

Exhibition Review: Kim Minae's *Anonymous Scenes*

(Un)monument for interface between self and world

Minae Kim is an emerging artist, who presented some works going into her inner self in several group show, looking rather sentimental. Now she seems, however, to achieve an emotional temperance and to grasp how to objectify herself into a subject position to work from, someone who makes a work and happens to be herself.

In the first solo show titled *Anonymous Scenes* (匿名風景), the artist stages enigmatic sights with malformed objects made out of everyday items. These works are originated from her own trivial memories, which are all about contemplating an object and transforming its mental image into another one. Let's take a look at an example.

There laid a window on the floor, a useless frame cemented up instead of glass panels fitted. The blocked window is slightly open, through which only the floor would be to be seen, but the narrow opening gleams due to a lighting device set under the frame. When looking closer, the right side of the frame is lifted up a bit, and an electric cord is going through it. Against the oblique frame, oddly enough, the cemented surface is leveled off (as if corresponding to the floor). This work is titled <72x11>, referring to the open part of the window, for the opening is 11cm wide and the inner space of the frame is 72cm long. Things are like that, ok, but why? What game is she playing with it?

This heavy sculpture more than 100kg has its origin in the window of the house where Kim lived, which directly faced the wall of a neighboring house and actually had no opening, but dimly shone at night because of the street lamp outside. Based on this psychological scene impressed on her mind, she materialized the transformed memory. Thus it is not a sculpture of representation constructed on reality, despite its origin in the real window. The result is an unmonumental monument for manipulated memory through association by meaning. In other words, the artist follows an emotionally restraint and logical procedure to make something that could be called 'unmonument,' which reveals anxiety about and for impossibility of communication.

<Manuscript-paper Drawing (a,b)>, which Kim says is the starting point of this show, is some sheets of manuscript paper for Hangul, thickly filled up with pencil stain instead of letters. She reread her own note for work, other reference text, and its summaries, and transformed them into pencil spots on manuscript paper. Thus this is not a manuscript covered up but a sort of monochrome painting as an equivalent, referring to the existence of manuscript. (On the other hand, <Manuscript-paper Drawing (c)> is transformed from the previous drawings into a white cardboard, which is in turn cut out instead of being

black leaded.) The irony is interesting: inhibition from disclosing original ideas is the start point of working for exhibition.

<Continuous Reflection> and <Sand Castle> are related to the memory of embarrassing mistakes in recognition. <Continuous Reflection> is an installation covering the wall with a half opened shutter and a mirror below it. This is what Kim embodies a factory in memory, from her awkward experience that "the factory always shut up near my workroom turned out to be a rippled wall looking like a shutter." <Sand Castle> is another installation on the floor, an arrow traffic sign stuck on a small sand hill and a flashlight overhung by a cord shining on it. The round shaped sign is 37cm diameter, smaller than the real traffic sign. (The standard size in Korea is 50-90cm diameters.) The artist sets out that developing a work is nothing but "walking with only a flashlight at pitch dark night" and that some tenuous principles on which her self-assurance is depended are like a "arrow traffic sign put in a sand heap." But the real traffic sign turned out to be bigger than expected, so she ordered a factory to make a miniature sign according to the mistaken size impression. Therefore, the overhung flashlight and the pile of sand could be interpreted as a double sign also referring to the limited faculty of embodied cognition/recognition of the artist herself.

<House Where Grass Lives>, concerning a house that Kim looked through the window of her workroom, represents the dilemma of arbitrary interpretation. "Behind the one-storied house, so white as to look like paper, a mountain is always against the sun, unlighted and dusky, by contrast with the backdrop-like white house." She wrote in her note. "The house seemed to be occupied, for the light shone from its window at night, but I called it 'a house where grass lives'." In order to objectify this arbitrary interpretation, the artist made a cardboard box and put a model of the house on it. (cf.: Her previous works suggest that she has a fetish for cardboard.) She took the bottomless box in a wheelbarrow and poured some gardening soil named "Suksukee[literally, it means 'lush-lushee']," on which a robust plant with the sentimental name of "Tear of Angel" was sowed. Creating a dilemmatic situation that "if the plant is to live, the box must die; and if the box is to live, the plant must die," this allegorical (un)monument addresses a harmony between arbitrariness and objectivity, two poles mutually incompatible.

Above all the rest, though, the centerpiece of the show is <The Strait Gate>, the most monumental (un)monument, probably named after the homonymous novel by Andre Gide(1869-1951). It is a tower of four doors connected to each other with hinge, on a clumsy set of stairs so narrow even not as to step on it; and a lighting device is built inside the tower, beaming up to the wooden structure of the ceiling. The narrow gap between the interconnected doors could be read as a diagram of contradictory memories, and which is put on the unsteppable stairs, then the whole thing might be a self-declaring and self-mocking (un)monument for making a sculpture as reification of interface between self and world with only limited faculty of cognition.

Kim's method to draw an (un)monumental result reminds of the precedent artists such as Bahc Yiso(1957-2004) and Chung Seo Young(1964-). Bahc sneered at the monumental things heading toward greatness by making an (un)monument out of worthless stuff. On the other hand, Chung also used un-artistic material, rather than to criticize the society like Bahc, but to scrutinize the ways to represent or refer to ideas and to study the subject-less/object-less reification.

While many young artists appeared to follow Bahc and Chung in the Korean contemporary art scene for the last 5-6 years, they were often nothing but a style-copier. So this mutant rookie is welcome in that she seems to succeed and mutate the precedent problematic in terms of method. Interestingly, Kim shows neither the pathos of frustration characteristic to Bahc's nor the venomous emptiness pervading in Chung's. On the contrary, her works look dimly affirmative, at least so far. <Wind Fishing> might be a good example of it.

It is a wooden fishing rod, 3m 60cm long, hanging down a wind vane made of squared paper outside the window. The artist herself tapered off the square wooden stick with a plane to adjust its scale to the small vane. When the wings are rotated in the breeze, it seems to catch a hope in vain from the world outside the gallery. Autistic, definitely, but its delicate romanticism is not so disagreeable.

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