

## Performance in Resistance, Archives in Challenge

LEE Gyeyoung (Curator of Daegu Art Museum)

《Renegades in Resistance and Challenge-Part 2: 50-year History of Performance Art of Korea: 1967-2017》 is an exhibition to look into the 50-year history of performance art which challenged the authority and customs. It manifests that Daegu Art Museum which has paid attention to the presence of the Korean art has been constantly interested in the history of the Korean art.

Due to the nature of performance art, this exhibition takes the form of an archive exhibition. Performance of Korea is categorized into four periods -Birth (1967-70), Settlement (1971-80), Spread (1981-99) and Globalization (2000-) -to take a glimpse at how performance art has been developed throughout the periods.

Many of the participating artists including Kim Kulim, Lee Kang-So and Park Hyunki were either from Daegu or worked in Daegu. In addition, the exhibition hints at the fact that Daegu was the trigger for the development of performance art and the contemporary art of Korea by heavily covering experimental movements in Daegu as in 《Daegu Contemporary Art Festival》, '35/128' and 《December-Dongseongro》.

Since the history and characteristics of performance art of Korea are described in depth in articles of CHO Soojin and YOON Jin Sup, I would like to elaborate on the process of curating this exhibition.

### Performances in Resistance

This exhibition considers the 50-year history of performance art of Korea as that of 'resistance and challenges.' True, 'resistance and challenge' is still a valid spirit as well as a driver of force in every moment of tumults in the contemporary history of Korea without being confined to performance art. And yet, given the social repercussions stirred by performance art in its early days in Korea and coldhearted view towards it<sup>1</sup>, one cannot deny that resistance and challenge

---

<sup>1</sup> Although performance art flourished until the early 70s, it was considered to be 'obscenity' or 'lewdness' prior and post to the Yushin regime, ending up being severely oppressed. <Funeral to the Established Culture> was subject to summary judgment at Yeongdeungpo Detention House for 'violating the Road Traffic Act.' 《Nonexistence Exhibition》 intended to accuse social chaos was shut down on its opening day. Kim Mi Kyung, <Performance Art of Korea in the 1960s-1970s>, 《Performance Art of Korea: 1967-2007》, p.21

empowered performance art throughout its 50-year history. The targets to resist and challenge against in performance art of Korea sometimes lied outside the domain and referred to the performance art itself, depending on the epochal flow and development logic of performance art.

As seen from <Street Protest> in 《Union Exhibition of Young Artists》, <Murder at the Han Riverside> and <Funeral for the Established Art & Culture>, resistance during the period of its birth was a significant trigger. Performance art during this period as in resistance and uprising against the established artistic circles, authority and Yushin regime and expression of thoughts on social affairs were derived from external factors. During the settlement period, directions of performance art seem to be tilted towards the essence and characteristics of performance art.

Conceptual were works of performance art as shown in the exhibition with works of LEE Kang-So, LEE Kun-Yong, SUNG Neung Kyung and PARK Hyunki where logic and reasoning mattered. Not that many artists conducted such works back then, but they enabled performance art to be escalated to the mainstream and the contemporary art of Korea to develop further.

Performance art after the settlement period accelerated its challenge. Such performance art groups as the Korean Nature Artists' Association and 19751225 came into being Daejeon. The momentum was carried on through 《Logical Vision of the Contemporary Art》 and 《December-Dongseongro》 in Daegu which established a robust presence in experiment art with 《Dageu Contemporary Art Festival》. In addition, performance art expanded its denotation by encountering other art genres including music, dance and fashion.<sup>2</sup> In the ongoing globalization era of performance art, global-scale performance art festivals sprout to enable such festivals to disseminate as local festivals. As in the street cheering for the 2002 Korea-Japan World Cup Games and candlelight vigils in the plazas to show the power of people upon the occurrence of some national issues, that performance art takes the form of a festival and solidarity in daily life with the word 'art' removed deserves to be noted for.

---

<sup>2</sup> Characteristics of performance art of Korea reveal propensities of cross-over, encompassing dance, music and pantomime. Cases in point: 《9-day Funeral》(Batangol Art Center, July 28-August 5, 1987) had a gathering of artists in different genres – literature, fine art, theater, movie, dance and the Korean traditional art: and HAN Sangguen(dance), CHO Choonyeon(art), LIM Kyungsook(fashion) and KIM Yoontae(movie) were appointed as new members in the second commissioner meeting at the Korean Performance Art Association in February 1988. YOON Jin Sup, 「The Beginning and Development of Performance Art in Korea」, *ibid.*, pp.104-104

## Archives in Challenge

As I curated performance art into an archive exhibition, I wanted to avoid the presence and vitality of performance art to look mundane by being trapped in the two-dimensional archives. As such, I wanted to arouse interest visually as much as possible, and mulled over ways for the audience not to feel detached by the content and forms by juxtaposing the archiving modality with content of the exhibition. In addition, I wished that the exhibition -instead of being a compulsory exhibition to trace the past of performance art of Korea - could be forward-looking by serving as a momentum to move forward through the empowerment of the 50-year reflection.

I found some solutions, first of all, inside the exhibition halls. First, I wanted to configure the space in a three-dimensional manner. It was intended that starting with the table with literature at the prologue section, there come in tables to look into verbal recordings and the archival bookshelves which are getting taller in height. I also wanted to impose a sense of rhythms in a space by having images and local performance art festivals showing epochal circumstances on the ceilings as banners, while diagonally connecting different bookshelves and tables. Such a spatial usage turned the exhibition space into a three-dimensional one by encountering the two-dimensional photo archive connected along the wall.

Second, I wanted to represent the history in a visual way. The gradual height of exhibited furnitures bring changes to the space, and symbolize the accumulation of time. In addition, the chronology in this exhibition boosted visual effects by expressing the trajectory of the contemporary art of Korea- from post-liberation in 1945 till today – via color spectrums. The chronology in this exhibition was required to be more than just that. It became a common denominator of Part 1 《Avant-garde art of Korea: from the 60s through the 80s》 and Part 2 《50-year history of performance art of Korea: 1967-2017》 by compiling the contemporary history of Korea in four areas: socio-political history, art history, history of avant-garde art and history of performance art. Even if performance art belongs to avant-garde art, periods covered in Part 1 and Part 2 differed: one was an artwork exhibition and the other was an archive exhibition, and we needed a connector of the two, and it was the chronology that played the role.

Third, I wanted to complement possible weaknesses of the archive exhibition by organizing affiliated programs including performances and the international symposium. In the opening ceremony, there were performances of first KIM Kulim, SUNG Neung Kyung and YOON Myungkuk followed by HONG O-Bong, KANY, Moohye, LEE Kun-Yong, YI Hyeok Bal, AN Chi-In, CAI Qing, YOO Jiwhan and MOON Jaeseon - in total, 12 performances.<sup>3</sup> The intention was to enable observers to

---

<sup>3</sup> There were following performances on the opening day on January 22: KIM Kulim's

see the untapped or raw state of performance Art itself in person, and holistically understand it in the archive exhibition. In the International Symposium for the 50th Anniversary of Performance Art of Korea on the theme of the Performance, the Variation of Communication and Art Forms (April 28, 2018, Auditorium of Daegu Art Museum), performance art of Asia was diagnosed in aspects of field, exhibitions and research - a ground to seek for the future of performance art of Korea.

There still remain some questions that are not addressed when the exhibition is about to close. True, it is essential for an art museum to present the ongoing performance art of Korea as its history was introduced in the exhibition. And yet, how can we bring in performance which refuses complacency and keeps stimulating the boundaries at a time when an art museum turns into an institution and a cultural authority? How would this exhibition look as an encounter of these two heterogeneous entities? Maybe the questions might be easily solved.

---

<Bodypainting>, SUNG Neung Kyung's <I'm the Low Man on the Totempole> and YOON Myungkuk's <A Two-legged Chair>; HONG O-Bong's <Bird and Me>, KANY's <The Korean Peninsular being Crucified>, and Moonhye's <Magazine Action> on March 10; Lee Kun-Yong's <Snail's Gallop>, YI Hyeok Bal's <Life>, AN Chi-In's <Water, Water, Water> and CAI Qing <Great Smoky Gun> on March 24; and YOO Jiwhan's <Neo Last Supper II> and Moon Jaeseon's <I Feel a lot of Sympathy for Your Action> on April 28.