

KWUN Sun Cheol

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Kwun Sun Cheol, one of the most renowned Korean contemporary artists, was born in 1944 in Chan-Won, South Korea. In 1989 he moved to Paris, where he is now living and working. Specially famous are his big-sized depictions of human faces. His paintings move in a line between figuration and abstraction and his oeuvre encompasses landscapes, portraits – amongst them some selfportraits – as well as surreal depictions he calls „souls“.

Kwun's landscapes are void of people as well as of vegetation, which – when it appears – is shown in the distance, black and wintery. He paints landscapes in a spectrum reaching from smooth, dispersed brushstrokes to concentrated clusters of paint. While the former convey the hazyness, coolness and atmospheric side of landscape, the latter are used for an exploration of surfaces of stony mountains and of rough earth. The themes of stone, earth and sea have something primordial and eternal about them. Some of his townscapes take up the chromaticity and mood of Camille Pissarro's paintings of Paris.

Also in his portraits there is a tension between smooth and rough brushstrokes, between surface and depth. Some portraits almost resemble sculptures by superposing so many layers. But the energy and tension of the brushstrokes disperse to show faces which are in the end only a shine and an outward shell. The brushstrokes don't form a firm body, they dissolve as if they were just a description of the ephemeral eye's movement; the crisscrossing and concentration of their lines form a topographic relief. Kwun doesn't give the expression of the portrayed away, he lets them avert their gaze and look inwards. He depicts the young with their smooth skin, but much more often the old and wrinkled, marked by life and time. The individuality of his faces seems a hazard, which the painter wants to get on the track of by making physiognomical studies, but in the end depicting human condition itself. Finally his paintings are not portraits in the conventional manner.

His sources for the portraits are taken from sketches done on the streets, or come from paintings and photos in magazines. Kwun is a passionate draughtsman, and specially in this area he has a freedom of expression which lets his portrayed resemble to mere phantasies. Daphné Le Sergent sees them as reaching back into time, as a far-off memory. A typical melancholical feeling impregnates in her opinion his work, still resulting from the effects of the Korean War (1950-53).

Kwun's colours by their superlayering and mixing form a palette of greys - but yellow, blue and red flare up, colours resembling miniature and glass painting. Kwun's search for spirituality in art shows most clearly in his „souls“: paintings showing mystical light apparitions, fallen souls and crucified figures. It is here that he most clearly states the focal point of his art.

Verena ALVES-RICHTER