. Having worked with oil paint and pencil on canvas in his earlier works, he began incorporating *hanji* from the 1980s. Unlike the Western paper pulp that reflects color, *hanji* absorbs light, harmonizing with Park's philosophy of art practice and materials becoming one with nature. His method of leaving traces, making furrows and shading areas by repetitively mark-making with a pencil while the *hanji* is still moist, can be interpreted as making the drawing tool subservient to the primitive materiality of the ground. As a result, only the process and intention remain on the canvas, instead of the traces of his pencil.

Similarly in his use of color, Park challenges Western dichotomous thinking, eschewing the individualistic propensity to think in terms of binary opposition, such as "subject and object" and "human and nature." When naming the colors used in his paintings, Park uses common nouns that mainly describe elements of nature, instead of referring to a schematized palette. This comes from Park's desire to not merely express a single color but convey the nuances of that colored subject, thus becoming a complete and comprehensive tone, and reflects the artist's belief that color beholds the viewer's holistic experience with the work. This exhibition offers an opportunity to experience colors that Park Seo-Bo translates from his unique perception of nature onto the canvas such as air, cherry blossoms, canola flowers, and wine, which are showcased in the front gallery of K1, of which the window faces the iconic streets of Samcheong-dong; while hues of ripe persimmon, maple leaves, and golden olives echo in the rear gallery.

About the Artist

Following his first university lecture in 1962, Park Seo-Bo (b.1931) has taught as a professor (1962-1997) and was the Director (1986-1990) of the College of Fine Arts at Hong-Ik University. In 2000, he was appointed Professor Emeritus at the same university, and served as chairman (1977-1980) as well as advisor (1980) of the Korean Fine Arts Association. He has held solo exhibitions at leading domestic and international institutions including major retrospective exhibitions at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (hereafter the MMCA), Seoul, and Langen Foundation, Neuss, in 2019, and the Musée d'art moderne et contemporain de Saint-Étienne Métropole in 2006. In addition, he participated in major biennales including the 13th Biennale de São Paulo (1975); the 8th Biennale de São Paulo (1965); and the 3rd Biennale de Paris (1963), and presented his works in important international group exhibitions, *Korea: Five Artists, Five Hinsek 'White,'* Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo (2018); *Korean Abstract Art: Kim Whanki and Dansaekhwa*, Powerlong Museum, Shanghai (2018-19); *When Process Becomes Form: Dansaekhwa and Korean Abstraction*, Boghossian Foundation, Brussels (2016); the official collateral exhibition of the 56th Venice Biennale *Dansaekhwa*, Venice Biennale, Venice (2015); *Korean Dansaekhwa*, the MMCA, Gwacheon (2012); and *Working with Nature: Traditional Thought in Contemporary Art from Korea*, Tate Liverpool, Liverpool (1992). His works are housed in the collections of renowned institutions all over the globe including the MMCA, Korea; Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Guggenheim Abu Dhabi; and M+, Hong Kong.



Park Seo-Bo (b. 1931)

Écriture (描法) No. 140410

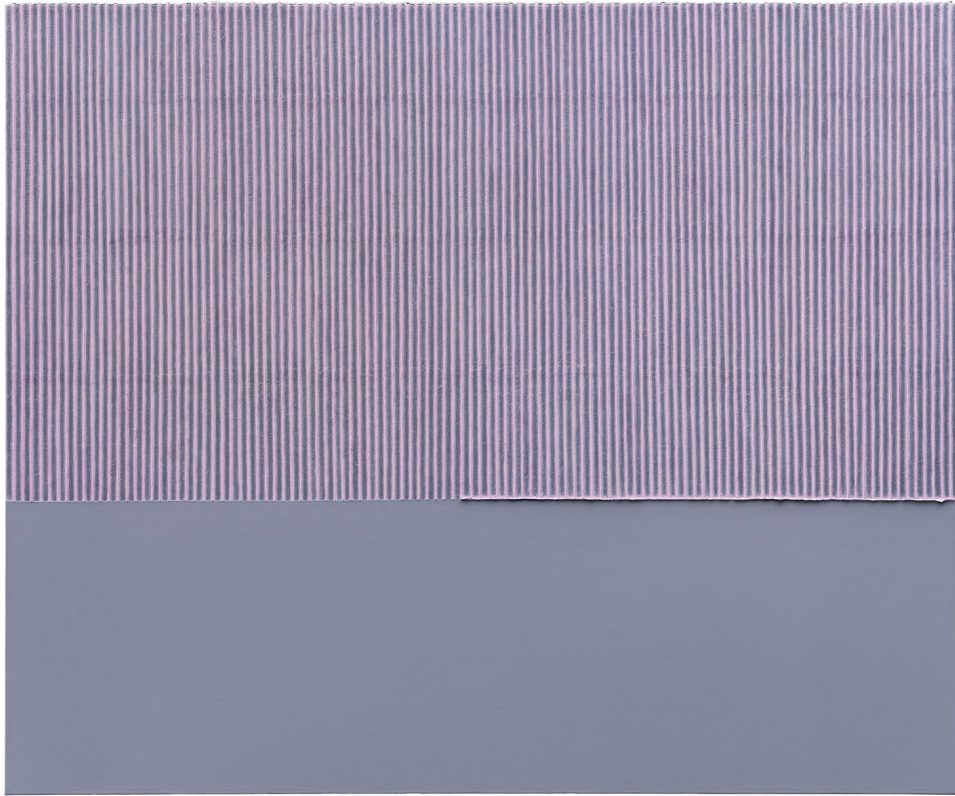
2014

Mixed media with Korean *hanji* paper on canvas
130 x 200 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Park Seo-Bo studio

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Park Seo-Bo (b. 1931)

Écriture (描法) No. 060910-08

2006

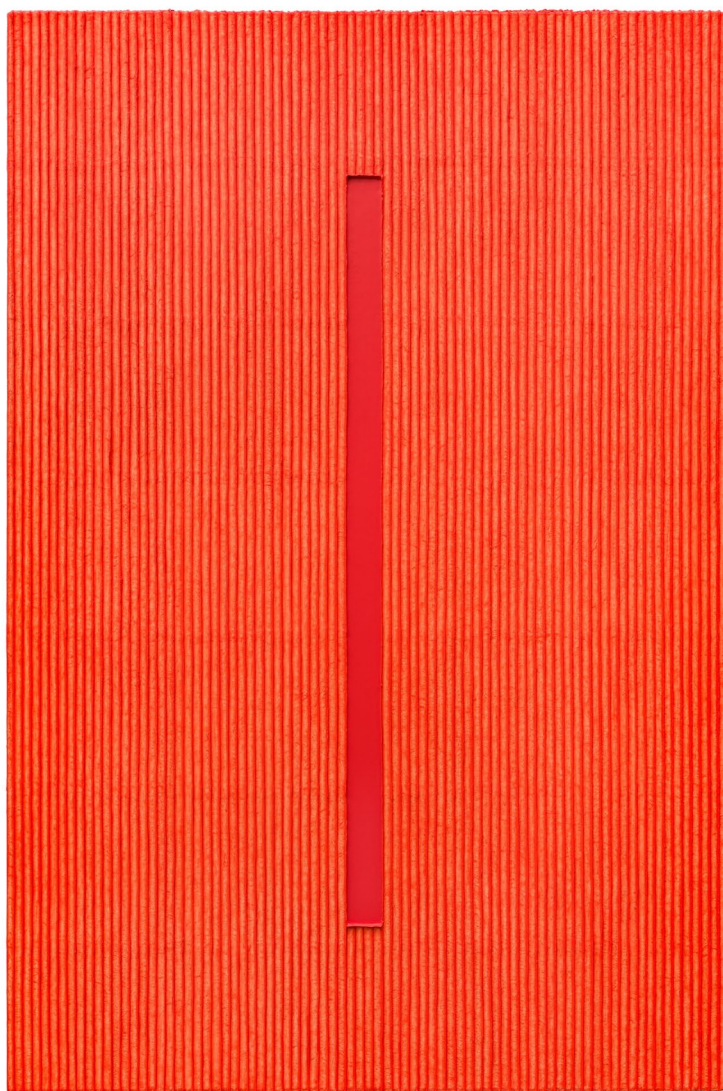
Mixed media with Korean *hanji* paper on canvas

162 x 195 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Park Seo-Bo studio

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Park Seo-Bo (b. 1931)

Écriture (描法) No. 080821

2008

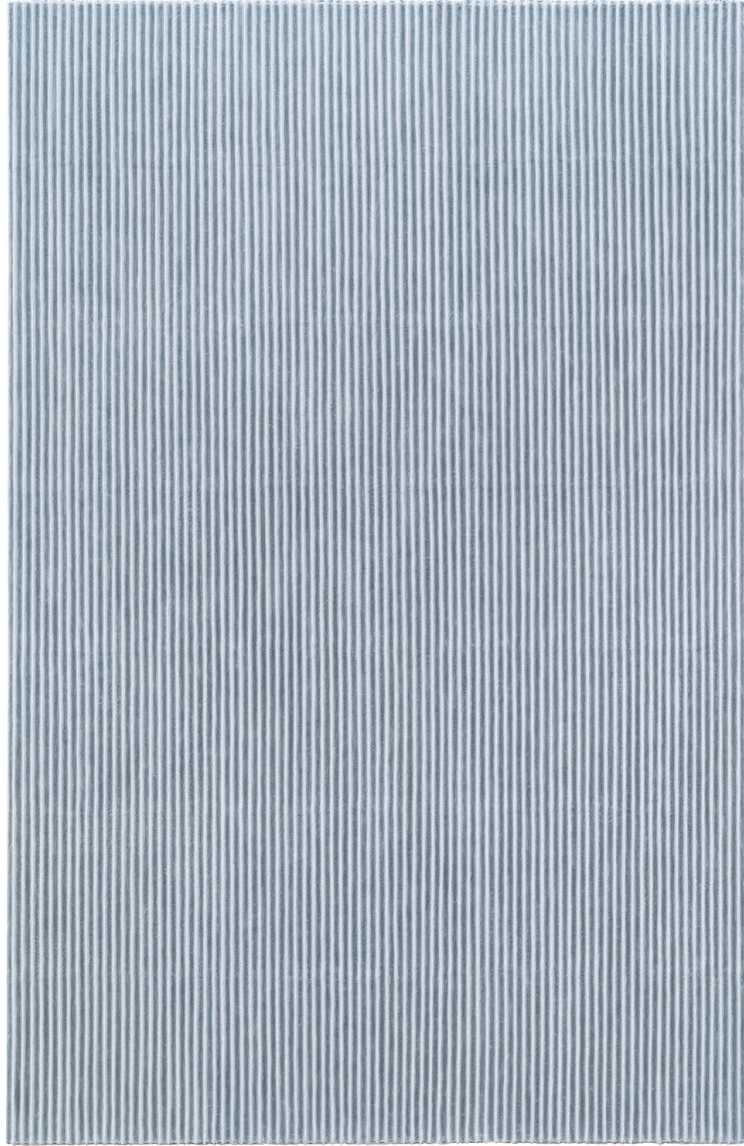
Mixed media with Korean *hanji* paper on canvas

195 x 130 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Park Seo-Bo studio

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Park Seo-Bo (b. 1931)

Écriture (描法) No. 161120

2016

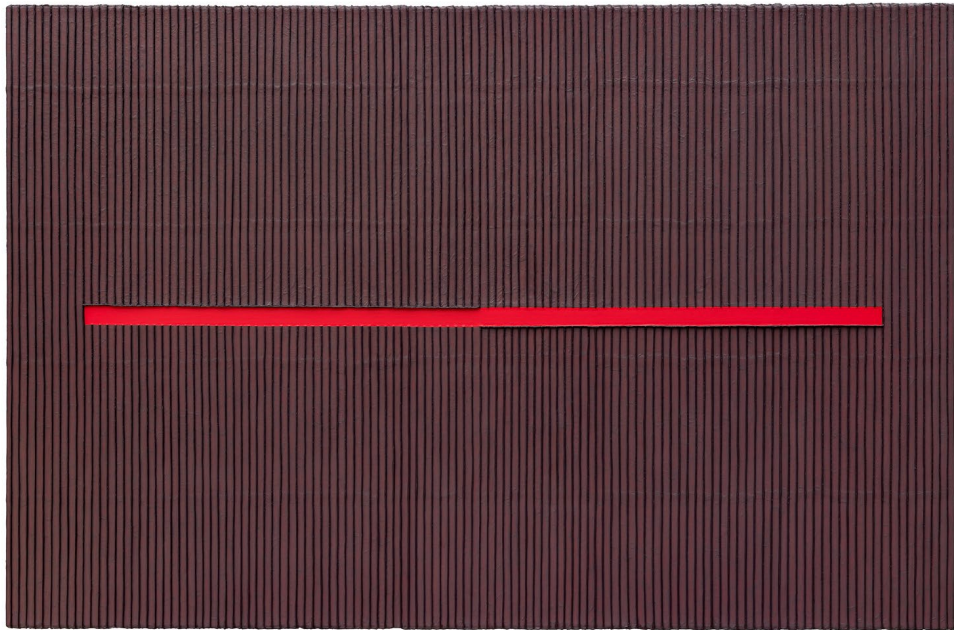
Mixed media with Korean *hanji* paper on canvas

200 x 130 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Park Seo-Bo studio

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Park Seo-Bo (b. 1931)

Écriture (描法) No. 120715

2012

Mixed media with Korean *hanji* paper on canvas
131 x 200 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Park Seo-Bo studio

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Artist portrait of Park Seo-Bo
Photo: Kim Youngrim
Image provided by Kukje Gallery

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