

Hidden behind the holy landscape

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Ock Jungho recently played on a mud flat. He did yoga and photographed himself doing yoga in the tidal flat of *Ganghwa* Island. What he did on a mud flat, yoga, was a playing. There's no other meaning than entertaining himself. It doesn't really matter if it is a satire on society, non-satire, a metaphor, a symbol nor even nothing. There are many ways for interpret about it, but the closest and the most literal one may be a playing on a mud flat or in-the-mud as he expressed. He said that he suddenly hit on the idea of doing yoga on a mud flat while drinking with his friend in the daytime. The mud flat isn't simple mud. It's like a pit sinking into gradually. If one stands on a mud flat, it feels like being landed on a hard ground at first, then the feeling changes as sinking into the sand. There's such sense of that a feet gets stuck in there. In fact, it's all depends on how much water or the sea covers an area of flat muddy land.

Of course, doing yoga or stretching on a mud flat rarely happens. Because it's not appropriate. Well, there are some exceptions to such venue being chosen; training for the marine corps, adventure entertainment programs on TV or experiencing army life. The mud flats are vital places for food production as well as for children's entertainment. They are important inhabits for a wide range of invertebrates from lugworms to cockles, a sheltered nature for turkeys and saltwort and a back yard playground for children grown up nearby. I remember my childhood experiences spending lots of time on the mud flats of the West Sea, swimming in the sea, rolling and sliding in the mud, building sand castles, stemming the tide and catching baby mullets and short necked clams.

Ock Jungho did yoga in his previous series of <Anyang Rainbow>. Doing yoga, to him, was a kind of a linguistic expression or a symbolic sign. The signs drawn by his physical body were there for laughing at varied situations of the society, just like a sarcastic smile. His physical gestures were placed in the solemn political and capital spots, such as *Gwanghwamun*, *Anyang Stream* and *Tienanmen Square*. He stood out of those places and led our eyes to look at them again. This style of his art has continued with his installations, performances and photographs of the places where the desire of our society is sensitively revealed. His yoga on a mud flat is an extension of his continuous artistic performance. However, the new series is slightly different. The difference initiates from the characteristics of chosen places and the performance he did in this time.

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Unlike the former places, the mud flat points out a different characteristic of his art world. The mud flat is the natural place where the hands of men can hardly reach out and stays out from any symbols of the politics and the capital. It's a place signifying both original production and primitive power. Therefore, the mud flat takes its meaning as primitivism rather than having an artificial symbol. There is the indifference of nature to human that does not attempt to neither conquer nor being invaded. In the natural world, the human body purely and simply becomes a living thing composed of weight and volume. Ock Jungho did yoga on a mud flat as a living thing rather than as a man.

This does not mean that there is the purity of being-for-itself. The fact that the mud flat is regarded as a nature reserve and the nature itself is the symbol and sign of his artistic choice. He also brought a familiar sign into his photographic frames, a shopping cart used in large grocery markets and malls which is placed as if it's dumped on a mud flat. The shopping cart reminds us

of a series of meanings, such as the market, consuming, the capital and New Liberalism. But it's just an empty cart and useless object on a mud flat which consequently puts the situation being humorous. A metal cart with four wheels runs well on a hard and flat ground, but turns out to be an useless load on a mud flat. Here, the end meets with the accordance in a rhetoric sense, because his yoga is also useless motion as a man's body is nothing special but a burden to the nature.

The artist says that he rather tried to focus on the realization and actualization of photography and remove meanings as much as possible. He precisely wanted to say nothing or emphasized on the trace and posture of his physical body on a mud flat without any symbolic signs. So his yoga posture becomes a lingual sign as well as the most pure form of human body. This is a possible antinomic state, because yoga itself has a cultural code pursuing at the concentration over the actions of human body. Indian yoga might started to look back on one's physical self, life and world throughout unordinary physical training and meditation. In such a notion, the mud flat actually very well fit into the original yoga practice. The scenery of which an artist wearing a suit does yoga on a mud flat, literally means such saying, "Dog fight in mud(이전투구 泥田鬪狗)"

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Another series of landscape photography is also a part of his continuous statement on the irony of reality. The reality he tries to say is non-understandable, unacceptable, estrange and twisted one that we struggle everyday. In this time, the way of his statement became more objective, therefore persuasive. The frames of reality he chose this time represent or realize our contemporary life as it is. They show the external resemblance among those sceneries with different contents, such as small folding chairs standing side by side at a fishing place, a container

crane at the pier, the rampart and the minaret of the church. The interpretation upon their external resemblance depends on how one reads the symbol. and the artist brings a code for his own interpretation; the natural and intuitive comparison and contrast between images.

He framed the images in two distinctive directions; one in a parallel way and the other one in a vertical way. A parallel direction enabled the representation of repetition on the original scenery without the original one, and a vertical direction enabled to draw the hierarchical structure of the world in a wide range. The artist made a parallel frames to compare the distance shot and the detailed shot of the landscape of crowd. For example, there are two images of two different groups of people gathered in a baseball stadium and a horse racing track with detailed shots of each. According to the artist, the tensions and attentions of the baseball stadium and the horse racing track are very different. Artist states that people in the baseball stadium usually take their time and enjoy the game, but people in the horse racing track are betting to win money short term. Their sceneries in a far distance seem similar, but their details are completely different. Photography enables to show this difference. The meaning became obvious with photography throughout the eyes of the camera, not the eyes of men. On the other words, we rarely recognize the true world with our own eyes.

I am personally more interested in the vertical frames. The vertical photos are made throughout the editing process of synthesizing and trimming of several consecutive shots. These consequently provide images of the new world unlike the ordinary panoramic view. If the basic frames with parallel and panoramic views represent the natural extent and length consisting with men's viewpoint, the vertical frames represent the multi layers and hierarchical structure of the real world. These are like piercing sections of the landscape of our lives where the power, the capitalism and ideologies are constantly realized and repeated. In this vertical sections from

heaven to earth, there are ideological and symbolic signs placed at the top while there are works, loads and burdens of everyday life placed at the bottom. For example, the landscape of flying *Taegukgi* (the national flag of Korea) in the park shows a vertical contrast between the flying flag at the top of the frame and the park placed at the bottom of the frame. The symbol of nation and ideology is placed high, and the peaceful everyday life is placed low. If we focus on the bottom part only, the park doesn't mean anything more than a park. But the photography straightforwardly reveals where the park is belonged to and whom conquers it. From a Marxist perspective, it widens its scope to deal with other social vertical divisions.

Another interesting point of the vertical landscape is the case when the ordinary height is reversed, like in the comparative photographs between a port and rock climbers. Both of them are shot in physically high grounds, but the actual altitudes are reversed in the images. This reversion is about the illusions provoked by the narrow and vertical viewpoint which contrasts against the custom of men's viewpoint on seeing images. This illusion may be the truth of the world where we are living right now.

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Ock's photography used to across between the reality and the conceptual performance. He may wanted to record his performance and self entertainment as well as achieving a kind of photographic images. A step off from the usual conceptual performance, he's now approaching another step closer to the photographic sense or the joy of photographing. The process has just started here.

In this time, he used high resolution camera to achieve more details of images. This means that the detailed and sophisticated description is requested in his art work. (I couldn't see the printed images yet, so I only imagine them based on what I am told.) However, details of photography sometimes get out of the intention of an artist, because they have too strong 'statements' as they are. The haphazardry of photography which comes out of photographer's intention is the most characteristic of photography. The dependency and intention of photographer who wants to take the subject at the most status and the haphazardry popping out of his/her will simply boil the artistic tension.

The artist in this time opened a new path, and his images began to talk what he wants to say in an indirect way. Those scenes facing the mud are like being there to talk about themselves. There is much attention towards this change of his artistic style that he puts photography and image to be just photography and just image. However, there is another important reason why I put the most meaning and expectation on his artistic process. Because there is a tendency towards painting to be regarded as a lower-class genre for a symbolic expression in these days. Images are not treated nor recognized properly, either. Regarding this situation, his artistic career faces ahead. He still has a lot to talk about, and nobody knows where he's going to. He may crawl through the mud flat again, runs along the four major rivers (of the national restoration project) or even float to somewhere.

Anyhow, Ock Jungho cries. Crying is his art. I have no idea why he cries. He probably doesn't know either. Maybe, he's crying for the fact that our life ultimately can't be changed. Can it be an answer? The play button on his crying image means that his crying is a present progressive. He just cries without a gesture, which seems like being naked. This frankness must be something he has to remember all the way through his path.