

Art is question of ___ ___?

Yunyoung Kim (Curator)

The artist Song Ho-eun certainly made a strong impression on me. At our first meeting, which was arranged for me to hear about his work, he declared that the generation of people who were born before 1980, such as this curator, would not understand his work or his sensibility. Not too long after this initial meeting with Song I visited his studio, and it too made a strong impression on me. It was a temporary studio space the school allocates to its art students for a year. Unlike the spaces around him, his space was neatly refurbished. Leaving the carefully laid wood floor aside, his studio was so meticulously organized that it reminded the visitor of a designer's office rather than an artist's studio. The wall was covered with drawings of notebook sizes that were individually hand-framed in wood by the artist himself. On the wooden shelf there were small paper boxes which had his drawings printed on them; a bundle of postcards vacuum-wrapped; books of drawings; and portfolios all neatly arranged. In this way, I came to see Song's work as having a unique sensibility which should not be dismissed easily.

Song describes his surroundings, his everyday life, and even his various interests in social issues by drawing every day, as if writing a diary. As if drawing was an unavoidable medium to capture the many thoughts that arise in his mind, to capture the overflowing ideas and images that flash by from moment to moment, his studio was full of large and small drawings. He draws habitually as if he is writing memoranda. He then collates the images, the thought fragments thus captured, and multiplies them onto an expanded frame. *I and You* (2006) and *Improvisation* (2006) are examples of his works that show how his spontaneity can be meticulously and intelligently re-combined and re-constructed in this way. This method of expanding and reproducing images not only breaks down the great boundary between 'art' and 'life' but it can also transform images for various different applications. Song defines this approach rather surprisingly as the "type of work that tries to get up close to the viewer." His definition makes more sense if one remembers his earlier

works in which he used packaging material for consumer products for his drawing and then displayed the finished pieces as if they were products to be sold. Having thus shed the authoritarian skin of 'art,' his drawings have met viewers as postcards, accessories, and T-shirts.

If Song's approach to his work was either bright or light previously, his more recent works show a more weighted attitude. The new attitude is distinguishable from the earlier attitude in that, before, he would readily cast off the heavy and ponderous subjects with which the older generation of artists would wrestle; Song would draw wherever his eyes and hands would go, and he would follow only where his five senses would lead him. What has been emerging in his recent works, in addition, is his obsession with neatness. It was only very recently that I realized that the very strong first impression I had of the artist was the inevitable result of his obsession. I realized that his new approach, which seemed somewhat strange at first, did not come about unheralded. In *My way of cleaning* (2008) Song interprets his attitude toward his own works as an extension of his "obsession with cleaning and organizing," a 'noose' around his neck. What's significant here is that the artist himself had recognized his own work only as a "plastic play," but now he sees it as "cleaning and organizing" for "concentration and resurrection." *Level 1* is the artist's first solo show, as he prepares himself to survive as an artist, and he probably wants to reflect on this change of his attitude toward his own work. Of course, the gallant declaration of the show's subtitle, "Art is a question of *naegong*,"¹ will certainly add more power to his metamorphosis.

However, the artist Song Ho-eun has yet to answer many questions. For example, if drawing is "the first embodiment of something that the artist draws out from his or her inner world," what is the artist supposed to do after the instantaneous embodiment of so many thoughts, constantly fleeing by? In other words, after organizing—and at times recombining and reconstructing—the ever-flowing thought fragments into images, what does the artist need to make them cohere as an artist's philosophy? In this respect Song's recent works such as *Iwouldn'thavesaidanything* (2008), *I'mtiredtooIwanttostopnow* (2008), *Myappetiteisstillgood*

¹ Naegong (内工): Literally 'inner industry.' A person with strong naegong is someone who has inner strength. A person can also have a strong naegong in a particular field or practice, in which case it means the person has reached a certain level of virtuosity in the particular field. Loosely the term can be translated as 'inner strength' or 'inner skills' – Translator.

(2008), *Artisaquestion ofnaegong* (2008) draw my attention, for they are the artist's soliloquies in drawing. And, I hope as I look at these drawings of somewhat detached utterances, that the artist's internal thoughts and external responses will stay a little longer in a state of disorder, that they will accumulate and brew a little more internally so that they may come out as something more than a soliloquy, and that in the process Song's *naegong* will emerge naturally.