

Artist Chun tells story with 100,000 triangles, large and small.

One of Korea's best-selling artists showcases new works at Gallery Hyundai in Seoul



A 3.5-meter-tall installation work that looks like the tip of a giant baseball bat looks down on visitors near the entrance of Gallery Hyundai Gangnam Space in Sinsa-dong, southern Seoul.

Sure, there are too many giant installation works nowadays to be impressed by size alone. What is awe-inspiring about this one, however, is that it is formed of densely studded triangular blocks of various sizes — from ones smaller than a thumb to those longer than arm-length. Each piece is carefully wrapped and tied up with “hanji,” Korean mulberry paper dyed in slightly different shades using natural herbs.

“This work is made of approximately 100,000 pieces,” said artist Chun Kwang Young on Friday, pointing to his work “Aggregation 09-SE056.”

Chun is one of the best-selling South Korean artists, known for his “Aggregation” series which he begun in the 1990s. His signature style of using pages from old books

and numerous triangular Styrofoam blocks to create three dimensional artworks, even on canvas, is hard to forget when once seen.

His works are especially favored by non-Korean collectors because of the strong Korean feel of the color, paper and the arduous handwork. Including ones in public collections of major art collectors such as the Rockefeller Foundation, Neiman Marcus Department Store and Woodrow Wilson International Center, Chun estimates that at least 400 of his works have been sold overseas.

The unique idea only came to him while he was studying Western painting at the Philadelphia College of Art, Pennsylvania. He realized his lack of competence in the genre because “there were so many talented painters.”

He came back to Korea, took a two-year long trip around the country with his wife and thought of hanji, which reminded him of the days he spent at his great uncle’s herbal medicine shop.

“I decided to tell my story. Numerous people had their fingers on the old books that I use. When I make the ‘Aggregation’ series, it feels like I am aggregating the spirits of our ancestors,” said Chun.

Chun had to learn how to catch the eyes of big collectors used to seeing world-famous works, he said.

“An artist should be able to explain why their works are important and tell the stories behind them. The stronger the story is, the bigger the effect,” he added.

At the exhibition “Aggregation 2007-2011” which opens June 1, art aficionados will find around 40 of the artist’s latest works which are more generous in their use of colors.

“The red color symbolizes my confidence in me and my people. The blue means hope. I also tried using some emerald colors for my latest one, to offer something to help viewers relax,” said Chun.

Starting with filling the public space allocated for him at the Hong Kong Art Fair which starts this week, his schedule is already packed for the next few years — exhibitions at overseas art museums such as The Knoxville Museum of Art in Tennessee in the U.S., Today Art Museum in Beijing, China, to mention just a few of his engagements.

Chun seems very excited about it all.

“I am a marathoner. I just made a turn. Now it seems that my art is getting in place and that I finally know how to do art. I am going to go slow and steady,” said Chun.