

Gunyong Oh's "Ecological Aesthetics Touched with Eyes"

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Since long time ago, paintings and poems have been very close. It has been said that poems are pictures without shapes and pictures are poems without sound. Words used in daily lives can be understood at once and need no other thoughts. Words used for poems are different from the ordinary language. Reverberation is formed and pictures are drawn in the mind through expressing with poems, instead of explaining with words. Poets don't say words which they want to speak but bring things to make them speak for them. Therefore, to read a poem is like looking for a hidden picture or treasure to find a true meaning hidden in the poem which the poet wanted to say but didn't do so. Just as people can't feel the true taste of a poem by reading it superficially and roughly, it is possible to understand and appreciate contemporary art only when people read the language of contemporary art and inner thoughts of artists first of all.

Oh enjoys to paint the sea. He edits his unique experience and regenerates his memory about the sea while living close the sea. It is more like assembling and making a part of the sea, instead of painting the sea. He doesn't draw the sea with paint on the canvas. Instead, he takes articles, including iron plates and barnacles, and let them speak about the sea which he wants to say. His way of expression is significantly different from traditional sea scenery which is reproduced realistically. In addition, the sea which he expresses not beautiful or graceful. His canvas is wild and irregular like wall paintings in caves during the prehistoric age. Degradation of civilization has been made in nature, so the sea suffers from a serious skin disease. In a way, his painting seems like a portrait of the sea in our age which was degraded to nuisance of nature and the world.

Modernist art in the 20th century had nothing to do with or was isolated from natural objects or objets of the everyday world. Modernist art has justified "flatness" which was an

ontological condition of paintings through self-criticism. Such extreme restoration of modernism resulted in silence (white painting, materiality). During the period, modernist art has been criticized as ignoring its social responsibility through causing interruption between art and life. Oh's paintings depart from elegant materials (rectangular canvases, oil paint) and limited physical properties of modernist art and raise density and tension between materials and canvases through borrowing objets (iron plates, barnacles) of a material level, instead. Sentiments given by material properties changing in natural conditions, such as irregular canvases, corrosion, rust and oxidation, becomes an important motif of his paintings. Such methodology of the artist resembles process art or material art focused on processes of chemical change about physical properties. His painting titled <Erosion in the Co-Existence Series> which speaks about a sea story using physical properties of materials as a medium shows that ecological existence of the sea, or inherent and apparent factors forming an art work, is closely related to the social environment to which he belongs.

If art germinates from a spirit surrounding it and ordinary situations of social customs, aesthetic values also are values which should be restored to social meanings. Before nature, the sea, civilization is resistance against disappearance in a way and it looks like an effort to cut flowing water with a knife and make a clear cube. No matter how people admire civilization to hide the burden and load, it reveals so cruel existence if it is stood before a mirror which speaks truth. Gunyong's paintings are such a mirror which reflects the sea of our age.

오건용은 바다와 관련된 소재를 주로 표현한다. 바닷가에 살면서 저장했던 바다에 대한 그만의 독특한 경험을 편집하고 기억을 재생해낸다. 바다를 캔버스에 물감으로 그리는 대신에 그는 철판과 따개비라는 사물을 데려와서 자신이 말하고 싶은 바다에 대한 이야기를 대신하게 한다. 사실적으로 재현되는 전통적인 바다풍경과는 그 표현방식이 사뭇 다르다. 아름답거나 수려한 바다를 표현하는 것도 아니다. 마치 선사시대의 동굴벽화처럼 그의 화면은 거칠고 불규칙적이다. 자연 속에서 문명의 열화가 진행되고 있는, 그래서 중증의 피부질환을 앓고 있는 바다, 이를테면 자연과 인간세계의 애향단지로 전락해 버린 우리시대 바다의 초상처럼 느껴진다.

오건용의 작품은 질료적 차원의 오브제(철판, 따개비)를 차용하여 재료와 화면 간의 밀도와 긴장감을 고조시킨다. 불규칙한 화면, 부식, 녹, 산화 등 자연상태에서 변화되는 재료적 속성이 주는 정서가 그의 그림의 주요한 모티브가 되는 셈이다. 이런 그의 방법론은 일견 물성에 대한 화학적 변화 과정에 주목한 프로세스 아트(Process Art)에 닮아있다. 재료의 물성을 매개로 바다 이야기를 풀어내는 그의 작품, 공존 시리즈 중 <잠식-동화되다>는 바다의 생태적 실존, 즉 작품을 구성하는 내재적, 외형적 요소가 자신이 몸 담은 사회 환경으로부터 무관하지 않음을 보여준다.

예술이 그것을 둘러싼 정신과 사회풍속의 일반적인 상태에서 발아하는 것이라면 미적 가치라는 것도 사회적 의미로 환원될 수밖에 없는 가치이다. 바다라는 자연 앞에서 어찌 보면 문명은 사라짐에 대한 저항이고, 흐르는 물을 칼로 베어내 명료한 입방체를 만들려는 노력처럼 보여진다. 그 책임과 하중을 가리려 제 아무리 문명을 예찬한다 하더라도 진실을 말하는 거울 앞에 세우면 그것은 너무나 잔인한 실존을 드러내고 만다. 오건용의 그림은 우리시대의 바다를 투영하는 바로 그런 거울이다.