

## **H.K KWON**

### **Lignes avec vue**

(...) Everything is entirely possible, and blind men can also see (...) <sup>1</sup>

Anne Sexton

In his inaugural exhibition at RX&SLAG, Korean artist H.K. Kwon presents his latest series, "Promenade." Kwon's work has undergone a transformation, or in other words, an evolution. The foundation of his sculptures remains unchanged from before, but the technique for treating the canvas has shifted. The initial change is seen in the shift from chromatic to achromatic colors, and from polychromatic to monochromatic hues. The "era of black and white" has now come.

To see the landscape, to be within the landscape... Accomplishing both concurrently is challenging. Does seeing the landscape entail contemplating the locations, the foliage, the perspectives, all of which are mere images? I'm gazing at a scene, a circumstance, perhaps a backdrop, or a "philosophical theater"? A landscape presents itself to us, and we interpret it. Being within the landscape is not equivalent. It's about being encompassed by the nature surrounding us, perhaps even being engulfed by it? We then observe the disappearance of a tree, a disintegrating rock, the traces of passing creatures. The sky becomes a landscape that, akin to K.D. Friedrich's, enables us to marvel at captivating storms. If not, we're soaked by rain or blinded by fog to the extent of losing our sight.

How can we manage to experience these distinct sensations simultaneously? To exist as both the observer and the one overtaken entirely by the depicted "entity." H.K. Kwon's painting provides a profound encounter that simultaneously divides and unites us. H.K. Kwon's painting serves as a bridge.

Upon entering his studio in Seoul, this sensation guides my initial steps. I perceive what might be interpreted as a hill, yet is in no way a hill; rather, it's a kinetic pictorial mass.

H.K. Kwon unveils this ambivalence through the very construction of his canvases, which, since 2021, have been divided into rectangular geometries that challenge us with, what we shall refer to as, horizons in sequence. These are replicated from top to bottom. Can we assert recognition of them? They come into being through brushstrokes that halt, delineating a lower threshold that intersects with the upper boundary of the ensuing sequence. These expansive zones engender spaces traversed by brushstrokes, evident in transparency and concealed by the evoked surfaces. They are, essentially, nothing more

---

<sup>1</sup> In *C'est un après-midi de printemps* – in *Tu vis ou tu meurs*, Anne Sexton, Traduction Sabine Huyn, 2022, Editions des femmes – Antoinette Fouch.

than surfaces, as one might scribe for paintings by Agnès Martin or Brice Marden, yet are they not equally as meaningful as the perception of a reality distanced by drizzle, an antiquated screen, a curtain unveiling and obscuring the figures that exist, in a shared substance, in the foreground and beyond.

H.K. Kwon plunges our gaze into a physical and mental "in-between" space, an infra-thin space where the painter seeks connection with the world, materialized by the aspiration to harmonize with the motions of reality, through our vision and our physique. H.K. Kwon plays upon this yearning utilizing every tool in painting and drawing. He casts lines that redirect our gaze into their networks, thanks to the horizontal intersections where the earth unfolds.

The artist immerses himself in this terrain, much like a hiker delving into the woods. This ground, whether composed of substance or lines, consists of these dual natures that one traverses and traverses, as the title "Promenades" suggests from a prior series. It unveils the yearning for a "complete moment" in painting, an aspiration to unfold. This unfolding and unfurling also functions as a "journal of a journey," not solely within the mental realm of the studio but in the artist's psyche, as he seeks to rekindle a sensitive and authentic connection with the form of the world, having distanced himself from it. It takes shape through a renewed attentiveness nurtured by extensive walks where the landscape invents the sky, the storm, the dawn, and the progression of the days.

The experience belongs to both a walker and a painter by the name of H.K. Kwon. The lines he creates define zones, bands formed by vertical strokes guided by his paint-drenched fingers. Painting becomes intertwined with the landscape, and the landscape with painting. H.K. Kwon encourages us to perceive them as a reality defined by an ongoing journey. It's not merely about the gesture, as with the Abstract Expressionists, or translating speed, as with the Futurists, but about mechanisms that draw us into a gradual unfolding where all our senses are engaged in the act of seeing. To see is to reach out, but also to intuit, to transition from a tangible object to its illusion. Seeing follows this gradual unfolding of the terrain. It's through these transformations of perception, linking one element to another, that we grasp the rejection of any primary perspective in this work, implying the absence of a singular focal point, whether it be a deity, a monument, or an adversary to be venerated or suppressed. For H.K. Kwon, vision discards any ballistic concept.

To see is to "truly" see, meaning to embrace the paradoxical adventures of sight and view reality as a continuum of events, in relation to one another. There's an intention here to exist on a tightrope, with representation animated by the potentialities that reshape them. In this regard, the geographer and philosopher Augustin Berque invites us to conceive a way of contemplating the living that transcends the consideration of individual, isolated bodies. The practical act of looking weaves them together. This "wave" connects a sighted

object, a created object, and their interpretation. A landscape isn't merely a compilation of observations but rather a reality composed of transitions. Isn't this the same for this artwork? We contemplate it, blending encounters between states and realms. Augustin Berque terms this manner of seeing "trajection," a slippage that aligns closely with H.K. Kwon's perspective. It forms the foundation of the reality he presents to us, no longer bound by the dualism of Western thought.

Here, the objective and the subjective are inseparable, and the artist embraces the plurality they generate. Augustin Berque sheds light on this matter: "[Reality] is neither solely objective, nor solely subjective: it always emerges from the intersection of these two dimensions, meaning it is trajective."<sup>2</sup> It exists, betwixt these two poles, as porous. It comprises cognitive investments in which reason is indivisible from sensibility. In this sense, it aligns with the essence of this artwork, where, as Augustin Berque articulates, "to believe that we can truly divorce ourselves from feeling is an illusion, because, the moment we exist and interpret it, reality will always be trajective, reality will always be a phenomenon, and a phenomenon invariably gives rise to sensations and emotions."<sup>3</sup> This line of thinking liberates us from the confines between external and internal.

Drawing upon Buddhist or broader Japanese philosophies, Augustin Berque highlights that these intermediary spaces are neither strictly within nor entirely outside, but simultaneously both. Are these not the primary driving forces of H.K. Kwon's work? This topography that both creates and carries us. He actualizes it in his painting, his poetics, and his practice, facilitated by this interdependence, this "abouchement" (merging), between the walker and the painter, who converge into one. He relinquishes his brushes to paint with his body, his fingers etching forms onto the canvas, now assuming the role of an interface. This canvas, with its vacant upper boundaries, designates itself as an artifice, a tool, before the ebb and flow of the act of painting transmute them. They exist solely as expressions of a quest that, within a constrained structure, begets the movements of freedom that, as a counterpoint, they incite. Their arrangement and construction unveil their essence: of succession and expansion.

Each element guides us from one form to another in a cinematic progression, especially evident in the predominantly black canvases. This film lacks images but features a sequence of meaningful states, with no discernible start or finish. Consequently, the gaze is summoned, spanning from edge to edge, propelling us in a motion that envelops us. It's a state of "nature-painting" we undergo without prior definition. The reality sought by H.K. Kwon cannot be accessed through theoretical laws. His geometries are never "flawless."

---

<sup>2</sup> In *Entendre la Terre*, Augustin Berque, 2022, Le Pommier, page 92

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, page 98-99

When I contemplate his work, I am reminded of Etel Adnan's phrase, which eloquently encapsulates the essence of his exploration, akin to that of H.K. Kwon: "Heat accumulates on the sea and leaves us exposed, much like the landscape. The skin of the fog remains unmarked. Empirical reality succumbs to mist, drugs, slumber... it beckons lines, forms, dimensions, sounds; even lower temperatures."<sup>4</sup>

This experience, as Etel Adnan articulates, leaves us exposed and beckons lines, forms, and dimensions. So it is in H.K. Kwon's painting.

We have invoked lines: those of structures, those of cinema, those of descending rain, which all represent facets of the existence of this mental line that circulates vibrantly between landscape and painting. This line allows him to transition from one realm to another, guiding us through the dimensions of his space: that of his studio and the biosphere we inhabit. This line "paves the way," a concept I associate with Henri Michaux when he writes:

"(...) Here's a line that thinks.  
Another accompanies a thought. Stake lines.  
Lines of decision.  
A line rises.  
A line goes to see.  
Sinuous, a line of melody through twenty lines of stratification.  
  
A line sprouts.  
A thousand others around it, bearing shoots: grass. Grasses on the dune.  
A line gives up.  
A line rests.  
A halt. A halt with three spikes.  
A habitat. A line encloses itself.  
Meditation. Threads still run from it, slowly.  
  
A dividing line, there, a ridge line, further on the observatory line.  
Time, time...  
A line of consciousness has reformed."<sup>5</sup>

This is what H.K Kwon's spaces are all about, a line of consciousness that paves the way for his space, that of a planet where each step creates the dream and transparency of a rhythm that embraces the times that lie ahead, with no end in sight.

---

<sup>4</sup> In *Le Destin Va Ramener Les Étés Sombres, Anthologie*, Etel Adnan, 2022, Points, page 135-136.

<sup>5</sup> In *Déplacements, Dégagements*, Henri Michaux, 1985, Collection L'imaginaire, Gallimard