



Chimneys, 2009

LEE BAE: *MARK/MOTION/IMPRINT*

CURATED BY ESRA JOO

OPENING RECEPTION: WEDNESDAY, MAY 20, 6-9PM

EXHIBITION ON VIEW: MAY 20—JUNE 14, 2009 WED-SUN 11-7PM

WHITE BOX is pleased to announce the US debut of Korean artist Lee Bae. Much has been said about Bae's mastery of the use of signs sans reference. Full of fortuitous, accidental pure form, his marks are endowed with a sense of suspended motion imprinting the sublime, naked time and space, as pure paint that in turn liberate its forms from the yoke of interpretation from which art suffers at present. Bae's works are instinctual, devoid of narrative and illustration and unwilling to offer any interpretation.

At WHITE BOX, Bae will surround his paintings with a long hanging installation, which transposes to an extent, the artist's studio recreated as a thesaurus containing thousands of signs. Marks-in-motion transparencies on acetate will be inserted in hundreds of see-through "Muji" boxes, flanked 360 degrees by his black and white paintings, while majestically hovering over an equally sized stretch of "shadow" composed of his cherished material, charcoal. For the first time ever, Lee Bae will introduce primary colors in several of his paintings.

The atrium at WHITE BOX will be animated by a new video work capturing the tone, pace and speed of the particular light witnessed out of Bae's Parisian studio. From here the top window faces a cumulus of rooftop chimneys and flues bathed by a 24-hour cycle of overcast night and daylight. Bae will also present wall-to-wall artwork inspired by his late 1970s "staple" drawings of subliminal, commanding power. His New York audience will be challenged by a daring and heretofore, untested presentation of the artist's oeuvre, assuming new risks in an installation that resonates with the artist's quest for an anonymous reality.

At mid-career, Lee Bae, a gifted artist of impeccable and inventive technique, authors solid, flat black liquid charcoal images arrested in time and space, layered then floated and contiguously merging within the surface of the surrounding white plane. At first glance, these images seem to reference, if obliquely, the inner and outer world of familiar objects, fleeting mental gesticular elements full of flare and fancy, provoked by a gestural need germane to Nicola and Giovanni Pisano's imbued Pisa effigies. His work has made the transition between the two cultures he lives in, flawlessly earned through constant, indefatigable contemplation and study.

Lee Bae's recent use of form shares more with Richard Tuttle's random de-formative glossary than with late tachism or any gestural abstraction that may have influenced him as an emerging artist in Paris, or even with Minimalism, another early love. In the late 1990s, Lee Bae began "imprinting" forms in a manner related to Richard Serra's large black paintings and Elsworth Kelly's tightly enclosed non-figurative geometries.

A student of Suprematism, Lee Bae learned early on to simplify the design of his worldly and gently exuberant dense forms. Lee nonetheless remains more akin to Neoplasticism's universalist-existential tenets. Being a tireless, innate searcher, Bae has realized a singular raw vision of an aesthetic "mind-eye". His anonymous signs appear capsized by an unbearable nothingness constantly activated in the motion of an "outer" non-gravitational space, weaving and wefting into a solid, yet delicate space of nurtured absence. The French critic Philippe Piquet, correlated Lee Bae's work to Samuel Beckett's coined term of the "unnameable," a sign that "says nothing, a sign there, raw and naked."

Lee Bae may be fully credited with carving out an independent territory, loosely laying the ground between the geometries of the aforementioned masters and the Korean tradition of black ink calligraphy, where in order to remain essential, everything was painted in black without color so as not to distract form.



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