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Acclaimed Korean Artist Chun Kwang Young at Sundaram Tagore Chelsea | The Artling

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New York, March 21, 2018—Sundaram Tagore Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition by acclaimed Korean artist Chun Kwang Young. The show—the artist’s first in New York in four years—features a comprehensive survey of work from his noted Aggregation series, which explores themes of harmony and conflict.

Chun Kwang Young began his career as a painter, but shifted his focus to paper sculpture in the mid-1990s. Incorporating elements of both painting and sculpture, Chun’s Aggregations are assemblages: freestanding and wall-hung amalgamations of small, triangular forms wrapped in antique mulberry paper, often tinted with teas or pigment. Born in Hongchun, South Korea, in 1944, Chun grew up during the end of Japanese colonization and the brutality of the Korean War. In the early 1970s, he moved to the United States to pursue a Master’s Degree at Philadelphia College of Art, where he was deeply drawn to Abstract Expressionism. “It seemed to be the best way to freely express my surprise and sadness at witnessing the huge gap between idea and reality,” he says.

The development of Chun’s signature technique was sparked by childhood memories of seeing medicinal herbs wrapped in mulberry paper, tied into small packages and hung from the ceiling of the local doctor’s office. He became intrigued with the idea of merging the techniques, materials and sentiment of his Korean heritage with the conceptual freedom he experienced during his Western education. Chun’s decision to use mulberry paper—known as hanji in Korea—is significant. It embodies the essence of Korean history and imparts a spiritual power, even in its most mundane applications. Derived from native trees and prized for its strength and ability to resist water, hanji has been used in Korea for centuries for everything from writing and drawing to packaging and weatherproofing.

With history in mind, Chun sources paper from antique books printed. “The hanji that I am currently using are from books between fifty and a hundred years old,” he says. “Each has its history and each generation of our ancestors’ joys and sorrows can be seen in the thousands of aggregated fingerprints that make my work even more mystical and precious. It’s almost as if these fingerprints are trying to

have conversation with me, to explain their reasons for being there.”

To create his compositions, Chun starts with the triangular forms, which are individually cut from polystyrene, wrapped in hanji and tied with string made from the same material. He then adheres each wrapped piece to a flat support or sculptural substructure. Once adhered, some of the forms are painted by hand. The process, multifaceted and repetitive in nature, necessitates an almost meditative approach. Chun’s arrangements vary from seemingly uniform surfaces to works that burst from their frames, constituting low reliefs. His palette ranges from subtle, sepia-toned hues, which naturally result from the teas he uses to tint the paper, to pigments in vibrant blue, red, orange and yellow. Some of the works employ subtle shifts in tone and color to create the illusion of craters, dips and depressions. Rendered in a restrained palette of natural hues, the overall effect is organic, geological —almost cosmic in appearance.

Over the years, Chun’s Aggregations have become more colorful and evolved in complexity and scale, but the use of mulberry paper remains at the core of his practice. Although imbued with the spirit of Korean tradition and history, Chun’s work, with its intricate, abstract compositions, is grounded in a purely contemporary context. A printed catalogue with an essay by Dr. Marius Kwint, reader in Visual Culture, School of Art and Design, University of Portsmouth, U.K., accompanies the exhibition.