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Her Landscape Painting: The Bricolage of the Style of Traditional Expression and Enlightened Consciousness.

On Yeonjoo Cho's solo exhibition, 'Things between the Sun and the Moon'

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Where does art history begin? The beginning of art and the beginning of art history are not the same. Also, the authority of reasonable argument about art history is the art history that has won the history of the first debate on painting. "*There is no more significant pointer to the character of a society than the kind of history it writes or fails to write,*" said Edward Hallett Ted Carr. The subjects of historical records are always understood as the history of the power that ruled mankind since controlling the past is controlling over the future, and managing the present is managing the past.

Artist Cho Yeon Joo expresses the ironies between the East and the West, women and men, reality and fantasy, symbols and concepts through the drawings of oriental emotions. She creates her own formative beauty by copying the images of landscape paintings that appear to be the works of Joseon Dynasty artists, such as An Gyeon, Jeong Seon, Sim Sa Jeong, Lee Jing, and Kim Myung Kuk, and by adding new elements. She creates an atmosphere of ink painting through oil paint and canvas, and generally follows the principles of 'resemblance' to produce a representative painting that draws the content by borrowing real figures, nature, etc., based on the drawing techniques such as Real Scenery Landscape (實景山水, landscape painting based on observation of real scenery), or based on the drawing technique of Eungmulsanghyung(應物像形, sketching) in terms of composition and description. Perhaps that's what she learned theoretically at school.

However, the world she has learned with reasoning, that is what is seen from the real world beyond her painting is not a world depicted in traditional oriental painting or a literary painting. Instead, her painting shows a mismatch of what's seen and what's intended to be expressed. The method of 'resemblance' does not indicate facts, but rather pictures of the past, reflecting her present consciousness and world. She is freed from the conventional obligation of making similar paintings to the original paintings, namely the paintings already drawn in history—the vertical way of producing paintings—, and now she enjoys the horizontal play of 'similitude' without regard to the originals.

She portrays old masters' paintings or paints a landscape in a classical style, but draws a female figure in the place of sages and Taoist hermits inside. She also adds imaginary creatures(unicorn, phoenix) that do not exist in reality, and makes a story of relating to the women in her painting. Rather than portraying utopia expressed in landscape paintings, she draws the landscape that contains her intimate and private domain. Meanwhile, she eliminates the art historical values and the hierarchy of landscape paintings, and displaces the landscape with her extremely personal story. She retraces the history of art, including landscape paintings and literary paintings from a female-centric point of view by borrowing or transforming several elements of famous landscape paintings in art history. As she realized that her dreamworlds of spirit through painting were the ideologies created in the history of Taoism and Confucian scholars and of the men in a high position and class, her gender consciousness takes the rite of passage of social enlightenment through her works.

Although it was a short period in 2019, her works about space-time <The sun, moon, and the five peaks>(oil on linen, 116.8 x 455 cm, 2019) and <Pieces between orbs>(oil on canvas, dimensions variable, 2019) were exhibited at her solo exhibition 《Things between the sun and the moon》 in Cheongju Art Studio.

<The sun, moon, and the five peaks> was drawn by borrowing <The sun, moon, and the five peaks(日月五峯道)> which drew the five mountain peaks behind the king's chair in the royal audience hall of the Joseon Dynasty, as well as the sun, the moon, and the pine trees that were familiar to us. She re-made the paintings on the folding screens used in the palace or wall paintings by dividing them into five canvases, with pictorial sensibility. The sun and the moon, two waterfalls and water, and pine trees were drawn from a stable bird' s-eye view; it was called Bird View but is now also called Drone View, so this might imply another change of time.

When discussing the formative difference between oriental painting and western painting, the biggest difference would be the ratio and composition of the screen. The composition of Oriental landscape paintings uses perspective that connotes an image of the painter's mind, instead of perspective that shows the depth. In order to express the depth and the reality of painting, Western painters mainly used perspective with a clear vanishing point. Further, aerial perspective was used for realistic descriptions as if watching the real scenery; that representation based on the aerial perspective also looks like landscapes in oriental paintings. As we pay attention to the background that makes the character stand out, rather than expressing the main character which is a theme of the painting, we realize that the aesthetic realization of both East and West was traditionally based on realism. It could be said that the attitude of placing emphasis on realism in Korean paintings has become the driving force behind the most remarkable painting style achieved through real view landscape paintings and genre paintings.

When discussing Oriental drawing theories, we usually use moral, metaphysical, or literary vocabularies, which are quite different from the various concepts implied by the modern vocabulary of 'art'. Perhaps she also learned the history of spirit among these East Asian painting theories. China, which was leading the development of oriental paintings, was also central to the development of such painting theories. That is, many theories related to the reason for the existence of painting, the attitude of painting(作畫), and the establishment of values pursued by painting, in the ideological backgrounds—such as Yin-Yang and the Five Elements Theory, Taoism, Confucianism, and Zen Buddhism which were quite popular among the nobility after the Northern Song Dynasty—were appropriated metonymically by artists' view of the world, awareness of the world, and social consciousness.

Artist Cho Yeon Joo says in her artist note that she wanted to draw a new landscape through a reflection of the painting theory of landscape paintings, literary paintings, and history. Also, she testifies that through her work, she realized the moment of the intersection of women's gaze, women's social activities, and the perception as an artist.

“My work shows an imaginary landscape inspired by landscape paintings. However, unlike traditional landscape paintings, the focus is on expressing the delicate friction that arises between my dreams and realistic conditions, rather than depicting the idealized natural world. I want to stay in the world of landscape, but the conditions of my life do not leave me in the nostalgia of the past. Urban life, globalization, frequent physical movements, the identity of a Korean woman, and the subsequent various problems and anxieties keep me away from the world I am dreaming of. After all, my painting is a record of the discrepancies and frictions between the world that I am aiming for and the world that I belong to, as well as a result of my efforts to understand and resolve them.”

- Yeonjoo Cho, *An Excerpt from Her artist's note (2016)*

I think she is at a crossroad of encountering different cultures and consciousness and of being fused with new things, going beyond the individual's birth, experiential, intellectual, and expressive domains to grow into an artist. One of the identities expressed here is her existence that reflects cultural consciousness mixed with the identity of a Korean woman, which reveals her awareness of living in the present through landscape paintings. I recalled two films I watched in 2019: <Kim Ji Young, Born 1982> and <This Changes Everything> which show the world achieved by women in the modern society of industrialization. However, the female-centred gaze has not acquired a dominant position in the flow of globalization, either in the East or in the West. Even in the 21st-century society where capital and science are advanced, women are still perceived as the socially disadvantaged group and victims. However, it is not only men who are responsible for the destruction of nature and environment, the outbreak of diseases and disasters, the neglected human rights, and the indiscriminate violence of society. All of us who overlook the fault and neglect self-reflection are responsible for them. Also, in this era, calling for ethical reason is required for not only a few philosophers but all of us.

As a Chinese-American cultural critic Rey Chow said, “The mission of the third world feminists is not only to ‘bring up vitality’ to the oppressed women in their culture but also to speak out transcending culture and boundaries according to their original mission. However, it is more than that.” She said that overcoming the hegemony and theoretical issues of the West and man-centered modernity was transformed into ‘structure and difference’ in the direction of post-feminism in the 2000s, so it was necessary to find one’s locality. In this context, Cho Yeon Joo’s landscape painting can be described as her native, empirical, intellectual, and artistic territory, and the role of translator/artist at the interface of global culture becomes very important.

Her words and paintings perform a kind of “bricolage” of knowledge and self-consciousness which voluntarily intervenes in thought, using the concepts and ideas found in the past grand theories in art practice. The art style and the art history of East and West, the ambivalent values of society represented by men and women, the time and space colliding in one outcome, the creation and social criticism of art, the complex realization of reality and imagination... She reappropriates such things without fear of finding new cultural signs starting from the enlightened self-consciousness that has become a driver for her art. In addition, she seems to reach the expressions of post-modernism art by summoning up the expression style that sticks to the tradition into new space-time of art, and connecting the past and the present to reappear in a painting.