

Adagio for Springs

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One could describe Shine Kong's recent works as a 'situation play of objects'. Such theatrical tendency present in the series Ribbing Room and Good Morning that were in her 2007 solo show at Arario Gallery, Seoul, play an important role in laying the foundation for her recent works. The objects the artist conceives herself become the symbol of the meaning she bestows upon them, and the relationship among the objects creates the narrative in the work. The objects such as the cloud, ladder, tree, paper airplane, and camel with a lifeboat around its neck, are all made with clay at first, then they are arranged on a stage and are given a role according to the direction of the stage conductor, the artist herself. Her work is not complete until the staged scene is manifested into a flat still life painting. The symbolic objects in the painted frame are not only messengers of meaning but also play a crucial role in forming an exuberant painting. The most interesting aspect about her work is the multiple layers of process through which a painting is conceived.

It is as if each object plays the role of a character in a psychological drama, acting as the psychological mirror that reflects a specific being or a happening. Shine Kong's objects hold the artist's stories that she has gathered about the world around her, her personal experiences within that world, and the relationship between the world and herself. Then, she creates a theatrical narrative by establishing a relationship of objects so richly invested with the artist's emotions. Finally, those narratives are reformed inside a painting frame through an objective point of view, simultaneously surpassing the subjective symbols to finally become a painted image. In this progress, there are several psychological steps such as the artist's immersion into the objects, projection of emotions onto the objects, then dissociating from the objects. The artist immerses herself into the objects, and then they are transformed into still-life-like-objects that require contemplation. Through this process the artist would view the objects in a single scene through an omnipotent standpoint. Through her work which is like a psychological drama with objects with their specific roles, the artist gains an opportunity to clear and empty herself out, and the audience becomes the spectators of that process played out on the stage.

Despite the fact that her work tends to have a theatrical aspect, the meaning of the objects in her work are so subjective and personal that their meaning cannot be comprehended easily through an objective discourse. Comprehension of the whole narrative is only possible through understanding the meaning of the individual representation. For instance, when one realizes that the chair with a tennis ball on its leg is a symbolic representation of the artist, it becomes possible to understand the allegorical meaning of the chair surrounded by flyswatters in the work

Steal Life, the broken-legged chair laying on the floor in the recent work 'Yestoday', or the cushioned chair without the tennis ball in another recent work 'Lullaby'. Those images express the frustration and maturity of the chair, which represents the artist. Even though the meanings are not individually clarified, the landscape of the symbolic objects compressed with meaning like poetry in itself goes beyond just being individualistic and unique, to creating a situation that allows for the communication of intuitive understanding.

The implication of the repetitive images like trees, ladders, life vests, camels, stars, chairs, toilets and bicycles are not directly expressed, but the organic relationship among the objects makes it possible for the conjuring up of creative inferences. Shine Kong's work is a still life in the sense that the objects are set up and then painted, but the naturalness of the objects and their suggested meaning directs it to be read as a symbolic landscape. The windmill is spinning with the wind, and the chair that attempted to climb up the rope is placed down on the floor. The sky in the background is blue and filled with white clouds. The ladder stands straight up pointing to the sky, and the white flags on the small tombs flutter. Under the flags are bright colored beads that are cheerfully laid down as if waiting for a pleasant surprise. Paper airplanes cast a long shadow while they all silently head east, and paper flower petals scatter and blow away at the end of the dark heavy railroad. The lonely islands, animals deep in meditation and other objects that seem to be drenched in thought all reflect the on the significance of self-introspection that is prevalent in the calm dreamy landscapes. The organic blend of objects that each speaks its own poetic artistic language composes a sense of indefiniteness and mysteriousness in the landscape, into which the viewers come to stir in their own memories and imagination through contemplation.

These scenes that are at times like melancholic dreams or cheerful lyrical poetry show the flow of nature that connects darkness to light. The heavy and the light, and the light and its shadow coexist and interact in the images. Though the audience might not have detailed information that describes the objective symbols of the painting, they can perceive the minute expressions of life that are portrayed through the painting. The bicycle behind the tree has handles on both its ends and holds a feeling of frustration and tension as if not knowing where to go, but the clouds in the same painting are light and placid. The small person watering a flower pot with crutches on it seems melancholic, but on the other side, he is portrayed in a cheerful perspective. Shine Kong's work is serene, but like a heart ache from the past, they are expressions of the light that has penetrated the darkness, or the darkness that still exists within the brightness. Her works contain the life's paradox that shifts between polar principles, and the artist's intention to consume the absurdity itself.

A notable aspect about Shine Kong's recent works is that she attempts to broaden her perspectives by transporting her experiences and progress in life into a painted landscape. The storyboard of a girl who loses a shoe and looks for it all day is an allegory for the artist herself

and her attempt to uncover the rules to life. It seems that through such an effort, she has accepted the present moment and the life's process as is an extension of nature where light and shadows do coexist. One of the latest works 'Yestoday' suggests a present moment in which the heavy process of meditation is conveyed in the simple everyday life. It is like an attitude that can sing a lullaby like a moving island, flowing slowly in the rhythm of nature and coexistence of light and shadow. If this lullaby is what Kong is attempting at, then her oeuvre is quite successful. After a visit to her studio, my mind is still busy at work thinking about the coexistence of light and shadow in the same painting, and the fact that accepting the darkest darkness leads to its brightening, and that human life is a part of nature. Her personal life stories displayed in the landscape paintings allow the contemplation on the universal life. It is for this reason that one can find solace through her quiet, humble stories.