

## Life and Earth (Jang Un Kim, Independent Curator and Art Critic)

When I invited Eunji Cho to a lecture, she invited a Buddhist monk, who was deeply engaged in the social issue of the time, to give a lecture. Cho told me that she would sing a song after the lecture. At the time, the monk was in a hunger strike while filing a lawsuit against the government, which was planning to make a tunnel for high-speed rail through a mountain. In her lecture, the monk told about environment, development and the possibility of sustainability of life, along with her situation. After the lecture, Eunji Cho performed A Million Roses, a Russian folk song, with her friends. She had sung the very song in front of dogs on the "dog day," a day when Koreans eat dogs to stay healthy during hot summer months, after she had seen edible dogs in a market in Seoul, sold illegally yet publicly. The monk has taken the extreme measure of a hunger strike, but high-speed trains run through the tunnel today, and the artist now sings about earth.

Among many Korean pop songs that became hits in 1970s, there was a song titled I Will Live to Earth. The lyrics of the song is a statement to live in one's home village as a farmer, with family members and the beloved one, which represent a pastoral life. Unfortunately, however, the song shows a sad aspect of industrialization in Korea. During the process of rapid industrialization after 1960s, most of young people migrated from countryside to cities in search of money and job opportunities. The industrialization process might surely include agriculture as well, but it couldn't stop the wave of young people moving towards cities. The protagonist of the song openly declares to remain in the countryside and live to earth. Such declaration, however, seems to be a mere wish or a kind of self-consolation in the period when the song was popular. Young people who left the countryside declare to live in the place they left, swear to live to earth, as a fundamental form of living to restore their damaged lives. Young people who are left in the countryside emphasize the life with earth as a fundamental form of living, to overcome their own sense of shame and be soothed. However, this song might be an elegy of loss and self-consolation about the fact that the young people, or we, can no more dream of living in the unity of nature, whether in the city or in the country during the process of industrialization.

The artist creates earth in a shape of a cube, and tries to escape with the earth. When she passes through different places that work as checkpoints, it seems that people at the places do not recognize earth as itself. It cannot pass through when it is declared to be itself, as earth. The land, the mother-like earth, cannot go beyond borders with its own name and appearance, for it is a habitat for all the minute forms of life and noxious insects. But the earth is now transformed into a form of cube, and it tries to escape with the artist. Then why does she plan to escape with it? The artist says that she recognized she had to escape with earth, though she did not know the reason. It might have come from a certain realization on the impossibility of her own life. She might have dreamt of an escape in the face of dying dogs, tears of a buddhist priestess in a hunger strike, or a bare living of herself as an artist. But why does she escape with earth? In 2008, Eunji Cho presented A Round Poem. Bearing the same pronunciation with different meanings of a circle and an archetype, the word 'round' in Korean spreads through the world with different meanings. The earth as a circular planet, the earth as an origin and the earth as the land. Being an artist who talks about the archetype of all the open ideas that are divided yet encounter themselves again, Eunji Cho might have drawn an enormous circle as humans return to earth. She might have imagined earth as her origin on such level.

But earth is no more the earth with its fundamental meaning. In the spring of the last year, there were usual news reports warning people not to dig out and cook mugwort grown in Hangang Park. Mugwort is a favorite spring dish for Koreans, but according to the reports, any edible plant grown in Hangang Park is no more edible since the earth in the place is already polluted with heavy metals. Land, or earth, has long been used as an index of the capital. The price of all the land in the country is recorded, and the change in the price is mathematically presented in each quarter of the year. Whether earth wanted it or not, the transformation of the earth has always been otherized upon the way our desire operated. Though the artist transformed earth into a cube to help its escape, it has already been transformed, polluted and restored by us. People drill holes through mountains and sometimes fill up the sea to make land which is not exactly land. They dig over ground in cities where people live, construct new cities and start another construction to restore the destroyed land back to a natural state.

In such situation, the artist transforms earth, tries to escape with it, and makes success. After the escape, she ruthlessly says goodbye to it, for 'life is more important than tears' as she says. For the parting, she takes apart the cube she transformed from earth and throws it far away into the world. The earth lives up to its life with the sound of "Puck," the sound of its collision. After the experience of division, which is called the modern times, we cannot unite with the nature, the nature cannot unite with us, and each have their own lives. Nevertheless, the artist repeats such collusion, escape and farewell. As if she is a nymph of earth, she helps the escape of earth from Paju to Gwangju, from Seoul to Berlin and from Berlin to Hague. And she, too, escapes.

The artist collects dust from the Borderless Village and put them in a transparent cube with the side length of 2 meters. The dust is from a 'borderless' village where immigrant workers reside, but the workers cannot easily cross the national border since most of them are illegal aliens without proper documents. Every spring, the dust storm that starts in the Gobi desert raids the city of Seoul. In the past, the yellow wind, hard to identify whether it was made of sand or dust, was a bad signal that let us know the spring has come. But the earth and dust that are carried by the wind now come through the industrial area in China and are recognized merely as pollutant from the country. The 'undocumented' people in the 'borderless' village are already being understood to potentially pollute Korean society. We cannot help but inviting them or taking them, but we take them to be already polluted or to pollute us, for we do not know what kind of members they will become in our society. It is the same with the case of earth, which is unable to pass through quarantine for it is recognized to be potentially polluted.

Earth has been moving with no regard to national borders. For example, the Mekong River rises in Tibet, runs through the Indochinese peninsula, moving earth all the way down to the South China Sea. The national border is an artificial boundary, and earth has always been circulated with freedom. But the only earth that can be officially circulated now might be the the mud that is sold by multinational cosmetic companies. Sterilized and disinfected, it is mixed with a variety of fragrances. It is internationally approved and circulated. And the artist stands wearing The Mud International. She stands wearing the earth that lives its life on a white T-shirt with the sound of "Puck." And she calls the earth that lives on a

white flag The Organic Flag. Is it possible for the internationalism of earth to function as life and ecology, that is, green? Should the ideal of internationalism, once stressed the unity of workers around the world to stand against imperialism and capitalism, now unite under the green flag to restore the people's lives?

In Green Underground, the artist tells that we have been consuming an enormous amount of Green. The Green here does not seem to literally mean the environment and ecology, which is represented by the very color. It seems that the artist views all the development ideologies that emerged after the modernization and still continuing to operate as being Green. At a glance, the environment and ecology seem to be considered to rescue our lives, but it has been a long time since they are also degraded to the surplus of political and economic desires of contemporary humans. In our reality, we block the sea and turn tideland into land, see the dying land, then declare to construct an 'ecological ocean park.' It is ironic and abnormal.

The recent ecological theories consider our planet as Medea, or 'a bad mother,' rather than view it as 'a good mother,' or Gaia. In Greek myth, Medea falls in love with Jason, who comes to steal the Golden Fleece, betrays her community, unconditionally help Jason, and leaves for the new world. When Jason betrays her, Medea kills Jason's children and beloved, then returns to her hometown. The artist now helps the escape of pig's lard, not of earth. The earth has become pig's lard. When foot and mouth disease erupted in Korea in 2010, people believed that Gaia will take care of the bodies of dead pigs if they bury them. But the land cried with blood tears like Medea and showed us the sign of death. In Dtang, the Mud Said, the artist tells the order from earth: 'be silent.' Though Medea helps Jason, she destroys everything in the face of his immoral behaviors and betrayal. After successfully finishing the escape of earth, the artist takes it apart and throws it away into the world to help it start its new life. The earth starts its new life with the sound of collision, but the sound we hear is a strange roaring sound. We literally indicate the sound with the word 'Dtang,' but by chance it reminds us of the sound of a gun's discharge or of a a demolition of some object. In the future, when the earth as Medea

changes into the earth as Gaia again, there maybe no humans existing. Now the artist is ordering us to be silent and keep on.