

## Kim Yong-Ik

May 5, 2017 | Tina Kim Gallery

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**27 Apr — 17 Jun 2017 at the Tina Kim Gallery in New York, United States**



Kim Yong-Ik, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Tina Kim Gallery

Tina Kim Gallery is pleased to present the first solo exhibition in the United States of Kim Yong-Ik (b. 1947), on view from April 27 through June 17, 2017. The exhibition focuses on three key periods of the artist's career: his Plane Object series of fabric works from the 1970s, his geometric compositions from the 1980s, and his dot paintings from the 1990s. Rooted in modernist painting, Kim's self-reflective practice questions the relationship between the avant-garde and society. Maintaining an independent stance amidst Korea's dominant artistic movements—from the modernism and conceptualism of the 1970s to the Minjung (populist) art movement of the 1980s—Kim uses the medium of painting as a starting point for unveiling both the structure and the contradictions of modern art and its institutions.

As a student, Kim Yong-Ik briefly studied agriculture and life sciences at Seoul National University before transferring to Hongik University to study in the school's renowned oil painting department. There, he worked and studied under Park Seo-Bo, a figurehead of the country's Dansaekhwa movement, who exerted strong influence on the South Korean art scene at the time. Kim's group and solo exhibitions after graduating all focused on his Plane Object series, which features spans of cloth of roughly human scale that are stained, creased, and then displayed directly on the gallery walls without a frame. By spray-painting the cloth while it is stretched or hung, Kim creates trompe-l'oeil contours on the cloth that contradict the surfaces' actual shadows when it is exhibited. The series incorporates aspects of Dansaekhwa's interrogation of a painting's surface and material; Kim transforms the two-dimensional plane of the painting into an ordinary, three-dimensional object, highlighting its material imperfections.

In 1981—at the beginning of the Chun Doo Hwan administration, infamous for its brutal suppression of pro-democracy movements—Kim was invited to exhibit at the 1st Young Artists Exhibition held at the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul. While the intent was to exhibit the Plane Object series, Kim decided to leave the works tightly enclosed in their cardboard shipping boxes, labeled with pieces of paper listing the title, dimension, and materials of the works. The boxes—used, taped-up, and dirty—were shown propped up against the walls of the exhibition hall. While some denounced this decision, Kim's gesture coincided with a larger backlash against modernist painting with the emergence of the Minjung art movement. However, whereas the Minjung movement opposed the austerity of modernist painting with its embrace of vivid figuration and ephemerality, Kim forged an independent response, collapsing the painting in on itself and drawing the viewers' attention to all of its packaging, both literal and figurative. In the following years, Kim continued to withdraw from the concerns of the Minjung movement by focusing on more formalist compositions that favored a clean, sharp-edged geometry.

In the 1990s, Kim turned his focus to a new series: his dot paintings, which feature the repetition of regularly-spaced circles. While these paintings share the seriality and overall composition of the works of Kim's predecessors—such as Park Seo-Bo and Kwon Young-Woo—the uniformly-placed crisp dots have a mechanical quality that defies the manual or the “natural” methods employed by these other artists. The canvases themselves are often in a state of deterioration, covered in scribbled notes, stains, and sometimes mold. The works echo a set of standards that Kim had outlined for his art a few years earlier— a work of art should be simple and cheap to produce, and “a good artwork would be okay even if it's a bit torn or soiled or broken.”<sup>1</sup> Kim revisited some of his dot paintings in the 2000s, altering and presenting them in new ways. In 2005, for instance, Kim began to modify *Closer... come closer...* (1995)—a painting of blue dots, one of several works with the title—by first adding a rough pencil sketch of his body to the canvas. Then, from 2009 to 2010, he left the modified work outside of his studio for a year, where it accumulated natural damage from weather. After taking the painting back inside, he added a design in glittering gold paint and affixed gold-painted bedposts to the work in a kitschy take on a reliquary or an altarpiece.

The work was soon vandalized by children while being shown at an exhibition at the Seoul Museum of Art, an event that Kim celebrated. After this incident he framed the work behind glass, rechristened it *Bidding farewell to you...*, and inscribed on the surface of the glass a text recounting the painting's history. In the text he describes, “[through its vandalization] the work has finally been completed. It was the completion of death! I incorporate the audience's ‘damage-drawings’ as part of the work, and lay it in a glass casket at last. Now it is time to enshrine this work in a museum.”<sup>2</sup> Kim has continued to make works in a similar vein, as in his recent “coffin” series, in which he repackages his works, adorns them with text, and gives them a funeral or burial in the form of an exhibition.



1. Kim Yong-Ik, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Tina Kim Gallery
2. Kim Yong-Ik, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Tina Kim Gallery
3. Kim Yong-Ik, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Tina Kim Gallery