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The Whole World on My Face

2014

How much and what appearance of 'I', and how is the act of making art embodied in my work? Do my eyes open only towards the outside, and does my artwork exist separately from me? How is the artist embodied in the artwork? How far is the distance between the artwork and the artist? Then, how much can be inferred about the artist by the viewer seeing the work? If the concept of the artist is the artist, what is the viewer looking at? Are they only looking at 'reason' and 'function'? How much can be communicated through the act of 'looking'? If the artist has to explain the artist's self - who is immersed within the artwork - what can the artist say? Is the artist only a person, who looks at the outside and criticizes the world's problems, finding alibis for its existence? These questions are the topics of these works.

I tried to find the answer in the part and the whole, the whole within the part. An artwork of mine is the whole of a mass like my body; however, each of the parts has completion and richness as a whole if you are looking at the each part. Even though my artwork is a work, it is several hundreds of artworks as parts. It would seem that the painting's essential duty is searching for visualization of the invisible as manifested through sculpture. Even though I am a place as a whole - as a visible body - there are complicated times, events, figures, relations, and social structures that are inscribed in my body. I construct the body of such a space. Even though I am a body, several thousands of bodies - which I am not - are parasitic on my body. They became my emotions, sense, and reason. I let them - right before they turn into me - be involved with the place, which is my body. Each of them is a place and the present, the same as me. Each one is a whole.

By exposing 'the reversion of invisible things', in recognizing the essence hidden under my face - which is myself - I combine, juxtapose, and sculpt 'them' - the phenomenon of myself -, within a sculpture. By doing so I create complex and multi-layered phenomenon, which is my body, and the double structure between 'myself' and 'them.'

Feeling, listening, and seeing are acts of embracing others in my body. They come to me and become a sense. Each one was an independent subject like me before and after they become a sense to me, even in the present time. They have materiality and subjectivity. However, they become feeling, emotion, and thought as they come and clash within me. Like in Kim Chun-su's poetry '*Flower*', before I call your name, you were nothing but a bodily gesture. But when I call your name, you become a flower. By becoming a flower, you made me feel 'myself' and then ultimately allowed me to recognize myself. I visualize things in order to respect the materiality and subjectivity of their state prior to coming to me and becoming feeling, thought, and emotion. They are

parts and the whole of my sculpture. I meet, conflict, break up, and love things on the street, in the house, in memory and light. My body constructs me within the activities I have performed. I was able to transform this object, which is admitted as an objective body, to the subjective body through others in the sunlight. I become a subjective body through the crucial incidents of clashes with others, not through my own deeds and activities. I ultimately attained my subjectivity by attaching others onto my body. Through others, I became a body that senses myself. In other words, I cannot be 'myself' without other things around me.

A body appears as a visible thing in the exhibition space on this street during the daytime, but when it becomes night and lights are off the invisible realm that has been neglected in the darkness emerges and is transformed to a subjective body. Body is an appearance of everything in the externally visualized world, and it becomes the invisible place where the 'different' life rises, which previously cannot be seen. I let time be vitalized, which internalizes the meeting and clash with 'others' - this is an operation of the invisible area in which I live. In time, my body as an object placed in front of me causes a reversion back to an invisible thing. In the action of reversion, the project in which a visible thing becomes invisible and the invisible thing becomes visible and operates. The whole world of my body and of face captured in this action becomes spread out.

My works in this exhibition are not the artist's own perspective turning back from outside to inside. This is the artwork that explores how 'I', the creator, embodies the outside world through the sensitivity, senses, and emotion of oneself and how far an external subjectivity and materiality are independent before the outside becomes the content of my internal life. Within this, my otherness, which becomes my memory by constantly connecting with others and creating presence, is created as a figure in the same way. Like writing a diary, I come outside, contact and clash between self and the outside. This becomes visualized through the act of labor, and kneading by hand. I tried to make it possess the most closed color and materiality of the human body. While working with this project, I tried to look at how the body which is in the process of pathos and deformity is created through encountering the body of others in the process of embodiment - not as the biological meaning of body -, the body of materiality, and the respondent considering my outside. By doing so my work can be called the phenomenology of my body, which subverts other, the outside before becoming inside. Therefore, even though my entire works can be seen as one work, I try to make parts of works divided into each work and hundreds of artworks.

The Cabinet of Fi's Curiosity

2012

I drew everyday much like writing a page in the diary. When I was about to go to sleep after completing the day, I was faced with the time of 'transformation' as if the effect of hypnagogic hallucination had taken control between sleep and reality. When the time approached midnight, 'time' as what we experience in a day through specific physical movements, sensitivities and language became shrouded in materiality or it took shape to visit me. Then I would be quick to sketch the form which is the transformed state of time before falling to sleep. Most of the forms could be described as records of contents of emotion such as despair, anger or fear. As my diary grew thicker and thicker, through the personal 'forms of the diary,' I thought I was truly experiencing the Anthropocene period as Paul Crutzen had mentioned that the natural environment on the Earth is undergoing rapid deterioration by human beings following the Holocene period. My forms seemed like aliens stuck between the seen and the unseen. I named each of the form in the belief that I too was undergoing the age of LeeFicene.

In my head, after the monster called 'I' was born and raised, I am undergoing my personal Cambrian era in which this 'I' is multiplying dramatically. Recently, I am immersed in observing the multiple 'I' and the forms in between them and certainly enjoying seeing myself. I initially believed that the things that oppressed me, that instilled fear in me and exacerbated me to the point of anger were the various levels of prejudices, inhibiting rules and regulations, the person who didn't love me, and the cultural background rooted in prejudices. But slowly I began to realize that the things that were alien and strange to me, the uncanny (*Unheimlich*), were full of paradoxes of their own. I began to think that what made things uncanny were not the fact that they were unfamiliar and alien in themselves but that I was pushing them away based on the fact that they appeared as uncanny to me. Or even I was refusing to see them because the uncanny was inherently inside me? I had to come face to face with such thoughts and ponder on their identity alone, awake in the night. In my diary, they looked like insects, animals or even things that couldn't be named, and eventually I came to the conclusion that they were my exterior that was merged with me, or a combination of me and an alien other. I held the view that an artist is someone who observes the in-between of languages that cannot be put into words, or even forms - an individual who draws out the life that lies hidden, trembling, in between the crevices. So at times, I had the impression that I was coming face to face with this existence.

I am emerging from myself in leaps and bounds. From the inside of me who was immersed in the flood of coughs because of a cold, the insects scramble out in their droves to cover the Earth. I pick one of the insects up and draw it up close for a look. Soon I realize that even though the swarm of insects is flying all over, they look like a single giant insect. I also come to admit that this insect is the being inside me that was present prior to the time of language by drawing it. I then color the insect and talk to it. I

give it the name of 'The Cold Bug'. Much like Franz Kafka's protagonist in *Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa, I see myself as a total stranger. I draw this picture of the insect from the deepest well of my being and color it in the morning which is part of my daily schedule. As time passes, I look at myself drawing out a stranger, ever more alien to me, or I find I am spending more and more time on observing this being who is far from what I am or changing with time. Like the relationship between my doll and I in childhood, that thing is becoming increasingly closer to me, to the extent that it is indistinguishable from me. This is how things stand.

In Onkalo, Finland, a god is securely hidden inside a cave in the deepest of mountains. With the end of the 21st century when thousands of copper containers are placed inside the cave, the entire storage will be sealed. The god placed securely inside the copper containers is the god of destruction in the name of nuclear waste. If there is a descendent who dares to open up the containers, then the world will come to an end. 'My descendant! Please don't open the seal.' – whether to demand this or to leave it a secret forever to the descendants remains one of the most controversial issues at the moment.

Do not dare to awaken the god from his slumbers who is asleep inside the copper containers as if they are incubators or even a manger for horses. In front of the cave full of containers, we are reiterating the secret words of the story from Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, although this time, it is in reverse. "Don't open. Don't open. Don't leave any footprints on top as if you are Neil Armstrong leaving footsteps on the Moon." With the death of my descendants, the life span of civilization is shortened. Ahh, now is the time to turn off the lamp. This is the moment to turn off the electric light brightened by the death of descendants." (An excerpt from 'Electricity fueled by the Destruction of the Descendants')

I look at the face of the entombed god of destruction. And quickly I do a sketch of it. I also attempt to write something about it. (I have left a record of the process of manufacture of each of the works on display.) While I am writing, I am reading my desire to open up a series of taboos although I am aware that they remain resistant to destruction. The next day, I will turn my desire that has been dealt a blow in this or that form by finishing the drawing. Before I was able to turn the drawing into certain forms, there existed numerous ancestors, forms and matter. I witnessed an overflowing of the self. There soon emerged a conflict between the revolution of change stemming from the outside and the revolution that was exploding inside me. I felt the desire from within me that was continually being pushed forward. This desire is making an alien of the self. In a way, we might call this desire a self-abjection of sorts. I try to free myself from this desire, but I am bound firmly to it. Yet I relish the moment when I am able to draw something inanimate out from the depths of darkness to turn it into something alive. What lie in my sleep and outside of its realm, what lives inside and outside of myself are intertwined in their multiplicity to turn into several organs and then into a single living being. As colors invade them, they begin to breathe gasps of life. Rather than the concept wielding

control over the process, the concept of the work evolves into a particular work in the 'process' of manufacture. I can see the image shredding the cloth of reality in my very hands. It releases a strange breath - the breath of things that are clinging and stuck together. I finally give a birth name to this being that has been raised from the abyss. The title of 'Electricity fueled by the Destruction of Descendants'. Today, I have written a page in my diary, as usual. I have raised a being from the darkness and endless depth. Even though it seems ludicrously bizarre in form, it is a being without being encumbered by the disparity of goodness and evil, front and end or right and wrong. I am holding something that is totally, utterly different from any other in the world in my very arms. Like my doll from my childhood, a living, breathing being that looks sad and yet appears funny-looking. I would like to ask the jellyfish-like critics- is this abstract or isn't it? I greet this being with, "Hi, nice to see you".

Monkey to the West

2010

I wish to travel back time. I want to escape from the current art works in Korea that appear like handicrafts by putting a moment in everyday life, a specific moment in time, to a stand-still. I also want to hold protracted time, wound round and round a thread holder, in my arms. I want to bring together the time dedicated to my work without having to divide it up. I wish to load my own narrative onto each piece of work as does a roaming peddler who moves from one village to another loaded with a variety of goods for everyday use. I wish to move grudgingly forward in this world while bearing the growing weight of the load of narratives.

For the past year, I have been reading ever so slowly the ten-volume work by Wu Chengen, *Suh You Gi(monkey to the West)*, published by Moonji Publishing. Monk Samjang and his fellow travellers are on their way to the world of heaven to rescue the dead who have yet to undergo rebirth after having arrived in the land of the dead. Since I am half way through the story, strictly speaking, they have not yet reached the west. I am afraid they may never reach their destination. The reason is that life-threatening adventures await them at every corner. But like those who have been to the West, I am rather at ease with reading about their adventures. I have always believed it is not about reaching one's destination, rather the course of overcoming any stumbling blocks along the way that matters. Every time, they overcome one hurdle, they unravel one Chinese fantasy after another into the air. There is a monster in every fantasy adventure. In this case, the monster makes its grand appearance clothed in the scales of a dragon or a

gold armor, but he turns into a sorry piece of creature after being attacked by the monk and his entourage. He seems to represent vestiges of my past moments of anger or anxiety. By reading the story, I am reliving my own version of monkey to the West. In the present exhibition, I intend to deliver a monologue on my very own monkey to the West.

I destroyed the majority of my installation pieces after returning from the United States. While immersed in a new work, I sometimes called forth and shattered the specters(monsters) of my time past. It was like reading my inner book of monkey to the West.

The monk is leading his gang of friends, while I cradle a black-haired and warm-blooded animal in my arms. This animal has remained a source of energy even before I was born. While living in the US, I was constantly caught in between a state of separation. Every night, I suffered from nightmares and severe pre-menstrual cramps from my residence that overlooked the grandiose sea-like Lake Michigan or the Hudson River. Whenever I took a dose of traditional medicine from home, the symptoms receded and as time went on, they came back in waves of pain. On the trees that lined the street under my doorstep, a flock of crows sat down and were noisily predicting my death in the near future. I once watched a documentary film on people with visual or auditory impairments. After having recovered their lost sensory capacities through an operation, they suffered more acutely from the sudden deluge of light or sound than when they had lived with the disabilities. Our senses both require the ability to sense as well as to edit. I was shuddering under the unfamiliar environment and language much like people with such disabilities. I wanted to materialize the chaotic state in my work.

At times, I had the feeling that I was like a woman living inside a mirror. I tended to forget while I was immersed in the work at the studio, but once in front of the mirror, I clearly saw a small Asian woman who was wearing the name tag of 'a foreigner'. I once read an article that seeing determined one's identity, and I sensed that the West seen through my eyes or the West that I was identifying with was constantly in conflict with my skin and image as a foreigner. The travelling gang led by the monk on its way to India was created by the author, Wu Chengen, while he himself was writing the narrative in a secluded room in the Ming dynasty. Similarly, one half of myself was in a foreign land. But I had the illusion that my other half was working on the piece in a location outside the mirror, far closer to where my parents were living. At such moments, I closed my eyes and imagined myself to be in a faraway place outside the black mirror.

At first, I created an altar for the goddess who was calling me from afar. The triangular horns hanging on the breasts of the goddess whom I had created in the solitary nights was making swooshing sounds to the far-out-there me. I even attached an electrical device to allow the goddess, the integration of my own solitariness, to walk around and sing to herself (<My Shrine>). Once the altar was lighted, I was able to come face to face with the solitary and cruel Jesus who was deeply seated inside me (<The Selfish Jesus>) and Louis XIV (<Louis XIV>) or even the woman with her intestines deprived of her skin (<The Intestine Woman>). I also met the moth decorated with my diaries around its body (<My Moth>). They represented my proud self who was visible if my outer skin was peeled off and the proud proprietor of the private inner world

smell of slightly scorched dried squid on the portable stove in the middle of the street at the time when the demonstration was at a stand still. Dried squid is one of the most detested food of foreigners. They hate the smell of dried squid on an open fire because it reminds them of cadavers being burned. In *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, the squid is a creature to be decimated. In a sense, the border of a community can be translated into boundaries of the senses. The reeking odor of grilled squid is the other as well as the abjection of the West. In spite of that, Seoul was welcoming me, the stranger of the West, with its odor. It felt as if the squid was the resilient 'time' muscle of Seoulites and represented the vibrancy of a soon-to-be-launched space vessel. I conjured up an entity fitted with both a space vessel and the muscle. The squid can be compared to a star with self-luminescent ability in the deep seas. Unfortunately, it has lost the ground for its existence in the deep seas by being drawn to lightings hanging from fishing vessels and being turned into either the object of aversion or preference. The squid talked to me. "Each luminescent cell in my body throbs at each heart beat. At that instance, huge orbs of light fall from the sky. Soon, I will be saved. I shall be saved from the oppressing, fearful and cold darkness. I expel every ounce of utmost darkness that remains in my body. At the same time, a sharp hook pierces my body. It is painful. The sharp pain draws me toward the light. Whatever ascends to heaven carries an odor." I wanted to juxtapose the legs of the dried squid with those of the giant squid resembling a big space vessel to remind us of the forlorn deep seas that remained waiting outside my body (<Glowing Sucker Octopus>). My mother was muttering while spraying the room with air freshener. "Your work space reeks of putrefying smell."

Even to this day when I am writing this piece, I wonder what I or the monk and his entourage have gone in search of in the West only to return to the point of departure. Perhaps I was looking for the holy bible hidden in the depth of the dark light in the deep seas. At present, I have the fleeting sensation of having glimpsed the glint of the eyes or the lingering image of the self-illuminating creature in the dark that seems to be there or not there.