

## **Life-ness contained in the uselessness and the abandoned**

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### **Encounter with several scenes or things abandoned**

In October 2006, Venue the planning room in the National Modern Art Museum. There stood wooden tiles that had endured a number of trains for a long time. Those had been lying in the wide empty plane and ran suddenly to stand in this place as if they had received some sort of oracle. Their outcry filled in the bay of Gwacheon Mountain. To the wooden tiles that had finished their assigned task and finished its life, Chung, Hyun, 'the artist of the year' selected by the National Modern Art Museum, gave another life. The hero trimmed the tiles in the length of 3 meters and arranged them in a row. Those 40 structures were overwhelming the wide space in the way it made a breakaway with the commonsense of the art philosophy. It is because he made an epochmaking move in the art circle which member normally thinks of formative art as made of noble materials like granite and bronze. Wooden tiles were in short some sort of foundation thing that dedicated itself under the racing trains, the things that showed the true meaning of sacrifice to the benefit of the others, and the things that would be trashed after serving its purpose with such an indifference by the human society in the same way that it had always been even during their service. Now that the era has changed the wooden tiles have even degenerated into some sort of wastes. One person cast a warming gaze upon those wastes, and that was Jeong Hyun who was selected as the artist of the year. This fact was further confirmed by the reminiscent exhibition held in the Art Museum.

The title of the wooden tiles were <Untitled> but it surely reminded of the lower body part of human. Being inserted with some sort of interposition, the two pillars were nothing short of the human lower limbs. These lower limbs were omitted with the trunk of the body which was important, especially abandoning the head part. The long painful lifetime and the scars embraced by the material made the tree nothing better than the forsaken that is far from elegance. The rough and shabby piece of wood evinced the long and painful life with the dark skin and scars engraved upon it. Such wooden tiles, which had been lying on the field for its entire life, were now forming a herd to be arrayed in the same direction. Without the upper body, or rather having abandoned it, they were producing some sort of symbolization. These construction was reflecting the human society that is ever increasingly into the process of being materialized. It

reminded of the spiritual world which had been long expelled, and the remaining physical world that is overwriting the reality. Furthermore it was so majestic to the extent that it exerted high-handedness to those before it. What does the array of the bulky lower body mean without its lower part?

In June 2004, Venue Kim Chong-yung Art Museum. The concrete asphalt(ascon) that had once paved the road was occupying the display floor of the museum after being abandoned. Jung was the person who dragged the discarded pavement materials all the way to the Art Museum. He held the private exhibition to celebrate him being selected as the 'face of the artist' by Kim Jong Young Art Museum. In this exhibition, he also turned back on those elegant materials in favor of the wastes. Ascon refers to the dark wastes left over after refining the crude oil. This is usually the favorite material for making roads, so it had some part in blackening a number of cities so far. But when the roads are dug up again for revampment or reconstruction, they are mostly ill-treated as some sort of trouble to dispose. The artist collected the trashed wastes and breathe in new lives to them. He trimmed and cut the black lump to the reasonable degree and dispersed them here and there on the floor. These looked like a group of islands in the Dado Sea but of course in the posture of a human body lying down. It was the resurrection of the wastes settling in the sandy field. Not only that, it also refreshed some strong liveliness there. The stone yard of Yongan temple in Kyoto which is best renowned for its artificial beauty is an artificial garden in which small and big 15 stones are arranged appropriately on the line made by racking up the sandy field. Some praise it highly as the formative revelation of the calm and focused mind which is the famous symbol of Japan. Other say their arrangement is in the shape of the Chinese character heart. And one study saw its arrangement as representing the Cassiopeia constellation, for which it even tried to elevate it to the status of the universe garden. People of the next generation were trying to attach excessive meaning to the arrangement of the stones and stands. How could one encapsulate the beauty of Japan in such a compact expression! Should I like that sort of beauty or not, I did not know the answer.

The stones gathered on the sands. One was pretending so noble that it tried to give up on the smell of human sweats with such a constant pedantic approach. The human figure which was made of discarded ascon on the sand made one ruminant over the existence of human or the true nature of objects. The virtue innately contained in that very essence was the smell of humans. Among those, how could he give back lives to those abandoned after losing their uses, those disfigured and forsaken, and the ugly ones of no use! Chung, Hyun's artwork was directly connected to the return of a human form, that is, the return of a living thing.

## **Giving Life to the trivial.**

At college, Chung, Hyun was baptized with the modernism detached from the reality. His scepticism during the school life led him to the wondering. But that doesn't mean he was directly led to the student rightist movement. He rather chose to go to France, which was reputed as the mecca of 'elegant art', in order to construct the art world of his own there. But the exhibition to celebrate his return to the home country caused a wide curiosity by filling itself with the artworks that were not expected by many people. Though decided on humans as the exhibition title, there was no beauty of human body displayed in the place. There was no sculpture of well-proportioned lady with a beautiful face, nor any elegant body shapes that made use of qualitative stones like done by many Italia background artists. Apart from simply disregarding the forms, the materials that he chose were 'market-valueless' humans that were made of Manila flax plant and plasters. Such start made one anticipate that his artistic activities would be a breakthrough with the previous artists of the French background. The title was human, which is all-time no. 1 subject of investigation for the old and the young all alike. Along with it, other materials that were chosen were not expensive luxurious materials, but old-fashioned wastes. That is why most of the materials composing his artworks were trivial stuffs like wooden tiles, ascon, plaster and others. Chung, Hyun would rather choose the rough stones that can be found everywhere rather than granites and marble stones which are classy and elegant. Those rough stones could even be used for the real construction works. They are not only shapeless but also have no consistent texture, which means it would be hard to handle them for a creative work. But the artist gradually discovers a contingency through the irregular nature of the stones and starts to understand the formativeness during the working process. Rather than insisting on his own willness from the outset of the work, he would find a tangent point in which a mutual agreement would be reached. It is the same for the lump of coals that he purchased himself from the mine. Spending time with the stones that look willy-nilly let the artist arrive at some sort of conclusion with the forms to give. The artist exchanges emotions with the useless materials that attract no other artist, and searches for the road to the creation of a new life being. The artist says,

"There were times at which I thought lime stones or bronze were the only materials to make a perfect sculpture. Many artists use plaster but they tend to think of it only for the experimental studies. I also liked the freshness of plaster like that of green grass. Another important reason was that I didn't have much money. Tiles, ascon, rough stone, they were all useless and trivial, but easy to get. They all have the painful story of its own, and nothing more than wastes. I liked its

fresh properties as if it were raw and unprocessed.”(From the art brochure of the National Modern Art Museum)

Chung, Hyun had affections for the things which were raw and had painful stories. Pain and rawness, these are important concepts. So to speak, "when I saw the trashed tiles, I could imagine the storms and rains that it would have long endured under countless rains throughout its lifetime. It was as if the tiles came to me in the form of a human. Though they were not noticed by anyone, it seemed to have a huge energy melted in it" confessed him. Once trashed, the tiles now were sublimed to the level of one human being, or even to that of one history. It is like being resuscitated as the source of energy. That doesn't show that the work with the wooden ties sailed smoothly from the beginning. He spoke again "since 98, I got down on the real work but the more I proceeded, the less I left their real properties and the more I was emphasizing on my own personality. It was like I confronted with the materials to conquer it. I thought something was not right. It is because my desire got the best of me. To make the tiles and I coexist with each other, I had to have a good understanding of the good properties of the tiles and rather play with them. Between the formativeness and materialness, the body and the mind, it is neither of the extreme reduction, but I would rather like it to be seen as the harmony." Chung, Hyun surely realized what he had to do. He was oriented towards the friendly attitudes with the materials, and the world of symbolization which would naturally attain itself rather than the artificially created meanings.

"Those we discover from the trivialities, what they are before being expressed in words, the living itself, the rawness, the unpredictable image, suddenness, the emancipation from the sorrow, and the long lingering depth of wanders..... and I would like to stress power is what we gain as a matter of course through the working. Chasing after the power itself would be nothing more than a formal beauty."

Being interested in triviality, this is the true starting point for art. Restoring useless materials, this is the final destination for Chung, Hyun. Writing a story about the useless and trivial stuffs is the substance of his works.

### **The scarred body or human's true nature.**

The working process in which one should meddle with cheap materials can neither be elegant. Rough materials often require an excessive labor and brave approach. Be it from the perspective of aestheticism or realism, working with the human body has always respected the forms in one way or the other. Outdated academic atmosphere sometimes give the feebleness regardless of

the essential quality. It is because the inner properties are hard to met. Therefore that sort of anguish should firstly start from the abolishing of the form. Though it was not upholding the doctrine of abstract art, the breaking and erasing of the forms were the results of an attempt to deliver a new message. The artist handled the materials roughly and violently to make a shape meaningful in itself. The artworks looked prima facie the raw and unprocessed ores. The did not abuse the special traces of being processed like a stone or a coal. I was only remaining the minimal process with the due respect for the properties of the materials. Thus, the artist was admiring at the rawness like the body voice and longing for the new energy. The freshness in raw things, it is the just starting point for everything that has an infinite potential. There acquired a new fresh message of wild character. It was a distinctive point from the normal sculptures which only tried to look pretty in a decorative manner. In fact, human bodies has been treated as gone out of window in the art society. This is grounded on the problem of expression and different perspectives. Human as the subject cannot but be the everlasting theme as long as the last person remained on earth. What would be more valuable art subject that human is. The question lies in the artful reponses and the methods of interpretation. Chung, Hyun ceaselessly used human body as the source of his art world to inquire into the essential problem of humans. Diverged from the fuddy-duddy way of viewing the human body at the level of reproduction, he tries to speak of the spiritual world via the human body. In turn the formativeness is weakened and the substance left like a chunk of the essential quality. It is in this context that one may fail to have the impression of human body from his body works.

Chung, Hyun used coal tar in many drawings. He also employed recycling papers like newspapers or cardboards to embody the human body. Coal tar reinforces the drawing effects by varying its concentration according to the diluents. The human body in the drawing has the lively and strong moves. It excellently harmonizes the materials and the themes that it intends to express. The drawing of the hemispheres is sprouting a bud over the head. It is a kind of spirits. Some have the green grasses color. It symbolizes life.

### **Rough but subtle works.**

Chung has the double characters as roughness and subtlety. Dealing with the rough materials like tiles, ascon, plaster and stones does not make him any rougher. He is rather unbelievably sophisticated and kind. One of his characteristics is that he is expert at cooking fishes. The delicateness of fish dishes requires one to have a highly developed sensation of taste like the one needed to taste the flavor of French wine. But the master of fish cuisine does not only enjoy the

fishes of high quality. He rather prefers to eat various fishes. As the morning fish market of Noryangjin is his main footpath for a walk, Chung, Hyun trained and practised the sense of taste for the sense of beauty. As he likes the sliced fishes of various kinds, he attaches meanings to the trivial things on the lowest bottom. He would prefer 'tsukidashi', the fishes of various kinds, that can never be served as the main dish in the Japanese restaurant. Jung's art is connected to the 'tsukidashi aestheticism' that is served as the leftover rather than a splendid and classy dish. Therefore, he is giving a form to the grand theme of humans with the wastes like tiles and ascon. He is achieving it in the way that while confronting with the true nature and deleting the form, the new life is being brought into. A creation of new life must be in need of an artful touch.

In November 2007, Venue Gyeonggido Art Museum in Ansan. Recently, a new building was built to open Gyeonggido Art Museum, which purchased the majestic artwork <Wooden Electric Pole>. In the length of 17 meters and 6 poles, they are stunning masterpieces. Chung, Hyun is the artist. The artwork had once guarded the front gate of the National Modern Art Museum while it was being displayed there. After then, it was invited to one planning exhibition of Gyeonggido Art Museum, then recently purchased for good as it was considered as harmonizing with the empty environments after the long display. This electric pole stretching high up to the sky is in one respect like the pillar of a temple, and in another like the totem pole guiding the sacred place. What is clear is that it established it self as the landmark of the Art Museum by making a strong impression on the attendants. This electric pole had once served its purpose in one era, but thrown away after finishing its role. But such a gigantic wooden pole in a gathering seems to produce another symbolization. This is also somewhat different from Richard Serra's gigantic iron board building installed in the gate of the Modern Art Museum in Dallas. The iron board is like the intended praise of industrial society. But for the everlasting time, the electric pole had persevered strongly like the nation people of this land. The electric pole is not bending its knees like how our people had been in the past. The trees look beautiful when they are standing upright. The wooden tiles that had been lying for a long time also look more beautiful when they stand up. They all refresh another side of humans and serve as a yardstick to examine the human nature. Reinterpreting human body and giving new lives by using the wastes and worthless stuffs, Chung, Hyun's work in this sense attracts people's attention.