

Garwood Jacqueline, 'Song Hyun-sook'. [www.hk-magazine.com](http://www.hk-magazine.com), 10 July 2012.

## Song Hyun-sook

Korean-born, Germany-based painter Song Hyun-sook creates minimalist yet evocative works using tempera—a paint made of eggs and pigment. She tells Jacqueline Garwood about the evolution of her technique, her artistic goals and why she counts her brush strokes.



**HK: What do you think your works' distinguishing features are?**

**SH:** It's hard for me to say. I don't think about these things when I'm doing my art. It's more for the viewers to say than myself. But what might be one of the differences is that I am very focused on the process of drawing itself, down to the single brush stroke. [When I first started painting] I tried to deliver certain content and tell a certain story. But it came out very complicated and loaded. Then I came to a point and realized that the simpler I make a painting, the stronger the statement. If you compare it with a poem, it would be like a haiku, where you have very short sentences and statements but they make the content stronger.

**HK: What is your work process like?**

**SH:** Firstly, when I prepare myself and try to draw a painting, I do sketches on paper and set up the composition to see how I'll approach the work. When I paint on canvas, the canvas lies on the ground. I stand above the painting. [The canvas] still has to be wet when I paint, and the whole thing happens in one stroke. Every brush stroke is connected. In that moment, all the power is forced to get out. It's not a process where I start and stop. I have to do it in the moment, so I can't pause. I have to prepare myself to do that. It distinguishes [my work] from classic Western art, where you can paint and stop or pause and step back; brush it out or try it again on the same canvas. That doesn't happen with me. If it doesn't work out, I have to throw the painting away and start all over again with a new canvas. If I am uncertain or flustered, you can see it in the brush strokes... it stops. You can see every emotion in the strokes. It doesn't mean that it's bad. I have to capture the emotion in one moment.

**HK: What is the importance of counting your brush strokes?**

**SH:** Numbers can contain a certain meaning as well. For example, your birthday can say something about your personality. And if you count brush strokes, you follow a certain chronology. If you start from one and end at 10, you follow a direction. That takes you through the process; you are actually seeing the painting happening in front of you. It's the same thing with calligraphy. You have an order to follow when you draw a character. You can say there are 20 strokes, and then you see the character happening from beginning till end.

**HK: Are there any common reactions to your paintings?**

**SH:** It really depends on the viewer and the circumstance. The reaction I often get is that the paintings evoke old or lost memories. I think nostalgia is more of an Asian reaction to my paintings. Maybe something of Korean society has been lost during industrialization. The reaction in the west is totally different—people say my work gives a certain meditative effect; it calms you down and helps you relax.

**HK: Do you have any goals?**

**SH:** I don't seek to accomplish anything. I think more about painting as a science to do research about painting itself; I see myself as a researcher of painting. It takes a very high amount of discipline for me to do that. My daily life is built on that, so I have a very structured life of eight to nine hours of work per day, six days per week. Sometimes I take my time. For instance, from 2009 to 2010, I didn't do any exhibitions.

**HK: What advice would you give to aspiring artists?**

**SH:** The most important thing for me is to improve your ability to see art and watch art. There's a Korean saying, "You raise your eye that can see," and that's essential for doing art. It takes a long time to do so. An artist has to train that. That's the first thing. Secondly, you have to find your own way of expression, then stick to it and develop it over a long time. That's the hardest challenge because it's so easy to go off track. To distinguish yourself in a very unique way takes a long time and a lot of effort. When I was a student, I tried different things like pottery and film, but slowly and gradually I found my path to painting.