

Yoon Kwang-cho who influenced to my artistic character.

Bockkyou Lee (Korea)

We met twenty-seven years ago. As soon as we meet I was sympathetic to his art world. And then, we often meet, and talk about each other was thinking. We swear to be brothers. We travel together, and we also attended workshops together. I learned humanities from him. When we meet, we talked about humanities ideas. He preoccupied by Buddhism, I have devoted to meditation. When we recently meet, we talk about beauty and nature. We are potters, but do not talk about pottery. I introduce to you as below for my brother Yoon Kwang-cho. The following article that was written by art critic Kwangjin Choi is in the solo exhibition brochure of Kwang-cho

Ceramist Yoon Kwang-cho has been widely known internationally for the recent few years. He had invitation exhibition in Besson Gallery, U.K (2003), which specializes in ceramics. In that same year, he was selected to be the first Asian artist invited to Philadelphia Museum of Art. The exhibition was continued in Seattle Asian Art Museum until 2005, gaining great public favor. He also succeeds in gathering attention in Korea as Korea National Museum of Contemporary Art selected Yoon for the artist of the year 2004 and held his solo exhibition. I was not only those museums held exhibitions for Yoon but purchased his work as well.

His solo exhibition at Macquarie Gallery, Australia, was the first strike to the global art-world. Following exhibitions between 2003~2005 in eminent galleries and museums of the world raised him to be the internationally well-known artist. He was appraised even higher internationally than domestically. It is quite rare for a Korean artist- including ones from other fields- to gain so much value in our neighborhood. Why did the global art-world notice a ceramist from a small Asian country despite the torrent of contemporary art flowing aimlessly to the new things? It is also an interesting question whether they could understand unique and subtle sentiment of Korean's own.

It was a bit of concern if Yoon's work may seem conversational to western eye however it turned out to come across as refreshing strike to them. Edward J. Sozanski wrote in The Philadelphia Inquirer as follows. "Gaudiness and intricacy have become so prevalent in contemporary ceramic art that the elegantly restrained and elemental pots created by Korean artist Yoon Kwang-cho all but shock the senses." Western contemporary ceramics which was deeply influenced by abstract expressionism attempted to shake preexisting style by expressing passionate inner self through exaggerated gesture, abandoning practical functions. Since they were soaked with such shocks, Yoon's work with refined graceful style with functions preserved was a fresh of wind to western connoisseurs.

It is not easy for people from other cultures to understand and share the same point of view. Korean traditional artworks are nothing like those of western art in a way that they do not show off sophisticated techniques or artistic genius. It would be misapprehension if one sees that as immaturity, for that is all because of different purpose Korea put it art. Korea traditional art is closely connected to everyday life and ultimate aim for an artist to reach is to not to care of creating masterpieces. Art begins upon practical interests of everyday lives, but soon it becomes means to reach transcendental state. By this the artworks can satisfy daily needs and also express the dream and idea of man before socialization. The state is realized only through the unification and communication between natural materiality and the artist. On the process, the

artist can reach the state of complete absence of ego where self and other is no different. In that state, artwork becomes inevitable product not bound to discrimination between good and bad or beauty and ugliness. The value of the artwork in this state does not exist in obscure beauty not avant-garde-like shock. It is estimated by how effectively it shows the eternal triangle between the practical need, the voice of the media, and the free will of the artist. Practical need and voice of media restrains the free will of man, and the will constantly attempts free itself from the boundaries. Works from such complex dynamics cannot be sophisticated but rough. From such point of view, traditional Korean beauty is not technical but rather folk-like. The term folk here do not refer to the public, but men who reached more instinctive and original freedom liberated from the state of the practical reason- politicalized reason. In this case, art is not marvelous techniques to astonish people but a means of accomplishing a human being to return to nature. Then, art becomes 'a path of culturing'. And Yoon's ceramics inherit that Korean folk-like spirit and aesthetics of Buncheongsagi.

Patrick Coolican wrote in The Seattle Times that "Yoon is not merely creating his art, he is living in its very creation. Moreover, as his creation has been a process of religious discovery, it's also been a process of collective aesthetic recovery for Korea, as Yoon has helped rehabilitate an ancient ceramic sculptural technique that was once lost." His comment was very precise in a way that he did not set the status of the artist as a creator- applying Western point of view- but considered the artist a mere practitioner. He also understood that the essence of art is not artificial technique but religious devotion- it is the basic idea of traditional Korean art. Those comments prove that Western eye can appreciate Korean concept of beauty which is totally different from theirs. It is particularly impressive that Yoon's work opened a way of international communication.

To some sophisticated viewers, Yoon's works may seem rough and unfinished but actually they are inevitable products of tense intercommunication between the artist and the nature. Real 'Ki' is breathing alive in such incompleteness. Art historian Yusup Goh once wrote of those high strategies in 'technique of no-technique', 'planning under no-planning'. It is quite impressive that western people can also read those out.

Burt Wasserman wrote in Prime Time as follows: "By utilizing these various procedures, Yoon avoids the creation of slick ceramic chic. Instead, he offers the connoisseur artworks alive with a rich and solid sense of earthy substance and profound mystical reflection..... They also manifest sensitively determined proportional relationships between the width and the height of each item. Again and again, specific works present the eye with extraordinarily subtle alignments of the parts of a given piece to the spirit of the vessel as a whole. "Descriptions like 'profound mystical reflection' or 'spirit of the vessel' show that he is reading out Yoon's work is not buried under practicality nor materiality but deals and communicates with the media to gain the utmost result. Also, he states that such seemingly unsophisticated works have following effects.

"In a genuinely concrete fashion, Yoon's vocabulary of design in three dimensions provides you with a means of focusing on emotions that might otherwise remain rather vague and undefined." This means that Yoon's works operate as means of liberating subtle and delicate emotion which cannot be described in words nor caught by human reasons. I believe that he was referring to the 'Ki' which is hardly recognizable under concepts of western philosophy.

Burt Wasserman reads out Korean sentiments so precisely that I wonder he might have been Korean in his former life. Also the words below reveal his remarkable analysis upon Korean beauty and Yoon Kwang-cho. "There is something inside the human makeup that wants to reach for the stars. Some might say this is an arrogant expectation. No matter! For those who are ready to respond vigorously to what Yoon offers, the artworks make the fulfillment of the desire an eminently tangible possibility."

It's true. It is the real portrait of Yoon who likes to drink and is innocent like child. He is a very realistic person and yet he tries to transcend reality. Transcendence does not mean abandonment to Yoon. It means returning to nature free from social boundaries and practical reasons. To do so, he enjoys drinking and working with his inspirations. Transcending reality through the reality, transcending life through everyday lives- that is ultimate aim of Yoon's art and the basic foundation of Korean art. It is in a quite different dimension from realism which reveals reality as it is nor surrealism or abstract art attempting to transcend reality in a rather artificial way.

It is romantic side of Korean nature dreaming the idea prior to all conflicts and antagonism and yet being faithful to practical daily life. I may be an excuse for how much they like drink. Such romantic sentiment is found easily in Buncheongsagi, Chosun folk art and so on. It is the essence of Korean folklore - like minimalist works as Greenberg once described. The western minimalist believed that phenomenological immersion is realized when they delete all objects and the inner world from painting and only represent the matter. But such phenomenological immersion does not come from one-sided victory of the materiality but from the tight tension between man and material. Western minimalist works are transcendental in an impersonal way, but Yoon's works are transcendental and personal at the same time.

I believe it was under similar circumstances that Philip Lewis described in International Examiner how Yoon's work made him feel as if he could hear Yoon boyishly proposing a toast: "Let's drink a cup of buncheong." And then laughter from the mountains." Yoon does not wish to live in the worldly dust, but nor does he abandon the world completely. His studio in the valleys of mountains near Gyeongju is far away from the troubled world and yet not impossible to reach. It may not be easy for you to get there, but it is still possible once you make up your mind. The journal he is writing in the mountains is humane and transcending. What the overseas exhibitions proved was that his journal is journal of a Korean man. They were meaningful as they showed how readable the journal was to anyone around the world, and art with most Korean nature in it can be the most global one of all. It has been a lesson to the Korean artworld still trying too hard to modernize traditions.



windy vally 1



windy vally 2



windy vally 3



windy vally 4



Kwang-cho Yoon