

Words Flying on My Mind

Painting a.k.a. Written Painting of the conflict between two languages



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ABSTRACT

I want you to read my words that are flying like birds on a canvas. I communicate without saying a word. My sign language paintings bring to life motions often not appreciated for their aesthetic beauty. By using black and white, the contrast between Korean and English, struggling to be heard, can be seen signs as birds, birds as signs. Language takes flight when the hands begin to move. I invite you to find your own words from these meaningless and confusing words.

Since early college year, my work has involved the creation of conceptually based large narrative figure paintings. The early paintings address personal stories of struggling and misunderstanding that are involved in racial, sexual, linguistic, and personality complexity. I strongly believe that art is a journey of finding meaning for life. An artist must find his/her own language and address a question and answer that follows.

Integrative Project allowed me to confront myself. Xu Bing wrote, “*My viewpoint is that wherever you live, you will face that place’s problems. If you have problems then you have art.*” My IP started with a lot of questions to be answered and problems to be solved. It was an opportunity to reveal myself to others and cry not for sympathy but understanding me.

I am not talkative because I am terrible at making small conversation or expressing myself. Let me say, I cannot transfer word on my mind to verbal vocabulary. This torment of weak communication skill lowered my self-confidence and blurred belief of my life. This is 21st century that requires a self-promotion in order to create one’s personality or proof of existence. And I could not fulfill the requirement. This is *the* problem I have and that makes *art*.

I spend half of a year in Korea and the other half in the United States. I speak two languages. I think in two languages. I have two homes. I have two different backgrounds. I am living in a dual life. There are two persons living inside of me. And the sad thing is that I am bad at being dual. The biggest frustration is language conflict. Like many other international students, I adjust process of verbalizing abstract ideas in between Korean and English. The process takes certain length of time that causes sudden pauses in conversation. It is important to look at the meaning of *Disability* because it addresses the state of my mind.

Disability: a permanent injury, illness, or physical or mental condition that tends to restrict the way that someone can live their life.

For 9 years of studying abroad in United States created second version of a human existence. The first version of me stopped growing as sixteen year-old. Then the second one needs to learn a new language in new atmosphere. I was a sixteen year-old child. I was permanently restricted in verbalizing about myself and communicating with others. This is where hands appear come to the rescue.

I find hands very emotional and intriguing. They speak themselves and they move with melody. Everything is made of hands. Artists create with their bare hands. Hands create things. Hands arouse emotional movements. Hand put life into elements. I like to dedicate my creation to my own hands. Hands are tools for my artistic and communication coding. I paint with my hands and I speak with hand gestures. My hands are busy enough to keep me alive. When hands and spirit meet, they create something beautiful and amazing. They can make someone happy, sad, or comfort with gestures. I think it's why people clap for birthday, shake hands when they first meet, holds hands, and put a hand on shoulder for friends. Hands are always there on any occasion. They are very busy.

'There is nothing more intriguing than what's obvious. The human hand is a miracle, which we completely take for granted. The work of our hands, in their eloquence, silence, restlessness, creativity, and violence, have made human history and continue to shape the present and future.'

(Faces of the Hand by Tamas Wormser)

Painting is a way of communication for a painter. Photography is a way of communication for a photographer. Art is a way of communication for an artist. Sign language is a way of communication used for example by deaf people. Art and sign language are similar because they are visual communication with different visual effects. An artist, for instance myself, renders the thoughts and feelings on their mind. I think, think and think until I find visual description of ideas. I pour out those visuals externally on canvas or paper. For this series of paintings, I will speak external language on canvas. External language would be signing. I created a process of coding:

thinking→internal language→visualization/expression→external language→signing

I use sign language as a method of objectification, simplification, and clarification. Sign language does not have a universal sign just like languages. We all have trouble understanding and communicating. There are infinite ways of communication that human being creates for them. Therefore, there must be miscommunication and confusion.

Journey of Painting

I wanted my work to be poetic. I wanted audience to participate in reading my words and learn about me. I walked 6 months of journey through loneliness and wished to find answers to questions I addressed in the beginning of the school. I have created five bodies of work that are connected to each other. My story begins with *Faces of Hands* (Fig.1), diagrams of sign language in English and Korean. 66 4"x4" small canvases vibrate through simple colors of black and white. They are direction of my words and key for finding answers to my question. I keep speaking in black and white language through second story, *Words Flying on My Mind* (Fig.2), which is the first body of work I created. This piece tells same stories only in two different languages. Delicate lines and simple visual of hands invite audience to find their starting point and find words from chaos.

In *State of Mind* (fig.3), I keep delicacy of word I choose, but delete line from the picture. Here, I hide obvious introduction of writing, but included weight to it. Four canvases are vertically juxtaposed within space between. The space between the canvases represents *the pause* of speaking. It starts with lots

of words and through experiencing pauses, I end up with less words. I introduce shades of pale hues in order to represent quietness. These colors reappear at the last painting, *Circular Arguments* (fig.5), but they are in different form of speaking. The circular form of hands is cycle of alphabets in two languages. The cycle of alphabet is a system in my head where I pick letters to create a sentence. Each letter fight for a space within crowded surface. *Scene of Silence* (fig.4) speaks less than the circular arguments. It rather stays silent in such loud visual field. There is moment when I have too many thoughts; I rather keep my mouth shut. I wait and wait for a right moment to express my thoughtful ideas, but I always loose the moment. Hands are tangled without space between each other. From far, hands loose visual vibration and become color field of black. This is when my head goes blank. The bottom canvas is louder than previous work. The black and white squares start to emerge from the center. This is state of erasing complex thoughts. Within a short period of time, those words of hand will disappear and goes blank.

All of five bodies of work have distinguished styles in different aesthetic beauty and delicate techniques. I sprinkle different notion of my state of mind through representing various techniques and visual effects. Thus, I preserve simplicity and delicacy in my words. I want all of them to speak to each other. I visualized my words and I want them to visualize answer I look for. I want them to speak for me. And I want audience to help me find the answers. I created a journey for myself and I walked through it in six months of loneliness and distress.

After finishing several paintings, I felt like I wrote a lot. I knew that art is very personal subject, but in this particular project was very secretive. I began writing those hands on the canvas for viewers to read my thought and understand 'me'. However, it ended up like I am writing a diary in secret letter code. Viewers have to experience steps of translations in my work just like I translate every minute and second. But at the end, they find out that the hands mean nothing but alphabets, or they may find their own meanings and substitute their translation. I want my paintings to *look* simple, clean and candid but formulate complex space to raise questions.

I spoke, wrote, thought, imagined, and poured myself. Yet, I have not emptied myself. There is so much to research and figure out fundamental

questions. I have changed gradually in continuation of documenting words in my head. Because those words are spontaneous, context of work will changes gradually. It is good thing I can paint something new and bad thing I cannot paint what I used to know. Thus, it is better thing to not doing the same thing forever and stay where I used to be.

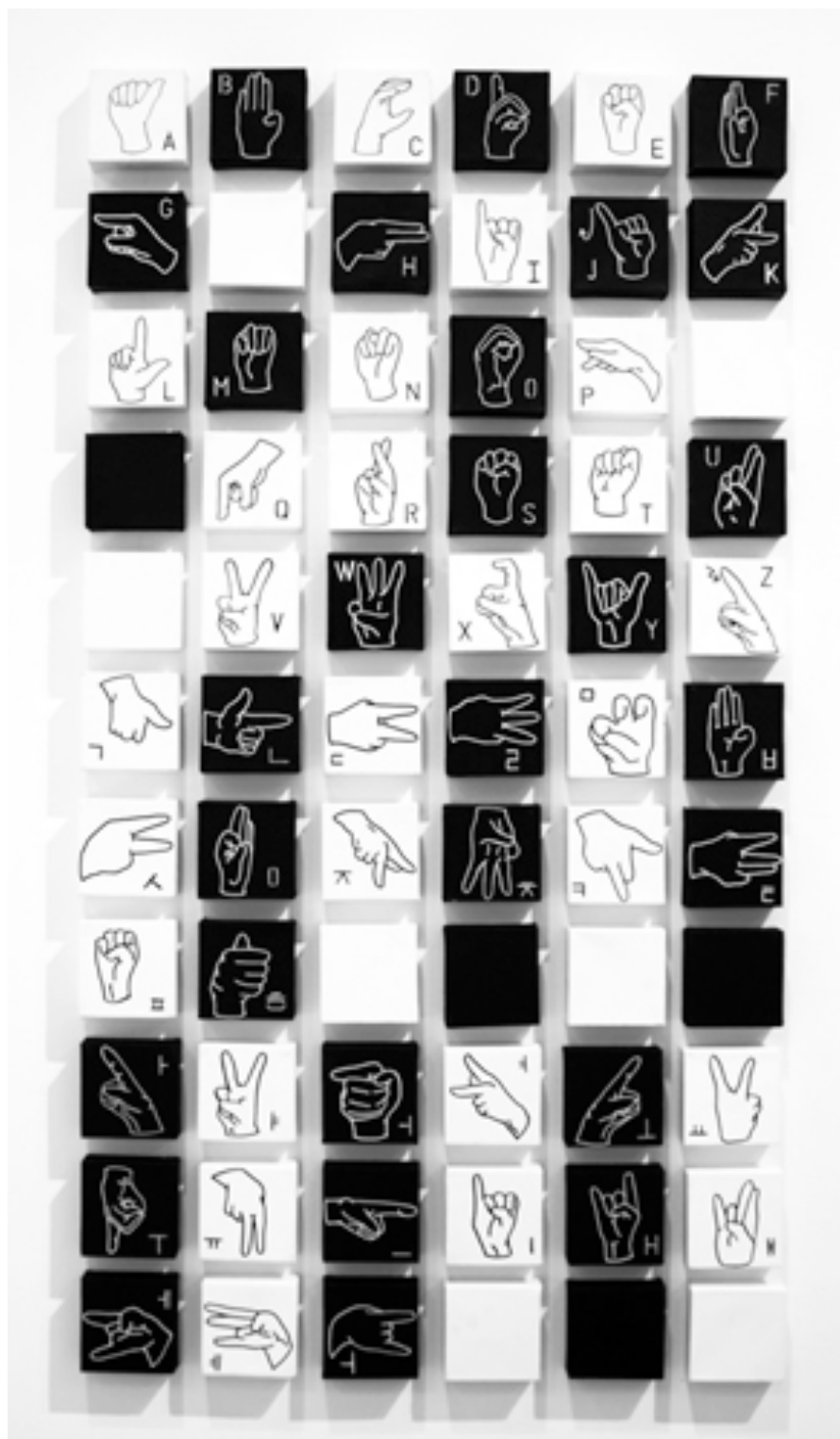


Fig.1 FACES OF HANDS, 2009, oil on canvases, 30"x54" overall

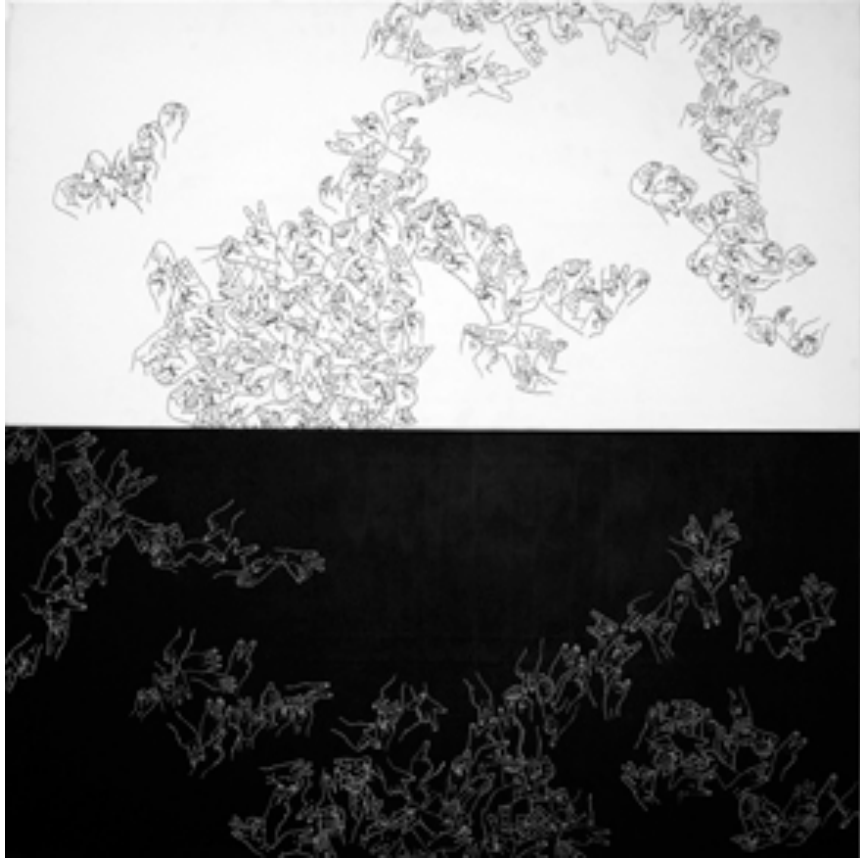


Fig. 2 WORDS FLYING ON MY MIND, 2009, acrylic on canvases, 24"x48" overall



Fig.3 STATE OF MIND, 2009, acrylic on unprimed linen, 30"x70" overall

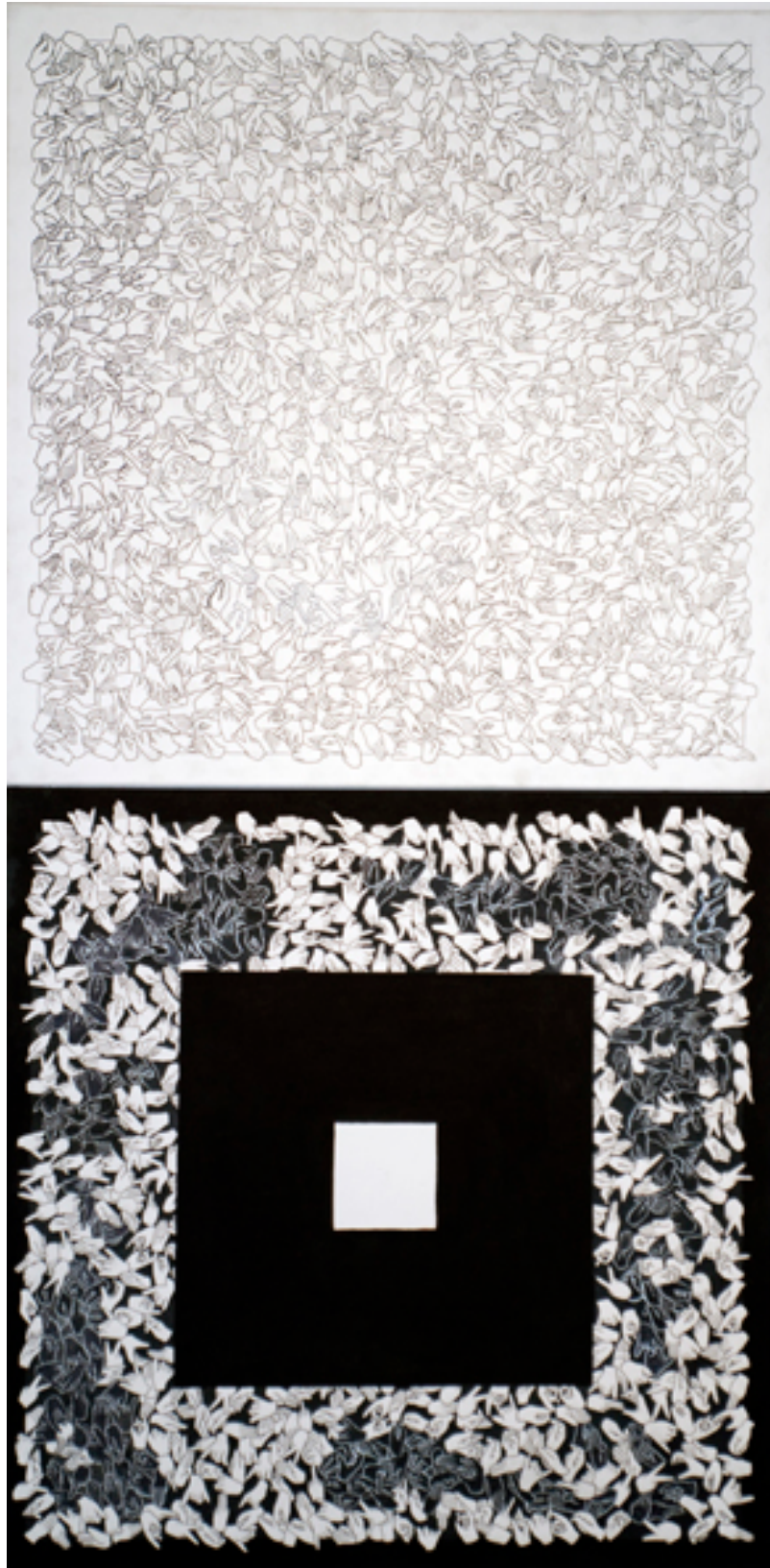


Fig.4 SCENE OF SILENCE, 2009, acrylic and ink on canvases, 30"x60" overall



Fig.5 CIRCULAR ARGUMENTS, 2009, acrylic on canvases, 36"x72" overall