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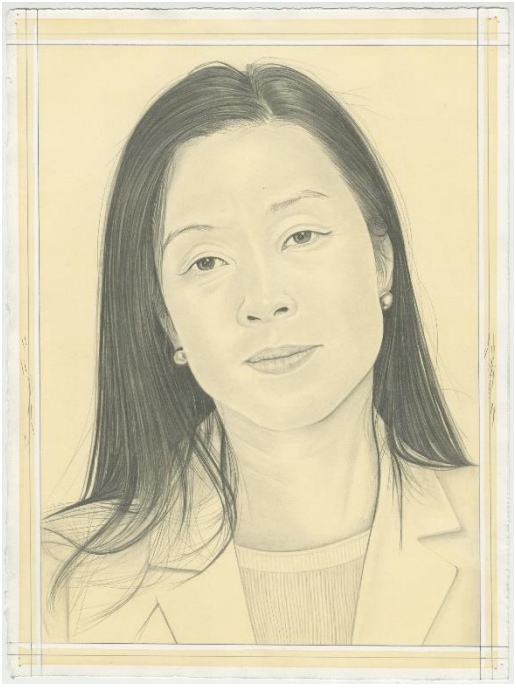
MINJUNG KIM with Helen Lee

"Ink and paper—they are like a couple. The ink is made by the smoke of the trees."



Portrait of Minjung Kim, pencil on paper by Phong H. Bui.

Minjung was born in Kwong-ju, Korea, and studied calligraphy and ink painting at the Hongik University in Seoul, where she received a Masters degree. In 1991 she furthered her studies at Brera Academy in Milan, where she expanded her art historical studies of the Western canon and wrote about the spiritualism of ink. Most recently, Minjung has had international solo shows at the Langen Foundation in Neuss, Germany, and the Gwangju Museum of Art in Korea. Her work is also included in a number of international public collections, including the British Museum in London and the Asia Society in New York. She recently had her first career survey at the Hill Art Foundation in New York, which had to close prematurely due to COVID-19.

The conversation that follows is an edited version of our lunchtime dialogue on the *Rail*'s New Social Environment. Ours was conversation #28.

Helen Lee (Rail): Hello Minjung! How are you doing?

Minjung Kim: Hello! I'm doing well. At the moment I'm in Saint-Paul-de-Vence in France, about 15 minutes by car from Nice. It's a very well known place for its art community. I'm just outside of town, with a nice garden. It's spring here, 20 degrees.

Rail: 20 degrees Celsius! Is that warm enough for you?

Kim: Very warm, yes. When I arrived, I had some bad news because a fox ate three of my chickens, so I was a little bit sad.

Now I have only two. But tomorrow, I will be getting another three chickens. One white color, one black, one brown.

Rail: I know you are an avid gardener. Is there something you can share with us about this time of growth and planting and enjoyment?

Kim: Right now, there are strawberries. Last year, I took from the mother strawberries the small baby strawberries, and I put them in a pot, and cared for them over the whole wintertime. Now they are growing, and I am waiting until they become red-ripe. It's relaxing to care for them.

Rail: I wish we could be there in France! I know you left New York a little less than a week ago, and you lived in Korea for a lot of your life, and also lived in Europe and other parts of the world. Where does it feel most like home for you?

Installation image: *Minjung Kim*, at the Hill Art Foundation, 2020. Image Courtesy Hill Art Foundation.

Kim: At the moment, I feel Saint-Paul-de-Vence, because the greenness is so entertaining. Of course, I don't speak good French and when I go out from my house I don't feel at home. But when I'm inside my house, I feel very much at home.

Rail: It's so great that you're surrounded by nature. What's the situation there compared to New York?

Kim: In New York you can still see people around, because it's natural in New York. But here, I don't see anybody. Normally this place is very well known, a destination spot. Millions of people come to this small town but these days there's nobody. When I'm walking, there's nobody. All shops are closed. But when I came back here, I immediately started doing artwork, repetitive-like collages. I finish work so fast, one in only three days.

Rail: As we segue into talking about your work, I thought we might discuss your material and your process, so that people who may not be familiar can better understand how you approach your work.

Kim: When I was in the first two years of university in Korea, I learned all kinds of techniques. The third year, I had to choose my main subject. They divided us in groups that specialized in sculpture, oil painting, or what was called "Oriental painting," or Asian painting, which used inks and what I'm doing now. I decided to do Asian painting with paper. My father owned a

printing company, and at the time, there were no computers. One wrote on silk screens and made a book, and then once they would cut out the book precisely, they always had paper remainders, which they had to throw away. I took these paper remnants for fun. Somehow I chose my material, which was something I was used to playing with from the time I was young. And then, when I finished my university, and went on to do my masters, for the theory and history of Asian art, I chose to go to Milano at Academia Breda, around '92, '93. It was a very fashionable institution at that time, and they had started studies in video art and photography. All of my class was interested in this material, but I felt like I was never good with machines, so photography and video seemed impossible. I thought, "What can I do? I have come here to Italy to do something." And then I decided just to keep doing what I've done before. I started doing ink paintings with a lot of rice paper I bought from Korea, but this time not as a calligraphy but as a form of expression of abstraction and gesture.

Rail: This is an important point. Your father used to bring home paper to you as a little girl, and that's what you were absorbed with, what you were fascinated by and would play with. You work with Hanji paper now, which is made from the inner bark of the mulberry tree, especially the Korean mulberry tree.

Installation image: *Minjung Kim*, at the Hill Art Foundation, 2020. Image Courtesy Hill Art Foundation.

Kim: Yes, it's like wine. Throughout Asia—in China, Korea, and Japan—they make mulberry paper. They take the inside of the mulberry trees and fiber, and they chop this fiber and with the water and a little bit of glue, they form paper the way one normally does. But this paper has many good characteristics. First of all, the paper is stronger than canvas. Because the paper is alkaline, which reduces oxidation, it doesn't yellow and it is very strong while also transparent. And it depends on the fibers how things distribute. When you paint ink, you can see they are absorbing differently. It is the material which gives its own voice. So if I paint, it depends on the character of the paper, it absorbs differently, changing color and shininess. So I really like paper more than ink, more than the brush, more than gesture. Each time they make this paper, it's always different because one year was more dry, or one year might have had more rain. But to know this, you have to use a lot of paper so you know when to drop the water, how it will be absorbed.

Rail: I know you are a paper expert and especially with this type of paper. Your sister, who is an art conservator, explained to

me how the paper you use is especially strong but that you also use glue to paste layers together, to reinforce it and give it even more strength. This is a completely different quality and type of fibrous paper than we're used to in the West. You mention that it is like something growing out of the earth; the tree is something growing out of the earth, and like wine, it has a character to it. When you think of paper, you don't really think of works that are this format and this size. Is this something that you thought about while you were doing these works, given the strength of the materials and your love of the paper, that this was something that you wanted to make this size?

Kim: The Korean masters, of course now they are all old gentlemen, normally have two formats: one, the 70 cm by 140 cm is a very normal size, and then the biggest one could be 150 cm by 200 cm. Normally I use full paper that size, sometimes I cut different formats, but it is good enough to express what you want to do with this paper. I could not make a big painting, like a 2 by 3 meter with this paper, I'd have to glue it together. Some paintings you can see this transference of joint parts, so it's difficult for a painting, but if I do collage work, maybe I could make 2 by 3 meters of work. In general I use the size in the show at the Hill Foundation: 150 to 2 meters.

Rail: Are the standard sizes that come from your purveyor in these formats?

Kim: Yes, I buy from the paper shop, where they sell only this kind of paper in Korea, and unluckily, it's a very hard job so no more young people are doing this work. As these old masters are dying, I'm not sure what will happen. This business is very narrow because not many people are using this paper. It could be material which has an end of story, but I hope not. I hope Asian people start to look at their own material like ink paper, and they produce more of it into the future.

Installation image: *Minjung Kim*, at the Hill Art Foundation, 2020. Image Courtesy Hill Art Foundation.

Rail: Do you want to talk about some of the other materials you use, such as ink?

Kim: Ink and paper—they are like a couple. The ink is made by the smoke of the trees. You burn the trees and you put a panel on top, so the smoke goes on this panel. The more faraway the smoke, the better quality. If you put this panel too

near the burning, it's a bad quality. This bad quality means there is not a smooth expansion when you use it on the paper. But it all depends on the tree; if you burn a pine tree, you have a more brownish black color, and some special trees have more of a blueish color. These are in China and already for a long time they divide into movements; the blue ink and another ink have some differences, but only slightly. You don't see it. It's only with expert eyes you can see the ink color has a different tone.

Rail: It sounds like you are not only using traditional forms of paper, but the preparation and process you use for the ink is something that is very classic and artisanal as well.

Kim: Yes, and the difference of the black color of the watercolor, the ink can make so-called 112 grades of the grey, which is very difficult with the normal black watercolor. Because they are smoked, you can really have many grades of grey.

Rail: The works from your show at the Hill Art Foundation are slightly different in their process from the initial works we've seen. These include collage and torn paper and have a singed, burning element to them too. During your studies and while growing up, whose works did you spend time looking at and studying? What influenced you from a young age to while in university in Seoul? Did you have mentors or other artists you were able to discuss these beautiful materials and your work with?

Kim: I grew up in this small city in Kwon-ju, which was very well known for keeping a lot of traditions. So almost all of the gentlemen could write calligraphy. There were very traditional bamboo paintings and some chrysanthemum paintings, all landscape but normally you can see these older Chinese paintings. I was sent to this private school where you learn calligraphy and the Asian masters paintings and you basically are copying these old masters. At the time I thought about artists all day. Before you go to university, there is a term for watercolor painting, so I did many many years of watercolor painting with the ink, and then of course in university you start approaching Western art. It was quite confusing because they were so different for me at the time. But the Old Masters like Botticelli, Piero della Francesca, and of course Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael—those Western artists were also on my mind.

Rail: Is it right that some of the works from Asia are not necessarily attributed in the same way that they are in the West? For example, that some works are known by certain masters at a certain time and a certain place, but don't necessarily have their names as recognized as Leonardo and Michelangelo and Botticelli?

Kim: Yes, in China and in Korea, there are two types: one type are like scholars, they write the letters and calligraphies after the ink remains. With a dish, they dilute with water then paint flowers and landscapes. But they are scholars, they are not professional painters. The other type, they are professionals that make colorful, decorative paintings. They are divided into two types, the painting group and the artists. But more importance is given to the scholars that had a free mind and one can see their own character. What the other professionals do was very standard but of course very skillful.

Rail: Let's talk about your move to Milan and how looking at and studying the Western art canon influenced you. Did you have much exposure to Western art previously?

Kim: At university, they teach Western art histories, so you have a vast knowledge of what has happened from antiquity to Picasso and what is contemporary. When I came to Italy, of course I was interested in contemporary art history and modern art history, but I also wanted to see the Western artists who were influenced by Eastern art: where it could be, how they accept using their own techniques influenced by Eastern art, and then of course from the 19th century looking to Van Gogh and so many other artists that were influenced by Japanese art. The result was they simplified much more, and it's not realistic and somehow more decorative. So I was interested in both sides of Eastern and Western: how they learned from and why they were interested in each other. For example, looking at a contemporary American artist like Franz Kline using brushes similar to Eastern art, I asked myself, "Minjung, what would you like to be with your own material, your own individual things?" And then I was not forcing myself to be different. It came very naturally to me, using ink and papers in a contemporary way.

Rail: It was more than a two-way street—it wasn't just your looking at Western artists and how they were influenced by Eastern artists or vice-versa, but that you were also trying to figure out a language that would combine the two that was not just pieces of this and influences from here and there. You were finding your own language from both East and West artistic influences. Your solo retrospective was up all of two-and-a-half weeks before the Hill Art Foundation, along with so many other institutions, had to close its doors until things can safely reopen. Tell us a bit about how the exhibition came together, which looks so beautiful hanging in the Hill Art Foundation's space. The architecture and the light perfectly suit your works. Boon Hui Tan, the director of the Asia Society Gallery, curated the show. How was it to do your first retrospective?

Minjung Kim, *Mountain*, 2019. Ink on mulberry Hanji Paper, 74 3/4 x 51 1/4 inches. Courtesy the artist.

Kim: Boon Hui was very greedy, and gave me a week. Boon Hui chose 50 works, so we brought these works in, and took some out until we had under 40. But he had a very clear idea and I like to work with people that have a clear vision. When I'm doing single paintings, or a single work, it's a finished thought. But hanging the works in an exhibition space is another frame of mind. Boon Hui knows my work very well, so he chose quite good work to show as a retrospective in New York.

Rail: I've seen many of your works, but I thought the show flowed beautifully along the different spaces. In the smaller works from the series "Mountains," we can see red and blue mountains. It's interesting how the different formats are equally powerful and impactful. In *Mountain* (2019), it's hard to tell from looking at a computer screen what we are seeing, so can you explain how you made this work?

Kim: I was staying in a small house just above the cliff by the sea, so I could hear the sounds of tides and I thought, "oh my god, this tide, how long it is doing these sounds?" and I looked back to primordial times. The world starts with earth, sea, something, and then ok: how can I paint these sounds of the tides? I came back to the studio and I started to adjust the ink color very lightly, and the tide comes. Then I put the second tide to come, the third tide to come. It was for me, the sounds of tides. And then I see this movement of tides, I turn it out, it looks like a mountain. And that idea, I really loved it, because you start with the water and the sea and they combine with each other, they penetrate each other. It looks like a mountain.
Then I decided this is no longer sounds of tides, this is a mountain. And this is not a real mountain, there is no mountain like this, but in Korea we have a kind of very, we don't have high mountains, but kind of rolling. So I have this memory of Korea, near my hometown, and I just started painting, and without any real scenery, no photos, it's just practicing with ink and water on the paper. It comes out very serene and I like this work, I feel like it is one of my major works, and when I painted this mountain, it's so relaxing, not stressful. When I feel sad, when I feel bored, when I don't know what to do, then I paint mountain paintings.

Rail: I think we have another Mountain work that we can show.

Minjung Kim, *Red Mountain*, 2019. Ink and watercolor on mulberry Hanji paper, 12 1/2 x 17 3/4 inches. Courtesy the artist.

Kim: There are many mountains, different mountains as I told you. Mountains come by moods. This is *Red Mountain*, but it was not my plan to make a red mountain. Some gallery asked me, "Can you make a red mountain?" I said, I will try, the transparency could come with red watercolor. So it comes out like ink, they have this very clear transparency, so I did red mountains. Then some people asked me for blue mountains, so I did blue mountains. But for me, color or no color, it's the same gesture, same technique.

Rail: You barely use ink in this work but instead you've used the gradation of the ink that you prepare to give a three dimensional effect.

Kim: Yeah. You can go on with the other imagination of the mountain.

Minjung Kim, *Mountain*, 2018. Ink on mulberry Hanji paper, 28 3/4 x 30 1/4 inches. Courtesy the artist.

Rail: Can you tell me about *Mountain* (2018)?

Kim: I wanted to give this mysterious space on the right side, and I leave this emptiness, that's what, in Asian painting, the emptiness is so important, a void. And I just leave some part of this empty. You feel something mysterious.

Minjung Kim, *Timeless*, 2019. Mixed media on mulberry Hanji paper, 74 3/4 x 51 1/4 inches. Courtesy the artist.

Rail: How about *Timeless* from 2019?

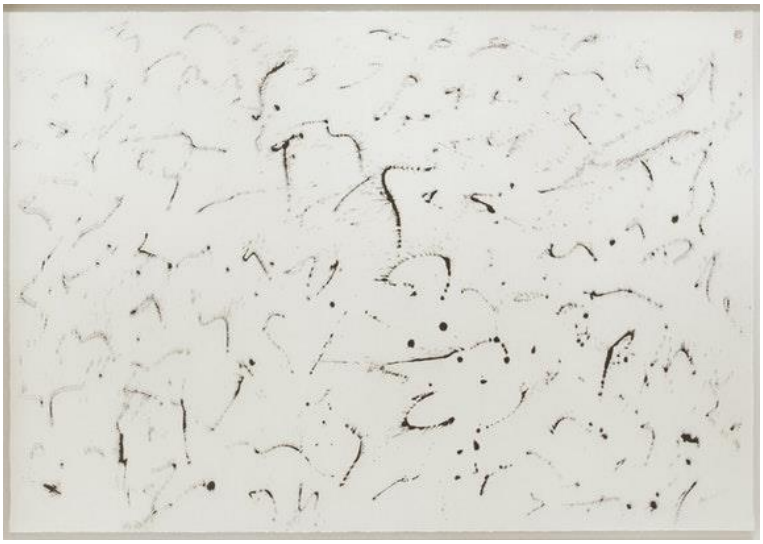
Kim: This is more like very abstract, there's no wave, it's just—I think this isn't a mountain, no, this is *Timeless*.

Rail: So this is a different process?
Kim: *Timeless* was… I do mountains as a painting, but then I wondered, if I cut all the mountains, what happens, because you give that feeling of time. I thought about how to make a very elaborate work, basically this is a kind of mountain I painted, and I cut this one in these little stripes, and each stripe, I burned it. So the burning, you can see, is a black charcoal color, so then I glued one by one. It's so many layers of the stripe, which was cutting up the mountain painting, and so I feel like the mountain itself, you see the mountain, you feel the time. This is another transformation of the mountain.

Rail: I love the transition, but also to see this work in person, and to understand how many of these strips this is composed, is really amazing. Just gorgeous.

Kim: This looks like a sea, looks like a mountain, so yeah.

Rail: The paper almost has like an impasto—a quality of thickness to it. And the color gradations, which are different, but definitely there. Can you talk about *Phasing* (2017)?
Kim: Yes, this is the "Phasing" series, this work, you don't see much through this. There are three layers of the paper, first I do a gesture, and then I put another paper—thinner—above the painted paper. And I take it out with incense, take out the painted part. So this is two papers. One painted with gesture, the other one I burned out. So there's a hole in this paper, and I put together, glue it, then I put another thick paper behind it to fix up. So this is three layers of paper. It is like you have two different emotions, two different characters of yourself. One, when you do the gesture, you are impulsive, use faster movement, you are convincing, it's a powerful movement. In the second movement, you look at your past, you take out where your power has been, so make an empty part. But it's so slow, cause you are getting it the instant, taking out these forms. So it's a completely different attitude with the paper, and then I put it together, and you get two different characters together in one work.

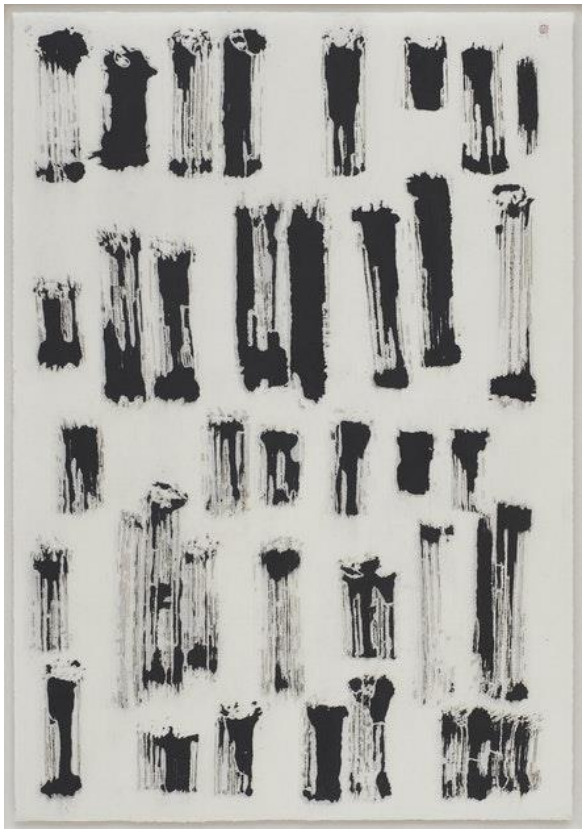


Minjung Kim, *Phasing*, 2017. Mixed media on mulberry Hanji paper, 57 x 81 1/2 inches. Courtesy the artist.

Rail: I like the way you describe it. It's very striking and somehow it captures your spirit in a very direct way. And it is a bit unusual. Do we have other works from this series to show?

Kim: This is a work I painted with a broom, and then after I took it out, I burnt out the hole, and it was very difficult because once you burn it out and the paper was like really, too reluctant, too moving, it was difficult to fix up with glue. You just need patience to follow all the stripes, the line on the paper.

Rail: Meditative and powerful. Is there another series we're going to look at together? Here's another "Phasing" work just to look at as a comparison.



Minjung Kim, *Phasing*, 2017. Mixed media on mulberry Hanji paper, 81 3/4 x 56 3/4 inches. Courtesy the artist.

Kim: Yes, this is also.

Rail: How did you get these marks?

Kim: For a long time I've done Tai Kwon Do, the martial art, with a brush. I took this ink, I never touched the brush to the paper. It was like you are painting in the air, kind of dancing, using your pulse, and then you increase your stroking down, and make these very free forms. And of course then after I burnt out with other paper on top and I glued it.

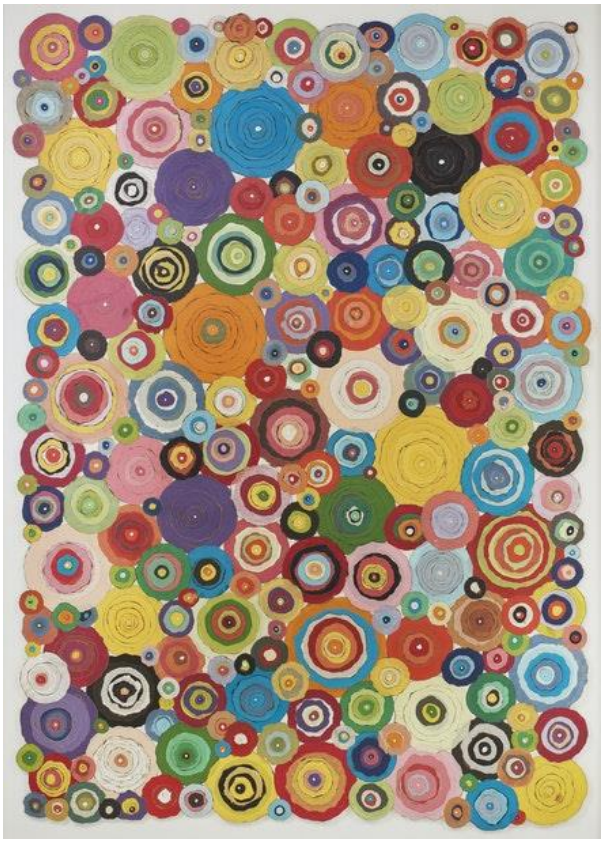
Rail: So you're actually doing a dance or a martial art while you're painting. That's beautiful. One more "Phasing" work from this series.

Kim: Oh, it's not nice to look at through my little telephone! I don't know, somebody who has a big computer can maybe look at it better. But all of you in New York, I invite you to go to see these works in person.

Rail: We all have to go see the show. It will be up for a while, so it sounds like we have a good chance. But let's just look for now. This is a favorite of mine. Can you tell us about making this work and the process behind this one.

Kim: They dye the color of the paper. It's always Hanji paper. And I cut out donut forms, and then I start to glue the smaller one, on top and on top. I choose the color moment by moment and glue on top. And what I was only concerned with was to make it more vivid, with more contrast between color and darkness. Somehow in my lifetime I remember it as the happiest time.

Rail: You burn the middle of the works of paper—that you singe to make a hole, is that right? I love the idea that there's an oppositional motif of being full of color and energy but there's also an emptiness in the middle of these.



Minjung Kim, *Pieno di Vuoto*, 2008. Mixed media on mulberry Hanji paper, 82 3/4 x 59 inches. Courtesy the artist.

Kim: So that's why I gave this the title *Full Emptiness* because each element of the round form, in the middle, is empty. So basically this small emptiness became a fullness, so *Pieno di Vuoto* is Italian for "full of emptiness," basically.

Rail: I know all these works are different—in your energy, the time you take, the period that you do it—how long did this particular work take you to make?

Kim: [*Gasps*] Yeah, it's the cutting first and glueing. One work will maybe take one week, but only one week because I've become very fast. Somebody who really wants to do it themselves might take more time, I think.
Rail: I imagine working sort of full-out, nonstop.

Kim: Yea. You should have the same mood, you have a happy mood and you go on with this mood because then color changes.

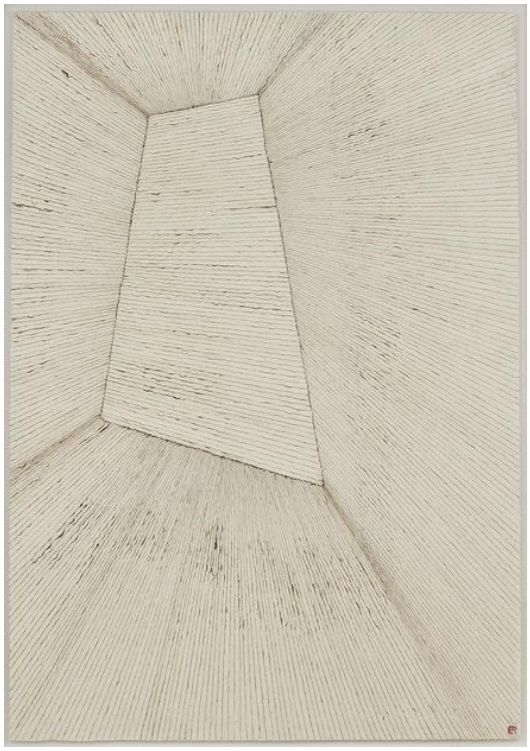
Rail: I know exactly what you're talking about. I can feel the mind space that you're sharing in these works. I wonder if you can tell us—you're using fire, and paper, and glue, and also your breath. You're giving breath, breathing life into the forms that you're creating, in a way.

Kim: Yea. It's because the paper is very thin. So when you are using these small candles—normally I use these candles which make warm the dishes. Smaller one very low, and then the paper is so thin that when you just touch it with the fire "boom," it burns. You keep breathing and then you burn throughout. Keeping the breath means you are mindful also if you have so many thoughts, your breathing stops or—the breathing shows the status of your anima. To burn these papers, at a certain point your breath becomes the same breath. So when you start to do this breath for a long time you go into a meditative situation without any strange thinking, any disturbance. And you go on, like you become a machine without thinking. And I like to do this process for myself. It makes me calm and my mind meditative.

Rail: That is so beautifully said. I'm really taken by your process because there's this element of mastery that you have and that you're fully aware of. When you create there's this feeling of not having so much on your mind, that you're so mastered in what you're doing that you can feel free.

Kim: Yeah. And mainly my world is very simple. Simple and repetitive. Very much elaborate and it's not that difficult, these paintings. I consider when I see my work and it's always important when artists choose their materials, the materials should become their skin so you have to feel the need in it, so the vibration of your material has to be very in line with your emotions. But in my case I'm continuously controlling my emotion, so controlling my emotion being the same status of anima and through the material. So it helps me, the material helps me and also to having this situation, it's born in this so called artwork. But I think it's not different than any lady who sews, you focus on something. I never gave that much importance to my art to be behind any special philosophy or special theory or special issue. It was just to make myself in the calm and transparent mind, having the same breath, not to be excited, not to be sad. It is a method, it's reserved for so-called art, for me.

Rail: That's wonderful thank you for that. Can you tell me about the fantastic piece, *The Room*, (2007)?



Minjung Kim, *The Room*, 2007. Mixed media on mulberry Hanji paper, 79 1/2 x 56 inches. Courtesy the artist.

Kim: I read some funny book, by Osho, that there are so many different kinds of meditation. One kind of meditation can make you feel like your mind goes floating up in your room, and suddenly yourself becomes too big and you call fill yourself up in the room. So I thought about "what if my spirit departed from my body and went on the top of the ceiling, how would the room look?" Then I made a very funny geometric form of the room because I didn't know how to use a computer for the perspective so it comes out very interesting in its geometric form. You can see I did always this stripe and edge and it's just collage. I cut, and burn, and collage for this form.

Rail: I love the idea of the random aspects of the control and the mastery of the works. At the same time there's this oppositional thing where you're not sure how the burning will turn out exactly, but you're just experimenting as you make the work. Do you feel that you enjoy a certain level of uncertainty or is this so well practiced that it's almost ok whatever happens?

Kim: When I burn, yeah. Because I know so well when I choose the paper I know that this paper will burn easily, or not easily. You can burn almost very regularly. So I know that burning the stripe, this burning, more or less has the same undulation so I can use it all the time, more or less, it's easy for me because I burn, I don't know, tons of paper.

Rail: Do you have any thoughts about being a female artist in a culture, and a generation, that perhaps has additional obstacles that we may not fully appreciate in the West? Everybody knows that female artists often get their due or success later in their careers. Judy Chicago has made comments that she doesn't mind having her successes later in life, because it's given her a chance to do her work outside of any external confirmation or expectations. Have you thought about what it was like to stay a dedicated artist as a Korean woman and how that might be different from your male peers and perhaps

different even from your Western female artist colleagues that you have gotten to know? Have you thought about that at all?

Kim: Well the main thing is that I'm a Korean woman and you know the women, they have a certain duty and everybody at a certain age has to marry and I'm not married but I have a kid. I have two kids. Each kid took two or three years to carry them completely, so I know my other practice is behind but life is too long and when your circumstance gives you more time for yourself you keep going on. And if you're too busy you leave it, but it's that parallel, really that being an artist, if you are an artist then you're an artist all of the time, so of course in my case and many women's cases, they have kids, it's quite normal to grow old but if you're really born to be an artist, it doesn't change. Also men could say "I have to make money for my family," and they have the same, different, but a problem. All artists have a problem not to parallel with your normal life, to produce your artwork and lots of economic problems. It's very normal. And artists, they somehow don't stop. And when the success comes late or early it's not the main thing that you consider. You consider the way you make your own art, which makes you convincing. That's the most important thing to parallel.

Rail: That's a great answer. It's reminiscent of something that Peter Brook said in his interview yesterday, when he was asked about the difficulties and obstacles of acting and he replied, you don't really question it. It's just something in you that you have to do. It's wonderful to hear that you have that same energy and inspiration.

Q & A

Nick Bennett: I wanted to thank you both for an incredible conversation. It's really refreshing to consider this sensitivity to material, and that accompanying intentionality. Ok, our first question.

Audience: Hi. I love your work—very sublime. My question is about material, and how they're important to your process. With the meditative mindset you get into, are the materials as important as the process? It seems there's a meditative aspect associated with, for example, burning wood for ink and the selection of paper you use. By burning incense, there's almost a religious aspect to it, as in Buddhist ceremonies. How important are the materials versus the process to you?

Kim: Yes, because in these materials, when you take the white paper, you already calm down your own breath. It's not intentional, but the material gives you pace to calm down. Like the incense and the paper as you are saying, they control you—you don't control them. It is quite a good reaction with what you are using.

Audience: Thank you.

Bennett: The next question is sort of a part 2 to the previous question.

Audience: Thank you very much! Your use of repetition stays close to the meditative state of Buddhist practice, as we've discussed, which is about emptying any image or messages in the mind, but your titles also indicate representational content. How do these different viewpoints affect how you approach abstraction?

Kim: Normally when I title, I don't think before the work. I do the work and I look at it for sometimes months or sometimes one week and it just comes out. The artwork gives you a title. Also, that title always comes to your mind, maybe you're activated by your mind and it comes easily. It's quite open because when I do work, titling can be a big trouble. The forms are changing but method and technique are the same. You give the art a name and the name gives it another aspect for the work, so it's like an abstraction with lots of elaboration. It's more difficult I could say to give a title, but the title is important. I also later find a good title or sometimes not. Some works are not titled, but I know when they come—sometimes a friend visits and I ask them to give it a title. [*Laughs*]

Audience: Thank you very much.

Bennett: Our next question is related to a moment earlier in the conversation.

Audience: Hi Minjung! Thank you for this wonderful conversation. It's good to see you. I know you have many studios in many different cities and I was wondering if your art practice and inspiration change when you go from studio to studio.

Kim: A bit, yes. Especially when I'm in this countryside, which is mostly very calm. As I move to other studios, I'm not married immediately to the space. I practice what I have done in my main studio, so I do a series of things I've already done in my main studio. Sometimes in New York, you can have some different inspirations, but as I mentioned, the new space does not give me a full feeling, a full creative mind. It's more excitement, and I need time for calm. So it takes time in each space to make work.

Bennett: Excellent. Thank you so much. Next I'm going to go to our dear friend from upstate, Raymond Foye.

Kim: Oh Raymond, hi! How are you?

Audience: It's great to see you. I have so many wonderful memories of being in Saint-Paul-de-Vence with you in your home and studio. My question was what was it like when you were a student in Italy? Who were the contemporary artists you were looking at in Italy, and in what way were you trying to figure out how to make this balance between tradition and innovation that you have managed in your work, and that I think most Italian artists have to find a way of negotiating because tradition is so heavy in that country?

Kim: That's true. When I was in Italy I was impressed by Burri and Fontana. So mainly Fontana gives me a lot of inspiration as he does like space—he cuts out a paper, goes to the space, and gives a big *apertura*, the openness. And so I was thinking "How can I be like Fontana?" I remember when I was a student I was quite focused on Fontana and also Burri because he was using fire and burning in his works. I think they gave me a lot of inspiration.

Audience: Wonderful. Thank you. Good to see you!

Kim: Good to see you!

Bennett: Thank you Raymond. Next I want to go to a question from our staff.

Audience: Minjung, thank you so much for this lovely conversation, and Helen thank you for interviewing. My question has to do with the tension between order and chance. Minjung, your process involves a lot of precision that must be time-intensive. I want to ask about the moment where you release the process up to randomness. Where you're working with fire, folding the small pieces of glued paper: how you decide when the right time to open it up to chance and what role that plays in your practice.

Kim: To talk about my burning paper, basically the air around the paper is wind, and the air is always moving. It's very random, and they move on their own. I do not force the materials to do something more or less random. I want to let it burn the same in a flat, black line. But by the nature of the air it becomes automatic randomness.

Bennett: Excellent. Next I'll give the virtual mic to Olivier.

Audience: Hi Minjung, how are you? Thank you for this wonderful conversation. Thank you to Helen and to everyone at the *Brooklyn Rail*. More of an observation or a comment than a question, but what strikes me, as we've heard about your sense of place and various studios, and that you create these large works with paper that you're cutting, you're basically drawing paper with color. The wonderful chapel in Vence by Matisse is so close to you, which Matisse created in the early '50s before he died in order to find a sense of repose and meditation, and that is really at the end of his life what he was looking for. He wanted to give that sense of serenity. Something which is quite oriental in a way. Since your practice switches back and forth between different varieties and different kinds, and also somehow related to place, is the fact that you have Matisse in your vicinity, does that in some respect influence your work when you're in the south of France?

Kim: Yes. Matisse, his color and his free use of the brushes and lines—I think he was the most free person to create his own work. And also the Chapel, you feel like he does not say "I need to make this beautiful." He has no intention, just a fluid creation of his own art. Maybe it's the weather, since it's never violent and in this circumstance he could make this kind of work.

Bennett: Thank you everyone for your excellent questions. Just a shoutout to Phillip Ellis Foster in the audience who kindly asked a very similar question to Olivier, so thank you Phillip. We've run out of time, and we didn't get to all of the questions, but thank you all for sending them in,

Kim: Yes! I'm so happy we could all connect today. I thank you so much, all of you who have come to listen to my humble talk. Thank you.

Bennett: Well, thank you, Minjung and Helen for joining us today! I just wanted everyone to know that Minjung's exhibition at the Hill Art Foundation will be on view later this fall so there will be a chance to see it. To round off the end of our day is a tradition here that one of our teammates reads a poem.

Audience: Hi everyone. Thank you for this lovely conversation. I had a previous poem prepared, but the more that I heard and the more that I saw the pieces, the more I thought of "Paraffin Lights" by Nagae Yūki:

My cheeks are kissed by light
soft as dandelion fluff, enveloping
me in paraffin paper. Thinking
of you and you, sound crumbles
like dry leaves–para para
para para–then the distant
intimation of weeping–hara hara
hara hara–rain falling
with the aroma of falling
light, evanescent, disappearing
into morning mist.
Whenever you flash across
my mind, I feel static
electricity's spark. You will stay
missing from my life and even
the sound of our laughing voices
will fade in time, but I wrap sepia-
toned fragments with my palms.
Memories echo back like light
crumbling and disappearing.
Moisten my dry lips, let me
croon you back to life.
For even if we never meet again,
I wish you prismatic tender luminosity.
To each and every one of you,
I bequeath blessings of echoing
rice-paper thin falling light.