

The Hero and His Sacrifice

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This exhibition title of Xooang Choi is *Pruritus*, Medically, 'pruritus' is "an unpleasant sensation that evokes the desire to scratch the skin."¹ It is generally known that itch can usually originate from a skin ailment, and might be caused by systemic disease such as diabetes and chronic renal failure as well as external stimuli including contact with external matter, change in temperature, chemical substances, and electric impulse. Like this, itch can be produced by diverse reasons and its causes are still poorly understood. If one feels itch on his body, he consciously or unconsciously scratches an itch spot continuously and if severely scratching there, blood might run out. While scratching, one may feel instant pleasure but its symptoms do not improved. The sensation of itch is an extremely peculiar symptom derived from any disease and external stimuli, but a physical condition might grow worse if repetitively scratched. Interestingly, this phenomenon often breaks out in society.

Xooang Choi previously noted the ordinary people and society they live in. The more enormous and advanced society is, the more its systems become standardized and systemized so as to more efficiently manage and control them. In fact, most of people cannot help but adapt themselves to this society or at times remain fettered by it. He refers to it as a 'vegetative state' in which one cannot do anything at his will. Even if it is hard to disregard any external impact, is it possible to find out its cause in the outside? According to Félix Guattari's analyses of capitalism and micro-fascism, men of power in capitalist society seek to make the public internalize what they want. They lead the public to spontaneous actions, as this society demands them to follow. Those who obey to power seem influenced by something external but a source of their energy may derive from their own desire.²

Such similar case is also found in Korea. In the period of Park Chung Hee, for instance, social comprehensive value has priority over each one's individual value in the name of modernization and industrialization. People in this period acted following the directions then society set, considering themselves heroes and the motive force of society. Of course, Korea owes its economic growth to their strenuous efforts and sacrifice. For today's younger generation living under new values, their stories are heard like the tales of their heroic deeds. After all, were they the real heroes to lead society? Or, were they scapegoats for society? If so, were they the subjects or objects of their activities?

The Hero on display at the show presents this critical mind and its subject matter is his own father. Discharged from the marine corps, He regards his father a typical man of the Park

¹ Medical information provided by the Seoul National University Medical Center. Search for www.naver.com

² Félix Guattari, *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics*, Translated by Yoon Su-jong, Prunsoop, 1998, pp. 80-81.

Chung Hee era. He said that almost all elders of his father's generation show similar propensities. For a 35 year-old sculptor, his father is a barometer condensing aspects of the times.

He represents his father in this work in a naked body peculiar to his elaborate sculpture. His inelastic muscles are a metaphor for a senile, shapeless aged man but his grimaced face implies he still has a firm bigotry to attain something. The artist sets up this statue on a pedestal like a classic sculpture. Its slightly crooked posture, not a firmly upstanding pose, indicates he is not a hero any longer. This statue seems somewhat strange by placing it on the front part of this pedestal, not its center and is of diminutive stature. *The Wings*, representing a fragmented body part, is in the same context. In this work, countless rough hands form a wing, just as an enormous ideal is shaped through the gather of many anonymous people's efforts. Although a deed of sacrifice is socially admired as a noble, lofty act, it might be individually so cruel.

Upon closer examination, in *The Heroine* featuring a beautiful woman, a pink knot is tied from her occiput to her back waist. It is like terribly-looking huge needle stitches with thick threads on the human skin. Surprisingly, the artist explains a woman puts on a human skin that looks beautiful. Beauty is originally hard to judge objectively but each society has its own standard to evaluate beauty. Based on this standard, a woman wishes to be beautiful and men have a preference for such a woman. The woman becomes an ideal type of women, namely a heroine, after putting on the skin of a beauty. It is not sure whether she put on it with her own will or by other's will. What's important above all else is that it is never possible to tie this knot for herself without other's help.

This young girl throws out her chest and hip on her knees, slightly twisting her waist. It is a posture to maximize the beautiful curves of a woman and often taken by models in women's magazines. This pose is to show off one's beauty which is commercially forced.

The Girl also addresses generally accepted ideas on women. A slender girl sits on her knees with her butt on a red, diaphanous cushion. It is known that this posture cannot be easily taken by a man due to his pelvic structure. All women whose bodies are anatomically and physiologically different from men's face menstruation every month. In every menstrual period, women suffer troubles and inconvenience but never give up it to turn out their femininity. The cushion that seems tinged with menstrual blood is a metaphor for such troubles and her sullen, depressed look means a tactful recognition of her destiny as a woman.

The King represents His illusion of the world after death. A guy with the belly drooped down points at his own head by making his fingers in a gun shape. His hair stands up and looks like a crown. Dreaming of becoming a king at the moment of his death, he seems to admire a state of death in which all remain beautified and are forgotten. This work symbolizes the mind of an ordinary man who wants to belie all his personal things and does not willing to reveal them.

Even though His sculpture is quite realistic, he would not represent real figures as they are or not idealize them based on his anatomical knowledge. He deforms some parts of the body

to accentuate them. Through this process, he gives birth to unique shapes, even extremely wired, horrible forms. They can be explained as the shapes that are not existent in reality but are plausible to exist. His work provokes our sensibility with elaborate body sculptures by adding extremely artificial elements. His nude sculptures approach us with familiarity and candidness on the one hand and they, on the other hand, appear sensuous and sensational. If so seriously deformed, his sculpture might be regarded as something monstrous. If slightly metamorphosed, the human body he depicts appears slightly provocative. His purpose, needless to say, is not to astonish viewers with the weird or admire them through an elaborate representation. Rather, he intends to reveal real dynamics among the diverse forces in our society, wishing that we could rediscover our active part in the relations.