metamorphosis

A JOURNEY OF TRANSFORMATION

Oh Myung Hee

Metamorphosis – A Journey of Transformation is a celebration of the passion and imagination embodied in the works of the Korean artist Oh Myung Hee. It is a personal journey that took years of dedication and work, but at the same time a journey that she invites us all to take with her.

Past and future, tradition and innovation, the contrast between respect for values held for centuries and the constraints that they impose, especially on a woman, in today's world, are core themes in Myung Hee's poetic vision. Through her art, she invites us to share her reflections and to embrace her dialogue of symbols and allegories. She draws us into her world, where memory and hope constantly overlap, where past and present dissolve into a continuum, and where freedom, imaginary or missed, is a powerful social dynamic.

The long and complex history of Korea is reflected in the personal experience of Oh Myung Hee and through her artistic expression.

At the end of the war, Korea was one of the world's poorest countries. The extraordinary economic growth that transformed it into a manufacturing and technology superpower inevitably interacted, often in the form of a contrast, with the culture developed through centuries and with the social structures that were underpinning that culture. Oh Myung Hee was caught up in the middle of this tension, not just because she was part of the generation born in the moment of an enormous push for the modernisation of Korea, but also because she belonged to that class where contrast between tradition and innovation is most strident.

The dialectic relationship between past and future carries an uncertainty that Oh Myung Hee ventures to metamorphose into her ultimate expression, conveying determination and hesitation, and rooted in the pride and insecurity of her feminine sensibility.

Change and instability in her culture, social space, role as woman and artist, are accompanied in her art by another two central themes: memory and freedom. Memory of the faded world of her childhood, seen through the eyes of nostalgia, coupled with the awareness of the difficulties that were intrinsic

to those years. Freedom of the artist to express herself, and of the woman to find her position, a new position, in society, a process that imposed challenges to the customs of the very culture that she understands and respects so profoundly.

In many of the works brought to this exhibition, there is a flying scarf. It is a symbol with more than one meaning. It is a desire of freedom, of liberation in the air, without constraints. It is also a memory, of a moment or of an episode perhaps, floating somewhere in the sea of the past, and probably so beyond reach that it can only be felt with profound wistfulness. The scarf is also a feminine accessory, which in the artist's mind is metamorphosed into an allegory of women: beautiful, elegant, free, but also delicate, vulnerable, transient.

If Korean contemporary art is surely obsessed with the present then it decidedly so with the future. There is no space for the past and it is not surprising, given the crucial importance of cutting edge technology and the high pressure urban lifestyle that comes alongside it. Oh Myung Hee with her figurative allegories of birds and flowers instead reclaims the traditional painting style called hwa-jo-hwa. She follows it with individuality, using details like the full blooms of Japanese apricot flowers or cherry blossoms that fill the canvas to bring the entire paintings to the foreground, thereby strengthening their ornamental qualities.

Specifically for this exhibition, Oh Myung Hee agreed to experiment with immersive 3D technology. Symbolic details of one her paintings, including the flying scarf, will detach from their physical background, enter the space around the viewers and freely wonder across boundaries.

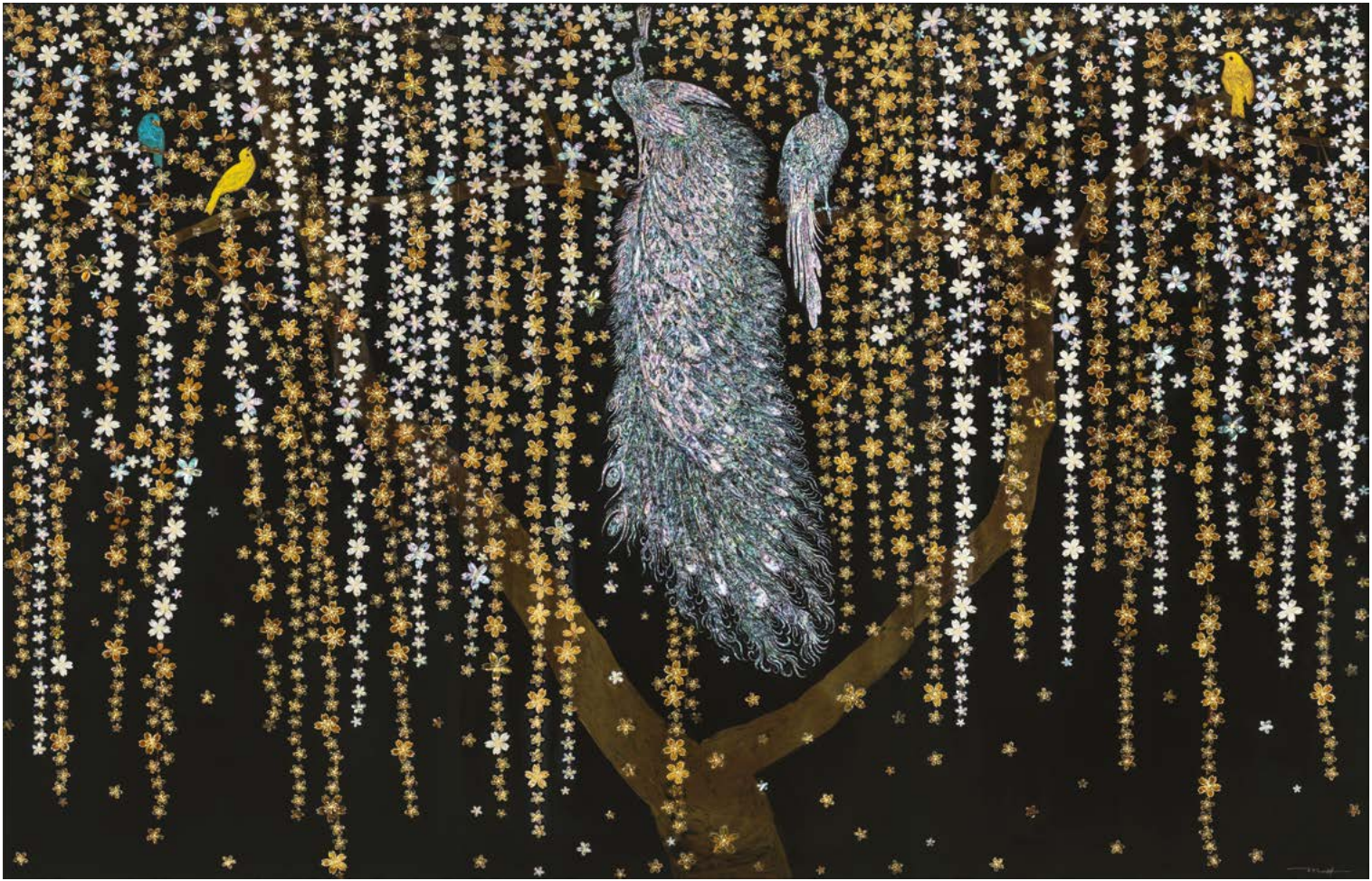
Oh Myung Hee's technique, too, expresses and resolves a contrast, this time between Western methods and Oriental ones. She uses lacquer, the centuries old Oriental technique that Westerners admired and tried to imitate. In this sense, she draws from the past – but then she experiments, adding oil pigment, bending the limits of lacquer painting, often using an unusual canvas support, building so many layers that details emerge from the background and almost transforming into reliefs, adding a marked three dimensional, almost sculptural aspect to some of her works. She also adds unusual or precious materials, such as mother of pearl, eggshell and gold and silver leaf.

In some paintings, she takes old photographs of Korean streets and begins to work around them and on them, building up surface and colour as if they were the encrustations of time and mental reflection. In others, a traditional Korean appreciation of untamed nature as the ultimate expression of perfection is presented.

Metamorphosis, transformation, the changing of the forms. These elements that in the paintings here presented appear as symbolic images or expressions of emotional change shaped through the mental processes of the artist and her technical experimentation. They become something else and yet they remain recognisable.

Our hope is that the viewer will feel this and feel the journey also as his own.

Tatiana Palinkasev



Oh Myung Hee

Zenith – Centre Of Radiant Life (Willow Cherry Blossom) • lacquer painted on wood board, mother of pearl • 180 x 120cm (60 x 120cm / 1pcs) • Triptych



Oh Myung Hee

Homeward Journey · lacquer painted on wood board, mother of pearl, pure gold leaf · 120 x 120cm · Triptych, Part I



Oh Myung Hee

Homeward Journey – Face-To-Face · lacquer painted on wood board, mother of pearl, pure gold leaf, pure silver leaf

120 x 120cm · Triptych, Part II



Oh Myung Hee

Homeward Journey • lacquer painted on wood board, mother of pearl, pure silver leaf • 120 x 120cm • Triptych, Part III



Oh Myung Hee

Secret Chamber – Delight • lacquer painted on antique furniture from Jeju Island, Korea, mother of pearl, video monitor • 130 x 90cm



Oh Myung Hee
Purification – Time For Introspection
• lacquer painted on woodboard, mother of pearl, eggshell, crystal
• 70 x 130cm



Oh Myung Hee
Purification – Time For Introspection
• lacquer painted on woodboard, mother of pearl, eggshell, crystal
• 70 x 130cm



Oh Myung Hee

Nostalgia · photo printed on Korean paper, Japanese traditional dyes, mother of pearl · 162 x 131cm



Oh Myung Hee

Tying The Knots · photo printed on canvas, acrylic, mother of pearl · 162 x 131cm



Oh Myung Hee

Centre Of Radiant Life – Silver Fantasy · acrylic on canvas, mother of pearl · 682 x 182cm (227 x 182cm / 1pcs) · Triptych



Oh Myung Hee

Autumn Lyricism · lacquer painted on wood board, mother of pearl · 140 x 130cm (70 x 130cm / 1pcs) · Diptych

Oh Myung Hee

Crossing Paths・photo printed on Korean paper, Japanese traditional dyes, mother of pearl・162 x 131cm



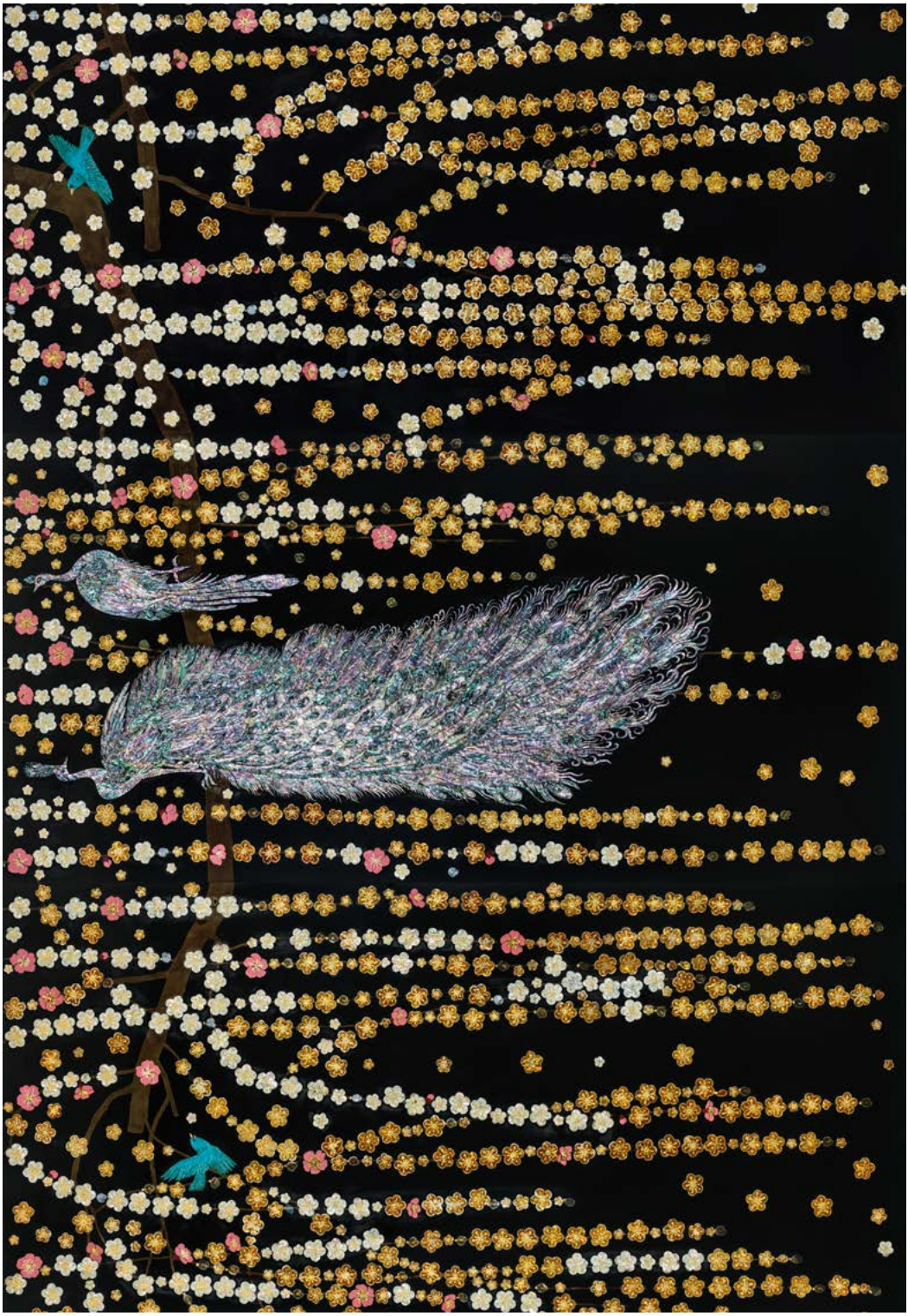
Oh Myung Hee

Zenith – Centre Of Radiant Life · acrylic on canvas, mother of pearl, gold leaf · 181 x 227cm



Oh Myung Hee

Centre Of Radiant Life – Silver Fantasy ・ acrylic on canvas, mother of pearl ・ 365 x 227cm (181 x 227cm / 1pcs)



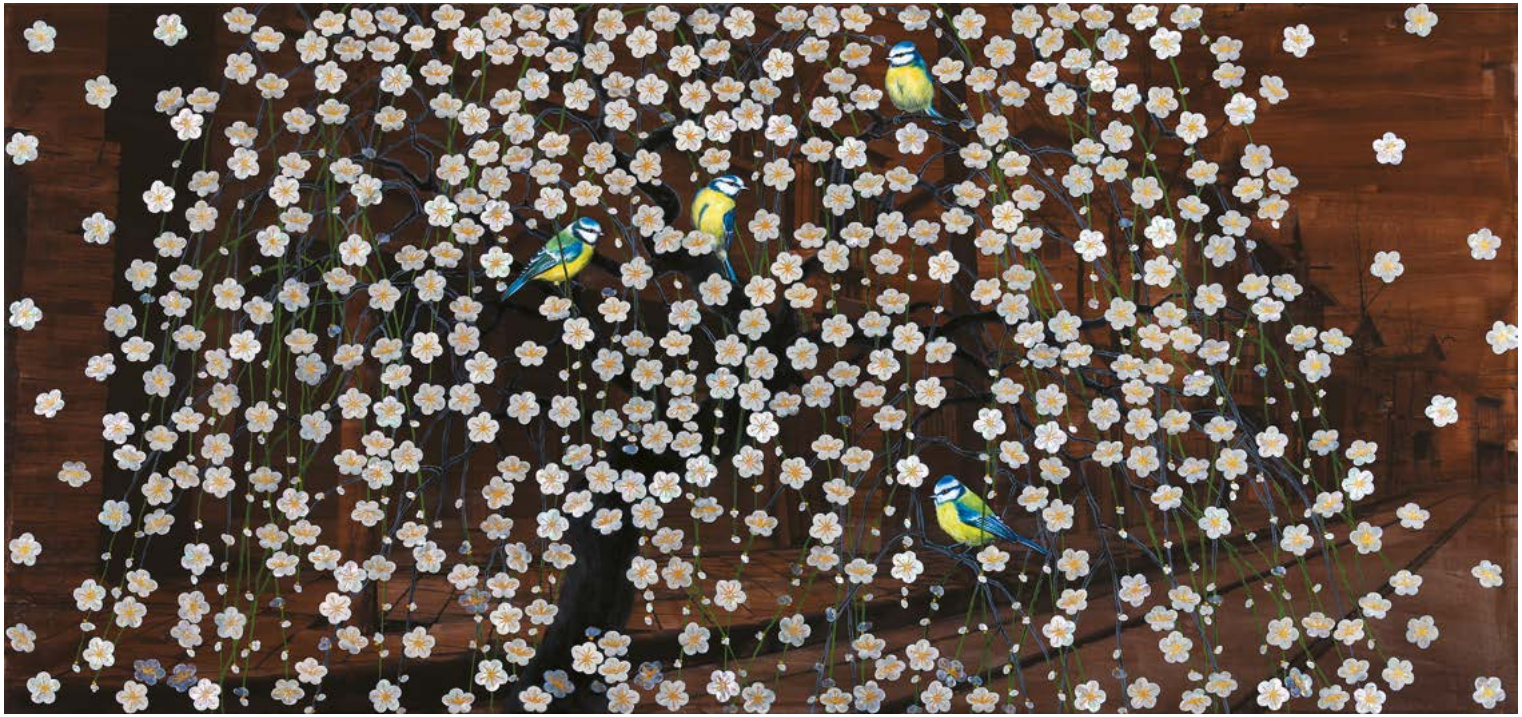
Oh Myung Hee

Zenith – Centre Of Radiant Life (Willow Apricot Flower) • lacquer painted on wood board, mother of pearl • 180 x 120cm (60 x 120cm/ 1pcs) • Triptych



Oh Myung Hee

Homeward Journey – Toward You • lacquer painted on wood board, mother of pearl • 360 x 120cm (120 x 120cm / 1pcs) • Triptych



Oh Myung Hee

Nostalgia • photo printed on canvas, acrylic, oil painting, mother of pearl • 229 x 108cm



Oh Myung Hee

Healing I • lacqer painted on canvas, papier maché, mother of pearl • 130 x 162cm



Oh Myung Hee

Healing II • lacqer painted on canvas, papier maché, mother of pearl • 130 x 162cm



Oh Myung Hee

Centre Of Radiant Life – A Splendid Day • print on Korean paper • 210 x 130cm (70 x 130cm / 1pcs) • Triptych



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Camellia • lacquer painted on wood board, mother of pearl • 120 x 120cm



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Red A Dream • lacquer painted on wood board, mother of pearl, hemp cloth, clay • 130 x 92cm



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Autumn Lyricism • lacquer painted on wood board, mother of pearl • 140 x 130cm (70 x 130cm / 1pcs)



Oh Myung Hee

Purification – Time For Introspection • lacquer painted on wood board, mother of pearl, eggshell, crystal • 30 x 154cm (30 x 60cm / 1pcs) • Pentaptych



Oh Myung Hee

Radiant Centre Of Life – Silver Fantasy • acrylic on canvas, mother of pearl • 162 x 390cm (162 x 130cm / 1pcs) • Triptych



Oh Myung Hee

A Little Song Of Life • acrylic on canvas, mother of pearl • 162 x 390cm (162 x 130cm / 1pcs) • Triptych



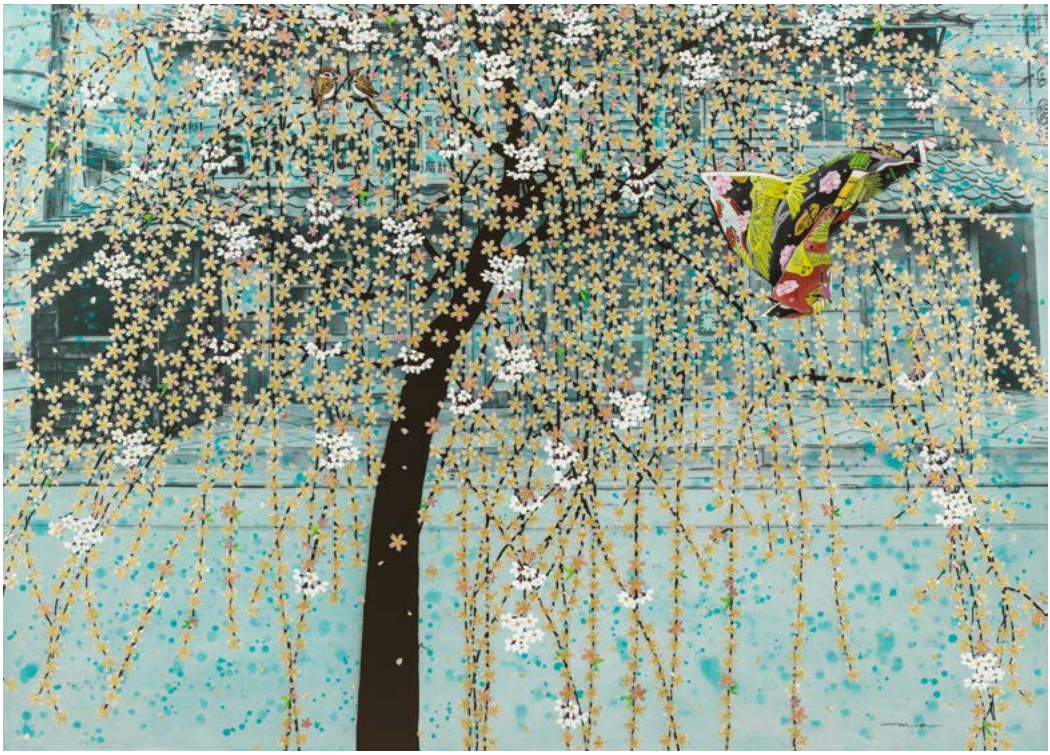
Oh Myung Hee

A Little Song Of Life • acrylic on canvas, mother of pearl • 162 x 130cm



Oh Myung Hee

A Little Song Of Life • acrylic on canvas, mother of pearl • 162 x 130cm



Oh Myung Hee

Nostalgia • photo printed on canvas, acrylic, mother of pearl • 227 x 182cm

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- Seoul Arts High School
- Sejong University (BFA)
- Graduate School of Sejong University (MFA)
- Tokyo University of the Arts (TUA), researcher
- College of Art & Design at Suwon University, professor
- Seoul Fine Arts Association, vice president/section
- Korean Fine Arts Association, planning director
- Grand Art Exhibition of Korea, judging committee member
- Grand Art Exhibition of Korea, steering committee member

Awards and Selected Exhibitions

Awards

2008 Korean Fine Artist Grand Prix, by Misoolsidae

2014 Fine Artist Prize, by Korean Fine Arts Association

Selected Exhibitions

1995 The 15th Line Art Fair, Galerie Futra, Belgium; Espace Miromesni Solo Exhibition, Paris, France; Rome Art Fair, St Charies de Rose, Rome, Italy

1997 Solo Exhibition, GALERIE BHAK, Seoul; Seoul Print Printing Festival, GALERIE BHAK, Seoul;The 17th Line Art Fair, Galerie Futra, Belgium

1998 Exhibition, GALERIE BHAK, Seoul, Korea; May Arts Festival, Public meet Art Exhibition, Parkryusook Gallery, Seoul, Korea; GALERIE BHAK, San Fransisco, USA; NICAF 1997, Galerie de Paris, Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan; Saitou Gllery Solo Exhibition, Sapporo, Japan

1999 Accane Gallery Solo Exhibition, Tokyo, Japan

2000 Solo Exhibition, GALERIE BHAK (Bhak Young-Duk), Seoul, Korea

2001 NICAF Art Fair, GALERIE BHAK (Bhak Young-Duk), Tokyo, Japan

2002 NICAF Art Fair, GALERIE BHAK (Bhak Young-Duk), Tokyo, Japan

2004 San Francisco International Art Exposition, GALERIE BHAK, San Francisco, USA

2005 Osaka Art Fair, Osaka, Japan; Beijing Art Fair, Beijing, China; Shanghai Art Fair, Shanghai, China

2007 Shinseido Gallery Solo Exhibition, Tokyo, Japan; Ovse Gallery SHINPA Exhibition, Tokyo, Japan; Sydney Art Fair, Sydney, Australia

2008 Chicago Art Fair, GALERIE BHAK, Chicago, USA; Korean Fine Artist Grand Prize Winner Exhibition, Seoul, Korea; Solo Exhibition, Insa Art Center, Gana Art Gallery, Seoul, Korea

2009 Los Angeles Art Show, Los Angeles , USA

2010 Los Angeles Art Show, Los Angeles , USA; Chosunilbo Gallery Solo Exhibition, Seoul

2011 Los Angeles Art Show, Los Angeles , USA

2012 Los Angeles Art Show, Los Angeles , USA; Chosunilbo Gallery Solo Exhibition, Seoul. Korea; New Caledonia Hotel; Aoki Gallery Solo Exhibition, Tokyo, Japan; Jang Eun Sun Gallery Solo Exhibition, Seoul, Korea

2013 Los Angeles Art Show, Los Angeles, USA; Kaze Gallery Solo Exhibition, Osaka, Japan; Korea International Art Fair, GALERIE BHAK (Bhak Young-Duk),Seoul, Korea

2014 SETEC Seoul Art Show, Seoul, Korea; Flower Object Exhibition, Gallery Hogam, Seoul, Korea; Asia Contemporary Art Show, May-June Gallery, Hong Kong; Painting Exhibition with Beautiful TV Gallery, Ara Art Center, Seoul; Korea Re-Discovery Exhibition of Drawing – Format as Reason, Chunjo Gallery in Museum SAN, Wonju, Korea

2015 Modern Flower & Bird Exhibition, Gallery Hanok, Seoul, Korea; Affordable Art Fair Hong Kong; GALERIE BHAK (Bhak Young-Duk), Hongkong

Artist's Note



Fundamentally I have always been a romantic and an optimist.
I firmly believe there is no better way to live,
and if there were…
I would not know.

The world is unforgiving, after all.
Ephemeral and ever-changing,
full of dangers and contradictions…
Some might even call it tragic.

In spite of this, my artwork aims to focus on scenes that are,
or scenes that were,
once beautiful.
"Once," because indeed,
these moments are not eternal.
The petals of a gorgeous bloom
will inevitably begin to wither
once they have reached the zenith of their beauty.
Songbirds warbling their lovely melodies
will fly away at any
instant.

Here, the scarf is an abstract incarnation of myself.
It flutters freely in the breeze,
both assimilating into
and contributing toward
the splendor of the scenery.
But alas…
it, too, is merely one component
of a fleeting moment
in this volatile succession of scenes
we call life.

Through my pieces I aspire to capture
pure, exquisite glimpses of the world
as sincerely as I can.
They may call forth long-ago recollections
of a particularly memorable scenic excursion,
perhaps,
or stop a busy passerby in his tracks
and provide pleasant respite
from the din and discord of modern life.

As if
immersing yourself into the landscape
of a Basho haiku,
my art will remind you to savor the brilliance
of a transient,
but nevertheless beautiful,
moment.

PRODUCED & CURATED BY

Eva McGaw & Tatiana Palinkasev

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