

## Interview with Myong Hi Kim

by Lee Jun Hee / *Wolganmisool* , June 2003

### **“The Protagonist in the Story of Dislocation Is Myself.”**

*It's been a while since you had your last solo exhibition, which was held at Won Gallery in 1995. Counting this one, you've had five shows so far in your career, and that's a small number, relatively speaking. Do you have a particular reason for not showing your work more frequently?*

It simply reflects my rhythm. I need ample time to go through the process of writing an epic poem for each of my works—gaining experience, drawing on my imagination, setting up characters and their narratives, and choosing a mode of expression. This is particularly true in the case of solo exhibitions since I regard the gallery space in the same way I view the ancient tombs with walls that tell a story. A sifting process needs to take place before my stories settle into an integrated whole.

*From early on, your work seems to be characterized by superrealistic figuration. Can you expand on how this figuration relates to painting in general? In addition, can you comment on your recent import of video images into your paintings?*

Given that some of my paintings are recontextualized representation of classical works, such as “The Immortals” by Kim Hongdo, the frescos of the Tang dynasty, and the paintings of Caravaggio, they may appear superrealistic, but the vision that I present is that of apparition rather than appearance. Anyone who has witnessed the metamorphosis of an everyday object into a supramaterial entity on the canvas cannot but be spellbound by its magic. What I am working on is the interspace where reality is renegotiated and new consciousness is embodied.

As for the use of video images, the dialogue that takes place in the dual presence of the moving and stationary images on the same surface has the power to pull the viewer into the present. A picture within a picture—this kind of illusionism appears quite frequently in my works during the 90s. I might add that I have had a fascinating experience as I tried to harmonize the colors on the monitor and the colors of paint. For me, the so-called “the end of the painting” has yielded an unexpected opportunity to expand its boundary.

*When you made the move from a huge metropolis to a rural village, the cultural difference must have been quite overwhelming. How have these extremes of environment affected your work? So far, most of your works have revolved around the theme of dislocation. Can you share with us something about your current and future themes?*

You are correct in pointing out that the difference is between city life and rural life, not between the United States and Korea. My main residence is Naepyeongli, but when I need a jolt of city culture, I head for New York, where I have my studio. To sharpen my perceptions, I like to travel through China and Siberia, “zooming in and zooming out,” so to speak. Perhaps this mobility has had the effect of my grappling with the issues of dislocation, both in my work and my life.

As a child of a diplomat, I moved from country to country as I was growing up, and I find myself still dominated by a sense of rootlessness. While my 1995 exhibition told the story of the sense of loss resulting from dislocation, my current exhibition tells the story of how this dislocation can give birth to a renewed will to live. The protagonist in the story of dislocation is myself. But then, dislocation is a human condition. As long as there is life, the story will continue, albeit in new forms.

*Many people discuss your work in conjunction with that of your husband. Living with a fellow artist day in and day out, it must be somewhat challenging to keep your zone of separateness. As artists, do you ever feel rivalry with your husband?*

This is a question I get asked often. And I can't help feeling that people ask me such questions because they assume that as a woman I work in his shadow. I will say this—my husband is my roommate and travel companion, but not my workmate. We are happy, however, for each other when each succeeds in producing good work.

Discussing our respective works in 1995, I said that I viewed Tcha-Sup's work as my son and my work as my daughter. I think the statement helped me deal with the sense of lost time, the time I lost dealing with the financial difficulties typically faced by artist couples. I am free of that sense now.