

Press release

Lee Kang So

Dwelling in Mist and Glow

12 September—11 October 2025
Opening Friday 12 September, 6pm—8pm

Thaddaeus Ropac
Paris Marais
7, rue Debelleye, 75003 Paris



Lee Kang So, *Untitled-75031*, 1975 (printed in 2016)
Digital chromogenic print. 40 × 60 cm (15.75 × 23.62 in)

*I seek my path in situations that originate
in feelings.*

— Lee Kang So

On the 50-year anniversary of the happening that propelled Korean artist Lee Kang So to international renown at the 9th Paris Biennale in 1975, the work returns to the city for the first time since this presentation in an exhibition at Thaddaeus Ropac Paris Marais. The avant-garde performance, in which Lee Kang So casts a live chicken

as artist, will be accompanied by works in hemp cloth executed the same year, as well as photographic, video and sculptural works that retrace his wider practice during the 1970s. Also on view will be a selection of paintings testifying to the development of Lee Kang So's art-making in the decades that followed this decisive period.

In the 1970s, through avant-garde performances and installations, Lee Kang So developed a highly experimental practice that profoundly shaped the evolution of



Lee Kang So, *Painting (Event 77-2)*, 1977
Digital chromogenic prints. Each 35 × 29.5 cm (13.78 × 11.61 in)

Korean contemporary art. His international reputation was cemented at the 1975 Paris Biennale with his presentation at the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris of *Untitled-75031*, a work co-authored by a borrowed chicken, who, tethered to a wooden feeder surrounded by powdered chalk, explored the area allowed by his tether leaving chalky footprints on the floor. In recognition of the work's 50th anniversary, it will be executed again at the Paris Marais gallery, with the chicken making its chalky marks on 12 September 2025 during the opening of the exhibition.

The final work, on view until the end of the exhibition, comprises these dusty concentric traces of the chicken's presence without the animal itself. A leading figure in the Process Art movement emerging in Korea in the 1970s, Lee Kang So transcends his own artistic autonomy to express the immaterial – presence and absence, time and transience – an exploration also evidenced by the inclusion of historic photographs of *Untitled-75031* in the exhibition, which accompany each reinstallation of the work. By the time the visitor encounters the work, only the material and photographic traces of its creation remain, forming an invitation to imagine how it came to be. In the artist's words: 'I think that's what the world is like, shaped more by what is absent than what is visible.'

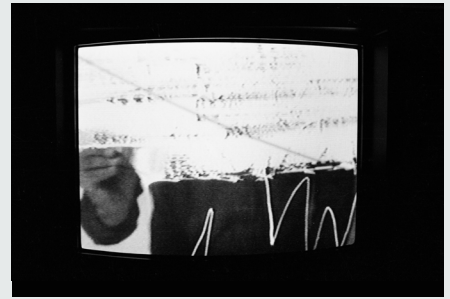
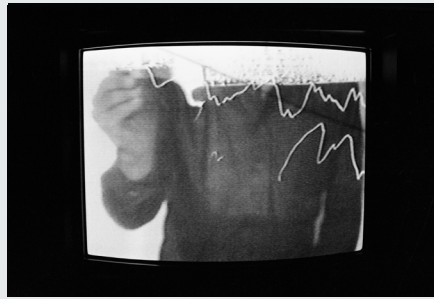
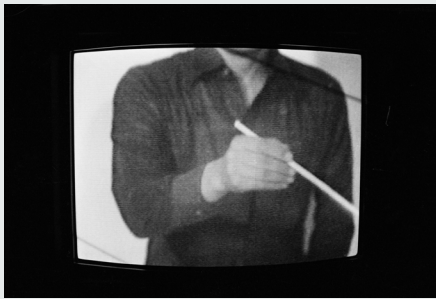
With my hollow awareness that everything in the world constantly forms and changes, and that I was also a part of this ever-changing structure, I meditated on how to grasp the world and myself.

— Lee Kang So

The recasting of documentation of past performances as artworks in their own right is central to Lee Kang So's meditation on ideas of transience and transformation. The exhibition presents several further examples of the artist's experimental installations and performances from the 1970s through documentation and sculptural artefacts that become relics of the original events. Among them, a group of black-and-white photographs testify to the unfolding of the 1977 *Painting (Event 77-2)*, in which



Lee Kang So, *Painting (Event 77-2)*, 1977
Digital chromogenic print. 35 × 29.5 cm (13.78 × 11.61 in)



Lee Kang So, *Painting 78-1*, 1977
Single-channel video, 29 min 45 sec

a nude Lee Kang So paints his own body before wiping himself down with a canvas cloth: a gesture the artist relates to Yves Klein's *Anthropometries*. The original cloth becomes a static sculptural object on the floor of the gallery, forming a reflection on the embodiment of experience and existence: 'a tactile portrait', in the artist's words.

I was interested in expanding the language of painting to include forms that are physical, that can be wiped away, that allow for varied interpretations.

— Lee Kang So

Painting 78-1 (1977), Lee Kang So's first foray into video art, also investigates the act of painting. The artist positioned a sheet of glass in front of a camera and filmed himself painting it, reversing the typical relationship of viewer to artwork by allowing us to observe the act of painting from behind an imagined canvas, as the artist's body gradually vanishes behind the brushstrokes. Ideas of disappearance are explored across the works in the

exhibition: notably in photography of his 1973 installation *Disappearance*. Lee Kang So purchased the fittings of a local bar, transplanting it in its entirety into Myongdong Gallery in Seoul, where he invited visitors to inhabit its displaced volumes which, bearing the stains and scars of a past existence, speak to questions on the way we relate to objects and where meaning is held.

During the 1970s, Lee Kang So not only developed a groundbreaking practice off the canvas, but also interrogated the very praxes of painting by exploring its fundamental component: its very fabric. This is evidenced by the two 1975 works in hemp on view in the exhibition, which were created in Paris as the artist prepared for the Biennale. Influenced by the Supports/Surfaces movement that he witnessed during his time in France, which was characterised by an examination of painting's formal elements, the artist's early experiments with painting were rooted in his material dissection of the canvas itself. 'If I was going to pursue a new format of flat painting', explains the artist, 'I had to first examine the structure of the flat surface'. As such, these trailblazing works are made by pulling threads from the woven hemp – a traditional support used in historic Korean art – to create areas of tension and opening, pucker and cavity. As Lee Kang So explained: 'I realised that the canvas itself had potential as an artwork'.



Lee Kang So, *Disappearance*, 1973 (printed in 2018)
Digital chromogenic print. 66 × 99 cm (25.98 × 38.98 in)

From the 1980s onwards, Lee Kang So shifted his attention to painting in the more conventional sense, commencing an exploration of landscape through recurring leitmotifs like deer and boats, articulated in sparse brushstrokes. These paintings, inspired by the artist's observations of the natural world around him, embody his desire to work in gestures rooted in memory and experience. Over the course of the 1990s and into the 21st century, these motifs have gradually dissolved, their stylistic impulsivity and reduction, which increasingly recall the calligraphic strokes of literati painting, betraying the

artist's growing sensitivity to the ineffable forces of the world around him. The title of the exhibition is drawn from a classical Korean poem written by Yi Hwang, a renowned 16th-century Confucian scholar. Composed during a retreat to Andong mountain, the poem reflects Yi Hwang's deep engagement with nature: 'Dwelling in mist and glow / Befriending wind and moon'. Lee Kang So profoundly resonates with the poet's sense of unity with nature, which echoes his own conception of art as an act of attunement with the natural realm and its ever-shifting rhythms, rather than personal assertion.

Uniting the works on view is their embodiment, as Lóránd Hegyi, curator of Lee Kang So's 2016 exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain de Saint-Étienne Métropole, put it, of the 'essential, basic questions of the human orientation in the universe'. As the artist himself wrote when describing his work at the 1975 Paris Biennale: 'Rather than depicting images through our conventional method, which falls outside the subject-object relationship, I aim to present an open structure that reveals the normally invisible order and relationships within the universe, making these unseen states naturally visible.' Whether through the retreat of the creator's hand in his performances, or through the sense that his paintings are gradually being reclaimed by



Lee Kang So, *Serenity-16181*, 2016
Acrylic on canvas. 310 x 360 cm (122.05 x 141.73 in)

the intangible, Lee Kang So questions artistic authority and even the very idea of objective reality, instead making art a space of resonance for the viewer's own perceptive possibilities. 'By erasing himself within his works', wrote Lee Soo Yon, curator at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea (MMCA), Seoul, 'he invites the audience to complete the piece.'

The exhibition at Thaddaeus Ropac Paris Marais will run concurrently with the second part of the artist's major retrospective, opening at Daegu Art Museum on 22 September 2025. The first part of the retrospective took place at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA) in 2024.



Lee Kang So, *Island-99165*, 1999
Acrylic on canvas. 162 x 130.3 cm (63.78 x 51.3 in)



Lee Kang So, portrait of the artist
Photo: Park Chan Woo

About the artist

Lee Kang So lives and works in Anseong (Gyeonggi Province, Korea). He graduated from the Painting Department of Seoul National University in 1965, subsequently participating in a number of avant-garde artistic initiatives in the following decades. In 1970 he was a founding member of the artist collective Shincheje (The New System), which stood in provocative opposition to the existing art circle dominant in Seoul. In 1974 he was instrumental in the founding of Daegu Contemporary Art Festival and championed the fostering of regional artistic practices outside of the country's urban centres. From 1985 to 1986 he was a visiting artist at the State University of New York in Albany, NY whilst working as a professor at Gyeongsang National University, Jinju. He then participated in the MoMA PS1 Studio Artists Program from 1991–92. These international encounters speak to the wide reach of Lee Kang So's work from the early decades of his career, as he formulated an idiosyncratic practice that developed alongside the legacies of other avant-garde movements, including Mono-ha in Japan, Korean Experimental Art, Minimalism in the United States and Arte Povera in Italy.

Lee Kang So has exhibited widely in Korea and beyond. In 2024–25, a major retrospective of his work was held at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary

Art, Seoul. Between 2023 and 2024, his work was shown alongside that of his contemporaries in a major institutional touring exhibition, *Only the Young: Experimental Art in Korea, 1960s–1970s*, which travelled to the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. In the five decades of his artistic career, the artist has shown work in countless other institutional exhibitions, including at the Daegu Art Museum (2021; 2020; 2018; 2011); Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2019); Musée d'art moderne et contemporain de Saint-Étienne Métropole (MAMC+) (2016); Tate Modern, London (2012–13); Musée des Arts Asiatiques, Nice (2006); Artsonje Museum, Gyeongju (2003); National Art Museum of China, Beijing (1995); Tate Liverpool (1992); Barbican, London (1992); Brooklyn Museum, New York (1981); Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (1976); and Musée national d'art moderne, Paris (1975).

Lee Kang So is represented in important collections internationally, including that of Artsonje Museum, Gyeongju; Daegu Art Museum; Mie Prefectural Art Museum, Tsu; National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Gwacheon; V&A Museum, London; and Written Art Foundation, Frankfurt, among others.

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