

Kwang-Young Chun's Double Feature

May 2013



Aggregation 07-DE145, 2007



One ticket to Art Basel in Hong Kong and two opportunities to fall beneath the spell of Kwang-Young Chun and his treasure troves of glistening, golden papers. Well deserving of his clout in the international art scene—his 50-year career has been thriving since '70s-era New York—Chun is celebrated worldwide. But why such prestige?

Chun made his mark wrapping styrofoam wedges in mulberry paper and pages recycled from discarded Korean books, inscribed with mythology, fairy tales, correspondence, and history. “For me the old paper has a life, a history,” he says. “It contains the souls of the people who touched it. In a way, I’m wrapping the stories of people’s lives.” The mulberry paper, in particular, recalls his own memory of a sickly childhood spent in the refuge of his relative—a traditional Chinese medicine doctor—and the clusters of herbs wrapped in mulberry paper that hung from the ceiling, inscribed with well-wishes that he never seems to forget:

“When I was young, I was a sickly child, and my mother used to take me to the Chinese medicine doctor in the neighborhood. I never liked the place because of the strong odor of infusion, and the threatening sight of the acupuncture needles. While the doctor felt my pulse, my mother held my hand, and I fixed my eyes upon the ceiling, hearing the doctor muttering something to himself. I remember that numerous packages of mulberry paper were hanging from the ceiling, each holding a name card of the medicine wrapped inside. The image of my old memories of the drugstore lasted in my head for a while. I always had a desire to communicate my art through a Korean sentiment, and the image of the medicine packages hanging from the ceiling became a new theme in my art since that memorable afternoon.”