

Park Seo Bo

Ecriture

Richard Rogers Gallery
From Monday 23rd of August

Imagine stepping into a gallery that cantilevers off a steep hillside, floating in the forest. The bright Provence light sifts inside with you, and its rays wrap the artworks like a glaze. The opening show of the Richard Rogers Drawing Gallery, nestled in Château La Coste of France, presents Park Seo-Bo's *Ecriture*. It is, for the first time in its history, exhibited at an art hub in nature, woven into the tapestry of a densely wooded ridge.

Park Seo-Bo (b.1931) is a pre-eminent abstraction artist who played a pivotal role in the development of post-war Korean art. At the start of his career in the mid-1950s, Park was moving away from representation and conventional painting techniques of that time. He claimed a primordial aesthetic, often with a dark and gloomy palette. It was his way of coming to terms with the wake of war, in which Korean society was gathering its ravaged fragments. Then, around the end of the 1960s, Park sought to make art that was categorically new. He had outgrown the fervour of young avant-garde artists, and it was at this juncture of change that the *Ecriture* series was formulated.

The incipient *Ecriture* is a construct of delicate and thin lines repetitively drawn using a pencil on oil paint. With the lines closely spaced and sweeping diagonally, the effect was reminiscent of hatching. Since then, the series has gone through successive changes, along which he explored variations in surface colour, its viscosity, the shape of lines, and a method of layering. The 1980s arrived, and Park embarked on his process of using hanji, traditional Korean paper, as his primary medium, initiating the most defining era of the history of *Ecriture*. To combine hanji with line-making (hereafter referred to as 'hanji *Ecriture*') was like consummating his relationship with the series, consolidating his artistic idiosyncrasy. All the works presented at this current exhibition are hanji *Ecriture*, composed of works made between the 1990s and the 2000s.



Park Seo-Bo - *Ecriture* No. 080405, 2008
Mixed Media with Korean hanji paper on canvas - 130 x 195 cm | 51 3/16 x 76 3/4 inch
Courtesy of the Artist and Perrotin

The first and essential characteristic of hanji Ecriture derives from the use of a 'hanji-canvas' made by laying sheets of wet hanji mixed with a binding agent, on top of the canvas. Whilst hanji is traditionally used in art of the past such as calligraphy and ink painting as a canvas, Park extracted this medium from its conventional context and placed it within Western painting. It was a creative confluence of hanji and canvas; the mediums attuned to two different artistic contexts. The seminal point of Park's hanji-canvas creation should not be understood from a singular perspective. It's neither about the reinstatement of tradition nor about the emulation of Western painting. Eschewing the ideological allure of both genres, Park was, rather, focusing on the material nature of the medium, which was instrumental to his art-making.

From Park's point of view, there is outstanding merit to this new hanji-canvas base. It had an unparalleled absorptive quality. As he applies acrylic paint to hanji layer by layer, the water-based paint penetrates superbly each layer of hanji. Moreover, owing to the half-transparency of hanji, the colour underneath the layer is not entirely buried. On the contrary, each layer of colour subtly reveals itself and delicately integrates into the colours of other layers.

To better understand this, the layering of colour can be compared to the classical method of European painting in which the painter applies a layer of oil colour, waits for it to dry, adds another layer of paint to certain areas, creating an accumulation of paint. Such a way of painting in layers, unlike *alla prima* of Impressionism or American Abstract Expressionism, results in the making of a condensed mass of colour. The intrinsic process of 'painting in layers' is an attribute common to both classical European painting and Park Seo-Bo's layering of colours in hanji Ecriture. Yet, we can discern the difference through its visual effect. The piled-up oils on canvas in layers, when dried, reflect light that generates a beautiful illumination, whereas the absorbed layers of acrylic paint subtly exude light through the porous hanji.

The second quality of hanji Ecriture is the distinct feature of lines in the works. Park's lines have no bearing on the use of lines in Western figurative painting – lines that form the foundation of the image and are morphed into its whole once the colours are applied. In contrast, Park's lines are the finality *per se*.

Most importantly, they are drawn in tune with the gravitational play between his body and the canvas. The action of his arms and body (through lines) is the final image. Coming to hanji Ecriture, line-drawing on wet hanji demanded a new physical focus. To think in material like Park, we must first understand the nature of hanji. The dampened base of hanji is malleable enough to push around but does not tear like paper. Park was pushing and pressing the wet hanji repetitively, creating congested textures of wrinkled forms.

Thus, his act of drawing lines onto the wet hanji base resulted in rows of 'sculptural lines'. Whilst his black series of works under Ecriture of the 1990s have rows of lines with barely discernable thickness, separated with immaculate calculation, the hanji lines of the 2000s are jagged and irregular when viewed from the side. These sculptural lines intriguingly feel like an embryonic growth of the hanji base, which lends its flesh to shape the lines.

Last but not least, the tenet of hanji Ecriture observed by Park deserves to be pondered. According to him, the making process of hanji Ecriture ingenerates the artist's bodily engagement with the material. It is a laborious struggle between the artist's intention and the material that has a mind of its own. The final result of the work hardly equates to the conquering of the medium. Neither the maker nor the medium overwhelmingly exerts its control over the other. Rather, the act of art-making induces an integration between the artist's idea and the material characteristic of the medium. Each absorbs the other and each buries its existence in the other. To paraphrase, the artist loses his self in the process of dealing with materiality. The work of art can never be a pure or robust transference of the artist's self. What the maker initially intends to realise becomes something like a forgotten note scribbled down on a piece of paper. After a course of compromising and re-thinking, the maker's intended concept is pulverised, losing its decisive and clear definition. The scribbled down note, however profound it may have been, loses its importance entirely.

Park sums this up as so: “The canvas is not a place where you regurgitate your thoughts, but where you empty them.” Park proclaims this art-making inadvertently results in the absence of the maker’s mind. In stark contrast, there is a tendency in contemporary art to prioritise the artist’s concept or intended idea, which to Park, is only a half-truth. His method of working provides a succinct criticism of the pervasive conceptualism valued in the current art scene. Park’s hanji Ecriture represents not only the culmination of his career but epitomises the essence of his art-making. He has laid a firm foundation that validates the practice of many artists like him, who intimately and passionately work in natural tandem with the materiality of their medium. Text by Kate Lim, art writer, director of Art Platform Asia



About Château La Coste

Situated in the midst of Provence between the historical city of Aix-En-Provence and the Luberon National Park, Château La Coste is a vineyard where Wine, Art & Architecture live in harmony. Since it opened to the public in 2011, the domain allows you to discover 36 major works of contemporary art installed permanently in the open air and 3 gallery spaces, offering you a unique experience at the heart of its 500-acres. Artists and architects are invited to visit the domain and discover the beauty of Provence. In turn, they are encouraged to choose a place in the landscape that speaks directly to them and are given the freedom to create a work that would live there. Château La Coste continues to evolve as new projects and installations are developed.

In 2021, we opened a new exhibition space, La Galerie. Set in Château La Coste’s vineyard, the Richard Rogers Drawing Gallery is a 120m² gallery space that cantilevers off a hillside amongst trees above an historic Roman track, overlooking the ancient ruin of La Quille.

For 2022, we are already planning the opening of our new pavillion by Oscar Niemeyer, an auditorium in the heart of the vines.

INFORMATIONS

Château La Coste is opened every day
10am - 7pm

Exhibitions are opened every day
12pm - 5pm

CONTACT PRESSE

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