

Keunmin Lee
When hallucination
is no longer a symptom

Derouillon,

Étienne Marcel
13 rue de Turbigo,
75002 Paris



Keunmin Lee (b. in Korea in 1982), lives and works in Seoul.
Public Collection: Space K, Seoul (KR); Colección Solo, Madrid (ES)

Keunmin Lee's paintings transcribe the sensations experienced during hallucinatory episodes, plunging us into deep compositions with rich red hues, inside a body without limits or exteriority. About twenty years ago, Keunmin Lee was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, a term that covers a very broad spectrum, from instability in relationships and self-image to extreme sensitivity to his environment. This diagnosis was, in essence, a form of cold definition that offered no space for alternative interpretations beyond the diagnostic label and its corresponding code, a rigid and unyielding categorization reducing an identity to an illness. For Lee, painting is an introspective and emancipatory practice in the face of this process of rationalization and quantification of sensitive, immaterial experiences. This opens the way for him to reappropriate his illness and resist social categorization, dissociating himself from art brut (outsider art) through his constant self-reflection. He paints his hallucinations in such a way as to affirm their creative and subversive potential, giving them a positive aspect rather than reducing them to the status of mere symptoms. Systems – blood, digestive, organic – thus become a metaphor for social systems, digesting, grouping individuals to obtain what they need to function, to the detriment of each person's individuality and differences. Omnipresent in Keunmin Lee's canvases, the body is crudely revealed to better escape norms and appeal to our deepest interiority.

Les peintures de Keunmin Lee retranscrivent les sensations éprouvées lors d'épisodes hallucinatoires, nous plongeant dans de profondes compositions aux riches nuances rouges, à l'intérieur d'un corps sans limite ni extériorité. Keunmin Lee a été diagnostiqué, il y a vingt ans, d'un trouble de la personnalité borderline, terme qui couvre un spectre très large allant d'une instabilité dans les relations, l'image de soi, à une extrême sensibilité à son environnement. La rationalité de ce diagnostic contraste par sa froideur avec la condition qu'il recouvre; il résonne comme une sentence rigide et violente, réduisant une identité à la maladie. La peinture est alors pour Lee une pratique introspective et émancipatoire face à ce processus de rationalisation et de quantification d'expériences sensibles et immatérielles. Elle lui ouvre un champ de réappropriation de sa maladie et de résistance à toute catégorisation sociale, se dissociant de l'art brut par son autoréflexion constante. Il peint ses hallucinations en affirmant leur potentiel créatif et subversif, leur conférant un aspect positif, plutôt que de les réduire au simple statut de symptôme. Les systèmes – sanguins, digestifs, organiques – deviennent ainsi une métaphore des systèmes sociaux, digérant, regroupant les individus pour en obtenir ce dont ils ont besoin pour fonctionner, au détriment des individualités et des différences de chacun. Omniprésent dans les toiles de Keunmin Lee, le corps s'y dévoile crûment pour mieux s'échapper des normes et faire appel à notre intériorité la plus profonde.



“The artist’s job is to deconstruct the defined state”

Keunmin Lee, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Elena Foster
Seoul

Lee Keunmin (LK): It’s a statement, you can read it when you are comfortable and have the time.

Elena Foster (EF): So this is your manifesto, your statement about what art means to you?

Hans Ulrich Obrist (HUO): [Quoting] “This art is made to liberate myself from the oppressive nature of illness and diagnoses.”
Can you tell us about your views and thoughts on the violence inherent in the way society defines and categorizes individuals through data?

LK: Before the diagnosis of my mental illness, I came across the book *Orientalism* by Edward W. Saïd and it made me realized that there is a way of constructing narratives that portrays others as weak, sick or inferior, and thus justifies this representation. So I began to take an interest in these social categorizations and definitions even before I started drawing my hallucinations.

HUO: Can we see some of the drawings?

LK: This is my sketchbook of daily drawings. Feel free to flip the pages.

EF: Do you draw the things you see or the things you have in your brain?

LK: The drawings are based on the memories of my hallucinations. And I draw them in a surrealistic automated way.

HUO: Is surrealism an inspiration to you?

LK: Not the movement specifically, but I do use that method of automatic drawing.

EF: We would expect something much more disorganized. This is a very meticulous and detailed drawing.

HUO: Who are the artists that inspire you besides surrealism?

LK: My biggest inspiration comes from outsider artists. Many images from them have had a huge impact on me.



HUO: Are the drawings the base for the paintings? Or are they completely independent? When you make a painting do you make drawings or studies before?

EF: You wrote here, “My art is a diary of repetitive pathological records.” The records you remember in your mind? You didn’t draw them when you were having hallucinations or delusions?

LK: The drawings are independent from the paintings. It’s a separate body of work; they are not a sketch of some sort. As for the hallucinations, I experienced them briefly, during two months of hospitalization when I was twenty and it’s on this memory that I rely; I relive them over and over again through my recollections. Now that I have distanced myself from that phase, I see myself as an outside observer of my own past. I try to capture its nuances and essence, rather than actively representing the hallucination.

HUO: Do the drawings have titles?

LK: I don’t have titles for individual works but I am working under a series entitled “Refining hallucinations”.

HUO: I notice that here - next to the drawings - there is some text: “Panic”, “Eye”, “Drink”, “Ears”, “Tumor”, “Knife”, “Hole”, “Hyperemia”, “Congestion”.

LK: The words I put here proceed from a sort of self-study; I wanted to put my condition into words. As you said, they could work as a title, but they are not an official title.

HUO: What about this work? Is it the biggest one?

LK: This is a painting in progress, so it doesn’t have a title yet; I usually give a title after the work is done, just like these new ones entitled “accidental landscapes”.

HUO: And do you also write? What connects you to literature?

LK: I only write artist statements or brief descriptions about my work. I am not very familiar with literature and I also have some difficulty with reading texts. So instead I turned towards experimental electronic music, like brain dance, before devoting myself fully to the visual arts.

EF: What is your relation to the body, to blood?

LK: There are a lot of paintings about blood and physical scars and that’s because when I was hallucinating and unable to tell the difference between my hallucination and reality I ended up hurting myself physically; blood became like a hint of reality. I use it as a metaphor in my paintings.

HUO: This makes me think about the flesh in Chaïm Soutine’s work. What do you think about his work?

LK: I like the gesture and the color.

HUO: I am very interested in outsider art, “art brut”... but we know nothing about historical Korean figures. Are there any Korean artists from the past that you appreciate? What is your view about the South Korean art scene?

LK: What disappoints me a little is that in Korea, the emphasis is often not on the artist, but on the artist overcoming his difficulties and finding healing through his art... I prefer to look at artists’ works through a study lens.

HUO: This work is fascinating. It evokes not only the flesh, but also the entire vascular circulation. It’s like an entire organic system. At first, I thought of Soutine’s influence and the flesh, but in fact it’s not that: it’s a representation of the system itself - blood system, digestive system, organic system...

LK: I kind of connect the digestive system to the social system, between absorption and elimination and so on. Generally speaking, through my works I try to express resistance to oppression, to the way in which society conditions and “packages” us. My works are very much linked to my personal history, but I’d also like them to help people become aware of the way they are reified by society.

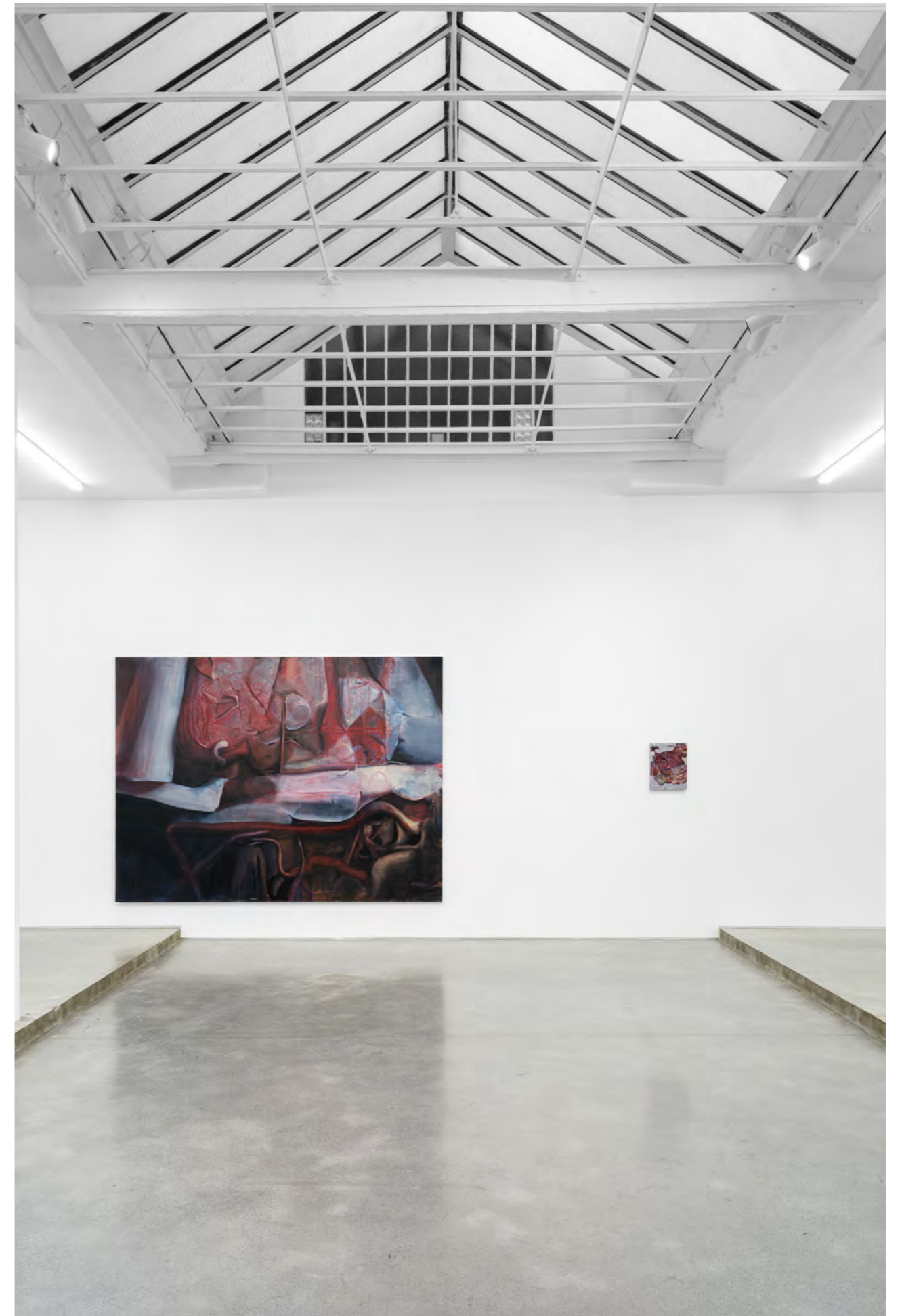
HUO: Do you have a definition of art or a sentence in Korean you could write so we can post it on Instagram as part of the series of artist’s handwritten phrases we publish?

LK: It means: “The artist’s job is to deconstruct the defined state”.

***Body Construction (I)*, 2024**
Huile sur toile
Oil on canvas
218,2 x 291,2 cm
85 7/8 x 114 5/8 inches







Connected Skin, 2024
Huile et film plastique sur toile
Oil and plastic wrap on canvas
42 x 32 cm
16 1/2 x 12 5/8 inches







Body Construction (II), 2024

Huile sur toile

Oil on canvas

218,2 x 291,2 cm

85 7/8 x 114 5/8 inches



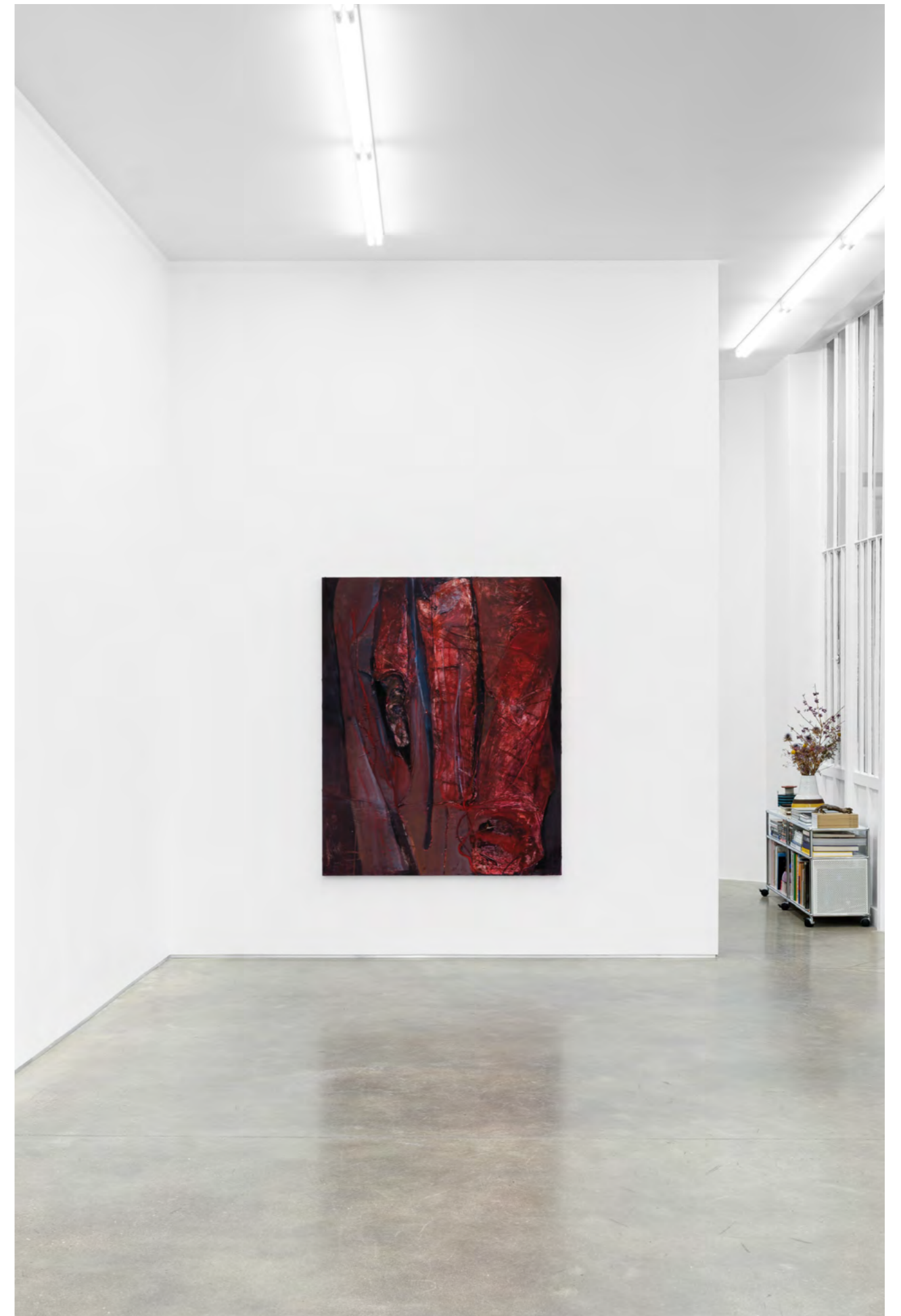






***Connected Skin (I)*, 2024**
Huile et film plastique sur toile
Oil and plastic wrap on canvas
162 x 130 cm
63 3/4 x 51 1/8 inches





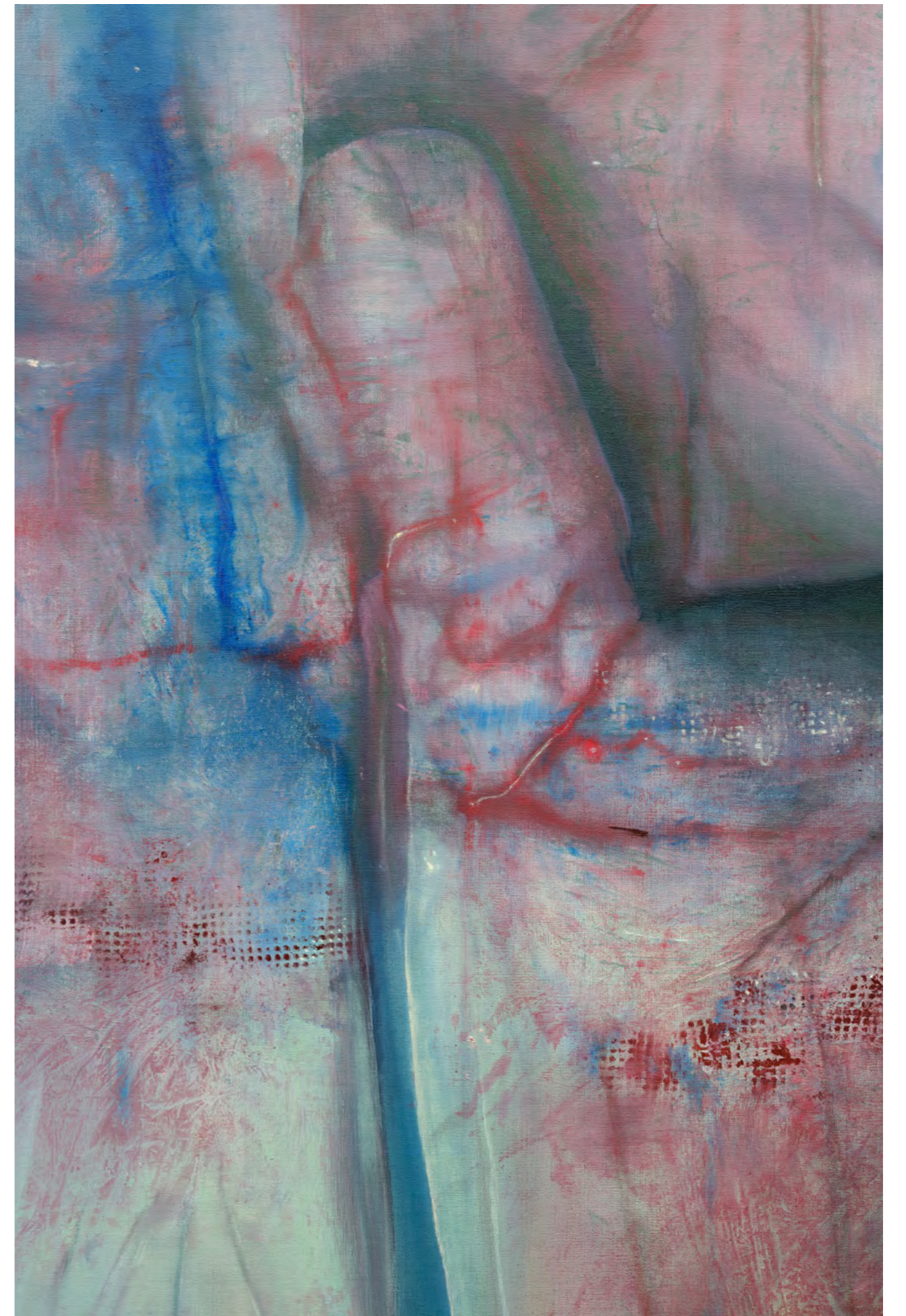






***Connected Skin (III)*, 2024**
Huile sur toile
Oil on canvas
227,3 x 181,8 cm
89 1/2 x 71 5/8 inches







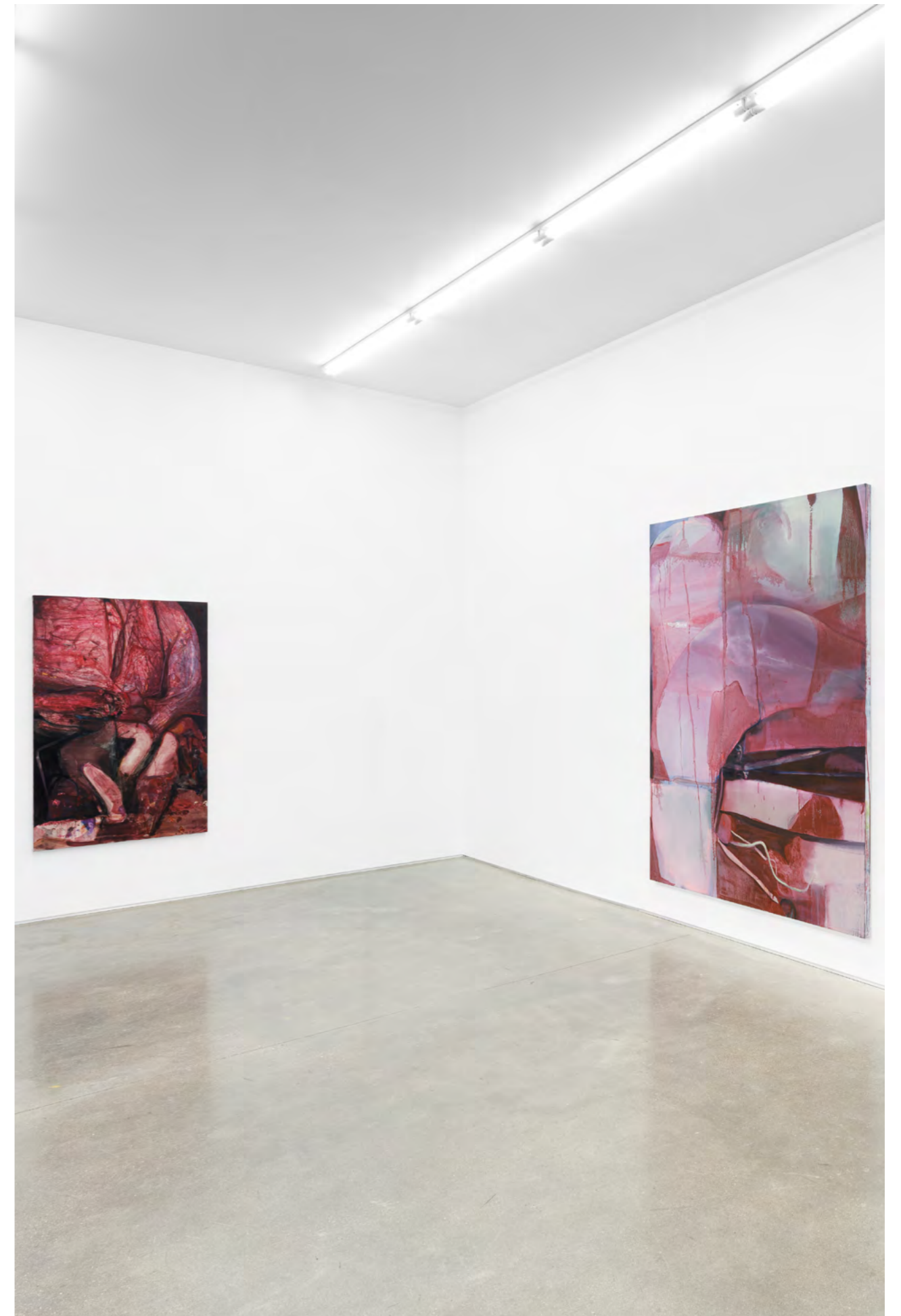
***Connected Skin (II)*, 2024**
Huile sur toile
Oil on canvas
227,3 x 181,8 cm
89 1/2 x 71 5/8 inches





***Connected Skin (I)*, 2024**
Huile, papier et film plastique
sur toile
Oil, paper and plastic wrap on
canvas
162 x 97 cm
63 3/4 x 38 1/4 inches





Psychiatrist's Head, 2024
Huile et cire froide sur toile
Oil and cold wax on canvas
117 x 73 cm
46 x 28 3/4 inches







***Connected Skin (I)*, 2023-2024**

Huile sur toile

Oil on canvas

227,3 x 181,8 cm

89 1/2 x 71 5/8 inches







Tumor Blossom, 2024
Huile sur toile
Oil on canvas
42 x 32 cm
16 1/2 x 12 5/8 inches





Organic Plate, 2024
Huile sur toile
Oil on canvas
38,3 x 38 cm
15 1/8 x 15 inches





Derouillon,

Keunmin Lee

Born in Korea in 1982

Lives and works in Seoul

Biography

Keunmin Lee's (b. 1982 in Yeongju, Korea) work, which comprises painting and drawing, delves into the meanders of the psyche. Drawing from his personal experiences with hallucinations and guided by instinctive gestures, Lee translates hallucinatory visions into visceral compositions characterized by rich red hues and meticulous brushwork. His paintings materialize enduring mental traces, as he engages in a cathartic process that turns the mind inside out. The forms he paints resemble magnified and abstracted fragments of flesh, muscle tissue, and veins, which seem to infuse each canvas with the heat, viscosity and pulsation of vital organs, thus eliciting a synesthetic experience.

His recent exhibitions include: "When hallucination is no longer a symptom", Galerie Derouillon, Paris (2025); "I am your Body: Chapter 2 - Flesh", Kunsthal Aarhus, Aarhus (2024); "Realizing Boundaries" (solo), Peres Projects, Berlin (2024); "What happens when we cry?", curated by Marion Coindeau, Galerie Derouillon, Paris (2024); "The Sum of our Parts", Swivel Gallery, New York (2024); "Embodied Depths" (duo), with Jessica Meeson Pae, Nexx Asia, Taipei City (2023); "Recombinant" (duo), with Mandy El-Sayegh, Lehmann Maupin, Seoul (2022); "And then none were sick" (solo), Space K, Seoul (2022); "Revisiting the Art of Painting: Modern Figurative Paintings by Korean Artists", CYAN Museum of Art, Youngcheon (2017); "Ugly as Art", Seoul National University Museum of Art, Seoul (2017); "All the Windows to the World", Blume Museum of Contemporary Art, Paju (2015); "The Portrait of Hallucination" (solo), Gallery Dam, Seoul (2013); "Selected Drawings" (solo), Salon de Factory, Seoul (2009); "JK Space Gallery" (solo), Seoul (2009); "Space Coordinate", Space K, Seoul (2004).

Public Collection: Space K, Seoul (KR); Colección Solo, Madrid (ES)

Education

2007 BFA, Seoul National University, Seoul (KR)

Public Collection

Space K, Seoul (KR); Colección Solo, Madrid (ES)

Residencies

2016 Pioneer Works, New York (US)

CV

Selected Solo/Duo Exhibitions

- 2025 "When hallucination is no longer a symptom", Galerie Derouillon, Paris (FR)
- 2024 "Realizing Boundaries", Peres Projects, Berlin (DE)
- 2023 "Embodied Depths", with Jessica Meeson Pae, Nexx Asia, Taipei City (TW)
- 2022 "Recombinant", with Mandy El-Sayegh, Lehmann Maupin, Seoul (KR)
"And then none were sick", Space K, Seoul (KR)
- 2013 "The Portrait of Hallucination", Gallery Dam, Seoul (KR)
- 2011 "No.25", Gallery Dam, Seoul (KR)
- 2010 "The Young Korean Artist", Hyun Gallery, Seoul (KR)
"Random Tetris", EVE Gallery, Seoul (KR)
- 2009 "Selected Drawings", Salon de Factory, Seoul (KR)
"JK Space Gallery", Seoul (KR)

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2025 "iwillmedievalfutureyou2", Lilith Performance Studio, Malmö (SW)
- 2024 "I am your Body: Chapter 2 - Flesh", Kunsthal Aarhus, Aarhus (DK)
"What happens when we cry?", curated by Marion Coindeau, Galerie Derouillon, Paris (FR)
"The Sum of our Parts", Swivel Gallery, New York (US)
"Fever Dream", Swivel Gallery, New York (US)
- 2018 "Secretly, Greatly", Eul Gallery, Daegu (KR)
- 2017 "Revisiting the Art of Painting: Modern Figurative Paintings by Korean Artists", CYAN Museum of Art, Youngcheon (KR)
"Ugly as Art", Seoul National University Museum of Art, Seoul (KR)
- 2015 "All the Windows to the World", Blume Museum of Contemporary Art, Paju (KR)
- 2012 "Wonderers Are Never Tricked", Television 12, Seoul (KR)
- 2008 "Tele-bridge", Television 12, Seoul (KR)
- 2005 "MAPP Media Workshop II", Hyun Gallery, Seoul (KR)
- 2004 "WWW.SHOW", Hyun Gallery, Seoul (KR)
"MAPP Media Workshop I", Hyun Gallery, Seoul (KR)
"Space Coordinate", Space K, Seoul (KR)
- 2003 "Multiply Difference", PKM, Seoul (KR)

Derouillon,

founder Benjamin Derouillon

director Marion Coindeau
marion@galeriederouillon.com

Galerie Derouillon, Étienne Marcel
13 rue de Turbigo, 75002 Paris

Galerie Derouillon, Haut Marais
38 rue Notre Dame de Nazareth, 75003 Paris

Galerie Derouillon, Cadet
Hôtel Cromot du Bourg, 75009 Paris

www.derouillon.com

