

FANTASIA: an Imagination toward the Daily Life

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In 2000, young curators from Asian countries were invited by the Japan Foundation to explore as a group the topic of “how to determine the cultural identity of contemporary art in Asia in the age of globalization.” The curators were invited to present the art and thoughts on this topic in different Asian countries through a series of exhibitions. We decided to break down the geopolitical barrier and make exhibitions of contemporary art in different Asian countries, which will not be based on the nationality of the artists but on the issues of their concern. In order to establish a cultural network of art among Asian countries, the curators were to first curate his/her own part of the exhibition, all of which were to come to Tokyo in 2002 and be presented to the audience as a whole.

After some discussions, “Under Construction” was decided as the larger theme of the exhibitions, for this term from the Internet not only reflects the process of urbanization and modernization in Asian countries in the age of globalization, but also connotes a sense of humor and incisiveness. On the one hand, it demonstrates the richness of urban life brought about with economic growth in Asian countries, and implies, on the other hand, that the modernization transformation in Asia is a long process, and that the modernity it establishes will be an “alternate modernity” different from that of the West. Each curator would, out of his/her intellectual background and interest, address different issues under this larger theme. For example, what are the thoughts behind the arts facing the history and reality of the countries, with a colonial past? What is the unique historical and religious conditions of the arts in Southeast Asia? How have the methods of social exchange and cultural rituals changed during the process of modernization? What is the significance of traditional craft and its internal changes brought about in the rapid process of modernization? What was of concern to me, to Kim Sunjung from Korea and Kamiya Yukie from Japan was how Asian artists unfold their imaginations in the process of modernization.

Amongst the fierce globalization and urbanization, the daily lives of people living in Asian countries today are undergoing unprecedented transformation in every direction. At macro-level, daily life in Asian countries is influenced by two factors: one is the different movements within a shared space, such as the nation-based capitalism and globalism, or market economy and State-controlled economy; the other is the interaction of ideologies, such as Westernism, collectivism, individualism, consumerism and pragmatism. At micro-level, there are signs of daily life in Asia that are just like any other parts of the world. That is, the diminishing existence of an individual due to the “transition” taking place while people spend busy lives under the pressure of time. Under such condition, calculation of chances has driven social life, with everyone accepting a high level of risk. Time and space are turned into variables in that same calculation, whereby they are saturated by information and manipulated by the endless and monotonous cybernetic and TV screens. This is the new feature of daily life in Asia with which globalization and urbanization have endowed us. This process accelerates emptying and sanitization of the imagination. Without the imagination, the meaning of art is in short supply. Here, the “meaning” and “instituted forms of value and understanding” not only include the stories and images, but also a struggle between culture and objective reality.

Among the Asian artists who live in a situation where they turn a new page everyday, we suddenly duly discovered a common ground for imagination. This was illuminated by the artists from China, Japan, Korea and Thailand, who observe the small details of daily life to affirm the very existence of the individual. From this perspective, we thought that “fantasia” in art that is “under construction” would become a base plan for our exhibition. This underlying concept was developed through the artworks that were shown in Seoul and Beijing. We hoped that these works would enthuse reconsideration of the identities of Asian art, and present the simultaneous changes that appear in the daily lives and the arts in globalizing Asia. In “Under Construction,” we did not find it necessary to present an exotic view of the daily life in non-

Western countries. But nonetheless, we thought we would provide an approach to discover and challenge the consistent ideologies and concepts (these ideologies and concepts are useful in nurturing commercial trade and traditional culture, therefore, are not necessarily confined by their political implications) that are revealed during the process of globalization and urbanization, both which lay behind the daily life. As to the art in the world today, maybe, fantasia could mean a certain kind of imagination and give us the opportunity to achieve “the disenchantment of the world.” In fact, this must have been the vision Max Weber had when he borrowed this phrase from Schiller.

Imagination in the artworks is the crystallization of strong intuition and creativity of an artist, who present their ideas in various forms. Naturally, this stems from their different historical and environmental backgrounds. Furthermore, this imagination helps to make up for the void in contemporary art that the artists are trying to overcome, but yet to fulfill. The biennales and triennales that are prevalent in various parts of the world today are not the only examples, which demonstrate a case for contemporary art as a “consumed” entertainment. This situation prompts artists to look for a grand discourse, with a spectacular visual effect, and an enlarged visual experience. Could our “imagination” provide a new opportunity for the Asian contemporary art that is extremely “consumer-oriented?” In fact, is it not the Asianesque imagination that could bring this opportunity? What is the Asianesque imagination? It is an artistic realm we endeavor to pursue in daily life. These artists have rejected the concept of everyday life as insipid and monotonous. They have, rather, regarded it as one of the forms that reflects modern life and the sources of their creation. They have turned ordinary objects and images into irreplaceable elements of artistic creation, so as to break the gap between the so-called high art and low art, and to make everyday a particular space full of imagination — a “fantasia” of everyday life.

In our exhibition, artist from different countries represented their own versions and views of daily life. Ozawa Tsuyoshi tried to provide a space in his works for communicating with and encouraging the participation of the audience in his “interactive art.” He presented his series of work, *Vegetable Weapon: Asia Version*, in both Seoul and Beijing. He used ingredients of local hotpot recipe to make models of weapons, then took photographs with the models who were invited to participate in his project. Afterwards, these fake weapons were cooked and eaten up in a banquet. He took photos of the weapons and the relevant process, which were put on display in a plastic greenhouse in the exhibition space. This suggested the transformation of food, which is closely associated with the local culture, and portraed combating and peaceful exchanges as two sides of one coin. Besides rewriting the rules of daily life, Rhii Jewyo invented new rules and ways of life. Her creation originates from her investigation into the people who has urgent needs to improve their lives. Therefore, her exhibited works were primarily small tools for these people and simple art books with instructions to relieve pain. All of her works were based on her own experiences. In one of her works, she created a space and a set of tools for people to scream, but by not disturbing anybody else but the person screaming, in both public and private spaces.

The second aspect of the exhibition was to reduce “art” in importance by using readymade objects or implementing everyday actions so that it becomes a part of “daily life.” For instance, Kan Xuan produced image as a means of personal writing. She has often initiated her creation from the details of her personal life, giving significant changes to all the details closely associated with our daily life. *The Boat* by Gimhongsok was a vehicle of transportation with full load. At first glance, it seemed to sail off with an abundant cargo, but by taking a closer look, it was revealed that a lot of objects were of no use, such as fish cans, beer bottles and an illustration of fish. It seemed to remind us that objects necessary in modern life could be such utterly useless wastes that were loaded on this boat awaiting for its captain’s order. Kim Sora brought daily objects into the exhibition. She was concerned with the contextual changes that would take place as these objects were removed from everyday life into an exhibition space. The works she displayed in Seoul and Beijing were 1,290,000 KRW and 1,650 CNY respectively. In these works, she exchanged US dollars into local currency so that she could buy various objects at the local markets. These objects were then bound together and hung in the show. In the exhibition in Beijing, she encouraged the audience to exchange the objects with their own things, thus linking the implication of the work with value, exchange, and regional differences.

The third aspect of the exhibition was concerned with the representation of the space of everyday life, by obscuring, breaking, and replacing the boundaries between private/art space and space of real life. Mareeya Dumrongphol used ceramics as her primary material. What she



created was not only some objects, but eternal works of art. She used clay to make the work and showed the process of the clay being created and damaged. Over and over, she repeatedly cleaned the exhibition space and covered the space with clay. While the work was given an ever-changing look, she took photos and video to record the process, and put this record on display. All of these elements have turned the work into a visualized diary, making the exhibition space a space for oneself, and the ceramic products the medium for the communication between her work, its space and the audience. Ham Jin, created his own unique world, which was far removed from a real space. He drew attention to those objects that were neglected because of their triviality or forgotten despite their beauty. He combined headless dolls, dried fish and medicine tablets, and plotted them in different corners of the exhibition space. The audience walked over his works as they viewed the exhibition. His art is solely based on his imagination and the beautiful daily objects, which particularly interest him.

The last aspect of the exhibition was to introduce a new world achieved through changed perspectives. Yang Zhenzhong addressed the spiritual emptiness masked by different scenes of everyday life in the city. In his work, *I Will Die (2000)*, which he started to create in 1999, he recorded images of the subtle facial changes of people from different regions with various identity, after they spoke the words, "I will die" towards the video camera. His other work, *Sleep Walking is a Therapy*, put together sections of different scenes in urban life. With the sound of intense breathing, a sharp contrast has been formed between the tension and anxiety in the black space and the active scene. The work tried to fantasize the daily life and interchange the fantasy with reality. In the photographs of Miao Xiaochun, Chinese men very similar to the artist were portrayed. These photographs were not a documentary, and they lacked a fixed visual focus. The huge photographs and their plentiful details drove our eyes browsing through the dense forest of images, while that man in ancient costumes and with a blank facial expression, seemed to be waiting for our sight somewhere. His existence did not change the nature of the scenes of everyday life, but instead produced a new sight on the part of the audience. What the works dealt with, was the critical point between presence and absence, which had been successfully transformed into a visual form. Noguchi Rika took photographic images of middle-aged swimmers in Beijing who swim throughout the year, even in the cold winter when the lake is covered by ice. Here, the artist again took away the specific time and space. Different from the "self-interested" artists, the works of Jung Yeondoo contained stronger sociality elements. He tried to recover in his photography works the memory of ordinary people lost in the sober daily life. Jung presented a work entitled *Bewitched* in the exhibition in Beijing, which recorded, through several pairs of photos, portraying the dream and reality of young people. He took one photo of young people in their everyday setting and another which showed their realization of the dreams. These young people included waiters of garage and ice-cream shop, who spoke of their daily life, dreams and hobbies. In this work the artist reminded us of the existence of the adolescent memories, the contrast of reality and dream, and the equivocal emotion of satisfaction and emptiness.

To date, we have tried to transform the geographical idea of Asia into a cultural identity. Asia itself is comprised of complex and panoply of ethnic groups, cultures, and histories. We are astonished by the rapid advancement of technology and the improved condition of network communication. In today's global world, Asia's daily life exists under a highly hybrid condition. The traditional culture and Westernized modernization have made Asia breed two uncompromising values within it. But because of this perplexing environment, the artists are trying out a dialectic approach from various angles. As part of the "Under Construction" project, we researched artists in China, Japan, Korea and Thailand, and presented them in the "Fantasia" exhibition, in order to show the ongoing transformation. The artists were able to share their experiences and concepts, and, through their exchanges, present their idea of "What is Asia?" from their various Asian perspectives. From hereon, we should envision new multicultural phase of Asia. These artworks should be able to vividly record the changes that are taking place amongst us, by touching on the surface of the everyday life where the various political issues are put aside from our conscience.