

'Renowned Painter of Water Drops Kim Tschang-Yeul Dies at 91'

By Sam Gaskin

January 06, 2021

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Kim Tschang-Yeul, *Composition* (1970). Acrylic and cellulose lacquer on burlap. 162 x 136 cm. Courtesy Tina Kim Gallery.

Korean painter Kim Tschang-Yeul passed away on 5 January, 2021, at the age of 91. Renowned for his decades-long project of depicting water drops, he was among Korea's most celebrated artists.

'[Kim's] legacy extends to that of a stringent individualist with a willingness to learn from others, a cross-cultural bridge harmonizing Eastern and Western values, and lastly a scholar, whose brilliance and wisdom shone through the understated complexity of his work,' said Tina Kim Gallery, New York, in a statement.

The artist is also represented by Almine Rech, Brussels, and Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong, among others.

Kim Tschang-Yeul was born in 1929 in what is now North Korea. After Korea was liberated from Japanese colonial rule in 1945, he moved south and studied under artist Lee Kwaedae. He began an art degree at Seoul National University in 1949, but his studies were interrupted by the Korean War (1950–1953).

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Kim Tschang-Yeul, *Événement de la nuit* (1972). Oil on linen. 50 x 50 cm. Courtesy Tina Kim Gallery.

In the mid-1950s, Kim became involved in Korea's Informel movement, which branched off from European experiments in abstract expressionism. After a stint at the Art Students League of New York, he moved to France in 1969, where he remained for the next 45 years, spending much of his time in St Germain, Paris.

Departing from pure abstraction, Kim painted *Événement de la nuit* (Nighttime Event) (1972), a photo-realistic droplet heavy with potential energy and bright with moonlight on a black background. Kim continued to paint hyperreal droplets—often on abstract or minimalist backgrounds—until his death.

'For me, thinking about transparent water drops is an act of making bad things go away. I've dissolved and erased horrible memories by painting them countless times,' Kim told the Yonhap News Agency in 2016.

Kim was honoured with the French Order of Arts and Letters in 1996 and the National Order of Cultural Merits of Korea in 2012.

Devoted to the artist's life and work, the Kim Tschang-Yeul Museum of Art opened on Jeju Island in 2016. It is currently showing the exhibition *Media and Waterdrops*, a selection of Kim's water drop paintings on newspaper pages.

Past exhibitions of note include *The Path* at Gallery Hyundai, Seoul, in 2020; *Kim Tschang-Yeul* at Almine Rech Gallery, New York, in 2018; and *Kim Tschang-Yeul* at Gwangju Museum of Art in 2014. —[O]