

A New Exhibition in Seoul Looks Back at a Korean Artist's Creative Journey in the U.S.

October 3, 2016 | Bridget Gleeson

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Image courtesy of Kukje Gallery.

The Korean artist Wook-kyung Choi (1940–1985) was in her early 20s when she arrived in the United States to study painting. It marked the beginning of a pivotal 15-year period in a creative career—and life—that was cut short far too soon.

"American Years 1960s–1970s," now on view at Kukje Gallery in Seoul, covers that crucial period, featuring more than 50 drawings and paintings Choi created between 1963 and 1978 while living in America. The young artist had already completed formal studies in her native country, but it was in the U.S. that she felt the strong influence of American Abstract Expressionism, an influence that helped shape her own artistic style.



Image courtesy of Kukje Gallery.

Today, decades after her untimely death from a heart attack, Choi is considered a pioneer in the field of Korean Abstract Expressionism. Along with her bold color and free-spirited brushwork, her work is characterized by its fusion of artistic traditions from both the East and West.

This latest exhibition looks at several key phases from those years. Choi first came to the U.S. as a student at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and went on to study at the Brooklyn Museum School of Art. Later, she worked as an assistant professor at Franklin Pierce College in New Hampshire and received an artist residency grant from the Roswell Museum in New Mexico.

It stands to reason, then, that the exhibition is similarly eclectic, running the range from figurative paintings to monochromatic works inspired by calligraphy, and from bold, abstract pieces to collages crafted from newspaper and magazine clippings.

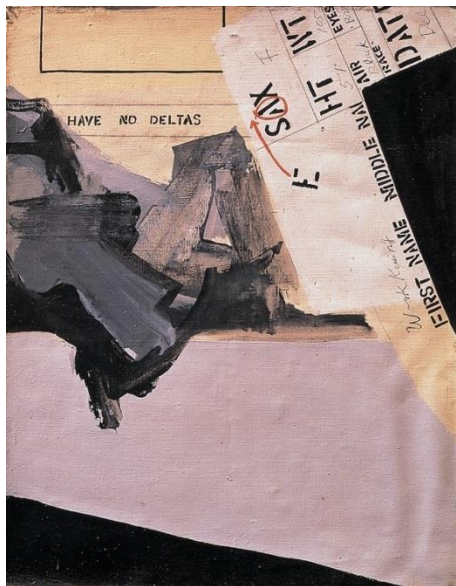


Image courtesy of Kukje Gallery.

“My works fall under the category of abstract expressionism,” Choi once said. “However, during my study and the creation of my works in America, although my abstract expressionism was spontaneous and free-formed, I was left with a sense of futility. So I had abstract expressionism in my heart and tried to discover figures or forms in my painting.”

Those figures and forms include organic shapes from the natural world as well as human figures, like the African-American man in *Who is the Winner in this Bloody Battle?* Completed in 1968, the work reflects the

tumultuous political climate that surrounded Choi in her adopted home. After all, she wasn't merely a passive observer in the U.S.; she was a mirror and an interpreter who observed and expressed the country's various colors of social anxiety.



Image courtesy of Kukje Gallery.

Choi eventually returned to Korea, where she passed away at 45. Fittingly, this homage to her creative journey abroad is held in the same city where her life started and ended, the place where she first discovered her artistic calling.

“Wook-kyung Choi: American Years 1960s–1970s” is on view at Kukje Gallery, Seoul, Aug. 31–Oct. 30, 2016.