

Tactile Sensation of Landscape

- Roh Choong Hyun's Landscape that brush against the Body

1.

Paintings by Roh Choong Hyun have gone back to find the materials of earlier days. He goes back to a place that he has left before and repaints it. During his absence, the weather has changed and the width of the subject has widened. In the dry weather that looks as if air has dried up to its non-existence, the changed landscape is filled with smog, yellow dust and cement powder. Moist snow comes down but this even looks like volcanic ash. Has the internal changed? Has the world itself changed? It would be both. This becomes certain once one follows the trajectory of his paintings. From his early works of series <Prosaic Landscape>, <Place(Zari)>, through <Closed-door Room>, he has come back to the subject matters of <Prosaic Landscape, Place>. He has interpreted the landscapes that he observed into collected, imagined and public ones and then, now, he has again turned his direction toward landscapes that the body interacts with directly.

Is this a simple return back or a restudy? I view it as being close to a re-investigation. Furthermore, his paintings have become more physical or synaesthetic. The visual has called for the tactile and they together have brought about an auditory effect. Thus, we hear sounds from his paintings. It is the sound of substance like snow, rain, yellow sand, cement powder and dust that pour down softly. A very blur sound that cannot be heard unless one concentrates hard— the vague sort of sound that is almost next to silence, a flattened and blurred painting. Thus, his painting is not focused on the visual. The vision is the conveyor of other senses. The eye views the landscape but what we feel becomes tactile or auditory sense.

2.

At a glance, the paintings of Roh Choong Hyun seem to be representative. However, his works are actually free from the burden of representation. In terms of the relationship with the subject matter, his paintings are close to similitude, not resemblance. Resemblance deals with the relation of how much the copy resembles the original since it implies a certain hierarchy between the original and its copy. However, similitude accounts for the similar looks between copies that do not have originals to refer to. That is, similitude can be understood as a repetitive play that is free from having to represent something and does not have to care about how resembling it is to the original, thus without the need to testify the original.

The making of the painting by Roh shows exactly this. Even though we look at a subject with bare eyes, the material for this painting is finally the reinterpreted information perceived through the monitor and printed image. The artist would look at a site and take photos of it or he would discover photos from magazines, newspapers and the Internet. The images are printed and the artist paints the printed images. To be more correct, it is not about painting the printed image at all. This is fundamentally impossible.

The painted images, in reality, exist everywhere in the whole process and at the same time, non-existent anywhere. The reason this paradox is plausible is that painters are stirred by images with the desire to paint but they arrive at another place which is not reflective of the original image. They even do not know where they will arrive. If we go farther, artists should not know what they would paint. And this is inevitable.

What are Roh's paintings trying to convey in the process of walking gradually away from the original image? This is somewhat strange as a question. His paintings can be said of depicting whatever the viewer wants to see rather than showing something, it questions what you have seen. Here is a swimming pool after the peak seasons. Cars are parked outside where snow is falling. There is a tennis court. There is a bird sitting on a cable. What is he seeing there?

This is why painting is attractive. When there is merely an obscure feeling and something behind it, this is when the artist picks up his brush and starts to paint, when he does not know quite what it is about. In reality,

this is all a painter does. The moment it becomes clear what we are going to see, the painting ends or becomes meaningless.

During Roh's process of searching for things that he wants to see, landscapes as visual images start to transform into tactile and auditory matter. The texture embedded in the landscape and the tactile sensation, both are rough. At the same time, there is a feeling of weakness. But it is not weakness that crumbles down softly. It is rather similar to the porous texture of an old cement brick that crushes in small quantity when held hard with the fingers. That is why it is dry and rugged. We don't know whether the artist wanted to see it or not. Well, it doesn't matter. What we intend to see is not whether he knows it or not.

3.

The landscapes painted by Roh Choong Hyun are geographically within the city center but their role and location are situated in the outskirts. Theme park, parking lot, riverbank of the Han River, swimming pool, etc. These places are slightly off the track of production and circulation. The places he painted are spaces of surplus. They are places for play and rest, not involved in direct productive process. The reasons the artist chose these spots are not precisely known but the character of the space itself is the component of the space, explaining somewhat of his choice of spot.

The painted spots clearly reveal their structure. The pool shows how it is a pool, nothing else, and the parking place, a parking place. The swimming pool is composed of a huge water container and auxiliary elements such as the lifeguard's seat and parasols. The scene depicted in the painting is set after business hours when there is nobody swimming. There is somebody left alone to arrange or clean up the pool but even this person looks like a part of the pool. This perspective is actually what the artist had intended to paint.

The sense of void and emptiness, dryness can be felt in the public places of <Closed-door Room> or from the zoo scenes of the series <Place>, in the works shown in the current exhibition as well. He seems to view all of these places as spaces symbolizing the city which at the same time, share the same character.

Most of the spaces that the artist depicts are spaces without any personal sense of place or those where this kind of sense is impossible to take root. In other words, these are places that cannot be owned personally. Maybe it is more correct to say 'personalization' rather than 'ownership.' To be frank, these are spaces where you cannot be emotionally attached to. Once you leave the place, you do not remember it, cannot remember it and you don't need to distinguish this spot from that spot, you don't feel the need. The place exists but simultaneously, it is non-existent. Huge holes perforated here and there in the city, a hollow cave-like spot.

In fact, the majority of the important spaces that composes the city that we live in, is this cave-like space. Road, subway, public buildings, theme parks, zoos, etc... Here, people are not quite conscious of the space and they move around, work, play and forget about it. It is a familiar and common place. These spaces can be explained as the place filled with *Studium* in terms of Barthes. Maybe the artist would feel his own sort of *Punctum* in those places. Is this the reason why he is pursuing via his paintings a certain personal matter that he observes from such a huge hole, in the city cave?

If it is the *Punctum*, indeed, we have no clue to realize what he is feeling. Furthermore, we may have no need whatsoever to guess what it is, either. Since all of his paintings that we see show such process, the assembly of results and the trace.

4.

Roh Choong Hyun's painting is a sort of trace. The trace of landscapes, the trace of human beings and the trace of systems. As somebody has cited, 'The modern images are merely traces of something that has vanished.' There are only traces left of Marilyn Monroe, mythology and capital, all disappeared, as well as the trace of belief in art vanished into the toilet. Roh's painting is physically a trace left on the canvas after the

encounter of paint, brush and the artist. The trajectory of the paint is the trace of the landscape he has seen and has thought of having seen. The physical trace that the paint left, the images that he saw, the trace of landscape all merge on the canvas. On this merging point, painters are troubled and shaken.

This is the diverging point where painting, photograph and digital images go apart. Photograph and digital images do not hesitate. Without any self-consciousness called trace, the artist vanishes behind his work. Painting, however, does not let go of the artist, ever. Even when he is not in front of the canvas and when he has already left the studio, the painting is still there in his head, never to leave. Strangely enough, this is why even though all of the narrative structure is eliminated in a painting, it becomes narrative. Human trace itself collectively gathers and become narrative. The narrative structure can be observed when one views the works of Malevich or Stella, in a continual way.

Roh's paintings are just so. He has created implications of narrative relations among images that correlate with each other, even though he has gone beyond resemblance or representation. Duck boats floating in the snowing night, a drained pool, the silhouette of a person cleaning the pool, again a car covered with snow, a bird sitting on a cable...these become a narrative notwithstanding the artist's intention. The narrative is opposed to a certain principle that a narrative relation between an image and another should be destroyed in order to go beyond simple representation. This being said, what does any principle have any meaning, anyway? A painting is just a painting and it is not an interpretation of phrases such as maxims.

The artist's method of painting the subject seems to ignore representation – to be more precise, it seems indifferent or pretends to be indifferent to representation but he allows in a generous way the narrative relation between images. He does not seem to be really interested in whether his work is representative or not, whether there is such narrative connection. In fact, the narrative character of his painting is not more than the trace of the narrative as well.

The important element for the artist, as mentioned before, is where and up to where his painting can go ahead. He has returned to a relatively personal place compared to the rather public places and world he has shown in <Closed-door Room>. Here, he questions himself. Where would he go from now? Or, how would he go?

He looks around himself. The weather changes. Snow comes down, it becomes a chilly and moist night and the sky is gray. This touches the body. The tactile feeling itself becomes the painting. Then the painting is completed, at least, in the first step. After this finish, the paintings do not tell us where we should go on. It stays precisely where it was painted or it vaguely points to a certain direction suggesting a possibility. This is why Roh Choong Hyun picks up his brush again and asks which road would it be, in front of the canvas. Where am I headed now? Until when and how would I go? Obviously, no one knows. Nobody knows, thus he paints.