

Allegory Landscape: Hong Soun's "Sidescape"

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Painter Hong Soun. Notwithstanding his reputation as an installation artist, Hong never quits painting. At the crucial moment for paintings the existential basis of which has been threatened to be restricted and devaluated with the flood of media and diffusion of media art, Hong's new landscapes, 'sidescapes' make a fresh crack. Getting beyond the revival of former paintings, his sidescapes which parody and reconstruct landscapes, the typical painting genre, enrich the vocabulary of contemporary art creating new visual discourses with using new codes for representation. Sidescapes named by the artist himself are 're-imaged' landscapes. Using images from news photos of home and foreign disasters like wars and terrors, film and video still cuts, and pictures depicted on postcards, Hong makes traditional oil-paintings. Nowadays, images of wars are easy of access through magazines, newspapers and television newscasts. Especially miserable scenes of the wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq have been widely spread out through mass communications making us so familiar with them even up to be unsensitive. For the public defenselessly exposed and addicted to media images, cruel war scenes become one of the sensational feasts to the eyes like hard-core pornos and bizarrerie hunting events.

The artist isolates natural objects like stones and trees, which stand in their proper place on corners of the photo frame being not related to the human affairs, from the original context of wars, and recreates them into beautiful and desolate meta-landscapes. When the skyrocketting disastrous heated atmosphere is magnified and fills up the canvas, it goes beyond its simple representational function and could be read as a phallic shape which implies paternal violence. Landscapes made by eliminating people from a photo of Siberian prison, still cuts of Andrey Tarkovskiy's *Solaris* and of Iran video artist Shrini Neshat's 환희 series <Untitled> free themselves from the semantic contexts and re-appear as odd surrealistic landscapes which give rise to a certain nostalgia. Paintings depicted the partial images of the Great Wall of China and 13 royal mausoleum of the Ming-dynasty from postcards are also displaced into 'uncanny' landscapes which seem real but not real.

Hong's late serial works titled <Postcard> are in succession to his sidescapes. He painted magnified images selected from parts of postcards on 14cm x 18cm(size n°0) canvas, the size of actual postcards. Collating partial images of the world, the artist is conceiving a global landscape. In the case of <Parlez-moi d'amour>, different series works, Hong selected human body parts

from film still cuts, painted them abstractly in erotic pink. In this way, Hong Soun re-transforms the reality which already exists as representations, images, and signs. His meta-landscapes, namely sidescapes are isolating 'parts' and representing 'the whole' with metaphors, metonymy and synecdoche. In a sense, they are linguistic landscapes which call into doubt reality and 'the real' and deconstruct the original meaning. Especially in <Postcard> and <Parlez-moi d'amour>, making a general entirety by constituting parts in links, Hong emphasizes the rhetorical meaning of 'parts and the whole', an aesthetic concept which penetrates his entire works, and converts his landscape into a kind of visual text.

Hong Soun's sidescapes could be called *allegory landscapes* in respect that he substitutes silent linguistic landscapes for the scenes of war, terror, and disaster, borrows already visualized scenic images, reconstructs them and ultimately parodies traditional historic landscapes. Basically allegory means the figurative rhetoric concerning interpretations of legends, myths, and the Bible. Corresponding to the related icons, it has created thematic and stylistic legend of visual art. Allegory which had been suppressed by formal theory of modernism re-appears in postmodernism era. The reason for this phenomenon is that postmodernism has adopted 'intertextuality' as a model for interpretation and criticism. Appropriation, propensity to fragment, regressive inclination, deconstruction through accumulation and repetition, metaphoric, metonymic, and synecdochic meanings are the elements constituting intertextuality of allegory. With these, virtues like reality and actuality which once removed from the art by modernism are restored as allegory.

Even though allegory has regressive impulse to resuscitate the past in the present appropriating past images, these images do not preserve their original forms or meanings. Allegory is not analytical. It does not come to a close with a hybridized appropriation. Instead, allegory transforms it and replaces it by another. Photography which perpetuates the temporality and memorializes the transiency, especially that of the postcards of sightseeing places which are the metaphors of culture and also its scenic metonymy functions as allegory. Hong Soun, giving the minimum transformation to this photo scene, deprives it of the original nuance and reality and replaces them with entirely different reality. Allegory, moreover, favors fragments and scraps and it has a will of recreation to generalize them on the whole. Like montages made up by combining fragmentary pieces, in Hong's postcards and porn series which construct serial continuum by arranging parts in parallel, comes the metonymic allegory to interpret the whole with legends of the parts.

Hong Soun is a practitioner of allegory who separates *signifiant* from *signifié* using appropriation and transformation. Through his first step of appropriation, the meanings are drained up, then in

the second step of transformation, new meanings are given. Ultimately, he is a postmodernist who tries to switch-over from the visual to the verbal, from the form to discourses, from pastiche to text. What matters in this turnover, from the modernist work which guarantees the stabilizes signification to the text where the *playing of signifiant* is highlighting, is the interactivity with spectators. Text is a "happening" which stems in a "multi-layered field where plural writings are colliding with each other." Accordingly, it is fundamentally unfixed, non-original, and therefore incomprehensible. Reading, in the end, can be completed not within a text itself but in the interaction between text and text, and text and reader/spectator. This shows text originally implies 'interactivity'.

Hong Soun's *allegory landscape* is completed only through its spectator's reading happening in painting itself, that is on the canvas. Hong's landscape which craves the interaction taking place on its surface with viewers might be the reflection of his autobiographic figure. Being related to one's unconsciousness and private desire, allegory is a kind of remedy like drugs and sex to save him from the prison of society and give him dreams of escape. Hong drags out the unconsciousness which has been concealed under formalism and aestheticism of modernism, transforms it into a new image with *allegory landscapes* and finally liberate the art and the artist himself at the same time. To conclude, allegory landscapes are individual psychologic portraits of Hong Soun, an 'allegorist' who revives tradition, history and myth in contemporary words, and a subjective expressionist who turns individual mentality and inner reality into an abstract experience. They, moreover, are allegory portraits as well which describes the artist who is mentally conflicting within himself as a social and existential being on the confines of the real and the imaginary.