



Lee Bae, *Issu du feu, ch-64*, 2003. 170 x 260 cm. | 66 15/16 x 102 3/8 in. Charcoal on canvas. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

Lee Bae

Promenade

Opening Saturday, November 2, 6pm - 8pm
November 2 - December 21, 2019

Perrotin New York is pleased to announce *Promenade*, an exhibition from Korean artist Lee Bae, based in Paris, France and Cheongdo, South Korea. For his first solo presentation with Perrotin New York, the artist has created a physically immersive environment that expands upon his ongoing aesthetic and material experiments with charcoal. This concise collection of drawings, paintings, and sculptures represents three distinct bodies of work: *Issu du feu*, *Landscape*, and his most recent works on paper, *Untitled*.

Charcoal has figured prominently in Lee Bae's practice since 1990, when the artist first moved to Paris and took up the ubiquitous material out of economic necessity. In this time of transition, charcoal also provided a cultural link to home, recalling the soot-based India ink used in Korean calligraphy but also the material's many domestic applications: In Korea, it has been used in homes as a natural purifying agent for thousands of years. Lee Bae continues to engage charcoal with formal and conceptual rigor, creating stunning works of art that draw out nuanced meaning from the ancient matter.

Forming the centerpiece of *Promenade* is an installation of 24 sculptures from the artist's *Issu du feu* series. Arranged in a modernist grid above pale sheets of mulberry paper, their formal placement evokes minimalism's austere serial installations. However, Lee Bae's works are not industrially produced, but created through profoundly personal and organic means of production. Sourced from his hometown of Cheongdo, South Korea where the artist also maintains a studio, Lee Bae carefully selects the pine trees that he then burns for two weeks in a custom-made kiln, transforming the verdant wood into brittle, black totems. Wrapped in elastic bands, these freshly carbonized forms reflect the fragile equilibrium between destruction and renewal. Viewers are invited to wander through this charged space, approaching the installation as a site of contemplation.

Lee Bae's corresponding *Issu du feu* paintings highlight the material's more luminous qualities. In these phantasmagoric works, charcoal fragments are combined into dense, faceted compositions. While the iridescent wood grain appears to be painted by the bristles of a brush, these subtle details are instead achieved through a process of gentle erasure; it is only after much careful sanding and polishing that these surfaces reveal their shimmering spectrum of blacks and grays. The artist's *Untitled* works, in contrast, embody a more explicit mode of mark making. Drawn on paper with a charcoal stick dipped in natural fixatives, the abstract compositions of both singular and serialized gestures call to mind the art of calligraphy. Yet the individual marks do not signify as language, landing instead in the symbolism of charcoal as both artistic tool and indexical trace.

From a distance, the artist's two *Landscape* paintings appear as a single, flat, monochrome surface made up of thick, black lines conjoined on a grid. On closer inspection, one realizes that these dark planes are not strokes of paint but large quantities of charcoal compressed into thick relief. While their surfaces exhibit faint textural details, their jagged, imperfect edges reveal the labor of artistic production: streaks and smudges that result from a simultaneous process of accumulation and removal that involves incorporating the residual powder back into the works with glue, rendering several discrete pieces into a single mass.

Lee Bae's artistic practice involves a deep commitment to the cyclical transformation of charcoal, ushering the raw matter on its journey from wood to fire to carbon to powder. The works in *Promenade* loosely trace this transformation, allowing viewers to experience the surprising aesthetic multiplicity of charcoal. Meanwhile, activated charcoal has become a familiar commodity, advertised as an ingredient in cosmetics, water filters, and health supplements and touted for its purifying properties. Walter Benjamin once identified the department store as "the last promenade for the flaneur"—a site where bourgeoisie "fantasies were materialized" and commodified, rather than experienced. In Lee Bae's exhibition, we are pulled back into the experiential and peripatetic dimensions of the promenade. Instead of machinelike products, the viewer follows a path through the primordial resonances of charcoal, an elemental landscape that breathes alongside you. As Benjamin wrote, "To dwell means to leave traces." Dwelling in Lee Bae's work, one is also marked.

– Olivian Cha

Born in Cheongdo, South Korea in 1956, Lee's works have been the subject of solo exhibitions at museums and institutions worldwide, including Wilmotte Foundation, Venice, Italy; Fondation Maeght, Saint-Paul de Vence, France; Paradise Art Space, Incheon, South Korea; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Vannes, France; and Musée Guimet, Paris, France. Lee's works are included in public collections, notably the National Museum of Contemporary Art (MMCA), Gwacheon, South Korea; Seoul Museum of Art (SEMA), Seoul, South Korea; Leeum-Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, South Korea; Fondation Maeght, Saint-Paul de Vence, France; Musée Guimet, Paris, France; Musée Cernuschi, Paris, France; Privada Allegro Foundation, Madrid, Spain; and Baruj Foundation, Barcelona, Spain.

More information about the artist >>>