

The Dismantling and Re-establishment of Ancient Things

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The Wooyang Museum of Contemporary Art has consistently hosted its Wooyang Artist Series as a means of empowering established artist in the Korean art community to further advance (and, at times, completely change) their work. The 2018 Wooyang Artist Series features Meekyoun Shin, who has created an artistic world based on a soap motif. Having engaged in creative activity for over 25 years while moving back and forth between London and Seoul, Shin is taking the opportunity this exhibition provides to highlight her past work, feature 62 new creations and artworks not yet unveiled in Korea, and introduce an architectural project that was originally featured at *The Abyss of Time: Meekyoung Shin* (solo exhibition at Arko Art Center). This large-scale exhibition of 230 artworks by Shin is featured especially for the residents of Gyeongju.

The subtitle of the exhibition (*Meekyoung Shin – Ancient Future*) was borrowed from an essay of the same title by linguist Helena Norberg-Hodge. Also, the exhibition was inspired by Shin's unique perspective on identifying contemporaneity between the current era and the distant past by dismantling the standardized perceptions of ancient civilizations and cultures. This exhibition aims to reassert this inter-temporal continuity for today's viewers.

Shin uses soap, a common everyday item, to create Western sculptures and “painting,” Buddha statues and Asian-inspired ceramic ware, and other objects that are representative of certain cultures, such as the ruins of famous buildings. These works are not merely re-creations of actual things, but represent the intentional de-contextualization of an object's external identity as well as the birth of a new entity through the transference of the subject's original context to a different “original copy.” They are visualization of concepts that can only be portrayed through the physical weakness of soap (questioning of firmly established authority and hierarchies based on an awareness of modernization's Western bias, inevitable distortion of traditional and interpretation caused by different cultural backgrounds, contemplation of the

validity/establishment of artwork or artifacts, irony of time being increasingly well visualized through the deterioration and disappearance or remains, etc.).

This exhibition focuses on the phenomenon of Shin's artworks being interpreted differently depending on the venue in which they are exhibited and cultural backgrounds of the viewers as part of the artwork. This feature of Shin's work will heavily overlap with the spatial characteristics of Gyeongju, which is known as an "outdoor museum" for its high concentration of historical artifacts and relics, accentuating the chaos and confusion between the original and the replica. The exhibition makes it easy for visitors to see the ruminations on fundamental questions on human existence that lie behind the elaborate façade of well-known works of art. When visitors encounter Shin's artworks at the art museum, after having already seen many famous artifacts excavated from Korean royal tombs, including the Gilt-bronze Seated Amitabha Buddha of Bulguksa Temple, Bonjonbul (principal Buddha statue) of Seokguram Grotto, Gameunsa Temple Site, and Hwangnyongsa Temple Site, they can interpret the artworks on an entirely new level by discovering yet another identity. Such creation of new identities is achieved by taking on a museum-style format as "exhibits" (painting, building, Buddha statue, pottery, Greek sculpture, etc.) of an official "exhibition."

The large-scale architecture project *Ruinscape*, which is set up inside the exhibit hall, adds two tons of soap to existing items to create a scene of sublime beauty. The ruins have the same effect as a screen,¹ in that they depict human mortality. The past glints past vanished remnants (like a time lapse), while the view of aged and broken remains has the effect of creating an overwhelming nostalgia, reminding us of the temporality of existence. The ruins visualize something that has already disappeared. Ironically, however, such visualization simultaneously emphasizes the eternity of its reinterpretation/rebirth. An observatory-style stairway allows visitors to have an aerial view of the ruins.

Positioned separately from the section displaying Shin's series artworks is a large pedestal in the format of a triptych (picture/relief carving done on three panels) from the Middle ages, on top of which are over 30 Buddha statues made from soap from various projects. The grouping together of identical formats serves to highlight the content of Shin's works.

¹ Jookis Min, "Aesthetic Experience of Ruins: Memory of the Place without Story," *The Korean Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol.81, No.1, March 2015, pp. 197.

This exhibition will also feature the Painting series, which deconstructs the meaning of the painting; the Translation: While porcelain series, which is comprised of new is comprised of new artworks and works that have not yet been presented in Korea; a large standing Greek statue that is part of the Weathering Project; a Buddha statue from the Toilet Project; and the A Petrified Time series, which condense and corrodes the ceramicware featured in the Translation series in order to show the passage of time.

In addition, the act of “weathering” the statues displayed for the Weathering Project outside the Arko Art Center by placing them at the entrance and on the rooftop of the center enables visitors to witness the “overlapping” of the passage of time as they from one space to another while viewing the exhibition. The Toilet Project, which offers everyday experiences of artwork, will be installed inside the museum’s restrooms, thereby adding another dimension to the museum’s indoor and outdoor exhibition spaces. Both projects question the practice of turning objects into works of art through hierarchical separation dome with white cubes, presenting the effects of the passage time on the artwork’s external features as the work of a “second artist” or the viewer’s actions rather than focusing on the artwork itself as a complete entity.

Meekyoung Shin’s future creations are expected to be even broader in scope in terms of both their internal and external aspects (East-West, sculpture-architecture, extinction-eternity, etc.).