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| **Monochrome Movement (Tansaekhwa)** |
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| Monochrome painting, otherwise known in Korea as *Tansaekwa*, was an art movement that emerged after the Korean War, lasting from the late 1960s through to the 1980s. It rose to prominence during an era of strict censorship and rapid industrialisation in the 1960s and the 1970s. The policies imposed by South Korea’s then-president Park Chung-hee restricted direct political messages, thus actuating the emergence of hidden themes in abstractions within the limitations administered by the state. The Monochrome movement’s pioneer, Park Seobo (1931–), worked both with abstract artists who were critical of the government and with the National Documentary Paintings Project, producing government-commissioned artworks that advocated nationalism. Through abstraction, Monochrome paintings can raise awareness without being overtly political, and still resonate Korean tradition without submitting to the confines of the artistic establishment of the time. The Monochrome movement did not only respond to political censorship, but also to the established standards of the Korean art world. The movement eliminated the notions of representation and the distance that sets the image apart from the canvas.  Prominent artists such as Park Seo-bo, Ha Chong-hyun (1935–), Kim Gui-line (Kim Ki-rin, 1936–), Choi Myoeng-young (1941–), and Kwon Young Woo (1941–) developed their homogenous ideas individually until 1975, when they became part of an official collective after the group was named the Ecole de Seoul. Despite each artist’s diverse methods, Monochrome paintings share common attributes in their minimal use of colour, their emphasis on the flatness of the canvas, and their references to East Asian spirituality, specifically in Taoism and the East Asian intellectualists’ views of nature.  Monochrome paintings have been often linked with Japan’s Mono-ha movement and the United States’ Minimalism. Their theoretical basis is indeed influenced by Mono-ha, more specifically by one of their leading figures, Lee Ufan, a renowned Korean artist active in Japan. Unlike the link with Mono-ha, the connection with the West’s Minimalism was strongly denied. Minimalism’s concept of the rejection of the human touch contrasted strongly with Monochrome movement’s emphasis on the meditative, labour-intensive nature of the actual practice of creating art. Still, Monochrome paintings were perceived as corresponding with the Minimalism in the West due to their two-dimensional abstraction. Nonetheless, it is this formalistic attribute that made the movement preferable in the West and, eventually, greatly successful in the international art scene. |
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