

Teaching

Ha
Chong-Hyun

ARTIST

HA Chong-Hyun

(ha jong-hyon)

하종현



Ha Chong-Hyun

BORN

1935, Sancheong, Korea

LIVES & WORKS

Seoul

THEMES

History
Materials and Process

“My studio practice continues to be based on experiments with processes and new techniques through which to create work.”¹

ART MEDIUMS

Mixed Media
Painting
Sculpture

ABOUT THE ARTIST AND WORK

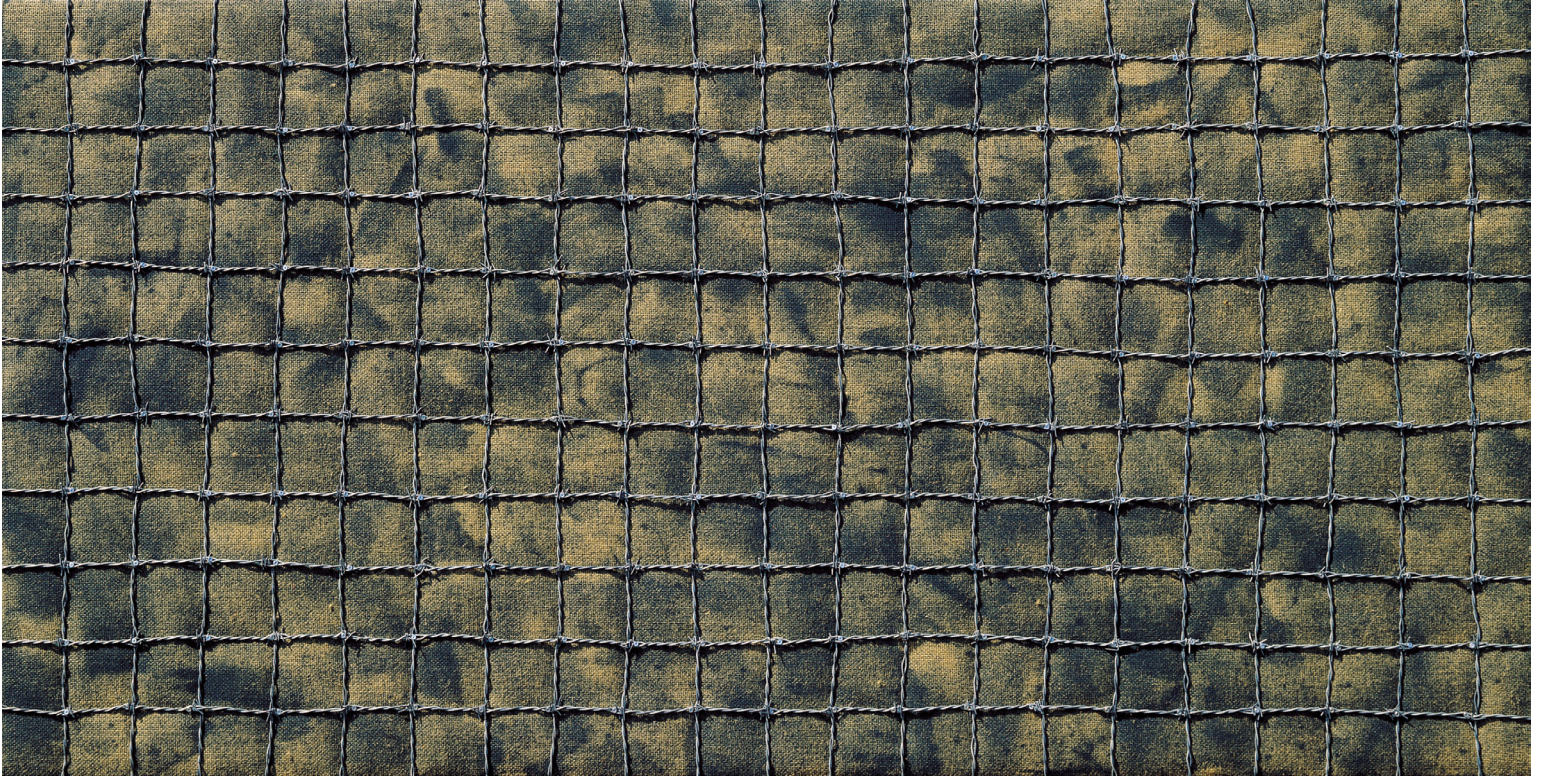
Born in 1935 in Sancheong, Korea, Ha Chong-Hyun is recognized in South Korea as one of the most important artists of the postwar and contemporary eras. He was trained in oil painting and became a professor at one of the leading fine arts universities in South Korea. As a painter, Ha experiments with the canvas's surface; his signature technique involves pushing oil paint through the back of the work, instead of brushing it onto the front, and embedding the surface with nontraditional materials. These explorations established him as a critical figure in Dansaekhwa, also known as the Korean Monochrome school, which emerged in the early 1970s.

Ha's investigations in the early 1970s yielded surfaces juxtaposed with materials that had radically different physical properties. He often used rough hemp canvases and lined them with gridlike formations of barbed wire, metal springs, nails, and other common industrial materials. These grids and repeating structures recall Minimalism, an artistic movement characterized by extreme simplicity of form, often as serial geometries. His materials, which were easily accessible at the time, represent South Korea's rapid modernization process and, according to Ha, take on metaphorical and political significance. For instance, hemp refers to the products shipped in large sacks from the U.S. Army that were a staple of postwar life in South Korea.

Ha created *Work 73-13* (1973) during the military dictatorship of Park Chung Hee, who had

tightened his grip on all aspects of life in South Korea. The way in which the cagelike barbed wire entraps the hemp and physically presses into the fleshlike surface provokes a visceral reaction and alludes to the onset of Park's reign of terror during which he declared martial law and installed a repressive authoritarian regime. With the Korean War and the division of the peninsula, South Korea functioned as a military station for the United States throughout the Cold War, while the North was sanctioned by the Soviet Union. The barbed-wire fence that protected the U.S. Army bases was a familiar sight for many living in Seoul, as were American soldiers. In this sense, *Work 73-13* is a powerful reminder and embodiment of the Korean War and its long, conflicted aftermath.

¹ Tina Kim Gallery, “Ha Chong-Hyun: Conjunction,” press release, October 28, 2015, <http://www.tinakimgallery.com/exhibitions/ha-chong-hyun/press-release>.



Ha Chong-Hyun, *Work 73-13*, 1973. Barbed wire on hemp, 120 × 240 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Gift, the Samsung Foundation of Culture 2015.51

View and Discuss

→ Look at the mixed-media composition *Work 73-13 (1973)*.

Describe the materials, colors, and shapes in this work. What do you associate with these elements?

→ This work is made with hemp punctured by a grid of barbed wire. Examine samples of hemp or burlap and describe their texture. Compare and contrast hemp to barbed wire.

What are your associations with each? What do you think about how the two materials interact in this object?

→ Rather than just painting on the hemp, Ha explored it as a three-dimensional object.

Debate whether you think this work is closer to a painting or sculpture. Explain your point of view.

→ Barbed wire has significance to Ha. When he created this piece, South Korea was under a military dictatorship and martial law. The country also had endured decades of Japanese colonization (1910–45) and the Korean War (1950–53), resulting in the significant presence of U.S. Army bases in and around Seoul—all of them fenced in. The artist explained that he chose this ubiquitous material to comment on South Korea's political situation.

How does his use of the material communicate this critique? How would it be different if it were combined with another material?

Classroom Activities

Material as Critique

For Ha, barbed wire draws associations with South Korea's military dictatorship, war, and the division of the country during the twentieth-century. For this activity, encourage each student to think about a political or social issue that they are passionate about. Ask them to write for one minute about their opinions on the issue. Next ask them to brainstorm materials that could represent this issue and/or help them explore it visually. Finally challenge them to make a sketch of a potential artwork using that material in a critical way.

Ask students to share their sketches and discuss the issues they are critiquing.

The Grid

Ha is among many modern artists who have employed the grid as a structure for their compositions. What do students associate with grids? Have them research the grid and its mathematical and scientific applications, as well as other artists who have used it in their work, including Lee Ufan, Sol LeWitt, and Agnes Martin. Share these findings as a group and discuss the grid's significance.

As an extension, you can assign students to write poems or make artworks inspired by their research.

Experiment with a Canvas

Ha experimented with the traditional surface of a painting: stretched canvas. For this activity, challenge students to transform the canvas in a way other than the conventional method of brushing on paint. Give each student a canvas that has been stretched. Then, as a class, brainstorm ways in which it can be altered, including tearing, cutting, reweaving, puncturing, and combining it with other materials. Encourage them to think of it as a three-dimensional object and produce something that feels sculptural. Share the results.

In what ways did students alter the canvas? What was challenging about their experimentation? How do the products differ from traditional painted surfaces?

Resources

Videos

- TEFAF. “Meet the Expert—Tina Kim Gallery.” May 6, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4S8GATOKjT8>.

Articles

- Artsy. “Amid Renewed Interest in Korean Dansaekhwa Art, Ha Chong-Hyun Continues to Experiment.” November 16, 2015. <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-amid-renewed-interest-in-korean-dansaekhwa-art-ha-chong-hyun-continues-to-experiment>.
- Degen, Natasha and Kiburn Kim. “The Koreans at the Top of the Art World.” *New Yorker*, September 30, 2015. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-koreans-at-the-top-of-the-art-world>.
- Gleadell, Colin. “The Dansaekhwa Bubble? 1970s Korean Art Phenomenon Sees Meteoric Rise.” *Telegraph*, June 6, 2017. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/luxury/art/dansaekhwa-bubble-1970s-korean-art-phenomenon-sees-meteoric/>.
- Min, Ines. “Ha Chong-Hyun in Conversation.” *Ocula*, July 13, 2017. <https://ocula.com/magazine/conversations/ha-chong-hyun/>.

- Morgan, Robert C. “Korea’s Monochrome Painting Movement Is Having a New York Moment.” *Hyperallergic*, December 2, 2015. <https://hyperallergic.com/258279/koreas-monochrome-painting-movement-is-having-a-new-york-moment/>.

Books

- Kee, Joan. *Contemporary Korean Art: Tansaekhwa and the Urgency of Method*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
- Lee, Yongwoo, ed. *Dansaekhwa*. New York: Tina Kim Gallery, 2015.
- Sup, Yoon, Alexandra Munroe, and Sam Bardaouil. *The Art of Dansaekhwa*. Seoul: Kukje Gallery, 2015.

Visit guggenheim.org/teachingmaterials for high-resolution images, audio, and video, as well as additional historical and contextual information about this artist and others featured in *Teaching Modern and Contemporary Asian Art*.

Note: On page 2, the artist's surname is capitalized to differentiate it from his given name. Colloquial phonetic pronunciations are included, rather than versions in the standard International Phonetic Alphabet, to help teachers pronounce names that may be unfamiliar.

Teaching Modern and Contemporary Asian Art
© 2020 The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.
All rights reserved.

Teaching Modern and Contemporary Asian Art was made possible through the generous support of The Freeman Foundation.

Artwork © Ha Chong-Hyun

Photo Credit:
p. 2: Kim Sang-Tae