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| Yoo Young Kuk (유영국, 1916-2003) |
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| As one of the pioneers of Korean abstract art, Yoo Young Kuk constructed a unique modernist aesthetic by combining simplified motifs drawn from Korean nature and abstraction. Yoo was born in Uljin, South Korea and enrolled in the oil painting department at Tokyo Bunka Gakuin, Japan, at the age of 20. In Japan, he absorbed European modernist styles and participated in Japanese avant-garde group shows, including Jiyu-ten (自由展) and N.B.G (Neo Beaux-arts Group) exhibitions, until his return to Korea in 1943. His works from his Japanese period were wide-ranging, from geometrical abstract paintings, to three-dimensional collages, to experimental photographs. In 1947, Yoo created the Neo Realism School (신사실파) with Kim Whanki (김환기 [1913–1974]) and Lee Kyusang (이규상 [1918–1964]), fellow members of the first generation of Korean abstractionists. From the late 1950s, he organised group exhibitions focusing on modern and contemporary art, like the Modern Art Society (모던아트협회), the Invitational Exhibition of Contemporary Artists (현대작가초대전), and Sinsang-hoe (신상회). Although rendered in a highly abstract way, Yoo’s work uses some natural motifs, including mountains, seas, and the sun. The contrast between submerged dark and rising bright colours along with the irregular wide lines contouring each shape add both dynamic tension and harmony to the pictorial plane. |
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| Further reading:  Ho-am Art Gallery. (ed.) (1996). *Yoo Youngkuk*. Seoul: Ho-am Art Gallery. (A well-illustrated exhibition catalogue with text in English and Korean, including a remarkable essay on Yoo’s modernist perspective).  Lee, I. (2008). *New Realist School*. Seoul: Yoo Youngkuk Art Foundation. (A comprehensive research on New Realist School that includes illustrations of the original exhibition catalogues).  Yoo, Y. (1979). *Yoo young kuk*. Seoul: Daeyoungmunhawsa. (A catalogue for Yoo’s first retrospective exhibition, held at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, in 1979).  Yoo Youngkuk Art Foundation. (ed.) (2004-2010). *Yoo Youngkuk Journal*. Seoul: Misul Munhwa. (Annually published collections of essays and monographs exploring Yoo’s art in diverse perspectives, by the Yoo Youngkuk Art Foundation since 2004). |