

## KUKJE GALLERY | PRESS RELEASE

### Kibong Rhee Solo Exhibition *Where You Stand* at Kukje Gallery

Press Conference: November 17 (Thurs.), 2022, 11am at Kukje Gallery K1 (Seoul)

Exhibition Dates: November 17 – December 31, 2022

Venue: Kukje Gallery K1, K2 (Seoul) and Busan

*Water and fog are the motifs that intrigue me the most. They change how objects and beings appear and make one approach the transcendental. It is as if from this other more obscure perspective, hidden from ordinary life, that I discover certain visions and the spirit of objects.*

– Kibong Rhee

Kukje Gallery is pleased to present *Where You Stand*, a solo exhibition of Kibong Rhee from November 17 to December 31, 2022. Fourteen years since his last exhibition at Kukje in 2008, this fifth solo exhibition of the artist will be held simultaneously in both the gallery's Seoul and Busan spaces. Working across painting and installation, Rhee continues his long interest in experimentation with and mastery of the fundamental structures and dynamics of the natural world. His works balance a nostalgia for a bygone past while at the same time evoke a longing for the ephemeral, forming an uncanny balance between the unconscious, the real, and fantasy. Described by many as oneiric, Rhee's dreamlike landscapes exist as lyrical scenes that transcend time, while his material specificity captures the imagination of the viewer. This exhibition presents around fifty new works of Rhee's "vanitas," reflecting on the impermanence and certainty of life.

Rhee is best known for his paintings that use technical mastery and material inventiveness to create highly realistic spatial illusion. Painting directly on clear plexiglass, or polyester fiber, and then layering these translucent sheets onto another layer of painted canvas, Rhee is able to create a significantly affecting depth of field. Drawn to look closely at both the painting's surface while also discovering hidden depths that exist within the multilayered work, his viewers experience a sense of transcendence. In so doing Rhee varies what he calls, the "density of reality," destabilizing our experience of encountering the world, and activating natural elements such as water and the horizon line to appear simultaneously familiar and unreal. As was demonstrated through the artist's 2003 solo exhibition, *There is No Place – The Connective*, in which a water tank filled with blue liquid was exhibited, Rhee has persistently presented works that engage liquid states in unique and enchanting ways. In both his paintings and installations, the artist has explored how water changes depending on its environment and how its characteristics mirror human qualities. The main focus of his interest in water gradually shifted towards fog or vapor, a state more elusive and temperamental in character, developing his unique technical approach to layering the pictorial field to create optical depth and density evoking mist. Fog, in particular, has become a primary theme in part because the artist maintains his studio in a remote, humid mountainside environment. By exploring the many states and qualities of water in his work, Rhee has been able to visualize the perceptual impact that space has on consciousness and our relationship to objects.

The gallery's Seoul space focuses on iconic works that depict dreamlike landscapes; a theme Rhee has worked on continuously for more than two decades. Using blurred lines and shadowy textures to create scenes that appear obscured by fog, Rhee's trees hover between a romantic mise-en-scène and something more mysterious. Though often centered on natural features, the artist is interested not in symbolic subject matters such as a specific tree or a lake, but in the atmospheres that surround them. By fusing the distance of these multiple layers and unsettling one's perception, Rhee frames his interest in the process of looking.

For Rhee, the act of seeing beyond the translucent "film" and through the opaque surfaces, corresponds

to the ordinary act of experiencing the world through one's own distinct framework. This interest in the subjectivity of perception is highlighted by the artist by painting different densities of fog. Works on the second floor of the gallery's K2 space portray landscapes amidst a denser vapor, immediately foregrounding the space between the viewer and what sits beyond the haze by emphasizing the distance between the artist and the object. In this way, Rhee explores the essence of painting as that which enables one to sense the presence of the body, in other words, that reveals the cognitive, confrontational impulse of the eye and one's proximity to other things.

In addition to his landscapes, the artist will showcase a new group of paintings based on his longstanding interest in philosophy, using layers of silkscreened quotes by Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. In one of the 20th century's most influential texts, Wittgenstein explores the limits of language, illustrating how it is unsuccessful both in clearly presenting concepts and representing the world. In these paintings, the philosopher's writing, emerging as if pushed forward from the back of the canvas, hides behind ambiguous landscapes that serve as another illusory film revealing the indeterminacy around us.

Wittgenstein's texts are also actively employed in a new installation series titled *A Thousand Pages* (2022), shown in both Seoul and Busan. In this ongoing work, a text, printed in relief on one plane, is pressed into pigmented powder on an opposite plane, giving the sensation of looking into an open book. The pile of pigment where the text is pressed alludes to the ashes of a burnt book or to pollen dispersed by a butterfly, portraying the paired fate of life and death. Mirroring one another both in form and content, Rhee powerfully evokes life and death as being each other's shadows. This interest in shadow can also be seen in Rhee's series of paintings titled *Deeper than Shadow* (2021). Exhibited in Busan, the works use strands of wire upon his signature landscapes to visualize and experiment the idea of mirroring gravity. Focusing not on manifest subjects but their shadows, Rhee's works are also incomplete phenomena that arise from a reality that is not real.

This long-awaited solo exhibition presents a significant number of new works, presenting Kibong Rhee's unique approach to exploring the invisible flow that exists as a force moving the world. With the recognition that humans perceive the world in ways presented to them, Rhee's multimedia work uses his mastery of pictorial realism as well as technical virtuosity to visualize processes and variations that govern awareness. As the title of the exhibition acknowledges, what and how you perceive depends on where you stand. As such, Rhee uses the device of painting to rediscover what is everywhere but nowhere. In this way the artist considers himself an "engineer who makes the art of reverie-image," inviting the viewer to reflect on the readily dismissed aspects of the everyday.

### **About the Artist**

For more than four decades Kibong Rhee has demonstrated a sustained interest in humanity and our relationship to nature and technology. He sees this relationship principally as a structure of creation, disappearance, and circulation, and explores the signification and dynamics derived from this flow. The theme of "impermanence" that emerges from this cyclical model is an inevitable physical phenomenon as well as one that elicits a sense of beauty, desire, and nostalgia. In his images painted on canvas and plexiglass, or translucent fiber, two worlds, incompatible within a single perspective, coexist in multiple dimensions. In this way, Rhee opens a dialogue in his works through structural changes, creating an introspective space where the context of disappearance and abstraction is emphasized.

Born in 1957, Kibong Rhee graduated from Seoul National University. He was awarded the Grand Prix at the National Art Exhibition in 1986, and since then has exhibited extensively. His works are in collections worldwide, including the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul; Hoam Art Museum, Seoul; ZKM Museum, Karlsruhe; and Leeum Museum of Art, Seoul. The artist has also participated in a group exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) in 2021. Rhee's work has been included in the 2016 Changwon Sculpture Biennale, 2012 Mediations Biennale, 2011 Moscow Biennale, 2010 Busan Biennale, 2009 Biennale Cuvée, 2008 Sevilla Biennale, and the 2008 Singapore Biennale.



**Kibong Rhee (b. 1957)**

*Where You Stand D-1*

2022

Acrylic and polyester fiber on canvas

186 x 186 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



**Kibong Rhee (b. 1957)**

*Where You Stand Green-1*

2022

Acrylic and polyester fiber on canvas

186 x 186 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



**Kibong Rhee (b. 1957)**

*Stand on Shadow No. 9-3*

2022

Acrylic and polyester fiber on canvas

110 x 110 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



**Kibong Rhee (b. 1957)**

*Passage to Illogic A*

2021

Acrylic and polyester fiber on canvas

180 x 120 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



**Kibong Rhee (b. 1957)**

*Black Shadow — The Void*

2022

Acrylic, resin, and polyester fiber on canvas

186 x 186 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Image provided by Kukje Gallery



**Kibong Rhee (b. 1957)**

*Deeper than Shadow — Purple*

2021

Wood, silicon, thread, and polyester fiber on canvas

241 x 186 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

Image provided by Kukje Gallery

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