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IP Thesis

Memento

It took me a very long time to find most proper word for describing my paintings.

“Memento”

It is an object, which you keep because it reminds you of a person or special occasions.

I want my paintings to be mementoes for my 4-year experience at art school in foreign country (in my case, the United States).

I have a different native language: Korean. Not only me, but also many other international students have different languages that they were born with. Even though people speak different languages, I think the image generated in the process of painting is one of universal language. My art school memories are very personal, and they are all scattered in my head in a variety of languages. But because the memories are visualized in a form of universal language (painting), they can be interpreted by anyone who looked at them.

Transformation of memories

The concept of memory- my images are constructed through psychological process of transformation. A piece of memory is stored in a part of my head, it transformed when I draw out on paper, and it transformed once again when I paint. I consider the drawing part very critical. I consider drawing as a mirror for the transient and ephemeral nature of experience of the past. After I mirror the scattered memories through drawings, I give a life to the memories by painting them with colors.

In my paintings, I want for viewers to enjoy the dialogues between the semantics and the visuals. The Images conceal and reveal the meaning in the same time. I want the viewers to imagine the stories behind them. The visuals are depicting specific events or memories, in other words, they are narrating specific stories, but because they consist of a mix of abstracted figures, they tend not to be interpreted in a way that I intend. The viewers are able to create their own stories drawn out from their own memories. The abstracted figures are scattered across the surface with colors just like memories are scattered in my head. According to one professor of mine said that his memories are very organized in his head like the chapters in a book. However, because my memories are very unorganized and lying here and there in my head, my paintings tend not to follow any chronological order. The colors are very important visual elements in my paintings as

well as the abstracted figures. I think that colors are significant for evoking certain emotion or atmosphere.

Expressive Symbolism

My figures are representing specific events, stories or memories in intangible way even though they seem like they come from somewhere not in reality. And the figures in a form of symbolism are expected to evoke emotions or feelings, so I would say that my paintings are somewhat leaning toward expressive symbolism.

This expressive symbolism is born in the process of transformation while being drawn on paper and painted on canvas. The specific memories are displayed in the space like a universe in the paintings. The abstracted figures of my paintings are put in their own world. The figures could be myself or anyone or no one. They are just figures symbolizing narratives of my memories. And a world where the figures live is full of ambiguity, of mysteries of what cannot be grasped, of what lies beyond reality.

At this point, I would like to quote from the book on artist Xul Solar written by Gradowczyk, Mario H.

“The work of art is born of the artist in a mysterious and secret way. From him it gains life and being. Nor is its existence casual and inconsequent, but it has a definite and purposeful strength, alike in its material and spiritual life.”

Dislocation & Ecstasy

The psychological process of transformation of my memories reflects my own emotions of being in foreign country. In this aspect, the figures can be explained as a representation of myself. I have felt dislocated in the world and the space that I belong to since I moved to the United States. It is important to look at the meaning of *Dislocation* carefully because it explains the origin of my emotions.

Dislocation : a situation in which something such as a system, process, or way of life is greatly disturbed or prevented from continuing as normal.

After I came to the United States, I felt I did not belong to this space and world. I live in this space, but this is not a normal space that I had been living in. I have always felt like I am a just visitor or a observer in this world. I have never felt I am really belonging to this world. It was so foreign to me. Undoubtedly, I had become accustomed to foreign life as time went by. However, I still feel that I am a third person in this world, just observing and dipping my one foot.

I accept the reality and reject it. I do not allow me to be melted in the reality that I am in right now. I am like an observer of myself, watching how well I am tolerating in the reality. My dislocated feeling can be a factor of creating the mysterious and universe-like space in paintings.

The failure to fit to reality gives me feeling of insecurity, vulnerability and despair. I try to evoke these kinds of feelings through my figures and colors in paintings.

Yet, strikingly, this feeling of being dislocated allows me to have room to work. I could think between the world I normally belonged to and the reality that I do not belong to.

And the promising possibility turns my feelings of sad loss to dreams and imagination.

I recall one night. I was on my way back home after I finished all my school works. I felt very lonely, tired and depressed. However, when I looked around me, I was able to notice the white world created by snows, a deer, the bright full moon and the Persian blue sky. That just comforted me.

Similarly, in the crisis of all of my dislocated feelings, I find out the vibrant and subtle anticipation for the new world- dream or imagination. It is like a surprise in lifetime.

“ I saw in his hand a long spear of gold, and at the iron's point there seemed to be a little fire. He appeared to me to be thrusting it at times into my heart, and to pierce my very entrails; when he drew it out, he seemed to draw them out also, and to leave me all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great, that it made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain, that I could not wish to be rid of it. The soul is satisfied now with nothing less than God. The pain is not bodily, but spiritual; though the body has its share in it. It is a caressing of love so sweet which now takes place between the soul and God, that I pray God of His goodness to make him experience it who may think that I am lying.”

I quote this from the episode written by Teresa of Avila in her autobiography, *The Life of St. Teresa of Jesus* (1515-1582). Two sculptural figures of *the Ecstasy of St. Teresa* created by Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini derive from this episode. The most compelling part of this quote is “ The pain was so great, that is made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain.” It is explaining the transition from the pain to the ecstasy. I believe in the fact that my feelings and experience this time will lead me to see new world through my works.

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