

LEE Bae

The Brooklyn Rail,
Lee Bae: Between
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Lee Bae: *Between*

<https://brooklynrail.org/2024/10/artseen/lee-bae-between/>



Lee Bae, *Brushstroke*, 2024. Charcoal ink on paper, 102 x 709 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin. Photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli.

Lee Bae, a remarkable Korean sculptor, also makes dramatic paintings on paper, working with a charcoal ink, resulting in a thick, viscous substance. In his current show, *Between*, at Perrotin, a large work on paper hangs at the center of the gallery's Lower East Side space. Composed of three large sheets suspended between columns in the gallery, *Brushstroke* (2024) forms a U-shaped configuration, each leaf presenting a series of squarish forms, sometimes filled with the charcoal ink and sometimes not. As the quadrilaterals follow one another along the top of the three large paper sheets, they emanate different densities and thicknesses of black pigment. It is a marvelous piece of extended abstraction, transcending traditional notions of both Western and Asian art.

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For seventy-year old, Korean-born Lee Bae, who now splits his time between Seoul and Paris, the tones and scaffolding of his art lean toward a universal function, in which the history of abstraction has become a shared idiom. The artist's visual language does not obviously drift toward one culture or another, allowing audiences to read the individuality of his formal elements without shouldering the burden of a formalism he *must* belong to.



Installation view: Lee Bae: *Between*, Perrotin, New York, 2024. Courtesy the artist and Perrotin. Photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli.

His minimalist tendencies are pronounced in this show. Lee Bae's sculptures, made of bronze, look very closely like the original wooden posts from which they were cast. The resulting sculptures, complete with the partial cracks one finds in wood, look like deeply primitive versions of a very limited art vocabulary. Yet their energies make it clear that the artist is interested in principles of contemporary art: the aggressive element of abstraction; the notion of multiples versus a single, unique object; and the choice of a monochromatic presentation of surface.

Lee Bae's predilection for monochrome allows for the form to be showcased above all else. In the sculpture *Brushstroke* (2024) a group of several bronze posts stand upright, seeming to support one another. The end faces of these posts, eerily reminiscent of cut wood, bear the cracks of this

original material—a meticulous copy of the first version, the actual wood itself. The artist seems most interested in relations between early and late discoveries of the original, which would call the linearity of creation into question, but that matters little in light of the idea of creativity itself being influenced, even changed, by the idea of initial progress, to be understood as an insight into how thinking works.



Lee Bae, *Brushstroke*, 2024. Bronze, 112 x 65 x 79 inches. Courtesy the artist and Perrotin. Photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli.

Another sculpture, also titled *Brushstroke* (2024) is composed of a single post leaning against a wall at a modest angle. In the sculpture, the artist cleverly generates complexities from simple relationships between line, weight, and correspondences in volume. The gestalt of this particular post is particularly interesting in that the work twists slightly near its center, an understated but actually important gesture that invests the overall form with a quiet intricacy, taking the otherwise straightforward post into a place of genuine innovation.



Lee Bae, Brushstroke, 2024. Bronze, 150 x 24 x 20 inches. Courtesy the artist and Perrotin. Photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli.

While Lee Bae's remarkable sculptural intelligence is based on subtleties like these, what is most important is his use of minimal form and tonality to generate statements that border on monumentality. This is an interesting ploy, in the sense that less becomes quite more than we would have expected. Size is often associated with achievement and ambition, but by working large rather than monumentally, Lee Bae envisions dimensions as something to work with, not something to apotheosize, yielding wonderful results.