

# Kim Yong-ik redefines modernism

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**Korean artist holds exhibit in Berlin, New York**

By Kwon Mee-yoo  
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Artist Kim Yong-ik ploughs a lonely furrow in the Korean art world.

He was an aspiring modern artist, but he soon broke to Minjung art, a political and populist art movement in Korea, in the 1980s. Later, he practiced public art and experimented with alternative art spaces in Korea.

Instead of being complacent, he always pursued something out of the norm. The 71-year-old artist still discovers new meanings from his old works and breathes new life into them.

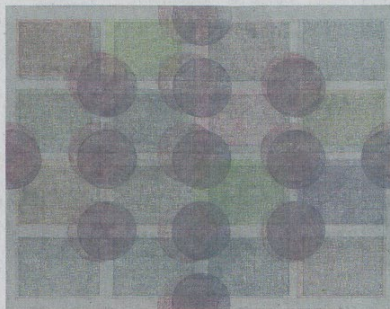
In recent years, he came to have a stronger presence in the international art scene, holding exhibitions at the Korean Cultural Centre UK in London and Spike Island in Bristol in 2017, followed by Cahiers d'Art in Paris in 2018.

On April 27, Kim will be in Berlin to open his first solo exhibition in Germany at Barbara Wien Galerie, coinciding with Gallery Weekend Berlin.

At the Berlin exhibit titled "This is not the answer," Kim will showcase an array of works dating back to the 1970s, including paintings, drawings and sculptures. Kim took part in the Cabinet sector of Art Basel Hong Kong in 2018, where Barbara Wien, founder of the Barbara Wien Galerie, saw Kim's painting "Despair Completed #3" and invited him to hold a solo show at her gallery.

"Barbara also came to see my Paris exhibit featuring prints and drawings and had her mind set (on the Berlin exhibition). Barbara liked the unfinished, less sacred aspects of my works. I call it a drawing, differentiating from a typical, concluded painting," Kim said in an interview with The Korea Times at his studio in Yangpyeong, Gyeonggi Province, Thursday.

"My works are slack and lax. In the world of modernism, artworks are perfect beings, sterilized and isolated from any trace of spoilage and decay. However, my works are imperfect. I paint over



"The Eye of Poetry #18-12018" by Kim Yong-ik



"Untitled (Dedicated to the Exhibition 'Young Artists' in 1981)" by Kim Yong-ik

an existing painting or scribble my thoughts on them, instead of keeping them pristine them at the state of completion," Kim said.

This comes from the artist's attempts to escape from modernist aesthetics, which are at the height of their presence in a sterile white cube gallery space.

"I didn't like completing a piece even in my student days. I was not the meticulous type who digs into things, but more of a man of abandonment. I developed such a habit aesthetically," Kim said.

The artist refers to his pieces as drawings, not paintings, but his drawings are

different from traditional rough sketches.

Kim defines drawings in several peculiar ways. By his definition, a drawing is a work that does not require much extra effort such as manual labor or complex technique, is continuously in progress and does not remain static after reaching a stage of completion, and does not conceal inadvertent blunders such as a blemish or smudge and is still in progress, perhaps in need of further production.

"If we consider painting as the existence of modernist aesthetics, drawing can represent the exact opposite.

Through this style of drawing, we can criticize modernist aesthetics, the modern world and even the purpose-driven modern civilization," Kim said.

Most of Kim's recent "drawings" are not totally new, but remakes of his previous works including his signature polka-dot paintings.

"To make an excuse in an aesthetic way, I don't make new works, but pursue the principles of appropriation. In the post-modern era, it is impossible to create something entirely new and editing the existing is the only way to create new things. For me, appropriation is a way of

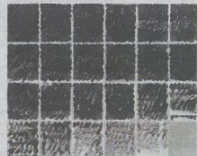
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editing.”  
One facing rework is the most seriously damaged. “Sometimes I paint over as if applying medicine, while adding more similar scars next to the harm. Sometimes I write down explanations with a pencil or put it in a coffin,” he said.  
Such reappropriation is influenced by Kim's pessimistic yet objective perspective on art.

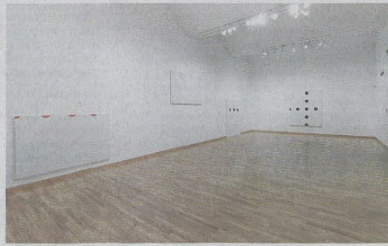
“Basically, I don't trust art, or the role art plays in society. It is ironic for an artist, but I have to continue pursuing art,” he said. “Many professional artists begin painting at a tender age, but I studied agriculture and life sciences at Seoul National University before I decided to become an artist. I don't have such an embodied affection for art and I can abandon it as suddenly as I started.”

After opening the Berlin exhibition, Kim will fly to New York to attend his second U.S. exhibition titled “Speaking of Latter Genesis” at the Tina Kim Gallery. Kim held his first U.S. solo exhibition at the same gallery in 2017 and received strong interest from major American institutions, leading his art to be acquired by institutions such as the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

At the New York exhibition, Kim will present his wall drawing series, which was showcased at “Flatland,” a group exhibition held at the Kumho Museum of Art in 2018.



▲ "This is not the answer #18-3" by Kim Yong-ik



▶ Installation view of Kim Yong-ik's "Flatland" at Kumho Museum of Art  
Courtesy of the artist