

"Untitled", 1992
Tak fiber on canvas
102 3/8 x 153 17/32 inches / 260 x 390 cm
Photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli



"Meditation 94302", 1994
Tak fiber on canvas
94 1/2 x 70 7/8 inches / 240 x 180 cm. 12 pieces as a set.
Photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli

CHUNG Chang-Sup "Meditation"

November 3, 2015 – December 23, 2015

Opening Reception: Tuesday, November 3, 6-8pm

Galerie Perrotin, New York is pleased to present the second exhibition dedicated to the late Korean artist Chung Chang-Sup (Cheongju, 1927 – Seoul, 2011), following a first monographic show at Galerie Perrotin, Paris last summer.

The exhibition at the New York Gallery will include an ensemble of 19 paintings focusing on artworks from the early series *Return* and *Meditation*.

Born in 1927, Chung Chang-Sup is a prominent figure of the Dansaekhwa monochrome movement, a synthesis between traditional Korean spirit and Western abstraction, which emerged in the early 1970s. While it has remained to this day a driving force in Korean contemporary art, Dansaekhwa has also gained international recognition over the past few years. A selection of Chung Chang-Sup's paintings was presented until last August along with that of Lee Ufan, Park Seo-Bo and other key masters at the Palazzo Contarini-Polignac for "Dansaekhwa", an official collateral event in this year's 56th Venice Biennial.

Although the Korean monochrome painting style has never been defined with a manifesto, the artists affiliated with it primarily share a restricted palette of neutral hues – namely white, beige and black –, which originated the umbrella term 'dansaekhwa' (literally 'single color'). However, monochrome as such hasn't been the main focus nor raison d'être of any of the Dansaekhwa leaders, whose unique ascetic vocabularies led to an overall aesthetics that is formally comparable to that of Western Minimalism: process prevails within the relentless repetition of geometrical or graphic patterns throughout their oeuvre. Parenthetically, Dansaekhwa and Minimalism both rose in reaction to either Art Informel or Abstract Expressionism, respectively, and meant to clear art of self-expression or the emotional outpouring that single strokes and vibrant colors used to carry. As a matter of fact, all the Dansaekhwa pioneers were formerly seen as practicing Art Informel, around the principles of which the latter had actually helped establishing in Seoul the Hyun-Dae Artists Association in 1957, hoping to enable young Korean artists to express their anguish in the immediate aftermath of the civil war.

That said, Dansaekhwa and Minimalism differ greatly in intent. Highly spiritual rather than purely conceptual, the quest behind the exceptional discipline of Korean monochrome painting isn't that of 'objectivity', but that of 'oneness' between self and matter, which is essential to Asian philosophy, as opposed to the Western Cartesian premise of a split. Unlike Minimalist artists who used modular patterns to step away during the production phase, Chung Chang-Sup is known for his material emphasis of the natural fabric he chose to work and become 'one' with – *hanji* or *tak* paper –, and above all his complete physical engagement within the artworks in the making. With a strong determination to achieve the unity between self and matter and align his art with nature, his lifelong repetition of gestures and patterns, as well as his uncompromising acknowledgement of the substantial act of painting, were the means of his meditative journey, similar to the strict routine of a Buddhist monk. "As a lone truth seeker gets a glimpse of the God, I believe that Oriental spiritualism and occidental materialism are harmonized on the crossroads of my lonely journey,"[1] the artist noted towards the end of his life.

In the mid-1970s, after having spent two decades exploring Art Informel and making oil paintings, Chung Chang-Sup turned away from the occidental techniques and initiated a series that he called *Return*, which literally implied "to the tradition". From this point forward, he began experimenting with *hanji*, a Korean handcrafted fabric made out of the inner bark of Paper Mulberry tree, also known as *tak*. Historically and culturally, *hanji* was not only used as exquisite sheets in painting and calligraphy, but also in traditional Korean architecture as panes for windows and doors, like the house the artist grew up in. "Through the screen of *tak* paper, one can distinctly sense the wind, light and flow of time outside his or her room, which allowed us to experience both feelings of being inside and outside"[2], the artist recalled of his childhood. In other words, *hanji* in architecture had the unique property of being able to absorb and transmit nature from the outside to the inside, which made it the most suitable medium for Chung

Chang-Sup to begin his journey towards self-enlightenment.

For the paintings of his series *Return*, which are highly evocative of traditional windows and doors, Chung Chang-Sup orderly applied square or rectangular sheets of *hanji* on canvases, the remaining blank contours of which he would then, for instance, cover with black ink, leaving the pigments and fabrics freely absorb each other and unite around the edges of the *tak* pieces of paper. Yet, he soon felt that the *hanji* sheets were still a mere frame, and supposed that it was because they had been handmade by someone else, preventing him to fully extend himself onto his paintings. So he decided to directly handle their raw material, which gave birth to his series *Tak* throughout the 1980s and paved the way for his latter and final one, *Meditation*, that extended from the early 1990s to his death, in 2011.

Thus for 40 years, Chung Chang-Sup worked solely with Paper Mulberry bark, which he soaked and rubbed in large vats of water installed in his studio, while monitoring the color variation of the washed fibers from their natural ochre to white. He would then proceed to the instinctive application and manipulation of the wet paste over the entire surfaces of his canvases, stretching and pressing it into whatever rough textures the material guided his fingers through and beyond the limitations of his ego. "In battering and kneading *tak*, I unknowingly put my breath, odour and finally my soul into the process, thus becoming a part of the process itself"[3], he stated.

Whereas only the sap of the tree produced the pale yellowish hues of the *Tak* rumpled 'paintings without paint', Chung Chang-Sup introduced other natural pigments in his series *Meditation*, essentially brown and black out of tobacco leaves and charcoal, as well as geometry, which symbolizes the harmony found in nature. For example, in the earliest paintings of the series, the artist used either a wooden stick or threads to incise the outlines of multiple squares arranged in a grid within the thick *tak* pulp all over his canvases, while it wasn't long before he would strictly focus on shaping, molding and flattening, the form of a single large square in the middle of all his monochrome compositions, as if tempering to his fingertips the surrounding yet united chaos. That is the inner and outer worlds, both literally and figuratively, coexisting in the same meditative and ecological vision.

Chung Chang-Sup's oeuvre reflects his Taoist belief that the artist must balance material and nature in the unified act of making in order to reach harmony. The works in *Meditation* carry the architectural and spiritual resonances of *hanji* paper through the use of *tak* fiber in a total embrace with it in place of the artist's ego.

Chung Chang-Sup's artworks have been exhibited in particular in Korea, Japan, United States, Australia, China, Taiwan, France... and are featured among others in the collections of the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Gwacheon, Korea ; Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea ; Busan Museum of Modern Art, Busan, Korea ; Daejeon Museum of Art, Daejeon, Korea ; Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea ; Royal Nepal Museum, Nepal ; Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan ; Mie Prefectural Art Museum, Mie, Japan ; Shimonoseki City Art Museum, Shimonoseki, Japan ; Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Hiroshima, Japan...

Violaine Boutet de Monvel

[1] Chung Chang-Sup, "The World of my Paper Works", in *Chang-Sup Chung Retrospective*, Gwacheon: National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea, 2010, p. 241.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 239.

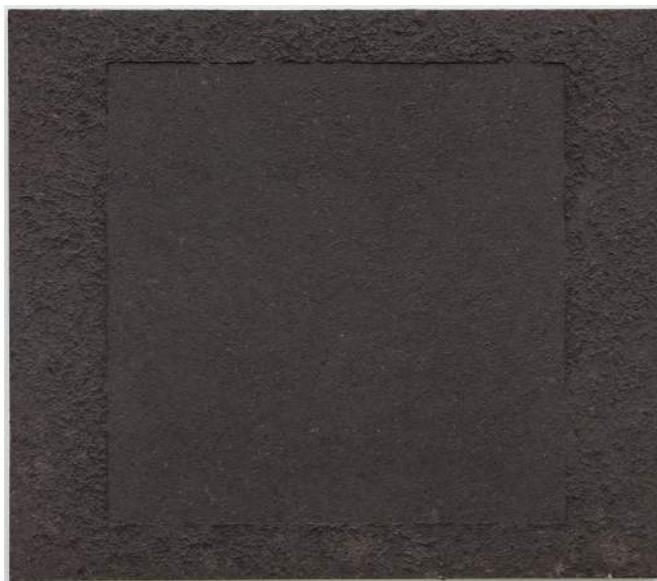
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 240.



"Meditation 9609", 1996
Tak fiber on canvas
102^{3/8} x 63 inches / 260 x 160 cm
Photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli



"Return 77-O", 1977
Mixed media on paper
77^{1/2} x 43^{1/4} inches / 197 x 110 cm
Photo: Claire Dorn



"Meditation 96500" 1996
Tak fiber on canvas
51^{3/16} x 59^{1/16} inches / 130 x 150 cm
Photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli

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Courtesy Galerie Perrotin

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