

10-26-2009 16:54

+ - PRINT

## Light, Hope Fill Su Kwak's Paintings



U.S.-based artist Su Kwak stands beside one of her works that incorporate light and time on exhibit at the Sun Gallery, Insadong, Thursday.

/ Korea Times Photo by Cathy Rose A. Garcia

By Cathy Rose A. Garcia  
Staff Reporter

Light has always fascinated U.S.-based artist Su Kwak. Her canvases have always been filled with sparkling yellows and rich blues that seem to exude a feeling of hope.

And hope is exactly what Kwak wants people to feel whenever they see her artwork.

“I felt I wanted to do something that makes other people feel good and feel hope and peace, instead of trying to achieve fame,” she told The Korea Times at Sun Gallery, Insadong, Thursday.

Kwak expanded her art to include not just light, but also the element of time. Her current exhibition at Sun Gallery features new works that express the interwoven nature of the two elements.

“I’ve been working on the time element for only about a year or two. When I work with light, I think of day and morning, while evening is darkness — there’s no light ... I realized time and light are closely related,” she said.

“Eternity” features three panels, each depicting the past, present and future of the world through light. “There’s the beginning of creation. The present is filled with slashes, symbolizing how in order to give light, you have to go through difficulties and sufferings. Then, the future is the world of light,” Kwak said.

Her works are filled with bright colors and lightness, but upon closer scrutiny, you'll find layers of Korean Bible pages. She tears off the pages, places them on the canvas, and covers them with paint.

“By coincidence, there are few words showing, and people have fun trying to read it. It's like a jigsaw puzzle,” she said.

Born in Busan, Kwak grew up Catholic and converted to Judaism when she married her husband in the U.S. Now she's a Catholic again. Although religious by nature, Kwak does not see ripping out the Bible's pages and using them in her artwork as a sign of disrespect.

“The only thing I thought is the Bible is like the riddle of life. It's a book of riddles. You can read it and read it but you don't always get the meaning. I thought it was the most important thing to attach it (on the canvas). ... For me, the spirit of the bible is more important than just having the physical book,” she said.

When she was 23, Kwak moved to the United States to study at the University of St. Thomas, Houston, and later pursued graduate studies in fine art at the University of Chicago.

She recalled having difficulties as a young Korean woman living alone in the U.S., dealing with a different language and culture. But with the help of many people, she overcame these challenges.

“Being an artist and going through these hardships, it helps you realize what's most important in life, and that's how I started with light,” she said.

Perhaps it's because of these experiences that Kwak has always managed to convey a spirit of hope in her paintings.

Kwak, who currently lives in Washington, D.C., has held several solo exhibitions at the June Kelly Gallery in New York, Sun Art Center and Jean Art Center in Seoul. In 2000, she received a Korean government award for advancing culture overseas.

Her exhibition at Sun Gallery runs through Nov. 6. Visit [www.sungallery.co.kr](http://www.sungallery.co.kr).

[cathy@koreatimes.co.kr](mailto:cathy@koreatimes.co.kr)