



HIGH MUSEUM OF ART ATLANTA

1280 PEACHTREE STREET, N.E. • ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30309

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HIGH ORGANIZES FIRST US MUSEUM EXHIBITION OF WORK BY SOUTH KOREAN PAINTER KIM CHONG HAK

Landmark show will travel nationally after debut in Atlanta

“Kim Chong Hak, Painter of Seoraksan”

April 11-Nov. 30, 2025



Kim Chong Hak (Korean, born 1937), “No. 13,” (2006), oil on canvas, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea

ATLANTA, Nov. 4, 2024 — The High Museum of Art will present the first American museum exhibition featuring the work of Kim Chong Hak (born 1937 in Sinuiju, Korea), a master painter from South Korea popularly known as “the painter of Seoraksan” — the highest peak in the country’s Taebaek mountain range. **“Kim Chong Hak, Painter of Seoraksan”** (April 11-Nov. 30, 2025) will feature more than 70 works, including new acquisitions from the High’s collection, that span the arc of Kim’s mature career and present an aspect of Korean art in the late 20th century little known outside of South Korea. The exhibition will travel nationally after its debut at the High.

“Kim is an artist who is beloved in Korea but whose recognition in the United States is long overdue,” said the High’s Director Rand Suffolk. “We hope to bring new attention to his work through this exhibition, which features some of the best examples of his artistic production over the past 45 years.”

Kim was born in 1937 in Pyongan-bukdo, Sinuiju, in what is now the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Having first worked as an abstract painter in the 1960s, he ultimately rejected the adoption of Western-style abstraction, which he viewed as a response to national melancholy brought on by previous decades of hardship and deprivation. In the late 1970s, he settled in Gangwon Province, eastern South Korea, home of Mount Seorak. There, he sought out an alternative artistic discourse, moving away from the monochromatic painting popular in Korea at that time toward his unabashedly expressive style.

He has since dedicated his life and work to interpreting the environs of Mount Seorak, developing an artistic and emotional attunement to the natural world during decades of self-imposed isolation in the mountains. There, the turning of the seasons, with its cycles of life, death, regeneration and ever-changing atmospheric conditions, have provided Kim with a subject of endless scrutiny and spiritual rapport. His work reasserts the expressive potency of mountain imagery in traditional East Asian art while demonstrating the influence of international movements of the 1970s and 1980s such as neo-expressionism and other strains of figurative painting.

Michael Rooks, Wieland Family senior curator of modern and contemporary art, was surprised that Kim's work has received little attention in the United States given its power and poignancy as well as the alternative narrative it offers to Korean contemporary painting. He stated, "At Mount Seorak, Kim forged a physical, spiritual and emotional relationship to the Korean landscape inflected by his generation's collective memories of colonization, war, geopolitical conflict and economic crisis. His painterly synthesis of tradition and contemporaneity stood in contrast to monochromatic painting's chasteness, austerity and remove from its specific social and cultural context."

In addition to East Asian and Western art history, Kim's work has been influenced by his enthusiasm for collecting traditional Korean folkcraft, especially folk embroidery and carved wooden "marriage" geese. A selection from his personal collection will be included in the exhibition. Additionally, the exhibition will feature Kim's drawings and sketchbooks from the 1970s to the present, including a group of recent botanical studies on Korean hanji paper (made from mulberry bark), and an introductory biographical video by award-winning filmmakers Jung Dawoon and Kim Jongshin of Giraffe Pictures.

"Kim Chong Hak: Painter of Seoraksan" will be presented on the Second and Skyway Levels of the High's Anne Cox Chambers Wing.

Exhibition Catalogue

Published by the High Museum of Art, the exhibition catalogue features essays by Wieland Family Senior Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art Michael Rooks and curatorial research associate Caroline Giddis Macia, as well as academics John Yau, Lisa Lee, Jungsil Jenny Lee, and Michael Semff. The lead essay by Rooks and Giddis Macia traces Kim's career highlighting his connection to renowned contemporaries associated with monochromatic painting (Dansaekhwa); his time spent in New York City with his coterie, which included John Pai, Kim Bongtae, Kim Tschang-yeul, and Lee Seung-taek; and his turn to landscape painting when he

sought out an alternative artistic discourse. Other essays consider Kim's work in relation to the influence of Western art history, specifically Symbolism and Neo-Expressionism and key artists such as Anselm Kiefer and Julian Schnabel, and how Korean literati painting and Korean folk art (mingei) traditions are inscribed within Kim's work. Lead sponsorship of this publication is provided by Johyun Gallery and the Korea Foundation.

Exhibition Organization and Support

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About the High Museum of Art

Located in the heart of Atlanta, the High Museum of Art connects with audiences from across the Southeast and around the world through its distinguished collection, dynamic schedule of special exhibitions and engaging community-focused programs. Housed within facilities designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architects Richard Meier and Renzo Piano, the High features a collection of more than 20,000 works of art, including an extensive anthology of 19th- and 20th-century American fine and decorative arts; major holdings of photography and folk and self-taught work, especially that of artists from the American South; burgeoning collections of modern and contemporary art, including paintings, sculpture, new media and design; a growing collection of African art, with work dating from prehistory through the present; and significant holdings of European paintings and works on paper. The High is dedicated to reflecting the diversity of its communities and offering a variety of exhibitions and educational programs that engage visitors with the world of art, the lives of artists and the creative process. For more information about the High, visit www.high.org.

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