ALMINE RECH

# Kim Tschang-Yeul

## Mar 6 — Apr 14, 2018 | New York, Upper East Side

**Almine Rech Gallery New York is pleased to announce an exhibition of historic works by renowned Korean artist Kim Tschang-Yeul.**

Known for his iconic images of drops of water, Kim presents this deceptively simple motif in a wide variety of contexts and mediums. In this exhibition, paintings range from an early 1968 abstraction, made while the artist participated in Korea's Art Informel movement, to his more recent *Recurrence* series in which sparkling droplets emerge against a background of Chinese characters. Reflecting his accomplishments over the course of the last four decades, this succinct survey underscores the reasons that Kim Tschang-Yeul has been one of the most internationally celebrated artists from Korea for most of his career.

Combining the restraint of Zen practice with the skill of an Old Master, Kim Tschang-Yeul perfects a balance between Eastern and Western influences, reflecting the various art movements he has witnessed over the course of his lifetime. Born in 1929 in Maengsan in what was then the northern part of a unified Korea, he was exposed both to *The Book of 1,000 Characters*, a Chinese text for studying calligraphy, and reproductions of the works of Leonardo da Vinci. His family moved south to escape the impact of Communism and the ensuing Korean War left the young artist scarred for life. Already embracing international ambitions, he participated in the Paris Biennale in 1961 and the Sao Paulo Bienal in 1965 which led to him living abroad for over forty years, first in New York where he studied at the Art Students League and later in Paris. Despite language barriers and cultural differences, he embraced the avant-garde wherever he lived, fully absorbing western masters from Jackson Pollock and Morris Louis to Jasper Johns and other Pop Artists. His enormous talent enabled him to fully assimilate modes of abstraction and photo-realism, calligraphy and minimalism, to create his own original iconography.

But a survey of Kim's work is much more than a history lesson in recent movements in art. Each work is a visceral experience bringing viewers into a state of contemplation, mesmerized by the artist's superlative facility with oil paint and other mediums. In the 1972 painting, *événement de la nuit*, a nightscape of moonlight and shadow is captured in the single magnified drop of water that is the focus of the canvas. In *Waterdrops* from 1979, the canvas appears to be weeping a curtain of jeweled tears, so realistic that we expect them to instantly dry before our eyes. The artist himself has spoken of these works as acts of healing, attempts to reach a state of serenity conquering the enormous inner conflicts left by his experiences with war and repression from his early days in Korea. Even without this explanation, viewers are able to share in the intensity of the artist's vision and his insistence that we find meaning in the most fundamental of experience.

Because, after all, a drop of water is the very essence of life, the beginning of all life on earth, according to both myth and science. Kim Tschang-Yeul complicates this truth in his more recent works, which pair water drops with text. In the 1980s, he began to paint water drops on the surface of French newspapers, allowing the larger-than-life splashes to magnify the print. He has continued this practice more regularly since the year 2000, creating ever more complicated feats of tromp l'oeil. In the latest works in the exhibition, Kim returns to his early lessons in calligraphy, replicating the *Book of 1,000 Characters*, as an ink-filled background against which his water drops glimmer and shine. Whereas an actual drop of water will eventually be absorbed into the surface of the material and fade away, Kim's carpet of dew remains in place forever, inviting his audience to contemplate the ethereality of existence and the endurance of art.

-Barbara Pollack

In 2016, the Kim Tschang-Yeul Museum of Art opened in the scenic Jeju Island in Korea, the highest honor for a Korean artist. By then, Kim's works have been celebrated in France, Korea, Taiwan, the United States, Belgium, China, Japan, Germany, Brazil, Switzerland, Canada and Singapore with recent exhibitions at the Gwangju Museum of Art in 2014; the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts in 2012; Busan Museum of Art in 2009; National Art Museum of China in 2006; and the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume in Paris in 2004. In 2017, he was awarded the Officicier medal, the highest honour of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres bestowed by the Embassy of France in Seoul. His paintings are in the permanent collection of Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, USA; Aqua Museum 104°, Shimane, Japan; Bochum Museum Art Collection, Bochum, Germany; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; Fondation Veranneman, Ghent, Belgium; Fukuoka Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan; Fundació Stämpfli, Sitges, Barcelona, Spain; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., USA; Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea; and the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan, among many others.