

Culture

Dansaekhwa on the rise

By Kwon Mee-yoo

Posted : 2015-08-09 17:12



Artist Ha Chong-hyun's "Conjunction" series are on display at the "Dansaekhwa" exhibit at Palazzo Contarini-Polignac in Venice through Aug. 15. / Courtesy of Kukje Gallery

"Dansaekhwa" is the talk of the art community across the globe these days. This seminal movement in Korean modern art is gaining attention for its unique form of Korean modernism.

Dansaekhwa literally translates into "monochrome painting", but the term does not necessarily mean simple solid-color artwork.

Yoon Jin-sup, critic and professor at Honam University who was the curator of a major Dansaekhwa exhibition at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea in 2012, was the first to come up with the term Dansaekhwa during the 2000 Gwangju Biennale when he organized a special exhibition, "The Facet of Korean and Japanese Contemporary Art," to distinguish Korean monochromatic painting that shaped the nation's modern art.



Installation view of Kim Whan-ki's works at the "Dansaekhwa" exhibit at Palazzo Contarini-Polignac in Venice

Yoon saw repetition in the artwork as a result of endless searching for neutrality and transcendence. "The school is devoted to the process of repetition and specificity of material based on meditative nature, which is the opposite of the Western Minimalism and monochrome's rationality and logic," Yoon said.

The abstract paintings are seemingly similar to Western Minimalism or monochrome paintings, but they were inspired by Korea's political, social and cultural situations in postwar years.

According to Lee Yong-woo, curator of the Dansaekhwa exhibition underway in Venice, the birth of Dansaekhwa is closely related to Korea's postwar sentiment and rapid economic growth.



Installation view of Lee U-fan's works at the "Dansaekhwa" exhibit at Palazzo Contarini-Polignac in Venice.

"Dansaekhwa can be thought of as Korea's postwar modernism, the extension of a sensibility similar to those that underlay the 1950s West-influenced Informel, and 1960s and '70s Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism," Lee said.

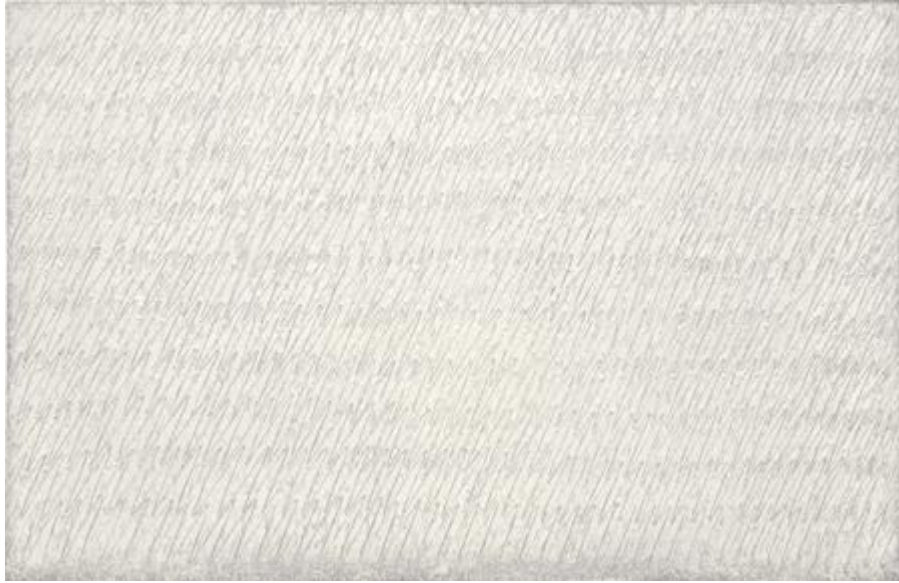
As the art world diverted its interest to abstract art — especially for non-Western modernism — in the 2000s, Dansaekhwa started to receive attention for its simple aesthetic beauty along with sociopolitical component.

Globalizing Dansaekhwa

Dansaekhwa was featured at top international art events such as London's Frieze Masters art fair and Art Basel in Miami Beach, where it garnered considerable interest.

The popularity of Dansaekhwa has also been proved through auctions as the auction price for major Dansaekhwa works soared over recent years. In May, Kim Whan-ki's HK\$13.8 million (\$1.8 million) at Christie's sale of Asian works, a record price for a piece of Korean Dansaekhwa.

Along with the international attention centered on Dansaekhwa, an exhibition sheds light on the Korean art movement in Venice, the capital of contemporary art and home to the world-famous Biennale.



Park Seo-bo's "Ecriture no. 89-79-82-83"

"Dansaekhwa," an official collateral event of the 56th international art exhibition, is held at Palazzo Contarini-Polignac, located on the Grand Canal, co-organized by the Boghossian Foundation in Brussels, Tina Kim Gallery in New York and Kukje Gallery.

Occupying all three floors of the 15th century Renaissance palace, the exhibition features some 70 works from seven notable artists from the school, highlighting the origin and significance of Dansaekhwa.

Curator Lee said this exhibition is going to be a platform for Dansaekhwa to increase a following on the international art scene.

The seven participating artists are Chung Chang-sup, Chung Sang-hwa, Ha Chong-hyun, Kim Whan-ki, Kwon Young-woo, Lee U-fan and Park Seo-bo. Though loosely affiliated as Dansaekhwa artists in general, each artist has distinct physical practice of repetitive actions.



Chung Chang-sup's "Wandering"

Chung Chang-sup (1927 - 2011) mainly used "dakjonggi," or Korean traditional mulberry paper. The artist soaked paper in water and molded shapes with it, maximizing materiality of the paper.

Chung Sang-hwa (1932-) is known for his repetitive, laborious process to create profound depth on unicolor canvas. He folds the colored canvas at regular intervals to make cracked lines where the fragments of paint are removed.

Ha Chong-hyun (1935-)s works emphasize texture, as the artist pushes thick paint from the obverse side of the woven hemp canvas.

The late Kim Whan-ki (1913-1974) is one of the pioneers in Korean modern art. He promoted abstract art in Korea, centering on formal elements such as points, lines, and planes.

Kwon Young-woo (1926-2013) also took interest in the characteristics of Korean traditional paper. He used his fingernails to scratch and tear thin sheets and stacked the torn papers to create dynamic three-dimensional relief sculptures.

Lee U-fan (1936-), the founder of Japanese art movement Mono-ha and also leading artist of Dansaekhwa, explored the themes of gesture and the connection between mark making and the medium of paint itself through his "From Line" and "From Point" series.

Last but not least, Park Seo-bo (1931-) is one of the founding members of Dansaekhwa, employing simple but dramatic gestures that allude to a rudimentary languages on traditional Korean paper. He still maintains this spirit, pushing the boundaries of Dansaekhwa until today.

Continuous research and discourse study on Dansaekhwa are crucial to secure the school's place in art history, representing Korea's modern history.

"In the future, Dansaekhwa and its many artists will be recognized not merely for work that explores monochromatic colors on canvas, but also as a practice focused on a highly refined philosophy of physical action. I am hopeful that this will bring renewed inquiry and deserved attention to both the importance of physical performance in Dansaekhwa and the ongoing rigor of its artists," curator Lee said.

The exhibit runs through Aug. 15. For more information, visit www.venice-dansaekhwa.com.

meeyoo@ktimes.com

URL : http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/culture/2015/08/148_184474.html