

Byron Kim Wins Robert De Niro, Sr. Prize, Coveted Award for Mid-Career American Painters

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Byron Kim, *Synecdoche*, 1991–92.

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Byron Kim, one of today's foremost abstract painters, is this year's winner of the Robert De Niro, Sr. Prize, an art award given annually to a mid-career American painter. Through the award, Kim, who currently has an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, will receive \$25,000.

In a phone conversation with ARTnews, Kim, who is based in Brooklyn, said that, when he first received the call that he had won the prize, he assumed that he was being asked to be a juror on the award—and was then shocked to learn that he was the winner. "It was really surprising," he said, adding that he felt a connection to De Niro's paintings, which he described as "really muscular and not apologetic" about occupying the space between figuration and abstraction, and as having "boldly imagined color."

The actor Robert De Niro, the son of the award's namesake, said in a statement, "Byron Kim's dedication to his art and his deep commitment to teaching resonates with my father's own commitment. I am therefore especially pleased with the selection committee's choice this year as it truly honors my father's memory."

Like De Niro, Kim is known for his abstractions. Kim's breakout body of work, an untitled series of monochromes based on human skin tones, appeared in the 1993 Whitney Biennial, and they have since appeared in three editions of the Gwangju Biennale in South Korea and one edition of the Sharjah Biennial in the United Arab Emirates. His works consider how abstraction can portray—and, in some ways, even obfuscate—elements of everyday life.

The jury that chose Kim as the winner included Carmen Hermo, the associate curator of the Brooklyn Museum's Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art; Norman Kleeblatt, the former chief curator of the Jewish Museum in New York; and William S. Smith, the editor of Art in America (which is owned by the same parent company as ARTnews), who previously did a studio visit with Kim.

For Kim, winning the prize "means everything because painting and mid-career is really rough. It really doesn't matter how successful you are, I think, because you have to go to your studio and try to make a good painting, and that's not easy."