

# The Abyss of Time

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Ruins share different times within the boundary between something that has disappeared and something that still exists. The times of ruins, which are solidified like fossils, come and go between their own boundaries while maintaining an unstable tension. The boundaries here distinguish natural and artificial times of the past and the future, and establish an ideal image in which different things exist. Shin Meekyoung's new project, <Landscape of Ruins>, is an architectural structure that visualizes these boundaries and it collectively reveals a topic about 'temporality', the key subject of this exhibition. In other words, it shows 'temporality that flows like liquid and evaporates like gas as a mass'. It is a story of a contact point between the things that disappear and the things that remain, and it is a temporary capturing of the time that flows irreversibly. Of course, the exhibited landscape of ruins is an idealistic scene without an actual subject of reference, and there is no factual foundation to analogize its history and culture. However, bricks and pillars recreated as the traces of a ruin and petrified forms indifferently placed as if they are waiting to be excavated can only allow you to guess at the original sources of the image they suggest. If so, why is it called 'petrification'? The artist focuses on the fact that relics are not made to be relics from the beginning, but became so. For instance, an object that has certain experience becomes a work or a trace of an object according to where it is placed. A statue in a toilet fulfills its instrumental function as soap and, as a statue exposed to the weathering project, passes the time of 'petrification' in the processes of disappearing and transforming itself. And an object on the shelf in a museum

becomes a relic per se. The object that becomes a relic according to the place or the situation is subject to change depending on its given condition, and it brings a doubt about its originality, the substantiality of its cultural context, the birth of the object and its consequent condition. A weak existence that changes according to the time, place and culture may set this variability as the central axis of its existence and be presented with the mixed identities built up through

a variety of channels. And this is the starting point for understanding the works of Shin Meekyoung.

Let's go back to the story of 'boundaries'. There is the issue of which work to you want to call art, the original piece and the replicas, the boundary between the real and its imitation, the boundary between the architecture and the sculpture, the boundary between the artist's authority and the viewers, or the natural environment as a creator of the work, and the boundary between the life and death of all existences with temporality, called extinction. This exhibition represents the artist's thoughts and considerations on such distinctions through the artworks. The materialistic property (of a work) with the natural trait of extinction is a challenge against the authority to be suspended by the impregnable object (objectification) and it presupposes a reserved state of judgement that cannot support just one side. Furthermore, it accepts the borderline of existences that have variable values according to the cultural, historical and geographical contexts. A mix of values that cannot be clearly distinguished is revealed via soap, which opens up the possibility of visualization. In other words, soap as a material shows the flow and dailiness of time, and compressively displays a temporarily that is wearing away. The artist actively uses such characteristics of soap in her attitude and work processes. The work as the final 'outcome' is not entirely determined by the artist. Chinese potteries with fancy patterns or figures or Buddha statues have clear references, but

external environments like the wind and rain are appearing as other artists in determining the outcome. This is the attitude of putting down the author's authority, who takes the entire responsibility for the work from beginning to end. The fact that different cultural creations coming from potteries or figure sculptures become recontextualized within a new space and time reveals that the aura of the reference is neither forever the same nor unchanging. This vulnerability of the authority is connected to the variability of soap, which is the common material in the artist's works, and which suggests the inevitable attributes of all existences facing extinction as the fundamental part of the content and the form of the works.

The ‹Translation› Series is the artist's representative work for decontextualizing the potteries or Graeco-Roman sculptures by moving them to various The Abyss of Time The ‹Translation› Series is the artist's representative work for decontextualizing the potteries or Graeco-Roman sculptures by moving them to various places. It started from the idea that cognitions from cultural contexts create different interpretations and translations of the same subject. Any interpretation of a work is based on an understanding of its cultural, historical and social contexts, otherwise the authenticity of the original can only be distorted several times in proportion to the layers of its accumulated times and travel paths. This must be the natural awareness of the artist arisen from her own mixed cultural identity (or of the original) created by her experiences of living both in Korea and abroad. A sort of distrust in the translated information is the same as the original in terms of the form, but it leads to the confusion of the viewers by creating a hybrid work invested with the contexts of various places. It also reflects the interests in translation, uncomprehended gaps, and the boundary between translation and mistranslation. The ‹Ghost› Series, which is the latest work of the ‹Translation› Series, has a glass-like shape that seems to be seen somewhere. It is the minimal shape of a pottery and it appears as a wandering form without its source and context, as if a ghost had crossed the borderline between

existence and nonexistence. An interest in translation leads to a question about a mixture and a boundary, and expands to the boundary between life and death.

This exhibition by Shin Meekyoung, who has been continuously showing her interest in temporality and boundaries, is focused on two things, aside from the title of a large solo exhibition and an influential artist support project of the public art museum. The first is suggesting the topic and the concept that can encompass the previous series, and the second is using the Arko Art Center as the platform for a new creation to peek into new projects and research. It is aimed at revealing the fundamental elements of the artist's works, which have been focusing on the materialistic properties, technical completion and decorative perspectives of soap as the artist created a framework of works by linking the topic of temporality with the wearing down property of soap. This selection of works mainly introduces the unseen works that have not been released for several reasons, and the new project. The ‹Translation Series› began in early 2000 and looks into the difference in perception of cultural products occurring in different cultures and places. The ‹Ghost› Series, which has been continuing from 2007 until now, reproduces fragile glass potteries in order to study the boundary between existences and non-existences. The ‹Painting› Series, which has been ongoing since 2014, leaves the frame to overlay masterpieces with colorfulness and expresses the possibility of the collapse of aesthetic values using soap, which inherently connotes the sense of extinction. The ‹Toilet Project› that began in 2004 with the participation of viewers and reproduced Roman bust sculptures or Buddha statues in soap sculptures and installed them in toilets, creating a situation in which the work transforms as the participants use these sculptures as soap. The value of these dignified sculptures is converted into a daily product within the spatial context called a toilet. And the retrieved soap (from the toilet) after the exhibition becomes the work of another exhibition. The ‹Weathering Project› is a sculpture installed outside and the place, climate, environment, time and season will determine

the final shape of the work. These two projects focus on how external environments and conditions change and petrify the works. ‹A Petrified Time› Series is the typical commission work of this exhibition along with the ‹Landscape of Ruins›, and the artist went through the process of collecting incomplete or failed potteries and corroding them by covering them with pure silver foil or copper foil. Time itself is used as the raw material and the viewers can peek into the natural process of corrosion during the exhibition period. This exhibition suggests the basic elements of ruins, where flowing time and stationary time coexist, as the overall outline of the exhibition, and it reveals the main topic of the artist by associating new works with the previous works through the concepts of ‘relic’ and ‘boundary’. An attempt to cover the more comprehensive territory of temporality and boundary is first revealed through the soap structures on the first floor. Soap potteries in the shape of earthenware excavated from the ruins, broken pieces of soap, worn-out soap due to weathering, cracked pieces of old buildings, and body figures like a mummy are placed around them to show a variety of ways by which to visualize temporality. In contrast to the first floor that recreated the space as the landscape of ruins, the second floor applied a display of ‘museums’. Multiple structures which will become relics are separately displayed through the first floor and the second floor, and corroding potteries, petrified works after the ‹Toilet Project› and fancy potteries that went through a transformation are displayed in order to turn the exhibition into a place where the times of the past, the present and the future overlap.

Ruins are the place where the speculation of extinction and a new history begin at the boundary between something that has already disappeared. It is also the place with a different temporality compressed by the something that has remained. The new history adds various footnotes to the works and the exhibition itself, and divides their meanings into several parts. This exhibition, which recreated ruins by fixing a specific time and wholly revealed a consideration of temporality through the corroding work

as well as the weathering and toilet projects, exposed the processes (of a change in the works) as the element of the exhibition. Maybe it is not visually distinguishable, but it is clear that the reaction created when the inherent attribute of soap meets time clearly demonstrates that the exhibited works at the end are different from those at the beginning in terms of their properties or shapes (and even their scents). In other words, the individual existences displayed as the 'works' are the new outcomes that added a specific 'time' called the exhibition, and they are placed in the process of their transformation. The exhibition space itself becomes a work of art for visualizing the theme of the exhibition while maintaining the tension of the boundaries within their temporal persistence, like the landscape of ruins. This leaves the scent, the (empirical) time, and the traces of the senses, which disappear and exist at the same time, established by the artist, the viewers, the wind and time through soap, that exists in order to disappear. 'The Abyss of Time', the English title of the exhibition, became the way of its existence.