

Aesthetica Magazine – Review of Minjung Kim at Luxembourg & Dayan, 58th Venice Biennale



In a nondescript, stripped Venetian house in sight of the Giardini della Biennale, Luxembourg & Dayan have staged *Minjung Kim: The Light, The Shade, The Depth*. The exhibition is curated by Jean-Christophe Ammann and utilizes Kim's ritualised mark-making to draw upon the unique environment the work finds itself in, as well as offering a sanctuary of subtle serenity against the backdrop of the loud showmanship of the Biennale. The works, which powerfully recall faraway mountainscapes and ambiguous renderings of bustling city streets, are born out of "a consciousness of seventeenth and eighteenth century Japanese ink painting," says Ammann. They are steeped in historical context, all the while retaining a refreshing contemporary quality that places the viewer in a transient space. This resolves in a beautiful synthesis that Ammann credits to the visual thinking of East Asia.

On the second floor, the walls have been stripped bare in an explosive, almost non-consequential fashion. It is a sight that is seemingly in direct contrast to the forethought and precision that Kim has crafted throughout her career. On one wall is *The Street* (2015): it consists of varying ellipses, in deep greys, rich burgundies and warm creams, each with delicate fan marks scorched onto their surface. The ellipses are all collaged, overlapping one another, as if vying for greater space on the picture's surface. This is a perfect

example of the existential range of Kim's visual vocabulary. The solemn piece summons the dull echoes from the street, and transforms each ellipse as if they were one of the people below, weaving in and out of the lives of others, unknowingly entering and exiting their lives for a brief moment.

Similarly on the first floor, in *Mountain* (2007), the viewer is drawn to the work addressing the viewer's own mortality in the context of the sublimity of nature. A forested mountain range is summoned by Kim's layering of black sumi ink waves across the mulberry Hanji paper. She builds up the layers as she descends to the bottom of the composition. The top waves are like grey tinted watermarks, and they become darker and darker until the final wave is a thick, almost impenetrable black. This gives the illusion of depth and distance greater than the viewer can perceive. This plays on the viewer's pre-existing knowledge of mountains, their sheer size; the danger and the power they exude – an unnerving tension results.

Alongside the evocative, almost Rorschach test-like interpretations of Kim's work, one is exceedingly aware of their painterly aesthetic. For example, in *Mountain* (2012) a slender composition shows the same aforementioned waves in a bold red hue. This time, as a result of its vertical emphasis and distinctly poetic palette, the viewer is alienated from the immediacy of nature bestowed by *Mountain* (2007) and trapped by its painterliness that summons the works of Guo Xi and Cui Ruzhuo.

It is in the most poignant work of the exhibition, *Cries* (2001), that the viewer is led to a feverish climax. Red ink is frantically cast in spindly scratches across the centre-right of the composition. Towards the top and bottom of the work the chaotic criss-crossing of ink fans out and the marks transform into choreographed gestures. The title evokes an urgency of vulnerability and pain. The exhibition is an opera of seismic evocations and associations, formulaically distributed into a unique and minimal gestural visual language. Just as the simple universal occurrences of light, shade and depth exist to the viewer in reality without much contemplation, one could easily miss the chameleon-like power of her work. The exhibition warrants further exploration and demands the viewer to revisit: the environment and the peculiarities of Venice whisper in and out and all around.

Minjung Kim: The Light, The Shade, The Depth, 5 May – 27 September, Ca' Boto, Via Garibaldi 1643, at Riva dei Sette Martiri, Venice, Italy.

For more information visit www.luxembourgdayan.com.

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Credits

1. Minjung Kim, *The Street*, 2015. Courtesy of the artist and Luxembourg & Dayan.

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