

galerie dohyanglee

TEXT //  
SUN CHOI

## GENERAL BIOGRAPHY SUN CHOI

Sun Choi (born in Seoul in 1973) studied Fine Arts and Painting at Hong-Ik University in Seoul, South Korea. Choi was won numerous Korean and international awards including the Grand Prize of the *12th SongEun Art Award*, SongEun Art Foundation, South Korea. He has been part of residencies as CEAAC, in Strasbourg in France. His work has been exhibited widely in Korea, Japan, China, India and France.

## GENERAL WORK SUN CHOI

### Beyond Illusion

The artist had vague questions about art. And he made efforts to make those vague questions more clear and tried to put those efforts into practice. Leaving behind the past irrationality of contemporary Korean art, which overlaps with his time, he found it difficult to figure out what on earth art is and what we can call artistic. In front of the vagueness created by Western-oriented conventional wisdom about art, the misery of reality that you and I can clearly witness is paradoxically artistic enough.

There are two conflicting factors existing at the same time in his "work" that is presented as art: visible and invisible, material and immaterial, clear and unclear, and artistic and inartistic. He is creating artworks in hope that "art" will vanish. Aren't there already too many "artistic" things around us ?

Sun Choi, 2004

*S O R I* a solo show by Sun Choi

May 28th – June 2nd 2022

The exhibition *S O R I* (sound) evokes the vividness of life via two routes: digital condensation of sounds of individuals pronouncing their own name and projection of landscape images taken through lens covered with the artist's blood drop. The Korean title refers to the human breath at the heart of their experience, from the most intimate to the most vast level (atmosphere), from being unscathed to being threatened (historical events), from the striking to the abstract (communication). *Sori* is given as a set of audible and visual facts of life which often escapes our habitual consciousness.

In 2021, with the artwork *Sori*, the Korean artist Sun Choi gave himself a particular task of gathering and assembling the voices of 20,000 inhabitants of Doksan district in Seoul pronouncing their own name. Although particular, its core idea is not new to him: allowing his works to extend the intensity of his primary aesthetic experience in reality and towards his audience and leading them to remain at the limits of metaphor. *Sori* (sound), which at the same time fills and disperses itself in the atmosphere, obliges him: the concentrated sound, emitted once every minute from 4 Bluetooth speakers, resembles the sound of thunder and falls down without any representative or favorable trace. These pronounced names speak only through the lives sensitized to sounds of life that are just as ephemeral as it is imperceptible.

*Flower* (2021) consists of a continued audiovisual projection of reddened images filmed with the artist's smartphone camera. Each of these images shows at different interval the progressive change of color resulting from clotting blood drop – simultaneously vivid and perishing – of the artist covering the lens. In front of the window next to the projection is the suspended transparent film sheet which eclipses the landscape of the declining district.

*Butterflies* (2014 - 2022) started out in 2014 as a project whose aim is to visualize each breath of immigrant workers that the artist met on the streets of Ansan, Korea. The work came about as a result of the artist's feeling of futility and nonsense regarding various social events. It brings forth a strong visual experience of human breath to do away with notional understanding of human affairs and has also been carried out in many parts of the world.

Very often Sun Choi would extract materials from real events and treat it as an undeniable fact to be brought directly into the exhibition space. The work requires our attentional and physiological engagement towards the material, allowing it to speak for the events they were extracted from. For example, in his *White Painting (Pig's Painting)*, he spreads gooey lard over multiple sheets of paper conjoined to form a large wall to tell a story of millions of pigs buried alive following the outbreak of African swine fever. Their existence having been reduced to serial numbers, Choi typewrites them in small magenta letters and lists them in his book *Magenta Painting* (2021). His insistence is upon his own inability to remain a mere spectator to the tragedy.

Hence his brutally realist view of art. Art, in his view, allows for exercising our capacities to establish a personal relationship with reality, to the point where it defamiliarizes and makes us rethink the status of our factual comprehensions of the world. Choi's method consists not only in expanding the threshold of his intuition, but also that of his understanding of the significations of the historical events whose truth can only be approached by the sense provided by the material medium as facts of experience. In his effort to extract a sense that does not lie, to do away with the idea that art and aestheticization can take precedence over experience, Choi visits the sites of real events, with the imperative of liberating himself from the phenomenological conditions to share the taste of their truth, presents and gives voice to the paradoxically aestheticized but never encrypted material of experience.

Jimin Son  
Associate Professor, Philosophy of Art

WITHOUT EYES AND HANDS

2021

This work is one of my serial work, <Butterflies> that I've been realizing since 2014. In 2017 I tried to collect the breath of many teenagers of South and North Korean descent living in Japan on a canvas. All I wanted was just to put their breath together on canvas, but it was considered illegal for the authorities of two Koreas. After all, it was impossible for me to work with North Korean teenagers. The unfinished part shows the gap and real situation of two Koreas.

Sun Choi

## CONVERSATION WITH SUN CHOI BY ANA MENDES DRAWING FROM WITHIN – DRAWING WITH BREATH

April 07th 2020

For this post, we spoke with the South Korean artist Sun Choi, who takes an experimental approach to painting. Educated at the Hong-ik University in Seoul, Choi questions the nature of art as well as the western canons imposed onto Korean art. As he points out, »My work reflects my own questions about the ambiguity and indefinability of art.« The projects Choi develops use natural materials such as salt, hair, bones, sugar, or snow, or take inspiration from physical conditions like vomiting or disease. In one project, he asked people to blow onto paint, creating a collaborative work that somehow defies the limits of authorship and the concept of drawing.

Painting can be perceived as one of the most individualist of all art forms. Painters are quite often understood as masters who shaped our imagination over centuries – from Diego Velázquez to Pablo Picasso or Jean-Michel Basquiat, no one can do what a painter does. So, when we ask ordinary people to paint for us, what happens to the concept of authorship? Choi is still the author of his paintings, as he has artistic vision. To some extent, we can argue that he is the curator of the paintings that he imagined, as he created a certain frame within which people could express themselves. But, one can also argue that he did not »make« the paintings himself.

Finally, blowing paint is not exactly painting, as the result is unexpected. To breathe/blow onto paint is an immaterial gesture. Only air is moved from the lungs, and unwillingly produces forms. Thus, the next question could be: who/what draws that form? The unconscious, the skilled artist, and his marvelous concept or chance?

Breathing is never a simple gesture, as it has strong symbolism. Breathing is of course one of the vital signs of life, in which the respiratory rate of humans is on average somewhere between ten and forty breaths per minute.

Breathing has different spiritual meanings, as the Latin word »spirit« means breath. The Bible also associates the creation of Adam through breathing onto clay – thus giving life to inanimate forms through breathing. Similar perceptions can be found in rituals such as yoga, t'ai-chi or Buddhist meditation. Finally, breathing is the main source of artistic expression in activities such as singing, whistling, and playing wind instruments.

So, when we breathe onto paint, blowing it, what kind of representation do we achieve? Do artistic people breathe/blow the paint better? Do we draw with our hands, or with the mind? What is the role the unconscious plays in the artistic process in general? Is the artistic inspiration a myth or reality?

Similar to walking or drawing, breathing can evoke a feeling of relaxation. When we walk, we discover new connections in our minds; when we draw, we find new forms, ideas, or feelings; when we breathe, we are better connected to our interior world. So, breathing could be seen as one of the essential manifestations of the self, similar to walking or drawing.

So, the question arises, when we draw through breathing, who/what and how draws/paints the work? We dared ask Choi some questions.

**Ana Mendes** : When and how did you get the idea of asking people to blow onto paint?

**Sun Choi** : In 2011, I watched a huge tsunami arise after the earthquake of Japan. It was a moment in which everything disappeared, including people and buildings. After the experience, I asked myself what life and beauty is and what art can and must do in that situation. First, I'd like to overcome the fear of disappearance by art, which is not made by hands and ideas. I liked to have a conviction that I can make artworks through life alone. As you know, we must breathe to keep alive, even the morning after a family member's death. Sometimes life seemed to keep breathing in from person to person. So, I tried to make a painting with people who lost their families in the 2011 tsunami by their breathing. The work is You Can Continue to Breathe at the Ending Point of My Breath, 2011, but I could not finish it yet.

The morning of April 2014, the Sewol Ferry Tragedy happened in Korea. More than 300 high school students from Ansan city near Seoul, headed to Jeju Island, disappeared into the sea. The Korean Government and the old generation could not control the accident and save them. They had no will and courage to save them because of the money and political power. The president of Korea was sleeping in that morning. Since the accident of Sewol Ferry Tragedy, I would like to make more beautiful works without any technology.

I initially titled the work “소식”. In Korean, “소식” may translate to “news” in English, but that word “소식” means sharing a part of my breath with others as the sign of my safety.

**AM :** How do you perceive the concept of authorship in a work like Butterflies, in which you asked people to perform a certain activity for you?

**SC :** Actually, the right of authorship in the work like Butterflies is not clear. I had no concept of authorship when I started the work. I am trying to get a contract with someone who calls me and manages the project for me before starting, each case is different. I am just trying it. I am good at begging someone for something I need, like the Buddha.

**AM :** To what extent do you perceive yourself as the curator of the work that the audience creates through your concept?

The audiences want to enjoy participating in the work. It's really great to make the audience feel the beauty of their breath, the marks prove they are living through the work. Butterflies is painting without any illusionary techniques. When I was in the Korean military 25 years ago. I crashed and lost feeling under my knee for a short time. After the accident, I realized living life is beautiful and important.

**AM :** How do you maintain a certain aesthetic vision when you work with ordinary people?

**SC :** That's a really good question. It is a serious problem with the work. I have to sternly warn the audience not to make any personal marks or messages, like a heart. That's the point.

**AM :** Your works are always very colorful. How do you perceive color; what role does color play in your works?

**SC :** I use color as a word before the word. I really love all kinds of color, including white and black. I am sure that we can understand the message of contemporary society through color.

As you know, Korea is separated into two nations. In the national flag of South Korea, the blue means South and the red means North. I do not know why, but many Koreans realize red is a symbol of North Korea's Communism; and blue is capitalistic democracy. Can you believe it? There is something incomprehensible in my subconsciousness. I used to use both red and blue for the conflict and the pain of separation in Korea. Conventionally, White means purity, but I use it to represent a contradiction to my inner world. And I use the color in the context of society and history as a Korean artist.

**AM :** How do you understand drawing?

**SC :** Drawing is a way of understanding the world for me. It means understanding human beings, the time of history and space of the world, too. I enjoy reading the drawings of other artists and doing the drawings for me, too. And I wish that my drawing could stimulate new thinking and new art.

Ana Mendes

## SUN CHOI: REALITY AS DISCREPANCY AND REGURGITATION OF BODILY EXPERIENCE, BY SON JIMIN

2019

Sun Choi wants to bring himself as close to reality as possible, even if it means he must subvert the foundations of his understanding of it. As he puts it, the reality experienced in its most intimate state, though vague as it may occur to us, is “so paradoxically artistic”. What the artist finds “beautiful” in the reality is the minute discrepancies revealed out of the repetition of similar, trivial habits and conventionalities. What he calls “artistic” is then not so much the kind of beauty fostered by fine-art techniques as what makes bemused our vision and our being in a very particular situation, or what shakes up our body, something that he has always experienced since his university years.

His work demands that the audience counter any propensity to avoid the foul, dismal side of reality. Choi does not however elicit changes in the way the audience sees the reality but rather reminds us that we are already part of this reality and our experience of it is incessantly being regurgitated back into our throat. Even when his processes derive from reality to suggest in the viewer’s mind the beautiful or the distasteful, these two opposing feelings cannot, in Choi’s oeuvre, be thought of separately. Put another way, Choi’s operation is more radical than revealing parts of reality as being potentially ambiguous. Besides alluding to the necessity of seeing past the beautiful or distasteful surface, Choi allows for an experience not of the reality itself but the experienced disparities that constitute it. More real than the ‘stuff’ of reality staged as or in a work of art – as a representation of reality – is the felt disparities with reality and the regurgitation of my own experience in recognizing these disparities. Choi’s work, then, does not simply consist of revealing one aspect of reality over others.

Today, the “beautiful” and the “ugly” each appear upfront at the expense of the other through media which allows for faster integration and sharing. Works of art, subject to the potential viewers’ aesthetic judgment, is no exception. At the same time, a work of art is most intense when experienced as a site of a real event, as opposed to when it is left to judgment as a set of traces. The condition under which Choi works with the immediate reality is that we embrace otherness through trees bleached by hydrofluoric acid leaked from chemical plants, animal bones, breast-feeding mothers, people who lost their lives in safety accidents, North Koreans that we never got to meet, the hands of elderly women suffering from leprosy, or the breath of each person he encounters. What is revealed in his work as a result is not art, but the material truth shared equally by every one of us. His practice acknowledges the inevitable struggle with reality.

The precariousness that lurks behind our social reality becomes strongest when the ugly shares the same kind of appearance as what we usually find beautiful and friendly. We are vulnerable to this indiscernible difference, and yet it can also provide lasting impressions. Isolated scenes of reality on the side of the road, in the sewers, at the sites of mass animal cull, chemical factories or polluted water belong to us and are experienced in different terms. Choi does not simply offer guidelines on how reality ought to be experienced or a straight perspective from which to reveal parts of it. Revealing sections of reality naked in the artwork is at best imitation of them which are already brutal in itself. The individual’s experience of each moment is much more unique and “artistic”. In other words, individuals exist already in the thick of this brutal reality and constantly have “such paradoxically artistic” experiences in places where we share the same air and catch breath. The “artistic” experiences include trees destroyed by chemical leakage and reduced to red lumber which very much resembles that of natural scarlet maple leaves, the scent of dead pig’s fat that smells just like pork meat, finely ground human bones that are indistinguishable from any other white powder, kimchi liquid emitting a tone of red painting pigment, salt grains that cannot be readily identified as to whether coming from the kitchen or from a field of nuclear disaster: ‘twins’ of the reality. In other words, for Choi, the most artistic experience of reality can be given through two irreconcilable concepts whose material existences resemble each other in appearance.

One striking message here is that the irreducible feeling of discrepancy in experiencing the reality must in turn suppose that such feeling is shared by everyone else. For example, in his *Butterflies* and *You Can Continue to Breathe at the Ending Point of My Breath*, his intention is to “enable the viewers to visualize human breath in different ways than any notional understanding”. This intention is materialized only upon making apparent the sheer fact that each human breath is at any particular moment imbued with a unique message of their being within that moment: “I realized nothing can be done without others.” This stands in striking contrast with the 20th Century Avant-garde spirit that purports nouveauté and technical discoveries via critical appropriation or adaptation of parts of reality for self-differentiation.



Both works first appeared to me as attesting to a kind of *acheiropoieton* made only by exhalation: a natural association was made between the breath which defies all imitateness or visual similarities and the divine seed of vitality from which spring all living things. And as the Greek word suggests, the association harkens back to the cloth of Veronica onto which was imprinted the holy face without the work of human hands. However, this is far from what is factual, first-hand experience. "Breath" here points towards a person's proof of the irreducible experience of reality and that which testifies the temporal, spatial and sentimental dispositions – themselves already differing from all the rest. A breath constitutes an uninhibited fact given without the work of hands. Upon reminding ourselves of this, we can see that what Choi means by "such paradoxically artistic" experience is the very fact of change within each moment of our daily experience or something minuscule in the individual's life that occurs and becomes an experience as difference. Because what is traditionally recognized as artistic or represented is already one notch too far from the first-hand experience. Breath, according to Choi, is the experience that is at the same time primal and shared. The word "we" or "us" is an idealized notion that wards off the personal first-hand experience. Such a notion allows for various images of togetherness which then become imitated in the view of suggesting that "us" has been achieved. The idea that "us" has been achieved merely covers up each unique breath, unique in the individual's breathing-becoming, with an abstract umbrella notion.

Choi's purpose of sharing the above thoughts goes against the main interests of abstract art or any art that purports to make fully manifest an intention, a premeditated idea or an image from within. Abstract artist, then, assumes the responsibility of overcoming the irreducible gap between the viewer and the inner intention through what can be generally described as 'free expression'. However, this gap is also the *raison d'être* for all arts and is what the 20 years-old Choi called in one of his old notes "problem recognition", taking it rather for a 'gateway to be shared' than 'a painting to be shown'. As Choi shows in his *Naked Painting* (2003), presented for his graduation show, if all paint is scraped off from a painting, the sheer fact of the enactment replaces the idea of expression and abstraction supposedly originating from within. The enactment can be shared as a fact vianoticing the pigment left to testify for the former appearance. The indelible traces of pigment tell us that the visual elements can only be as material. What Choi makes manifest then is precisely the material proof of the gap that abstract art claims to be able to penetrate through free expression. "Painting" here is stripped of any recognizable visual indications such as clear color and shape; what is left on the piece of cloth is entirely reliant on the fact of enactment. This "enactment" translates Choi's reaction to abstract art into the following questions: "What is? What exists? That which does not lend itself to pigment cannot be shown. Doesn't painting in its most true sense mean "manifestation of the spirit"? What is shown is a mere piece of paper."

Choi intends to make the unilateral transmission of intention into a reversible one. The immediate manifestation of intention (the aim of the bodily gestures of abstract artists) must take place within the irreducible gap. However, Choi's "problem recognition" arises from the material trace which in itself points directly towards the fact of it having been put there. Such evidence can only be telegraphed through the becoming of material, which in Choi's works were people's breath pushing ink, or elsewhere, seawater taken from where tragic incidents took place and dried to make salt, human bones reduced to white powder or animal hair being burned and spread on gallery walls. The presented evidence says nothing explicitly or in abstract fashion, yet it contains all the facts. It suffices to simply think about what happened in front of the material traces before our eyes. To give a more specific example, in *White Painting (A Pig's Painting)*, upon realizing that what the artist is trying to communicate is less what comes from within than a set of facts, a direct indication of a certain event, the viewer can then experience the pig fat not as representing an inner intention or an ideal but that which has in it the very irrevocable changes the pig went through: the facts telegraphing that it was born, drew the first breath, grew up, was branded and received a number and left meat, fat and smell after death; they are simply there to be seen. Also in fact, there is no "painting" in his *White Painting*, a fact which permeates Choi's entire group of "paintings". The pig fat reacts to the heat emitted by our body as the viewer approaches the surface, forging a direct experience of the sacrificed livestock. His "art" is to be experienced through our bodily participation and resonates as material fact to our senses.

That Choi works in close relationship with reality ought not to be interpreted as taking parts of it to reproduce a subjective perspective or isolated meanings. His material facts, while blowing our common sense back into our throat through facts, speaks much more directly to our body than even readymades in the strictest sense possible – objects selected disinterestedly without any aesthetic purpose and thus deprived of any predetermined signification and thereby opening up to the widest range of concepts and interpretations. Such appropriation of existent elements of reality by Duchamp, as a method, consisted in searching for its own functional limits as an art object, but slowly and more and more widely came to be imitated by artists from different corners of the world. This appropriation, particularly in the Duchampian sense, turned away from imitateness of the past while minimizing all inner aesthetic impulses, thus paving the way to problematize the epistemological gap between the artist's intention and the perception of the viewer.

This brings us to one of Duchamp's key concepts, "inframince", or the difference that ever so slightly touches on the point of phenomenal manifestation in the world of reality but eventually moves on incognito in the flow of time, a concept that Duchamp attempted to reflect upon in his works for his entire career as an artist and a chess player. Despite the material impossibility of making this difference into a work of art, it must provide us with a never-ending impetus to artistic experiments. My view is that Choi chooses to work not to introduce an arbitrary solution to this difference in determining in advance his own conceptual aim, but to regard it as something to be shared as material facts.

Appropriation and symbolization as technique, widely used today in all cultural domains, may lead us to think that the age-old demarcation of art and non-art has become blurred. But the fact that every object, including those of art, was from the very beginning imitable and susceptible for appropriation must, in turn, lead us to question if something rather than anything is or can be "art" within the reality in which we dwell. At the same time, art itself tends towards but cannot become our bodily experience, and the experiences arising in the most specific context were more often than not encapsulated in the concept of art. But Choi "makes artworks in hopes of seeing off art."

"[Seeking] truth in ambiguity" then requires doing away with imitation. As stressed above, it would be misleading to state that he takes parts of reality for appropriation. Rather, he tries to see something "artistic" in our reality which is already intrinsically ambivalent. In other words, he asks himself what the necessary conditions are in embracing through the body seemingly evident facts. If beautiful things can be found in reality, can those things be felt by my skin? Can these experiences be shared? Can a work of art be a pure experience?

The visible world is saturated with things to be perceived and imitated. And if anything could avoid reduction or imitation, it would be our bodily experience specific to a set of circumstances. In Rice Braille Greeting, Choi writes unheralded messages on cooked rice grains and sticks them onto a blind person's face and hands. With the visual perception taken out of the equation, the taken object is not only experienced through the body but it meets specific circumstances in which the person exists. Meanwhile, in a totally different context, his Yellow Wall consists in staging wooden plates painted yellow, seemingly identical but irreducibly different from one another, where each individual plate's uniqueness is indiscernible because of the indistinguishability at the level of perception. The work therefore does not stage one single unit of artwork, nor does it symbolize an idealized notion like that of "us". Choi's bashful intervention simply shows that the visual perception alone cannot be made truly manifest to our existence or share it with others.

Yellow Wall does not show the same "color" but the traces of different experiences of material. "Yellow" is a predetermined notion, yet its manifestation always exists in multiplicity. Likewise, there is no such thing as a single "white painting" in Choi's work as a whole. White is already multiple experiences. The pig fat used in White Painting, the ashes from human bones fluttered by gallery visitors in Silbaram (Light Breeze Comes Again), the rectangular piece of cloth that was exposed to imperceptible, odorless hydrofluoric acid hidden in the atmosphere and exhibited as another White Painting (Hydrofluoric Acid Painting), the plane of cotton wool soaked in animal anesthetics in Anesthetizing Painting, are all works consisting of staging white materials that reveal the perpetually double-sided (sublime-forlorn) reality but of which our experience cannot be satisfactorily represented via white nor discernible via our visual senses. What these works offer is less the experience of particularization than that of the discrepancy that material facts create. The forlornness insinuated by the ground human bones, salt, anesthetics or hydrofluoric acid, can be represented by white just as sublimity can be by the same material agents. "White" here means nothing more than material presence. It should be further emphasized that Choi stands critical towards the idealized notion of white propounded by the proponents of what became known since the 1970s as Dansaekhwa, just as he does towards the notion of "us". Such notions that get absorbed into the tautological cycle as symbols and words, propelled by mimetic desires in the name of art didn't however find any meaningful place in Choi's philosophy.

His critique of this tautological cycle instigated by appropriation and imitation of reality can be observed in his work as a whole and constitutes an attitude that predisposes him to offer his works as the first-hand experience which, to him, is no more, no less than the experience of the uncanny discrepancy. It is also an effort to reconcile this first-hand experience – which resists all notional articulation – and the being of the work of art. If the intention is projected through subjective methods and appropriation that essentially work to imitate parts of reality, the coveted contact between the experience and the being of work is lost between two isolated starting points: their bridging must be forced by means of abstraction.

There have always existed the differences between the aesthetic and the artistic dimension. For example, aesthetics – as an investigation into subjects such as beauty or philosophical notions relating to artworks and the nature of our understanding of them – cannot fully explain or communicate the events of the artistic dimension where sensation, experience and production become immediately manifest. Or, aesthetics as a branch of philosophy and art as unique first-hand experience have always maintained a gap through which a new kind of cognitive understanding can be used or discerned. This gap was at the center of exchange between many scholars, the 1990s being a particularly intense period of its flourish. What this flourish meant was that art exhibitions and the activity of criticism must not only take both dimensions into consideration but also find a way to reconcile them through curatorship, texts, and images. More importantly, the Duchampian realization of this gap led to a radical departure from the aesthetic dimension in announcing the Dadaist opposition towards aesthetic judgment, critique, and imitation. Such a move opened the door to a much more direct experience of reality via paradoxical use of objects or words that describe such reality and finding not objects to be appropriated but imperceptible or even outlandish signs of the discrepancy. The reality here 'is' this discrepancy.

Choi's work puts the viewer's perception into an even deeper abyss as he now does not only accentuate those signs of discrepancy but claims that they are always already being shared and must be shared as discrepancy and not as unity. His belief is that this realization can "make art disappear", where "art" includes anything that can be baptized with a notion of art, albeit through imitation and appropriation. This requires him to work in an even more mucky fashion, but also ironically harnesses the appearance of "fine art". As it was already affirmed above, transferring my experience of partial reality into a work of art in its entirety is not only impossible but also vain when faced with the question of the cognitive approach towards the real. The real, in other words, cannot be communicated or shared as a single entity nor regarded as having one irreplaceable meaning, owing primarily to its ever-becoming nature and secondarily to the inevitable intervention of our faculty of judgment. The focus should therefore be on (what was called above) discrepancy or disjunction which is synonymous in Choi's work with our strongest experience of reality. Therefore, to him, sharing of this discrepancy as experience and presenting a work of art are one and the same activity. This sharing or perfect exchange between the artist and the viewer can be conceived if and only if this discrepancy is considered the only possible object of communication.

If any expression of intention or appropriation of objects cannot lead to this sharing or exchange, how can a work of art consisting of readymade elements tell us anything about this goal? As mentioned previously, Choi seeks answers following the plastic change of material and the occurrences this change gave rise to. The discrepancy qua experience is in fact the viewer's approach towards this material truth, an approach that can be likened to mathematical integration as opposed to approximation and derivative of the real. The concept of integral is another key to Choi's work as a whole. His Wastewater Painting (2015), Bloody Excrement (2014) and Salt Painting (2014) all bear the same subtitle "Integral Calculus Painting". Here, "integral" means "asymptotic approach" towards truth concealed by and simultaneously ingrained within reality. In the case of Salt Painting, the plastic change brought by the crystallization of salt extracted from seawater absorbed in a piece of white cloth at an actual site of tragic events or obtained from areas bordering the maritime boundaries with North Korea. Choi, who once worked at a saltern, simply dips and dries the cloth to try to arrive at an "integer" while acknowledging the ever-present gap with this integer. "Integral", then, always presupposes a discrepancy with the position of the viewer (or the artist as a viewer). What Choi wants to show is not the salt grains' characteristics and properties, or even less what they notionally and metaphorically mean, but the truth that they contain.

This asymptotic approach is an absolute necessity to arrive at various "integers" such as the life of the visually impaired, those suffering from Hansen's disease or all biodiversity. Integral is conditioned by countless repetitions to reveal discrepancies, as it is made evident in Answer Me (2011) in which Choi repeatedly asks willing participants for their name until their answering pattern is disrupted by their emotional change caused by the repeated exchange, in order to reveal the discrepancy between each participant's self and what the name means to their existence. Watching them break down in tears or show irritation ought to (if not must) have allowed Choi to put himself in the participants' shoes and ask himself repeatedly "What is? What exists?"

If Choi has any intention, it would be to set a direction in these asymptotic repetitions which are extended towards what Choi calls "the unknowable world of the thing itself" or "Hon-mono(本物)" (as one of his works named in Japanese). He asks the viewers to do the same by guiding them to spend time in front of an extremely simple event. An anonymous is led to approach the burned animal hair smudged on walls, numerous wooden yellow plates by different people, entangled Japanese hop stems, a room filled with red light emitted through the artist's blood painted onto a light bulb, a floor on which ground human bones are sprinkled.

The anonymous “completes” the work by simply “passing through” it. All that is needed is in fact the viewer’s presence and time. Making his work “complete” then means the material truth of bone waste, salt grains and other materials are taken out of the exhibition space to be spread into the world, notwithstanding the secondary reflection of the viewer.

Jimin Son (Philosophy of Art)

**AN ARTWORK'S VALUE**

2019

As a contemporary artist, I got a desire to go beyond the illusion and decorativeness of the painting and searched for invisible values over its materialness. Therefore, I've experimented with invisible materials like breath, body heat, wind, smell or materials taken from social happenings in search of new artistic languages. I believe an artwork's value is no more in the artist's genius or his/her inviolable aura; it gets meaning in the context of the contemporary art and our society.

Sun Choi

## WASTEWATER PAINTING BY YOO EUNSOON

2018

Sun Choi produces in nitely thin surfaces. In Bruised Saliva, Wastewater Painting (Integral Calculus Painting), and Bloody Excrement (Integral Calculus Painting), the artist only saves the patterns from objects he observed with care and transfers them to paintings. The discrepancy between the disgusting or sickening material and the beautiful patterns from it raises a question regarding the beauty of art to the audience. Furthermore, he covers the surface with a thin layer of paint for exterior use or cheap colors. He then lls in the planes of the abstract patterns without applying a particular set of skills. The paintings completed from such a process further remove the represented object from the original.

The purpose behind it is more clearly legible from works such as White Painting from Breast Milk, Salt Painting (Integral Calculus Painting), White Painting. The material is hard-earned to say the least; breast milk is collected from six months of begging, paying a visit to the scene of an accident and repeating a process of soaking the canvas in it and drying it to gain a slim layer of clinging salt, and hydro uric acid acquired in the same way at the scene of an accident, etc. However, the surface of the completed work itself is simple. In the end, the weight of the original material and the thin and fragile surface of the canvas are dramatically set against each other.

The surface of the painting has been an illusion for ages and after some time, it became the greatest medium that embodied the purity of art. However, from Choi's perspective, it is nothing more than a thin layer of the surface. By contrasting the fragility of the surface with the material, the artist uncovers the weakness of the medium of painting. However, a thin layer does not necessarily indicate shallowness in meaning. The surface ironically demonstrates with more depth the other side of time. As time passes by, the material is decomposed, peeling o from the surface, or volatilized, doing away the fantasy of the eternity of aesthetics. Instead, the artist's time in the past spent in acquiring the material as well as the duration of the work's decomposition after completion (rather it would be more tting to refer to it as the point where the artist ceased to add any more touches to it) is accentuated. Eternity is gone and the two axes of temporality continue on from the artist's practice.

Choi attempts tirelessly to erase the substance of the work to do away with the fantasy of the eternity of artwork. Interrupted Voyage imposes a more direct requirement of moving to the audience. The sea water that came down from North Korea on the ocean current was drawn to go through distillation, and the salt from this process was scattered about in the gallery space. It has been more than 70 years of division until we nally started to discuss the agreement to end a war. Yet the future of free exchange between the two countries seems distant. Against such a backdrop, the artist tries to send some salt from the sea in the north to the corners of the south. The salt is feebly attached to the surfaces of the audience's heads, shoulders, bags, and shoes to be transferred to somewhere outside the gallery space. The artist calls his action "sending the salt on a journey." Such is a more active means of erasing the work than that of Salt Painting (Integral Calculus Painting) where the salt from the canvas was designed to be chipped o little by little. Choi's works merely exist for the moment before unceasingly disappearing.

On the other hand, Choi demands a deliberation on the conditions of the gallery space and artworks. Hard Edged overturns the prejudices on the artwork's stability. Most of the time, the audience appreciate the work with a contemplative attitude, keeping a certain di erence from the work. Such a distance is maintained to an appropriate extent for a better view of the work as well as to keep the works unharmed. The artist reversed this relation and generated a situation where it's not the audience that poses a threat to the work but the work jeopardizing the audience. Hard Edged, dazzling the audience with clear lights, embodies a smooth surface and contrastingly sharp edges as the title suggests. The edges leave no choice for the audience in the middle of appreciating the work and observing the surface but to inch and back away from the work.

Choi's question that departed from painting reaches an attempt to eliminate the artist himself. For Choi, artists are "dispensable" beings. As the artist mentioned in several interviews, we live in an era where all the things in the world are "more artistic" than art. Here, "artistic" indicates what it ought to, but it suggests a bit of a sarcasm as well. Do we truly need artists in living through such a time? Choi asks again how art could be di erentiated from what is not art when he himself erased his status as an artist. This is the reason why the artist calls himself "a painter without hands." The artist proceeds to the point where he does not depend on the hands of a human being.

In <Will>, Choi collected earthworms that emerged on the ground to survive after a shower of rain and failed to get back down before drying to death, and transformed their form on the canvas, making it a painting. <Mulberry of June> is completed through a course of throwing or dropping fruits collected from mulberry trees in the environs of the Blue House. Mulberries scattered around canvas gradually oxidizes, looking more like a blood stain. In such processes, the artist does nothing more than putting forth the minimum extent of the method that he determined.

Choi's paintings strive to be in nitely thin, the works to dissolve, and the artist himself to disappear. He asks himself about the role of an artist. What does an artist do? Does he do art? Does he create? Does he speak to the world? Choi makes all those e orts go in vain. He knocks down the authority of art, attempts to tear down the concept of creation and speak to the world. But such a speech hovers around like an echo. Choi shies away from stability and unity, constantly generating layers of various contradictions, negations, and extremity within the work. Beauty and ugliness, the noble and the humble, security and threat, life and death, what is painting and non-painting at the same time, something that is art and not simultaneously, an artist that is not an artist (at times not only the audience but the artist himself ceases to be an artist) etc. The artist barely and precariously oscillates the two extremes. He limps away, spitting on the art that he holds tight nevertheless, believing that art has a value of existence even in the contemporary era that is more artistic than art.

Yoo Eunsoon (Aesthetics)

SUN CHOI BY CODY CHOI

2016

I first met Sun Choi in a classroom of a university. At that time, a student with an unfamiliar, strong feeling came in my class about the 20th cultural topographic map, and he was so serious that he could devour all the contents of the class. That was why I was very interested in the student. And when I heard later that he was the artist called Sun Choi who gained huge popularity among the young artists, I began to have a closer relationship with him. In those days, many young aspiring artists attending the lectures at various universities for years arranged an office at Samseongyo and established the lectures to teach the would-be artists like the secret private lessons every weekend for 5 years. Finally, he visited in the place, and he had a time to discuss on the artwork with the young artists. On seeing his serious, modest attitude, I thought that I met a good artist after a long time. His single-minded seriousness, undiminished enthusiasm, and considerable study impressed me. Sometime when I first saw his work, once again, I realized that he was a really good artist. When the artist Sun Choi finds the irrationality of human beings as an individual living in a society, he personally studies and experiences it without hesitation. And through such learning and knowledge, he subtly leads it into an artwork. However, he doesn't decorate the artwork and make it into a dry theoretical bundle or visual basket. That is because what are ingrained in his work is not the traces of theory and knowledge, or aesthetic appreciation and design, but breath, blood, and practice. As such, his work appears to be alive.

In the United States in the 1960s, the early conceptual art began to show the anti-aesthetics current revolting against the commercial success of abstract expressionism and resisting the aesthetic point of view. In this respect, we could say that this is to be immersed not in art that only intended to show, but in the real meaning of art. This art movement was very popular among the young thinking artists in the '70s, and then, it was known in the world of scholarship through the journal 'October' (American art review magazine that established the criteria of postmodern art in the United States in the 1980s) led by Rosalind E. Krauss and Hel Foster. As a result, it was established as a new current of art in the late '70s. Finally, the movement opened a new horizon for postmodern art in the United States in the 1980s. However, at some point, as the artistic current was embraced by commercialism again, it won a worldwide reputation as a commercial mainstream in the field of art. But, by contrast, its early innocent appearance is changed so drastically that we can't find the early traces. In the 2000s, this trend spread to the young artists in the UK. And combined with the apocalyptic cultural phenomena, it still exists as a postmodern syndrome in the cyber era. In Korea in the late '90s, thanks to information in the art magazines transmitted or imported abruptly by the artists studied abroad, the last stage of postmodernism in the US was very popular among the artists in Korea, and in the early 2000s, as another artists studied abroad introduced their awkward, clumsy works mimicking the anti-aesthetic installation works made in the US in the 60-70s, they were also considered as the real, fresh artists. It might be another phenomenon similar to the shock faced when we first encountered the fashion magazines in the '60s printed coarsely while we read the fashion magazines in the '90s that was too sophisticated. However, if the position of the viewer is changed into the people in Western art scene, despite the fact that these attempts are fresh to us, they might think that the phenomena appeared in their 60-70s appeared again in Korea in the 2000s. If we see his work as a visual gesture only from this anti-aesthetic point of view, we could mistake it for tracing back and recycling the anti-aesthetic fustiness. In my experience, however, the artist Sun Choi is not such an artist. He doesn't mimic the semblance of the anti-aesthetics in Western society and he doesn't use the half-automatism as a diction through intentionally showing a clumsy installation, either. That is because in his work, all the ideas, actions, contemplation, and compositions are centered on his own life and his surrounding environment. Therefore, this work is his own story, and on the very point, we could say it is real. His approach, suddenly in a flesh, reminds us of Francis Alice's beautiful wandering, but unlike Francis Alice, the artist Sun Choi, relying on art, re-transforms the extreme point of irrationality into a beautiful anger. This is his artistic talent. And that is why we are moved by his work.

Cody Choi

He is not only an artist, but also a cultural theorist. He held many exhibitions in many countries, including US, Europe, and China. Since 2015, his retrospective exhibition 'Culture Cuts, Cody Choi' has been touring Europe, including the Kunsthalle Dusseldorf of Germany, Musée des beaux-arts de Marseille (France), the exhibition hall at the University of Malaga (Spain), the National Chemnitz Museum of Germany. He was the exclusive artist belonging to the Kukje Gallery in the '90s. And he is now the exclusive artist belonging to the PKM Gallery, and he is also introduced as a leading artist at the Korean Pavilion of the 57th Venice Biennale. He wrote many books in foreign language, including Culture Cuts (KÖnig Books, Germany 2015), Fairwell to the 20th Century (Deitch Projects, NewYork, USA 2000). He also wrote books for Korean readers, including The 20th Cultural Topographic Map, revised edition (culture grapher, 2010), Contemporary Cultural Topographic Map (culture grapher 2010).



## TRANSITION OF MOVEMENT BY NAYOUNG JUNG

2016, from the catalogue *Transition of movement*, p 13 - 17

Transition of Movement is an exhibition presenting works by Sangchul Choi and Sun Choi. These two artists have represented their critical views and independent interpretations of art by taking note of body movements and converting their artistic attitudes into painting works. "Movement" is often referred to as a purely bodily motion that is a less conscious activity than "behavior" and less socially meaningful than "action." The exhibition title Transition of Movement has a connotation that artists exclude their subjective will by minimizing their bodily movements and alter the system of artistic meaning by overthrowing the values invested in art. These artists rest on a series of mechanisms in order to reflect this intention. Sangchul Choi taps into the body and makes use of simple tools for his work while Sun Choi involves his own body and the engagement of others. The two artists have one thing in common: they are both artists with a basis in painting. We commonly consider a painter to be someone who is concerned with what materials he uses to represent his creative intention and how he represents it on canvas. The painter aims to accomplish his own distinctive idioms by honing his skills. A work of art that properly reflects an artist's will and skilled techniques can act as a yardstick for value judgement and is also inextricably bound up with his status. To Sangchul Choi and Sun Choi, however, their works are nothing but references to their work process or vehicles for conveying meaning. A repetition of the same movements brings about a pattern in their works but the result is nevertheless unpredictable. Both artists seem to be fineto any proposed modeling beauty. Intending to minimize the involvement of their will in their works, they uphold that it is enough to showcase their monastic self-introspections and anti-artistic attitudes. In their works, bodily movements are a means to practice their creative impulses. Even though they touch the canvas with their own hands, the images on them are not the products of their own will. After all, they intend to internalize art as life, rather than art for art's sake, in their own fashion and cast aside the authority of preexisting art and paintings, privileges granted to artists, and any artistic auras.

In short, Sangchul Choi's work can be defined as "a painted picture" or more accurately as "a picture half painted and half unpainted." If his work is seen merely as a modeling factor, we may not be able to discover how his artworks are different from other paintings. As mentioned briefly above, the work method Choi uses is more significant than the artwork and its artistic quality so his facture is especially worth noting. Choi just wants "to be painted" and has thrown away any greed he has to paint. He explores and experiments with a wide variety of methods to be painted as nonchalantly as possible. For instance, in his work that consists of rolling a stone covered in paint on a canvas, the stone is his tool, the act of rolling is his method, and the number of times he repeats this process is 1,000. He first chooses an appropriately-sized stone and the position and direction in which he rolls it is decided by tossing a piece of rubber packing. The artist repeats the movements in the same pattern after setting his work method in this way. While repeating movements such as the throwing of the rubber packing, applying paint to the stone, and tilting the canvas, traces of the stone become documented on the canvas as they are. What appears on canvas at this time is a chance accumulation of points, lines, and planes rendered by movements that work on the device of the stone. In other words, his scene is portrayed by a situation brought about by his work method. At this point I wonder why he works in such a unique manner.

Choi is skeptical about lending any value, meaning, or being to art. He has tried to restore the purity of art by removing his existence from his work process. A new methodology seemed necessary in order for the artist to not engage in deteriorated art in which the act of painting brings him a social and economic reward. He confessed that it took him almost 10 years to get rid of all the knowledge and techniques he had learned during his college years and break away from the bondage of established art. He used to begin his works whilst wishing that the order of nature will be set by itself" in his art while excluding any involvement of his artistic will as much as possible. He has continued to execute his monastic work of erasing and emptying himself through a transition from the act of painting to a repetition of meaningless movements. Color and other modeling elements began to be gradually removed from his paintings in 2004. His continuous work on the Mumool series seems to be an inevitable consequence of this. Following the late 1970s when he abandoned the use of brushes and explored his own idioms, his primary work methods have been as follows:

- Tearing paint off paper by attaching tape
- Sectioning his scene into tiny squares and filling up each square with a myriad of brush lines
- Pulling and pushing paint with a tool afterpouring paint on the canvas
- Dipping a bamboo stick in paint and smashing it

- Drenching a canvas in paint and tossing strings at it
- Rolling a stone smeared with paint to the place where a piece of packing thrown at the canvas landed. Then tilting the canvas and rolling the stone until all the paint is removed
- Pouring paint onto a canvas and rolling a stone over it until the paint dries
- Dropping steel wire smeared with paint on the place where a piece of rubber packing thrown at the canvas landed
- Drilling into a wooden plank or cutting out a wooden stick with a knife

As such, Choi has constantly explored new factures and given variety to preexisting methods. Thus, appreciating his paintings is slightly different from other paintings. It is quite interesting to infer the work method of each of his pieces. His works are either traces of his movements or records of a repetition of his actions. Stopping in the middle without too much or too little and depending on the rules he has set for himself such as "1,000 times" and "the number of days he has lived" is also a sort of methodology that helps him to cast away his greed. The degree to which a work of art is aesthetically satisfied is not important. He always works with a notebook in which marks a' to count numbers are written. His art takes its roots in the Eastern thought that painting as an aspect of life is subordinate to life and a means to live life. His art is to "approach his true self" by "maintaining the state before he paints without painting." To do this, he empties his heart and removes himself in a way that corresponds to his attitude for life.

Unlike Sangchul Choi who has taken the path of a truth-seeker through self-introspection, Sun Choi dreams of becoming an artist who assumes an intermediating role in communication between art and society. Sun Choi is also negative towards the authority of preexisting art. He raises doubts over the value of art through his work of twisting the way that paintings have long clung to the arena of painting. His physical involvement in his work can be thought of as his reaction to the infinity of art as well as a reflection of his artistic interest in the matter of life and death we face in our finite life. He deems what his body senses in every moment of his daily routines as the source of his art. To the artist, his work is a vehicle to more minutely observe society and life. Therefore, to Sun Choi, art is not a production of the artist or an artwork itself but is something that puts value on the messages a work of art conveys, realizing and perceiving it. We can figure out what he feels and thinks of artists, artworks, and painting from his statements as follows:

" It is not fair for an artist to deem his or her work as a unique thing and generate its own aura. This only results in the artist acquiring a skill of combining paints on a canvas and the audience consuming the relation of this combination. I understand how this does not bring about any productive aspects."

" A work of art and its production depend on the individual artist. A really productive aspect is the fact that an artwork arouses empathy among those who have the consciousness to share it and causes them to open their eyes to new values. If a work of art has its value in such consciousness, it is not only for an artist but probably comes into being through his or her body."

" I still consider painting to be a new possibility. It is no longer a matter of new images and materials. That is why it can be obtained while answering a question concerning the definition of art, a prime issue in contemporary art."

Based on these ideas, Sun Choi has had very deep reservations about the nature of art. He applied single color to canvas with great care to produce his early painting series Naked Painting. This process is similar to that of monochrome painting. After that, however, he began to rake paint from the canvas using his hand or a tool until the ground was revealed. Moreover, he massed the raked paint into a lump and put it on a plate. How freaky! He then turned to damaging other artist's works. It was not a smooth process to gain a work from an artist because an artwork is like an alter ego. What did they feel when the artists who agreed on Choi's purpose witnessed their works defaced by Choi. Choi's work of raking paint and tearing away at hard work is both a rejection and a resistance against the value of established art. This was perhaps a gallant counter by a late bloomer who was disappointed by aspects of the times such as honing skills to be an artist, evaluating artworks for their economic value, and settling for a reputation. The artist ultimately revealed his intention that "This work is not merely doing painting but a trace of negative actions against overly heavy painting. This work may be thought of as worthless and futile from the established point of view toward painting but it aims to make viewers arrive at an awareness of such futility."

You Can Continue to Breathe at the Ending Point of My Breath, Butterflies, Mother Tongue Painting, and Bruised Saliva are a series of works involving others in the process of production. One made an image by blowing paint spread over paper and then others continued their movements of blowing to complete the work. Butterflies, in which migrant workers were involved, is also a project unveiling breaths: in this work participants shared visual experiences of "breathing." The artist only assumed the role of arranging a field for their engagement, raising a question concerning the role and value of an artist who removes themselves from the process. He shaped points, lines, and planes by chewing bubble gum in Mother Tongue Painting and he took saliva from street goers and transferred their shapes to canvas in Bruised

Saliva. He questions the nature of producing and appreciating paintings by reconstructing unexpected shapes engendered by the insignificant movements of random individuals into painterly scenes. As such, Choi poses underlying questions such as who the artist is in contemporary society and what an artwork is through his work and tries to raise discourse on the social value of art, citing that "any artistic value lies not in one's desire to consume a flashy semblance but in productive efforts and attitudes to escape a widely accepted aesthetic consciousness."

As reviewed above, the two artists Sangchul Choi and Sun Choi have been pursuing art as life rather than art for art's sake, turning down art as an established value. Sangchul Choi has investigated artistic methodology whereas Sun Choi has constantly extended the territory of his art to others and social relations. Despite the difference in their methodology they share a critical attitude toward and a warning against dominant forces in the art world, putting more stress on the process of ever-changing work through the medium of the body. They seek to alleviate the meanings overly applied to artists and artworks by reducing their intervention in art and lowering the status of artworks. What their work ultimately pursues is an exploration of art, shedding art's aesthetic significance and value. They have pursued their own ways in spite of all others' negative assertions. Their modest yet consistent work arouses massive inner resonances. While viewing this exhibition, we may realize that our imagination combined with random movements can gather and raise a wind of change, just as many drops make a shower.

Nayoung Jung, curator of SOMA

## TAINTED PURITY BY LEE SEONYEONG

Sun Choi Exhibition (February 13th - March 28th 2015, SongEun ArtSpace)

In Sun Choi's exhibition *Meari*, many of the materials and subject matter that appear on his canvases is considered dirty: excrement, blood, saliva, waste oil, wastewater, and ashes. The exhibition venue appears as a place for diverse "scatologic rites" in which one cannot distinguish perversion from creativity. From every aspect of the various impure materials he has selected for this exhibition, one can even surmise an inclination towards coprophili or coprophagie. In contemporary art, materials and subject matter with the characteristics of abject art tend to be arranged or excreted in a dirty or obscene way that befits the concept of the abject, but what is different in Choi's exhibition is that the space is clean and neat no less than that of abstract painting as seen in modernism. As perceived in the work entitled *Naked Painting* (2004) from his first individual exhibition, which was presented like a refined abstract painting with the paints on the canvas surface scraped off, modernist abstraction seems to be an underlying target for him to overcome. The tendency toward reductionism, which entails removing a variety of elements in one work of art leaving behind what is called the pure mind of an artist or the materialistic essence of painting, has ended up with the mass production of pallid crafts that would not have even stood alone but for the backing of the art world establishment consisting of certain schools and galleries.

To me, this type of art remains as the image of sophisticated wallpaper pasted to a wall where people are sitting in front of it in deep meditation. When a monotonous aesthetic, only indicative of an individual, does not remain content for self-identification but appears as an ideal and unjust power is additionally given to an illegitimate authority, a compulsion to break this arises. Although there have been some groups in art circles that have had the intention to break the rules of the dominant language of Korean modernist abstraction, we're used to them disappearing after becoming exhausted or eventually toeing the line so that they resemble one another after fiercely objecting to their opponents. Or often these groups would fall short of their will to power or realistic strategies. Sun Choi intends to overturn the existing rules of language from the inside by seizing an opportunity as a recipient of a grand prize. Although there remains a question about whether it would be productive to raise a question on aesthetics, which has already been thrown to the test of time (history), it is necessary to keep in mind that art progresses not in a vacuum but in the context of dialogue.

The title of the exhibition, *Meari*, meaning echo, may imply such dialogue. Although modernism remains in its own soliloquy, the new generation wants a dialogue. What is considered dirty in Choi's works hides its nature, attached to clean objects such as a panel of aluminum, a white canvas, a wall, or a camera lens. The idea that a lofty mind and the original brushstrokes of an artist should be revealed in their works is also tainted. Eccentric figures found in his works come from the enlarged images of bloody excrement or wastewater. Paintings or murals painted by the breath and hands of others taint the myth of creation that artworks should reveal the spirit and craftsmanship of an artist exactly as they are. The abject in the exhibition are dirty but sacred at the same time. They are truthful in that they uncover the nature of dirty objects that pretend to be clean; they are sacred in that they paint those who have been considered dirty, including them in their art.

Rather, it is art that has taken over the sacred, which has disappeared over the course of modernization. Even in contemporary art, espousing the myth of newness, the dialectic of sacredness and secularity is distinct. The history of contemporary art shows numerous examples in which artists, who became celebrities through the most secular themes, are glossed over with the sacred. There are even cases where artists who once represented sacred ideas are downgraded as sheer by-products of the period due to the collapse of an ideology. Amid this, modern art has succeeded in the lineage of minor rebellious artists such as Sade and Bataille. The sacred is revealed by violation, and taboos can be oppressive enough to be felt as sacred. In Choi's works, filth and cleanliness do not hold their individual places, but emanate violative impulses by constantly swapping places. By not belonging to either black or white, unstable changeability applied to both subjects and objects (decentered subjects or transitional objects), becomes impious by itself. As soon as visitors enter the gallery, they can see the work entitled *Integral Calculus Painting*, in which aluminum panels in urethane paint are deployed like a minimalist installation.

The horizontally spread on the floor arrangement reminds the audience of death. It seems like an attempt minimalism, which once initiated the movement against modernism at the height of modernism, made at non-relational composition, or deconstruction, to refuse anthropomorphism that persistently tagged along contemporary art. What is represented in the wrapping of various sleek products including a car is literally bloody excrement as the title indicates. The many layers installed as a physical measure to prevent contamination from the outside, in fact, appear overshadowed by the strange patterns traversing the surface. But art cannot necessarily stand in opposition to something. A simple objection can be incapacitated or nullified by the targets of that act of objection. Although Choi's works are critical and satirical, these traits stem from his enthusiasm for art. Art is not about the common act of simply moving an object from here to there, but about a game of limitations that requiring squeezing until nothing but bloody excrement oozes forth: this is not an exception for the artist Sun Choi.

Paints, non-object art materials, are also considered products excreted from the body. Choi's work implies that like primitive men and children, artists enjoy squandering these inappropriate by-products. Floating images on the evenly painted aluminum surface go beyond the scope of the external dregs of the body to already become part of the body, better at delivering even more intense pain. The paintings on the third floor, embodying breath, are light like butterflies symbolizing breath, but the works consisting of the breath of migrant workers and Hansen's disease patients are as desperate as bloody excrement. The tough lives of the minority are transformed into an image of a group of fluttering butterflies, which cross a path of breath depicted in special ink. The project *You Can Continue to Breathe at the Ending Point of My Breath*, submitted to the Yokohama Triennale as part of the audience engagement programs, presents a variety of unexpected images of the breaths of unspecified persons. This living act, where one breath endlessly connects to another, can indeed be art.

The "other," including the minorities drawn deep inside the work, crosses the boundaries of fixed subjects and art. This process can be as fascinating as it is dangerous. Heterogeneity as carried by the object disturbs homogeneity, but at the same time, enriches it. Processes, where what is inside the body is excreted outside or vice versa, act as dynamics on the boundaries between purity and contamination, which is not unrelated to the boundaries between the sacred and the secular. Although breath itself is not inherently dangerous, in the age of contagious disease, the breath of others is not necessarily benign. That is why modern science focuses on developing technology for virtual contact. Virtual contact via various interfaces, including a screen, only leaves a humble body radical in the abstract sense beyond any splendid spectacle. The refreshing blue wave patterns that interact with the white wall in *Wastewater Painting (Integral Calculus Painting)*, have been extracted from bubbles generated in wastewater gathered in the Nanji Sewage Treatment Center in Seoul. The mural was created by others according to the manual suggested by the artist.

This is neither an implicative object nor a product containing the concentrated individual talents of the artist. Moreover, the image, filling the entire wall to the end and stretching to the scope of the environment, gives an impression that visitors have fallen into the wastewater. The entire concept of inundation is related to the annihilation of a grand boundary. One aspect of the annihilation of a boundary is death. Isn't it obvious that the Sewol ferry disaster, which shocked the nation last year, demonstrated that all of Korean society remains in wastewater? Another mural on the fourth floor, *Meari*, was created by painting the entire wall of the exhibition room with the ashes of a dog, a cat, and a human. If you touch it, the ashes smear. As if from a scene of a disastrous fire, traces of ash spread across the wall are full of an image of death. Rather than describe the ashes as being spread on the wall, it would be more appropriate to say that it is the wall that's been tainted. In a negative sense, the excretions from the bodies of humans and animals are connected to the emotions that the dappled wall smeared with ashes is a tainted white cube. Although *Spitting Saliva* and *Salt Painting*, displayed above, appear as white monochrome paintings that could be considered crystals of purity, the material is dried spit and the crystallized surface has been preserved in brine.

Eccentric materials, substituting for expensive paints filling the canvases of expensive paintings, resemble substances spit or splattered across unlucky objects. The unsettling feeling in the room covered with ashes, causes the audience to remember that by-products of the body were used for shamanistic purposes to curse someone or drive away evil spirits. *Black Painting*, hanging on the white wall of the next room, also runs dirty oil when it is touched. The mere fact that this piece is not a fixed scene, but a moving one, gives the audience a sense of filth. This work, which brings to mind the black rectangles that are now considered sacred masterpieces that spurred modern art, seems to get covered with contaminants spit out in order to preserve the white wall. According to another criteria, the concentrated black dregs in the rectangle, which serves as a frame for the work, can be said to be more innocuous and beautiful than the white wall itself. *Flower* depicts a process in which the artist's red blood has been applied to the lens of a video camera as it turns to black over the course of oxidization, through a change of "solid colors" in a "minimalistic" style. This work hangs on the line between life and death.

The body fluid is what presents the drama in which red light fills the screen, reminiscent of the sun, and changes to pitch black as it decomposes. The footage in the last room of the exhibition hall, displaying a scene where the leaves of a book are pressed with a stone and turned over by a storm, seems to deride metaphysical and material possession-worshipping subject matter such as spirit, substance, and nature that are frequently adopted in modernist abstraction. A stone may represent an ideological aesthetic boasting of individual masses. On the other hand, it may be so light that it needs to be held down by an object such as a stone. The power of nature, represented by the storm, could turn the once-protagonists into dust scattered about the vast universe. Choi has excluded paint as if he were the conceptual artist who once said that, "paint cans are where paints should stay." His "paintings" may not be a mere economic response to expensive materials, the paints. Although he has long contemplated the absurd practices of art circles, he is not obsessed with ideology.

Theorizing art is as pointless as being buried under trivial craftsmanship. Rather than a logic game to activate the brain for a short moment, it is important to discover the appropriate opportunity to engage in a game about the boundaries in the languages of art. As for this boundary, the body is its base. It should be noted that most of the alternative materials Choi chooses, rather than paint, are associated with the body. Using materials fine art has considered inappropriate, he disturbs the purified body, that is, art or artistic subjects. By his impious violation, "fine" art, which has drawn a boundary circling itself according to the aesthetic ideology of modernism, is tainted. Studies in anthropology generally show that purity is generally proven not by purity but by contamination or violation, as in the cases of the myth of a scapegoat and religion; this point is emphasized even as a principle of new aesthetics in contemporary discourse, such as psychoanalysis, which calls for a return of the oppressed. Various abject art materials and subject matter including excrement and blood used in Choi's works are associated with the boundary of the impaired body.

This could be an abnormal aspect leading to death. But what is indeed abnormal is the blockage of two-way communication between the inside and the outside. The blockage is more likely exist when art is isolated from society—what's worse than isolation is when art circles belong to society only in a way that existing power structures remain intact. In Choi's works, the boundary of the body, as a fundamental rule to differentiate the inside from the outside, is crossed or disrupted. A festival is a sphere where this boundary is crossed, reaching the essence of art. In these festivals appear anti-heroes, pretending to be kings or clergy, and they subvert the existing order. The abject are subversive materials, partnering with the anti-heroes; in them, perversion and play cannot be distinguished. At the same time, the abject are the flip side of novelty and experimentation. The sacredness caused by violating taboos is different from that of righteous sacredness. This is not a matter of merely sublimating filth. Choi's works approach viewers as remnants of a frenzied festival that breaks the fragile boundaries of modernist abstraction.

Lee Seonyeong (Art critic)

## COUNTERATTACK OF MEANINGLESSNESS BY JUNG HYUN

2014

The relation between works of art and their interpretation results in the irrepressible meaning of art. The value of visual art reveals itself in the outer world of written language, which coincidentally converges as an expression of discourse. In this process, contradiction is implicit but the symbiotic relationship between the work and the interpretation of the work plays a decisive role in the transformation of art into a transcendental object. Although frontline experimentation, like that of Marcel Duchamp purported to destroy meaning, and much of modern art that has appeared since has engaged in a heated competition to overcome the limitations of those existing spheres, has in fact only led to the repetition of similar processes of production and meaning rather than a dismantling of that meaning. Jacques Derrida once criticized the social sentiment that takes the existence of language, which has been developed by humans, as a “natural fact” to be unconditionally accepted since the attitude that sees the fruit of civilization as natural law can create an incontestable value of the absolute. Therefore, the essence of dissolution is to destroy the ideas that are deemed “natural” and the systems of genealogy that have become “historical.”

In his artworks, Sun Choi questions the essential meaning of art and his creative process consists of erasing the aura of art adorned with solid ideas. Visual sentiment, which is seen throughout his works, is read as abstract expressionism or minimalism. In his creative process, form vanishes and color and the abstract touch of a brushstroke emphasizes such an impression. His works are, however, completed by the process of concrete reference and performance despite such expressive aspects. The concrete reference here can be interpreted as a mechanism that satirizes the absolute value of modernist aesthetics and the purity referred to as recovery of painting through materials. In *Naked Painting* (2003), one of his early works, Choi inverts modernist aesthetics by scraping the paint off a canvas to return the object into the materials themselves. As a result, what we see is a completely scraped canvas where only the lumpy remnants of color remain; it recalls those modernist paintings that deny perspective in pursuit of optical illusion. This so-called naked painting dually references the history of modern art. Choi refers to the satire of “nakedness,” a condition where paintings are erased, and satirizes the supposed purity of an abstract expressionist painting. His work seems to be a sarcastic commentary about how meaning has been seized through the written words of art theory and criticism, which have become offensive to fine art itself. Is it possible for us to appreciate art as it is? Is it possible to observe an object objectively without seeing it through our accumulated knowledge and experience?

Dada’s experimentation and resistance to authority, which the inartistic materials attempted by the Fluxus movement has shown us, is well known. But the monumental meaning of this experimentation has been reproduced and transplanted into cultures all over the world through modernization. The good name of globalization depends on how Western theory is localized. In other words, the so-called “meaning of modern art” can be said to exist only as globalization is defined from a Western point of view. Recent trends, such as social and political art, are presented as a decontextualization criticizing the hegemony of Western-centered ideology. Sun Choi’s works follow a similar trend but there is no historical baggage or syntactic point of view in them. He specifies his works by using components of installation and performance art but it would be remiss to label him as an installation or performance artist. To me, Sun Choi is literally a “painter,” and painting is always where his agony begins and that agony displays itself in the form of what we know as “painting.” After making *Naked Painting* and *White Painting from Milk* (2005), Choi had the momentum to stay away from paintings that recreated pictorial epics or meaning. Choi completed *White Painting from Milk* over six months by spraying the breast milk of random nursing mothers on the canvas. The “breast milk painting” gradually turns into a rotten fetid object. The so-called “white painting” becomes an object of filth. It is a dramatic process for breast milk, which might be one of the loftiest secretions, to oxidize into a nightmare decomposition. It may be a joke about the innocent ideals of painting and the kind of modern painting that pursues a lofty state. But what is loftiness? Loftiness may be no more than a state that transcends time and space, a vacuum, and a constellation that forever shines. The questions Sun Choi raises about painting seem to resist against the “violence of meaning” that goes beyond the visual thing we call painting.

Since *White Painting from Milk*, a series of works, such as *The Silbaram: a Light Breeze Comes Again* (2011), *White Room* (2013), *Spitting Saliva* (2014), and *Salt Painting (Integral Calculus Painting)*, serve a role in questioning the social and cultural dynamics between loftiness and disgust by using various objects. The *Silbaram* is a project in which there are ashes on the floor of the exhibition room and visitors unknowingly walk on the ashes of the dead. The project reminds us of unseen death and ignites our imaginations about what is a normal life outside of written history and, furthermore, towards the abandonment of life and death.

In White Room, there is salt from the seawater at Yokohama spread out on the exhibition floor. Despite the fear of a nuclear accident, if you are rid of the blatant reminder of the disaster created by the media, then the face of fear becomes rather abstract. The act of wandering around the floor with salt fantastically spread over it is no different from the process of experiencing fear. Salt, as the crystallization of civilization and human desire, becomes an ambivalent substance. In Sun Choi's works, the environment and ecology are emphasized more than a political agenda. However, the environment that dominates our life is also the product of our political desire. You Can Continue to Breathe at the Ending Point of My Breath (2011) seems like an Informel painting but it is the outcome of a collaborative project. A number of people participated in this work: one person makes a form by blowing out ink on the paper and then the next person continues to breathe on it. For Choi, the participatory nature of a project like this is based on the need to share life and question what it means to be alive rather than engage in ideas about community or public art.

In his recent works, Sun Choi takes an opposing approach to the works mentioned above; Wastewater Painting (2014) and Bloody Excrement (2014) are representative examples. In Wastewater Painting, Choi uses patterns of wastewater as a decorative motive, recreating the patterns in a typical Informel style. By bringing an object into a pure form of painting, he transforms filthiness to loftiness. In this project, he seems to be focusing more on changing typical "ways of recognition" rather than pursuing any lofty and ritualistic meaning as in his piece, Abjection. The gap between what we see and what is seen reminds us of the story of the Buddhist monk who drank water from a skull. How on earth do we recognize what we see and feel? Who created meaning in art and artwork and why does meaning continue to be an issue despite all the attempts to dissolve it? It does not seem that Sun Choi wants to be a truth-seeker. Rather, he is asking about what the role of the artist is and how the artist can communicate with society—how the artist can harness the source of art from the core of our daily lives.

Jung Hyun



## EAST ASIA'S DINING TABLE

2004

Countries in East Asia that I've recently witnessed seem very insecure because of major and minor conflicts among them. These East Asian countries share a common culinary culture of using animal bones, especially in making soup. From such a common culinary culture, I can imagine they might have had a sense of cultural kinship in the past. Taking notice of similarities and differences, I've gathered bones from restaurants in East Asia, such as Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and China, and made a symbolic dining table. What will a dining table of East Asia that we'll face ten years from now look like? These countries could possibly devour each other and taste the leftover bones.

Sun Choi

## INSTEAD OF PAINTS: INTROSPECTION BEFORE NOVELTY

2004

Although Clement Greenberg's theory of flatness was one theory among many on the pursuit of abstraction through style, some Korean art critics in the past exaggerated that "white painting" was "Korean modernist painting" and propagandized it, based on the flatness. This phenomenon was nothing but "white wrapping paper," missing the fundamental question: Why do we have to follow abstract painting at all?

Facing the current status quo where distorted views and the power structure of art circles taint the values of contemporary art, I had to start my projects from serious contemplation on past trends in the history of Korean modern art. Since I cannot empathize with the historical context of formalist modernism in Western art, I refuse to passively accept it. Based on my introspection on Korean modern art, led by submissive and deceptive Korean modernism, which is even more incomprehensible than Western modernism, I seek an alternative art to both art histories.

Sun Choi

LETTER TO JUNGYEONG BY SUN CHOI

May 28, 2003

Dear Jun-gyeong,

I can't thank you enough since you were willing to offer one of your paintings to which you must have dedicated your time, effort, and heart. First of all, I would like to thank you for listening to my thoughts. As you know, I am just a humble student without any noticeable achievements. Further, I am not perfect in conveying my thoughts in complete phrases. However, you listened to me and even encouraged me to take a chance, and so here I extend my sincere gratitude to you. I decided that the least I can do out of courtesy is to explain how I came up with the scraping idea, and this is why I am writing to you.

First I hate the thought of visiting a gallery just to realize that a painting is ultimately a combination of colored paint regardless of method, consuming various illusions created by the combination. I believe that what makes a painting different from a photo is the spirit within, not the fact that it is a piece of artwork. I have had doubts over what on earth a painting created by a combination of color on a canvas can make it be sold at such a high price, and why audiences should pay a considerable fare to appreciate it. And I have come to conclude that fetishism of painting is the reason. No matter how many times I have inspected paintings I can't get rid of the thought that they're just combinations of colored paint. As such, if you say that something has been materialized through a painting, it is likely to be pointed out as too much of an impressionist critique. It might work like this: people say that something feels good or is interesting when it's what they ultimately find familiar or have learned somewhere before even if they're not aware of it.

As you are well aware, since Duchamp, art has been about more than creating exclusive art works. Instead, what counts has been the discussions raised regarding the relevant works. I don't think it is right for an artist to regard his or her work as the one and only work, creating his or her own aura. This will only result in obtaining the skill to combine paints on a canvas, thereby allowing audiences to continue to consume the relationship created by that combination of paints. Further, this will not create a productive development in any respect. It is true that the creation of an artwork starts from an individual artist. However, only when a work created by an individual becomes the subject of empathy, thereby allowing people to open their eyes to something new, can productivity be created, rendering the work to be a true piece of art. I believe that the value of a work of art is not placed within the thickly layered chunks of colored paint.

I noticed that I started to work on paintings based on values modeled after a Western education, and this is what has motivated me to engage in the scraping. Mulling over perspective, shading, and other methods of expression derived from the West has raised serious questions about the implications Western methods have had on me. This, in turn, makes me question myself about the essence of a painting.

Saying that the reason we have to acquire an in-depth knowledge of Western art is not to imitate their works but to overcome them and produce better ones, you added: "Starting from Western-style drawing, one should realize what their style of drawing truly is, and further one's own style of drawing. Ultimately, I desire to interact with people having different values through different art works." I couldn't agree with you more. I know that one cannot seek both practice and art theory just to master them. In fact, one does not need to. Such belief is from the self-recognition that a new piece of work precedes any relevant theory. I should have realized what I was doing before starting my project.

As you also know, the work that we mainly encounter on the 8th floor of Unit F have been assessed based on the theories coming from the West, particularly those introduced by the American Clement Greenberg in the 1940s. However, I couldn't disagree more with the argument that the essence of painting lies in its flat surface. Asserting that the flat surface is the essence of a painting means that changes in definition and conception of the state of flatness subsequently change the essence. However, if the essence changes, how could it be called essence?

# galerie dohyanglee

Such an argument has been established based on Western culture in the 1940s when people sought the essence of a substance. However, things have changed, and this has only given rise to a series of questions to me. As science has been developed in the West, many things that could be seen as essence have turned out not to be. I wonder if the concept of essence is simply a notion people have established. As I continue to think, I've realized that there are so many undefined issues within society, and the consequences, rather than the essence, pose a greater issue. What has been established as truth is doubted, and I think this is the current status of society. At the very least, who would indeed be able to define oneself? I believe it is hard to explain why I was born into this world even if I did not wish for it. At this very moment, a cell in the corner of my body is on its way to death while another is newly created. As a living organism that replicates and changes every moment, the notions embedded also change. In other words, I believe there are only unceasing cycles of circulation, and no such thing as essence exists. At the moment you have seized the essence of a substance, it instantly becomes the essence of the past.

Modern art has progressed with a constant suspicion towards things of the past. Such a deep suspicion has gradually separated art from concept and notion. This, I believe, is how modern art has constantly moved toward new values, instead of seeking truth. However, this has helped modern art to take one step closer to truth compared to when it is fixed, which can only sound paradoxical.

This is why I intend to continue to create works that are not familiar—which look unfamiliar even to myself. Something familiar would mean that I have encountered it somewhere before. Now, I hope to see more of your works become unfamiliar. I also hope that watching my works becoming unfamiliar might be a whole different experience for you. Although my works may fail to serve as a huge inspiration for you, they could still provide an opportunity to take one step back from the obsessive desire for drawing and to think about paintings again.

Even if your work were to disappear after my work on yours has been completed, I believe that it will still show its presence through a new value in my work. If it is true that Hegel was a wise man, I would like to share the joy of reaching the spot within the triangle established through the dialectic asserted by him.

Sun Choi