

Lee Heejoon's Painted Constructions at Kumho Museum of Art

June 15, 2023 | By Sherry Paik

Page 1 of 7

In his first museum solo exhibition, Lee Heejoon finds inspiration for his paintings in the world of abstraction and construction.



Exhibition view: Lee Heejoon, *Scaffolding*, Kumho Museum of Art, Seoul (5 May–11 June 2023).

Courtesy Kumho Museum of Art.

Presented at Kumho Museum of Art in Seoul, Lee's recent exhibition *Scaffolding* (5 May–11 June 2023) was part of the ongoing Kumho Young Artist programme, an annual competition dedicated to supporting emerging South Korean artists and providing them with the space to stage a solo show.



Exhibition view: Lee Heejoon, *Scaffolding*, Kumho Museum of Art, Seoul (5 May–11 June 2023).
Courtesy Kumho Museum of Art.

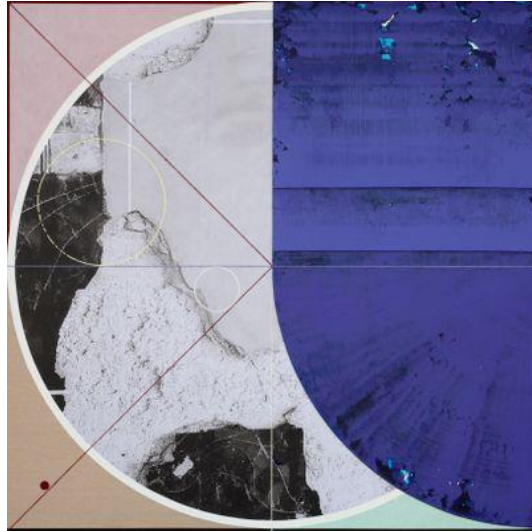
The exhibition included 14 acrylic and photo collage works in two connected, completely white rooms. Lee explains that the stark white of the spaces was intended to assist the audience in seeing each painting more clearly, enabling them to concentrate more completely on the details and ambience of the exhibition.

Like the exhibition title, the raw white coarse fabric that covered the gallery's usually bare wooden floor was also intended to reference the makeshift structures erected during construction projects. Central to Lee's exploration is the use of colour, scale, tactility, and geometric components abstracted from cityscapes.



Exhibition view: Lee Heejoon, *Scaffolding*, Kumho Museum of Art, Seoul (5 May–11 June 2023).
Courtesy Kumho Museum of Art.

Since 2018, Lee has used photographs of urban landscapes—taken with his iPhone—as the foundation of his practice. In his studio, the artist uses them to prepare drawings by hand or digitally on his iPad, printing them on pieces of A4 paper and laying them onto canvas to serve as a guideline for painting. He then builds upon the surface, using a squeegee to erect small or large bodies of paint that are several millimetres tall.



Lee Heejoon, *The Map to Neptune* (2023). Acrylic paint photo collage large on canvas. 100 x 100 cm.

Courtesy the artist and Kukje Gallery. Photo: Eurok Lee.

Lee likens his process of applying paint to plastering cement, something he did while working on construction sites during his college days. His new works are exercises in using paint to build and expand on two-dimensional surfaces.

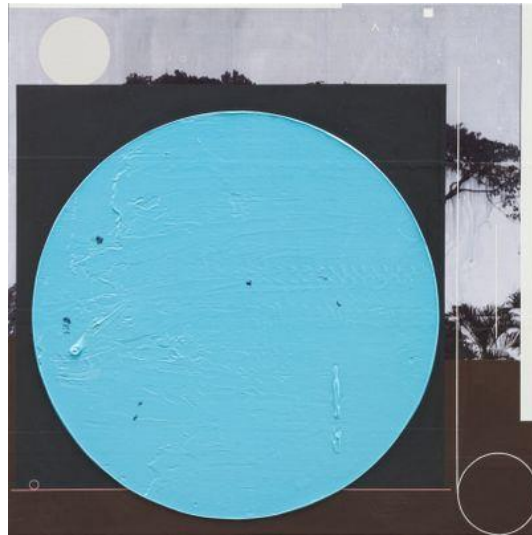
In *The Map to Neptune* (2023), for example, a white circle frames a black-and-white photographic image of concrete surfaces—smooth, rough, or receding into blackness—with colours showing through the topmost layer of blue. The circle, which recurs throughout Lee's paintings, is divided into four quarters in *Utopia* (2023), where thick layers of beige and red paint on the photographs suggest accumulation and density.



Lee Heejoon, *Utopia* (2023). Acrylic paint photo collage on canvas. 91 x 91 cm.

Courtesy the artist. Photo: Euirok Lee.

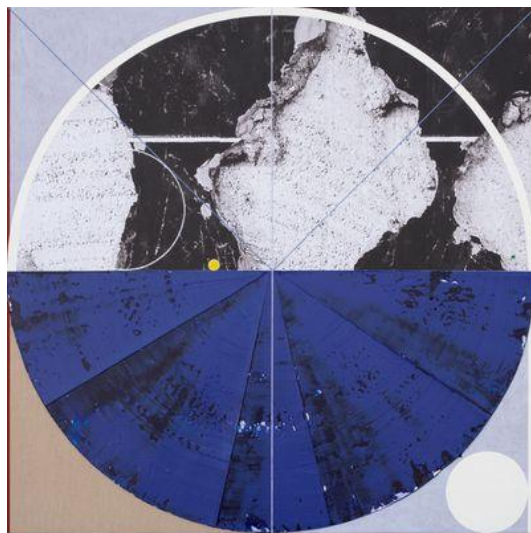
Lee's photo collage technique in *Scaffolding* first appeared in his solo show *The Tourist* at L'espace 71, Seoul, in 2020. In this earlier show, the artist incorporated photographic images of natural and architectural motifs to construct space with attention to his own memories. For example, *The Bangkok Moon Light* (2020) depicts a full blue moon painted over a black square and a picture of a mostly obscured landscape from Lee's travels to Thailand.



Lee Heejoon, *The Bangkok Moon Light* (2020). Acrylic photo collage large on canvas. 91 x 91 cm.

Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Euirok Lee.

Paintings at Kumho reveal the challenging task of constructing a three-dimensional space on the flat face of a canvas. Realistic imagery offers little aid in establishing perspective, having been abstracted to such an extent. Instead, the paint and its application create the work's physical depth.



Lee Heejoon, *Beyond the Horizon of a Black Hole* (2023). Acrylic paint photo collage. 91 x 91 cm.

Courtesy the artist and Kukje Gallery. Photo: Euirok Lee.

In a conversation with *Ocula Magazine*, Lee shared his interest in developing a methodology of 'mining', saying that 'if scaffolding suggests ways to construct on the pictorial plane, mining is closer to digging into the crux of a narrative and finding the gem of an idea or concept.'

As the artist continues his inquiry into painting, Lee's upcoming projects—including a group exhibition during Korean Arts Week in New York in July, a major group show at SongEun Art and Cultural Foundation in August, and a Seoul Museum of Art Nanji Residency starting in October—may provide glimpses of his latest challenges and resolutions.