

Chun Kwang Young: The Dimension of Threshold

Curator: Feng Boyi

2023.9.28 – 10.29

Tang Contemporary Art, Beijing 2nd Space

Tang Contemporary Art is pleased to announce the opening of Korean artist Chun Kwang Young's first solo exhibition in mainland China, "Threshold Dimension", on 28 September 2023 at 4pm at Beijing 2nd Space. The exhibition, curated by Feng Boyi, will feature more than 20 representative works from the artist's "Aggregations" series made between 2003 and 2023.

"Threshold" as a term and concept in cultural anthropology signifies a socio-cultural structure moving from a stable state towards a transitional unsolidified structure including three stages: separation, threshold, and aggregation. "The Dimension of Threshold" refers to the cultural mix of space between these two states, characterized by ambiguity, temporariness, and uncertainty, filled with indescribable charm. Chun Kwang Young's artistic journey and the series of works titled "Aggregations" possess the "threshold" characteristics of transformation and progression between different states: through artistic rituals, he blends personal thoughts, perceptions, and experiences into his "resolute" artistic experiments.

He ingeniously transforms the resilient mulberry paper, a staple of Korean tradition, into his chosen artistic medium. The material not only serves as the foundation of his creations but goes beyond its characteristics to help directly mirror and gauge the sweeping transformations of the times. This results in a fragmented, interwoven structure that perpetually lingers on the edge of infinity. This artistic process encapsulates his meticulous and rigorous approach, representing his disciplined and refined artistic attitude. It effectively shapes and defines a visual realm that is uniquely self-contained. Engaging in prolonged, singular tasks appears to be his preferred working mode.

In Chun Kwang Young's creative process, he engages with mulberry paper in a manner that aligns with the ebb and flow of time, space, and mood. He binds, ties, sketches, and dots the paper, creating a unique practice that carries the essence of daily meditation. This practice unfolds within a confined visual space, drawing viewers into a realm of psychological experience and evoking a serene atmosphere. Therefore, the state of artistic devotion he embodies aligns directly with Eastern traditional culture. In moments of enlightenment, meditation, and introspection, it increasingly reveals a fusion of stillness and motion, coldness and warmth, simplicity and complexity, as well as sparseness and density. In his artworks, the juxtaposition of stable triangular structures with overlapping configurations of various shapes generates a captivating visual effect akin to a kaleidoscope of words, intricately folded paper bundles, and a myriad of converging elements. As a result, time and space establish a hybrid, delicate relationship highlighting the role of uncertainty and the elusive nature of change. This sense of "uncertainty" is better understood not merely as his exploration of ambiguous artistic boundaries through a merging approach, but rather as a transcendence of artistic imagination beyond the bounds of lived experiences. This process accomplishes his profound connection with the specific and intricate aspects of history, everyday life, and memory. The various "magical blocks" he composes, including wall-mounted collages with gradual color transitions, are more than mere visual forms stacked upon one another; they encapsulate his personal and even collective energy. This energy carries weight, entangled in the struggle of contradictions while maintaining a delicate equilibrium in the face of confrontation. Its value and significance are not sought solely within the correspondences of the artwork but are continuously explored through multi-dimensional projections of history, reality, and personal circumstances, as manifested in his "aggregation" installations.

When these cultural codes, bound together with mulberry paper, densely hang in the exhibition hall, the exposed wounds of society itself become conspicuously apparent. They bring forth the intentionally or unintentionally overlooked details of historical narratives. This creates a simple and direct power, opening up another imaginative space for historical consciousness. We can explore and share what was once visible or invisible through the dust of history. It's like searching for temporal memories from the realm of reality, yet it also resembles an altar where, in silence, solemnity, endurance, and bearing, there is an acceptance of history, a reverence for the earth, and solace in the hues of symbolic material culture.

Hidden beneath Chun Kwang Young's art lies a deeper sense of his national sentiment and his profound connection to the essential attributes of real life. These motivations drive him to use art as a means to carry forward and contemporize traditional Korean culture. He understands that historical imprints aren't confined to the past; they live on in the memories of the present and the interpretations of art. This fusion of heterogeneous isomorphism can be sensed in his art, where you can perceive the restlessness within the silence, the warmth within the frostiness, and the eternal within the transient... Thus, it establishes the pure and precise cultural specificity, serving as the cornerstone of his artistic creation and the defining feature of his style.

Feng Boyi

About Artist

CHUN KWANG YOUNG
b.1944, Hongcheon-gun, South Korea

Born in a time when colonisation and political suppression were overwhelming South Korea, Chun Kwang Young went to the US to study at the Philadelphia College of Art in 1968. Chun never adapted to the art scene or lifestyle of the US, however, for it to have emphasised too intensely capitalism and self-expressiveness. Returning to Seoul, he began experimenting with Korean mulberry paper — a material he was familiar with during childhood — to craft large, free-standing sculptures.

Aggregation, as Chun's hallmark series, manifests as sculptures reminiscent of rock formations or monumental crystallisations of minerals. And to create these different shapes and dynamics, Chun would twist, fold, and corrugate countless reused mulberry paper torn from Korean books before wrapping them over polystyrene, giving each of the uniqueness and individuality of his creations — as if becoming metamorphic, living organisms. The medium of paper, after being exploited by mankind, is hence able to return to its natural embrace at long last under the artist's hands, once again imbued with vitality. Chun is also mindful of the texts and characters printed on these sheets of mulberry paper. In his approach of tearing and reshaping, what is thus created is an analogy about the destruction of the past and subsequent rebirth of the new. Such a perspective mediates not just artistically as the conscious challenge of traditional genres and methodologies, but also socially in the greater scale to convey the fluidity of semiotics — where meanings of words and language can fade and transform swiftly.

Chun Kwang Young's recent important exhibitions include: "The Dimension of Threshold", Tang Contemporary Art(China,2023); "Chun Kwang Young: Times Reimagined" at BIENNALE ARTE (Venice, 2022); solo exhibition at Moscow Museum of Modern Art (Russia, 2022); solo exhibition at Museum Ground (Korea, 2021); "Chun Kwang Young: Full Spectrum", Sundaram Tagore Gallery (Singapore, 2020); "Special Exhibition: Moment of Giyeok", Hagaram Art Museum (Korea, 2020); "Kwang Young Chun: Aggregations", Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art (USA, 2020); "Sensitive Structure", Beck & Egeling International Fine Art (Düsseldorf, 2019); and "Aggregation", Sundaram Tagore Gallery (New York, 2018).

Chun Kwang Young's works are collected worldwide including British Museum; M+, Hong Kong; United Nations Headquarters, US; Yale University Art Gallery, US; National Gallery of Australia; Victoria and Albert Museum, UK; National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea; Seoul Museum of Art, Korea; How Art Museum, China and more.

About Curator

Feng Boyi is an independent curator, art critic and also concurrently work as a researcher in the Institute of Sociology of Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts. Now live and work in Beijing. He served concurrently as the art director in the He Xiangning Art Museum from 2007–2017 and won the "Annual Curator" for the 12th ACC Art China in 2018.

Since the late 1980s, Feng has devoted himself to curating, commenting, and editing contemporary Chinese art, paying attention to the marginal, alternative artists and groups, as well as the living state and artistic creation of the younger generation of artists, focusing on experimental and critical contemporary art. He has written, and contributed to numerous articles, theses and essays. He has curated many important exhibitions in China and abroad, including "Traces of Existence: 1998 Chinese Contemporary Art Study Exhibition" (Beijing), "Fuck Off 1 and Fuck Off 2" (Shanghai; Groninger Museum, Netherlands), "Reinterpretation: The First Guangzhou Triennial" (Guangdong Museum of Art), "Right Hand, Left Hand: A Sino-German Exhibition of Contemporary Art" (798 Art District, Beijing), "A Vista of Perspectives: The Sixth Shenzhen Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition" (OCT Contemporary Art Terminal, Shenzhen), "Surreptitious Substitutions: Post-Modern Methods in Chinese Contemporary Art" (OCAT Art and Design Gallery), "The Fourth Cross-Strait Four-Regions Artistic Exchange Project" (He Xiangning Art Museum; Taipei Fine Arts Museum; Osage Gallery Kwun Tong; and Macau Museum of Art), "CAFAM Future: Sub-Phenomena – Report on the State of Young Chinese Art" (CAFA Art Museum, Beijing), "A New Dynasty – Created in China" (ARoS Aarhus Art Museum, Denmark), "Utopias/Heterotopia—Wuzhen International Contemporary Art Exhibition (Wuzhen, China) and "Xu Bing: Thought and Method"(UCCA, Beijing)

Feng Boyi is one of the most active independent curators and critics in China.