



National Museum of
Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea



Wook-kyung Choi, Alice's Cat

27 October 2021 – 13 February 2022

The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA, Director Youn Bummo) presents ***Wook-kyung Choi, Alice's Cat***, a large-scale retrospective exhibition of the representative Korean abstract artist Wook-kyung Choi, from 27 October 2021 to 13 February 2022 at MMCA Gwacheon.

Wook-kyung Choi, Alice's Cat is a retrospective exhibition that aims to shed new light on Choi's overall artistic vision and provide a comprehensive review of a wide range of her work and career as an artist, art educator, and poet. The exhibition seeks to reinterpret Choi's oeuvre by focusing on the multilayered links between her art and literature, exemplified by her volumes of poetry and her interest in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

Wook-kyung Choi, born in Seoul in 1940, graduated from Seoul Arts High School and the College of Fine Arts at Seoul National University. She then moved to the United States in 1963, where she received degrees in art and began her career as an artist and art educator. In 1965, she published a collection of poems in English titled *Small Stones*, revealing her interest in literature for the first time. In the 1970s, she produced artworks and delivered lectures in both Korea and the US, and in 1972, released *Like Unfamiliar Faces*, a collection of 45 poems in Korean including *Alice's Cat*. Working as a professor at Yeungnam University and Duksung Women's University, she focused on painting on the theme of Korea's mountains and islands from 1979 until her death in 1985.

Choi was recognized as a representative artist of Korean art in the 1980s, participating in numerous international exhibitions that introduced Korean contemporary art to international audiences, such as the 16th *Bienal de São Paulo* (1981), *Korean Drawing Now* (1981) in New York, *The Status of Korean Contemporary Art* (1982) in Kyoto, and the *Salon d'Automne* (1982) in Paris. After she died, retrospective exhibitions dedicated to her were held at several venues including the MMCA and Ho-Am Gallery in the late 1980s. Her works are included in the traveling exhibition *Women in Abstraction*, organized by the Centre Pompidou in Paris and held in the Guggenheim Bilbao Museum in Spain from this month, as well as *With Eyes Opened: Cranbrook Academy of Art Since 1932*, an exhibition held by her alma mater, Cranbrook Academy of Art, indicating that even abroad, Choi is still regarded as a woman abstract expressionist artist who was ahead of her time.

Despite being active in both Korea and the US as a painter, educator, and poet, Choi has been largely considered “an American-style artist highly influenced by abstract expressionism” or “a tragic woman artist who died tragically young.” *Wook-kyung Choi, Alice's Cat* intends to examine the significance of her works in the context of Korean contemporary art by regarding them through the lens of their relationships with contemporary art and literature from various angles. At the same time, the exhibition will highlight both the active life of Choi, who never ceased to explore new worlds while moving between Korea and the US. Moreover, it will invite viewers to understand the contemporaneity of Choi's active life and creations as she ceaselessly explored new worlds in Korea and the U.S., similar to Alice as she embarked on an adventure into Wonderland out of pure curiosity.

The exhibition is divided into four sections under the themes of **To America as Wonderland, Korea and America, In between Dream and Reality, To the Mountains and Islands of Korea and the Home of Choi's Painting, and Epilogue. Mirror Room: The Beginning of a New Story**. The first three sections are organized in chronological order and the last one introduces Choi's self-portraits and records to help viewers explore her life and works from different angles.

The first section, **To America as Wonderland**, displays works Choi produced from 1963 to 1970, when she was studying in the US and taking in a wide range of American contemporary art from abstract expressionism and post-painterly abstraction to pop art and Neo-Dada. Abstract paintings and black-and-white paintings with prominent expressive elements, such as *La Femme Fâché* (The Angry Woman) and *Three Eyes, I Do Have* are among the displayed works.

The second section, **Korea and America, In between Dream and Reality**, presents Choi's life and works between 1971 and 1978, when the artist frequently moved between Korea and the US. During this period, she produced large abstract paintings demonstrative of her unique style, which combines figurative and abstract elements beyond the scope of abstract expressionism; the works introduced in this section include *Tightrope Walking* and *Martha Graham*.

The third section, **To the Mountains and Islands of Korea and the Home of Choi's Painting**, exhibits Choi's works after 1979, when she produced numerous pieces on the theme of Korean nature, such as mountains in Gyeongsang-do Province and islands in the South Sea, while working as a

professor at Yeungnam University and Duksung Women's University after returning to Korea. This section introduces *Mountains Floating Like Islands*, *Red Flower*, and other works from this period. Choi's emphasis on restrained lines and compositions using neutral colors at this time contrasted with her large works produced in the 1970s, which are characterized by expressive elements and stark contrast between loud colors.

The last section, **Epilogue. Mirror Room: The Beginning of a New Story**, consists mostly of self-portraits Choi produced between the 1950s and the 1970s. These self-portraits were a way for Choi to continue producing figurative works while experimenting with abstract painting.

Youn Bummo, the director of the MMCA, notes, "This retrospective exhibition, covering Choi's entire career, will provide an opportunity to look at the true worth of Wook-kyung Choi, who contributed to raising the status of Korean abstract art. I hope the exhibition helps visitors rediscover Wook-kyung Choi at home and abroad by highlighting not only her life as an artist but also her diverse experiences as a poet and educator."

Notes to editors

For high-resolution images of the museum, please follow the link: [here](#)

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Appendix 1. Main Works



La Femme Fâché, 1966, Oil on Canvas, 137×174cm, Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art Collection



Martha Graham, 1976, Pencil on Paper, 102×255cm, Private Collection



Mountains Floating Like Islands, 1984, Acrylic on Canvas, 73.5×99cm, Private Collection



Untitled, 1966, Acrylic on Paper, 42.5×57.5cm, Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art Collection

Appendix 2. Exhibition View



