

***Joo Myung Duck: Sensory Space in Photography  
and Its Conversation with Korean Abstract Painting***



From **March 8 to April 13, 2024**, MIYAKO YOSHINAGA is pleased to present ***Sensory Space in Photography*** by Korean artist **Joo Myung Duck** (b. 1940), an exhibit showcasing the artist's transition from social realism to abstract photography. ***Sensory Space in Photography*** is a follow-up to the gallery's first exhibition of the artist, ***Motherland*** (2015) and is our official program of **Asia Week New York** (March 14-24), celebrating the diversity of Asian art.

Born in 1940 in the village of Anak (in North Korean territory today), **Joo Myung Duck** became passionate about photography in his college years, documenting lives deeply affected by Japanese colonialism and the aftermath of WWII and the Korean War. With activist passion, he recorded and published empathetic images of mixed-race orphans and struggling rural families amid rapid urbanization. Joo's mentor was the Japanese photographer Hiroshi Hamaya (1915-1999) known for his iconic images of rural Japan. By the end of the 1970s, Joo established himself as a leading photographer of *Korean Saenghwalchuŭi* (life-based) *Realism*. This exhibition, however, focuses on Joo's work created between 1988 and 2011, a turning point in his career when he was transitioning into an important fine art photographer.

In the 1980s into the 1990s, Joo shifted his focus to the terrain around him. The skyless, bird's-eye-view landscapes are so dark in his gelatin silver prints that Vince Aletti, a critic for *New Yorker*, described Joo's depiction of clustered trees, reeds, and flowers as "impenetrably dark with just enough light to glow like dying embers seen at close range." Korean critics named this enigmatic and rich veil of darkness "Joo Myung Duck Black." Metaphorically titled *Lost Landscapes*, Joo's dense scenery with slowly emerging details creates a pathway towards an abstract realm of the senses. In this exhibition, four expressive monochromes from this series are juxtaposed for the first time with a textured black painting by renowned Korean artist **Chung Sang Hwa** (b. 1932), a central figure of the Dansaekhwa (Korean monochrome art) movement.

A dramatic development in Joo's work began in 2011 after he turned 70. While *Lost Landscapes* can be associated with the traditional nature sensitivity of East Asian religions and philosophies such as Daoism, this new body of work primarily focuses on the modern urban environment. Unlike his earlier documentary photographs capturing Seoul's cityscapes amidst post-war recovery and rapid industrialization of the 1960s and 1970s, Joo explores ordinary surfaces such as a wall, the ground, or old paint in his *Abstract in Photography* series. At an extremely close range, he emphasizes the depth of colors, lines, patterns, and textures lit by dazzling natural light, reflecting his experimentation traverses the boundary between documentation and expression. The exhibition introduces seven outstanding works from this

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series and taps into Joo's relationship with the aesthetic and philosophy of Korean abstract painting, particularly, of the Dansaekhwa movement.

**Joo Myung Duck** was born in 1940 in Hwanghae Province, now part of North Korea. His family moved south shortly after the end of the Japanese occupation in 1945. While studying history at Kyung-Hee University in Seoul, he engaged in a great deal of mountain climbing and taking photographs. His first one-person show, *Mr. Holt's Orphanage* in Seoul in 1966, caused a sensation. For several years from 1969 he worked for *Monthly Joong-Ang* as a photojournalist, contributing numerous photo essays. Other solo exhibitions include *Lyric of Korea* (1981), Lotte Museum, Seoul, *Landscape* (1989), Seoul Museum, Seoul, *The Space of Korea* (1994), Aichi Arts Center, Nagoya, Japan, *An Die Photographie* (1999), Kumho Museum, Seoul, *Incheon Chinatown 1968* (2002), The Museum of Photography, Seoul, and *Portrait of Memory* (2007), Circulo de Bellas Artes, Madrid, Spain. A two-part museum retrospective took place at Daelim Museum, Seoul in 2008 and 2009. Joo's work has been published in numerous magazines and books, including *Lost Landscapes* (1993), *Rose* (2009), and *The Abstract in Photography* (2012).

**On March 19, at 6:30 pm**, during **Asia Week New York**, the gallery will host a talk by **Dr. Yuri Doolan** about his book ***The First Amerasians***, which offers fascinating historical background behind Joo's Mixed Names series. Dr. Doolan will tell the heartbreaking story of how Americans created and used the concept of the "Amerasian" to remove thousands of mixed race children from their Korean mothers in US-occupied South Korea to adoptive US homes during the 1950s and 1960s. His talk will explore the Cold War ideologies undergirding this so-called rescue and show how this process of removal and placement via US refugee and adoption laws profoundly shaped the lives of mixed race Koreans and their mothers. Dr. Doolan is Assistant Professor of History and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and the inaugural chair of Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies Program Brandeis University. To attend Please RSVP by email [rsvp@miyakoyoshinaga.com](mailto:rsvp@miyakoyoshinaga.com).

MIYAKO YOSHINAGA would like to thank our collaborator Datz Museum in Seoul and its curator **Chloe Jungeun Oh** for her tremendous help with this exhibition. We would also like to thank **Dr. Haely Chang**, the Jane and Raphael Bernstein Associate Curator of East Asian Art at the Hood Museum of Art, NH, for her valuable advice.

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