



Hosook Kang, *Intangible*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 63 x 96". Image: Courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery, New York.

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Hosook Kang at Sundaram Tagore Gallery

Korean-born painter Hosook Kang detonates a series of delicate explosions in her second solo show, entitled *In-Flight*. With miniscule flecks of paint she creates the sensation of infinite particles gently dissipating. From afar that is. Take a step closer and you discover that each of her canvases is obsessively detailed with tiny crane-like forms that form an all-over pattern resembling snakeskin. Spanning up to five meters in length, her works explore the beauty and volatility of the natural world.

Suffused with color and drama, the paintings evoke the sublime. They are strangely reminiscent of the landscapes by 19th-century Romantics. Not unlike Turner or Whistler, Kang is acutely attuned to the moods of nature. She has no

interest in defining a particular scene or moment in time, rather, she is searching for nature's essence—its lushness, color, and restlessness.

Walking through the exhibition is a visceral experience. The work moves from brooding and pensive to airy and carefree. Most compelling are the melodramatic diptychs that suggest violent storms. In *Intangible*, a dark expanse of cobalt blue is shot through with streams of luminescent blue light. A flickering ochre cloud rises from the bottom of the canvas. And overlaying everything is a fine web of scale-like marks that send ripples across the painting's surface. The piece almost quivers on the wall.

Kang has grown bolder of late, clearly reveling in the sensuousness of paint. She no longer makes intimate works uniformly covered with subtle marks. Now she works on a monumental scale, unabashedly including the odd gestural brushstroke among her repetitive marks. The results are vivid, colored surfaces, receding and protruding, as though a mirage has been rendered palpable.

Kang's success lies in a masterful handling of the medium. Her work is a marked departure from the growing band of Korean artists working in new media. There is no mechanization or computerization here, nor are there slick or

glossy surfaces. She repeats her tiny brushstrokes as if chanting a mantra, which makes her canvases meditative spaces. It is a notion that no doubt stems from the philosophy of Eastern landscape painting.

Having learned poetry, calligraphy, and Korean landscape painting at a young age, Kang's work naturally draws upon such ancient traditions. Kang's absorption in the natural world is rooted in the age-old belief that one may find solace or renewal through contemplation of landscape.

Season After Season and *Red Base* directly reference Korean landscape painting of the four seasons or flying cranes. However, rather than recreating idyllic scenes of trees, mountains, and water, Kang probes the metaphysical. Although charged with energy and movement, her works also possess quietude, often with little or no activity.

Kang abandons the verticality of Eastern painting in favor of the sprawling, horizontal Western format. This gives her work a freshness, which, along with her fluid melding of abstraction and traditional Korean themes, speaks to a universal art that is not defined by geographical boundaries.