

Artist Statement

After graduating from an art college in 1965, I have been searching for ways to understand and realize the contemporary arts, and starting 1970, I formed a group with my fellow artists, studying and continuing exhibitions, and with the understanding that the fine arts in Korea should take the form befitting the status of the current times and that it requires urgent changes first, I started to involve in Daegu Contemporary Art Festival, a country-wide fine arts movement, in 1974. The reason why I selected Daegu was, first it is my hometown, but most importantly, it was the hub of contemporary arts in Korea back then. The DCAF was an arena for experimental art exhibitions and seminars to pursue new forms and frameworks that would lead Korean artists to realize in the future to interact with art of the world. With positive response and support of fellow artists, a country-wide art movements in mid and late 1970's, including Seoul Temporary Art Festival, Busan Contemporary Art Festival, Gwangju Contemporary Art Festival, and Jeonbuk Contemporary Art Festival, have swept Korea, bringing about transformation in the world of arts in a short period of time. This represents amazing collaboration by artists of our generation who were committed to making efforts to change themselves.

I still remember that as a child or an adolescent, the world felt an open field of bright hope to me. However, around the time when I started my career as a young artist, something has dramatically changed. With wild awareness that everything surrounding me comes into being and changes eternally and I am merely a part of the ever-changing cycle, I have agonized over how I can understand the world and myself entangled in this world, and here I am as an artist now. In retrospect, the works that I have created and how I started them around 1970 till now clearly manifest such awareness that has bound me so far. I have worked on a variety of works including event works (going through processes), installation works, painting, sculpture, photo, video footage, etc. That was because I wanted to speak out what I think about concerning those areas.

For instance, in 1973, at my first week-long private exhibition held in a gallery in Myung-dong, Seoul, Korea, I provided experience of an open bar to walk-in audience, which may have been a pleasant surprise to them. I was motivated by something wonderful that I ran into at an old bar that I visited with my friend in Seoul. I may have passed by on an ordinary day but rows of tables and chairs at the store seemed to tell their old stories, touching my heart. The tables and chairs which were made of discarded wooden slabs were standing there as antique as old as the history of the bar, mirroring the history of the barmaid and old customers who came and left. The surface of wooden furniture reveals touches of the customers, stubbed-out cigarettes, burns by hot sizzling pots and decades of wiping with dishcloths by the barmaid. And the worn-away surfaces of the tables and chairs emit glows, as if echoing talks and shouts of people, spewing words and expressions full of their sufferings.

I bought those tables and chairs, to hold my first exhibition, to let my audience go through the same experience as if they were in that open bar. As far as the space is concerned, it was not designed for me to put forth something for them but for me and my audience to be put in a space together. In other words, by stepping back from our daily lives and tasting a different experience in a strange space, I hoped that they could have their own moment of awareness as I did.

Those types of works at that time inspired my endless efforts to tap into novel areas un-trodden, which were evidently represented in my following works in paintings and sculptures. In short, my works are not to express myself but they are my experiment to realize paintings or sculptures for which the intention of expression was diluted or excluded as much as possible. My randomly flowing strokes in paintings and dirt and earth randomly hurled are not the product of reasoning by brain but the product of unification of my body including brain and further, unification of the world surrounding me.

You may feel that my photos are not perfect from professionals' point of view but the direction that I am heading toward is to see things that are reflected on the lens as naturally as possible, rather than capturing a certain moment. We see the world with our eyes, not eyes of others or other creatures. It is a good relief, however, that there are different ways to see the world not just through our eyes but through lenses. But after all, it does not seem that we differentiate the world seen through eyes from those seen through a lens. I guess it is because of our old-seated recognition that lens shows the world for us. To me, the eye of photos is another mysterious area to explore and therefore, I hope to best utilize that area.

There is an old maxim: "How marvelous and mysterious thing it is! I carry firewood and water." I always admire and reflect on the maxim. This world that includes me is full of unknown mysteries. The custom of looking at this world which goes back around 340,000 years is so analytic-/reason-driven that the world is shadowed by the customs and simplified by ideologies. I want to go beyond reason, to sharpen intuition that will further free me. "Eat when you get hungry, Sleep when you get tired" is also from an old maxim. This attempt to forget myself may allow me to mingle and blend with such mysterious world.

Thank you.

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