

## ***From an Island – From Anonymity to Extremity***

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Lee Kang-so's works presented on this occasion are entitled *From an Island*. At first glance they appear similar to images which one might get from traveling. But actually, right after his trip to Cheju Island, the artist is immersed in the questions of how to faithfully feature paintings as their own reality and how to purely mirror them in the process of painting, rather than simply treating them as a medium of visual reproduction.

In this latest works we find a demeanor similar to that he showed in the works of his solo exhibition held at the Myongdong Gallery in 1973, in which there was "an installation of tables and chairs inside the gallery making a barrelhouse saloon, which was actually run as such for seven days." They forecast a possible coexistence of real phenomena and consciousness. In other words, the submerged consciousness in the bottom of people's hearts, which is scattered in pieces, has become shaped into a unified form by its encounter with new circumstances and natural phenomena. This is the distinctive trait that we can detect in these recent works. The concept that Lee showed in the Myongdong Gallery about 25 years ago has dominated all the works he has made from that time on. Still, he has sedulously tried to reshuffle his ideas with a strong will to transcend this dominant theme. The irony is that the more he struggles to escape from the theme, the more he becomes hooked by it. *Untitled 75031*, the installation work accompanied by a chicken which he presented at the 9th Paris Biennale, 1975, also presented to our eyes two conceptual axes, consciousness and circumstances, like those presented in his Barre/house of the Myongdong Gallery exhibition. These traits are revived intensively in his latest works, which do not cram his ideas into viewers' heads. They draw out spontaneous performances from viewers inside or outside of the installations. This is closely related to one of the nascent trends of contemporary art. But he has not been influenced from the outside. The gravity that induces spontaneous participation is rather a power that gushes out from inside him, that gives viewers "an invitation to the action." This applies not only to the result of a performance but also to its start, in a manner connected with Eastern thought. It is more a piercing, interconnected, unclassified, and flexible structural performance than one of simple logic, black or white. Whether the structures are three-dimensional or two-dimensional, the eyes guiding Lee Kang-so focus on the place where a converged power stirs. This spontaneous performance, not any meditative perception, is the aim of the artist. Three-dimensional *objets* like a table, chair, or chicken, or two-dimensional *objets* like a duck or a boat, are the very motifs which help him in his quest of something. These motifs awake people to their sleeping consciousnesses and interlace

them with subjects which one can pass by without noticing in ordinary life. He then breaks down the symbolism, the intended scenario, by merging images and reversing concepts. The result of the process we can see is the merger of "reality combined with images" which share the room with viewers for spontaneous participation and performance.

The unique expressions we can glimpse from Lee's recent serial work entitled *From an Island* are its limitedness, depth, and neoteric concept of plane figures. With a bamboo culm he makes a cuboid, tops it with finely ground granite, places a miniature granite house above that, and around the house puts polished granite ovoids. The first impression from *these objets* is that they encapsulate the landscape of the Eastern ideal realm. Their proportions are also exaggerated, which creates various kinds of visual illusion. The artist tries to portray the possibility of capturing existential images through reverse visual sensation and the visualization of percept. Ion

Even though Lee employs different properties from different materials, they join in one stream. From his installation work *Barrellhouse* to his recent fixed *objets*, they all suggest a special viewpoint, "a realm of sheer oneness." He never stops pursuing that ideal and trying to actualize "unchangeable changes" through a process of latent conceptualization. He tends not to show fixed ideas. He prefers to show the movement of "the primal force animated by imaginary elements in nature" and to translate substances in nature through "the visualization of images." His "island" is an anonymous one. It is not identified with a specific place. But it has its own origin. From this unique origin we can see and discover and play with perception. Such repetitiveness and performance become resources for him to pursue the origin.

Lee Kang-so forges ahead with his performance by burning with great fervor in order to overcome the human visual perception of suggestive afterimages that chase us like shadows in our consciousness. He also tries to overcome the lapse of time and physical common sense. The interactions born from such performances are the very artist himself.