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Finding language for existence

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FINDING LANGUAGE FOR EXISTENCE

by

Younghee Yim

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of
Fine Arts degree in Art
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2010

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Thomas Aprile

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Younghee Yim

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Art at the May 2010 graduation.

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David Dunlap

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Isabel Barbuzza

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Matthew Rude

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Anthony Sutowski

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The works I have been creating for the past twenty years are the outcome of the search for my identity and unique way of interpreting the world-life we are living in. In making art, I preferred works that required careful planning and hard labor rather than spontaneity.

My love for life was the beginning point for my work. I have been trying to find my own identity through art and my desire for creativity and inspiration was been a long, and difficult journey. My love for art is the basic theme of my works and it's the language I use to communicate with this world.

I found my own ways of applying traditional and new materials to my works. My own methods became my unique language to communicate with this world in ways impossible through words.

In this thesis, I have divided my works into five different phases. Through this, my aim is to revaluate my works and find new directions for my future works in the process.

CHAPTER II

CONIDERATION OF WORKS

Existence, Desire and Language

The will and the desire of an artist are an important keyword and the source of art to define one's life and existence. My desire is to show the reason for existence through art. This desire does not only affect my initial planning of my works but it also influences the process of the actual making.

Most of all, my desire for creativity becomes stronger as I try to define my existence. The reason for this is that as an artist, I interpret and restructure what I experience in real life. These desires are expressed metaphorically in my works.

In my work, there exists both reality and ideals. When making my early works, I am fascinated by the Marxist theory that emphasizes the search for an ideal ego based on the dialectics of Hegel. Living as an artist and having to be a father of two children at the same time was an example. Most people live with two different viewpoints but my desire was to express the conflicts between two different worlds. How my expression of these conflicts differs from other artists was my main interest. My focus was not in portraying that reality but in the reinterpretation of such conflicts and the catharsis through art.

I tried to send positive messages, rather than the negative ones. My efforts are to build a bridge that connects us to a transcendent place.

The Time-variant Characteristics of my works

Early 1990's:

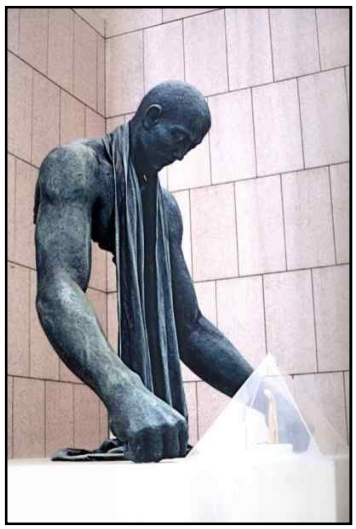

Figure 1. Meditation-I

Figure 2. Meditation-II

Figure 3. Memory of Family

Figure 4. At Subway

In the early nineties, my focus was on social ideologies and human values. Conflicts between capitalism and socialism were at its highest right before the collapse of

U.S.S.R.. Marxist theories were the main theories discussed in the art and scientific world. My aim was to find human values in the conflicts of these two ideologies. Instead of expressing art through ideology, I tried to visualize the meaning of existence. In my Meditation series, I tried to portray human figures trapped in their own thoughts and struggling to overcome isolation. Meditation II (1992, figure 2) was about a shadow of a person overlapping that of a mummy. It was about modern man meditating on his own ego and the meaning of existence. Clay work, plaster and plastic mold suited my purpose very well. I studied human anatomy in order to make my figures more realistic.

Late 1990's

Figure 5. Landscape-III

Figure 6. Poem-III

Figure 7. Landscape-Iron

Figure 8. Landscape-IV

Instead of relying heavily on figures, I began to include environments, history and nature as my subject matter. ‘Landscape III’ (1996, Figure 5) was about a man who became homeless due to city re-planning. He feels desperate but tries to find hope while staring at the moon. The late 90’s was a period of time when I felt that working with the human figure was something done by many artists and that they were repetitions of the past. This naturally led to my simplifying the forms and searching for my own language. I was not interested in the exact representation of nature but in finding abstract forms to effectively express myself. Size, colors and textures became my vocabulary. Representational forms became more abstract as I realized my language was more effectively communicated through non-representational forms.

Early 2000's:

My works became more abstract during this period and I became interested in dynamic forms that symbolized the industrial age we were living in. However, I also felt that relying only on abstract forms was too limiting. I began using both representational and abstract forms as time progressed.

Figure 9. At Kwanghwamun

Figure 10. Win win-I

Figure 11. Memory for Road

Figure 12. Win win-II

2005 – 2008 period:

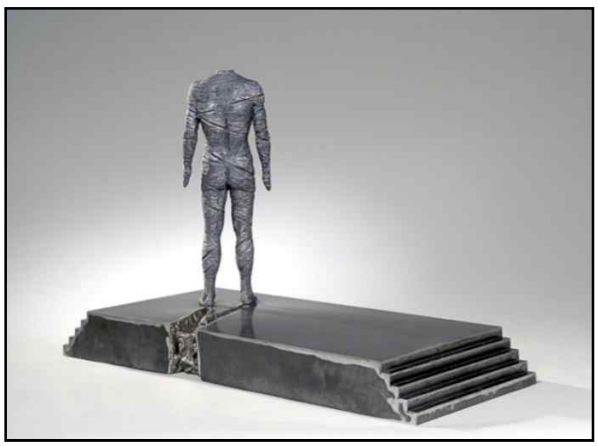

Figure 13. Dialogue with poetic mind-I

Figure 14. Prologue-Landscape

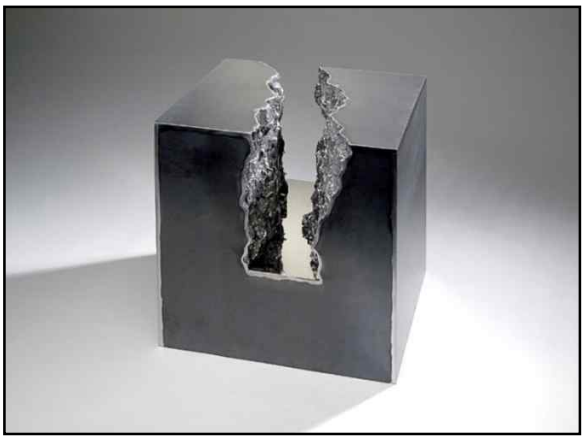

Figure 15. Fountain-I

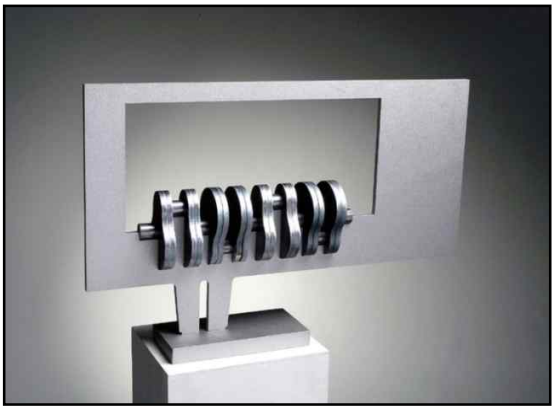

Figure 16. Sleeping Giant

From 2005 to 2008, most of my works were composed of abstract and simplified forms in addition to representational figures. Like my previous works, they dealt with isolated human beings in an industrial landscape. Small chairs in some of my works represent myself looking at the world. The human figure and chairs symbolized myself looking for hope and answers to the stark reality I am facing. Making some of the forms abstract was effective in expressing my personal feelings about the world. I tried to instill a sense of hope in my pieces by making doors, stairs and halls, which were symbolic of a path to another world. I tried to raise the most basic questions about life, such as, “who am I, where am I, and where am I going?”

My aim was to make works that transcend everyday life.

Figure 17. Father's Mirror

Figure 18. The days seeking

Figure 19. Father's dinner table

Figure 20. Prologue-Poem

CHAPTER III

RECENT WORKS

Figure 21. Enter into Nirvana

Figure 22. Memory of table

Figure 23. Meditation of wood

Figure 24. I believe I can fly

MFA Gallery Exhibition.

In recent exhibitions my work has moved more towards installation, learning behind traditional sculptures by opening more possibilities and diverse interpretations. I have used discarded and used wood in order to give them a feeling of our daily lives rather than the nature that surrounds us. Like my previous work, these installations are meditative, in that they question the meaning of our existence and lives. I was interested in the relationship between a subject and an object.

Figure 25. Dialogue with Tony(1)

My main installation works in the M.F.A. exhibition is a good example of this. It is comprised of a six-foot tall human head made up of small wooden cubes and a chair placed on top of a trunk of a tree. Both the head and the chair piece were made with wood in order to emphasize the world they both come from. I was not interested in the simplified relationship between the subject and the object but a more complicated reading where the object creates multiple interpretations. I found the contradiction between the subject and the object interesting. I prefer the vanishing of the subject-object distinctions rather than the conversions of the two. In other words, my works are based on the Lacan's theory [1]of the contradictions between the Gaze and the object than the Sartre's necessary interactions[2] of subject-object.

Unlike my previous works where the materials were merely means to an end, I began to realize that the materials themselves were effective tools in communicating my language to the viewer.

---

[1] **Jacques Marie Émile Lacan** (April 13, 1901 – September 9, 1981) was a French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist who made prominent contributions to psychoanalysis, philosophy, and literary theory. He gave yearly seminars, in Paris, from 1953 to 1981, mostly influencing France's intellectuals in the 1960s and the 1970s, especially the post-structuralist philosophers. His interdisciplinary work is Freudian, featuring the unconscious, the castration complex, the ego; identification; and language as subjective perception, and thus he figures in critical theory, literary studies, twentieth-century French philosophy, and clinical psychoanalysis. From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

[2] **Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre** (June 21, 1905 – April 15, 1980) was a French existentialist philosopher, playwright, novelist, screenwriter, political activist, biographer, and literary critic. He was one of the leading figures in 20th century French philosophy, existentialism, and Marxism, and his work continues to influence fields such as Marxist philosophy, sociology and literary studies. Sartre was also noted for his long relationship with the author and social theorist, Simone de Beauvoir. He was awarded the 1964 Nobel Prize in Literature but refused the honor. From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Figure 26. Dialogue with Tony(2)

Figure 27. Dialogue with Tony(3)

CHAPTER IV

FUTURE WORKS

In the future, it is my desire to explore more with various materials. I am interested investigating scale in my future pieces. Public art presents challenge since the relationship of the piece and the viewer changes all concepts of art and its relationship to the world. Not only will public art be challenging to install them but it will also change the nature of my works. My main point of this field is how much to share with my language for general than other factors.

As my works become more complex and large in scale, it is my wish to research further computer soft-ware which will facilitate the creative process and hopefully create new possibilities.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

My desire to communicate with this world through my personal language has been my biggest concern and focus when creating art. Expanding and exploring different vocabularies through various materials and different ways of presentations have been very beneficial to my art process and my life as well. It is my strong belief that the language of art has to keep up with the world I am living in. I do not wish to repeat the condition I live in or I am comfortable with but to continue exploring new concepts in the search for new possibilities. It is easy to be stuck with one or two ways of making art but it is my desire to keep changing and make my art challenging. As long as art is my personal way of communicating with this world, I will strive to expand and invent new vocabularies to express the profound meanings of existence and what it means to be a human being.