

The Intentional and Beyond

Lee II (Art Critic)

I had an unforgettable experience with Kang-So Lee. It happened at the Ninth Paris Biennale in 1975. Lee's entry in the Biennale was a most extraordinary creation, *The Chicken's Performance*. The artist spread plaster powder all over the floor of the exhibition hall and drove a wooden stake in the middle. Tied to the stake was a chicken who walked around and around in a circle. That was it. The whole thing almost never happened, what with trying to find a chicken and everything else, but finally the guard at the exhibition hall volunteered one of his own chickens, and the piece was completed. That wasn't the end of it either. T.V. camera men filled the exhibition hall and Kang-So Lee and I ended up going through the "indignity" of appearing on French national television.

Who knows? Perhaps this little incident was simply my own personal experience, but for me at least, I felt that his achievements, like that in Paris, were definitely not merely temporal notions but were rather expressions of the artist's basic attitude which runs consistently throughout his work. If one looks at Lee's creations over the years, one can understand this quite easily.

Kang-So Lee is definitely not a man who digs only one well as we often say in Korean. By temperament, he is an experimental artist. The art that he pursues rejects any set definition, any existing methodology, any repetition. In fact, his sphere of creation stares from painting and prints and moves through a broad spectrum of three-dimensional works, environmental installations, video creations and performances. In this private showing, Kang-So Lee is making another experimental attempt, intensifying his expression through painting and object. This attempt is not something pursued in a formal dimension, but rather is something related to the process of creating that expression. In short, he is not acting according to some calculated intention but rather transcends intention to achieve something more meaningful, something that could perhaps be called coincidence or even automatic spontaneity.

Thus one can see Lee's work includes a strong element of performance, and not just that of the chicken. For example, sometimes the spectators make up part of the work itself or the image of paint coming straight out of the tube is recreated right there in a print. In this way, Lee's works take

coincidence or spontaneous events as active elements, blazing a new artistic frontier. When Kang-So Lee stands in front of the canvas, he has no clear plan in his mind. It is no different when he sits kneading clay. He works with almost no goals or preconceptions. He paints because the empty canvas is there in front of him. When he is kneading clay, it is as if he is kneading bread, cutting it into blocks, stacking them or laying them end to end. And then he is finished. Thus Lee realizes the significance of creation through repetition and continuity, his works colliding with the media he chooses, leaping the boundaries of our own intentions, foreshadowing something that lies far beyond.