

Press Release

Heemin Chung

UMBRA

8 October—20 November 2024

Thaddaeus Ropac
Ely House, London



Heemin Chung, *Scattering Vanishing Notknowing Between Open Lips*, 2024.
Acrylic, gel medium, and UV print on canvas. 240 x 459 cm (94.49 x 180.71 in).

My work often begins with a very subtle and fleeting sensation, almost like a whisper that moves between the physical and the virtual.

— Heemin Chung

For her first solo exhibition at Thaddaeus Ropac, and the first presentation to take place in Europe, Seoul-based artist Heemin Chung presents a new body of paintings, sculptures and a video. Her artworks explore the sensorial impact of transitional states – from darkness to light, from virtual to physical – in the rapidly changing city of Seoul. As Chung explains, ‘*In this city, technology has gone*

beyond mere convenience; it has fundamentally altered our relationship with space and time.’ Titled *UMBRA* in reference to the deep shadows cast by celestial bodies, the exhibition unfolds a world of shadows, replicas and rituals. This investigation of our contemporary condition includes a reimagining of the traditional Korean funeral ritual Chobun.

The interplay between the physical and the virtual, the felt and the replicated, the seen and the unseen is central to Chung's work. For her new series of paintings she was inspired by the objects that she encounters on early morning walks in the streets of Seoul: from manmade urban detritus to elements belonging to the natural world. Translucent and white layers cloud dark backgrounds with hints of purple and pink, capturing the softness of light, the fog and the subtle gradations of colour that occur at the break of dawn.

Through her process Chung addresses the material loss that occurs when three-dimensional forms are flattened into two-dimensional data, exploring the gap between technological and physical realities. Sourcing digital images of similar objects – notably flowers, sea shells, bark and bird feathers, but also car shells and broken roads – her canvases



Heemin Chung, *From the Old Prophet*, 2024.
Acrylic, gel medium and UV print on canvas. 194 x 130 cm (76.38 x 51.18 in).



Heemin Chung, *UMBRA*, 2024.
Single channel video with sound, 11'02".

are printed with this imagery and then built up with painted additions to synthesise them into new forms. Employing her signature use of gel medium, she creates membrane-like sheets, the surfaces of which are also at times digitally printed or painted, then draped, tucked and pinched onto the canvases or metallic structures. As the artist explains, '*by re-materialising objects that have become data through techniques such as transferring and casting, I open up an imaginary space of replication and proliferation.*'

The resulting works offer echoed forms of the original objects and digital images, reconfiguring the genre of the still life as Chung asserts her innovative approach to painting. '*Given its long history, I believe painting is a medium through which we are able to detect changes in the way we see and perceive,*' she says, reflecting on the effect of the digital realm on our contemporary perception.

A series of multimedia sculptures presented in the exhibition reimagines the traditional Korean funeral ritual Chobun. This practice, predominantly performed in the Gyeongsangnam-do province, is intended to free the soul from the body, naming the process of tying the body to the ground or trees until the skeleton is exposed and subsequently buried. The Chobun ritual is often accompanied with a traditional Korean play, the Dasiraegi (Rebirth) which starts with a betrayal and ends with the birth of a child, conveying that life and death coexist. Chung explains: '*At the site of death, our ancestors danced, joked, indulged in profane imaginations, and spoke of new births.*' Chung reinterprets the play in a new video using advanced 3D modelling. She restructures the ritual and the story's framework,

layering two different timelines – her own childhood and a day in the life of her grandfather. In reference to *Dasiraegi*, the sculptures are presented on a raised LED platform to emulate the idea of a stage, casting the gallery as an arena for her art.

With an acute sensitivity to the societal dynamics of our era, Chung reflects on the intersection of life and death, technology and humanity, and the profound fatigue of contemporary existence in a digitised world.



Heemin Chung

About the artist

Heemin Chung was born in Seoul, South Korea, where she continues to live and work. She received her MFA in Fine Arts from the Korea National University of Arts, Seoul in 2015, and has since exhibited her work in solo exhibitions at DOOSAN Art Center, Seoul (2023); Sindoh Art Space, Seoul (2022); Museumhead, Seoul (2021); Kumho Museum of Art, Seoul (2018); and PS Sarubia, Seoul (2016). She has also participated in numerous group exhibitions, including those at WESS, Seoul (2023); Nam-Seoul Museum of Art (2021); Eulji Art Center, Seoul (2021); Soorim Art Center, Seoul (2020); Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art, Ansan (2020); Rainbowcube, Seoul (2020); Platform L, Seoul (2019); Boan

1942, Seoul (2019); National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Gwacheon (2019); Hite Collection, Seoul (2018); Korean Cultural Center, Hong Kong (2018); and Archive Bomm, Seoul (2017).

Chung was awarded the DOOSAN Arts Award in 2022 and has participated in the SeMA Nanji Residency, Seoul (2022); Sindoh Artist Support Program (2020); and MMCA Residency Goyang (2020). Her paintings and sculptures are housed in public institutions including the DOOSAN Art Centre, Seoul; Art Bank, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul; Seoul Museum of Art; and Kumho Museum of Art, Seoul.

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