

Artist Lee Kang-So interview (2021)

From a Dream is an exhibition, entirely focused on paintings. Would you introduce your new paintings?

I show works on canvas. Paintings drawn by the transitory self, paintings written like texts by my own self, unfamiliar every moment, and the paintings done with dazzling colors that captivated me. Also, the swift and slow speed of the strokes: those are what I have experienced. Then I have persistently striven to avoid marking habitual brushstrokes.

If the viewers recall any specific images from my paintings, I wish that they penetrate through countless transient instants passing between these images by repeatedly looking between these gaps, although they will disappear in a glimpse. I wonder how an adventure of intuition can be activated. I am also interested in how the qi (氣) energy of paintings can stimulate the viewers.

I believe that you have consistently delved into a question 'what is painting?' since the 1970s. Could you elaborate on the experimentation and exploration throughout this process?

During the mid-1970s, I aimed to realize a new type of two-dimensionality suitable for the contemporary era. I thought I should begin with interpretative works that allow me to understand and self-persuade what structures organize a two-dimensional painting. Therefore, I decided to first reconfirm its most fundamental structure. For instance, I made works by picking out a few strands of thread from a canvas, or picking out a couple strands of the canvas on which serigraphy is printed, and putting a little bit of paint on it.

During the early and mid-1980s, I experimented with leaving unregulated brushstrokes on canvas. Nevertheless, despite an attempt at liberating myself, my habitual strokes acquired since childhood inevitably resembled those depicting a landscape. Thus, I desire to abandon these habitual strokes from the past and have been striving to exercise more unpredictable brushstrokes.

The longstanding history of brush demonstrates it as a kind of form that can share the most sensitive and powerful energy. Hence, I continue to make paintings that explore new experiences of brushstrokes. The world of strokes is filled with interactions among the living qi energy. I intend to visualize and share this relationship through a clear and bright energy.

Could you comment on the relationship between paintings and conceptual works from 1970s in various media like video, performance, installation, sculpture, and so on?

Just as my paintings are made with unpredictable energy oscillating every instant, all my sculpture, ceramic and other performance pieces, such as *Void*, *Disappearance (Bar in the Gallery)*, *Nakdong River Event*, coexist in this continuously transforming world.

Since around 1970, I had tried out experimental works in installation, performance, video, and so on. On the other hand, I recall that many artists had aimed to reinterpret the traditional system of painting or sculpture in a modern language and to create a new formality of painting and sculpture. For me as well, the realization of contemporary interpretation on 2-dimensional or 3-dimensional works was a difficult task and yet, the most desperate yearning.

I have doubted the actuality of the world we live in as I made works such as the reed piece *Void* (1971) and *Disappearance (Bar in the Gallery)* (1973) shown at Myeongdong Gallery. My skepticism about the reality became a driving force that encouraged me to make two-dimensional works in 1975.

If traditional sculptures were intentionally made, through *Untitled-7522* (a broken stone), I wanted to create ones that "become." Since 1981, I have attempted to produce sculptures that "become" with conventional sculpture materials like clay, plaster, and bronze.

Ceramics as unmolded chunks of clay opened up new possibilities, so I have started to produce a number of experimental sculptures since 2003. Since last year, I have gone through a process of selection, and I am currently seeking new ways of art practice.

Painting, sculpture, installation, performance, and all my works are not made by a specific self, but rather, they are created by a ceaselessly changing self that cannot be specified. In addition, I believe that a viewer from a 3rd person perspective is also shifting every split second in relation to the works.

You have not only stressed the internal construction and formation of an artwork but indeed have always emphasized the interactions among the energy of all things in the universe.

When we say 'universe,' we often think of the sky. Nevertheless, it is funny how the infinite universe, in fact, exists within human introspection. We humans float in this grand universe like minute dust particles, picture illusions, and pursue them as the reality.

My paintings provide a source of inspiration for such illusions. I cannot illustrate a particular scene from the visual landscape or abstraction from my works. Moreover, just as the viewers, these elements of paintings and their interactions constantly shift.

What do you expect the viewers to experience from your work?

Enforcing the artist's subjective expression and emotion to the viewers is a typical characteristic of Western modernism. A thought where all individuals consider themselves as the center of the universe is a zeitgeist from the 17th century to the late 20th century when the ideas of Descartes and Newton prevailed. These customs persist until the present day even after the development of the theory of relativity by Einstein in the 20th century and quantum mechanics by the Copenhagen schools. However, they will not be empathized in the contemporary period.

Along with the advancement of science, the thoughts and lives of humanity may inevitably undergo consequential changes. Art should also communicate and flow along with the scientific truth in a soft and beautiful manner. I would like to state that neither subjects nor objects exist as individuals in this world; we are networked in a mysterious, constantly vacillating world within the symphony of universe.

My artworks only attempt to offer clues, which prompt these thoughts. I also approach my works from the same stance as the viewer's. Therefore, I try to discover forms that appear differently every moment, either to myself or to others.