

Esthetical Coherence through Methodological Multiplicity

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The extremely sensual, organic, physical richness of the painterly reality with all of its connotative imaginary and emotional, evocative - hidden - narratives, the joyful and delicate application of brushwork, the subtle, elegant, reduced, almost monochrome, somewhat melancholic, chromatic quality of the painterly sensation, and the balanced, intellectually controlled calmness carefully build structural fundament. On the other hand, the permanent self-questioning and the analytic observation of pictorial self-determination and self-organization create the frame of interpretation of Lee Kang-So's painting.

The sensual intensity of the material appearance of the painted surface, the strange, irritating, enigmatic fluidity of the formations, and the consciously undefined and ambivalent semantic status of the different painterly elements open a large free field of a radically liberated imagination of different possible narratives, which emerge from almost hedonistic atmosphere of the painting process. The sensation of the sensual concreteness of the painterly reality seems to observe all the other forms of perception, but does not limit the realm of the narrative aura —with all of its possible metaphoric evocations.

Lee Kang-So's oeuvre offers a rare, provocative beauty, an immense intensity of painted texture, richness of material sensations, and, at the same time, arouses an intellectual questioning about basic competences and capacities of contemporary painting. In other words, his painting is a result of aesthetic considerations concerning the capacity of laboring, vivid, effective, suggestive, visual metaphors of space-time-movement constellations, which embody basic human realities and mental orientations.

Lee Kang-So's pictorial oeuvre invites us to enjoy the richness of an artistically elaborated visual-plastic reality and to participate in the sensual euphoria, which is emerged from it. That means his painting does not offer any illusion or imitation of elements of the world outside of the reality of painting. But it evokes metaphoric narratives, which embody essential, basic questions of the human orientation in the universe. In this sense says Kim, Ai-Ryung, that Lee Kang-So "approaches the

realm of the origin of painting, where truths and illusions are born. His paintings not only subvert the clichés of the landscape genre, but also are simply paintings, clear and refreshing. With this series of new paintings, Lee draws out the very condition of painting, that is, the contemplation on perception and consciousness, imagination and material."¹ This could actually suggest that the immediate, joyful, non-contextualized, spontaneous, sensual perception of the subtle pictorial phenomenon would be the very intention of the artist. These "simply paintings, clear and refreshing", offer a wonderful, suggestive, impressive pictorial sensation, indeed. The question is that in which context recipients interiorize this refreshing sensation, and in which spiritual, mental, emotional context they concretize this extremely appealing sensual experience.

At the same time, the recipients witness a certain kind of rigorous, consequent, repetitive systematization of all painterly elements and methods, from "motives" to compositional, structural considerations, from representational, mimetic, connotative or symbolic capacities to evocative and mysterious imaginary, and from immanent, constitutional, analytical tendencies to empathic, expansive, suggestive, spontaneous and quasi immediate emotional experiences, where the radical simplicity of form does not result in a degradation or limitation of literary references and associations, or produce a reduction of possible connections of diverse narrative contexts and metaphoric references.

To be exact, this complexity, this -let's say -"parallel strategy" seems to be a central consideration of Lee Kang-So's aesthetic vision: he emphasizes the concreteness of the singular visual-plastic phenomenon and gives a decisive power to the painterly reality. However, this painterly reality exists as materialization of intelligible considerations and evokes metaphoric perspectives. It is explicitly not self-referential, tautological visual system, but a vivid, sensually offensive, appealing and suggestive pictorial reality, which poetically evokes possible references on a metaphoric level of significance. The radical concreteness of the painterly surface activates our imaginary, which connects referential contexts and diverse systems of perception of reality.

The recipients also witness that Lee Kang-So is working with various methods, suggesting different semantic concretizations for his motives. The diversity of his working methods does not challenge

¹ Kim Ai-Ryung: Lee Kang-So In: Lee Kang-So: the river is moving Exhibition catalogue, Artsonje Museum, Gyeongju, 2003, p. 49.

the coherence of his vision. Reversely, it relativizes the superiority of one single method, or one single reading of the artistic texture. Philippe Dagen precisely formulated: "Juxtaposing distinct methods in single paintings and interpreting different styles unpredictably, Lee Kang-So may very well be a postmodern artist who paints from a certain distance and enjoys such a method of painting. These painters completely understand the process of painterly creation and take that process as their true subject matter: in other words, they are post-conceptualist painters."²

Lee Kang-So's pictures, specially his picture series, emphasize this almost encyclopedic and analytic character of his work in an epoch, when the rigid, closed, monolithic systems of methods and values lost their credibility, when artists and thinkers are operating in the consciousness of the "multiplicity of responsibility", as Jean-Francois Lyotard wrote about: "The decline, perhaps the ruin, of the universal idea can free thought and life from totalizing obsessions. The multiplicity of responsibilities, and their independence (their incompatibility), oblige and will oblige those who take on those responsibilities, small or great, to be flexible tolerant, and svelte."³ The statement seems, at first, to be far from the pictorial praxis of Lee Kang-So. However, it reveals the ethic and aesthetic basement of the position of the Korean artist who practices very consciously the deconstruction of an exclusively relevant linguistic system and valid reading through practicing diverse methods of reading the painterly reality as well as through re-introducing different references of traditional topoi.

The "multiplicity of responsibilities" refers to the real crisis of any universal, predominant, exclusively valid system of values and to the crisis of the representation of these values. It refers to the concreteness of the socio-cultural situations and value systems which allow the diverse readings and the parallelism of different visual-plastic representation models. In this cultural situation, the concreteness of the specific mental, cultural constellations, the singularity of the anthropological reality, and the inevitable importance of the immediate, concrete, contextual meaning of signs and textures determinate the message of the visual-plastic phenomenon. Michael Newman formulated: "This involves an emphasis on the specific contexture or situation meaning of the statement..."⁴

² Philippe Dagen: Lee Kang-So's Paradox In: Lee Kang-So: the river is moving Exhibition catalogue, Artsonje Museum, Gyeongju, 2003, p. 47.

³ Jean-Francois Lyotard: *Grabmal des Intellektuellen* Passagen Verlag, Wien-Graz, 1985, p. 18.

⁴ Michael Newman: *Revising Modernism, Representing Postmodernism: Critical Discourses on the*

Instead of one universally relevant, exclusively valid value system, which determines any reading or one predominant system of representation, which decisively roles any articulation of the language, there are the diverse concrete constellations and the different realities of perception and communication, which embody themselves in the different visual-plastic systems.

The "emphasis on the specific contexture or situation meaning" not only critically challenges the great mainstream modernist conception of homogenization of the linguistic structures, the elimination of the personal and local narratives, the reduction of references on particular micro-communal relevancies, but opens towards personal, sub-cultural, local and particular sign systems and contextual symbols. It involves all kind of - often hidden or only partly recognizable - references of diverse metaphoric levels and perspectives, which create the very center of message of each work of art. This can involve a special relation to local tradi-tion, specific subculture elements, mythological or historical nar-ratives, and collective experiences, and it determinates collective and individual memory and articulate symbolic forms and linguistic models.

When Lee Kang-So does not accept one methodological system, he consciously mixes diverse contextual references, or he confronts different readings of his motives and pictorial formations within one painting, he executes a double-side strategy: on one hand, he creates an artificial mixture of representational(evocative, imaginative, or even literary) elements and non-representational, self-referential formation (with their immanent painterly functions, or with their structural, constitutional vocations); on the other hand, he permits to regard the painterly laboring as an open process or intellectual building of a demonstrative visual-plastic reality. This demonstrative character of his painting allows the recipient to follow the working process and the intellectual plan behind the working praxis, as insider, which means, as a conscious reader who is aware of the possibil-ity of different -legitimate-reading of the painterly structure. Lee Kang-So has his audiences acknowledge this multiplicity of cultural codes, which enables them to read the pictorial texture in different ways: one is a spontaneous, offensive/ sensually hyper intensive, primary phenomenon which is organized by-seeming-ly -spontaneous gestures, like works made by artists of Abstract Expressionism and Gesture Paintings; another one is a fine, bal-anced, intentionally developed, complex texture, in which literary references, anecdotic evocations, metaphoric perspectives are confronted with structural elements/ divers linguistic models, and different connotations and associations, whose evocative capacity opens the purely painterly phenomenon and installs, a lot of emotional and

intellectual considerations as the central narrative of the painterly work. In this sense, the complex -and eventually eclectic-pictorial texture functions as sensual experience -with all of its dramatic and explosive reserves -as well as an intellectu-ally organized, precisely elaborated, analytically built model of parallelism of different readings and diverse referential systems.

Lee Kang-So's paintings, with a rigorously fixed process, offer precise, objective, analytic systematization of structural possibilities and space constellations, which constitutes the principal painter-ly context. But this principal painterly context involves unlimited referential fields and metaphoric evocations! That means it is not at all – only – analytic painting, not at all – only – demonstration of the possibilities of parallelism of diverse and equally legitimate readings, not at all an intellectually elaborated and objectively executed lecture about methodology. No, this painting is thoroughly refers to a vision of a certain kind of – “new” – complexity, which was built on the ruins of no more relevant, functioning, or credible vision of a certain kind of –“old” complexity, the complexity of universal, timeless, abstract generalization, homogenization of the illimitable multiplicity, and diversity of realities. Lee Kang-So's painterly work seeks for authentic, sensually effective, poetically suggestive formations, which involves evocations of possible representational linguistic systems as well as possible imaginary fields of empathy. The emotional intensity of these paintings prepares the way towards a state of capacity to interiorize a new kind of complexity, in which nature and artifacts, organic and non-organic realities, material processes and intelligible systematization of perceptions and methods are confronted and connected with each other without giving any priority to one or the other methods. In this sense, Lee Kang-So's painting stays pure painting, without any didactic intention, methodological demonstration, or heavy lecturing or didactic pressure. This painting is elaborated within the realm of pure painting. In other words, it is executed with purely painterly vehicles and is speaking about the possible interpretation of the painterly reality, in order to speak about basic human experiences.

One of these central experiences, which specially occupies Lee Kang-So's artistic thinking, seems to be the consideration of the human space-time-movement constellation, which is connected to our basic human orientation in the universe; and forces us to concretize in every moment, in each situation with our very special relation to this complexity. In this questioning, each of the personal, individual, cultural, historical, anthropological con-stellation will be permanently re-defined and re-created, thus, the endless modification of each component and the permanent modification of the human constellation appear as natural, 1nev1-table, objective reality. While repeatedly working with motives of the natural surroundings, like the river, mountains, sky and rain, or even animals and houses, Lee Kang-So creates -inside of the virtual, imaginary, anecdotic -reality of the painterly

situation, where stable and changeable elements, conscious and uncon-scious actors, materials and atmospheric, emotional effects are playing together as a poetic event, through which the artist can evoke metaphoric perspectives.

Lee Kang-So keeps the universal - metaphysical - quality of space as abstract emptiness, and, at the same time, he opens the ways to concretize it as landscape and material reality, which is cultur-ally determined and which gives space for the personal creative act. The reason he works with the reminiscences of the traditional Korean landscape painting is the conception of landscape, his way of watching the landscape is culturally obtained. The landscape, with its stable and changing elements, involves the definition of the observers or the absence of the observation, which creates a certain kind of universalistic mysticism. Instead of that, Lee Kang-So is using the parallelism of material concretization - and so he creates motives, things, literary subjects, and the gestural, spontaneous, emotional improvisation - and so he creates highly intensive, explosive formations of non-representational character. The formations manifest different models of laboring par excellence painterly realities, where specific considerations of space-time-movement constellations can be visualized. These space-time-movement constellations create visual-plastic metaphors, which evoke the questions of basic human orientation, evoke the drama and ambiguity of perception of time as personal, equally, universal, objective, supra-personal reality. When regarding and observing Lee Kang-So's painting, we feel to be involved in this permanent questioning of ourselves, our position, our standard of capacity and competence.

That's why I said before, that Lee Kang-So's oeuvre creates a new kind of complexity that is not based on the no more credible, irrelevant vision of abstract universalism, contrary to the ever concrete, particular, heterogeneous constellations of human life. The sensual intensity, the suggestive imaginary and the poetical, emotional aura of these visual-plastic phenomena transfer this complexity where our basic human orientation embodied itself.

all the methodological considerations and linguistic parallelisms relativize the predominance of any exclusive model, in order to create a poetically suggestive, evocative visual-plastic reality, which embodies the metaphoric perspectives. The central issue of Lee Kang-So's painting formulates itself through these aesthetic and ethic questions: How to transmit the real complexity of our time-space-movement constellation which provokes the permanent self-questioning from each individual? How to create a sensually appealing, suggestive, poetically offensive, pictorial reality which embodies basic metaphoric meaning?

In order to be able to build this complex and organically hetero-geneous system, he had to relativize all the methodological limits and regulations, all the conventional antagonism between self-referential and narrative sign structures as well as between rep-resentational and non-representational systems, and elaborated - through the references of the traditional landscape painting as well as the references of the action painting, and the gesture painting - a sensitive painterly structure, which transmits meta-phoric dimensions and perspectives ..

In this sense, his painterly oeuvre unifies the observation of movements, the meditation about transformations - through the gestural brushwork - and the creation of virtual, imaginary space around the gestural formations that generate massive forms and heavy bodies in the empty space. The gestural formations generate quasi three-dimensional material realities that take their place in the emptiness. The artist concretizes the emptiness and trans-forms it to - imaginary - space, imaginary landscape. The small figurative - or semi-figurative-motives like boats or ducks contributes to the imaginary landscape, but these landscapes are actually universal spaces where the action of generating forms happens. Precisely, this action of generating forms involves metaphoric perspectives and evokes the concrete, personal reality, also each of the creative labor concretizes itself. Lee Kang-So returns to his own central issue with each methodological decision every time: to the relevant metaphors of the creation and transmission of being. The sensual concretization, the suggestive materialization and the visual embodiment of that being in the individual act of creating forms seem to be the central moment of Lee Kang-So's subtle, intelligent, evocative painterly work.