

Leeum Meets the Artists

Hello, I'm Lee Kang-So.

Q: What Kind of artist do you want to be remembered as?

A: Well... as I've continued working, I've seen that physics has advanced especially quickly from the last century to today. Our everyday lives and cultural activities are tightly linked to the development of science. As science advances, philosophy, music, design, and contemporary art change rapidly, transforming the way we think about art. From the end of the eighteenth century to the twentieth century, Eastern countries like Korea, China, Japa and India were forcibly westernized by colonization. Because of colonization, East Asians have been receiving a Western-style education for the past century, so that we now perceive the world in the same way as the West. Since the time of ancient Greece, the Western perspective has centered on a geometric point of view based on Euclidean geometry, various mathematical pursuits, and the idea of the universe as circles. This is exemplified by the message on the front door of Plato's Academy: "Let no one ignorant of geometry enter here!" Modern science, represented by Issaac Newton and René Descartes, conceived a world in which time and space were separate, but this was disproven by Albert Einstein in the early twentieth century. In other words, time and space are not separate, they are intertwined in the world. So Einstein argued that the way in which Western civilization had viewed the world up until modern times was wrong. Since then, there has been intensive research in cosmology and quantum mechanics from the last century to the present. All of this has shown that the past view of the world is a misconception, an unreliable illusion, because it's based on a geometric or conceptual way of thinking. A map is not the real world, only a representation of it. The old view turned the real world into a map, but it's wrong to see, understand, and accept the map as the world. In the twentieth century, we had to change our thinking. If we look through human history for ideas that are equivalent to the new perspective of physics, it's interesting to note that the worldview of certain religions and lifestyles, like Hinduism and Buddhism in India (before spreading to East Asia), and Taoism and Confucianism, is completely different from the modern Western perspective. Contemporary cosmology tells us the universe is in constant flux. This notion changes our view, forcing us to perceive the world as an event or intuition. Like Einstein said, the unity of time and space is difficult for the average person to perceive. But the thoughts of Hinduism, or the intuitions of Taoists and Zen Buddhist monks, are much more in line with contemporary physics than the modern Western perspective. That's why the overall view of the world is shifting towards the traditional Asian perspective. But we still can't shake the habit formed by our modern Western

education, of remembering time and space separately, forgetting pieces of memory. So I thought that I would try to realize my own way of art creation, based not on Western modernism, but on the traditional thought of East Asia. From the 1970s to the present, I'm continually studying, and gradually changing the way I work. Rather than artworks that simply convey the subjective expression of the artist, I'm trying to create works that stimulate people to feel themselves changing from moment to moment. I hope that my works can make them feel intuition. Rather than working for a set amount of time, I get completely immersed in the canvas, forgetting all my thoughts and concepts until everything around me – the paints, canvas, moisture, etc. – becomes one. Since this method is very intuitive, I thought that the resulting works could also convey intuition to the viewers. One of the most important aesthetic principles in East Asia is "spiritual resonance and life's motion." Every work – even if it's rendered with very light ink – connects the artist's "spirit" or energy directly to the viewer through the canvas or material. Knowing that the work will be appreciated within the continuous exchange that characterizes the universe, the world, and the narrower world of facts, I'm constantly trying to contain that exchange of all things and "spiritual resonance and life's motion" in my art.

This works can be called drawings. I made them just to practice with the ink. For several decades, I've been working on a large canvas, making a single stroke in an instant, like a sudden intuition. But when you're working on a large canvas, even the smallest distraction can cause a mistake. Because of such difficulties, I'm now trying to practice drawing on a small piece of paper first. While I was practicing, I noticed some unexpected brush movements. As opposed to the mistakes that sometimes happen when I'm working on a large canvas with no preconceptions, my practice work revealed some unexpected actions. I now look for such surprises as a reference. If I'd started working this way sooner, I could have created much more diverse works. So these days, I've been working hard on these drawings.

The work in the back is quite large, about 5 meters long and 2.5 meters high. I laid the canvas on the floor, and then moved around it, adding brushstrokes. A work like that has to be done all at once, purely in the moment. I painted it from my belief that when my spirit and work are unified, certain elements that were hidden beneath the artist's intentions become bright and clear.