

## **Some Thoughts on Tools**

### **The Will to Turn a Chair into a Work of Art**

Hello. Now, I would like to explain how an object such as a chair is transformed into a form of artistic expression.

The chair is an object that ordinarily has three or four legs, a back and perhaps armrests, and can typically be considered as a tool that people use for sitting. An artist would probably rely on the transformation of its materials, scale, shape or color in order to produce meaning from this object.

Actually, this is not something that we ordinarily get the chance to think about. Let's say that a particular artist decided to create a work of art involving the chair; if he decided to make it in the form of an actual chair, chances are that we probably wouldn't be able to tell the difference between an ordinary chair and the work-of-art-chair made by the artist.

I recently met an artist who decided to create five chairs. I would now like to tell you about these chairs.

I will describe the first chair.

In order to make the chair, the artist went to a thrift store and purchased several suitcases. In order to construct the form of the chair, he used one suitcase for the seating, another propped upright for the back, and two smaller bags for the legs of the chair. After he completed the first chair from this assemblage, he made about 10 of these suitcase-type chairs. Then he cast the chairs in bronze. When I say casting, I mean the process whereby bronze is melted down to a molten state using hot fire and is then poured into a mold in order to produce an object. The reason why he cast the chairs in bronze is because he was thinking about installing them in a public space. The people passing by the square seem to have been able to sit down quite freely on the suitcase-shaped chairs. The height of the seats was about 40 centimeters high and the overall shape was solemn and had quite a contemporary feel about it; the chairs had both a comical aspect and yet a slight air of solitude.

It appears that in the case of this chair, it was the material, rather than the size, shape or color that was emphasized. Then why, in fact, did the artist decide to

make a chair like this? The artist decided to call the piece *Chair for Progress*. In the lexical definition of progress, the term denotes societal change or development, especially when understood as a process following the law of historical development; however it seems that with this work, the artist wanted to place the emphasis instead on the individual people and the lives that had been devoted to achieving those broader processes of change or development. The artist probably chose to turn the suitcases into a work of art because he thought that people with that sort of progressive lifestyle travelled a lot.

Next, I will describe the second chair.

The artist decided to title this piece *The Chair of Justice*. Justice is a term that is usually understood to mean a moral obligation to uphold the truth. In philosophy, it means an ethical obligation maintained between individuals. Or, it can also mean an official responsibility, which actively constructs and binds society together. The artist thought about what constitutes the proper responsibility or official duty of a chair. Rather than thinking about symbolic meanings attached to the chair, for instance meanings attached to its comfort or shape, the artist decided that he had to focus on the chair itself as the subject of this piece. The artist selected a small stone and decided that the duty of the chair was that it could be sat upon. The stone appeared very comfortable, for it was smooth and of a decent height and size for a person to sit upon. If we look at this stone from the perspective of the title, the meaning of the piece is communicated quite easily but just looking at it, the piece looks more like a rock than an actual chair. And how is it possible to persuade those looking at this piece that it has been transformed into a chair solely by the act of transporting the stone to its present location? It seems that the artist did not pay attention to this sort of dilemma. Ultimately, it appears that *The Chair of Justice* became simply a stone.

Next, I will speak about the third chair.

For several reasons, this chair could not actually be made and it only existed in the artist's imagination as a potential plan. However, because it is a part of his project, I will introduce this chair to you.

He decided to call this chair *The Chair of Rights*. The notion of rights can be understood as something comprising both self-interest and a higher power, and

can also be explained as a power or ability that can be rightfully demanded of another, or as comprising civil rights, societal rights and private rights. One could say that its opposite is coercion. In order to capture the meaning of rights, the artist decided not to make a chair in a certain form or using a particular material. Nor did he choose a particular color or size. Instead, he wanted to obtain a number of chairs that could be found in ordinary places and to place them on street corners, on top of buildings, or the wall of a five-story building. Because there was the possibility that the chairs could fall from the top of a building or from a building's wall, it was decided that the chairs would have to be securely fastened. The people seated in the chairs at the top of buildings or atop the walls could look down at the landscapes below them, while people sitting in the chairs located on populated streets could encounter many passersby. On the other hand, they would be exposed right in the path of pedestrians. According to this plan, most of the chairs would have to be installed in the middle of the city in a space of about 3,000m<sup>2</sup>, or around 900 pyeong. The total quantity would be about 40 chairs. Would people actually be able to interact naturally with these chairs? Wouldn't they easily become damaged by rain and wind? And would it be possible to get permission to install the chairs from the proper public authorities or the building superintendents? Is it because he lacked basic knowledge about the kinds of institutions involved in public art that he decided to make this kind of piece? Or was it that he thought that this kind of impossible installation coincided itself with the concept behind *The Chair of Rights*? What kind of meaning does this chair, which never saw the light of day, ultimately have? Can possibilities that have merely been imagined or have not been actualized be called complete works of art too?

Next, I will describe the fourth chair to you.

It took roughly a year to produce this chair because it required thorough calculations and resolving several technical issues. It is possible that the artist has a stronger attachment to this chair because it took that much more effort to get it made. In terms of the technical difficulties, they revolved around securing the extremely intricate temperature control device installed within the cushion of the chair. First, the artist purchased the Poltrona di Proust chair, first produced in 1978.

The designer of the chair was Alessandro Mendini, and the chair drew from the work of the artist Paul Signac. The outward form of the chair resembles an eighteenth-century French Neobaroque style, while the frame and entire cushion have been colored with impressionistic dots. The form and the color of the chair are extremely flamboyant. The artist purchased five of these extremely expensive chairs and installed car seats and electric panels inside of them, along with electric thermal controls. Even a massage function was installed so that when seated, one could receive a massage from the heated seat. Suffice it to say that the price of this chair was beyond imagination. He decided to call this chair *The Chair of Democracy*. Putting this kind of strange title on such an expensive and extravagant chair is likely to raise questions. Democracy is usually understood as a political system where citizens take power and exercise self-rule. Or it can also mean the form of thought that leads to that kind of politics. Maybe he just wanted to emphasize this notion of the peoples' power? Or perhaps he was cynically trying to mock the possibility of a democracy in reality? Or is he criticizing the attitude whereby we simply celebrate the idea of democracy not only because it is able to overcome dictatorship or totalitarianism, but because we consider it the highest, most extravagant and therefore best idea?

And finally, I will describe to you the last chair.

This chair was comprised of a bench and was installed in a public place. The intention of the artist was to create a chair that you couldn't actually sit on. In other words, when we think of sitting, it is associated with such terms as "rest," "stop," "staying," or "safety," and thus, the artist sought to express its opposite state, which would suggest notions such as "labor," "progress," "in motion," "change" and other terms that describe states of action. The artist made a bench using a pile of barbed wire fence. He used the pile of barbed wire to make the basic armature and then filled the entire inside of the bench with the wire. He made three benches out of this material each in a different shape. One was made in the form of the English character "L", and another had the form of a circle. For the last bench, the artist made the inner corner of an "L" shape into an acute angle and secured the corner to the ground.

Although the individual sizes of the benches were similar, some of them were as tall as 8 meters high.

What happened is that people coming in search of this place or those walking in the vicinity would have no thought of sitting on the benches and would thus be forced to just look at them from a distance. The artist decided to call this piece *The Chair of Revolution*. And with that, I conclude my description of some chair pieces done by an artist whom I recently met.

## **Some Thoughts on Expression**

### **The Will to Turn Concept into a Work of Art**

Hello, I would like to talk to you about a situation where a single word is transformed into a work of art.

There was an artist who had long thought about whether it would be possible to express the meaning of tolerance through a work of art. This artist had received formal artistic training and was considered an expert painter who became extremely successful for creating paintings called Minjung misul(people's art). This artist typically painted landscapes full of people who were oppressed and ostracized, but mainly from the point of view of a disinterested observer, since he had never actually met any of these kinds of people, let alone had he ever spoken with them or had a conversation with them. As he gradually became more successful, word began to spread about this fact of his work. People began to ask whether he really knew about the lives of the oppressed people that he painted. However, it seems that this artist was skeptical about the idea of being able to "really know" about other's lives. It seems that he felt that objectively meeting with these downtrodden people and seeing their living conditions did not mesh well with an artistic attitude. If the artist did eventually feel anything like sympathy, it would end up ruining his objective viewpoint and consequently, the intention that the artist was trying to express would be destroyed. That is why instead of becoming a documentary artist who objectively observes and describes the world, the artist decided to adopt the attitude of a novelist who captures society through allegories. So the artist did not bother paying any attention to the criticism around him. However, he had not produced a new work in nearly two years, during which time he remained locked up in his house. His friends became worried and even when they came to look for him, he would not open the door, nor would he answer the phone when they called. No one knew if he had decided to destroy all of his paintbrushes because he felt he was an utter failure, or if he was struggling alone in order to achieve a grand, ambitious masterpiece. Then one day, all of a sudden, he reemerged in the outside world. He displayed around eight pieces in an exhibition and the canvases were

completely filled to the brim with images that could only be called abstract painting. The title of the work was *Tolerance*. How did he in fact capture the meaning of *Tolerance*, such an abstract expression, on canvas? Whereas normal people were interested in the style of painting he had been associated with, the people who knew him best stopped to consider the mental anguish that the artist must have gone through. Is it possible to truly express *Tolerance* through a work of art by simply attaching it as a title? And is it really possible to pour all of the meaning of *Tolerance* into a small square canvas? Might there be limitations to expressing everything through art?

Most of his works were monochrome paintings. Some of the paintings were painted so delicately that the canvas itself became visible, while in other works the paint was mixed together so densely that it became a single muddy mass. Some of the hues were mixed colors and others were primary colors. In other words, there were colors that were so muddled they could not be called gray, beige or dust, while at the other end, there was a red that was so garish and weirdly amateurish that it seemed to have been squeezed right out of the tube. Was the artist was trying to apply the meaning of tolerance to his materials of canvas and paint?

Or was he demanding tolerance from those viewers who would understand such intentions? The artist merely presented titles in this exhibition; he never once spoke about the intent behind his works or the context of their production. After the exhibition, the artist continued to create more works for his *Tolerance* series, without ever once explaining anything about those works.

Presently, this artist is making artworks on the subject of "knowledge."

## **Some Thoughts on the Ethical Attitude**

### **The Will to Turn People into a Work of Art**

Hello, I would like to talk to you about works of art that incorporate actions or situations. This kind of artwork is usually called a performance or is at times called "performance art". As you may all know, performances can be theatrical scenarios such as those on a stage, or they can be participatory events where the viewers actively engage in the work of art. Moreover, there are also documentary situations where the process of labor involved in producing the work of art is shown directly to the viewer. Considering that we live in a world where technological developments in media such as the video camera have allowed for widespread dissemination, a performance is not bound to a situation that takes place at a specific site, nor does it have to be targeted to a limited group of people. Instead, it can also include some act that has first taken place in a secret location or a personal space or a place where it is not easy to encounter other people, which is recorded and then transmitted and shown to viewers later. There are even cases where it becomes difficult to determine whether a given work of art is a video piece or a performance piece.

Then why do artists carry out performances and then call them works of art? What are the elements that make such works different from theater or dance?

I do not know the answer to these questions. However, I have made the ambitious decision to try and plan something that is both theatrical but spontaneous, something that involves viewers' participation even as it is highly artistic. It will be a performance with a script. I myself will not participate in the performance, but actors will rehearse and then perform in a location that is not a stage but is instead just an ordinary place, a place where the audience does not watch passively, but instead voluntarily participates, and where the conclusion is not fixed, but "open-ended"; no one knows how it will end. So what I have thought of creating is some sort of piece where people explain the processes involved in works of art and people listen to them. So in other words, the work is a landscape made up of people explaining the works of art and people listening to them, instead of there being art objects arranged in an art exhibition space. That way, there are still works of art, but they aren't visible to the eye, and even

though they are not visible, the works of art are still there and moreover, each viewer can imagine a different kind of piece in his or her mind.

All of you listening to this, here and now, are already a part of this artwork and already a work of art. Thank you for listening to my story.

## **Some Thoughts on Pure Matter**

### **The Will to Turn Stone into a Work of Art**

Hello, I would like to describe my artwork, which is made of stone. I am not explaining a finished work of art. This explanation is of a future work, one not yet realized, but which I hope will be realized. As a public proposal, it is meant to be a commemorative monument for people living in the city and is a park that includes aspects of urban planning.

Stones are familiar to us as objects found in nature. Sometimes, when we go on a trip, we might even bring some back as a souvenir in remembrance of the journey. Going to Jeju Island, you might bring back a piece of Basalt rock because you want to have a material object with which you can preserve and always treasure the memories of your trip. *Suiseki*, or collectors' stones, beyond their significance in a collection, reflect man's reverence for nature; the collector, taking the form of a truth-seeker, gathers stones, gives them meaning and contemplates them for a long time. Artists too can remain lost in thought when they consider stone. Because most people are not familiar with this artistic process of considering the material properties of the stone and creating different works of art based on them, I will describe some of these possibilities to you.

Collect a stone and place it in the exhibition space

Invite people to look at the stone in the exhibition space

Collect several stones and rearrange them (stack them, place them in parallel rows, stick them together, etc.)

Select one stone and carve it into a shape

Cast a stone and transform it using different materials such as bronze, plaster, silicon, sand etc.

Draw a stone on paper

Photograph a stone

Record a video of a stone

Play with a stone by tossing it

Cut a large stone in situ

Turn a stone to powder and then use the powder to create another form

There are so many such methods but artists do not treat stones in an easy manner like a sack of potatoes that have been bought at the corner store. In other words, for artists the stone has been more mythologized than the potato. This is because stone seems to exert some kind of abstract power over man. Sometimes, an artist might feel that she can't even lay a finger on a stone, for the fear that carving it or moving it to another place might symbolize man's infinite selfishness and greed, and yet nevertheless there are artists who, in their desire to exhibit that stone, will simply bring the viewers with them to see it. Some artists, finding it blasphemous to carve a stone, will only leave the slightest trace on a leftover part, while other artists will use concrete as a substitute material in order to make their sculptures. Of course, there are artists who carve enormous stones however they want and others who have large stones transported to wherever they desire. This kind of attitude should not be censured on ethical terms or out of custom. As is well known, when such artworks are preserved for a long time, they are then received as new entities that are able to convey a sense of historicity, and can even be considered as helping out the regional economy.

At this point, I would like to propose an artwork that incorporates stone.

The title of this piece is *The Solitary Path*. The location of this piece is more important than anything else. This is because it requires the creation of a spectacular context. That is the only way that the stone can appear like an actual stone. First, a city filled with high-rise buildings must be found. And because this work must be located between two buildings, at least one building will probably have to be purchased. Then, the site where the building is located will have to be completely cleared of everything. Thus, an empty space will be created between the buildings.

Afterwards, all of the country's rocky mountains, or even better, all of the world's rocky mountains will be scoured with a person who really knows something about stones and those with the best shape and meaning will be chosen. If possible, the smallest stone as well as the largest boulder will be collected. There should be

enough stones to fill an entire 50-storey building. Afterwards, experts in mountains and architecture, such as Feng-shui specialists, geologists, poets, landscapers, contractors and structural engineers, will be called to put their heads together and determine how to create an artificial stone mountain. Although it might seem like this is the happiest moment in the project, it is vital that this collision of expertise does not result in the complete foundering of the project.

First, a hexagonal 50-story tall building will be constructed. This building must first be constructed from a structural framework without any walls. Next, with the help of experts, the stones will be stacked one by one beginning with the first floor. And that is how a stone mountain that is as tall as the 45th story of the building is made. If possible, some trees and greenery that are fitting to this stone mountain will be arranged. And if the budget allows, a waterfall and pond can be placed at an appropriate location, thus transforming the stone mountain into a mountain with sound. Construction on the walls of the building will be finished when the mountain is completed. In other words, the walls will all be of glass and the bottom of the mountain, if possible, will be sealed off with concrete. When all of these procedures are completed, the project will be finished.

When the building and the stone mountain are finished, all the people passing by will be able to look at them from the street. And the people visiting this building will even be able to climb to the summit of the mountain. Although it is an extremely steep summit, it is assumed that there will nonetheless be many people willing to climb to the top.

I will tell you some conditions and limitations that apply when using this building. Entry to the building is by reservation only. No more than 10 people are permitted to enter at any given time, and the maximum time allowed on the mountain is 20 hours. This building is always open, even on weekends and holidays. There are no cultural facilities or services such as food stalls, shower stalls, music, or places selling coffee in this building. Admission is free. The building and mountain are not responsible for any falls or accidents.

This stone mountain is a pathetic mountain even from its conception. It is, however, aimed at those city dwellers who can afford to live in the utmost luxury. And even though I have proposed making this kind of stone mountain, I am

extremely wary of it actually being constructed. That's because even though achieving this project might not be so exceptional in this day and age when there are artificial islands and missions to Mars, if this project were ever realized, it would instantly confirm the existence of man's original sin.

## **Some Thoughts on Matter that Cannot Be Formed**

### **The Will to Turn Water into a Work of Art**

Hello, I would like to describe some art about water. As is well known, water has the quality of being something that cannot easily be shaped, but artists nonetheless incorporate water and express it in their works. It is likely that it is so difficult to visualize because the material cannot be easily shaped, which is also most likely why it has been determined to be quite an abstract material. It is probably because of this abstract quality that artists turn to metaphors or symbols in order to express water as love, coolness, beauty or even life.

However, when I think of water, I end up thinking of tears. Tears do not produce a vast body of water on the scale of oceans or rivers, and like rain, they have little movement, but nonetheless they are something produced by humans, and thus are extremely emotional and even historical.

That is why I particularly like works of art that incorporate tears as an element of the work. One artist I know was able to express tears through a work of art comprised of the wallpaper that hung in his own room. The room was completely empty, save for a long tear about three millimeters wide, from ceiling to floor, ripped into the wallpaper on one of the walls. That was the entire piece. The torn portion of the wallpaper resembled the trace of a tear, and considering that it ran from ceiling to floor, it was probably about 3 meters long.

Now, let me tell you about the work of another artist. According to the artist, this work is made of iron, but it is only the size of a single teardrop. So, this work is a teardrop, but ironically, the heavy material of iron was used to make it. The length of one tear is about 8 mm and its diameter is about 5 mm. The lower part of the teardrop is round like a drop of water, while the top part is pointy. The entire work consists of, not just one teardrop, but many teardrops along a thin iron wire. The teardrops are separated by about 10 cm of space, and these lines of numerous tears hang from the ceiling of an interior space. There are about 220 of these strings of tears undeniably a very large number of tears.

The movement of people passing by near the work causes the teardrops to swing and collide creating sounds. The chiming of the tears can be clear and cheerful,

but sometimes it can also sound lonesome and forlorn.

Now, I will tell you about my own teardrop artwork. I am going to think about a very ordinary sadness. I am not going to think of a sad memory or something sad I read in a book; I am simply going to feel sadness itself. If teardrops fall, I will forget the sadness and think about myself shedding tears. At that moment, this artwork will be completed. Now, I will show you my artwork.

+ Shedding tears.

