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# Kim Guiline

By Olivia Sand

Although Kim Guiline's career spans more than five decades, it is only recently that he has gained international recognition. Indeed, Western collectors and institutions have just begun, a few years ago, to go beyond their interest in contemporary art from Korea and explore the art scene of Korea from the 1950s onwards. One of the key movements of that time was Dansaekhwa, which was established either in mid-1950s, or the mid-1970s according to some sources, brought the work of its members to international attention. Kim Guiline (b 1936, Korea), although based in France, has been associated with this movement as his work has, over time, followed a similar path to those of his counterparts in Korea. Seen as a response to the dictatorship, Dansaekhwa's aim was to create works, mainly abstract, that were neutral in terms of content, allowing artists to continue to paint in a difficult atmosphere. Over the years, the artist restricted forms and palette to reach a stage of monochrome paintings that echoed his rich poetic interior universe. Looking back, he discusses his career from the moment he arrived in France in the early 1960s.



Kim Guiline.

Photo: Olivia Sand

**ASIAN ART NEWSPAPER:**  
Your work is always associated with Dansaekhwa. Are you still following the movement's motto and main criteria?  
**KIM GUILINE:** I have never really thought about the movement. At the time, I was in Paris – I did not graduate from art school in Seoul. I originally wanted to become a poet, as in my opinion, poetry is the summit of art: a poet relies on very few words to get his message across. This is what I really wanted to do, but as I encountered limitations with the French language, I chose to work with colour instead. In that sense, I was not really a co-founder of Dansaekhwa, but with very few

means, I found a way to express my feelings. This is why and how I happened to be associated with Dansaekhwa, as I belonged to the same generation of artists and happened to know most of them. I met them when they came to Paris and exchanged ideas with them. My being included in the movement somehow happened naturally.

**AAN:** Your decision to enrol in French language studies in the 1960s in Korea was very avant-garde. Ultimately, was it languages that also led you towards art?  
**KG:** I wanted to be a poet and had written various poems in Korean. I arrived in Paris in 1961, settled in Dijon where I found an art history teacher who encouraged me a great deal and it is thanks to them that I began painting. I had an exhibition in Dijon in 1965, selling various paintings – three pieces were acquired by the Museum of Fine Arts in Dijon. That was wonderful encouragement which led to me to enrolling at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. I then continued with an additional curriculum at the Arts Décoratifs in Paris. There, I learned the art of restoration, which became a regular job, because it was very difficult to make a living just from painting. I graduated from the Art Décoratifs in 1971 and then worked for the Forney Library and the National Library in Paris whilst continuing to paint. Subsequently I had a successful show in 1976 with

Durand Dessert. At the start of 1985, I returned to Seoul where I had an exhibition in a gallery that was considered very avant-garde. That is how I became known as being part of Dansaekhwa, but at the time, I was not aware that it had become a movement.

**AAN:** Initially, how did your fascination with the French language begin?  
**KG:** Through poetry.

**AAN:** At the time, did you go to France on a scholarship?  
**KG:** As is the custom in Korea, the eldest brother is in charge of his siblings. In order to go to France, my older brother helped me financially, provided that I finish my thesis and return to Korea to teach. However, two years after being in Dijon, I gave up the idea of finishing my thesis. My brother was furious and cut all financial support. Therefore, I had no choice other than taking care of myself and becoming independent.

**AAN:** In your opinion, what triggered the sudden interest in the movement, considering it started more than 40 years ago?  
**KG:** Dansaekhwa was a movement created at a time when members of the group wanted to accomplish something new within painting. I do not understand why this sudden interest in the group is taking place now. With regards to artists of the

Continued on page 4

## NEWS IN BRIEF

The bronze mirror was found at the Nakashima archaeological site in Fukuoka's Hakata Ward. Made in China during the later Han dynasty, between 25 to 220, and measures about four and a half inches across. Inscribed on the surface are the words *chang yi zisun*, which translates as 'to benefit future generations forever'. It was not found in a tomb, so the mirror may have been used in religious rites, commented Hidenori Okamura, a professor of Chinese archaeology at Kyoto University. The mirror was excavated last year alongside earthenware representing the middle to late Yayoi pottery culture, which corresponds to between 300 BC to AD300.

### GUARDIAN ART CENTER, BEIJING

The Guardian Art Center is considered to be the world's first ever custom-built auction house, creating a new typology of a hybrid arts institution in the heart of Beijing. Offering museum-quality galleries and conservation facilities, the building is also a community resource with restaurants, a hotel, flexible events spaces, and integrated public transport infrastructure.

### CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY, DUBLIN

The Library is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the founder's death this year by hosting two major exhibitions and there are plans to launch the Chester Beatty collection online before the end of the year. Beatty moved to Dublin after the

Second World War, when his collection had evolved into one of the finest private collections of rare books, manuscripts and decorative arts in the world. In October, a major exhibition will showcase the best of the collection, including the earliest *Qur'an* by one of Islam's greatest calligraphers, copied in Baghdad in the year 1001 by Ibn al-Bawwab, a 17th-century Japanese Chogonka scroll and other masterpieces from Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.

### INK ART WEEK, VENICE

A week-long programme of events in Venice, to be held between 17-20 April, is dedicated to discovering new perspectives and trends in the field of Chinese contemporary ink art, bringing the public in direct contact with artists and scholars. The event includes a four-day conference, hosted by Ca' Foscari University, includes lectures, performances and workshops. The schedule will be published mid-March on inkhub.it

### NINE DOMES MOSQUE, AFGHANISTAN

In the dusty plains of northern Afghanistan, archaeologists are seeking to unravel the secrets of one of the oldest mosques in the world, whose structure is still standing after a 1,000 years of solitude. The Nine Domes Mosque, named for the cupolas that once crowned its intricately decorated columns, still retains remnants of the lapis lazuli stones that once encrusted it. Carbon dating in early 2017 suggests the ancient structure in Balkh

province was built in the 8th century, soon after Islam swept into Central Asia, but exactly when, and who by, remains a mystery. However, the mosque could be even older, with other carbon dating and historical sources suggesting it could have been built as early as the year 794. 'This means that the mosque of the Abbasid Empire has been influenced by Afghanistan, not the other way around,' said Julio Sarmiento-Bendezu, director of the French Archaeological Delegation in Afghanistan, who is leading excavations at the site.

### KOREAN CULTURAL CENTRE, HONG KONG

The Korean Cultural Centre (KCC) in Hong Kong has opened at the PMQ buildings and marks the establishment of the 32nd KCC worldwide, with the objectives to promote Korean culture across the globe, KCC provides a variety of special programmes for local residents to experience Korean culture first hand.

### SERPENTINE IN BEIJING

Modelled on the Serpentine's annual Pavilion Commission in London's Royal Park of Kensington Gardens, the inaugural Serpentine Pavilion Beijing will launch in May 2018 at the opening of WF Central on Wangfujing in Beijing's Dongcheng District. The lead architect, Liu Jakun, says the new structure takes inspiration from Confucianism with an architecture that is a physical

representation of the traditional pursuit of *Junzi*. The pavilion will be in place for six months.

### SPRING AUCTIONS, HK

The Sotheby's Spring series of sales runs from 29 March to 3 April at the Hong Kong Convention Centre and includes Fine Classical Chinese Paintings, Modern Contemporary Southeast Asian Art, Fine Chinese Painting, Important Chinese Art. A highlight includes a ruby-ground *yangcai* vase, seal mark and period of Qianlong, estimated at HK\$40-60 million.

Bonhams auctions, in Admiralty, are: Ritual + Culture, Fine Southeast Asian Arts on 29 March; Fine Classical Chinese Paintings from the Zhen Shang Zhai Collection on 3 April; and Fine Chinese Paintings also on 3 April.

### JAMEEL PRIZE 5

The V&A in London has announced the shortlist for Jameel Prize 5, the international prize for contemporary artists and designers inspired by Islamic tradition. Eight finalists have been shortlisted for the £25,000 prize, which is awarded every two years. They are: Kamrooz Aram, Hayv Kahraman, Hala Kaikow, Mehdi Moutashar, naqsh collective, Younes Rahmoun, Wardha Shabbir and Marina Tabassum. The Prize returns to the V&A on 27 June 2018 when the winner will be announced. The accompanying exhibition, showcasing the work of the eight shortlisted artists and designers, runs from 28 June until 25 November.

IMPORTANT JAPANESE PRINTS  
FROM THE COLLECTION OF  
HENRY STEINER

March 17-29, 2018  
11AM to 5PM (Closed Sunday, March 25)

KITAGAWA UTAMARO (1754-1806)

*The Hour of the Horse [12 pm]* (Uma no koku)

Color woodblock print, yellow ground:  
*oham tate-e*, 15 x 10 1/8 in. (38.1 x 25.7 cm); ca. 1794-95  
Series: *Sandal of Young Women* (Musume hi-dokei)  
Signed: *Utamaro hitsu*  
Publisher: Murataya Jirobei

Provenance: Henri Vever



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movement, I have met and have known most of them for many years, but being based in France, my role was slightly different from the other artists based in Seoul, who were able to meet on a regular basis. I have always held a particular position in the group, just by being abroad in France. Other artists have come through France and other countries, but ultimately, they have returned to Korea. Being part of the first Korean artists of my generation to settle in France, I feel I acted as a link, or bridge, between Korea and France.

AAN: In hindsight, was the fact of your staying in France in any way detrimental?

KG: It was a difficult choice, as I was certainly much more introverted than the artistic Korean society. Living in France allowed me to live through my painting in a much more thorough and intense way. For a long time, I restored old posters, which meant I gained a certain financial independence away from painting. As a result, I could paint freely without being preoccupied by the market. I have never thought about my painting in relation to the market. That also gave me a certain advantage as in Korea the fact that I kept painting was viewed very highly. However, there was a symbolic moment back in the 1980s, when I was offered a professorship in Seoul. In Korea that is a huge honour, changing one's social position completely. Although I hesitated, I ultimately decided to remain in France. It was a decision based on personal artistic choice rather than social choice.

AAN: Arriving in Paris, did you interact with many artists of your generation?

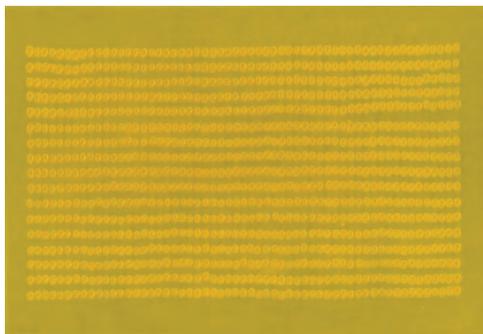
KG: When I arrived in Paris, I did not interact with that generation. I was at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and, of course, I was in touch with other students, but I was not involved in any of the leading art movements of the day, although I was very interested in what they were doing (Supports/Surfaces, etc.). Looking back, besides my interest in poetry and literature, I originally came to France to study the importance of modern art in general, as well as the history of modern art in Europe to see if there was a link that could be established with Korea.

AAN: However, you continued writing poetry whilst painting?

KG: My ultimate goal has always been poetry and I was extremely fond of Valéry, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, basically all the poets of that generation. As you correctly pointed out, I continued writing poetry, but through the medium of painting. I am always aiming at a poetic image. My spirit is Korean and my painting has always been a reflection of my spirit. As a poet, you want to create the essence using nothing but accurate words. I have the exact same approach when it comes to the medium of painting.

AAN: During autocratic rule in 1960s and 1970s, artists were trying to create works with a most neutral content, with no visible message. Did people in Korea understand that process or on the contrary, did they view these artists as not being outspoken enough against the regime and not taking any risks?

KG: As I was not in Korea at the time, I am not that familiar with the



*Inside, Outside, 2008, oil on canvas, 21.65 x 31.89 inches 55 x 81 cm*  
Courtesy the artist, Lehmenn Maupin, New York and Hong Kong, and Gallery Hyundai, Seoul. Photo: Max Yawney



*Untitled, 1967, horizontal, oil on canvas 28.74 x 35.83 inches 73 x 91 cm.*  
Courtesy the artist, Lehmenn Maupin, New York and Hong Kong, and Gallery Hyundai, Seoul. Photo: Max Yawney

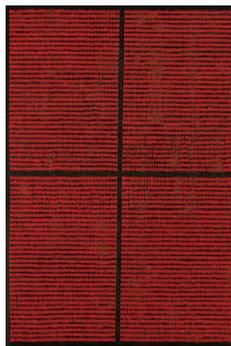
period of this dictatorship. However, Dansaekhwa was not censored and I believe that it was because there was another movement that was strongly opposing the dictatorship. Of course, it goes without saying that Dansaekhwa artists were not completely free, because of the situation in the country. Being an artist during this period was already a bold choice, as it was the choice of a life that was marginal and anti-establishment. In addition, back then, painting was less accessible to people than it is now. I have always been well received within art circles in Korea even though I was living abroad.

Overall, I guess the situation can be seen in two ways: in my work, the political orientation is not really there, but it is rather to be seen in the long view, as I am completely involved in my art and in my painting. If we look at my work in relation to modern Korean art, it was very bold considering the Korean society of the 1960s/1970s and I guess that my contribution towards modern and contemporary art can be better assessed today. In Asian societies, art plays an important role, but I was detached from that and kept was able to keep going forward. Perhaps unconsciously, I felt I had a better chance to do what I wanted to do in France, where I also had more freedom. There are other artists who make references towards Asian art or Oriental art that can be identified in their works. It is clear that with regards to Western and Korean art, my painting was quite radical. As some Korean artists visited me in Paris and saw some of my red paintings, they kept telling me that if I were to paint similar works in Korea, I would be considered a communist.

My work was certainly not overtly anti-establishment, but in my

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AND, AS FOR  
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PAINTING IS A  
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WITH AN AUDIENCE

undertaking, I opened Korea towards something else, creating a true contrast with what was happening at the time. I would tend to say that my work makes more sense today, as we are able to look back at the past 50 years. Considering the recent enthusiasm towards Dansaekhwa, I really cannot explain it. Perhaps it is simply also due to art critics who have opened the Korean art scene to



*Inside, Outside, 1986, oil on canvas 76.77 x 51.18 inches 195 x 130 cm.*  
Courtesy the artist, Lehmenn Maupin, New York and Hong Kong, and Gallery Hyundai, Seoul. Photo: Max Yawney

a wider Western world. In addition, it was a time when Korea started to develop economically. Perhaps, when all these elements are brought together it created the right context. Currently, Korea is still in the process of writing its history, it is still a developing country. There were things taking place then that were out of phase with the country, but make sense today. I benefited from being part of that generation, even if it was only from a distance. If today people are coming to look for me, it is because of a network of artists and critics who appreciate my work. Even if I have always held that position, a lot has been unfolding naturally in Korea, in order to put Korea in a more global context.

AAN: Has living in Europe given you the opportunity to see works from artists that created an impact?

KG: Indeed. I love the Russian school with Malevich. To me, Malevich is a painter who found a way of expressing everything, but in a way that is simple, almost elementary. My favourite painter, however, remains Georges Braque because of his depictions of birds, which indirectly bring me back to the theme of my thesis which was on Saint-Exupéry. In an ideal world, I wanted to be not only a poet, but also a pilot. That explains why my first painting was about flying. As for Braque, he is presenting an image that is pure and has a poetic dimension that I greatly appreciate.

AAN: In your work over the past decades, there have been various periods where you have associated colours in different ways, be this a juxtaposition of colour, or superimposed colours. How has your work evolved over the past 30 years?

KG: I would say that there have been three distinct periods, all with different challenges: how to express oneself in conjunction with the poetic image followed by the juxtaposition of colours, and now, how to express what is, what is in one's heart. In my first phase, there were still some notions of composition and form. The 1970s was the moment that I slowly drifted away from it, where forms began to disappear allowing me to concentrate exclusively on a complete monochrome image with various layers of colours. My transition towards monochrome had me pushing back the limits: I have been trying to go towards a kind of purity where I project my soul on to the canvas which is actually like a window. The notion of window, or mirror, is very much present when I work on a canvas. I view my paintings as windows of my soul, that longs for a kind of purity.

AAN: So, the physical act of painting is of great importance to you.

KG: I guess I have a very rich interior world and, as for any artist, painting is a way to share this world with an audience. Ultimately, my work is seeking a link with the world. For me, painting is a kind of meditation, of liberation even. In the 1970s, as I moved towards pure abstraction while still using geometrical shapes, I slowly drifted away from it in order to reach a stage that to me was more radical and more authentic. I began adding something I would call individual 'spots' with various layers of colour, a

technique which is always identical while being different. It marks a moment, a succession of moments creating a moment as a whole. This process of painting is also a way to mark traces of moments reunited in a painting.

AAN: As your career carried on, you decided to use a limited number of colours.

KG: Yes, I presently rely on five colours: black, white, red, blue and green.

AAN: What is colour for you?

KG: Colour is my soul. Red is passion, green is nature, yellow is glory (to me, music is glory like the one for example by Mendelssohn), white is purity for a window, a door and means hope. Black is the earth.

AAN: What is there left for you to discover within colour?

KG: The use of colour in painting, at its most pure state, does not exist. There are variations and ultimately, it is like music with various tonalities. Pure colour only exists in nature. Creating a painting is a projection towards the future, but it is also the accumulation of the past. I listen to a lot of classical music. A musician does not play to perform one single time, but he constantly needs to play and rehearse. It is the same for me: painting is an act that I truly need in order to project my life through rituals and colour. To some extent, my work is also based on instinct with the texture of my painting based on an accumulation of moments.

AAN: Do you paint in silence, or with music?

KG: Always with classical music, mainly Brahms, Mendelssohn, Tchaikovsky or Beethoven. In addition, I work completely by myself and with no assistants.

AAN: Are there any preparatory sketches for your works?

KG: No, not at all. I am completely unable to draw. In my opinion, being a painter or being an artist has nothing to do with any skills in terms of draftsmanship.

AAN: What, in your opinion, makes a true artist?

KG: In my case, it is about a poetic life that is very rich and very strong which is something I transpose on the canvas through abstraction. I have never had the obsession of drawing well. For me, abstraction acted like a kind of liberation: one could be an ambitious painter without being an excellent draftsman like they can be found in art academies.

AAN: You have chosen a difficult path. It seems harder to present something new and personal in abstraction than in figurative painting.

KG: My situation is particular, as I am not coming from an artistic background. My parents were from the countryside. My father passed away when I was five years old, leaving my mother behind who had not completed any studies as at the time, girls did not receive any academic education. As my parents came from North Korea, they decided to move to the South during the Korean War (1950-1953). With my mother being illiterate and no artistic family background, I truly jumped into the unknown with regards to my artistic life and career.