

Dansaekhwa and Korean Abstraction at Boghossian Foundation in Brussels

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page 1 of 2



Chung Sang-Hwa (b.1932), 'Untitled 86-2-28', 1986, Acrylic on canvas, 227.3 x 181.8cm, Collection of Leeum, Samsung, Museum of Art, Seoul. Photo copyright © Sang-tae Kim

Opening at the Boghossian Foundation's Villa Empain in Brussels this weekend is "When Process Becomes Form: Dansaekhwa and Korean Abstraction," the first exhaustive exhibition of the Korean Dansaekhwa movement in Belgium, featuring some fifty works by seven of its leading proponents: Chung Chang-Sup, Chung Sang-Hwa, Ha Chong-Hyun, Kim Whanki, Kwon Young-woo, Lee Ufan, and Park Seo-Bo.

Co-organized with Seoul's Kukje Gallery and New York's Tina Kim Gallery and curated by Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath, "When Process Becomes Form: Dansaekhwa and Korean Abstraction" represents the latest effort by the two galleries to boost the international critical profile of the Korean movement.

At Frieze Masters in 2014, curator Yoon Jin Sup presented "The Art of Dansaekhwa," a showcase of major artists over a fifty-year span. This was followed by another high-profile presentation that was one of the official Collateral Events at the Venice Biennale last year. Curated by Yongwoo Lee and also co-organized with the Boghossian Foundation, "Dansaekhwa" sprawled over the three floors of the fifteenth-century Palazzo Contarini-Polignac sitting on the Grand Canal.

Painstakingly assembled from prominent private and institutional collections, “When Process Becomes Form” highlights a corpus of work that trains a steady gaze on a particular, postwar historical moment in South Korea, where the exploration of an abstract visual language amid a turbulent political backdrop helped these Korean painters to pioneer an idiom entirely their own.

Unlike the expressionist, gestural painting that dominated other postwar movements like the Japanese Gutai, Dansaekhwa was based on assiduous, repetitive manual labor, and a certain handcrafted, conspicuously austere mode of production that many have likened to a process of monastic training.

At the same time, the artistic forays of Dansaekhwa’s prime proponents were also invested in trying to establish a certain wider context for Korean art in relation to a global conversation about abstraction and modernism — the notion of “multiple modernities” that has become much in vogue in recent years, as formerly overlooked marginal regions become increasingly invested in reclaiming a sense of their own historical and artistic significance.

“When Process Becomes Form: Dansaekhwa and Korean Abstraction” runs at the Boghossian Foundation – Villa Empain from February 20 through April 24, 2016.