

Jung Hyang Kim: Reconciling Art and Nature

The diptych paintings of Jung Hyang Kim juxtaposes two ways of seeing in art: figurative images of nature occur next to geometric renderings that are inherently abstract. Kim is an artist who cannot give up either of the imagery groups, and so she sets out to render, side by side, the two very different, but equally important, kinds of visual consciousness that the two styles represent. The dual approach is not a solution so much as it is a system in which awareness of form flares outward with a remarkable intensity; color adds to the artists effects, which include a lighter palette for the panels devoted to nature and a darker color scheme for the abstract motifs. Combined, abstraction and nature coalesce into a formal awareness that encompasses a considerable amount of what we might easily call the real--the two sets of information are basic to the way we perceive the world. Consequently, there is the sense that Kim's paintings render what she sees with a remarkable completeness; hers is an art that includes rather than marginalizes the world of what is seen and what is imagined.

The viewer is exposed to Kim's system in the attractive painting entitled *Queen's Lace* (2004), which is a small (14 by 22 inches) diptych devoted to the flowers of Queen Anne's lace on the left and a muted arrangement of overlapping circles on the right. The flowers are painted an off-white against a light olive green, while the spheres in the right-hand panel are muted, even melancholic in their color: a dark green background sets the tone for several deep-blue circles; other colors for the circles include pale lavender and a green hardly distinguishable from the green of the ground. As regularly happens in Kim's art, the contrast of the panels sets up a sophisticated way of looking; two kinds of representation, objective and nonobjective, have been painted into being, with the result that even as the viewer gives way to the lyricism of the painting, she also remains very aware of categories that add up to an implied totality of vision. In *Chrysanthemums* (2004), a similar if larger (20 by 32 inches) diptych, the chrysanthemum flower is painted in a yellow green against a background of the same color. On the right are several light-brown circles, which have been painted against a matte, dark-brown ground. There is little direct dialogue between the flowers and the spheres, but there is the sense that the double presentation of reality reveals some of the intricacies that occur in the world.

Kim's nearly decorative approach to the study of flowers results in canvas and paper works of exquisite subtlety. In *Night Bloom* (2004), a work on paper incorporating gouache, pastel, and graphite, the red, white, and pale pink blossoms are highlighted against a black ground. The flowers seem to explode like fireworks; they are superimposed upon each other in a profusion of form. The mysteries of darkness, of night itself, are explored in this work, which communicates a belief in beauty and the enduring attractiveness of floral forms. In another, earlier, dark work on paper, entitled *Night Bloom--Lotus* (2001), Kim also employs a dark ground, with natural forms energizing a black space. On the right, in the middle of the painting is a line drawing of the lotus flower, symbol of persistence and tranquillity in Asian culture. *Night Bloom--Lotus* signifies Kim's ongoing, enduring exploration of the mysteries in nature, in a language that refers both to her Korean background and American experience and training. Just as her art encompasses two modes of representation, so her esthetic includes two kinds of mind. The combination results in impressive and compelling art.

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