



MATERIAL

Contemporary Art in South Korea

& FORM

OPERA GALLERY

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25 April — 11 May 2025

SINGAPORE

OPERA GALLERY

FOREWORD

We are pleased to bring together seven luminary Korean artists working across a diverse range of mediums and subjects to Opera Gallery Singapore for ‘Material & Form: Contemporary Art in South Korea’.

In recent years, South Korea’s cultural exports — film, music, literature and, perhaps above all, art — have gained increasing recognition on the global stage. This exhibition showcases the artistic outputs of a nation where almost a century of rapid modernisation has produced a rich and varied visual culture. In the second half of the 20th century, following years of foreign rule, military administration and war, South Korea quickly developed a contemporary art scene that was both boundary-pushing and reverential of the country’s cultural history.

The history of artistic expression across the globe is full of rhymes and coincidences, comparable visual paradigms emerging in different geographies. It’s important that these developments are understood both in their own unique contexts and as part of global currents. Take, for example, the deeply textured abstract paintings of Lee Jung Ho. On one hand, they might be understood as part of a Informalist lineage including artists from Jackson Pollock to Georges Mathieu. On the other hand, their fractured surfaces could also be compared to those of crackle glazed Korean Goryeo celadon ceramics which date back to the 11th century.

This exhibition is a survey of South Korean art today, arranged across the two axes of material and form. Each artist — from Lee Gi Seong, whose oxidised steel powder abstractions are both relic-like and undeniably contemporary to Chun Kwang Young, whose expansive relief sculptures unfold in three dimensions across the wall — combines them to achieve unique results. In each case, we see resonances of both the history of Korean art and the broader visual canon.

No artistic tradition is a monolith. Within this exhibition you will find seven singular and unique practices that contribute to and draw on a wider history. Each artist responds not only to the lineage that they belong to, but also to their own unique experiences and points of view.

Cho Sung Hee blends her own personal reflections with her Korean artistic heritage. Her intricately constructed collages are evocative of flowerbeds replete with blooms that recall her childhood spent watching her father tend his garden. These meditative artistic recollections are rendered in hanji, a type of paper made from the bark of a mulberry tree native to Korea. Its use as an artistic medium can be traced back to wood block prints from ancient times, and it is still used today by thousands of artists and craftspeople around the world.

Stories like Cho’s recur throughout this exhibition, each artist’s approach to material and form at once informed by their background and their own specificity. Seo Young-Deok and Lee Gil Rae, for example, use the materials of Korea’s 20th century industrialisation to sensitively depict human and natural forms, and Jae Ko draws equal inspiration from the bright colours of traditional Korean paintings and intricate patterns that occur within nature. Here in Singapore, all of these artistic practices come together to form a snapshot of one of today’s most vital and vibrant artistic movements.

Gilles DYAN
Founder & Chairman
Opera Gallery Group

Stéphane LE PELLETIER
Director, Asia Pacific Opera Gallery
Singapore



CHUN Kwang Young

(b. 1944)

Chun Kwang Young's materially-driven practice represents a bridge between the Western abstract art traditions that became popular in the mid-20th century and his own unique methodology, inspired by Korean culture. Born in Hongchun, South Korea, in 1944, Chun grew up during the end of Japanese colonization and the brutality of the Korean War. In the early 1970s, he moved to the United States to pursue a Master's Degree at Philadelphia College of Art, where he instantly became drawn to Abstract Expressionism. Over time, he decided to move towards a visual language that was uniquely his — a decision that gave rise to the sculptural works that he is now known for.

Today, using materials that reference Korean history and culture — chiefly, triangular cells made from delicate hanji paper, reminiscent of the packaging for medicine during his childhood — he has developed a novel technique and style. Meticulously composed and often resembling organic formations, Chun's mixed media relief sculptures, known as his 'Aggregation' series, lose none of the energy and dynamism of Abstract Expressionism. These hard-edged works are covered with forms and clusters that the artist describes as moving "in groups all over the surface, making scars, creating movements and depicting confrontations and conflicts."

Chun was named Artist of the Year by the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, in 2001 and in 2009 he was awarded the Presidential Prize in the 41st Korean Culture and Art Prize by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. His work is in numerous public collections, including the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, The Rockefeller Foundation and the United Nations in New York, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art and Seoul Museum of Art in Seoul and the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra.

CHUN Kwang Young

Aggregation 16-DE111
2016

Mixed media with Korean mulberry paper
Titled and inscribed 'AGGREGATION 16-DE111 /
163 x 131 cm / MIXED MEDIA WITH "KOREAN" /
MULBERRY PAPER' on the reverse
163 x 131 cm | 64.2 x 51.6 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio





CHUN Kwang Young

Aggregation 17-AU041 (Star 15)
2017

Mixed media with Korean mulberry paper
Signed, titled and inscribed 'Chun Kwang-Young /
AGGREGATION 17-AU041 / (Star 15) / (160 cm
diameter) / MIXED MEDIA WITH KOREAN /
MULBERRY PAPER' on the reverse
160 x 160 cm | 63 x 63 in

PROVENANCE

Artist's studio

CHUN Kwang Young

Aggregation 18-JA009
2018

Mixed media with Korean mulberry paper
Signed, titled and inscribed 'Chun Kwang Young /
AGGREGATION 18-JA011 / 195 x 143 cm / MIXED MEDIA
WITH KOREAN / MULBERRY PAPER' on the reverse
182 x 163 cm | 71.7 x 64.2 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio

CERTIFICATE
The artist has confirmed the authenticity of this work.







CHUN Kwang Young

Aggregation 18-JA011
2018

Mixed media with Korean mulberry paper
Signed, titled and inscribed 'Chun Kwang Young /
AGGREGATION 18-JA011 / 195 x 143 cm /
MIXED MEDIA WITH KOREAN /
MULBERRY PAPER' on the reverse
195 x 132 cm | 76.8 x 52 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio



CHO Sung Hee

(b. 1949)

Cho Sung Hee is a mixed media artist whose meditative mixed media practice invites the viewer into a meditative world of colour, texture and repetition. Born in Jeon-ju, South Korea, she first trained as an artist at Hongik University and Ewha Womans University, before moving to the United States where she went on to study at the Pratt Institute in New York and the Art Institute of Chicago. Her work celebrates the quietude and beauty of nature, exploring the garden as a key motif representing both her own childhood memories and the fleeting fragility of memory itself.

Cho Sung Hee constructs her works, which sit somewhere between collage and relief sculpture, using a unique method by which many circles are hand-cut or torn from a sheet of Hanji, a traditional Korean paper made from mulberry bark. They are then saturated with pigment and layered atop one another in arrangements that are either monochromatic or replete with a variety of colours. This methodical, meditative process reflects the values passed on to Cho by her father, as well as her earliest memories of watching him tending the family garden.

As well as containing references to Cho's own biography, her oeuvre acts as a counterpoint to fast transmission of information that defines today's world, leaning deliberately into slow, reflective activity. As she puts it, "I want my work to be a shelter to those who are tired of today's fast paced society and bring a moment of respite into their world."

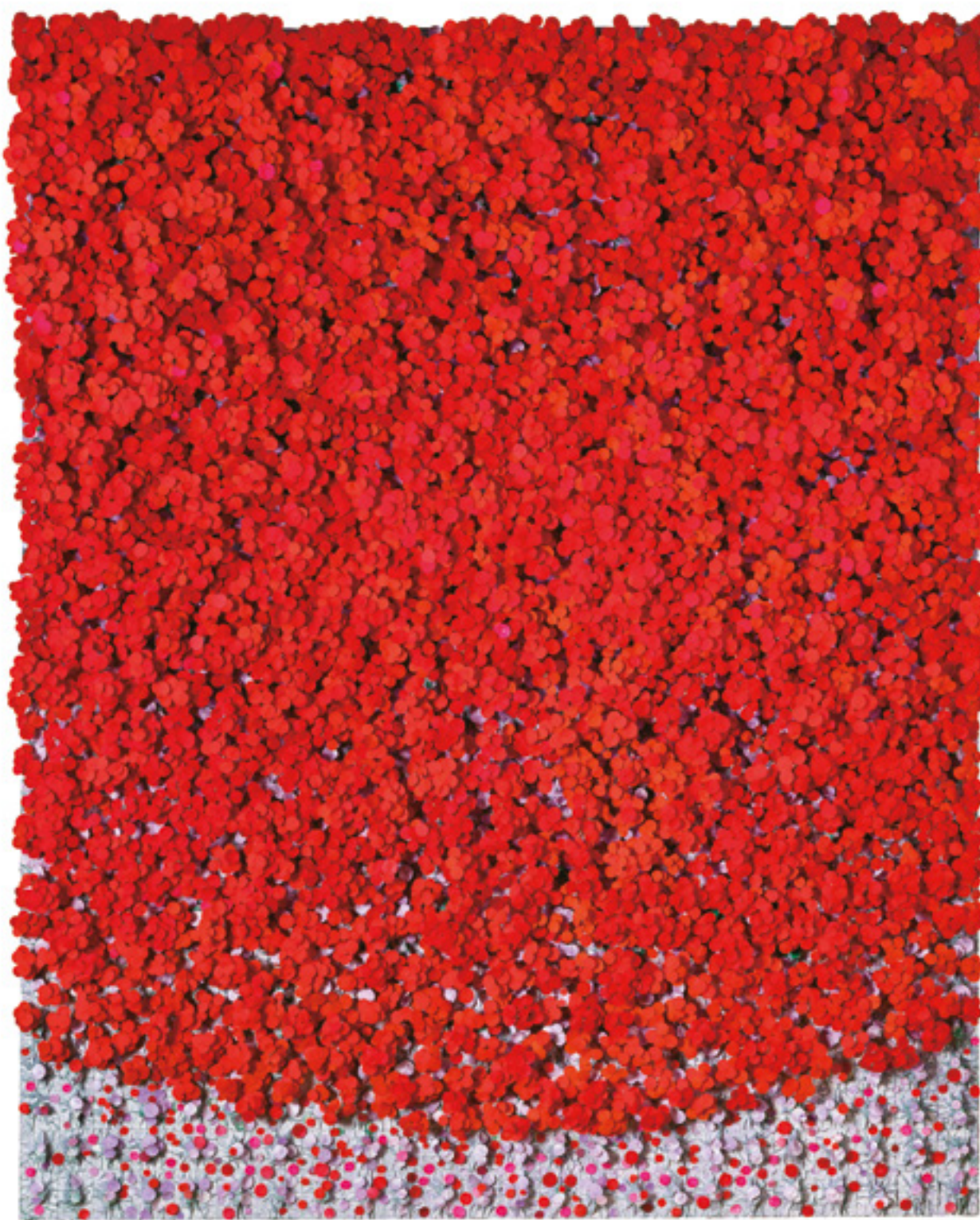
Cho's work has been exhibited and collected by various prestigious private and public institutions around the world including the Museum of Contemporary Art and Sejong Art Centre in Seoul, Telentine Art Centre in Chicago and the LA Korean Cultural Service.

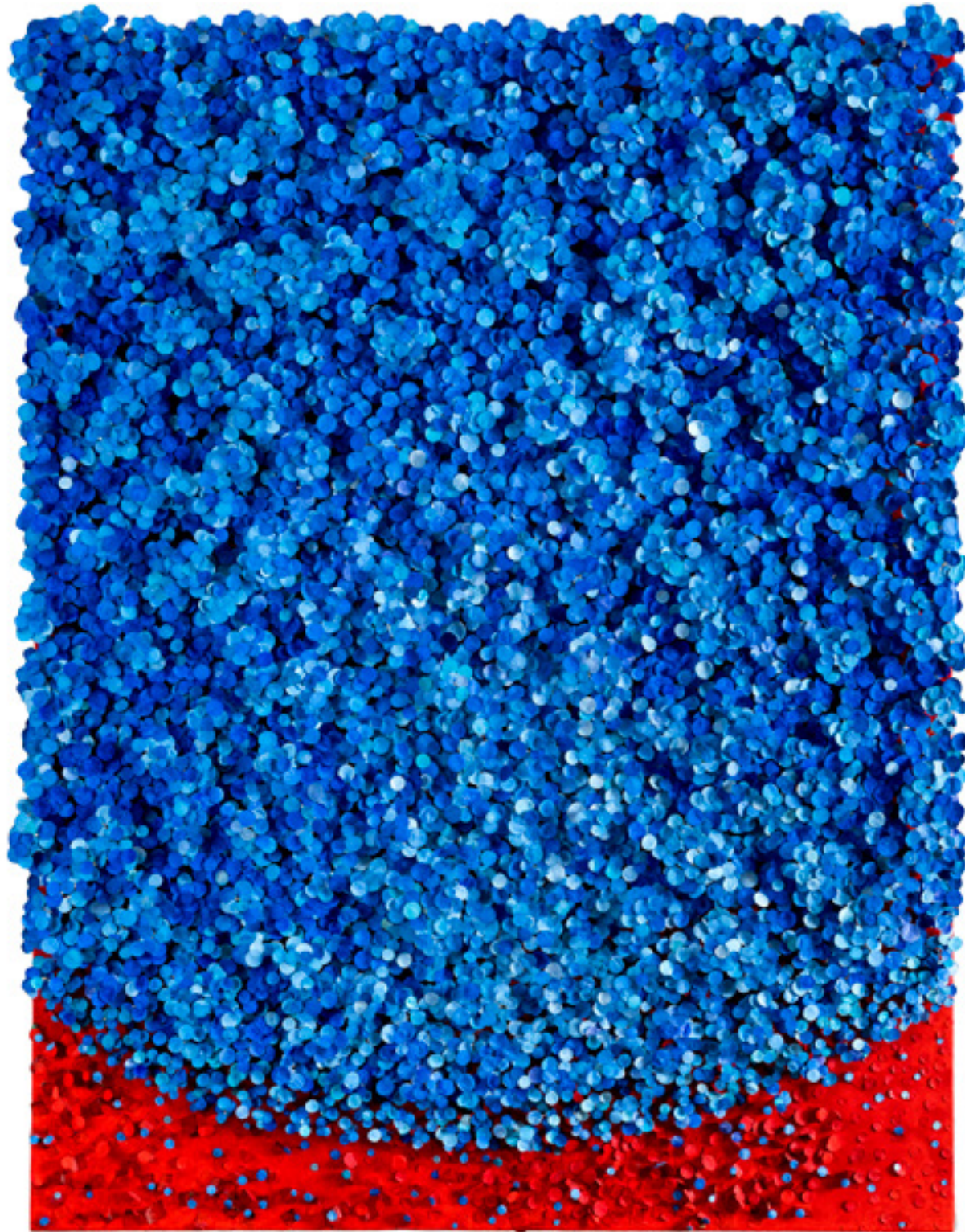
CHO Sung Hee

Red Blossom
2018

Collage, Korean rice paper (Hanji) with oil on canvas
Signed, titled, dated and inscribed 'sung hee CHO / Title: Red Blossom / Year: 2018 / work: collage: korean rice paper (Hanji) / with oil on canvas / size: 162.2 x 130.3 cm' on the reverse
162.2 x 130.3 cm | 63.8 x 51.2 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio





CHO Sung Hee

Blue Cluster
2018

Collage, Korean rice paper (Hanji)
with oil on canvas

Signed, titled, inscribed and dated 'sung Hee
CHO / Title: Blue Cluster. Size: 145 x 112 cm /
Year: 2018 / work: Collage: Korean rice paper /
(Hanji) / with oil on canvas 'on the reverse
145 x 112 cm | 57.1 x 44.1 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio

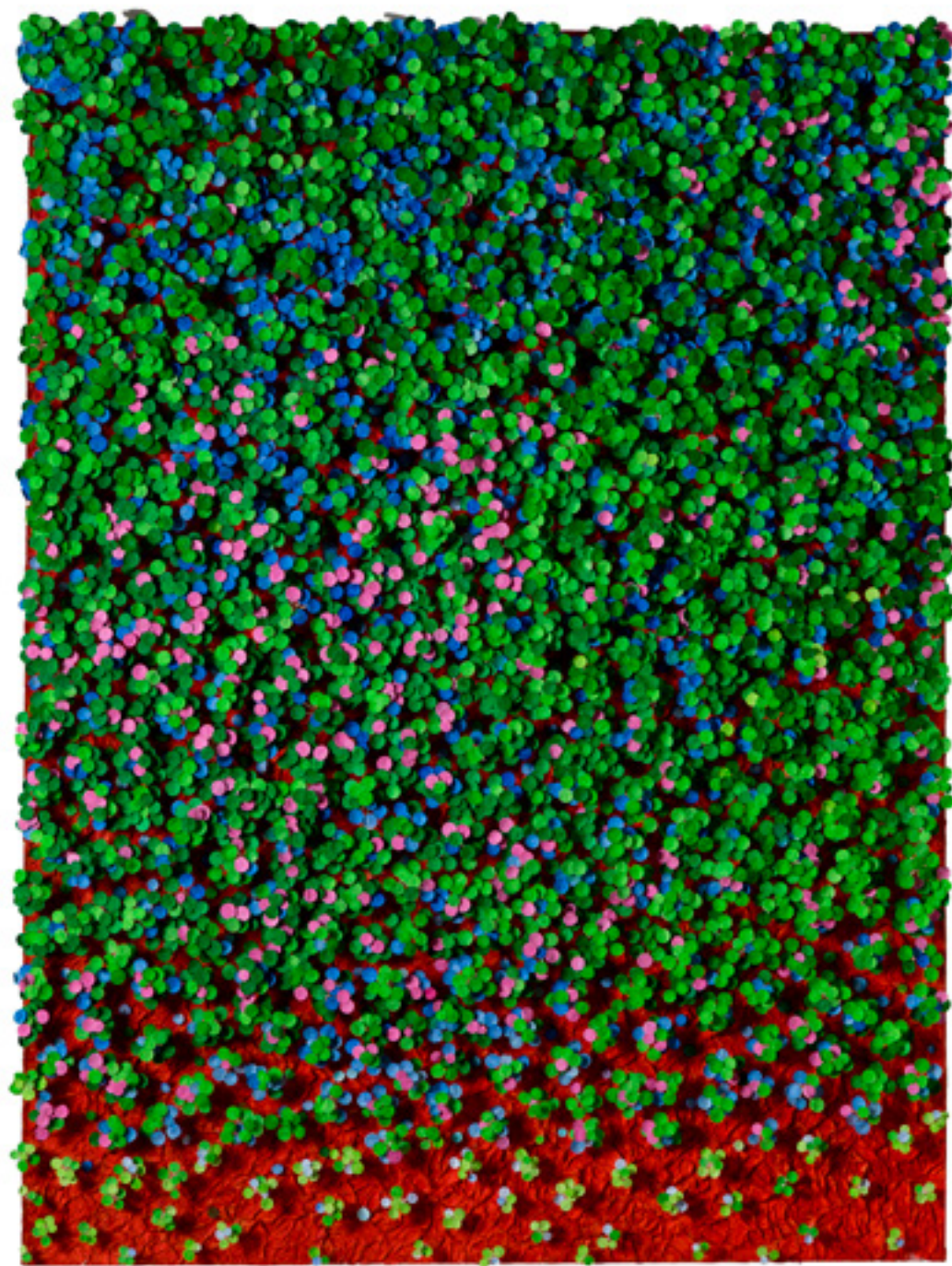
CHO Sung Hee

Happy Blossom
2019

Collage, Korean rice paper (Hanji) with oil on canvas
Signed, titled, dated and inscribed 'sung hee CHO / Title: Happy Blossom / Year: 2019.2.12 / size: 162.2 x 130.3 cm / work: collage, korean rice paper / (Hanji) / with oil on canvas' on the reverse
162.2 x 130.3 cm | 63.8 x 51.2 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio





CHO Sung Hee

Green Blossoms

2019

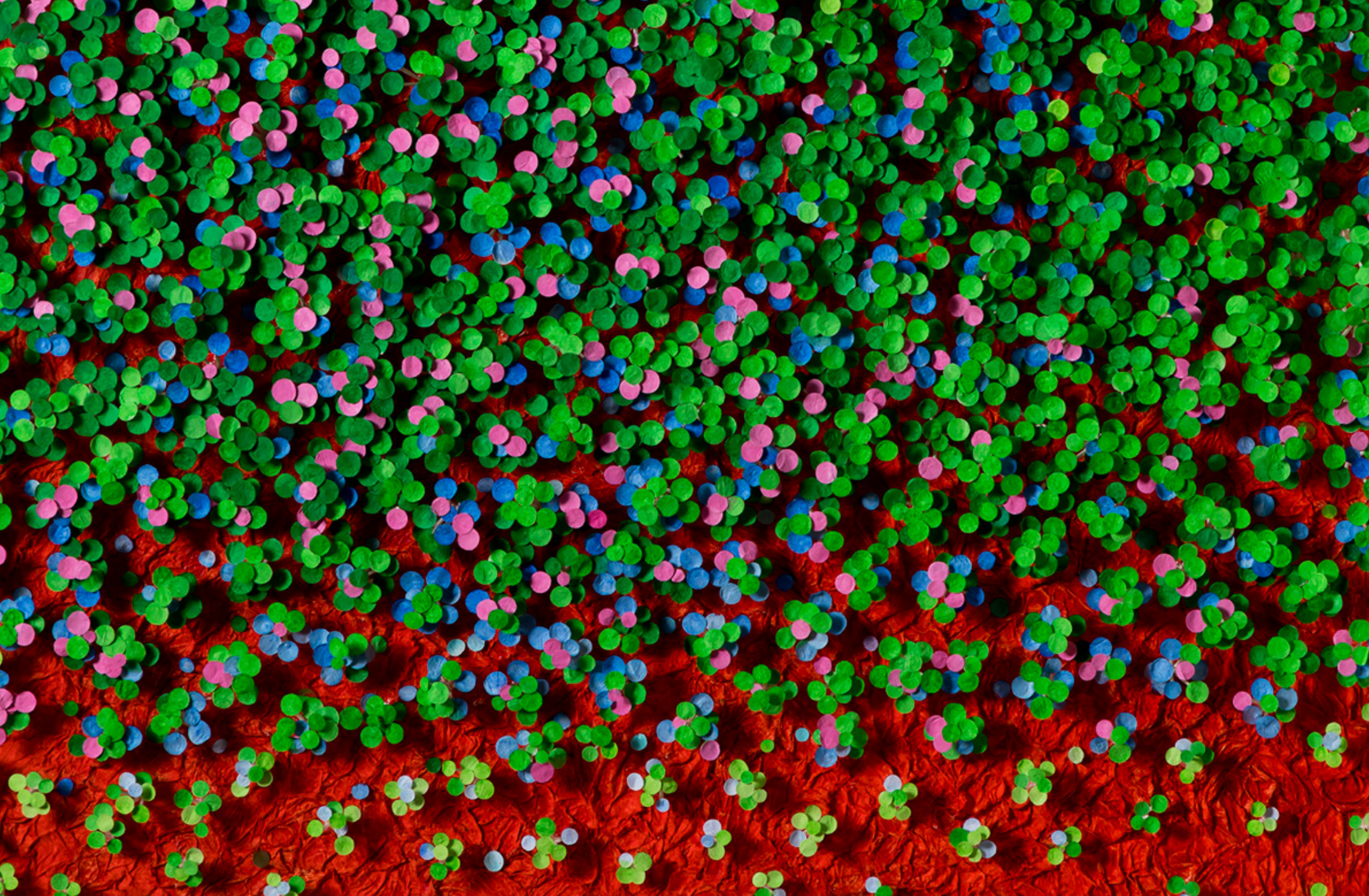
Collage, Korean rice paper (Hanji) with oil on
canvas

Signed, titled, dated and inscribed 'sung hee CHO
/ Title: Green Blossoms / Year: 20190110 / size:
130.3 x 97 cm / work : collage / Korean rice paper
(Hanji) / with oil on canvas' on the reverse

130.3 x 97 cm | 51.2 x 38.2 in

PROVENANCE

Artist's studio



CHO Sung Hee

Gold Blossoms and Gold Stars

2019

Collage, Korean rice paper (Hanji) with oil on canvas
Signed, titled, dated and inscribed 'sung hee CHO / Title:
Gold Blossoms and / Gold stars / Year: 20190922 / Size :
117 x 91 cm / work: collage / Korean Rice paper / (Hanji)
and / oil on canvas' on the reverse
117 x 91 cm | 46.1 x 35.8 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio





CHO Sung Hee

Garden in Universe

2023

Collage, Korean rice paper (Hanji) with oil on canvas
Signed, titled, inscribed and dated 'sung hee CHO /
Title: Garden in universe / size : 145 x 112.2 cm /
year: 2023 / work: collage / korean rice paper (Hanji) /
with oil on canvas' on the reverse

145 x 112.2 cm | 57.1 x 44.2 in

PROVENANCE

Artist's studio



LEE Gi Seong

(b. 1959)

Korean artist Lee Gi Seong was born in 1959. He is renowned for creating abstract works using iron powder which, as it oxidises, creates unpredictable patterns on the surface of the raw canvas. His process involves mixing iron powder with a medium to create a dough-like substance, which he then pours onto an unpainted canvas, manipulating it until he is happy with the form. He then uses acid to oxidise the surface. As an artist, he is interested in the immediate impact of abstraction upon the senses of the viewer. In this way, he aims to create a timeless communication that is visceral, rather than cerebral.

Lee has explored various materials and techniques in his creative endeavours, from painting to installation art, before settling on this method. When working, he gradually reduces his personal thoughts and consciousness, leaving only the material and his body, interacting in a wholly natural and unconscious way. He is also interested in material degradation — something that all physical things, including people, are subject to. Rust comes to symbolise the process of aging and weathering that awaits us all. Running alongside this, though, is a paradoxical sense of timelessness: the moment of communion between artwork and viewer as one that somehow transcends reality. As Lee says, “through art, humans can forget their fear of death.”

Lee’s work has been displayed around the world and is included in a number of public and private collections.

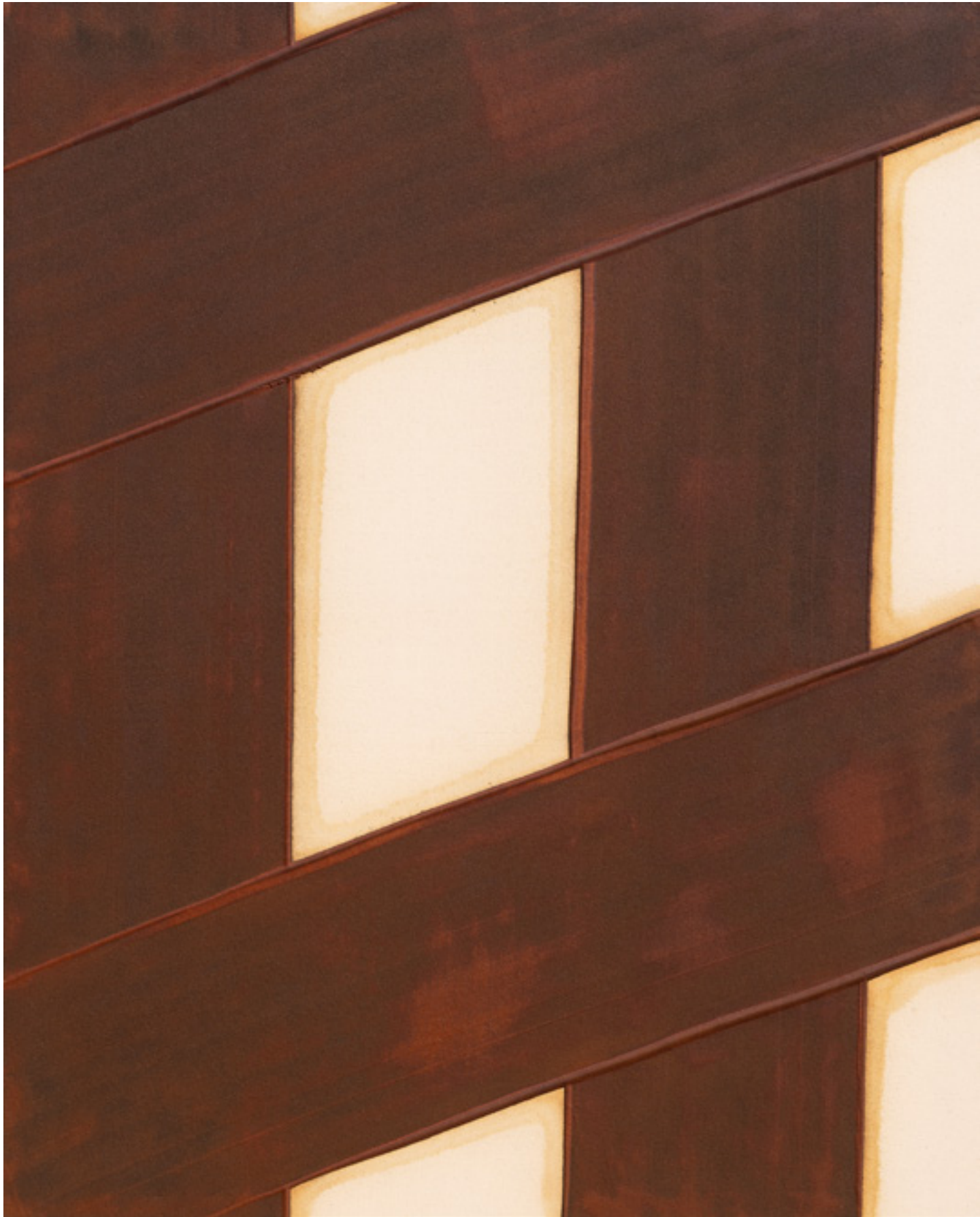
LEE Gi Seong

Kalpa 2250-016
2022

Mixed media on canvas
117 x 91 cm | 46.1 x 35.8 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio





LEE Gi Seong

Kalpa 22100-024
2022

Mixed media on canvas
162 x 130 cm | 63.8 x 51.2 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio

LEE Gi Seong

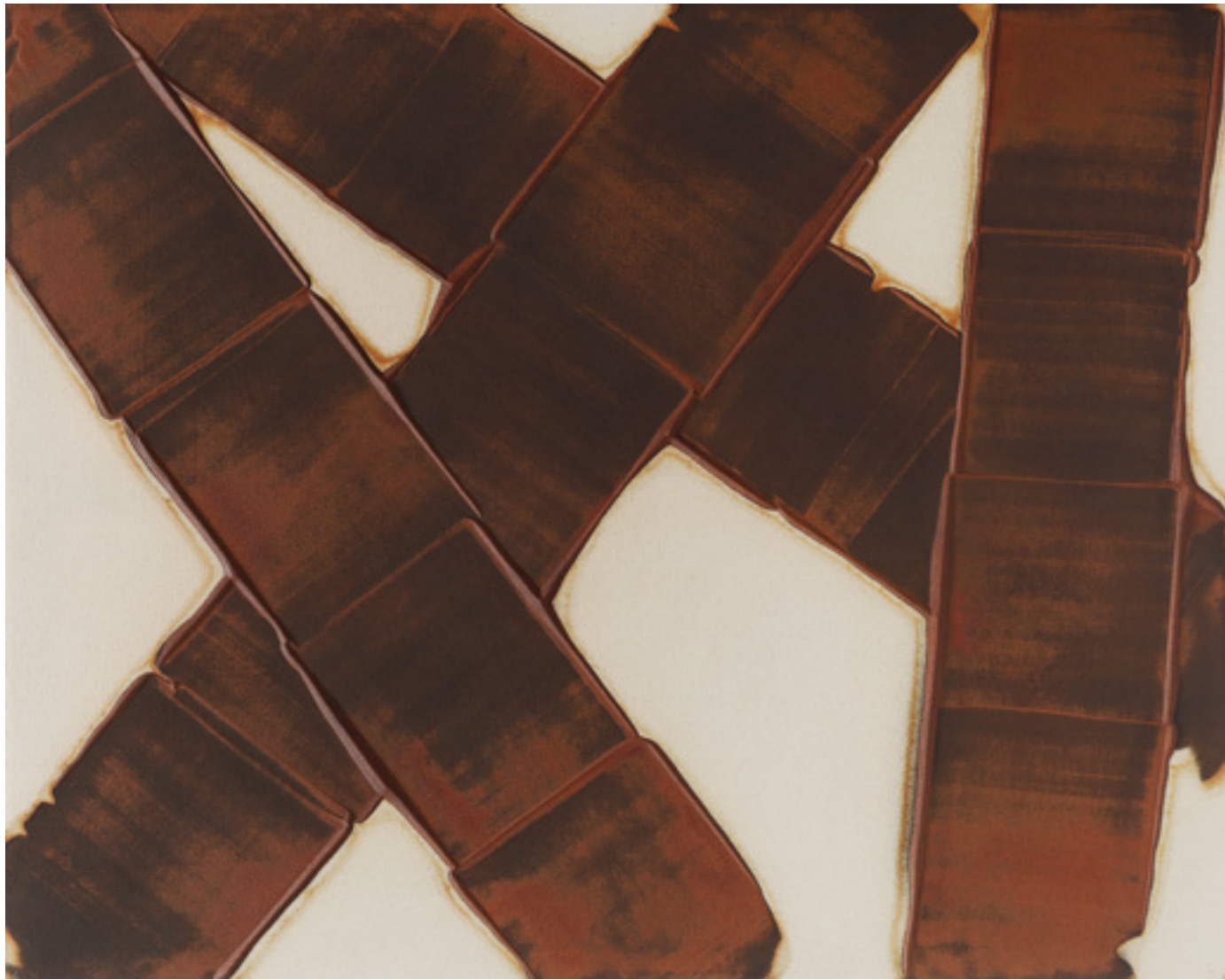
Kalpa 22100-060
2022

Mixed media on canvas
130 x 162 cm | 51.2 x 63.8 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio







LEE Gi Seong

Kalpa 22100-066
2022

Mixed media on canvas
130.5 x 162.5 cm | 51.4 x 64 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio

LEE Gi Seong

Kalpa 22150-030
2022

Mixed media on canvas
227 x 187 cm | 89.4 x 71.7 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio





Jae KO

(b. 1961)

Born in 1961, Korean artist Jae Ko attended Toyo Art School and received a BA from Wako University in Japan and a MFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, United States. She creates elegant spirals and ribbon installations that can reach monumental proportions, drawing inspiration from nature. Her forms often resemble organic elements such as tree rings, tornadoes, roots, branches, or seeds. Her creative process was initially inspired by trees, as she began using sumi ink, a calligraphy ink made from burned wood, which she combined with paper, drawing from a common source of materials. She currently lives and works in Maryland, United States.

The intuitive design of each of Ko's sculptures are made from seemingly endless amounts of everyday office, recycled paper or adding machine tapes, which she unwinds and reshapes, bathes in vats of ink and then leaves them to dry out over months. Her captivating sculptures blur the line between writing and sculpting, taking on a biomorphic shape that resembles a swollen calligraphic mark. She may incorporate color into her pieces, drawing inspiration from the vibrant primary colors found in traditional Korean settings.

Ko notes that as her environment changes, her sources of inspiration continuously evolve to include influences from the Western world. She has related her work to bristlecone pine trees that are bent into shapes by the wind, yet still alive. These trees are present in the American West, which adds to her sources of inspiration that infuse into her work.

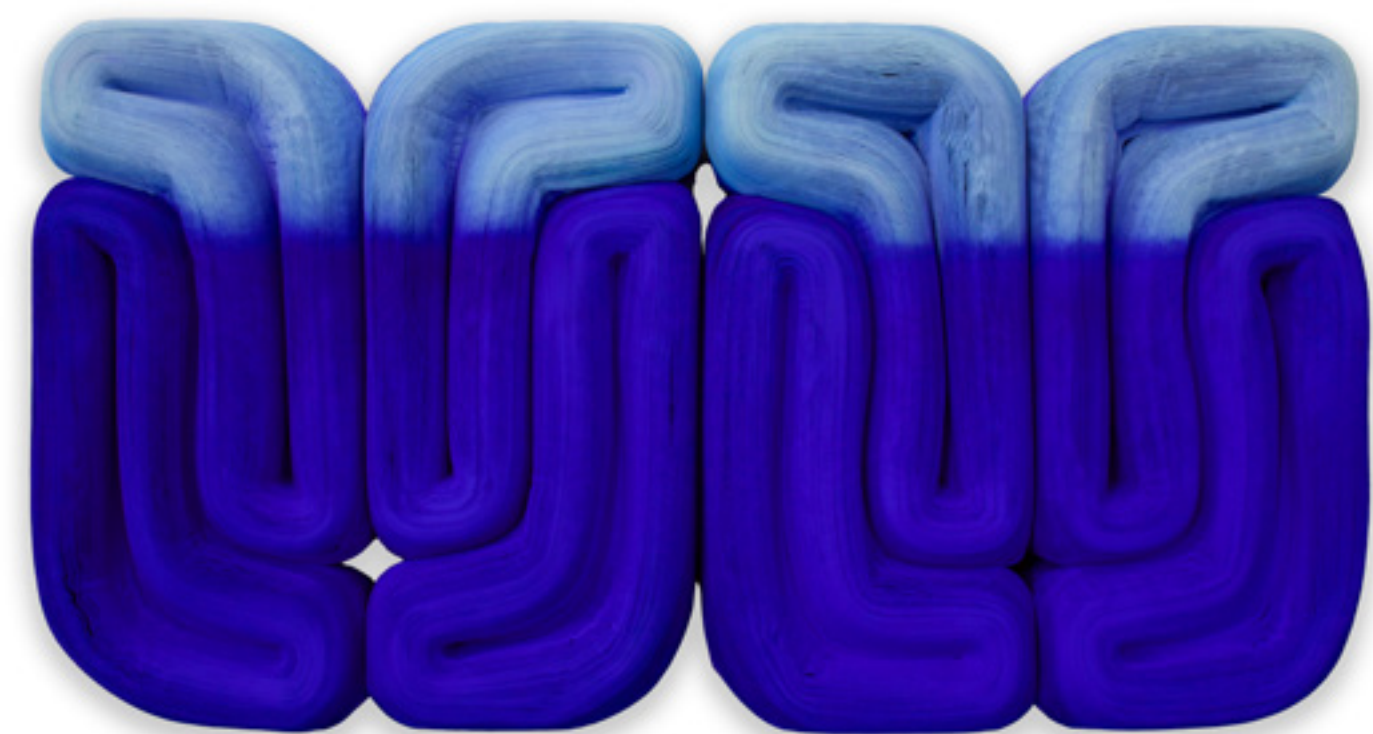
In 2002, she received the prestigious Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant, followed by the esteemed Anonymous Was A Woman Award in 2012. Notably, Ko's installation Force of Nature was showcased at The Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C.. Her work has been included in renowned private and public collections, such as the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, The Phillips Collection and The Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. and ADM in Chicago, among others.

Jae KO

JK 1039 Ultramarine Blue with Sky Blue
2009-2010

Rolled paper, Sumi ink and pigmented ink
58 x 109 x 12 cm | 22.8 x 42.9 x 4.7 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio





Jae KO

JK1026 Black with Pink
2016-2019

Rolled paper, Sumi ink, glue
51 x 40 x 12 cm | 20.1 x 15.7 x 4.7 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio

Jae KO

JK2130, Ultramarine
2022

Rolled paper and pigmented Ink
95 x 95 x 18 cm | 37.4 x 37.4 x 7.1 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio







LEE Gil Rae

(b. 1961)

Lee Gil Rae is a Korean artist, who was born in Yeongam-gun in 1961. He graduated from the Kyung Hee University in 1993 with a Master's degree in sculpture. He currently lives and works in Seoul. For more than 30 years, he has used a range of sculptural mediums to represent the fragile beauty of the natural world. In his early work, he made sculptures from earthly materials such as soil and dirt. Around 20 years ago he began experimenting with welded metal, focusing on copper and steel tubing. This catalysed his move to the recognisable style that he is now known for, featuring gridlike constructions which he then uses to form organic shapes.

Lee's primary choice of the subject is loaded with symbolism, the pine tree being an evergreen that remains in leaf regardless of the season. In using modern industrial materials, he creates a juxtaposition between the organic and mechanical. These sculptures deftly negotiate a number of the key binaries that define modern life: natural and artificial, organic and mechanical, ephemeral and permanent. Furthermore, they are a response to continued deforestation, which lends them an air of melancholy; life-sized copper monuments to the increasing fragility of the natural world. In 2024, Lee unveiled his latest solo exhibition, 'Rooted to the Roots of Life: Net of Existence' at the Savina Museum in Seoul.

Lee has been the recipient of several awards, including the Korea Association of Art Critics Award in 2015 or the Special Award in the 8th Great Art Exhibition of Korea in 1989. He has participated in numerous exhibitions worldwide and features in numerous public collections in Korea such as the Seoul Museum of Art, Savina Museum of Contemporary Art, Samsung Foundation of Culture, the Four Seasons Hotel Seoul and the Nampo Art Museum.

LEE Gil Rae

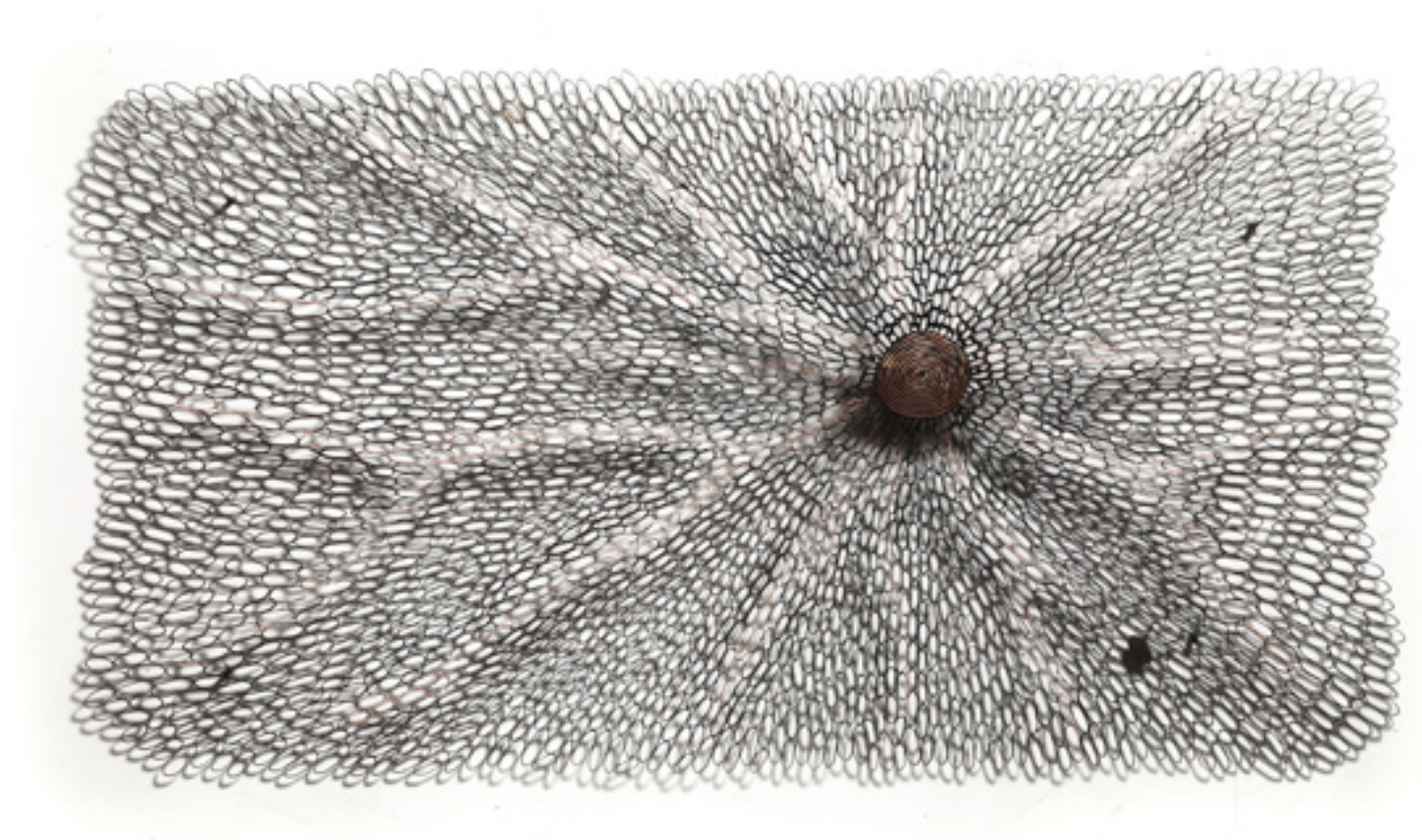
New Pine Tree 2017-1
2017

Copper welding
Unique piece
Signed with the artist's monogram and dated '2017'
on a metal plaque affixed on the work
112 x 112 x 9 cm | 44.1 x 44.1 x 3.5 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio







LEE Gil Rae

Millennium Pine Tree 2018-4
2018

Copper welding

Unique piece

84 x 120.5 x 9.5 cm | 33.1 x 47.4 x 3.7 in

PROVENANCE

Artist's studio

LEE Gil Rae

Old Pine Tree 2019-6
2019

Copper welding
Unique piece
Signed with the artist's monogram and dated '2019'
on a metal plaque affixed on the work
225 x 89 x 72 cm | 88.6 x 35 x 28.3 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio





LEE Gil Rae

Millennium Pine Tree-15
2020

Copper welding

Unique piece

Signed with the artist's monogram and dated '2020'
on a metal plaque affixed on the work

103 x 193 x 16 cm | 40.6 x 76 x 6.3 in

PROVENANCE

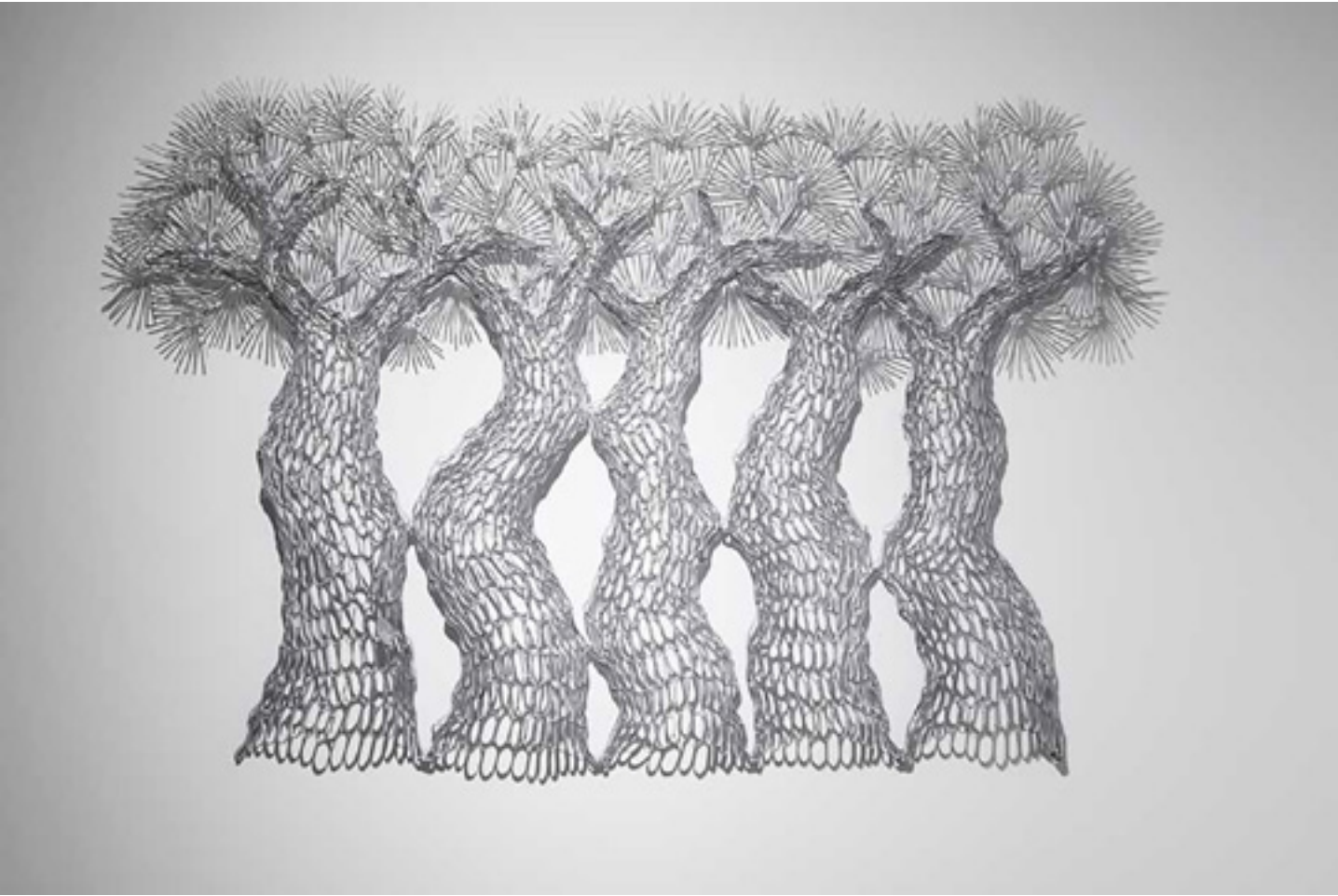
Artist's studio

LEE Gil Rae

Millennium-Pine Tree 2022-7
2022

Copper welding
Unique piece
Signed with the artist's monogram and dated '2022'
on a metal plaque affixed on the work
100 x 157 x 5 cm | 39.4 x 61.8 x 2 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio





SEO Young Deok

(b. 1983)

Seo Young Deok is known for his monumental sculptures of human bodies that are at once introspective and dynamic, using found materials to create psychological three-dimensional portraits. was born in 1983, in South Korea. He graduated from the environmental sculpture department of the University of Seoul in 2008. He lives and works in South Korea.

Exploring the relationship between humans and their environment, he is best known for his, life-size sculptures of human figures fashioned exclusively from welded chains taken from industrial machinery and bicycles. The shapes the artist creates with this cold and dark material, whether it be a human's face with closed eyes, or a body surfacing from the background, is imbued with an emotion which is both strong and peaceful. The final uneven aspect of the outside shell of the sculptures recalls the emergence of cells being duplicated, a DNA chain intentionally left unfinished or even the complexity of modern societies. As the artist puts it, “we are interlocked and running like parts of a giant machine.”

Seo's work has been collected and displayed by a number of esteemed galleries across the world including the Sungkok Art Museum, Gallery Hyundai in Seoul and the Daekyo Culture Foundation.

SEO Young Deok

Nirvana 8
2016

Iron chain
Edition: 5/8
Signed on the base
175 x 35 x 50 cm | 68.9 x 13.8 x 19.7 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio





SEO Young Deok

Anguish 255
2018

Iron chain

Edition: 4/10

Signed on the leg

67 x 92 x 63 cm | 26.4 x 36.2 x 24.8 in

PROVENANCE

Artist's studio



SEO Young Deok

Meditation 187
2018

Iron chain
Edition: 8/10
110 x 84 x 50 cm | 43.3 x 33.1 x 19.7 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio





SEO Young Deok

Meditation 399

2019

Iron chain

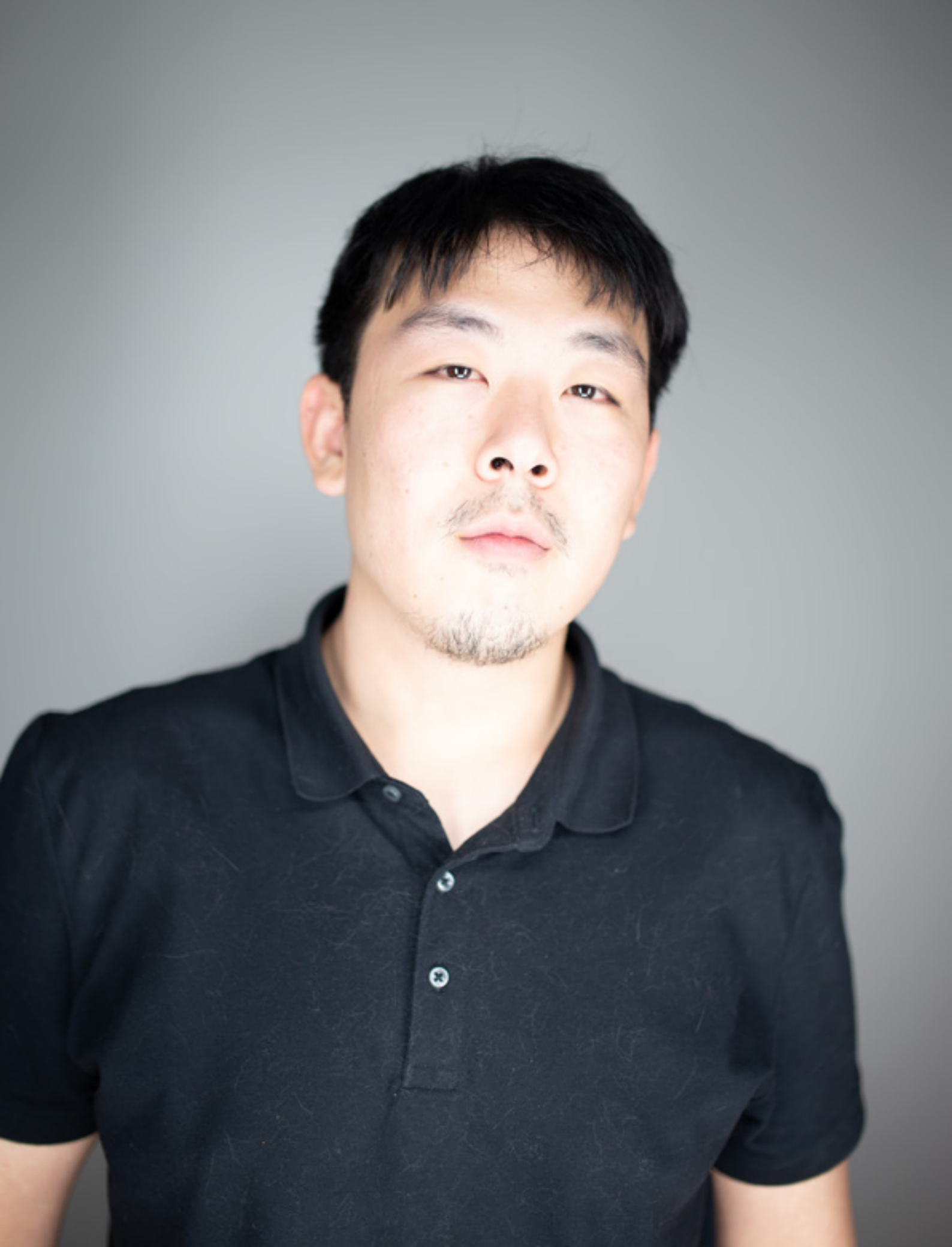
Edition: 5/10

Signed 'Seo youngdeok' on the front of the neck

104 x 87 x 121 cm | 40.9 x 34.3 x 47.6 in

PROVENANCE

Artist's studio



LEE Jung Ho

(b. 1984)

Lee Jung Ho is a Korean American artist whose work is characterised by an inventive use of raw materials and found objects. Born in New York in 1985, Lee received his BFA in Fine Arts at The Art Institute of Chicago in 2012 and his MFA from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York in 2016. He currently lives and works in New York City with his wife and son.

As a child, his family moved every couple of years, and Lee found himself frequently living near construction sites before settling in New York City. It was this childhood spent in an ever-changing world where the debris of an evolving landscape surrounded him that inspired him to become a sculptor. He uses materials including birch wood, broken stop signs and copper wires from junkyards. Frequently, he is inspired by urban applications of the idea of entropy, a law which dictates that everything in the natural world must constantly move towards decline and disorder.

This exploration is revealed in his treatment of materials, such as the burning of birch wood poles and manipulation of epoxy. His painting practice has been informed by similar principles, defined chiefly by the mixing of materials. When he began painting again in 2018, he was drawn to the combined usage of oil on water based medium and vice versa.

Lee has been awarded residencies at Cite International des Arts in Paris and Shinjin Art Stay Project in Ulsan, South Korea. His work has been displayed in solo and group exhibitions around the world. He was also awarded the 2017 Cherry Valley Sculpture Trail award in New York.

LEE Jung Ho

Fracture 균열 GBW802212
2022

Mixed media on linen
Titled, inscribed and signed 'FRACTURE GBW802212 /
145.5 x 112.1 cm / JUNG HO LEE' on the reverse
145.5 x 112.1 cm | 57.3 x 44.1 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio



LEE Jung Ho

Fracture 균열 G1002212
2022

Mixed media on linen
Titled, inscribed and signed 'FRACTURE G1002212 /
162.5 x 129.5 cm / JUNG HO LEE' on the reverse
162.5 x 129.5 cm | 64 x 51 in

PROVENANCE
Artist's studio





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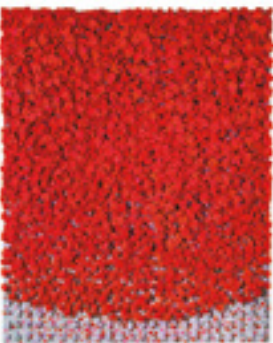
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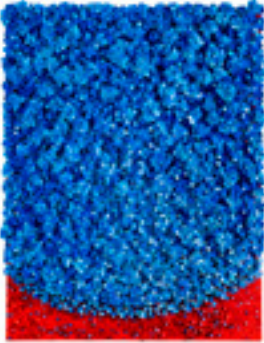
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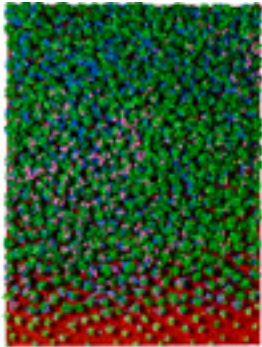
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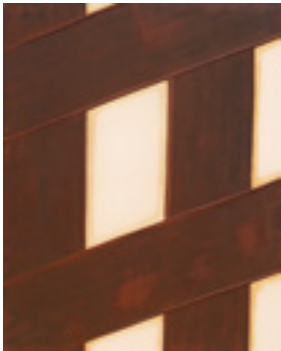


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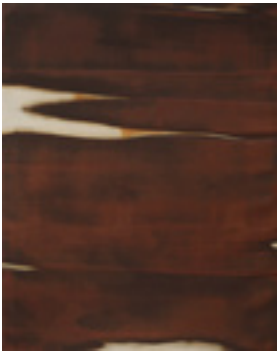
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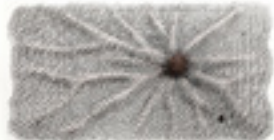


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with Sky Blue*
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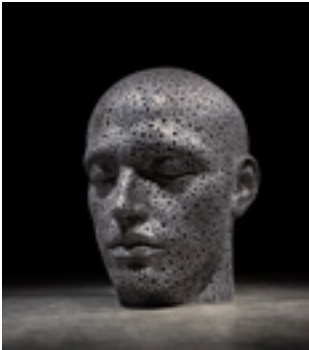
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Samia Rabehi
Fiona Heung

COVER
CHUN Kwang Young, *Aggregation 17-AU041 (Star 15)*, 2017

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