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Art Reoriented: Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath Interview

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Installation view, *Overcoming the Modern | Dansaekhwa: The Korean Monochrome Movement*
 Courtesy of Alexander Gray Associates, New York

By SHANA BETH MASON, MAR. 2014

Art Reoriented is the multidisciplinary platform of internationally-renowned curators Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath. They were responsible for such widely-covered exhibitions, including *Tea with Nefertiti* (2013) hosted at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha, Qatar and the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris) and Mona Hatoum's *Turbulence* (2014), also at Mathaf. Also of note: they curated the Lebanese Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013). But back in the US, Bardaouil and Fellrath have crafted a subtle, exquisite showing of early modern works from the Korean Monochrome movement (known as Dansaekhwa). Alexander Gray Associates in Chelsea played host to an elegant collection of works rarely or never seen before in the United States (or, for that matter, a major western venue) collectively titled *Overcoming the Modern | Dansaekhwa: The Korean Monochrome Movement*. Speaking with Bardouil and Fellrath, their exhaustive research and curatorial process is laid bare.

Shana Beth Mason: The term "Monochrome", I think, has this unhealthy connotation of melancholy, depression. This show seems to suggest otherwise.

Art Reoriented: "Monochrome" is a term that Dansaekhwa is associated with later on as art critics and curators, especially in Japan in the late 50's and early 60's, were discussing the work coming out from this young group of artists. It is amazing, though, how unexpectedly dynamic and versatile, as you rightfully pointed out, these canvases are. It only shows the expansion of formal boundaries that these artists were going for. Unlike the reductionism of what is perceived as minimalism in the West, their approach is more about accretion and layering and this is where the energy in these works reside.

SM: I imagine these artists had hoped their unique methods of synthesizing traditional materials with avant-garde gestures would bring them a form of recognition and success: why has it taken this long?

AR: For decades, the history of modern and contemporary art has been articulated and cemented in cities that enjoyed a Euro/western-centric position of artistic production, economies and networks. This was underlined by a self-referential attitude by which everything that is far and different was perceived as tangential. The artists in the shoe might not be known in New York or London (not yet, at least) but they definitely enjoy a fair share of success and recognition in South Korea and in many other parts of the world. Ignorance is not bliss!

SM: Simon Morley referred to Western influence, for these artists, as "liberating" after the Korean War. Is it fair to say, though, that these artists were drawing larger ideas from Abstract Expressionism and Western Modernism rather than simply 'emulating' them for the sake of aesthetic rebellion?

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Ha Chong-hyun, Conjunction 97 - 102 (1997), Oil on hemp cloth, 61 x 72.9 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Alexander Gray Associates, New York

AR: We do not like the term "influence" as it implies a passive copying on behalf of the "influenced" we see this process more as one of negotiation whereby the artists had the freedom and sensitivity to a wide array of formal, aesthetic and socio-political factors which they perceived and employed as catalysts in formulating a unique language that is rightfully theirs to contribute to the advancement of contemporaneity in their immediate environment.

SM: Was there a moment that was particularly satisfying for both of you throughout this curatorial process? Now that the show has opened, how are you feeling?

AR: It [is such] a joy and honor to showcase these eight artists together for the first time in NYC. The best moments are always the ones that take place during the studio visits. So many discoveries, discussions and incidents that are beyond the traps of any representation in a show or book. We have tried to reflect that spirit of political awareness yet formal innovation so evident in the works of these artists. The fact that we made it possible for others to experience this body of work is extremely satisfying.

Overcoming The Modern | Dansaekhwa: The Korean Monochrome Movement opened at Alexander Gray Associates on February 19 and runs through March 29. The exhibition is curated by Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath (Art Reoriented) and features artists Chung Sang-hwa, Ha Chong-hyun, Hur Hwang, Lee Dong-Youb, Lee Ufan, Park Seo-bo and Yun Hyong-keun.

www.alexandergray.com

www.artreoriented.com



Shana Beth Mason is a critic based in Brooklyn. Contributions include Art in America, ArtVoices Magazine, FlashArt International, InstallationMag (Los Angeles), Kunstforum.as (Oslo), The Brooklyn Rail, The Miami Rail, San Francisco Arts Quarterly (SFAQ), and thisistomorrow.info (London).

<http://www.shanabethmason.com>

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