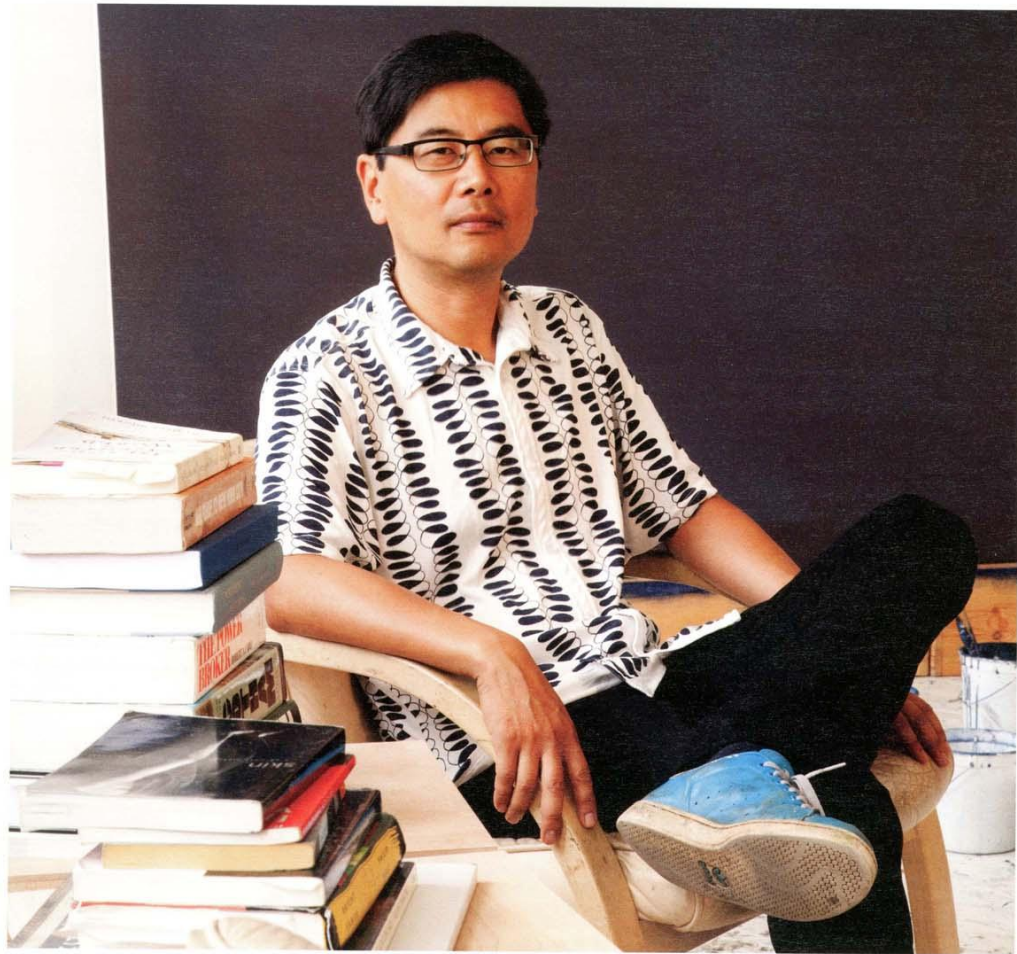


Kunitz, Daniel, "Byron Kim," *Modern Painters*, November 2011

STUDIO CHECK



## Byron Kim

BY DANIEL KUNITZ PHOTOGRAPHS BY SARAH TRIGG

ALTHOUGH A PAINTER, Byron Kim has a not-undeserved reputation as a Conceptualist. This is due both to his cerebral approach to his work and to its appearance. In the ongoing *Synecdoche*, for instance, he paints a grid of skin colors, and for the past 10 years he has painted the sky weekly. In all these cases the pieces seem to be abstractions when in fact they are quite literal representations. The dual nature of his efforts reflects his influences: the Minimal-

ism and Conceptualism of the '70s as well as midcentury New York School painting. His current series, he says, consists of "paintings from my head of the night sky in the city. Not that really romantic sky with very deep space and lots of stars, but that ceiling that is mostly reflected light from pollution."

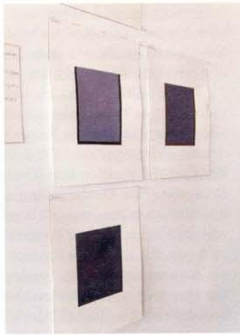
Born in La Jolla, California, in 1961, Kim now works in Brooklyn. At first glance the space seems spare to the point of austerity. White light from a bank of windows

picks out a stack of paintings, a worktable, a few piles of books, a small desk. Yet like its occupant, the studio on closer inspection reveals both richness and humor—a celadon pot given to Kim by his family, an old Van Gogh reproduction, and, over the door, a pair of clocks, one bearing an image of Kurt Cobain, the other of Curious George.

"Byron Kim: New Works" will be on view at James Cohan Gallery in New York from November 3 through December 19.

## STUDIES

"These are studies for larger paintings. Some of them have some gouache in them, but they're mostly the acrylic that I'm using to make the bigger paintings. I don't always work from little things and then big—sometimes the little thing is the finished thing. And I don't privilege any particular painting medium, although I seem to finally have decided that I strongly privilege painting itself."



## CELADON POT

"I'm Korean-American. I think probably the proudest moment of Korean cultural production is these 12th-century pots, with their celadon glazes. This is a real Korean celadon—I based one painting in a series of about a dozen on its color. My family handed it down to me. It's from the 1100s, and while I was painting one day I dropped it. It was in mint condition. My friend mended it with Crazy Glue, but you can see the join."



## MATH EXERCISES

"I've been studying precalculus. All the art stuff drives me nuts sometimes. In a weird way, when it's going well it makes me feel lost—I hate to talk about it this way—in kind of a spiritual way. It fills me with doubt. I feel happy when I'm doing math because there isn't any doubt; you get an answer. Math and science is what I was good at. I did a couple of years of calculus in high school. With art I pursued what was most challenging and what I wasn't good at."



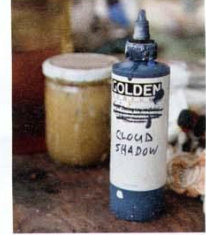
## POSTCARDS

"I have a reputation as a Conceptual artist somehow. When you go to the studio of real painters, there is always stuff on their wall, and sometimes on their palette—postcards that they got in Italy. So this table is my version: the Rothko Chapel, Lucy and Desi, Robert Johnson, this great picture of Lauren Bacall that Roddy McDowall took, Cindy Sherman, Lead Belly, and Josef Albers. But the medium seeps under the glass. It's done a really funny number on the Albers."



## SUNDAY PAINTINGS

"I've made a painting of the sky during the day every week since January of 2001, preferably on Sunday; at the latest it's Thursday. I call them Sunday paintings. It's very rare that I'll miss a week—fewer than 10 times in 10 years. I try to do them wherever I am; they're small enough to fit into a carry-on bag. Also, I'll add a little note, or sometimes I'll write on the back of the painting, just a few lines about what's going on. They're diaristic."



## CLOUD SHADOW

"For years, because I was painting the sky during the day, I would use blue and white paint. With cerulean blue and white, you mix them together and you get something close to the general color of the sky. But underneath the clouds there's a gray, and I would always have to mix that. They sell gray paint, but it isn't always right; I would always have to mix other colors into it. So I have this one particular bottle of cloud shadow."