

KUKJE GALLERY | PRESS RELEASE

Kim Yun Shin Solo Exhibition *Kim Yun Shin* at Kukje Gallery

Press Conference: March 19 (Tue.), 2024, 11:30am

Exhibition Dates: March 19–April 28, 2024

Venues: K1, K2

The principles of addition (合) and division (分) are the source of Eastern philosophy and the foundation on which the world exists. I have been pursuing this philosophy since 1975 and titled my work 'Add Two Add One, Divide Two Divide One (合二 合一 分二 分一).' In this dynamic, two entities come together and form a union as one, and this union becomes divided into two again. And then, as in the case of human existence, the process of addition and division are repeated continually and infinitely. [...] The lines and planes created by my chainsaw based on the process of division are, in this view, at once an addition and a division. My mind, my existence, and my soul become a unified one. At this instant, I pray that I may be the one blessed by the Absolute. – Kim Yun Shin¹

Kukje Gallery is pleased to present *Kim Yun Shin*, a solo exhibition by the Korean sculptor Kim Yun Shin, on view from March 19 to April 28, 2024. Since relocating to South America in the mid-1980s, Kim has forged an independent path as an artist, developing a singular visual language that bridges her experience as a woman artist and ex-patriot while also highlighting her unique position vis-à-vis mainstream Modernism in Korea from which she remained physically and conceptually separated. Driven by a keen interest in and respect for natural materials, she has especially dedicated herself to exploring the inherent properties of wood with a profound respect for its materiality. As the gallery's first project with the artist, this exhibition also marks the first presentation of Kim's work since her recent move back to Korea, her homeland, after having lived in Argentina for almost four decades. Taking place across K1 and K2, the exhibition highlights approximately 50 works by the artist, including wood sculptures based on her unique philosophy of "Add Two Add One, Divide Two Divide One (合二合一 分二分一)," a central concept that has guided her artistic practice since the 1970s. The exhibition will also include paintings that Kim has produced consistently over her prolific career.

Since the mid-1970s, Kim has organized her sculptural practice under the title of *Add Two Add One, Divide Two Divide One*, an expression that encompasses her sculptural practice. Based on the Eastern philosophy of Yin and Yang, this cosmic phrase conceived by Kim in the 1970s revolves around the interconnected dialectics of addition/integration and division/fragmentation. According to the artist, all matter in the universe can be described by the interchange in which two heterogeneous elements meet ("add two") and become one through interaction ("add one"); this sum is then divided into two again ("divide two") so each becomes one ("divide one"). This infinitely repeating dynamic not only forms the basis of her artistic philosophy and a way of life, but can also be applied to her sculptural process, which begins by observing the material for a long time with an intimate attention to the natural qualities of the found wood. Attuning her energies to the innate vital rhythm of her material, she takes her chainsaw to chip and carve away at the material based on the instinctual cue of the 'right moment.' Through an intuitive and labor-intensive approach, the wood and the artist become "one" and form a union (add 合); this process of union is then subject to multiple stages of fragmentation that involve dividing and creating space in the material (divide 分). As a result, the true "division" of the wood is rematerialized in the form of an artwork.

¹ Artist's notes (March 2022).

Assembled throughout K1 are wood sculptures mainly drawn from the ongoing series of *Add Two Add One, Divide Two Divide One* paired with paintings. Some of the persistent themes of her works, such as the quest for transcendence and a profound interest in the relationship between humans and nature, can be glimpsed in these early works. *Stacking Wishes*, for instance, is representative of her experiments with vertical stacking in the early and mid-1970s, which reflects her interest in (re)interpreting traditional motifs such as that of the *Jangseung* (a kind of traditional Korean totem) and the custom of stone stacking in Korean folk religion. Her formal variations on *Stacking Wishes* segued into *Add Two Add One, Divide Two Divide One*, as the former work is often regarded as a prototype of the latter. Passing through her hands, diverse types of raw wood—including algarrobo, lapacho, calden, eucalyptus, quebracho, and olive—get transformed into various forms of prayers. Notably, the visual contrast between the soft inner wood revealed through her sawing and the rough bark preserved in its original appearance has been recognized as a distinctive expressive feature in Kim's sculptures.

On display in K2 are paintings and painted wood sculptures evocative of the unique vigor and dynamism of Argentina's natural environment. In her definition of the inseparable relationship between sculpture and painting, Kim has said, "I need to paint in order to sculpt, and I need to sculpt in order to paint." Her paintings, which share the formal characteristics of surface fragmentations observed in her sculptures, are charged with a vibrant palette consisting of colors and patterns drawn from Korean and South American indigenous traditions. Also visible are influences from her travels including Mayan and Aztec symbolism from Mexico, reflecting the way the artist has consistently synthesized cosmological vocabularies. Organized under titles such as *Granted Wishes, Song of My Soul, Primal Vitality, Fragments of Memories, and Vibration*, her paintings exude a sense of primitive energy accentuated by her rough-hewn techniques such as scraping the canvas with a palette knife to expose layers of paint or applying paint to thinly sliced pieces of wood and stamping them onto the canvas. Composed of multi-colored lines and free-floating planes, they celebrate the essence of vital force and virtue of life.

Kim's visual grammar that straddles painting and sculpture naturally led her to an attempt at painting her wood sculptures. This group of painted sculptures became a field of experimentation with color and geometry for Kim, who was motivated into this direction after discovering an unexpected correspondence between premodern South American and Korean folk traditions and symbolic systems. Due to limited access to materials during the global pandemic, Kim has recently begun to focus on collecting pieces of wood available around her, a more organic approach that in turn has propelled her renewed interest in painting her sculptures. These new painted sculptures, comprising collaged, fragmented, and recycled wood covered with acrylic paint, illustrate another type of 'Add Two Add One, Divide Two Divide One' based on an integration and division of the two mediums of painting and sculpture. With her open-minded spirit and unflinching nature, Kim continues to expand her universe by fluidly moving between painting and sculpture, thereby reinvigorating the artistic potential of her chosen materials while remaining unafraid to take a leap, even at this precise moment.

About the Artist

Born in Wonsan (present-day North Korea) in 1935, Kim Yun Shin is Korea's first-generation woman sculptor, whose practice encompasses wood and stone sculpture, lithography, and painting. After graduating from Hongik University's Department of Sculpture in 1959, she pursued further studies in sculpture and lithography at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, France. Captivated by the expansive landscapes of Argentina, Kim relocated to Buenos Aires in 1984, where the robust wood she came across in the region allowed her to express architectural structures and cohesive forces in her work.

Recent solo exhibitions include Nam-Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul (2023); Whitewave Art Center, Seoul (2022, 2015); Gallery Banditrazos, Seoul (2022); E2Art Gallery, Los Angeles (2022); Korean Cultural Center, Buenos Aires (2022, 2021, 2018); Korean Cultural Center, Warsaw (2019); Korean Cultural Center, Madrid (2019); Centro Cultural Pilar, Buenos Aires (2017); Cabildo, Córdoba (2016); Hanwon Museum of Art, Seoul (2015); Museo Municipal de Arte Moderno Mendoza, Mendoza (2015); María Elena Kravetz Gallery, Córdoba (2010); and Museo de Arte López Claro, Azul (2009).

Kim has also participated in group exhibitions and events at numerous institutions, including Park Soo Keun Museum, Yanggu (2024); Ahn Sang Chul Museum, Yangju (2015); Korean Cultural Center, Washington, D.C. (2012); Korean Cultural Center, Buenos Aires (2011); International Sculpture Symposium, Rosario (2007, 2001); Exhibition of Korean Artists in South America, São Paulo (2006); Korean-Spanish Sculpture Symposium, Icheon (2003); Beijing International Sculpture Symposium, Beijing (2002); International Sculpture Symposium, Buenos Aires (2000); Exposición Grupal de la Asociación Artes Plásticas Coreana, Buenos Aires (1998); Galería de Arte La Candelaria, Buenos Aires (1995); '95 Korean Women Artist Festival, Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul (1995); and Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City (1992, 1991).

Kim's works are included in the collections of major institutions around the world, including the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Gwacheon; Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul; Hanwon Museum of Art, Seoul; Museo de Arte Moderno, Buenos Aires; Museo de Arte López Claro, Azul; Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City; Korean-Spanish Sculpture Park, Gwangju; Beijing International Sculpture Park, Beijing; Central Post Office, Rosario; Korea Land and Housing Corporation, Seoul; Asan Social Welfare Foundation, Seoul; Asan Medical Center, Seoul; and Central Sports Park, Iksan. The artist currently lives and works between Argentina and Korea.

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Kim Yun Shin (b. 1935)

Add Two Add One, Divide Two Divide One 1978

1978

Pine wood

68 x 18 x 20 cm

Private Collection

Courtesy of the artist

Photo: Chunho An

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Kim Yun Shin (b. 1935)

Add Two Add One, Divide Two Divide One 1992-1
1992

Algarrobo wood

42 x 47 x 31 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Chunho An

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Kim Yun Shin (b. 1935)

Add Two Add One, Divide Two Divide One 2000-653

2000

Algarrobo wood

74 x 63 x 25 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Chunho An

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Kim Yun Shin (b. 1935)

Add Two Add One, Divide Two Divide One 2002-790

2002

Palo Santo wood

155 x 41 x 39 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Chunho An

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Kim Yun Shin (b. 1935)

Add Two Add One, Divide Two Divide One 2019-19
2019

Acrylic on recycled wood

114 x 41 x 27 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Chunho An

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Kim Yun Shin (b. 1935)

Add Two Add One, Divide Two Divide One 2019-14
2019

Acrylic on recycled wood

126 x 45 x 25 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Chunho An

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Kim Yun Shin (b. 1935)

Song of My Soul 2008-72

2008

Oil on canvas

100 x 100 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Chunho An

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Kim Yun Shin (b. 1935)

Song of My Soul 2011-14

2011

Oil on canvas

120 x 100 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Chunho An

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Kim Yun Shin (b. 1935)

Granted Wishes 2018-22

2018

Acrylic on canvas

70 x 70 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Chunho An

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Kim Yun Shin (b. 1935)

Vibration 2018-56

2018

Acrylic on canvas

150 x 180 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Chunho An

Image provided by Kukje Gallery