



K O H  
S A N G  
W O O

**WILD  
IN  
BLUE**

高尚佑

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文章 ESSAY

## Koh Sangwoo: The Camera Eye/I

Raul Zamudio

Koh Sang Woo's photographic oeuvre to date spans an array of genres including the still-life, mise-en-scenes of nudes, figures in other worldly landscapes, works that can be characterized as self-portraits, abstraction compositions, and others that are text-based in orientation, and a mixture of these. Examples of this expansive corpus have been brought together in the exhibition titled *Wild In Blue* and the attendant works are formally characterized by Koh's signature aesthetic style. In one sense, Koh's artistry and technique allude to an earlier photographic history and although the work may occasionally evoke the past, it is also very much of the moment.

The contemporaneity of Koh's photographic practice resides both in form and content. As per the former, this is evinced in Koh's modus operandi in composing his pictures via a laborious process entailing painting his figures or arranging his compositions in very detailed and precise combinations and then photographing them and printing the negative in color reversals. Lush, saturated and palpably chromatic, the dichotomy of transforming the negative into the positive print is not only a formal strategy as it also contains a conceptual approach to the photograph's subject matter.

In the self-portraits presented in *Wild In Blue*, for example, we encounter Koh in a pose with eyes shut conveying a heightened degree of interiority in which pictorial and thematic differentiation resides in each of the figure's exterior surface. Thus, in *Resistance* (2017) the artist has closed his eyes and looks within while elements of the U.S. flag are painted over his visage. This image is somewhat iconic and its lineage resides with anti-war demonstrators and protestors who depicted similar elements over their faces to draw attention to political and social issues. At the same time, however, this highly recognizable American signifier can be seen in seemingly more celebratory contexts such as the United States' Independence Day on the Fourth of July. In this festive date marking the founding of the United States it's not uncommon for patriotism to be fervently expressed by individuals who may wear clothes with the American flag or even paint their faces similarly to *Resistance*. But Koh expands on these to include aspects of his own biography. As a Korean-born artist who has made the U.S. and specifically New York City his home for some time, navigating multi-cultural life within urbanity and other areas outside of New York City where the population is more homogeneous, is embodied in his photograph. Other works are no less evocative of the artist's ability to capture a sense of otherness that is ubiquitous in many countries outside the United States. In *Introvert* (2016), the artist presents himself in a similar posture with his attention inward; but here Koh has written the words 'Don't Fuck With My Feelings' over his face. Whereas in *Resistance* there is a palpable sense of empathy with the persona in the photograph, in *Introvert* the power of the work seems to go outward, which is somewhat in tension with the work's title. On the one hand, Koh seems to be in a pensive if not meditative state contemplating his inner life. On the other hand, the very straight forward narrative is addressed without apology to the viewer. Consequently, there is an aggression in the work that captures a sentiment that many of us feel in the face of a confrontational society regardless whether the context of that antagonism may be topical, political, cultural, or personal. In contrast to these is *Made in Beijing* (2017). Unlike the previous two photographs, which to a lesser or greater degree are provocative yet buoyed by a marked emotionality, *Made in Beijing* displays a vulnerability that creates a sense of assertion and is poetically melancholic. Koh's humanization of historical differences between Korea and China are cast in a kind of empowered surrender. In other words, victory is in acknowledging the humanity of the other, whether this be prejudices held by some Chinese towards Koreans, or whether it is by a few Koreans about the Chinese. In these three works one can see a confident artistry and the broad scope of subject matter the artist is capable of conceiving and executing. However, though

these self-portraits as well as others in Koh's oeuvre to date may seem outwardly innocuous, they subliminally embody visual verve coupled with a brutal honesty. They may seem highly personal and originating from experience, but they have an ability to reveal to us much about the world around us. Similar to these are other works in *Wild In Blue* that seem to have been made in series because of their somewhat unified subject matter, and what is being referred to are photographs of women in which some were made almost ten years apart.

One of Koh's earliest photographs consist of a voluptuous nude woman that has become akin to a recognizable motif in the artist's corpus. Composed in various contexts including set within a kind of Garden of Eden backdrop replete with dragonflies, butterflies, and an assortment of flora and fauna as well as a skull, for *Wild In Blue* the artist has presented two works that seem to incorporate the same model: *Proposed Lady* (2007) and *In Blossom II* (2012). Both works are startling because of the intensity of the highly saturated palette; the former with a deep black background in which stands a woman in a blue body topped with cascading gold hair and she holds a large bouquet of red roses. Looking downward and self-conscious and thus conveying a degree of shyness, the woman in *Propose Lady* also happens to be nude, reminding us with aplomb about the cultural construction of beauty. Not unrelated to *Proposed Lady* is *In Blossom II*. Whereas *Proposed Lady* somewhat alludes to straightforward portraiture with a few nuanced elements to create a narrative element, *In Blossoms II* is rife with multiple meanings. The bouquet of roses has now turned into nocturnal flora as a woman dreams her future into existence. *Mother* (2016), on the other hand, is powerful too as a rendition of a kind of feminine archetype. Here, though, the mother holds in her arms a baby, and this composition is situated in the art history of mother/infant depictions often the register of the religious. Is Koh consequently offering his own interpretation of Virgin and Christ child, or possibly something more humanist and outside of organized religion but nonetheless evoking the sacred? Regardless of the permutations the work embodies in encompassing those themes, there is a nurturing quality in the positivity that *Mother* evokes. Yet there is also a kind of indecipherable specter that haunts this composition. Although the color combinations in *Mother* are energized and invigorated, there is still something subliminally unnerving in the blueish hue of the figures. Blue has an interesting history in the context of both Western and non-Western art including Picasso's Blue Period that lasted between 1901 and 1904. The triggering of this important artistic milestone for Picasso was the suicide of his close friend Carlos Casagemas. In contrast to this was Yves Klein and his usage of blue, or what he trademarked as Klein Blue. Within this pedigree of this specific color one should include *Proposed Lady*, *In Blossom II* and *Mother* as well as many other works that Koh creates where figures are dominated by the color blue.

Koh Sang Woo is an artist of his time in his ability to present to us what we often overlook. Reminding us again and again through an exquisite body of work that he not only wields a camera to make his art, but that his inner self is a recorder too, by which the world is filtered through a kind of visionary camera eye/I to capture myriad things including the wild in blue.

Raul Zamudio is a New York-based independent curator, art critic, art historian and educator.



## Wild In Blue: Something Unseen

Yuree Jang, Asian Art Works Director

Many people have fantasies and curiosity about what is on the other side of the visible, that is, about the invisible. It is the curiosity about what is beyond the horizon, about what kind of world unfolds itself behind the closed door. Through the representation of the blue world on the other side of our visible world, the work of Koh Sang Woo leads us to the 'unseen' world we have not seen before.

Human figures in Koh Sang Woo's works are blue. We are used to saying of 'skin color'. Yet those figures of blue skin mingle well with other objects in the works to create cinema-like, dreamy scenes. Koh is an artist who 'reverses' colors. In other words, various colors including the blue in the photographs are produced by reversing them in the printing process. The blue skin and the red, yellow, and purple colors contrast with each other intensely in his works to make the blue color more intense and surreal. For us, who are only accustomed to the outward appearance seen through our eyes or through the screen, the artist shows images of reversed colors to drive us to look for something under the surface, something behind the appearance.

The works of Koh Sang Woo contain a variety of feminine sentiments and beauty. The women in his works have a subtle smile with their eyes half closed, as if they are dreaming. Butterflies and flowers surrounding them maximize love, dream, and aspiration. The woman, surrounded by flowers holding her hands together and shyly putting them close to her face with her eyes closed, seems to express the ecstasy of falling in love. The work depicting a woman, who shyly holds a bunch of red roses turning her hair backward, transpires the trembling and fluttering of love that has just begun, which makes the audience thrilled in spite of themselves. Meanwhile, in the image of the mother embracing the child, we feel the love and responsibility of the mother for her child. The artist explores the intrinsic story of the model in each of his work and transfers it again to his works to tell the audience the story and share the genuine feelings.

Koh Sang Woo's *Boundaries of Senses* series consists of self-portraits, in which he expressed his emotions in writing. Over the past few years, self-photographs have been a means for people from all walks of life to express themselves and reveal their individuality. By dividing his emotions into different areas and putting them in writing in his self-portrait series, Koh expresses the invisible emotions to share with the audience so that they can have the experience of becoming one with the artist. With their reversed colors, *Better Man* and *Walk With Me* are inside-out expressions of the inner state and values of the artist lying deep in his heart. Koh did a double major in photography and performance art at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Perhaps this background explains why he carries out performance art in which he paints colors, writes texts on his face and poses for his self-portraits, and at the same time captures the moments with his photos, allowing him to recreate his self-portrait into a composite medium of art.

At first sight, the intensity of Koh Sang Woo's blue color catches the spectator's eyes and stimulates curiosity. The closer we look into the work, however, the more we feel the blue is neither intense nor cold. Rather, it comes to us as a magically warm color that takes us to the inner stories we have not seen yet.

## 蓝色中的狂野：未见的世界

张幽丽, Asian Art Works Director

通常人们对目所能及事物的内在本身，即目所不能及的事物抱有幻想与好奇。地平线的另一端是什么样子？那扇紧闭的门后面会是怎样的存在？高尚佑的作品通过我们目所不能及的内在蓝色世界，将我们带入另一个未曾见过的领域。

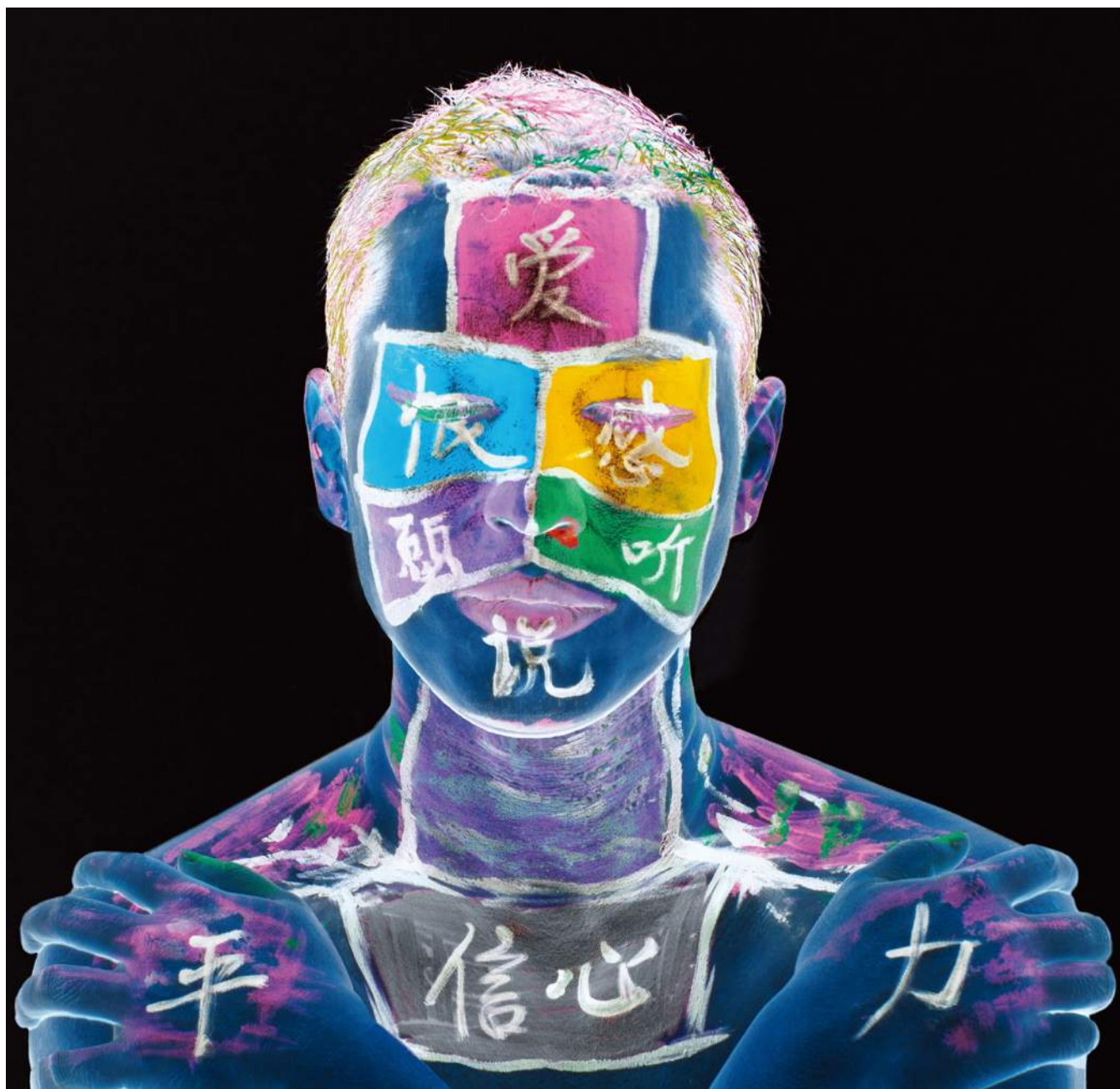
在高尚佑的作品中，人体是蓝色的。相比之下，我们常说的“皮肤色”都略逊一筹。有着蓝色皮肤的人与其它道具融合在一起，打造出如同电影或是梦境般的情景。高尚佑是一名擅长对色彩进行“反转”的艺术家。在他的作品中，包括蓝色在内的各种色彩，都是在显影过程中利用颜色的反转而形成的。作品中蓝色的肌肤与红、黄、紫形成鲜明的对比，使蓝色显得更加强烈，带给人们一种超越现实之感。而对于习惯通过肉眼或者画面所看到的表面现象来认知事物的我们，在艺术家利用色彩反转技巧而创作的作品中，能够看到与表面相反的另一面，并探知其内部世界。

高尚佑的作品中蕴含了女性的各种情感与美。作品中的女人紧闭双眼，面带淡淡的微笑，好像沉睡在梦中。女人周围所环绕飞舞的蝴蝶和漫天的花朵，将梦想和爱情以及心中的热情表现得淋漓尽致。沉醉在花海里，交错的双手羞涩的贴近脸旁，双眼紧闭所呈现出的是女人坠入爱河后陶醉的神情。手中娇羞地捧着玫瑰花束，用手向后捋动发丝所呈现的是对即将开始的爱情的憧憬与悸动，让站在作品前的观众也不禁为之动容。在怀抱婴儿的母亲这一作品中，使人深切地感受到母亲对孩子的爱和责任。作者对其作品中的每一个人物形象和故事都进行了探知分析，并将其转译到创作中来，通过作品给读者带来叙事和真情流露之感。

高尚佑在其《Boundaries of Senses》自画像系列作品中，将艺术家自身体会到的情感充分地表现出来。近年来，自拍不仅深受年轻一代所喜爱，而且逐渐成为不同年龄层展现自我、表达个性的途径。高尚佑在自画像中将自己的感受用文字表现，与读者们分享自己的情感，使观赏作品的所有观众拥有一种身临其境、并与艺术家融为一体的感受。《Better Man》和《Walk with Me》通过色彩反转，将艺术家内心深处的心理状态和价值观充分体现出来。高尚佑在芝加哥艺术学院取得了摄影和表演艺术专业双学位。这样的学习经历，让艺术家成为在自己脸上涂色、写字、摆造型等表演的主体。同时，他还用相机捕捉了这些瞬间，将他本人的自画像重塑为一种复合艺术媒介。

高尚佑作品中强烈的蓝色，能够瞬间抓住观众们的视线，激发人们的好奇心。随着观众慢慢地深入到作品之中，蓝色也变得不那么强烈和冰冷。它犹如魔法一般变成一股温暖色调，引领我们进入未曾见过的内在世界。

作品 ARTWORKS



**Walk With Me**  
Archival Digital Print  
103 x 103 cm, 2017





**Introvert**  
Archival Digital Print  
103 x 103 cm, 2017



**Resistance**  
Archival Digital Print  
103 x 103 cm, 2017





**Tears**  
Archival Digital Print  
113 x 81 cm, 2016





**Proposed Lady**

Archival Digital Print  
156 x 120 cm, 2007





**Mother**  
Archival Digital Print  
113 x 87 cm, 2016



**Thorns 2**  
Archival Digital Print  
103 x 103 cm, 2017







**In Blossom II**  
Archival Digital Print  
97 x 113 cm, 2012





**Girl**  
Archival Digital Print  
127 x 95 cm, 2014





**Ether**  
Archival Digital Print  
127 x 95.5 cm, 2014





**Woman in Field**  
Archival Digital Print  
97 x 131 cm, 2014



**Monologue**  
Archival Digital Print  
97 x 131 cm 2015





**Falling Sky**  
Archival Digital Print  
127 x 93 cm, 2017





**My Choice III**  
Archival Digital Print  
127 x 97 cm, 2017



**My Choice II**  
Archival Digital Print  
127 x 98 cm, 2016





艺术家简历 BIOGRAPHY

# 高尚佑 KOH SANG WOO

## EDUCATION

- 2001 School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Major in Photography & Performance Art, USA
- 2000 New York Studio Program, Independent Colleges of Art and Design, New York, USA

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 *Wild In Blue*, Asian Art Works, Beijing, China
- 2016 Koh Sang Woo Solo, Wanrooij Gallery, Amsterdam, Nederland
- 2014 Koh Sang Woo Solo, Wanrooij Gallery, Amsterdam, Nederland  
Koh Sang Woo Solo, James Freeman Gallery, London, England
- 2013 *I am the most beautiful girl*, Asian Art Works, Busan, Korea  
Koh Sang Woo Solo, Wanrooij Gallery, Amsterdam, Netherland  
Koh Sang Woo Solo, Taipei Expo Dome, Taiwan
- 2012 *Join me there*, ZAHA Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea  
Koh Sang Woo, Wanrooij Gallery, Amsterdam, Nederland  
Koh Sang Woo Solo, The Cat Street Gallery, Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong
- 2011 *The Burning Flowers*, The Cat Street Gallery, Hong Kong  
*Pretty Powerful*, Gallery Sun Contemporary, Seoul, Korea
- 2010 *True Stories*, James Freeman Gallery, London, UK
- 2009 Koh Sang Woo Solo, Gallery Sun Contemporary, Seoul, Korea
- 2008 *I Am Beautiful*, 2x13 Gallery, New York, USA
- 2007 *I Love You*, 2x13 Gallery, New York, USA
- 2003 Koh Sang Woo Solo Project, CIGE Art Fair, World Trade Center, China
- 2001 Insa Art Space, Korean Culture & Arts Foundation, Seoul, Korea

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS & ART FAIRS

- 2017 *Selfie*, Savina Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea  
Art New York, Wanrooij Gallery, Miami, USA
- 2016 Art Busan, Asian Art Works, Busan, Korea  
Daegu Photo Biennale, Main Exhibition, Daegu, Korea  
Art Miami, Wangrooij Gallery, Maimi, USA
- 2015 Art New York, Wanrooij Gallery, Amsterdam, Netherland  
*Some Love*, Shinsegye Gallery, Seoul, Korea  
*Woman Empowerment*, Waterfall Gallery, Korea
- 2014 *Double Mirror*, American University Museum, Washington D.C., USA  
*Korean Pop*, The Cat Street Gallery, Hong Kong
- 2013 *Sometimes Beautiful*, Castellani Art Museum, New York, USA  
*REALISM*, Wanrooij Gallery, Amsterdam, Netherland  
*The Fifth Seasons*, Asian Art Works, Beijing, China  
*Love Actually*, Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea
- 2012 *New Convergence*, Yangpyung Museum of Art, Yangpyung, Korea  
Yeosu International Art Festival, Yeosu Art Center, Yeosu, Korea
- 2011 *Art of Party*, Lancaster Museum of Art, Pennsylvania, USA  
*From Desire to Sublime*, HOMA Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea  
*The Signal 8*, Salon Exhibition, The Cat Street Gallery, Hong Kong  
Art Basel Hong Kong, The Cat Street Gallery, Hong Kong

## AWARD

- 2009 AHL Asian Art Award, Prize Winner, AHL Foundation, New York, USA

## PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

National Museum of Contemporary Korea, Seoul, Korea  
Savina Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea  
Korea University Museum, Korea  
Hongik University Museum of Art, Korea

Koh Sangwoo studied performance and photography at School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Koh creates vivid images of human figures with an approach that adopts painting, performance, documentation and traditional photographic techniques. He used to lead performance group called ‘Performance Society’ during his college years. He shoot self-photographs that transformed himself as an Asian guy into Maria and Eve, who are representative women figures in western history. He reversed the film in the darkroom using the reversed color and light, and discovered the optical principle of image transfer. Koh’s work is characterized by the development of a blue tone photograph that captures his subjects using negative film, expressing the themes like desire of women, romance and racial or social problems.

高尚佑在芝加哥艺术学院研修了表演和摄影专业课程。通过绘画、表演、文献、传统摄影技术等手段，他创作了丰富而生动的人物形象。大学期间，他主持过名叫“表演协会”的表演团体。在所拍摄的自画像作品中，他由一个亚裔男人摇身一变成了西方历史上代表性的女性形象——玛丽亚和夏娃。他使用反转的色彩和光线在暗室里制作负片，并发现了图像转化的光学规律。高尚佑的作品具有蓝调影像的特点——他使用负片来捕捉灵感，表达了诸如女性的渴望、爱情、种族或社会问题等主题。

# 高尚佑

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