

Two Major UK Exhibitions to open from Korean Artist Kim Yong-Ik

Korean Cultural Centre | 26 September – 4 November 2017

Spike Island | 30 September – 17 December 2017



Kim Yong-Ik, *Triptych*, 1976–2015, Mixed media on canvas and acetate film, 157 x 226 x 16 cm, Photography by Nothing Studio, Courtesy of Artist and Ilmin Museum of Art, part of DSL Collection

Spike Island, Bristol and the Korean Cultural Centre UK, London announce two exhibitions from Korean artist Kim Yong-Ik (b. 1947), marking his first solo presentation in Europe. Kim's 40 year career as an artist, activist and teacher – spanning a turbulent struggle from dictatorship to democracy in South Korea – has had a profound impact on the country's modern art history, influencing many younger artists. The exhibition at Spike Island surveys an array of works from the 1970s onwards, whilst KCCUK presents new site-specific paintings which engage with the surrounding exhibition space. Part of the Korea/UK Season, a programme of extensive cultural events across the UK celebrating Korean creatives, these exhibitions provide a timely insight into Kim's influential oeuvre.

At Spike Island, seminal early works produced under the influence of the Dansaekhwa movement (or 'Korean Monochrome Painting'), are presented alongside later works that demonstrate his relentless questioning and deconstruction of contemporary art. A student of Park Seo-bo (a master of Dansaekhwa), Kim was first recognised in the late 1970s for his Plane Object works, a series of unstretched paintings which challenged the surface and material of the formal picture plane. Kim was invited to exhibit these works at the 1st Young Artists Exhibition held at the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul in 1981. However, in opposition to the increasingly repressive military dictatorship in South Korea, Kim left the works enclosed in their cardboard shipping boxes, labelled with just their titles, dimensions, and materials. This gesture was to forecast his direction throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

During this period, Korea's dominant artistic culture polarised the country between the so called Minjung art (people's art) and Korean Modernism (which believed in paintings' inherent tautology). Although Kim shared some common ground with the Minjung art movement, as both placed emphasis on institutional critique, Kim's focus on conceptual and aesthetic exploration set him on a distinctive path. This is shown by his geometric compositions from the 1980s and 'polka-dot' paintings from the 1990s, also present in Spike Island's exhibition.

Kim's use of the omnipresent polka-dot, perhaps his most distinctly recognisable visual trait, calls into question the very foundations of painting – the canvas. While the dots are crisply applied, the canvas itself is subtly marked and soiled, these imperfections lying at odds with the formal language of the dots. He believed that "a good artwork would be okay even if it's a bit torn or soiled or broken", and that art should be made simply and cheaply. Untitled (on paperboard, 1990) is an early example of the polka-dot series. In this work dots have been mechanically removed from the canvas, rather than depicted within the painting; presented not as voids however, the cut-outs represent instead a promise of new beginnings. In later versions of the polka-dot series, Kim's dots break away from the picture plane, appearing to move beyond the canvas. Transcending the physical limits of the canvas, the artist encompasses the gallery's architecture as part of his painting, thus challenging the role of the canvas as a necessary base for the image. These paintings provide the focal point for KCCUK's exhibition, which will see new site specific works engage directly with the exhibition space.

Kim's artistic and academic practice is not only characterised by his interest in aesthetics but also his belief in art's ability to engage with the social realities of the time. His participation in various artists' resistance movements, including the "Gwangju Biennale Normalisation Art-wide Committee", which criticised the bureaucratisation of the biennale by 'government-friendly artists and critics' point to his disconnection with the art world and his ambition for reform. In 1999, along with the critic Lee Yeong-wook, Hwang Se-jun and artist Park Chan-kyung, Kim founded Korea's first artist run space "art space pool". As an educator and writer, he produced a number of critical texts, ranging from art criticism to writings on the future directions of public and private museums, galleries, and art education.

The exhibitions are co-curated by Helen Legg, director at Spike Island and Jeyun Moon, curator at the Korean Cultural Centre UK.

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Notes to Editors | Kim Yong-Ik

Kim Yong-Ik was born in Seoul in 1947 and graduated from Hongik University in 1980 with an MFA in Painting. He served as a professor of Painting at the Arts and Design College in Kyungwon University from 1991 to 2012.

Selected solo exhibitions of Kim Yong-Ik include his retrospective Closer...Come Closer... at Ilmin Museum of Art, Seoul (2016) and Timidly Resisting the No-Pain-Civilization at Art Space Pool, Seoul (2011). Group shows include the 5th Yokohama Triennale (2014); SeMA Gold 2012: Hidden Track at Seoul Museum of Art (2012); Timidly Resisting the No-Pain-Civilization at Art Space Pool (2011); Tripping the Balance at Anyang Public Art Project (2005); Gwangju Biennale (2002); Korean Pop at Sung-kok Art Museum, Seoul (1999); Yokohama Museum of Art (1983); the 13th São Paulo Art Biennial (1975), and a series of Independents exhibitions at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Gwacheon from 1974 to 1979. His works are in the permanent collections the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul Museum of Art, Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, and Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum among many others.

About Korea/UK Season 2017-2018

The Korea/UK season is a programme of extensive cultural activities taking place across the UK. The season will see multiple institutions present exhibitions, performances, residencies, workshops and public art installations of Korean artists, from 2017 - 2018. KCCUK is lead partner of the season, supporting external projects as well as hosting exhibitions. Collaborating institutions include Art Night, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Delfina Foundation, Eastside Projects, Fact, Gasworks, Hayward Gallery, Liverpool Biennial, Locus +, The New Art Exchange, Nottingham Contemporary, Site Gallery, Space X, Spike Island, The Showroom and Wysing Arts Centre. The Korea/UK season runs parallel to the UK/Korea season which takes place in Korea, and is supported by the British Council. Both seasons endeavour to strengthen the relationship between the two countries and form new cultural and creative partnerships.



About Spike Island

Spike Island is an international centre for the development of contemporary art and design. It is a place where artists and the public can meet, enabling audiences to engage with artists' research and production. Within an 80,000 square foot building, Spike Island offers visitors a year-round programme of exhibitions, events and activities in the central gallery spaces, as well as providing working space for artists, designers and creative businesses. www.spikeisland.org.uk

Spike Island