

Lee Ufan

25 March – 9 May 2015
27 Bell Street, London

This exhibition brings together a body of new work by Lee Ufan, famed as a founding member of the Japanese Mono-ha and Korean Dansaekhwa groups of the late 1960s and early '70s – both important modern and parallel art movements which have only relatively recently been feted by major shows in the West. Although his practice is widely regarded as minimalist, Lee believes in utilising an economy of gesture or representation in search of the maximum possible effect or resonance. His most recent series of *Dialogue* paintings and watercolours are economically composed of singular sweeps of paint, each built up over an extended period of time through an accretion of smaller strokes. The brush gradually unloads, the mark lightening towards immateriality as he drags it across the surface of the canvas or paper, each repetition being ritualistically controlled by Lee's held breath. The incorporation of strong colours – blue, red or an earthy green – to the artist's traditional grey palette, marks a decisive shift away from the intangibility of grisaille towards elements or references in the real world, perhaps harking back to an early series of fluorescent spray-painted works by Lee from 1968, entitled *Landscape*. The four large-scale paintings at Lisson Gallery combine together to form a chapel-like environment within the main atrium, surrounding the viewer with gestures that require time and concentration to fully appreciate.

The finely crushed stone that Lee mixes with his paints physically connects his two-dimensional works to the three-dimensional sculptures, which here includes an installation of a large rock placed in front of a blank virgin canvas, each element willing the other into a relationship. In contrast with his carefully wrought paintings, this work consists of objects to which, pointedly, no artistic action has been applied, offering instead a space for the contemplation of non-productivity and for a rare moment of silent, solo interaction with a work of art. Outside, in the interior courtyard, Lee has placed another large stone onto a sheet of glass and manmade steel plates, which themselves are set adrift within a sea of white marble chips. Such meticulously balanced, site-specific interventions achieved their apotheosis last year in Lee's spectacular presentation in the gardens of Versailles, for which he created a bridge, a monumental arch, a tomb and a wall of cotton among other major sculptures. Ultimately, whether at a monumental or domestic scale, it is Lee's hope that his work might "lead people's eyes to emptiness and turn their eyes to silence," (taken from his collected writings, *The Art of Encounter*, 2008).

About the artist

Painter, sculptor, writer and philosopher Lee Ufan came to prominence in the late 1960s as one of the major theoretical and practical proponents of the avant-garde Mono-ha (Object School) group. The Mono-ha school of thought was Japan's first contemporary art movement to gain international recognition. It rejected Western notions of representation, focusing on the relationships of materials and perceptions rather than on expression or intervention. The artists of Mono-ha present works made of raw physical materials that have barely been manipulated. In 1991 Lee Ufan

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began his series of *Correspondance* paintings, which consist of just one or two grey-blue brushstrokes, made of a mixture of oil and crushed stone pigment, applied onto a large white surface. His sculptural series *Relatum* is equally minimal: each work is comprised of one or more light-coloured round stones and dark, rectangular iron plates. The dialectical relationship between brushstroke and canvas is mimicked in the relationship between stone and iron plate. In Lee's installations space is at the same time untouched and engaged, at the confines between doing and non-doing. The relationship between painted / unpainted and occupied / empty space lies at the heart of Lee Ufan's practice.

Lee Ufan was born on June 24th, 1936, in Kyongnam, South Korea. He studied calligraphy, poetry and painting at the College of Kyongnam and the University of Seoul. Lee has been the subject of major shows at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels (2009); the Yokohama Museum of Art (2005); the Musée d'Art Moderne de Saint-Etienne Métropole (2005); the Samsung Museum of Modern Art, Seoul (2003); Kunstmuseum Bonn (2001); the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris (1997); and the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul (1994). He was awarded the Praemium Imperiale for painting in 2001 and the UNESCO Prize in 2000. In 2010 the Lee Ufan Museum, designed by Tadao Ando, opened at Benesse Art Site, Naoshima, Japan. In 2011, Lee's work was featured in at the Venice Biennale and the Solomon R Guggenheim, New York organized a retrospective of his works. Alfred Pacquement curated Lee's 2014 exhibition in the gardens of Versailles.

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About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, it pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Sol LeWitt and Richard Long, as well as those of significant British sculptors from Anish Kapoor and Tony Cragg to a younger generation, led by Ryan Gander and Haroon Mirza. In addition to its two exhibition spaces in London, one in Milan and a fourth gallery to open under the High Line in New York in 2015, the *Lisson Presents* programme also extends a legacy of curatorial innovation beyond the galleries, working with institutions and artists to present new initiatives around the world.

Exhibition Facts

Opening Hours: Monday-Friday 10am-6pm, Saturday 11am-5pm

Location: 27 Bell Street, London, NW1 5DA

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Website: <http://www.lissongallery.com>

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