

Human World Narrated by Fairies Whose Wings Are Pulled Off

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Xooang Choi's works are always based on human figures. However, his human figures, unlike the typical nude statues of human body, do not take the monumental posture to stand on the ground with transcendental sights toward the ground or sky. They are mostly doll-sized. They look like dolls, but they are not cute and decorative, embraced by cozy environments. These little figures are thrown or abandoned in relatively gigantic and unfamiliar environments. They are twisted or cut in agony or pain. The little human figures are not mere formative images, but they emphasize the vulnerability of modern people that are shrunk as much as they can be. These stripped human figures with specific forms and life-like facial gestures represent the anxious psychology of humankind.

Even if they are identical in shape, larger ones have different contexts than smaller ones. Smaller ones selected by Xooang Choi are different from the narratives of human figures found in classical/realist/expressionist artworks. His works are placed in certain environments, such as indoors or labs and two identical characters can have different contexts based on their dramatic behaviors on the stage. They are on role-playing like the horses on a chessboard. The humans depicted by him using miniature models are not confident subjects that design and dominate the environment, but they are anonymous public in situations of petit bourgeois or in existential situations. He uses them to criticize the modern world's reason based on traditional man-centeredness or humanism.

His works have deeper roots on pop culture or low-class culture than on contemporary art to depict the human circumstances in modern civilizations rather skeptically. Human figures depicted by him are not extraordinary beings, but members of the majority - the public. Since the 19th Century, the public has been the major topic in cultural theories. Gustave Le Bon is the one who first discussed the public psychology in the history of culture. In his *Mass Psychology*, published in 1895, he emphasized the irrational aspect of the public. He pointed out that one of the major characteristics of modern society is that conscious behaviors of individuals are replaced with conscious behaviors of the public, and this is a hypothesis that is still valid. The public can become worthless or heroic through the power of subconscious. The human figures in Xooang Choi's works act mysteriously like natural creatures that act instinctively.

The public has become the subjects in the modern times where equalitarianism was supported, but such horizontal idealization is rather paradoxical. The public has the desire to stand out and to classify themselves, although they are still identical. What are in his small stages are lonely beings in a group. They are, like the members of civil society, have the tension to

remain true egos despite that they exist as molecules in a massive system. In his works, each individual is threatened by unidentified forces. Not only are the one whose head is destroyed by a gun, but also a couple in love putting out long tongues to prey on each other. In his work, humans are antagonistic to one another and have given up coexistence or have been acclimated.

Ortega points out that others become risky because of the fact that they want same things as you. As the largest group of animal on earth, molecular individuals engage in the wrangle of searching for food. In this respect, human society is just like nature. The doll-sized miniature people in Xooang Choi's works live in irrationality like the characters in Kafka's novel that transform into insects all of a sudden and become distant to all familiar things of life. They look back on their daily habits from a distance. The people in his work are lonely. The people in his recent works, in particular, are isolated individually thrown in certain situations all by themselves. He is outside the great norm that determines the course of life, and emphasizes the existential aspect of life in reality. In existential philosophy, Ortega Y. Gasset, a philosopher who discussed the inhumane issues of individuals and art in modern society, explored the difference between humans and animals in terms of isolation in *Human and People*. Animals already have the repertoire of behaviors dominated by instincts. However, life is an assignment for humans.

Ortega points out that human's existence as human are not as definite as tigers' existence as tigers and fish's existence as fish. Animal life is essentially away from oneself in self-isolation, whereas human has the autonomy to leave or return to the environment. However, contemporary artist Xooang Choi's human figures focus on animal-like destinies rather than ideal notions of autonomy and free will. In other words, they are chased and pushed by the unpredictable surroundings. Also, they are confined in tomb-like bodies and do not appear as massless fairies. They are very small in scale, but their facial expressions and even blood vessels are delicately recreated in his works. Thus, life and death are one substance contained in a lump of flesh.

Their living bodies grow molds and they flail in filthy-looking soups, struggling to survive. Peter Sloterdijk, the author of *The Rules of Human Farm*, also compares humans and animals. He says human has failed to exist and remain as animals. Still undefined, this existence detaches from the environment due to its failure as animals and acquires a whole new world in terms of existentialism. However, socialization pursuing human liberation has captured humans back in bird cages. Sloterdijk, by quoting Heidegger, insists that the essential function of humanism was to hibernate and adjust human brutality. Humanism has become a method of ruling and human nature has become a greater violence over other humans. Sloterdijk points out that this society is realized by the one and only complete humanist, or the Platonic ruler with the skills of King's Shepherd. Here, we come to a conclusion that some humans domesticate colleagues, while other humans are domesticated.

Unlike how non-human organisms are confined to the given environment, humans possess the world and live as a part of the world. However, such humanism was a military humanism where one's wills were realized by power. Xooang Choi's works that depict human as a figure in between confined animal and human have invisible metal bars of fascism. A big-headed child abandoned in an empty document drawer, a human vomiting blood and mountains of documents in color, and a human dumped in a dumpster are elaborately depicted in his works. Human images are pushed back and forth by massive structures, subjectless procedures, and impersonal forces. The current social order that pressures and confronts individuals eventually relates to the fact that "the society is the sum of decisions of each actors for hierarchy and classification according to the symbols of ownership distribution" (Bourdieu).

In several exhibitions that he participated in this year, he has exhibited works where little humans are put in transparent cylinders or crunched like lab mice, creating dramatic scenes where humanistic 'human farm' is transformed into post-humanistic bioengineering. Peter Sloterdijk, the author of *The Rules of Human Farm*, argues that bioengineering of the future will develop into clear character design and turn to selective birth or selection before birth, while pointing out that the horizon of humanism has changed essentially with the emergence of bioengineering. According to him, bioengineering means the advent of post-humanism. In Xooang Choi's works, the human figures in cylinders or cages symbolize that autonomy of subjects is nothing more than a fantasy and that man-centeredness has become another subject of suppression as modern critical minds have insisted. According to Luc Ferry, modernity is what Heidegger called humanism, rationalism and philosophy of enlightenment, and the scientific and technological outcomes that are born from them.

Discourses on man-centeredness and subjectivity are logically recorded in the frame of deconstruction of modernity. It emphasizes violence inevitably hidden in the egoistic reason of modernity. The universal subjects of modernity based on integration through equality and homogeneity have created a camp-like system rather than a democratic utopia. It relates to the attempt to produce new humans with scientific knowledge, regulations, and internalization plan. It is 'thoroughly specified by the knowledge' of modern universalism from the time Descartes. It is a handicapped subject like the big-headed child of Xooang Choi that cannot move because of the weight of its own head. Such pseudo-personalization eventually created confined existence. It represents the irrationality achieved when reason-centeredness is consistently pursued.

The human figures named *The Beggar*, *The Shovel Man*, and *Pint-sized Dude* and placed in transparent cylinders like lab animals are cynical yet obedient to the system. Superficially, Xooang Choi's works convey messages through exaggerated gestures. It was a characteristic of modernism adopted to show colorful images in the age of mass media where there are too many

visual stimuli and the sassy code of low-class culture is used through mass media. Internal organs are ripped open or brains are cut open under the friendly titles of *Open Mind* or *Open Heart*. This is how modern people appear in dangerous societies full of wars and crimes. Media showing new environments to a majority of scattered individuals also become even more cruel with more intense stimuli. Sloterdijk points out the tendency of media to turn from creating information to creating stimuli.

Pop culture always relies on the strategy of forced attention to attract people to banal things. Where pop culture becomes valid, it always concentrates on combining banality with special effects. His works are rather critical about the civilization, but they are rather fragmented to represent a holistic view. It is not simply because the scale is too small, but he refuses organic structuralization or unification in compressing numerous events of modern society. Also, the individuals in his works are psychologically divided. He points out that the true subject of modern psychology is division from oneself or tension. The humans in his works are not autonomous, but heteronomous. They are not integrated, but they are hollow everywhere. However, this division also becomes the gap that breaks the shell of identification, which has been found suppressive by modern critical minds.

Art is known as something different for something better. Because the message-conveying elements are small, his works emphasize the meaning of empty spaces in our mundane world. One of his works that depicts a human figure in a dreamy fantasy shows that it is not easy for him to create something different in a society dominated by homogeneity. The fantasy of being pushed up by slight differences does not lift him up as much as its height, but becomes a pressure that suppresses this clueless daydreamer. However, it is also the world of difference, or "something dominated by various cores of forces that integrate and conflict every moment" (Nietzsche). Only sheer difference, or diversity, can revitalize our lives outside the ideology of massive homogeneity. However, as philosophers warn us, concerned about the deconstruction of subject, we must not forget that others become complete others and brutal beings to each individual when only difference is emphasized. When modern heritages are unconditionally liquidated, difference, the heterogeneity of interests, is placed under the law of violence and power.