

Kim Dong Yoo: 'Expensive Artist' That Remained Undiscovered Until Age Forty

Debut Exhibition at Gallery Hyundai in Gangnam

"Art is how one communicates with the world, and the only way to fill the absence."

By Lee Hyang Hwi, 11/8/2012

Of all the mid-size work producing artists, Kim Dong Yoo (age 47) sells his work for the highest price. Just seven years ago, he was a figure representing a subculture of emerging artists. Growing up, Kim had a stutter speech impediment. Then in high school, his parents divorced. His father opposed his decision to continue studying at an art school, which led to a separation that lasted ten years. Upon graduating from Mokwon University, Kim's work did not receive much attention or praise.

One day, on the edge of his immortal fighting spirit, he finally received some good news while staying with his family in a barn in Chungnam province. It was in November of 2005. He received word that his work sold for 88,000,000 KRW at a Christie's auction in Hong Kong. The following year, his work sold for more than twenty five times the starting bid, for hundreds of millions of Korean Won.

Kim went from an outsider to a poignant, 'rebel' artist with a fresh take on the paradigm of the art world. He is now exhibiting his work at Gallery Hyundai, the mother of all art galleries in Korea. In a timely fashion, his work is nourishment to the past hurt and struggles with his new body of work titled, *Image of a Flower, Rice of Tears*.

I met Kim Dong Yoo at the opening reception for his show, and he is a man of a cheerful demeanor, tan skinned scruffy appearance, and a distant heart.

In regards to his foray into Gallery Hyundai, he said "This is something I enjoy doing, so the size of the venue does not matter". I then responded by noting that no other medium-sized works are as expensive as his, and he burst out in genuine laughter. Kim was recently invited by England's Queen Elizabeth II to exhibit his work at the London National Gallery for the 60th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth II's enthronement. He was the only Korean artist invited, and displayed his work alongside Andy Warhol and Gerard Richter.

Behind the glory and success, there lies a scarred young child.

"I had trouble relating to my peers. School life was difficult, so I found something that I can do alone... drawing. I had no energy to do much else."

Kim's inability to connect with the world was so severe that he was able to relate to Rousseau's stories on an isolated island. Perhaps it is because of this reason that he is able to use art to communicate with the world. He has encountered struggle as an artist in the past, but he did not want to give up on art because that was all he ever had.

Perhaps it is because life always threw him a curveball that he did not seem too phased when he finally gained recognition for his work. The success doesn't exhilarate him. He put distance between himself and the auction house that made him famous. "When I put Christie's in full control, I felt like I was being dragged by a guillotine. I started to feel like auction houses can mean the death of an artist."

Kim said very plainly, "Art was a means to fill a void inside myself, and arose from my utter uselessness".

"As a child, I used to go to the mountains by myself to pick up broken pieces of china. All the useless broken piece of China resembled how I felt about myself." Perhaps it is a result of the broken shards he collected in the past, but some of his paintings look like they reference the cracks of old oil paintings. In an irregular move, he represents a new series titled *Crack - Cracked Appearance*.

Kim's work seems easy to understand at first, but upon a closer look the image gets more and more complex, and the viewer really gets a sense of the handiwork involved. "If you think of my art like music, it is like a stereo. For example, pop art is usually very quick to the point, but my work is different. It is more like an analog."

The emotions that come with age is not something that has to be looking at the future, but can be appreciated by looking back in time as well. The exhibit ends on the 30th of this month.

