



## Kim Dong Yoo

### The process behind the artist's large-scale portraits pairing cultural icons

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Already a household name in Asia, Korean painter Kim Dong Yoo's inaugural U.S. exhibit at NYC's Hasted Kraeutler gallery aims to introduce the artist to a new, American audience. The self-titled show features a series of large-scale paintings that, from afar, depict a single grand portrait of notables from John F. Kennedy to Michael Jackson. Upon closer inspection, however, one realizes that the work is actually comprised of hundreds of smaller portraits of other, connected figures from Marilyn Monroe to Madonna.

The relationships between his culturally iconic pairings are intriguing. In addition to Queen Elizabeth II and Princess Diana, and Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck; Kim Dong Yoo has coupled Albert Einstein, one of the greatest geniuses of all time, with Marilyn Monroe, one of the greatest beauties of all time. He's also played upon the religious and pop culture interpretations of the Madonna, and the tension inherent in the legendary relationships between Jacqueline Kennedy and JFK, and JFK and Monroe, to name a few.

Perhaps even more surprising than the dueling portraits, however, is the process behind each piece. While the look is decidedly digital, the work itself is absolutely man-made. Kim Dong Yoo begins each labor-intensive piece by drawing a grid, hanging a tiny photo for reference by his canvas. He then hand paints every tiny portrait—no stencils, stamps or

computers involved. It takes him about two days to complete a single half row, wherein each portrait varies just so from the rest, allowing for the larger, composite portrait's depiction. Kim Dong Yoo began the series in the late nineties, and completes three to five paintings each year. As gallery partner Sarah Hasted notes, "He makes it look easy, but the process is incredibly involved."

Elements of Kim Dong Yoo's series call to mind the work of both Andy Warhol and Chuck Close. Also interesting, according to the gallery, is the fact that another artist by the name of Alex Goufeng Cao has recently begun displaying work using the same visual concept, though his pieces are rendered digitally. Hasted Kraeutler notes the similarities bring up questions of derivation and new creation—ongoing issues in the modern art world—but rather than taking legal action, Joseph Kraeutler says, "We just want people to understand the concept began as Kim Dong Yoo's."

When Kim Dong Yoo himself is asked what he hopes people will take away from the show, the artist responds: "I find joy in the fact that my work balances both grid-like elements, which call to mind the digital world, and an analogical technique—drawing every pixel by hand. And while these components coexist in my work, I want viewers to also see both the visual and emotional harmony and the competition between the two figures—Marilyn and JFK, for example—in every piece. But, at the same time, the thoughts the viewers have when they see the works will be colored by their own distinctive feelings regarding the format and the personalities involved."

Kim Dong Yoo is on display at New York's Hasted Kraeutler through 24 March 2012.