

I wish to travel back time. I want to escape from the current art works in Korea that appear like handicrafts by putting a moment in everyday life, a specific moment in time, to a stand-still. I also want to hold protracted time, wound round and round a thread holder, in my arms. I want to bring together the time dedicated to my work without having to divide it up. I wish to load my own narrative onto each piece of work as does a roaming peddler who moves from one village to another loaded with a variety of goods for everyday use. I wish to move grudgingly forward in this world while bearing the growing weight of the load of narratives.

For the past year, I have been reading ever so slowly the ten-volume work by Wu Chengen, *Suh You Gi(monkey to the West)*, published by Moonji Publishing. Monk Samjang and his fellow travellers are on their way to the world of heaven to rescue the dead who have yet to undergo rebirth after having arrived in the land of the dead. Since I am half way through the story, strictly speaking, they have not yet reached the west. I am afraid they may never reach their destination. The reason is that life-threatening adventures await them at every corner. But like those who have been to the West, I am rather at ease with reading about their adventures. I have always believed it is not about reaching one's destination, rather the course of overcoming any stumbling blocks along the way that matters. Every time, they overcome one hurdle, they unravel one Chinese fantasy after another into the air. There is a monster in every fantasy adventure. In this case, the monster makes its grand appearance clothed in the scales of a dragon or a gold armor, but he turns into a sorry piece of creature after being attacked by the monk and his entourage. He seems to represent vestiges of my past moments of anger or anxiety. By reading the story, I am reliving my own version of monkey to the West. In the present exhibition, I intend to deliver a monologue on my very own monkey to the West.

I destroyed the majority of my installation pieces after returning from the United States. While immersed in a new work, I sometimes called forth and shattered the specters(monsters) of my time past. It was like reading my inner book of monkey to the West.

The monk is leading his gang of friends, while I cradle a black-haired and warm-blooded animal in my arms. This animal has remained a source of energy even before I was born. While living in the US, I was constantly caught in between a state of separation. Every night, I suffered from nightmares and severe pre-menstrual cramps from my residence that overlooked the grandiose sea-like Lake Michigan or the Hudson River. Whenever I took a dose of traditional medicine from home, the symptoms receded and as time went on, they came back in waves of pain. On the trees that lined the street under my doorstep, a flock of crows sat down and were noisily predicting my death in the near future. I once watched a documentary film on people with visual or auditory impairments. After having recovered their lost sensory capacities through an operation, they suffered more acutely from the sudden deluge of light or sound than when they had lived with the disabilities. Our senses both require the ability to sense as well as to edit. I was shuddering under the unfamiliar environment and language much like people with such disabilities. I wanted to materialize the chaotic state in my work.

At times, I had the feeling that I was like a woman living inside a mirror. I tended



Where no one was seen wandering, in between the front and the back of the mirror, in the darker place between the skin and intestines, between a glacier and another, the crevice deeply cut was my own living space. I met the tree standing with its top on the ground upside down. The upside-down tree that was taking bab(nutrition) to its mouth whenever it was hungry by reaching out its hands, I hung a light fixture inside the tummy and head of the tree. As I was doing so, I had the feeling that all the trees of this world had their heads to the ground so their mouths, noses and even their eyes were headed down and they were moving their bodies with their thighs wide open toward the sky. I hung fish and berries on the bodies of the trees (<Swirling on her Heads>).

I thought about the first female figure in Korean mythology. She revealed herself in the birth myth of our nation. She transformed herself from a bear to a human being after overcoming hardship, but she disappeared from mythology after giving birth to a son. From a human perspective, she can be seen as a foreign creature from a far away place, like myself. I worked on a piece in which she as a human being was springing forth from the body of the bear. I engraved her skin with images of plants, animals and sea creatures to hang outside her. I created her existence in between the skin and the fountain. I wanted to titillate the senses of the visitors. Through light, sound, and the revolving red water and the image of the fountain (<Quira fountain>).

As soon as I returned to Seoul, I went to observe a demonstration scene. One of the most memorable images of that night was not the sight of burning candles, but the smell of slightly scorched dried squid on the portable stove in the middle of the street at the time when the demonstration was at a stand still. Dried squid is one of the most detested food of foreigners. They hate the smell of dried squid on an open fire because it reminds them of cadavers being burned. In *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, the squid is a creature to be decimated. In a sense, the border of a community can be translated into boundaries of the senses. The reeking odor of grilled squid is the other as well as the abjection of the West. In spite of that, Seoul was welcoming me, the stranger of the West, with its odor. It felt as if the squid was the resilient 'time' muscle of Seoulites and represented the vibrancy of a soon-to-be-launched space vessel. I conjured up an entity fitted with both a space vessel and the muscle. The squid can be compared to a star with self-luminescent ability in the deep seas. Unfortunately, it has lost the ground for its existence in the deep seas by being drawn to lightings hanging from fishing vessels and being turned into either the object of aversion or preference. The squid talked to me. "Each luminescent cell in my body throbs at each heart beat. At that instance, huge orbs of light fall from the sky. Soon, I will be saved. I shall be saved from the oppressing, fearful and cold darkness. I expel every ounce of utmost darkness that remains in my body. At the same time, a sharp hook pierces my body. It is painful. The sharp pain draws me toward the light. Whatever ascends to heaven carries an odor." I wanted to juxtapose the legs of the dried squid with those of the giant squid resembling a big space vessel to remind us of the forlorn deep seas that remained waiting outside my body (<Glowing Sucker Octopus>). My mother was muttering while spraying the room with air freshener. "Your work space reeks of putrefying smell."

Even to this day when I am writing this piece, I wonder what I or the monk and his

entourage have gone in search of in the West only to return to the point of departure. Perhaps I was looking for the holy bible hidden in the depth of the dark light in the deep seas. At present, I have the fleeting sensation of having glimpsed the glint of the eyes or the lingering image of the self-illuminating creature in the dark that seems to be there or not there.