

Sea Hyun Lee
Red Romance

April 10 – May 31, 2025
Opening: April 9, 6pm – 8pm
Rämistrasse 33, 8001 Zurich

With *Red Romance*, Galerie Peter Kilchmann is delighted to present the first solo exhibition of South Korean artist Sea Hyun Lee (*1967, Geojedo, South Korea; lives and works in Seoul and London) in the gallery. The artist is renowned for his utopian, surreal, and opulent landscape paintings, known as *Red Sansu* (*sansu*: 산수, landscape [mountain and water]), which he creates using various shades of red in oil paint. In these works, the white areas of the canvas serve as both separating and unifying elements. For the artist, red embodies emotions such as grief, pain, fear, and horror, while simultaneously representing a magical, beautiful, and powerful color.

The exhibition features paintings created between 2022 and 2025. Two of these works, *Beyond Red - 024MAR02* and *Beyond Red - 024MAR01* (2024), are in an elongated format measuring 33 x 100 cm. The remaining fourteen paintings are square in shape, ranging from medium to large formats (60 x 60 cm to 200 x 200 cm). Additionally, the exhibition is rounded up by two works on paper.

According to Sea Hyun Lee, Switzerland is a dream travel destination for many Koreans of his generation. This is partly due to its breathtaking landscapes, which are frequently featured in Korean media. Moreover, images of Swiss and other European landscapes were once widely disseminated, appearing on decorative paintings and household objects. Sea Hyun Lee states that Switzerland seems to have largely preserved its natural beauty—not only in paintings and photographs but also in reality. Unfortunately, he notes, the same cannot be said for Korea. The once-admired landscapes have been relentlessly destroyed or erased by reckless and chaotic urban development. Many of these places now exist only in old photographs or paintings—once radiant in their beauty, they now stand out only through their absence.

Red Romance alludes to the contrast between the captivating beauty of the exhibited works and the hidden, often unsettling realities beneath their surfaces. The new painting, *Beyond Red - 025FEB01*, 2025, for instance, initially presents a utopian, breathtakingly beautiful South Korean dreamscape: mountain peaks are romantically embraced by drifting clouds, constellations glow magically in the sky, and a diverse array of trees is scattered across mountainous and hilly terrains, punctuated by temples and a few boats. Upon closer examination, however, the viewer's gaze suddenly shifts to a flower meadow and a chalet nestled within an alpine landscape—an allusion to the Swiss countryside. Yet, in certain areas of the image, subtle hints of destruction begin to emerge—are we looking at a ruin? The distress, grief, and emotional conflict resulting from the division of North and South Korea are often concealed in Sea Hyun Lee's works, as if veiled by a romantic, red hue.

The "Red Sansu" series originates from Sea Hyun Lee's military service, as one of his tasks at the time was to observe the area along the border between North and South Korea through a night-vision device. The landscape, when viewed through the night-vision scope, appeared as though soaked in green hues. It was through this experience that the artist ultimately found his unique artistic approach and began to interrogate the nature and landscape of his homeland. Instead of using the color green, he chose red, as it most accurately represented the emotions he felt while observing through the night-vision device—sorrow and pain over the reality of his country. Red also reflects his awareness of fear and terror. Nevertheless, the landscapes he observed also possessed a magical and beautiful quality. This experience has remained a defining influence on the artist and his oeuvre to this day.

The painting technique employed by the artist references the proximity to traditional Korean landscape painting, which, in turn, has its origins in Chinese painting. "Sumukhwa," the Korean ink painting, relies on a single color: black ink, which is diluted to varying degrees with water, creating tones that range from milky white to the darkest black. While the artist does not use ink in his works, he applies oil paint in a similar

manner, mimicking ink painting. He plays with the transparency of the color, creating the illusion that we are constantly moving within the same color spectrum, thereby generating a monochromatic effect.

The vibrant red works are complemented by several landscape paintings in a color spectrum of royal blue, such as *Beyond Blue - 024AUG01* (2024, 130 x 130 cm). Blue is less painful than red, according to Sea Hyun Lee. While the red works can evoke suffocating and even agonizing emotions in the artist during the painting process, the works in blue, on the other hand, are relaxing to create and have a calming effect. The blue allows the artist to focus more on the beauty, mystery, and mysticism within the landscapes, rather than on their constant ambivalence. The blue paintings serve as places of tranquility, where, for once, only beauty can be seen.

Between the bittersweet present and the past, between what remains and what has been lost, lies the stark reality of human intervention—often harsh and irreversible. This exhibition invites viewers to look beyond the surface of landscapes and recognize the layers of destruction, dystopian elements, and the complex emotions that come with what we choose to see or ignore.

About the artist: The artist has had the opportunity to showcase his works in numerous solo and group exhibitions. Solo exhibitions include, among others, the Horbach Foundation, Cologne, the Savina Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul (both 2024), the Bermel von Luxburg Gallery, Berlin, the Shinsegae Gallery, Seoul (both 2023), the Mimesis Art Museum, Paju, Korea (2015), the VOUS ETES ICI Gallery, Amsterdam (2014), the Nicholas Robinson Gallery, New York (2011), the Contemporary Museum of Hongik University, Seoul (2001). Group exhibitions include, for instance, the Kunstmuseum Bern, Hangaram Art Museum, Seoul (both 2021), Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art, Anshan, Hwangnyongsa Historic Museum, Gyeongju, Museo Nacional de las Culturas y del Mundo, Mexico, National Museum of Korea, Seoul, Korea (all 2018), Vestfossen Museum, Vestfossen (2016), Sanshang Contemporary Art Museum, Hangzhou (2014), Seoul Museum of Art, Santralistanbul Museum, Istanbul (both 2009), Neuberger Museum of Art, New York (2008), Tate Britain, London (2007). In 2011, the artist exhibited as part of the ILLUMInations Biennale in Venice. His work is already represented in several collections, including the All Visual Arts Collection, London, the Bank of America Collection, USA, the Berger Collection, Zurich, the Microsoft Art Collection, USA, the Uli Sigg Collection, Zurich, the Hana Bank Collection, Seoul, the collection of the Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, and the collection of the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea.

About the gallery: Galerie Peter Kilchmann was founded in 1992 by Peter Kilchmann in the emerging Zurich-West district. Between 1996 and 2010, it evolved into an internationally renowned gallery representing artists from Switzerland and the United States, as well as various European and Latin American countries. The gallery gained recognition for exhibitions that challenge established narratives and highlighting critical, non-Western perspectives. In 2011, the gallery moved to larger premises at Zahnradstrasse 21 in the Maag district of Zurich-West. Continuing its expansion in 2021, the gallery opened a second location at Rämistrasse 33 near the Kunsthaus Zurich in the heart of Zurich. The most recent milestone in the gallery's ongoing growth was the inauguration of a branch in the Parisian district of Le Marais in October 2022.

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