

“20 Questions for Painter and Conceptual Artist Byron Kim,” Art Info, December 15, 2011.

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Photo by Sarah Trigg

Byron Kim

by ARTINFO

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Name: Byron Kim

Age: 50

Occupation: Artist

City: Brooklyn

What project are you working on now?

I want to make some small oil paintings about something I'm looking at or about painting or both.

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At first glance, your paintings seem to engage with color field painters like Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt, and Agnes Martin. But while your "Synecdoche series" resembles Ellsworth Kelly color blocks, it's actually a document of various tones of human flesh. The "Dark" paintings, meanwhile, look like Reinhardt's Black Paintings, but they're really figurative representations of the night sky. What is it about this kind of false abstraction, or gap between literalism and abstraction, that appeals to you?

I love a good abstract painting, but I'm often not interested in what people talk about when they talk about abstraction, so I prefer to apply my own content.

For your new show, you painted the night skies from memory to produce blackish-blue monochromes. Why from memory?

I don't know how to paint a canvas which is in the light while looking at a sky which is in the dark. My eyes and brain can't manage it.

You are often deemed a conceptual artist, most likely due to your diaristic approach to working, as when you painted the sky every Sunday for ten years. But you once quipped, "I'm a painter until 2:00 in the afternoon when the daylight in my studio is so blinding that I become a conceptual artist." What did you mean by that?

For about 20 years I've had large west-facing windows. I've never bothered to get proper shades. I'm a morning person. By the time the sun shines too intensely, it's time for me to stop staring and come up with some ideas.

The absence of stars in your skylines may not even be noticeable to New Yorkers, who are used to unstarry nights thanks to the city's pollution. As a Brooklynite, do you miss these celestial lights or do you like to keep things monochromatic?

I miss the celestial lights. If people ever forget about Vija Celmins' work, I'd like to give it a shot.

What is the future of the monochrome?

Bleak.

What's your favorite place to see art?

The Met.

What's the most indispensable item in your studio?

Presently, it's Golden Matte Fluid Acrylic, Paynes Gray.

Where are you finding ideas for your work these days?

Walking around Brooklyn, looking at things, and thinking of people.

Do you collect anything?

Playing cards on the street.

What's the last artwork you purchased?

A drawing by Elana Herzog.

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What's the first artwork you ever sold?

Not sure, but it was probably something I called a “Belly Painting.”

What's your art-world pet peeve?

Openings.

What's your favorite post-gallery watering hole or restaurant?

The Half King. Kofoo. Gam Mee Ok.

What's the last great book you read?

Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters, Tom Perrotta; The Leftovers

What international art destination do you most want to visit?

Spiral Jetty.

What under-appreciated artist, gallery, or work do you think people should know about?

Brian Tolle’s “Irish Hunger Memorial” in Battery Park City.

Who's your favorite living artist?

On Kawara, Robert Irwin, Vija Celmins, Robert Gober

What are your hobbies?

I could use a hobby.