

The Way a Form Exists in Time

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1. Proposition: The Abyss of Time

Three Venus heads are installed on the wall of the gallery building. They are the “soap pieces” installed outside, in the very midst of the hot and humid weather, for Meekyoung Shin’s solo exhibition. These works, named <Weathering Project> (2010), arouse the feeling of the sense of place of the building’s exterior through installing a fourth Venus head in the hallway that leads indoors. The four Venus heads, mass-produced plaster statues cast in soap, are iconic figures, and they not only attract the curious eyes of the public in the plaza, Maronnier Park of Darhak-ro where the Arko Art Center is located, and of the viewers visiting the gallery, but also inspire a series of significant questions. Who brought the Venus statues to the plaza and why? What are they made of, and why are they so wet, and seem as if they are going to melt? Why are these fragile statues placed in this uncertain situation? What will happen to these statues in the end?

Meekyoung Shin suggested the title *The Abyss of Time* as she leads the flow of the exhibition from the outside to the inside. This is paradoxical expression that puts two opposite meanings, “to disappear” and “to exist”, in a parallel state, implying a concept of “time” that embraces the contexts of the <Weathering Project>, the <Petrified Time Series> and <Ruinscape>. In particular, <Ruinscape> considers the true nature of “various layers of time” and the uncertain existence that both are “becoming” due to a decentred temporality. <Ruinscape> also reveals a destructuralized space and time, in which the inside and the outside, or the past and the present, are loosely opened up and endlessly segmented, and which discovers multiple layers of time that are accumulated in this chaotic “intermediate place”. In this way, “something that disappears and still exist” implies a series of locales and temporality while paying attention to the many “intermediate forms” to be encountered in an accidental moment where these two properties cross and connect. It reminds us of the chaotic middle that is becoming deterritorialized by the numbers of connections, just like the plateau of multiplicity of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.

It has been a few years since Meekyoung Shin expanded the <Weathering Project> into an architectural project, and she has been paying continuous attention to its large architectural scale and to the context of time and space in which such a scale is place. She studies the temporality inherent in museums, which is represented as the “enumeration of stopped times” or “the display of petrified times”, through the *Cabinet of Curiosities* (2014) held at The National Centre for Craft & Design. <Ruinscape> is the output of the works created in the continued process of these two perspectives, and it signifies the decentralized and non-hierarchical system of time and space, just like a large “plateau”, where multiple times and forms are condensed and meet at some point. Boiled and cast soaps are stacked up like bricks and form the architectural spatial outline of <Ruinscape> to intensify the conditions of the ruin. When looking at the architectural structures of <Ruinscape: a Wall> (2018), <Petrified Time Series: a Mirror> (2013), <Petrified Time Series: Angel> (2013), the forms dragged by Meekyoung Shin into the time and space of “ruins”, we feel that they are referring to the existences that could be self-sufficient in the “eternal currentness of the moment”. When the existences in the “eternal currentness”, which have been defined transcendently from reality, come to an end, called a “ruins” as a series of intermediate forms that do not have any

boundary between disappeared things and existing things by considering the narrative times and visualising the property of those times through “walls”, “paintings” and “mirrors” in the form of soaps.

As Susan Buck-Morss borrowed the idea of Walter Benjamin and described a “ruin” in *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project* (1991), ruined buildings, like a collapsed castle, have the traces of the matter that is revealed when the vitality of the building has escaped. In that sense, Meekyoung Shin’s ruins significantly emphasized the time (history), in which the collapsed and decayed form lasted for a long time, and the properties of the remains. Interestingly, this can be seen in her new works; <A Disembodied Soul 1> (2018) and <A Disembodied Soul 2> (2018). But the “lying” body figured made with white casting tapes are explained as a “bodiless soul” instead of a body without soul. In <Ruinscape>, Meekyoung Shin brought back the timeless existences (spirits) that existed in the history of times and transposed them into the physical traces remaining in the time called a ruin, like fossils. In other words, a bodiless soul is close to representing the matter and traces of an intermediate form that “disappears and exists” in ruins.

2. The Logic of Time: The Process of Translation and Petrification

<Ruinscape> is a paradoxical place where the current time has ceased forever and therefore can be present. Meekyoung Shin probably thought about the logic of the times to be brought into reality through the soap sculptures solidified with boiling liquid, as if freezing flowing time. For instance, she had been immersing herself in creating the forms that are “becoming” as they transform by expressing the concept of time through “translation” and “petrification”. Let’s look into her work process of transforming and condensing actual times into different speeds through petrification process. In <Toilet Project>, Meekyoung Shin created copies of classical statues and Buddha statues through soap casting and installed them in public toilets to make a soap that fulfilled its purpose, regardless of the aesthetic or religious meaning of the statues. When the soap statues were used by an anonymous public and visibly transformed by becoming worn down, Meekyoung Shin found the condition to redefine the copied products, which functioned as soap, into sculptural forms by pausing time at a certain moment. This object, discovered and newly defined by a person, obtains its status and value as an “artwork” that no longer allows any transformation when it is officially placed on the display stand of an exhibition hall, although it still connotes the potential to be transformed over the course of time. Meekyoung Shin, in short, has been seeking to disable a single time inherent in the original form during the process of petrification, and to define new forms created from the transformation in overlapping and complex layers of times.

If we look back to her earlier works, we can meet her representative work <Translation Series>. <Toilet Project> or <Weathering Project> experiments with the transformation and dissipation of forms in this existing time, and suggests a discussion about the unique and monumental value that is obtained when time is frozen in the process. On the other hand, the preceding work, <Translation Series>, embraces a discussion on the cultural time/spectrum differences that imperfectly translate the solid symbolism of the classics and a tradition beyond time. <<The Abyss of Time>>, <Toilet Project> and <Translation Series> are installed in the same space facing each other. One thing to note in <Translation Series> is the unavoidable mistranslation of the time difference that is derived from the translation process, and this inevitable circumstance is the same as a misalignment of the time occurring when the “sense of time” accumulated in the original form cannot be shared. In other words, <Toilet Project> or <Weathering Project> froze the temporality that has been accumulated through

experiences into our common history (time), but <Translation Series> directly faced the imperfection of translation and whether or not it is possible to translate the accumulated sense into the frozen time.

<Petrified Time Series> (2018), which is expanded as a new version in this exhibition, leaves the impression that it regathers and materializes the scattered discussion on the sense of time from <Translation Series> to <Toilet Project> and <Weathering Project>. <Petrified Time> (2006) and <Petrified Time Series: Drawing> (2009), which now have naturally transformed surfaces as they were left in a corner of the studio for a long time, foreshadow a sense of time connoted in “Petrified Time”. Meekyoung Shin paid attention to her past work from <Translation Series>, where the pictures drawn on the surface of soap pottery with metal powders are completely transformed over time due to oxidation. She concentrated more on the temporality that may be inherent in the pottery shape found in her studio, just like an old artifact made of metal, and created the new version of <Petrified Time> using metal powders by systemizing the logic of time.

Considering the incomplete forms scattered around the architectural structures of <Ruinscape>, Meekyoung Shin is learning a sense of time in which the previously completed work is “being discovered as” or “becoming” a new form by connecting their layers of multiple times. We can say she experimented with the possibility where the failed and neglected soap potteries can become the unique symbols of a “petrified time”, owing to the accumulated time that condenses the failed form in the existing time by covering them with silver or copper foil and quickly oxidizing the surface. It is clear that the architectural indoor scene seems more “sculptural” than the four damp Venus heads outside because a sense of a “petrified time” led these two forms to “become” something else. This means that Meekyoung Shin has been continuously exploring the way in which a series of forms existed in many times. Her works, in particular, experience the stage of “becoming” due to an accumulated time as they enter into the exhibition hall as stationary forms.