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Byron Kim Solo Exhibition *Marine Layer* at Kukje Gallery Busan

Press Conference: March 17 (Fri.), 2023, 12pm at Kukje Gallery Busan

Exhibition Dates: March 17 – April 23, 2023

Venue: Kukje Gallery Busan

Swimming in the open ocean gave me a new relationship to my body. Normally, I privilege imagination and mind space over the body, which corresponds with my tendency toward abstraction. Depending on my body as a vehicle brought me away from abstraction—in a strange way, it was grounding, and brought me towards representation.

– Byron Kim

Kukje Gallery is pleased to present *Marine Layer*, a solo exhibition of new works by Byron Kim, on view from March 17 to April 23, 2023. Five years since his first presentation, *Sky*, in the gallery's Seoul space, this also marks the artist's first exhibition in Busan.

Byron Kim's painting practice adeptly balances formal ingenuity with conceptual sophistication. Through keen observation of the prosaic yet profound details in everyday life, Kim explores the relationship of parts to a whole, teasing insightful meaning from otherwise ordinary elements. Often worked out through open-ended series, the artist uses seriality and intimate focus to capture layered phenomenological studies of identity and place.

His breakthrough work *Synecdoche* (1991-ongoing), first shown at the 1993 Whitney Biennial, epitomizes this approach. Composed of nearly five hundred uniformly sized panels, each monochrome canvas faithfully reproduces the unique skin tone of a single subject. In its minimal expression, the fragmented bodies depicted in these works enclose the sensuous history of portraiture, as well as issues of representation and identity. In a similar vein, *Sunday Paintings* is a series that Kim has worked on every week since 2001. Painted from observation, each canvas renders the sky accompanied by a few lines of diaristic entries, his works serving both as a personal testament and a meditation on how the experience of the sky might connect those separated by vast distances. While his imagery is often reduced to an abstract vocabulary, Kim's works remain figurative, functioning as pictorial devices that embody the tension between conceptualism and observation, and between abstraction and that which is rooted in the body.

The new series of works presented in *Marine Layer* shares this combination of site and physical presence. Named *B.Q.O.*, the title is an abbreviation for Berton, Queequeg, and Odysseus, three literary characters from famous oceanic narratives: Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris*, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, and Homer's *Odyssey*, respectively. These heroic figures, who struggle with the oceans in each story, sparked Kim's imagination as the artist re-read these texts during his stay on Captiva Island at the Rauschenberg Residency in January 2020. Kim lived on this small island off the coast of Florida for an entire month, spending time in and on the water kayaking, swimming, and paddleboarding. For Kim, immersed in this environment, the three characters symbolized the way the sea is a metaphor for human struggle and perseverance.

In each of the *B.Q.O.* paintings, three panels are stacked vertically: the upper panel encapsulates the sky seen from the water; the middle panel shows the water's surface and its reflections; and the bottom panel reveals a view from underwater. The subtle changes of hues and delicate brushstrokes evoke both abstraction and the material specificity and atmosphere of water, symbolizing the medium of painting itself

and how it occupies a unique threshold that slips in and out of legibility.

If former *B.Q.O.* works captured the mythic fantasy of battling the oceans, Kim's newest works in the gallery's Busan space present a more direct study of water—based on the simple and concrete activity of swimming that the artist embraced during the lockdown. For a year, Kim and his family settled in San Diego—where the artist was introduced to the ocean as a child and where his elderly parents still reside. Tentatively, yet gradually, Kim found solace in proximity to water as he engaged in regular open-water immersions with his wife, Lisa. Henceforth, Kim found himself gravitating towards various bodies of water—from La Jolla Shores Beach along the Pacific Coast, Tobey Pond in northwest Connecticut, to indoor swimming pools in New York and San Diego—engaging the balance of immersion, observing the water's surface, and pondering his affinity with water. In this way, Kim came to synthesize his new passion with his longstanding interest in perception by drawing upon the natural world and the body as primary subjects.

Responding to the power of water in these tripartite compositions, Kim provides viewers with an immersive and visceral experience of being submerged. Installed as a group, these works impart a powerful experience of being in and in-between the elemental forces of nature. As in his earlier canvases in *Synecdoche* and those in *Sunday Paintings*, Kim's works from the *B.Q.O.* series become part of a larger ongoing whole. Of this recurring framework, Kim has said, "My work has mostly been concerned with the relationship of a part to the whole. How am I connected to the others in the world, and how are we all connected to the greater whole?" Oscillating between his innermost experience and the expansive connection between human and nature—as the title and the literary references suggest—these paintings offer a space for meditation while simultaneously raising many questions regarding our relationship with nature through the overpowering, yet silent presence of the painting.

About the Artist

Byron Kim (b. 1961) was born in La Jolla, California, and currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Kim received his BA in English Literature from Yale University in 1983 and later attended the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture in 1986. He is currently a Senior Critic at Yale University School of Art.

Byron Kim has held solo exhibitions at numerous institutions, including the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland (2019), Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (2015), Columbus College of Art & Design (2012), Berkeley Art Museum (2006), Rodin Gallery, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul (2005), and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1999). He has participated in group exhibitions at institutions around the world including the Smart Museum of Art, Chicago (2022), Brooklyn Museum, New York (2021), Centre for Heritage, Arts and Textile (CHAT), Hong Kong (2020), Anyang Public Art Project 5 (2016), Sharjah Biennial 12 (2015), New Museum, New York (2013), Tate Liverpool (2009), and Museum of Modern Art, New York (2008).

Among Kim's numerous awards are the Skowhegan Medal for Painting (2022), Robert De Niro, Sr. Prize (2019), John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship for Fine Arts (2017), Painters and Sculptors Grant from the Joan Mitchell Foundation (1997), and National Endowment for the Arts Award (1995). Kim's works are in numerous public and private collections, including the Art Institute of Chicago, Berkeley Art Museum, Brooklyn Museum of Art, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Walker Art Center, and the Whitney Museum of American Art.



Byron Kim (b. 1961)

B.Q.O. 27

2022

Acrylic on canvas

182.9 x 121.9 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Chunho An

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Byron Kim (b. 1961)

B.Q.O. 28 (Near Cove)

2022

Acrylic on canvas

208 x 152 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Chunho An

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Byron Kim (b. 1961)

B.Q.O. 31 (Canyonview, UCSD)

2022

Acrylic on canvas

208 x 152 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Chunho An

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



Byron Kim (b. 1961)

B.Q.O. 34 (Marine Layer)

2023

Acrylic on canvas

208 x 152 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Photo: Chunho An

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