

## **Luxembourg Wort, December 2018**

The artist grew up in a black and white world before discovering the profusion of colors  
by Marc Thill

He has a smiling look, he resides in joy, and his work draws from this source. It makes the intense lights of his paintings vibrate gently and discreetly. Kim En Joong, an artist of Korean origin, is part of a long tradition of Western and Eastern painting with which he continues to dialogue. But this Dominican priest, 78 years old, is also inspired by literature. In recent years he has been influenced by the poetic breath of academic François Cheng to transpose his work into the world of colors. Kim En Joong OP currently presents a selection of his works in tribute to the Belgian Cardinal Godfried Danneels at the Chapel of Christ-King in Luxembourg.

**Father Kim En Joong, are these gray days of the northern hemisphere December more difficult for an artist who is often called the ‘artist of the light’?**

Not at all. If you keep the sun in your heart, everything is fine. So even the night can become light. My greatest joy is to get up at one in the morning, in the middle of the night, to meditate. At that moment, the colors appear, it is the moment where I can remain silently in front of the Creator of the Sky and the Earth.

**You are an artist and a Dominican priest. Your Order is the Order of the Preachers. Can we say that you are preaching through art? Is this your way of sharing the divine word?**

That is too pretentious. To say that I preach through art, it could be badly received. I cultivate a gift that I received from above. What is very encouraging for me is that the more time passes, the more I am inspired. I thank the Holy Spirit for that. And I would be pleased to have the Holy Spirit say to me: “I am very glad that you have had confidence in me, I have inspired you all the time, I am inexhaustible.” Today, I say to the Holy Spirit: “Please, do it, I am only an instrument, it is always You who hold my hand.”

**Is art divine?**

I would not say that art is divine, but that art is a way of expressing the reflection of the creation of beauty. “Art will save the world,” said Dostoevsky. I am more and more convinced of this. There are so many divisions in the world, struggles, demagoguery and superficial things - but the depth of the human soul is much more than that.

**What do you feel when the light floods one of your stained-glass windows, or if it illuminates one of your works?**

For me, it's always a great mystery. I discovered the beauty of stained-glass first in books, and I asked myself: "Will I ever have an opportunity to do that?" It is Providence that guided me. Today, I do it.

**Coming from Korea, where you were a student of Seoul Fine Arts, what has marked you in the West?**

I was interested in color. On the other hand, my artistic civilization was that of black and white, whereas in the West there had always been a profusion of colors. I was delighted to come from a black and white world and to be able to get into color.

**Your father, a calligrapher, worked mostly in black and white. You too have first studied traditional calligraphy. What place does your father take in your life?**

Your question makes me happy, but it also makes me a little sad. My father would have been a great professional calligrapher, but because of the Japanese occupation, his talent was lost. Professional calligraphers envied his talent, he was a craftsman who far surpassed other pretentious artists.

**You lived through the Second World War, the Japanese occupation, the famine, you experienced privations. Have these difficult moments influenced your work?**

Surely. To appreciate the light, it is necessary to go beyond the darkness. My country was released when I was five years old. Afterwards, there was the war between North and South. Until I was 17, I did not know what color was. I did not know anything about it. Already at school, only the competition counted. Our teachers told us, "Your neighbor is your enemy, you will have to do better than them".

**South Korea has had a difficult history. Today, it is a dynamic country. What is your analysis of this meteoric rise of modern Korea?**

Let me tell you that I, like you probably, hardly know the Korea of today. The only thing I notice is that my country has lost its inner richness by becoming too materialistic - and so have other countries too. The closeness

of the two Koreas is a miracle, but we will have to wait to see things more clearly. It was a bit unexpected, I'm very happy, and I really wish that one day the two Koreas would be united.

**Living since 1974 in France, do you feel today more French than Korean?**

Korea, Luxembourg, France - it does not matter. For me, all this is the house of God ...

**... that is the Dominican priest speaking. So tell us, what brought you to Catholicism after a traditional Taoist education?**

Following my military service, a Protestant school invited me as a professor of art, compelling me not to smoke or drink, and to convert to Protestantism. To not smoke or drink did not cause me any problems. But I did not want to adopt a religion to have a job. Soon after, a Catholic seminary invited me as a teacher. This is where I discovered Catholicism. It was not the priests who inspired me, but my pupils, the seminarians. I am of the opinion that the priesthood is there to serve, and not to teach others. That is why I have an admiration for the Belgian Cardinal Godfried Danneels. He gives me the ideal image of the good pastor. He does not dominate, he shines. My works in Luxemburg are exhibited in tribute to Cardinal Danneels.

**Tell us how you met the Archbishop Emeritus of Brussels-Mechelen.**

I met him in the year 2000, while I was exhibiting in the Sainte Gudule Cathedral in Brussels. One day, the Cardinal visited the exhibition and was very interested in my work. I learned that he was not only a prominent clergyman, but also a poet and musician. Since then, we have worked regularly together, we have developed an artistic and literary collaboration. He encourages me a lot.

**For ten years, you have also maintained a fruitful and bright dialogue with the poet François Cheng. His verses and paintings gave birth to three books. Did it take France itself for these projects between a Chinese and a Korean to emerge?**

When I met François Cheng for the first time, he told me: "We are so well received here, we have to give back a little of what France has given us." François Cheng's past is incomparably more painful than mine. That's why he is currently suffering physically. The first book I did with him was *The real light comes from the real night*. In fact, it's the summary of his life.

**Your journeys brought you to many countries, also to Luxembourg. What is the link you have with the Grand Duchy?**

Luxembourg was one of the first countries to welcome, recognize and appreciate my works. For that, I must particularly thank someone: Mr. Edouard Kutter. It was he who had exhibited my work several times in his art gallery. He was a real gallery owner who knew the art world very well. I owe him a lot.

*Kim En Joong*, exhibition of canvases, ceramics, stained glass and chasubles, in the chapel of Christ-Roi, 25 avenue Gaston Diderich, until December 22, then January 11 to February 2, every Friday from 2 pm to 5 pm and Saturday from 11 am to 1 pm and 2 pm to 5 pm.

*Kim En Joong between East and West*. A study day in the presence of the artist on December 10 at the Luxembourg School of Religion & Society, [www.lsr.lu](http://www.lsr.lu)

«Bush âme». Oeuvre inspirée du poème de François Cheng en hommage au cardinal Godfried Danneels.

