

Ham Kyungah

15C, Entertainment Building
30 Queen's Road Central
November 28, 2018 –
January 31, 2019

Opening Reception:
Tuesday, November 27, 6 – 8 PM



Hong Kong – Pace Gallery Hong Kong is hosting a solo exhibition for Korean artist Ham Kyungah. She is known for her multidisciplinary experimental work in fields ranging across painting, photography, installation, performance, and video art. This exhibition consists of her signature work, a series of six large-scale needle paintings of chandeliers that have been completed in collaboration with North Korean embroidery craftsmen. The exhibition, titled Ham Kyungah, will open at the Pace Hong Kong Entertainment Building on November 28, 2018 and the opening reception with the artist will be held from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. on November 27, 2018.

Her artwork has sought to reveal the hidden side of social systems that affect each individual's life, reaching their culmination through needle painting. Coming across North Korean propaganda leaflets that scattered in the wind outside her parents' house in 2008 became the trigger of her attempt to communicate with North Koreans, who are completely isolated from the outside world. To Ham, needlework is a tool to communicate with them. Among her needlework projects, including the Morris Louis series and the SMS (Sending Message Service) series, this exhibition presents a set of large-scale needle paintings titled "What You See Is the Unseen / Chandeliers for Five Cities."

Ham created her work by passing on designs that have been enlarged to the extent of being able to see each pixel, to be delivered to North Korean embroidery artisans through a Chinese intermediary and their painstakingly meticulous work on every stitch, to be subsequently returned through the same route. The time required for such process depend on inter-Korean relations at the time, but it generally takes over a year to complete a single project, requiring much patience and tenacity. There is also a risk of her works being confiscated or lost in transit. Even if they arrive safely in completed form, it is sometimes possible that the design has been damaged or the product differs from the initially intended form. The artist remarks that this complex creative process with many constraints is also a part of her work, Ham is a rare artist who wholeheartedly embraces risks. However, according to Rosalie Kim, curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum in the United Kingdom, the risk itself is not the point. What is important is that such risk emphasizes the consequences of the division of the Korean Peninsula and the stakes involved in trying to overcome it.

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“The image of the dim glow and fragile collapsed chandelier is an implicit allegory for the longstanding ideological conflict behind the division of the Korean Peninsula and the paradoxical dynamics surrounding the matter. Hidden underneath the fancy chandelier are the North Korean embroidery craftsmen who have made painstaking efforts for each pixel and stitch, as well as the pain of all those who are living through the history of division,” remarked Ham in relation to the chandelier needle painting project.

A shining chandelier against a massive black background appears to be as conceptual and political as it is beautiful. The visible part of the embroidered image is not what is important, however. The label attached to the underside of the piece conveys invisible conceptual elements embodied in the work—1,600 hours of labor by two craftsmen, censorship, anxiety, ideology, bribery, and middlemen. The invisible story of the working process beyond the visible images of the works lends greater gravitas to her artistry.

Ham Kyungah, born in Seoul in 1966, is an artist who has constructed her own artistic domain with bold and proactive enthusiasm, largely dealing with politically sensitive subjects as the main theme of her works. Ham’s projects often begin with impulsive, unanticipated discoveries that are crafted into artwork with a long period of patience, labor, and costs.

Ham graduated from the Department of Painting at Seoul National University College of Fine Arts in 1989 and earned a master’s degree in fine arts from the School of Visual Arts in New York in 1995.

Her works are housed in the Leeum Samsung Museum of Art, the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, the Seoul Museum of Art, the Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and the Uli Sigg collection.

Ham has held solo exhibitions at the Carlier Gebauer Gallery in Berlin (2017), the Kukje Gallery (2015), the Art Sonje Center (2009), etc. She has also participated in numerous exhibitions in Korea and abroad, including the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg (2018), the Artspace Sydney (2018), Aarhus Denmark (2017), the Kyoto Art Center (2017), the Taipei Biennial (2016), the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (2016), the Asia Biennial (2015), the Leeum Samsung Museum of Art (2014), Kunstmuseum Bonn, Düsseldorf (2013), the Liverpool Biennial (2012), the Guangzhou Triennial (2012), the Busan Biennale (2012), and the Singapore Biennale (2011).

Pace is a leading contemporary art gallery representing many of the most significant international artists and estates of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Under the leadership of President and CEO Marc Glimcher, Pace is a vital force within the art world and plays a critical role in shaping the history, creation, and engagement with modern and contemporary art. Since its founding by Arne Glimcher in 1960, Pace has developed a distinguished legacy for vibrant and dedicated relationships with renowned artists. As the gallery approaches the start of its seventh decade, Pace’s mission continues to be inspired by our drive to support the world’s most influential and innovative artists and to share their visionary work with people around the world.

Image caption: Ham Kyungah, What you see is the unseen / Chandeliers for Five Cities, SR 01-02, 70-55/64" x 107-31/64" (180 cm x 273 cm), 2015, North Korean hand embroidery, silk threads on cotton, middle man, smuggling, tension, anxiety, bribe, censorship, patience, ideology, wooden frame, approx. 1600 hrs / 2 persons. © Ham Kyungah. Photography by: Chunho An. Photo courtesy of Pace Gallery.

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