

Forbes  
**Minjung Kim Became A Master Before She  
Became Famous**

By December 26, 2017.



Minjung Kim Story 2008 Mixed media on mulberry Hanji paper 55 1/8 x 78 3/4 in.

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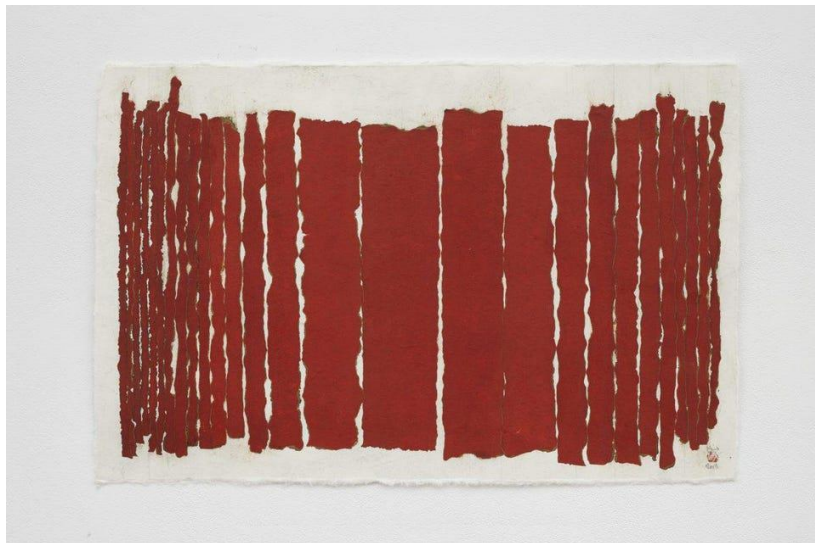
Minjung Kim's work cannot be hedged into either Eastern or Western traditions of art making. Born in 1962 in Gwangju, a city in the southwest of Korea, Kim knew that she would be an artist from a very young age. The reason was simple. "There was a children's painting competition in my area, and I always won the competition," she told me over the phone from Miami, where she had traveled to attend Art Basel.

She went on to study calligraphy and painting, eventually receiving a Master's degree in the four essential components of ink painting from Hong Ik University in Seoul in the mid-1980s.



Minjung Kim Mountain 2008 Ink on mulberry Hanji paper 11 7/16 x 14 9/16 in.  
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Although she had many female peers at the time she graduated, they quickly disappeared into domestic life, and stopped making art. The reason for this, again, was simple. "They got married, and cared for their children," she said. Men did not share the domestic burden. "It was all on the woman, either you had a family, or you kept a job," she told me.



Minjung Kim Cascata 2013 Mixed media on mulberry Hanji paper 14 3/16 x 21 5/8 in.  
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Kim got married, but refused to stop working. In this way, she was very modern. In other ways, as well. In 1991, she moved to Europe, where she enrolled at the Brera Academy in Milan. There, she discovered the work of Paul Klee and Franz Kline, whose expressive mark making was inspired, at least in part, by Eastern calligraphy. Kim enjoyed studying what was familiar to her through the work of those who were discovering it from the outside. This gave her new perspective.

Unlike Klee and Kline, and others of their milieu, Kim was not so much interested in process as she was in material. "If you can master a material, you can really express yourself," she told me. "I chose paper."

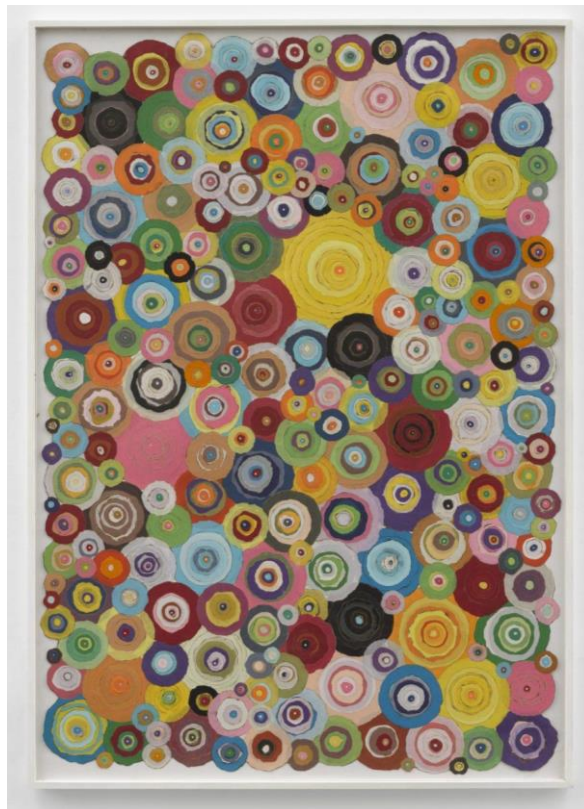


Minjung Kim Cascata (detail) 2013 Mixed media on mulberry Hanji paper 14 3/16 x 21 5/8 in.

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In specific, she chose Hanji, a type of paper hand made from the inner bark of Paper Mulberry, a tree native to Korea. "My major development as an artist was learning how to use that paper," she told me.

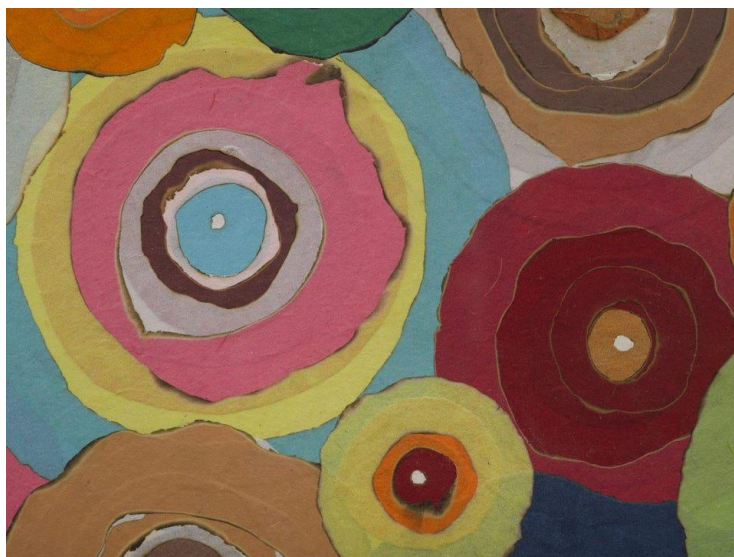
Kim has been working with paper since she was a young girl. Her father owned a printing company, and would give her scraps of paper to play with. She learned that paper was a material that could not only receive gestures — in the form of writing or painting — but could also be sculpturally manipulated to form its own shapes.



Minjung Kim Pieno di Vuoto 2008 Mixed media on mulberry Hanji paper 79 15/16 x 55 1/8 in. (203 x 140 cm)

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"You can make a web, a painting, you can tear it, you can cut it, you can bond it," Kim said. Even better, paper is mobile. "My life is a diaspora," Kim told me. "Paper, you can roll it, you can take with you. It's like your skin."



Minjung Kim Pieno di Vuoto (detail) 2008 Mixed media on mulberry Hanji paper 79 15/16 x 55 1/8 in.  
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Kim uses Hanji to make magnificent variety of abstract works that, depending on the series, are redolent of Agnes Martin, Briget Riley, Wassily Kandinsky and Guo Xi, the Song Dynasty landscape painter. All of them are composed of scraps of paper that are burned, torn, glued, folded, or otherwise manipulated to make rich, layered compositions whose forms resemble perfection found only in nature.



Minjung Kim Tension 2005 Mixed media on mulberry Hanji paper 24 x 24 in. (61 x 61 cm)  
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In an upcoming exhibition at White Cube gallery's Mason's Yard location in London, which will be open from January 26 – March 10, 2018, Kim will show work from the past twenty years. While not a retrospective, exactly, the exhibition is the first comprehensive show of her work in the United Kingdom.

Female artists, Kim told me, often get their due after their male peers. "A woman gets success as an artist very late."



Minjung Kim Raggi 2005 Mixed media on mulberry Hanji paper 84 1/4 x 61 in. (214 x 155 cm) 85 13/16 x 62 5/8 x 1 3/16 in.

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The good thing about this is that by the time they do, they are already masters of their materials. "I feel like I am a master," she told me. "I know what I'm dealing with."