

**East Asian and Western Perception
of Nature in 20th Century Painting**

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East Asian and Western Perception of Nature in 20th Century Painting

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Abstract

The introduction aims to investigate both my painting and exhibition practice, and the historical and theoretical issues raised by them. It also examines different views on nature by comparing and contrasting 20th Century Western ideas with those of traditional Asian art and philosophies. There are two sections to this thesis; Section A contains an historical overview of Eastern and Western philosophy and art, Section B presents observations on my studio and exhibition practice.

Section A is divided into two chapters. Chapter 1 examines concepts of nature in the East and West before the early 20th Century. It discusses examples of different approaches to nature and cross-cultural world views and explores the diversity of perceptions, especially Taoism and Buddhism, which emphasize harmony within nature and the principle of universal truth. It also gives pertinent and relevant examples of attitudes to nature in the Korean, Chinese and Japanese art of the 20th Century. Chapter 2 discusses new and changing attitudes to ecology, post 20th Century, and the environmental art movements of the East and West. Their ideas have a great deal in common with traditional Eastern views on nature and the mind, so have the potential to change both our identity and our relationship with nature.

Section B draws together this material to establish the main argument of the thesis, concerning a connection between modern ecological approaches and traditional Zen Buddhist ideas which emphasize the interconnection of all natural forms. The section consists mainly of observations on studio practice divided into 3 chapters and a conclusion.

Chapter 1 compares ways of approaching nature in my own paintings, entitled 'the story of mud' (1985-1992). Chapter 2, 'nature-culture' painting (1993-1999), examines the way that, for me, the meanings of nature were affected by the environment when I settled in London in 1989. It discusses cultural gaps between Eastern Asia and the West. Chapter 3 is concerned with a series of plant paintings (2000-2007). It deals with ideas on finding an identity and the views of others on the way monochrome colour painting works. Lastly, the conclusion provides a summary of differing Eastern and Western attitudes towards nature. It also examines the relationship between painting and painter in reflecting an acceptance of the here and now.

This chapter finishes with a discussion of my plant paintings which attempt to present a visual equivalent of Zen ideas about the here and now and the oneness of subject and object. Illustrations of paintings and photographs, which were shown in Seoul, Beijing and London accompany and illustrate the thesis together with a CD Rom.

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Preface

In this thesis I wish to look at the way in which, in recent years, a new understanding of the importance of nature in our consciousness and life has evolved, and how this has had a major impact on ways of thinking about, and making, paintings.

This new understanding concerns a flow of ideas between Eastern and Western thought and culture, and as such, can be related to earlier developments in Western art history: such as, the impact of Japanese woodblock prints on painters like Monet and Van Gogh, or the later, mid- twentieth century impact of ideas from Taoism and Zen Buddhism on artists such as Robert Motherwell, Joan Miro and Antoni Tapies.

While I am aware of such history, my thesis builds upon a broad and necessary amount of contextual reading, across a wide cross-cultural range of inter-related intellectual fields, its core concern has been both defined and fructified by my personal experiences - of life, and the developing practice that is my painting.

I have sought to bring these three elements – personal experience, contextual, critically informed reading and my painting practice – into the sort of creative relation that may, I hope, offer a fresh contribution to the ongoing and developing confluence of Eastern and Western ideas about our place in the natural world: to a revitalized spiritual sense of the importance of a deep understanding of nature for the practice of painting, chiefly illustrated, or embodied, here by my own evolving practice.

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I have greatly appreciated the guidance of Zen Master Seung Sahn whom I can no longer meet in this world. When I visited him with many questions in 2000, he showed me another way to realize 'Who I am'. I was born and brought up a Christian, and learned many positive things from that experience but I also held certain views about other religions and ways of thinking. Zen Master Seung Sahn's un-doctrinated teaching and his exemplary way of living broadened my views and understanding not only of 'who I am' but also of 'who others are'. How precious and wonderful his teaching was. I also thank Professors Roderick Whitfield and Pak Young-Sook for their encouragement and love towards me.

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Author's declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed

Dated

Section A. Context (Chapter 1, 2)

Chapter 1. Concepts of nature in the East and West before the early 20th Century

The meaning of ‘nature’ in Asia has two main definitions: the first of these is, ‘it exists by itself’, which means that changes occur without human intervention. In Eastern philosophy, no god creates and controls nature or history. It is accepted that every thing and every being occurs independently (natural law) and becomes itself (natural being). This viewpoint is very different from the Western approach to nature.¹

The second meaning of nature refers to outside objects, such as mountains, which reflect the objective environment. Even though the word ‘nature’ has two meanings, they are not separate from one another.

In the West it is assumed that a being is born imperfect and that their development can be controlled by the human race. In Western culture, the main ideas on this subject originate from Christianity. The book of Genesis in the Bible explains that humans and other living things are creatures created by God, but that the relationship between humans and nature is different. Nature exists for humans only. It is God who, as the creator separated from nature, decided that nature should exist as an object for human usage, to be conquered. The position of the human race is to govern, correct and perfect nature.

These variations in approach in the East and West meant that there were great cultural differences before the 19th Century. The Western modern mechanical approach to nature favoured industrialization and globalization through capitalism, but has introduced environmental problems which are difficult to solve given the modern-day human-centered appreciation (anthropocentrism) of the world. Post 20th Century, many scientists and ecologists in the West have highlighted the limitations of the old way of thinking and have suggested that a new view of the relationship between nature and mankind is appropriate. The Western, industrialized approach needs to change if an ecological crisis is to be averted. Firstly, this chapter discusses and compares different Eastern and Western views on nature. It then comments on the new appreciation of the subject and the world vision which predominates in the East and West today. This

¹ Kim Kyo-Bin. *Is Eastern Philosophy an Alternative Plan to Material Civilization?*. (Seoul: Woongjin Press, 1998) p. 13 -14.

confirms the value of our ethical philosophy toward other beings, which is further explored in the next chapter.

- **The Western view of nature**

Rational natural research in the West began in Greece around the 6th to 7th Century B.C. Until that period, nature was an object which inspired fear (water, fire or air, for example). With the arrival of the naturalists, and in response to a new found desire to think about it in more philosophical terms, it ceased to be an object of worship.

As Clive Ponting indicates the Greek sophists, who were represented by Protagoras of Abdera (B.C. 480-410), and their concentration on the essence of nature, Western philosophy began to take more of an interest in the human spirit and in social problems. Protagoras stated that, ‘man is the measure of all things’, and this eventually led to the human centered world views of Socrates (B.C. 469-399) and Plato (B.C. 427-347). Socrates believed that animals were created for man to use and for man’s benefit.²

Plato separated nature from ideas. He accepted that nature was a changing and sensitive world, opposite in concept to the unchanging world of ‘Ideas’, ultimate reality, or the eternal world. His dualism was later to have a strong influence on Judaism and Christianity. Aristotle (B.C. 384-322) was famous for ‘natural philosophy’, which today examines world phenomena such as physics, biology and natural science. He approached the natural world in terms of movement and change and believed that original, motivating power sprang from an ‘unchanging element’. Change, he believed, consists of two different ‘movements’ - ‘substantial change’ and ‘accidental change’. Aristotle’s paradigm accepted the human world and nature as organisms, with biological life cycles.

These men were the main forefathers of Western philosophy. They mainly treated nature as ‘Logos’ and ‘cosmos’, and as subject to human-centered rationalism. In the Middle Ages, with the exception of some such as Saint Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) who had a nature centered worldview, most philosophers thought that nature and all its creatures were created by God - from nothing. Saint Francis’s relationship with the animals is famous; there are stories about his conversations with birds, wolves and even flowers, but his were not mainstream ideas for the time. Saint Augustine (354-430), one of the church fathers behind Western Christianity, believed that nature was a world

² For a fuller discussion of this point about Greek sophist, the reader should consult Clive Ponting. [A New Green History of the World](#). (London: Penguin Books, 2007) p. 117.

created by God. This differed from the view of the Greek philosophers, who were believers in hylozoism (the doctrine that all matter has life). The main world view of the Middle Ages was represented by Scholasticism, led by Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). He believed that nature operated in accordance with God's purposes, so that man might know God from the natural world, which was hierarchic.³

After the Renaissance and the Reformation in the West, there were two main visions of nature: one known as pantheism and the other (the main one) as mechanism. Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677) thought that nature was an attribute of God, who was a part of everything. He did not accept the concept of a Christian God, a meter out of compassion and punishment, but held views more in common with the Eastern concepts of nature and god. He also agreed with the principles of monism and pantheism - 'everything is one.' To Spinoza, nature, God and the single entity were the same thing. God is omniscient and omnipotent and has the power to create. According to another group, natural things were not living, autonomous beings, but were to be used by man. The 16th Century introduced: anthropocentrism and the mechanical view of nature proposed by Nicolas Copernicus (1473-1543); Francis Bacon's (1561-1626)'s heliocentric theory; and Rene Descartes (1596-1650) Anthropocentrism and Issac Newton's (1642-1727) Experimentalism.

'In the early 20th Century, new scientific theories such as Albert Einstein's (1879-1955) 'theory of relativity' and 'mass energy equivalence' and Werner Karl Heisenberg's (1901-1976) 'principle of uncertainty' questioned the traditional concept of nature based on the human centered view and structure of dualism. This divided subject and object, humans and nature, and spirit and matter from nature and history. These people showed that nature was not a machine but a living organism.'⁴

Since then, modern technology has brought about the demolition of the environment and nature but also of mankind itself. Since the middle of the 20th Century, Western society has reflected on what it has done to nature and has pondered its belief systems and environmental ethics, and compared its paradigms with the ecological viewpoint. The new concept and approach to nature in the West contrasts with Wang Yang-Ming's 'one body' theory which has views in common with ecology. This is discussed later.

³ Ibid. 118-119.

⁴ Park I-Moon. The Civilian Paradigm of the New Millennium and Zen. (Seoul: Mobul Seonwon Press, 2000) p. 25.

- **The Eastern view of nature (Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism)**

The traditional concept of nature in the East is quite different from that of the West. Nature is accepted as the supreme existence, which humans should emulate in an attempt to become whole and to overcome their human imperfections. Consequently, the relationship between nature and humans is not the same as that between master and servant, or enemy, which exist separately. Instead nature is the 'Great One' which humans must follow, accepting the natural law which operates within them. Until recent times there has been no move in the East to set culture against nature. Nature is considered to be perfect; the highest level of existence, and one which requires no manipulation or decoration. According to Professor. Park I-moon, the Western concept of nature stems from Descartes' (1596-1650) anthropocentrism and from Christianity. Traditionally, the Eastern view of nature - Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist - is that all beings (Chinese: *Wanwu*, the "ten thousand things") come from the one being, which is revealed in different forms and as various phenomena. All share a common philosophy, monistic ontology, cycle of nature, and atheistic and metaphysical philosophy, which are characterized by nature-centered metaphysics which emphasize love.

These philosophies lead to an Eastern culture which is not based on anthropocentrism, but on nature and eco-centralism in metaphysics. In these philosophies, it is not possible to separate man from nature or to be a controller. This chapter reviews the Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian views on nature in the East prior to industrialization and globalization.

These Eastern philosophies generally have something in common. The background of most Eastern cultures is agriculture and this places importance on the harmony between nature and man. People depend on the land and climate, which involve natural elements and principles.

The agricultural life style lasted for about two thousand years and man's life cycle followed the cycle of the natural world. Their relationship was based on worship of, and curiosity about, natural law and reliance on everything under the sun. This idea led to a non-dualistic view of other beings and the environment. Also, people depended on nature, which cannot be controlled and manipulated at man's will. Despite having developed technology of their own this did not work in opposition to natural law. The influence of Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism meant that people had virtue and sympathy (love) for living things. Even though they ate and used other creatures as food, for clothing, and for shelter, they treated them with respect.

● **Taoism**

In Far Eastern Asia there was no word for nature until Lao Tzu (B.C. 604-531). People did not think of themselves as separate from their environment, so there was no concept of nature, or indeed any material characteristic separate from the human being. However, the understanding of nature in the West is similar to the traditional Eastern ideas of 'Heaven and Earth' and of 'Tao', namely that 'it exists by itself'.

'Man models himself on Earth
 Earth on Heaven
 Heaven on the Way
 And the Way on that which is naturally so.'⁵
 (Chapter 25, Lao Tzu)

The word nature can be interpreted in Chinese as '*tzu-jan*.' *Tzu-jan* means 'it is so on its own' (see Lao Tzu above (B.C. 604-531)). So '*tzu-jan*' is a state which is not controlled or ruled by any other. It is usually encountered in the form '*wu wei-tzu-jan*', where *Wu Wei* means 'non-artificial action' and effortless, and '*tzu-jan*' means to be itself and natural. '*wu wei-tzu-jan*' is the best state for a person to be in to accept nature. Another great Taoist leader, Chuang Tzu (B.C. 369-286), urged his people to follow nature by living passively, contentedly and with humility, following the natural law. Taoism promoted doctrines of *Wu-Wei* (non-artificiality), softness, humanism, relativism and emptiness in *Tao Te Ching*, the main textbook on Taoism.

Tao Te Ching was written by Lao Tzu. *Tao*, literally means 'the way' or 'path' and can also be interpreted as 'ultimate reality' in the universe and the order or law of nature, which Chuang Tzu simply called 'the way' (Chapter 25). Tao is another interpretation of nature. Tao (the way) is the power which exists behind all material things and behind all change in the world. It is a proxy for one fundamental, universal principle which lies at the root of all things and which cannot be named (Chapter 34, 41). Tao is also accepted as the principle which gives rise to all existence, governs all things and all life, and is the essence of multiplicity and difference between all beings (Chapters 6 & 21). *Te* translates as 'concrete power' and is about making humans and things work. It is the activity of Tao.

Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu's view's of nature extend not only to attitudes toward human life but also to the state of heaven and earth, which change on their own. In their

⁵ D.C.Lau. *Lao Tzu- Tao Te Ching*. (London: Penguin books, 1963) p. 30.

opinion, the best way to deal with nature is not to interfere with natural law for human benefit. They believed that nature has its own perfect state and its own autonomy and can exist without the influence of other things.

According to Chapter 1, *Tao* has two aspects, being and non-being, which are represented by *Yu* (being) and *Mu* (non-being). Before ‘being’, there must be ‘non-being’, after which being becomes a part of every being. This means there are many beings, but there is only one original being (Chapter 42): ‘From Tao there comes one. From one there come two. From two there come three. From three there come all things.’ So all creatures and phenomena came from one originality but appear differently depending on their harmony with the *Tao*’s polarity power; that is, with *yin* and *yang*.

Taoists accept that all changes in nature are manifestations of the dynamic interplay between the two extremes of polarity, which are *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* and *yang* are also interpreted as negative and positive, male and female, active and passive, life and death and good and evil. The concept of *yin* and *yang* is based on *the Book of Changes* (Chinese: *I-Ching*; Juyeok in Korean) which originated in the ancient kingdom of Yin (ca.1600 B.C-1122 B.C.) in China.⁶

Taoists explain the physical universe as well as all non-physical dimensions (all power in nature) in terms of *yin* and *yang*, which are the manifestation of Tao. In nature, both *yin* and *yang* states exist together but the degree of each is in constant flux. So there is not absolute stasis. The concept of *yin* and *yang* is the principle behind all movement of the Tao, various combinations of which are developed and elaborated upon in the *I Ching*. This documents the general concept of Chinese philosophy and is the first of the six Confucian Classics which are at the core of Eastern thought and culture. The activity of *yin* and *yang* is illustrated by the ‘Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate.’

This diagram shows a circle, which is divided between dark *yin* and bright *yang*, but neither shape is static. The symbol has rotational symmetry, which indicates continuous movement, and each part has a dot which signifies the opposite power. When each power is at its most extreme, it starts to move in the opposite direction. Taoists apply their ideas to the lives of real people believing that we should return to nature by reducing our egoistic cleverness. This does not mean we need to be foolish, but that we should glean wisdom from nature rather than pursue the accumulation of

⁶ Park Won. Traditional Korean Thought. (Seoul: Inha University Press, 2002) p. 51.

knowledge alone. Lao Tzu suggests the ideal place to live is a small village which is cut off from unnecessary communication with others. Real wisdom lies in knowing when we need to stop.

The Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate (Yin and Yang)

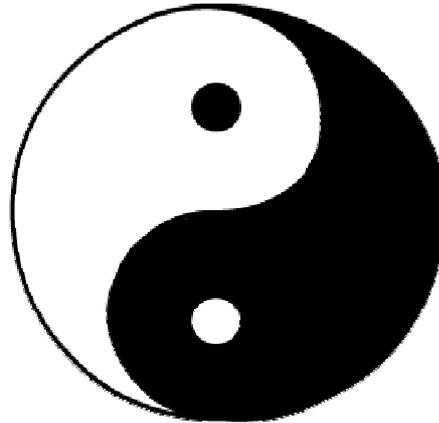


Fig. 1.

- **Buddhism**

It is difficult to summarize the vast teachings of Buddhism about nature and our identity, but it can be helpful to know how Buddha accepts all things in this world and in nature. The most essential teachings are ‘The Four Noble Truths’ and ‘The Eightfold Path’, which deal with human ethics and a view of the world which is gained through observation. The theory and purpose of Buddhism are summarized in three steps: gaining ‘insight into impermanence’, ‘insight into impurity’ and ‘insight into non-self.’

The Buddha taught that life is an ocean of suffering in his teaching of ‘The Fourth Noble Truths’, which are the main truths of life. The first truth is that life is suffering. The second is that suffering is caused by craving and aversion. The third truth is that suffering can be overcome and happiness can be attained and the fourth is that the ‘Noble Eightfold Path’ is the path which leads to the end of suffering.

Buddhists believe that this world is not real, but only appears as a dream which will disappear. In the Mahaprajñāpāramitā (Heart) and Diamond Sūtras, Buddha teaches that everything is emptiness. Even form is emptiness and emptiness is form. In this, he points out that what we call reality is actually empty, but in our minds we think and believe that all beings exist. The Buddha teaches that what we call ‘mind’ or ‘I’ is only made up of the five skandhas (aggregates), form, feelings, perceptions, impulses, and

consciousness.⁷ Buddha preaches the reality of entity as three elements. One is that ‘whatever is phenomenal is impermanent’, the second is that ‘nothing has an ego, or nothing is independent of the law of causation’, and third is ‘the unreality of all things.’ By seriously observing these truths and accepting the world itself in accordance with these teachings, one achieves Nirvana (liberation) by coming to know the Four Noble Truths and taking the Eightfold Path.

The appearance of all beings is determined by karma (cause and effect) at different times. For example, a chair is made from a tree, which is fashioned into a useful object and, after a period of time, disappears into emptiness. So there is emptiness and there are no fixed things in this world. There are no external tangible characteristics and all things are emptiness. All human suffering, then, which is treated as a real thing, is the result of a mistaken point of view (ignorance). It will disappear as we reach Nirvana (the state of liberation), which is the ultimate state of separated self in which we recognize oneness with all. According to the Fourth path, all suffering disappears by the Eightfold Path to self-development with the ‘Middle Way’ as the Buddhist way of life.

The Noble Eightfold Path involves ‘Right Views, Thought, Speech, Action, Livelihood, Effort, Mindfulness, and Meditation’, which help to restore our nature and take away desire, anger and ignorance. The Buddhist’s main ethic is to return to nature and to live for the moment by asking ‘what am I?’ during their daily activities. The other important practical teaching, the middle way, is interpreted as the practice of non-extremism. It advocates the avoidance of self-indulgence and self-mortification and a preference for moderation, where dualities and separation disappear. Buddha’s teaching has views which resonate with 20th Century environmental issues.

The first is ‘Interdependence Philosophy’, which considers causality (without this, that cannot exist, and without that, this cannot exist’) and interpenetration (no entity can survive alone).⁸ As with Indra’s net,⁹ every action of a being has an impact

⁷ Hyon Gak. *The Compass of Zen*. (Boston & London: Shambhala publications, 1997) p. 132.

⁸ Korean Religion Research Association. *The Entry into History of World Religions*. (Seoul: Korean Religion Research Association, 1991) p. 141.

⁹ Indra’s Net (also called Indra’s jewels or Indra’s pearls) is a metaphor used to illustrate the concepts of emptiness, dependent origination, and interpenetration in Buddhist philosophy. The metaphor of Indra’s net was developed by the Mahayana Buddhist school in the 3rd century. This idea is communicated in the image of the interconnectedness of the universe as seen in the net of the Vedic god Indra, whose net hangs over his palace on Mount Meru, the axis mundi of Vedic cosmology and Vedic mythology. Indra’s net has a multifaceted jewel at each vertex, and each jewel is reflected in all of the other jewels.

“[Indra’s net](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indra%27s_net),” 22 July. 2008. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indra%27s_net>

and an influence on others, because all beings are connected, like a net of jewels in which each jewel or bead is joined to and reflected by all the others. The second view is the idea of 'Life Esteem'. Compassion (love) is a key concept of Mahayana Buddhism. All creatures are physical manifestations of life. They contain the spirit which has its own value and will to live. The third idea is that of Non-existence (immaterialism). If we decide to accept the concept of 'non-existence', maybe we are moving towards this objective through our present environmental problems, which are the result of greed, and the pursuit of material wealth through industrialization. The last common view emphasizes the practice of self-control and applauds our efforts to overcome egoism.¹⁰

● Zen Buddhism

Chapter 33 of *Tao Te Ching*, 'Knowing others is wisdom, but knowing the self is enlightenment', shows how important it is to know the true self. The starting point for solving all problems depends on knowing 'Who I am?' and 'How I recognize'.

Zen, the general meaning of which is meditation, is deeply rooted in both the teachings of 'the Buddha Siddhārtha Gautama' and Mahāyāna Buddhist thought and philosophy. There are various definitions of Zen such as 'the attainment of mindfulness and concentration' (by sitting in meditation), 'enlightenment of the mind', 'looking for what is', 'concentration on realizing the truth of life' and 'achieving the spiritual awakening of self and the world.'¹¹

Recognition of an entity, principle or phenomena, depends on two things; one is direct cognition and the other rational inference. The attitude of Zen, however, is not the same. To recognize something is to enter the object directly, to realize and experience it from the inside. The Zen monk Suzuki explained that, Zen practitioners aim not to think about things but to directly experience them in the inner self. For example, to appreciate a flower, one needs to jump into that flower and for there to be no separation between the flower and the viewer. This extends to everything one encounters - enjoying the dripping rain, the lovely sunshine. Just as you *are* that flower, you must be yourself with all; not as a third person who interprets real things according to their knowledge, but by directly being the entity.

¹⁰ David Kinsley. *Ecology and Religion, Ecological Spirituality in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hal, 1995).

¹¹ Park I-Moon. *The Civilian Paradigm of the New Millennium and Zen*. (Seoul: Mobul Seonwon Press, 2000) p. 31.

From this example, it is possible to understand emptiness and the metaphysical view of the Buddhist world. So there is no 'I' as the subject, neither is there 'entity' as the object. Emptiness is not nothing at all, but all things, including the universe, individual existences, activity (power) and consciousness. Korean Zen Master Seung Sahn explained that sitting in meditation is only part of the process. Asking 'Who am I' in each second of every new situation is the real meaning of Zen and meditation. When a person removes their fixed attitudes and preconceptions, and directly observes the inner mind, everything works correctly. Buddha taught that, at this stage, the real self is Buddha and is revealed. Our sense of recognition and our inner Buddha can work together within a clean mind.

According to Zen Buddhism, everything which includes 'I' and 'ego' is not fixed forever, but is a phenomenon which will pass in the never-ending cycle of movements and changing fate. Zen is the realization of this, as is the acceptance of non-duality (only the one existence). If a person can accept their own real identity as Buddha (the One) rather than as a person, then they can accept that 'emptiness' is our reality and can also change their attitude to living things (plants, insects and animals included). This teaching claims that in treating other beings as like oneself one helps to increase the happiness of all beings. These views are shared by today's radical ecologists.

● **Confucianism**

'Confucians accept nature as an object which is separated from man as the subject. This means that nature consists of the whole world minus man and man's products.'¹²

In the East, the concept of nature commonly equates to the universe, beginning with the environment, where people live. It influences the relationship between humans and their natural environment and also the ways in which they think and function.

Special geographical features of the East have helped to develop its unique culture, spreading out from the Yellow River in China. The main occupation in this area was agriculture, and farmers were accepted as middlemen between heaven and earth, with different elements of natural power.

Agriculturalists emphasized moderation and harmony. Moderation is seen as

¹² Yoon Sa-Soon. The Nature Philosophy in Choson Confucianism. (Seoul: Yeamoonseawon Press, 1988) p. 17.

the optimum path, in preference to a belief in absolute right and wrong. All outcomes depend on different conditions and situations. This perception of nature stems from basic agricultural concepts and the need to follow natural law and the seasons. Farmers learn and work with the repeated cycle of nature, which has parallels with *yin* and *yang*.

Thus, for people of the East, there is no concept of God as the creator and owner of this world, and nature is accepted as a self-created entity which exists in harmony with man. The characteristics of Chinese philosophy emphasize the harmony in relationship between nature and humans, and this gives greater value to human relationships and to 'we' rather than 'I.' When working in partnership to cultivate a farm, cooperation is important. The harvest depends on the land and climate which embodies the harmony between heaven and earth. Agriculture fostered the large family concept, which promoted ancestor worship, the family ethic and filial piety.

Fertile land and the importance of climate influence Asian people's views. They would rather live positively in this world than think about another world after death; they feel no need to transcend reality as Westerners do. The Asian view is that nature is the provider and the origin of life, like a mother or principle which instigates all change. This concept of nature has had an impact on the ethics of relationships between humans and with all other creatures.

The great philosopher, Confucius (B.C. 552-479) was interested in humans and society rather than nature. He was interested in how to apply natural law and teaching to human society and emphasized the values of humanity, righteousness, manner, and knowledge. Mencius (B.C. 372- 289), one of Confucius' famous contemporaries, believed that human nature was 'born' good, but without education from society could deteriorate. To counter this, he felt it was important for man 'to know his own nature' (Mencius 7:A1 in Chan 1963; 78) and to 'study' to reclaim lost knowledge (Mencius, 6:A11 in Chan 1963: 58).

The Mencius, a book of his conversations with kings of the time, is one of the Four Books that Chu Hsi (1130-1200) grouped as the core of orthodox Neo-Confucian thought. The theory of *The Book of Changes* is based on *yin* and *yang*. This accepts that all beings were created from different 'Ki' (energy) which consists of *yin* and *yang*. In this way, all creatures are organically linked, related, dependent and connected. The views on nature of Confucianism and Taoism agree in the sense that they respect and worship life and living power. The concept of *yin* and *yang*, which implies perpetual contradiction and change, was developed by Chu Hsi. *I Ching (Book of Changes)* is the book, which summarized the principles of the universe and life in terms of different

combinations of *yin* and *yang*. Later Chu Hsi's ideas became the leading School of Principle (*Li*) and the most powerful rationalist Neo-Confucianism. Chu Hsi insists that all objects and people have energy (*Ki*) and principles (*Li*), which originate from the 'Great Ultimate' (*T'ai-chi*). There is interaction between these two. Originally, physical entities were created from five elements; fire, water, wood, metal and earth. Neo-Confucians explain the phenomena of life and death in terms of the condensation and scattering of *Ki*.

Still later, Wang Yang-Ming (1472-1529) researched nature metaphysically with respect to the philosophy of the mind. In his view, 'The mind is the principle (*Li*)', which is quite the opposite of Chu Hsi's affirmation that, 'Nature (attribute, disposition) is the principle (*Li*).' Chu Hsi treats human attributes (human nature) in the same way as the 'property of matter', the difference arising from *Ki*. The purpose of discipline is to reach the ultimate reality for all Confucian scholars of Chinese philosophy. It means reaching the level of 'Unity within oneself and oneness with all entities' or 'to reach beyond the separation of subject and object.' Wang concluded that the most important tool in achieving unity was the 'mind.' Chu Hsi proposed that the Universe contained two different elements. One was the metaphysical (*Li*), and the other was the concrete, or physical (*Ki*). He believed that *Li* was virtuous and pure whereas *Ki* contained characteristics of impurity. So he emphasized the principles of the inner man and ethical action and practice; the research of principles and of objects and things. Wang Yang-Ming however, did not agree that *Li* or *Ki* were main elements in achieving oneness with all things in the Universe. He felt that only the 'awakened mind' could help people to reach that level because the human mind is a reflection of the Universal mind. Wang did not separate *Li* (the principles or laws, according to which all things are produced) from (the circulating life force within an object), he accepted they were same elements of nature, but appeared by principle and the other activity. Also, he applied the theory of no separation between 'principle and action' to human life. He made no distinction between practice (to do) and knowledge (to know). They are one, but their outward appearance is different. To him, the mind was perfect virtue, existing not only in humans but in the whole universe, so that at last all creatures could be one.

The philosophy of the mind will be discussed further on page 32 in the next chapter, entitled 'Ecosophy of Wang Yang-Ming's Mind'. This deals with views on who we are and how we can solve our 21st Century ecological problems, which are a result of anthropocentrism. It also documents research about eco-ethical ideas in the East and West.

Chapter 2. The post 20th Century Western Ecosophy Movement and Environmental Art

The 20th Century was a period of worldwide material abundance in the world because of industrialization and the rapid development of science and technology. In contrast, nature, which is the home base of all humans, was rapidly destroyed. There was a need for a new paradigm which would allow for the coexistence of man and nature.

The resolution of the eco crisis has been urgently researched since the middle of the 20th Century. In the process, some of the teachings of the Eastern philosophy of nature were suggested as possible solutions; in particular, the theory that ‘all things are connected’, and people, society and nature are dependent on one another as part of a cyclical process.¹³ Fritjof Capra (1939-) is famous for his research into Eastern philosophy and physics and safety of living system can be get by continuity and interdependence. Capra’s visions are shared by other ecological scholars, including Arne Næss, Carolyn Merchant and Thomas Berry.

Another group of ecologists, represented by Murray Bookchin (1921-2006), however, does not agree with Capra’s ideas. They believe that Eastern traditional philosophies, such as Zen Buddhism and Taoism, are anti-scientific and mystic, and cannot be the solution to the present crisis.¹⁴ Park I-Moon, a Korean philosopher, suggests there is potential for a hybrid between Western technology and knowledge and the vast, comprehensive, Eastern world-view. Through the selective and efficient development and use of Western knowledge, he believes man might hope to solve his environmental problems and move towards a brighter future.¹⁵ This development has been part of an ongoing expansion of philosophical work involving cross-cultural studies of world-views and ultimate philosophies. Philosophical studies in the West have often ignored the natural world and most studies in ethics have focused on human values.

This chapter considers Deep Ecology and Ecosophy, which emerged in the West around the mid 20th Century. It also looks at Neo Confucian scholar Wang Yang-

¹³ Fritjof Capra. The Way of Life: A New Understanding of Living, Trans. (Seoul: Bumyangsa Press, 1998) pp. 19-30.

¹⁴ Murray Bookchin. The Philosophy of Social Ecology, Trans. Moon Soon-Hong (Seoul: Sol Press) pp. 136-159.

¹⁵ Park I-Moon. The Future of Civilization and the Ecological World View. (Seoul: Dangdae Press, 1997) pp. 196-200.

Ming's theory that every life (including those of humans) is part of one body and points out that the mind is capable of solving the world's problems. Wang believes that humans are the mind of all creatures in the universe.

This first section deals with the short history of the Western Ecosophy movement. The second introduces Wang's philosophy, which has much in common with the new Western idea of Ecosophy, to help understand my art world and ideas.

- **The Western Ecology movement and philosophy**

In early 20th Century America and Europe the environmental awakening had already begun under the banner 'Protect Nature'. In 1871 the American environmental group the Sierra Club, was established and in 1902 E.H. Haeckel instigated the study of Ecology. In the late 20th Century the anthropocentric concepts of man protecting nature shifted towards environmentalism which treats nature and the human race as equals. Then, in the 1960s, there was a further powerful environmental upsurge, in the form of a political movement, following the publication of Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*, which sought to link environmental ethics to human relationships with nature.

Lynn Townsend White, Jr. (1907-1987), a professor of medieval history, said in his article 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis' in the journal *Science* (1967), that the origin of the 20th Century environmental crisis lay in Judaism and Christianity. He also suggested that instead of the usual Christian doctrine which interprets the relationship between humans and nature (including other creatures) in terms of master and servant, St. Francis accepted all creatures as brothers and sisters who had the universal ability and duty to praise God, just the same as man. Also he believed that a human's duty is to protect and enjoy nature as both the stewards of God's creation and as creatures ourselves. Arne Næss explained the idea of Deep Ecology in *Inquiry* magazine as changing man's consciousness of the need to solve environmental problems based on the human values of philosophy, psychology, religious study, and anthropology. He considers this idea as the 'ultimate norm of self-realization' which emphasizes self-practice through eco-centralism. The ultimate level of the norm of self-realization is encapsulated in the statement 'I am the forest, river, desert and mountain.'

The main principle of Deep Ecology is that man is part of the web of life and has to live his own life according to the mantra, 'Do as little harm as possible.' This has parallels with Eastern Taoism's 'Do not do artificial things, just follow nature', and the Buddhist 'Respect Life' teaching. The Deep Ecology movement developed and has had

a vast influence on the Animal Rights and Earth First movements, the Green Party, and Eco-feminism.

Ecosophy (ecophilosophy), which means ecological wisdom, is a new word invented by Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss (1912-), a leader in the field of Deep Ecology. In 1973 he introduced the Deep Ecology Movement in environmental literature. At that time, American environmentalism was beginning to ask about modern science, culture and ethics. Peter Albert David Singer (1946-), an Australian philosopher, wrote *Animal Liberation* and started the Ecology Movement. Naess's article was based on a talk he gave in Bucharest in 1972 at the Third World Future Research Conference. In June 1972, the UNCHE (United Nations Conference on the Human Environment) was held in Stockholm.

According to Arne Næss, Deep Ecology is based on the premise that humans and all other beings have the right to be, to prosper and to achieve their own form and to regard one another in biospherical egalitarian terms. Deep ecology includes the idea that all beings are connected, so that they coexist together through egalitarianism and variety. The environmental crisis is a result of social structure and culture, which are in need of reform. The reasons for the environmental crisis can be identified by questioning our current world views and values. Næss also developed his own ultimate ecological philosophy, 'Ecosophy T'.

'Ecosophy T was strongly influenced by Gandhi's nonviolence, Mahayana Buddhism, and Spinoza's pantheism. He emphasized life's uniqueness, variety, equality, balance, the urgent need for a conscious revolution, the need for political change, the need to recognize quality of life, and human duty.'¹⁶

The degree of success in ecological life can be estimated not by talking about different degrees of altruism, but by practice. Arne Næss distinguishes deep from shallow ecology and considered the preserve nature movement (which concentrated only on man's health and ability to flourish) to be anthropocentric.¹⁷ Deep ecology is an all-encompassing concept which includes the theories of shallow ecology, nature and man; biospherical egalitarianism, based on interrelationship and equal rights, stems from the acceptance of variety and coexistence. Ecosophy T is subject to the will of others. In Ecosophy T, Næss argues, it is important to note the inner value which exists

¹⁶ Drengson Alan. *Ecosophy, Ecosophy & the Deep Ecology Movement: An overview*. 20th Dec. 2007. <<http://www.ecospherics.net/pages/DrengEcophil.html>>

¹⁷ Drengson Alan and Inoue Yuichi. *The Deep Ecology Movement; An Introductory Anthology*. (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1995) p. 4.

in all beings. It is also important to accept the richness of the variety of life by controlling self-realization. Self-realization is only concerned with the individual and the limited concept of self.

‘Self’ is, however, not fixed; it can be expanded and developed through personality and socialization, to incorporate wider concepts such as family and friends. So Næss accepts that man is ‘small I’ (egoistic) and that self is the expanded concept of I which is a posterior result of the effort to obtain. Ecology T emphasizes three expanded concepts: one is self-realization, another is the maximization of diversity and the last is the maximization of universal symbiosis through the eight principles previously outlined.

Author Carolyn Merchant summarized the five main principles of Deep Ecology in her book, *Radical Ecology*, as follows: 1.) It requires a new metaphysical philosophy which includes the principle of equality across the whole biosphere. Instead of separating ‘I’ from ‘you’, or ‘individual identity’ from ‘the earth’, it emphasizes the unity of these concepts. Man is not in a governing position over nature, rather he is a part of nature. 2.) Deep ecology requires a new psychology which involves a different way of thinking about the self and one’s identity. The concept of self needs to expand and change from ‘man with the power to control the earth’ to ‘the self as a part of the earth’ – otherwise known as the Great Self. These ideas are mainly to be found in the teachings of Buddhism and Hinduism, and in the theories of Spiritual Ecology and of Green Peace. The relationship between man and nature is based on an anti-egoistic world. 3.) The third principle is a new anthropology, based on farming and fishing, which is concerned with the natural ability of acceptance. Instead of developing an industrialised society which makes use of all available land, some must remain uncultivated, affording opportunities for man to live as ‘future primitive man’. 4.) Deep ecology involves a new ethic of eco-centric -in preference to anthropocentric- values. Other creatures have a right to exist and develop, as does man. Man has a duty to protect the survival rights of other beings, instead of overcoming all other forms of life in an effort to maximize efficiency for his own ends. 5.) Finally, Deep Ecology is an ethic which coexists with nature. It needs a new science which accepts that man requires a house in which to live, in the form of ‘nature’. This science, based on ecology, should proclaim the doctrine of nonviolence (ashima) towards the natural world and should treat technology as a way to improve public welfare rather than concentrating on self-development.¹⁸

¹⁸ For a full discussion of these five points consults Carolyn Merchant. *Radical Ecology: The Searching for a Livable World*, Trans. Hea Nam-Hyck (Seoul: Leewho Press, 2007) pp. 141-143.

James Lovelock (1919-), a UK environmentalist, published the Gaia Hypothesis in the early 1970s. In his *Gaia: A new look at life on Earth* (2000), he identified a self-regulating system which he named after the Greek goddess Gaia. His idea is one of a complex entity which keeps a balance between the earth's biosphere and non biospheric elements such as the atmosphere, oceans and soil. In his new book *The Revenge of Gaia* (2006), he pointed out the urgency of the Earth's environmental situation (global warming, sudden climate changes) and expressed the view that Gaia has lost her power of self control and is beginning to take revenge on mankind. To him, even the Ecology movement cannot solve the present environmental problems. The main cause of pollution and global warming is carbon dioxide, which comes from three main sources: combustion of fossil energy; methane gas from breeding cattle; and deforestation. Whilst other scientists emphasize the dangers of nuclear power, Lovelock suggests it should be used in place of fossil energy and gas, which are the main reasons the greenhouse effect has been so influential in such a short period of time. Lovelock also suggests that we need to change our view of human status so that we are no longer the 'owners' but an 'element' of the earth, and we need to learn how men depend on other life for survival.¹⁹ The condition of the Earth is such that it can only recover if we control the present extreme environmental crisis. So men need to give up 'sustainable development' in favour of 'sustainable regression'. His views on the future of humanity are, however, quite negative if we continue with our habitual lifestyle and thinking. Lovelock's ideas are rejected by some scholars. One of these, Hans Jonas (1903-1993) highlighted man's responsibility to establish his ecological ontology and ethical use of the environment, whilst Murray Bookchin (1921) introduced the theory of Social Ecology.

Hans Jonas diagnosed the cause of ecological crisis as man's polluted spirituality. If this is the case, the solution lies with man, not with God. Jonas comments that humans are a part of nature, because nature can carry on without man, but man cannot continue without nature. He rejects anthropocentrism and defines the relationship between man and nature as a living spiritual one. Man's freedom is best served when it works for the biosphere alone. He concludes that real progress can be made based on self-examination about the ecological crisis which dangerously threatens our existence. His most important demand is: 'Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life'. This is known as the imperative of responsibility.

¹⁹ James Lovelock. *The Revenge of Gaia: Earths' Climate Crisis & the Fate of Humanity*, Trans. Lee Han-Um. (Seoul: Seajong Press, 2008) p. 169.

In Thomas Berry's (1914) opinion, the ecological crisis stems from industrial systems and the pursuit of wealth, which have separated man from nature.²⁰ He also considers that it is time for man to determine his own future in relation to the existence of the earth, and that this requires change according to ecocentric principles. We need to accept that the community of all living species is bigger than the human centrist view. This requires an improved degree of intimacy between man, the earth and nature.

Berry's search for the root of intimacy between nature and man was triggered by three things - an ancient traditional line of thinking, new science and a Chinese idea - which propose that all living things are of the same body.²¹ He valued the Confucian concept of *rén* (仁), which is usually translated as 'humanity', 'human-heartedness', 'virtue' or 'love'. This is not only an emotional and ethical idea, but one which expresses the view that universal power, intimacy and compassion exist throughout the universe. Berry believes that we will achieve total universal order and essential equality within, through the new natural science which values intimacy and reveals man's love. His idea has much in common with a lot of Chinese philosophy, especially Wang Yang-Ming's (1472-1528) idea.

Eastern Neo-Confucian Wang Yang-Ming's philosophy is more aligned with ecocentrism than lifecentrism and characterizes all individual lives as part of an organism which cannot be separated. Yang said "all beings with man were originally one body. In this sensitive organ, man is the most sensitive part, which came from spiritual brightness by the human mind: the wind and rain, dew and thunder, the sun and moon, star and asterism, bird and animal, mountain and stream, soil and stones were originally one body with man".

Man, then, contains not only living things, but also all the nature in the universe, including inanimate objects, in one body; man is the mind of all things.²² Yang explained one body theory with reference to three things: 1.) Universal nature is an 'active and self-organic ability': the activity of the universe never stops, it is everlasting. 2.) The attribute of emotion and manifestation of *Ki*, which exists in all beings in the universe. All beings contain different amounts of *Ki* and this results in various natural phenomena; plant, animal, man, and also man's mind, which is a spiritual and mystical thing. In this way, Wang expanded the character of *Ki* as the mind of universal nature. It had not only the characteristics of material but also highly

²⁰ Zimmerman Michael. E. "The Viable Human, Environmental Philosophy" From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1998).

²¹ Thomas Berry. The Dream of the Earth. (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988) p. 14-17.

²² Kim Sea-Jung. Wang Yang-Ming's Life Philosophy. (Seoul: Chunggea Press, 2006) p. 140.

spiritual organic life. 3.) The ‘Mutual assistance link’. Wang explains that nature is a great resource for living which is instinctively loved by man. The theory known as the One *Ki* Currency between man and nature recognizes the mutual assistance link. Each being is a part of universal life as a living life organ and life essence of nature. These three elements contribute to the theory that man and the universal being are all one life and one organ. As Buddhists treat nature as one body, Wang believes that the original human mind communicates and is intimate with nature. Although man has the ability to do this, his potential to recognize that ability depends on his individual greed – greed can be sufficient to cut off and reduce his ability.

Ecosophy and Wang’s one body theory share views on the way to solve our present environmental situation. Deep ecology emphasizes the importance of attributing value and rights to other members of the world and awakening self-examination of the inner self. These steps, it is believed, will eliminate greed and help to recover communion with nature.

● **The Environmental Art movement**

The Environmental Art movement first appeared in America and Europe in the 1960s and 70s. It flourished, and soon became popular in other parts of the world. It incorporated conceptual art and installations including video, architecture and new science technology. One of the major subdivisions of the movement was ‘Land Art’, represented by Walter de Maria (1935-), Robert Smithson (1938-1973), Richard Long (1945-), and by the married couple Christo (1935-) and Jeanne-Claude (1935-). In its later stages, the movement influenced nature-centered artists such as Alan Sonfist (1946-), Andy Goldsworthy (1956-), Herman de Vries (1931-), Sjoerd Buisman (1948-), and Wolfgang Laib (1950-), all of whom worked in the open air and produced works created from authentic natural materials. These artists used natural elements, sometimes transforming the landscape itself. Their work is deeply connected with conceptual, minimal, and process art, and with installation, body art, happening art, and events. All were non-materialistic, and had experimental attitudes and a strong intellectual, theoretical tendency.

Most of their interest lies in the relationship between man and nature and is mainly fabricated, manipulated and directly expressed in natural materials and elements. As Pop Art used ‘ready-made’ goods, Land Artists use real objects to create artworks from daily life; the natural elements of earth, water, wind and so on.

American artist Robert Smithson is famous for his ‘Spiral Jetty’ (1970) set in

Great Salt Lake, Utah. As a 1,500 foot long spiral-shaped jetty extending into the sea was constructed from rocks, earth, salt and red algae, it was entirely submerged by rising lake waters for several years.

The *Lightning Field* (1977) is De Maria's best-known work, consisting of 400 stainless steel posts arranged in a precise grid over an area of 1 mile \times 1 km. The time of day and the weather change the optical effects. It is a dramatic living landscape, emphasizing time and process, which also lights up during thunderstorms. Multiple images depend on changes in the weather. In this sense, it has been described as "an unframed experience with no one correct perspective or focus".²³

Christo and Jeanne-Claude are an artistic couple who practice environmental, installation art. Their works include the wrapping of the Reichstag in Berlin, and of the Pont Neuf Bridge in Paris, as well as installations such as the 24-mile-long Running Fence in Marin and Sonoma counties in California, and *The Gates*, in New York City's Central Park.

Richard Long is a British artist who is interested in concepts of nature from different areas and in traditional ways of producing art connected with the land. He uses the natural elements, grass and water, which inspired him to make a sculpture by walking. Walking (as art) provided him with new relationships at different times and places, distances and measurements. All things used for the walk, such as maps, photographs and his writing are precious results of his experience. Sometimes he not only walked, but changed the local conditions of a place through a new concept of sculpture. During his walks, he worked as a performance artist who was concerned about nature, leaving a photographic record of what he had done in the places he visited. He might, for example, move stones or rearrange them to make a line in a wide pebble field. Other styles of photography include images of different local natural characteristics (landscape and atmosphere). Collectively he called these works 'landscape sculpture'; subgroups include 'monuments' and 'leaving only footprints'. One of the representative works is 'A line Made by Walking' (1967).

Most of the work of the American Landscape Artists does not fall into the aesthetic category. De Maria, Smithson and Heizer worked in mountains, deserts and various other American landscapes, moving large masses of earth and digging huge trenches in the soil to transform and redesign the landscape. There is, however, neither

²³ Maja and Ruben Fowkes. *Unframed Landscape: Nature in Contemporary Art*, Sep 2006, Dec 2007. <<http://neme.org/main/492/unframed-landscapes>>

strong artistic theory nor a message in their work. Although they use nature as a medium for expressing their ideas, their relationship with and attitude towards nature is still one of lord and master. This view is the starting point for environmental art and points out the ecological debate on respect for the earth, the dangers of pollution and the excesses of consumerism. In comparison with former art movements and the Pop Art of the 20th Century (which had exalted industrial objects and mass-production), Land Art was an anti-industrial and anti-urban aesthetic current. Land Art was carried out in nature, isolating it from contamination by the great artistic centers, the capital cities. For this reason, Land Art is also a utopian attempt to run away from the existing art system.

● Ecological Art

In Germany and England, among other countries in Europe, some artists work and live with nature, changing and expanding the definition of art.

Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) is a representative environmental artist and a founder of the Green Party. Having experienced a plane crash in the Crimea from which he was rescued by nomadic Tartars and received life-saving care during WWII, his purpose and approach to art changed radically from the traditional. He used objects and materials such as felt, fat, dead animals, and stones in his artworks, in an effort to break down the gap between art and real life.

His early work, 'How to Explain Paintings to a Dead Hare', which demonstrates his ideas about the function of art, was performed on 26th November, 1965. His idea of the role of art in society is that recovery evolves over time, and he presented to the public both at exhibitions and in installations.

Beuys' greatest artwork, which incorporated green ideas and the relationship with matter, was '7,000 Oaks', a social sculpture involving every day life. This was a tree-planting event, pointing up the transformations in the whole of life, society and the world's ecological systems. This performance began at Documenta 7 in Kassel, Germany, in 1982, in a plan which called for the planting of seven thousand trees, each paired with a columnar basalt marker measuring approximately four feet above the ground, throughout the greater part of the city. This planting project continued with the support of the Free International University until 1987 at public places throughout the city. Beuys is an artist, who acts out the artist's role in real society through practice rather than through artforms in a gallery.

Alan Sonfist is a representative ecological artist who reclaimed wasteland in New York City to create a park which resembled virgin forest. Where Duchamp chose 'ready made' things for his artworks, Sonfist chose natural phenomena and processes for his. To him the outer features of artwork are less important than their content, which holds the purpose of the project and processing and real practices. It took more than ten years to complete his most famous ecological project 'Time Landscape' (1965-1978). This park reminds us that nature still exists in the big city. Most of Sonfist's artwork consists of outdoor installations and photography which records changes with the passage of time following the initial planting and installation of other elements (for example, stones) at historical locations. These he treats as public monuments, which memorialise the life and death of natural phenomena such as rivers and forests.

Sonfist accepted that the role of the artist is to bridge the gap between nature and human history and to let the people know the past and present of the nature, geology and environment which surrounds them. What is currently a city, for example, was once a forest or a marsh. He placed special emphasis on public awareness of the earth, and the need to regenerate nature for future generations.

Andy Goldsworthy is another ecology artist who uses natural material: colourful leaves, icicles, mud, stone, ice and snow. He has displayed these elements to make circles, stars or unfixed shapes on the ground. All of these changed and disappeared with the passage of time and he permanently recorded these changes as they happened by creating a photographic record of his work throughout the process.

Other ecological artists include Herman De Cries (1931-), Sjoerd Buisman, and Wolfgang Laib. The common characteristic of their works is that they use nature as the object of their creations. They use real plants, pollen, pumpkins, and vegetables to consider the links between humanity and nature. Herman de Vries sampled and regularly arranged natural materials, gluing plants to wooden panels or to paper. He listed the names of the plants, and the places and times at which they were collected, alongside photographic records.

Sjoerd Buisman is famous for landscaping projects. His representative work is the 'Constricted Pumpkin' (1971), which was transformed by a leather belt. Wolfgang Laib originally studied medicine in the 1970s before he became an artist. His expressive artworks are unique and quite different from others. To him, nature is something to be experienced and confirmed by the six senses. For example, he collected pollen from his house in the Black Forest in Germany in the summer and winter time and made artworks by sanding thin pieces of marble to make a powder for use in his installations.

He pointed out the unique quality of everyday materials (pollen, marble, rice, and milk), their beautiful colour, smell and the love felt towards them. His inspiration was drawn from Zen Buddhism and the monastic tradition, and his approach to installation can be classified as minimalist. The difference between his works and those of other minimalist artists is that his are characteristically meditative, and have reverence derived from humanistic stillness.

There is another main group whose style of ecological artwork differs because they work with nature as a positive way to reveal its character. Richard Wilson's (1953-) artwork '20:50' shows the result of human consumption (the title refers to different grades of motor oil used in cars and trucks). His work is characterized by architectural concerns with volume, illusionary spaces and auditory perception. '20:50' connects well with the environmental view. It consists of a room filled to half its height with highly reflective used sump oil. The oil reflects the ceiling and blue sky, a view which is accompanied by the strong smell of sump oil. This work reminds us of what remains after man's usage of the environment.

The artwork was first exhibited at Matts Gallery, London in 1987 and is considered a masterpiece of the genre of site-specific installation art, due to its success in enveloping the viewer into its rendition of the space.

Section B. Observations on Studio Practice: a Series of

Exhibitions undertaken between 1985 and 2007

Introduction

My Childhood

This chapter is autobiographical and presents my experience of the great cultural and environmental gap between the small country town in which I was born, and Seoul, the capital of modern Korea. The character of the two places was very different, due to industrialization and westernization. They represent, on the one hand traditional Korean views, and on the other those values shared with Western countries following the Westernization which took place after the Korean Civil War (1950-1953).

- **Experiencing nature in the mountains (1964-74)**

I was born in Muju-Ahnsung, which is a secluded village in the Dukyu Mountains. My father was the first son of a poor priest and even after he had graduated from university with a certificate in pharmacy, he could not open his own pharmacy due to lack of funds. After working for a couple of years for a medical manufacturer he opened his own pharmacy in Ahnsung, which had never before had its own professional pharmacy.

My first consciousness is of a time when I was about two years old. I was in a dark room which had a window, not on the wall, but in the ceiling. I was lying down on a warm traditional Korean floor, and my mother was preparing food for dinner. When I looked upward, there was light coming through the window. I realized that it was light, not only in terms of light as a concept but also in a linguistic sense; ‘Oh! The window in the ceiling!.’ Almost at the same time, something else asked ‘Who am I and how do I distinguish between words and the light and window itself?’ This was my first recognition of my identity, of other things, and of connections with names.

My second memory of my realization of identity was when I was seven years old. I was an ordinary child, who liked to play with others and sometimes to visit favourite places by myself, such as the riverside, hills, and fields which were full of crops, weeds and flowers.

It was an early spring day. As I faced the rice field, a heat haze rose up from the field, which was filled with dried rice stalks. The smell of dried wild chamomile filled the air. I could see the high, Duckyu Mountains (Fig 2) through the shimmering air all around me. I became aware that mountains, air, heat, soil and all things between heaven and earth are one. I could communicate with and feel what the other shapes of beings felt, not through words, but by intuition. I knew that at some point in the future, I remember this what I already knew. In fact, this would not be until the middle years of my life. But at that time, I again realized how wonderful we are and how we are connected with one another. Until I came to England in 1989 I had been formally taught that nature and humans are separated and that we must study hard to use nature as a resource. On a couple of occasions, I needed to determine my place in a strange situation or a new environment. I invariably asked myself ‘Who am I? What do I feel and think?’ and ‘Why do I accept that it is like this?.’ I could not always answer, but sometimes I knew, without having to think about it. The answer was there. It came, not from my ordinary self, but from a higher level of consciousness within me.



Fig 2. Duckyu Mountain (winter)

At that time (the 1960s see Figs 3 & 4) Korea was very poor after the Civil War and was experiencing political chaos, but when Park Chung-Hee became president, he declared war against poverty by way of the ‘Seamaeul Movement’ (New Village Movement). He began to organize agricultural land use, build new highways, and promoted industrialization with the creation of many factories. Even under the influence of that movement, however, my village was too small to be really affected and in the deep mountains I was able to continue to enjoy native country life. Even though my village was quite small, it was a center for other smaller villages, with a large road market every five days. The scene was great. It was like a festival. Many temporary stalls were set up, selling various daily needs, food, livestock and diverse traditional goods, such as ceramic chamber pots and special combs for catching lice.



Fig 3. Photo image of myself in the early 1970s



Fig 4. Photo image of my parents and younger sister in the early 1970s

Even at that time, it was not difficult to meet old people wearing traditional Korean dress as their daily attire. Some of the gentlemen wore white jackets with hats made from horsehair. A few years later, this kind of dress style had disappeared from the village because of the rapid introduction of Western culture. The image is very similar to scenes from China's Hangzhou road market, which I visited in 2004.



Figs 5 & 6. Chilyoun and Yongchu Falls in the Duckyu Mountain Range (summer)

In the spring, I had the chance to go with friends who knew much about wild plants to visit the hills and fields and to look for those plants. Plants like shepherd's purse, sow thistle and young crown daisy could all be eaten. In the late spring, I saw huge rice-planting groups in the rice fields which were filled with water. In the summer,

the rice grew to almost a meter high. There were lots of watermelons, yellow melons, peaches and so on. I cannot forget how happy I was swimming in the clean river. Without swimming goggles, I could see dace, loach and crawfish swimming over the beautiful sand and gravel of the stream bed (Figs 5 & 6). How could I forget the sound of the cicadas against a beautiful sunset sky after a passing rain shower? Following rain, the smell of the pine trees is very strong in the cooler, freshened air. I was so happy to see the colours of the sky change so beautifully with the movement of the sun. At first it might seem an ordinary blue, but the sky becomes yellow, orange, red - as if burning - bluish pink, cobalt blue, cerulean blue and finally full of stars against their ultramarine velvet backdrop. After dinner, my father would bring a long wooden bench from the pharmacy and my sisters and I would enjoy the sky show, falling asleep where we were on the seat.

In the autumn, the fields were yellow and full of crops. I have another funny memory of catching locusts (grasshoppers) and mud snails in the rice field before harvest. This was another colour feast because of the changing leaves on the trees: yellow, orange, red, brown, green, burnt umber. In winter there was heavy snow, because my village was in the middle of a mountainous area. It was so cold and there was snow all around. Everything was absolutely white. It was like a magic show, changing the landscape so that it looked totally different. Rice fields were again our playground when they became skating rinks. At that time we could not afford to buy ready made professional skates from the big cities, so my father made his and my uncle's skate shoes himself. He also made sledges for us. I experienced cold and ice and was aware that I was a living being, with warm breath. After winter the fields were full of the smell of burning rice-sheaves. Then the spring came again and all the hills were covered with pink azaleas and the blossoms of the golden bell.

I learned painting from my father. Before he decided to be a pharmacist he wanted to be an artist but was unable to follow his ambitions because he could not have supported himself. From my memories of him, he was a natural born painter. Before I was sent to Seoul, my father regularly gave me art lessons, in which he taught by example. His way of teaching was not an academic, disciplined style. He would show me examples of things he found interesting to paint and would simply draw them. He suggested to me that wherever I found a beautiful place to paint I should allow myself to feel and then to express what I felt. He was one of great art teachers in my life.

My perception is that I lived in and with nature until I was sent to Seoul for a higher quality education. Living in Muju-Anhsung, which is still a country park, was a great opportunity for me to experience nature, not only as the beings which are

separated from my body, but also as the universal law which moves by itself.

- **The cultural gap between Seoul and Muju-Ahnsung (1975-1988)**

After I received first prize in a national children's art competition when I was 10 years old, my parents decided to send me a better school in Seoul. I also had the chance to learn to sing and joined the Seoul city children's chorus. Two days a week I went to Namsan open concert hall, which is situated in the center of Seoul. It seemed like chaos to me - too many people, too many buses and cars, on streets surrounded by tall buildings. I was also shocked because the way people treated each other was quite different to the way they behaved in my hometown. Instead of greeting one another, taking the bus seemed like going to war. There were no manners. Only the strong and fast could catch the crowded bus. People did not have respect and kindness for one another. It came as a shock to me that people did not think that their manners were a problem. It was accepted that, in the life of a busy city, survival was the golden rule. Every value was judged by price instead of by the mind or heart.

Serious capitalism and the power of persuasion to follow Western culture existed in primary school as well. I even experienced a cultural gap between city life and country life styles in my lunch box. My and my sister's boxes were filled with traditional Korean foods, such as kimchi pickle, seasoned vegetables with rice, instead of ham, sausage and fried egg. Some jokers commented that the contents of our lunch boxes were strange and out of date.

Every vacation we visited our country home which, in our minds, was a real refuge (Fig 7). As time passed, however, the reality of country life seemed to change. We felt alienated both in Seoul and in our hometown. Through various experiences I began to realize that different social classes existed. When we first settled in Seoul, my father bought a detached house in a middle to low class area. I witnessed the middle to low class daily life and values which surrounded me. About two years later, we moved to a small apartment in a high-class village. The daily life and pattern of living in that area was very different. It was so Westernized and modern. People's education and manner of dress were different, even in the same district. Another two years passed and we moved to an area of bigger apartments where the values and concepts of life were again quite different from those we had previously experienced. We continued to regularly visit, and stayed for a couple of months in Muju-Ahnsung during every summer and winter vacation. The mountains and land were the same but the people who lived in the countryside had changed. Instead of innocence and a manner of living with nature, they had started to become more concerned with the benefits of farming. When

they began to profit from their way of life, their behaviour and nature seemed more money orientated.

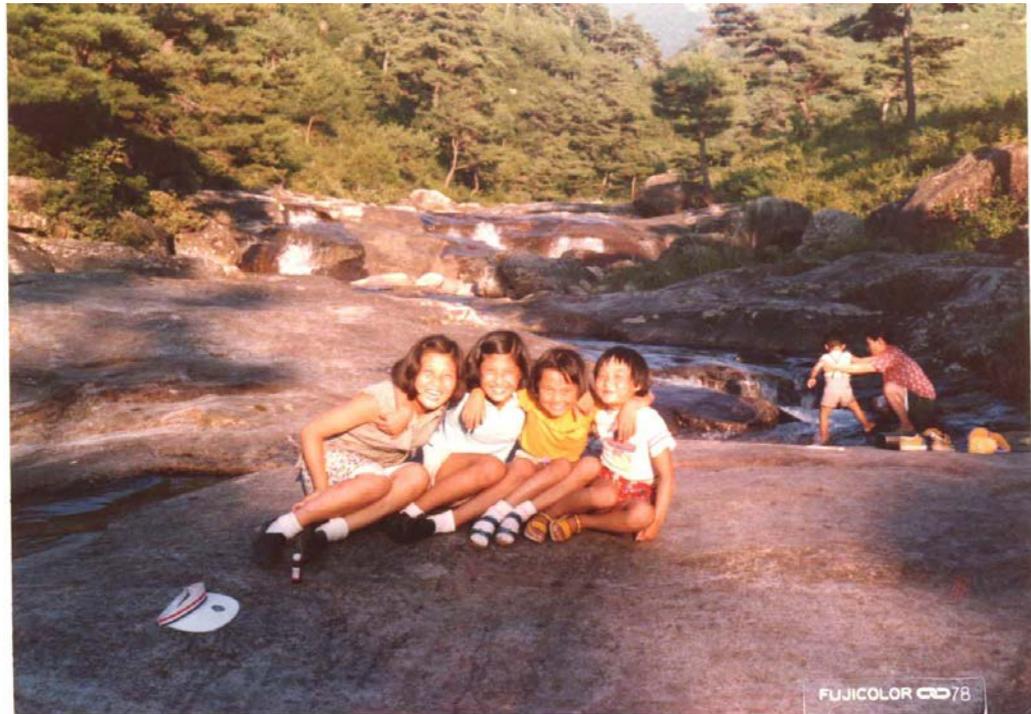


Fig 7. Family picnic in the Dukyu mountains range, 1978

Almost every summer I would hear about farmers being killed by poisons from agricultural chemicals. Their involvement with nature changed from a friendship to a material relationship. They began to separate foods cultivated without chemicals (for family consumption) from those cultivated with chemicals (for commercial production). This was a separation, human from human; customer from family. In the 10 years between leaving primary school and my first year as a university student, I was a witness to the way different social classes existed and also to the gap between city life and countryside, both culturally and conceptually.

- **Academic background**

When I became a BA student I began to take an interest in the following questions: What is human? What is the best set of values for all human beings? What is nature and how do we need to treat her? Is there a golden rule for right and wrong? Are the things I do learned from others or governed by my own free will? Is there a God who is the owner and creator of this world? Is God really the same as I learned in church? And finally, who am I? To begin with, I looked for clues to the answers to these questions in lectures and books and in scholarly teachings. Then I visited many people who held disparate views about the human race and nature, in an attempt to amass

knowledge and information as an observer. I wanted to be able to appreciate the mountains and rivers holistically, with my body and my senses, free from fixed views of the world. Without defining, or giving a title to my approach, I would concentrate my feelings and senses in a way which allowed me to communicate with other things on a pure level, and to express this in my paintings and artworks. This enabled me to understand the moment in terms of pure feeling rather than in more conventional human terms. I began to appreciate that nature exists despite our mistreatment of it.



Fig 8. 'Ahsung Stream' in the BA Studio, 1983

In my first two years as a Hongik university student (1982-1983) I was interested in nature and painted realistic expressions and the beauty of natural scenes. These included images of clean water, reflections of sunshine, waves on pebbles

through water, a fishing village scene showing human daily life in harmony with nature, and the sea (Fig 8). In contrast, I also painted the urban landscape, including the corner of a staircase on campus which was full of sunshine and shadow, and a winter tree, the lines of which were illuminated by yellow streetlights in the late cerulean blue sky (Figs 9, 10, 11, 12 & 13). To me, even in city life, nature coexisted with people and made me appreciate how wonderful it was. When I was a third year student, I tried to visualize those themes using abstract methods with minimalistic colour fields. I decided to study and further develop the common view of nature which is documented in the history of art and also to clarify the value of my own message and style.



Figs 9 & 10. 'Urban Landscape Painting' in the BA studio, 1984-1985



Figs 11, 12 & 13. 'Urban Landscape Painting' in the BA studio, 1984-1985



Fig 14. View of 'The Story of Mud', solo exhibition at Kwanhoon Gallery, Seoul, 1987

When I began to study for my MA (1986-1988), I was more concerned with nature from a Taoist perspective than with depicting what I saw. In my view, the traditional Korean house, and especially the walls, was a thing of beauty. Walls were made of natural materials including bamboo, straw, and seaweed mixed with mud to create a living space. Mud (soil) is the mother of human life, a source of food, clothes, and houses. It is a useful material but also has magic power. The process of making a traditional house wall is first to build the main structure out of timber and tree branches. This is the middle of the wall, to which other things will be added. These are a mixture of mud, seaweed glue, dried straw and weed, which are applied to thickly cover the timber structure. The wall may be allowed to dry like this or is covered with white lime paste. As time passes, it is changed by the sun, rain and wind, but also reveals the history of time in the natural markings, cracking and dust on the surface. This was a form of art, which revealed the original character and beauty of nature to me. I chose mud to visualize the beauty and power of nature in my artworks. (Figs 14, 15, 16 & 17)



Fig 15. 'Mud Painting 2', solo exhibition, 1987

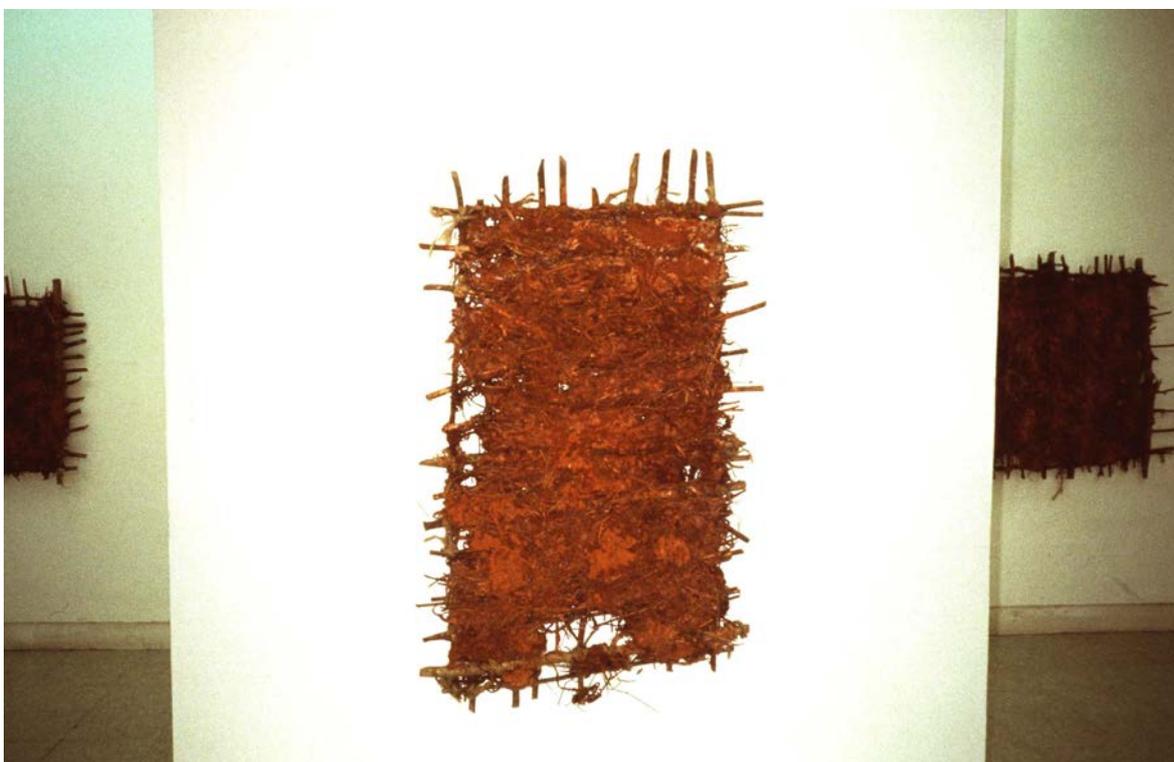


Fig 16. 'Mud Painting 3', solo exhibition, 1987

Chapter 1 Mud Painting



Fig 17. 'Mud Painting 1', solo exhibition, 1987

- **Mud painting: project, concept, description and statement Project**

Mud (soil) has long been accepted as the mother of life in Eastern Asia, which has particularly in agricultural areas. In *Tao Te Ching*, the sky and soil are symbols of humble elements for learning.²⁴ According to Chinese philosophical beliefs, the world consists of four main elements: earth, water, fire, and wind. My concern is with how to visualize the characters of these elements in my artworks. During the BA fine art course, I trained in realistic techniques with oil and water colour, and also in media for expressing, in abstract form, my ideas and beliefs.

In 1987 in Korea, the first year of my MA, I experimented with the expression of equality (or even-handedness) by repetitive colouring and scratching with monochrome pigment (Figs 18 & 19). I repeatedly applied white or blue oil to a canvas by roller. White, to me, is symbolic of humility and purity. I used a roller to paint the canvas evenly and naturally with blue pigment, and after it had dried, I scratched the canvas with the heads of nails. I again covered the canvas, using a roller, with white colour, and scratched it evenly again, repeating the process until I was satisfied. The scratching produced various characters of line and also some unexpected effects with unintended textures and figures on the canvas, which constitute a creative story in their own right: although at a casual glance the canvas is only covered in white pigment.

²⁴ Lao Tzu. *Tao Te Ching*, Trans, Oh Kang-Nam. (Seoul: Hyunamsa, 1995) p. 26.

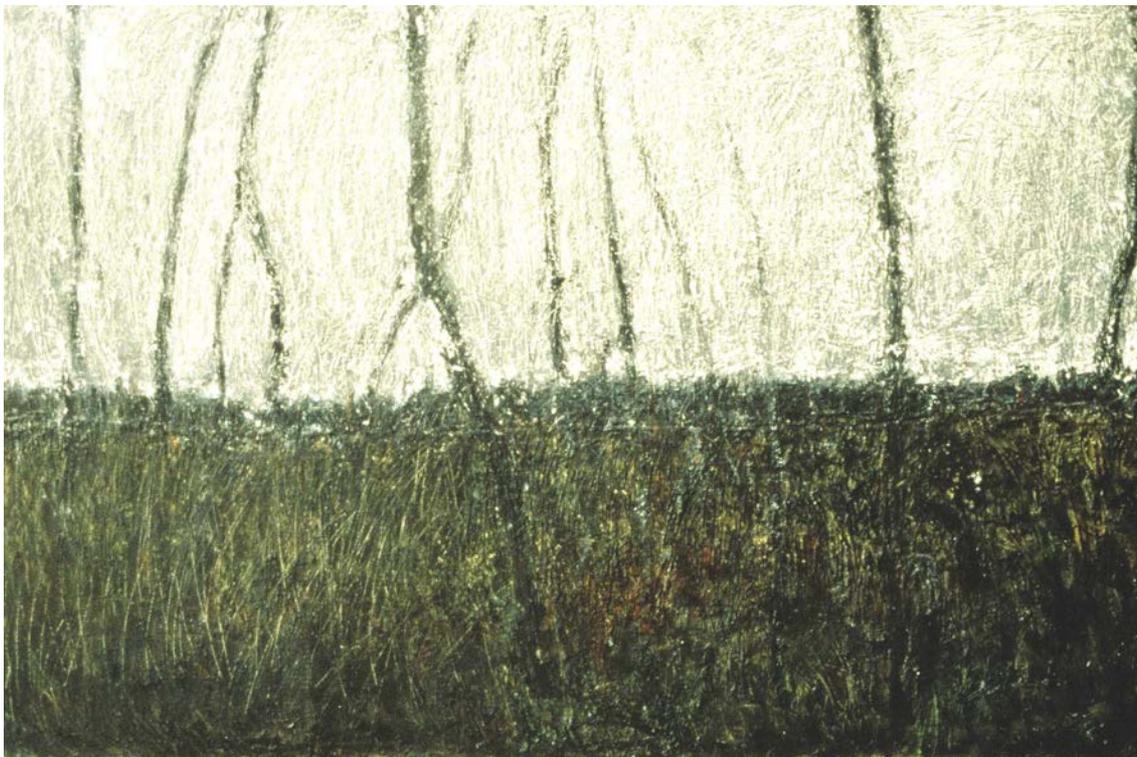


Fig 18. 'Winter Landscape Painting' in the BA studio, 1985

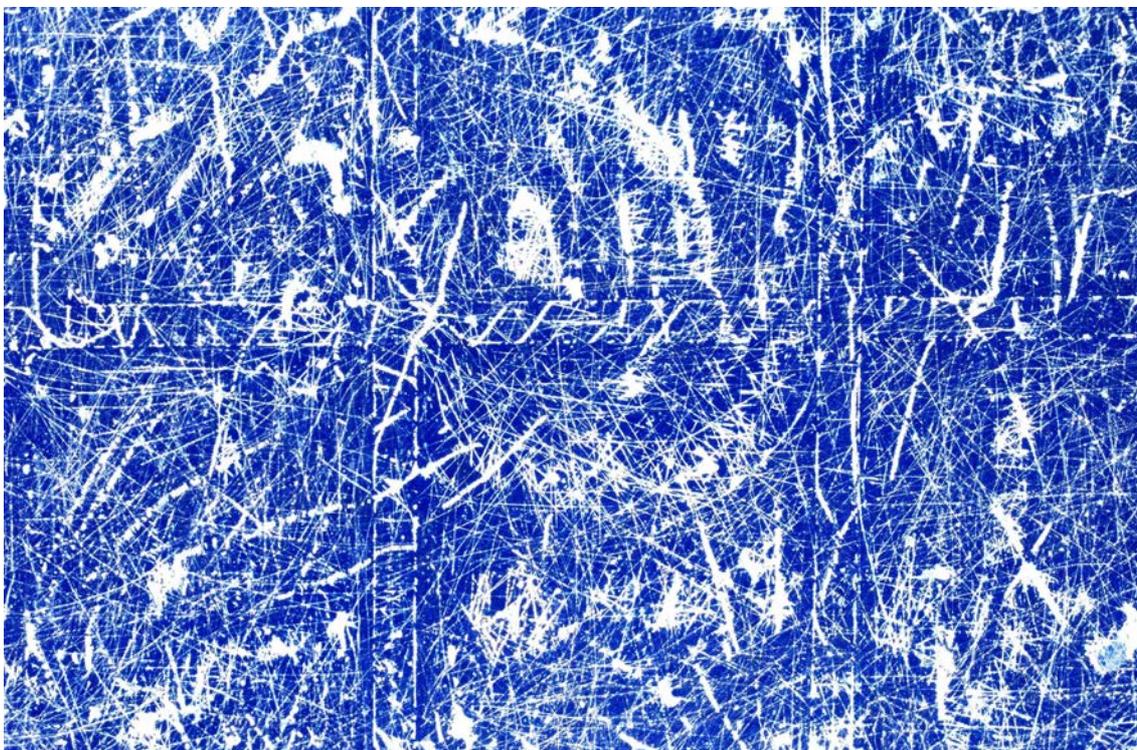


Fig 19. 'Untitled', a scratched painting in the MA studio, 1986

In 1986 I experienced beauty and a moment of unspeakable truth when I came across an abandoned cottage in the countryside. This led me to choose mud with lime as a medium instead of white oil paint. I regularly visit the mountains to experience nature through the senses of sight, smell, hearing, touch and taste.

I found the abandoned cottage one day as I climbed up the mountain alone. It was made of red earth and timber and the walls were covered with powdery white lime paste, which was cracked along lots of natural lines because of long exposure to wind and rain. Lovely sunshine revealed the materials, processes, time, and even the heart of the builder and his intentions to me. It was an unutterable moment of awakening, about truth, perfection and beauty, and about the harmony between a man-made product, nature and me. The white wall I was looking at was not only part of a building. To me, it was also a monumental artwork created by human hands with natural resources containing the four elements. It was a masterpiece from nature which expressed the harmony of the elements earth, water, fire, and wind, by means of a natural skill. All materials for the building were natural resources: lime powder, bamboo, corn stalk, straw, seaweed and ox bone glue which increases adhesive strength.

- **Description and statement**

Motivated by this, I began to learn about the traditional ways of building house walls from my father and from professional traditional house builders. I tried to achieve two different styles in my work (2-D and 3-D). Soil, the main element, was brought from my hometown. Red soil came from the pine forest and the white, grey tones were the product of different proportions of limestone powder mixed with various hues of clay.

To build up the 3-D works, I first used corn stalks and tree branches to make a skeleton. I then covered the skeleton with a mixture made from mud, straw, and a natural adhesive made from boiled ox bone glue, seaweed and water. The glue increased the adhesion of the soil to the tree branches. Red mud is a nutritious material which contains many minerals which are good for the human body. It also serves as a wall insulation material.

For the 2-D work, after the soil mixture had dried on the skeleton or canvas stretcher, which was covered with thick cloths, I covered it with a paste of white lime powder and liquid glue or limestone mixture. I controlled the viscosity depending on the seasons and the degree of natural cracking I wished to achieve. These adhesives are sensitive to temperature variations, which can lead to cracking. Depending on the

weather and whether I worked in summer or winter (different ambient temperatures), I could achieve various natural crack lines on the surface (Fig 20).

The types of cracks exposed the elements of nature; earth, water, fire, and wind. When I made the glue, I boiled seaweed, which increased the adhesive strength. After that I melted ox bone glue over a fire and mixed it with lime powder as a symbol of earth and water. This is both symbolic of life and nature and a medium which contains a mix of materials coexisting together.



Fig 20. 'The Story of Mud - I', solo exhibition, 1987

The characteristics and elements of these materials revealed themselves as a result of my creative process. Even as they changed their shape and form of existence their own real nature neither changed nor disappeared. Even though they looked different and existed in different ways, they were basically the same (Figs 21 & 22). My abstract works symbolized and revealed the law of nature through these processes (boiling, mixing and temperature control).

- **Mud painting exhibitions in 1986 -1988**

I believe that the content of nature cannot be separated from the form used to express it. It is closely related. I choose my art materials from earth products; soil, lime powder, straw, weed, seaweed, tree branches, and ox bone glue. In my mud painting series, I isolate and expose the properties, character and nature of these elements. In the painting process, I was only an assistant, helping natural elements and phenomena to reveal themselves (Figs 23, 24, 25 & 26).



Fig 21. A part of 'A Story of Mud - I', 1987



Fig 22. 'The Story of Mud', solo exhibition at Eal Gallery, Seoul, 1988



Fig 23. 'The Story of Mud-II', solo exhibition, 1987

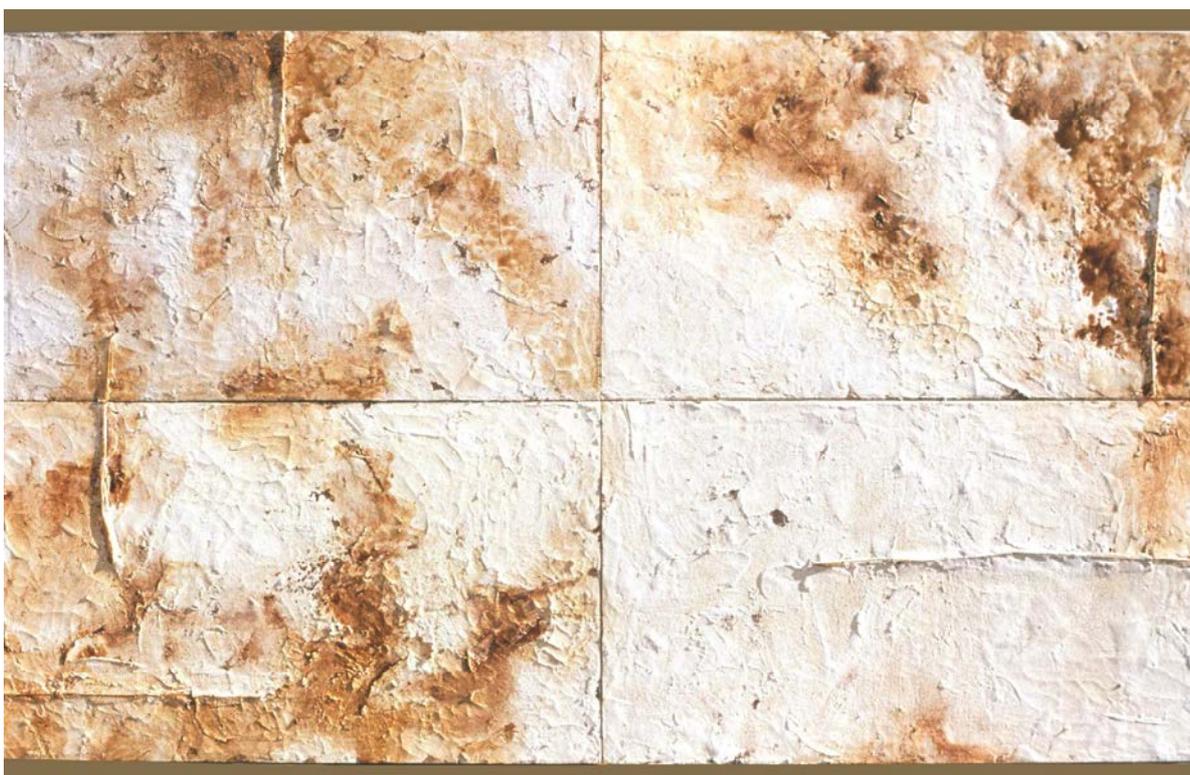


Fig 24. 'The Story of Mud', solo exhibition, 1987



Fig 25. 'The Story of Mud - IV', solo exhibition at Eal Gallery, Seoul, 1988



Fig 26. View of solo exhibition, 1987

Chapter 2 Nature-Culture Painting (1989-1999)

- **International experience between East and West (culture shock and Eastern/Western traits)**

When I had finished my MA course in Seoul, Korea in 1988, I decided to study views on art in other countries. Korean art education mainly followed the American style, so I chose to study in Europe, an unknown world to a Korean artist.

I had some information about 20th Century modern British art, represented by David Hockney, Richard Hamilton, Lucian Freud, Henry Moore, and Barbara Hepworth, amongst others, and had the opportunity to visit Paris, to compare it with London before I decided where to study. British art seemed to offer more variety in its approach. During my education in the Fine Art department in Korea my subject was Western painting, as distinguished from Eastern painting. Western painting classes taught Western art history with art techniques. By contrast, Eastern painting courses emphasized traditional Far Eastern ways of painting. As a third year student experiencing and experimenting with a range of art movements, we were almost forbidden to use realistic styles of painting.

Painting was to be expressed in the abstract, rather than using a realistic approach, because realism was seen as old fashioned. When I visited some art school studios in London I found that British art education did indeed include abstract concerns but that these coexisted with different approaches to realism. For these reasons, I chose to study in the UK to develop my art without any limitations on my style.

Having decided to live and study in London, I experienced another serious culture shock. The first culture shock was when I moved from the countryside to Seoul, capital of Korea, and became aware of the conflict between agricultural customs and capitalistic life and values. My second culture shock, in London, was caused by multi-cultural conflict. London is not only the capital of England for Anglo-Saxon people, but also an international place in which representatives of all the peoples of the world coexist. With insufficient information about the UK in 1989, my preconception of London was that it was filled with English gentlemen who wore black hats and suits. In reality, I encountered many different races living together in London. I met Indian ladies wearing saris in the street, but also saw one Islamic gentleman with four, black-dressed wives at Heathrow airport. Before coming to London I had not imagined contact with the Islamic people and religion in my own life. Although this has become

common in Korea in recent years, before the early 1990s foreign people in Seoul were rare. This was my first experience of meeting Indians, black Africans, South Americans and other people from all around the world.

My political belief was shaken when I met people from communist countries. Because of the influence of cold war diplomacy, Korea had no relationship with China, even though it was a neighbour. I had had no opportunity to meet real Chinese people until 1989. Meeting them in China Town in London was another shock. Was this acceptable or not? I had learned that communism was our enemy, that it had killed many people and divided our country into North and South Korea. I had an unconscious hostility toward China, but when I met ordinary Chinese people in China Town they were not monsters or 'the enemy' - they were human beings who shared a cultural background with we Koreans. I started to realize just how powerful the impact of education could be and how dangerous knowledge can be without a real understanding of circumstance and the situation of others, without love for humanity. I realized that everybody in the world wants the same things: health, wealth, happiness, abundance, love, peace, relaxation, friendship and so on.

I spent 26 years, living the Korean way of life without truly recognizing that things were different in other parts of the world! When I arrived in the UK, I realized that it has its own approaches to dealing with things such as electricity, road directions, and electrical products. To me, this was another great chance to think about 'relativity'! I began to realize that there are no absolute truths in human society, but there are relative concepts everywhere, including different cultures, societies, living styles and ethics.

At that time I could not summarize the main reasons behind my shock and confusion, I was just aware of day-to-day differences. These different experiences provided me with new understandings, realizations and concepts and helped me to appreciate that various understandings and values rule the whole world and every individual in the same place and time. I even sensed different interpretations of the same religion between the East and West. Korean churches in London were a source of yet another culture shock when compared to other English churches. For example, when I went to a Korean church, the minister emphasized the need to repent of our sins. He said that we had been cleaned by Jesus but had made ourselves dirty again. I believe this approach to God came from a Confucian cultural background. At an Evangelical church in London, however, which I regularly attended at that time, they seemed to hold a festival every Sunday. Even though the congregation sinned (as we all do) and repeatedly and repeatedly made mistakes, they believed that Jesus had already saved

them. So even though they were sorry about their imperfections, they boldly approached God with happiness because of what Jesus has done for them. Even though this was the same Jesus and the same teaching, their approach to God was quite different because of their cultural roots and interpretations.

- **Educational background and artworks**

As previously mentioned, 1989 was quite a turning point for me in which I experienced different concepts of life and art in the new environment of London. Things - sky, earth, grass, trees, flowers, and ponds existed and had names as they had in Seoul, but even though I called them by their names both the exterior shape and the object's character and personality were quite different. For example, the sky above me was the same as before, but the feeling and mood were quite different to those set by the sky in Seoul. In Seoul it seemed higher, cleaner and cooler because it was influenced by the Siberian air mass in wintertime and humid, soft, warm air from the Pacific and typhoons in summer time. It differed greatly from the thick cloudy skies of a London winter. There is a word for 'sky' in both languages, but the experience is far from the same.

Based on this, I began to rethink the meaning of nature in terms of my new experiences of everything in day-to-day life. Also, I was deeply concerned about who I was in cosmopolitan London. Unconsciously, and intuitively I began to understand other ways of thinking about and valuing nature. I am constantly aware of this phenomenon whether in the people I meet or the places I visit. What is it that makes me understand and find similarities and alternatives to what I had learned in Korea? Who am I?

In 1989, when I joined the Wimbledon School of Art as a researcher, I attempted to work with nature in two ways. One was concerned with the interpretation of nature in the East and West and involved experimental artwork in 2-D (painting and printmaking). In the other I produced 3-D works, mainly using tree branches which were pruned from the trees in winter in the park. At that time I was interested in fate (karma) which seemed the key to answering all my questions.

The things which happened every day were not chance occurrences, but seemed ordained by fate so that I might realize who I was. If a branch was cut in front of me when I passed a street by chance I would ask, why in that place and at that time? I, a foreigner, jump into foreign daily life. I introduce examples of my works from this time in the next chapter (Figs 27 & 28).



Fig 27. 'Destiny I' from a series of 3-D works, 1989-1990



Fig 28. 'Destiny II' from a series of 3-D works, 1989-1990

From 1990 to 1992 I studied on an MA printmaking course at Camberwell College of Arts in London. During this course, I met Ray, a part time tutor who gave me a great deal of philosophical guidance. He advised me to always look for my identity and my story instead of just copying Western culture and values. He encouraged my interest in and thoughts about spirituality and my relationship with nature.

When I had finished my MA, I moved to live in the Wimbledon area, but I kept my painting studio in Hendon, at Alma Mansions, as before. After the move to South London, I had more opportunities to visit the suburbs and parks and to enjoy walking and communing with the plants, especially around Richmond Park, Wimbledon Park and Kew Gardens. These are my favourite places to quietly meet with other people and to make contact with nature. Meeting different people made me think about who we humans are, with our different religions, cultures and values. These interests prompted me to begin my doll painting series, which reflected people's cultures, values and understanding. I realized from these simple dolls, that former generations' values and customs pass over naturally to the next generation.

- **Nature as a subject (experimental 2-D and 3-D works)**

Beginning in 1989 in London I expressed my feelings and ideas about nature and human culture through two main styles of work. One was 3-D and the other was 2-D, mainly oil painting and printmaking. At that time I was concerned with destiny and fortuity as expressed by 3-D works.

My main topic was nature, especially English scenery and views, which are quite different from those in Korea where 70 percent of the land is mountainous. I used to pass by small parks which had trees and green grass even in winter time.

My preconception was that London was quite an industrial place without any natural greenery, but the reality was quite different. Whenever I passed by a park, I used to sit down, relax and look at the different trees. This was mediation and communion time. When I observed the changing seasons, the leaves changed from life to death and I was aware of destiny (karma), which is a part of all beings and the natural cycle. I wondered what existed behind the destiny of life's circle, and what had brought me from Korea to England on the other side of the world. The simple answer is 'It is me', but then 'What is me'? It was not only my will to make this happen. Living in London in 1989, I also had many chances to visit other countries in Europe. Each time, whether in London or somewhere else, I opened my senses to feel, know and experience nature and people with fresh eyes, as if I had been born today. To me this is like being Alice in Wonderland. Everything that happens is a miracle.

To coexist with one another in the same place and at the same time is not chance; there is some reason for the meeting. So when winter came I collected fallen branches from trees and tied them with string without any plan or purpose for their composition or form. I wanted to be the cause of relationships between the branches. They were in the same park but never had contact whilst alive. Tree branches have their own shapes, lengths and characters, so even though I tied them together without any pre-planning, they made special shapes in their own right (Figs 27, 28, 29 & 30).



Fig 29. 'Destiny III', from a series of 3-D works, 1990

I tried to experiment with minimalizing my own intentions in the process, choosing instead to expose the character and origin of nature itself. There are minimalized but existing difference between just branches, as they were found on the ground, and what I had done to them. I think it has mainly to do with nature and natural law. At that time I collected two Kinds of natural objects. I collected tree branches and also variously shaped junk boxes and panel pieces from the 3-D studio (Figs, 31, 32, 33, 34 & 35). The boxes were made from paper and wood (natural materials), but human touch had totally changed their character. Despite having been manipulated, their own meaning and beauty remained.



Fig 30. 'Destiny IV', from a series of 3-D works, 1989



Fig 31. 'Destiny V', from a series of 3-D works, 1989

During the 1990s, I continued to paint all the things which sent me a message: dolls, plants, glass beads, and different shapes of shell from various places. I feel able to relate to plants and this has been a precious guide for me, showing me that the world is a much, much bigger place than I knew. I feel this knowledge will continue to expand until I leave my body.



Fig 32. My studio at Wimbledon School of Art, 1989



Fig 33. My studio at Wimbledon School of Art, 1989

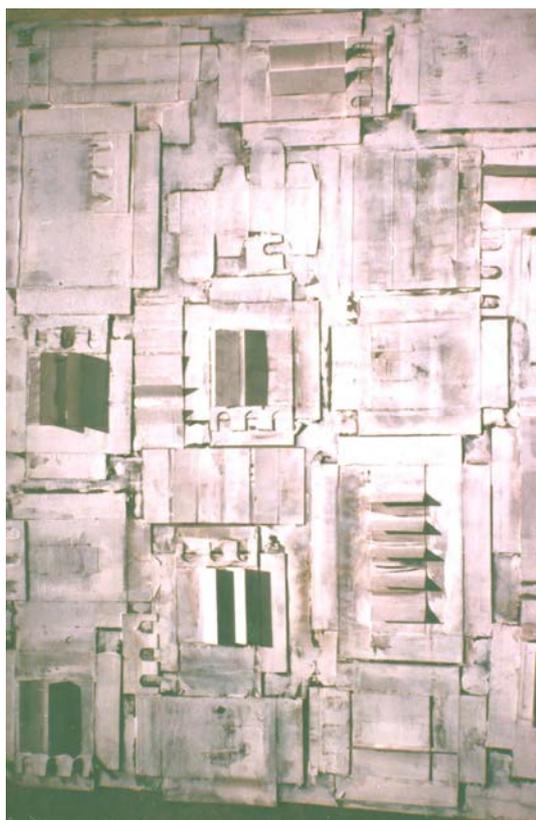


Fig 34. 'Destiny-White', 1989

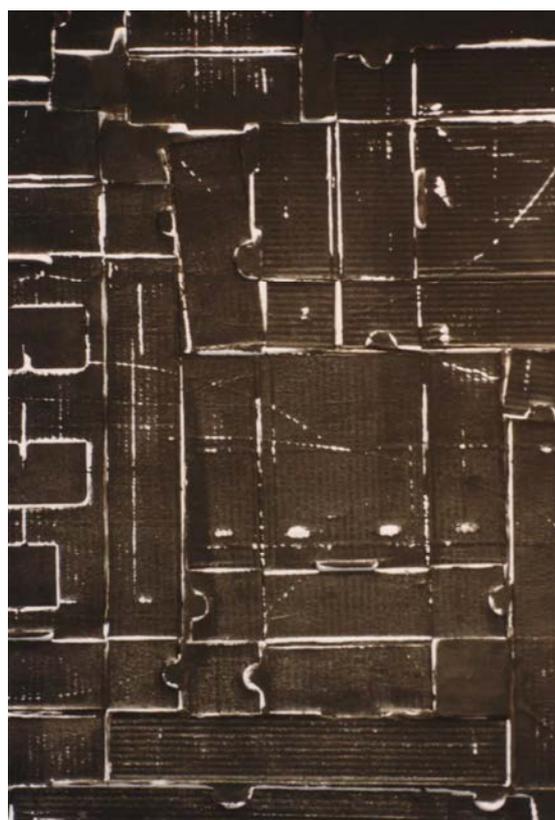


Fig 35. 'Destiny-Black', 1989

Other beings coexist on earth, not in terms of my concept of coexistence, but through physical contact. The doll painting series was my expression of the difference in concepts and values between humans of the East and West. The glass bead and shell

series of paintings were my worship of the amazing character of nature and ‘Just as it is’ forms. When sun shone through the glass beads, they did not reject the sun as a natural phenomenon which revealed their colour, transparent character, and even bubbles of air inside them (Figs 36, 37, 38 & 39). To me it seems that the universe, which has different stars, has different natural laws and orders.



Fig 36. ‘Just as it is – the Glass Beads’, from a series of oil paintings, 1994-1996

Fig 37. ‘Just as it is – the Glass Beads’, from a series of oil paintings, 1994-1996



Fig 38. ‘Just as it is – the Glass Beads’, from a series of oil paintings, 1994-1996

Fig 39. ‘Just as it is – the Glass Beads’, from a series of oil paintings, 1994-1996

The shell series of paintings reveals not only the beauty of the shapes and patterns, but also natural mathematical principles which are present in their various proportions, ratios and sizes (Figs 40, 41, 42 & 43). After I had developed the ability to look at the object and analyze the delicate difference between the elements of material, shape and form, the individual spirit became apparent even in inanimate objects. Later I became more interested in living things like plants, insects, animals and even landscapes which hold the spirit.



Fig 40. 'Shell' series of oil paintings, 1994-1996, exhibit at the Battersea Art Fair, Battersea Park, London, 2002

Fig 41. 'Shell' series of oil paintings, 1994-1996, exhibit at the Battersea Art Fair, Battersea Park, London, 2002



Fig 42. 'Shell' series of oil paintings, 1994-1996, exhibit at the Battersea Art Fair, Battersea Park, London, 2002.

Fig 43. 'Shell' series oil paintings, 1994-1996, exhibit at the Battersea Art Fair, Battersea Park, London, 2002

I also continued to paint with mud after settling in London, but the characteristics of the materials (mud, tree branches, straw, bamboo, corn stalks, and so on) were difficult to duplicate, so I substituted others which would recreate the effect I had achieved in Korea (Figs 44, 45 & 46).



Fig 44. 'Destiny VII', from a series of 3D works, 1990



Fig 45. 'The Story of Mud - London', 1990



Fig 46. 'The Story of Mud – London (1990)',
exhibit at the PhD degree show at Brighton University, 2006

In the case of the panel work, I collected and combined, as naturally as possible, shaped wooden pieces from a timber mill. These timber pieces were of various heights and shapes. I covered them with thick, wide gauze and then coated the whole with gesso, evenly applied by roller (Fig 47).

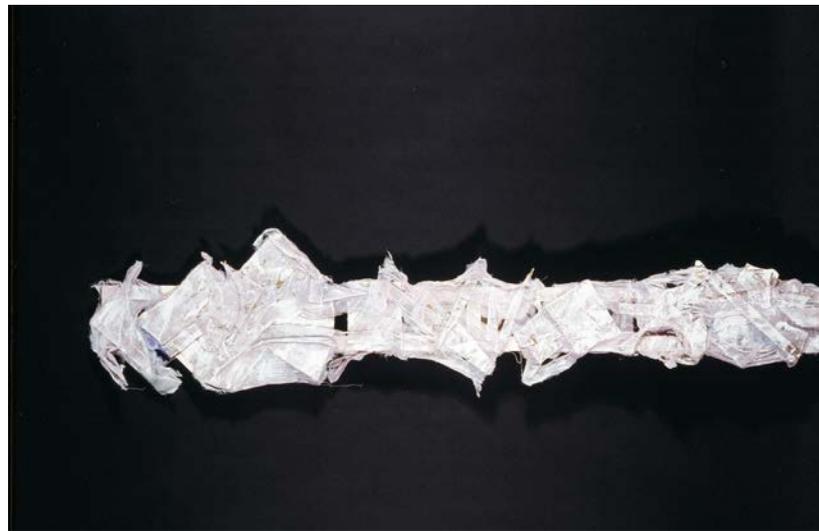


Fig 47. 'Destiny VI', from a series of 3-D works, 1989

The even application of white colour on every surface meant I using the roller in the same way on each piece of wood. Even so, after a while different shapes and effects appeared on their surfaces because each was unique. To me these works were a reflection of my interpretation of the generosity of nature toward all beings in the world. (Fig 41)

- **Culture as a subject (expanding view of the world)**

There were a number of reasons why I decided to study printmaking for my MA at Camberwell College of Arts (1990). Up to that time there had been no proper printmaking courses in Korean art schools. I felt that the course would expand my expressive techniques and methods in Fine Art.

Whilst on the course, I became more concerned with 2-D than 3-D works. I tried to learn and to develop hybrids of silkscreen, etching, lithography, relief and computer printing techniques. Mainly my interest was in making prints which reflected different views of human cultures and ideas from Eastern views (Taoist, Confucian and Zen Buddhist). I had a strong interest in the diversity of human beings and the different values and styles of London life. The school offered a great opportunity to make friends from different countries in the East and West. Living in Clapham Common for a year, I became acquainted with many black and Indian people, who had totally different values and cognizance to typical British people. This contact with people from African and Indian backgrounds and exposure to their culture was a new experience for me. Since Korea had no direct relationship with England until recently, I could not have anticipated the globalized international situation which exists in this country.

Between December 1990 and 1994 I lived in Hendon, North London, where I came across the Jewish culture which I had learned about in connection with reading the Old Testament. A long time ago, Alma Mansion, the place where I lived, was a passionate mission branch belonging to the Pillar of Fire Church. It consisted of a Christian building, like an old convent, and a neighbouring Jewish synagogue. Every Saturday we could hear the voices of the Jewish people as they read the Bible and worshipped together; on Sunday morning we would hear hymns from Alma church. It seemed a beautiful thing to me to coexist in this way, two different views on the same street. Every Saturday I became a witness to the march to the synagogue in London. The worshippers used no transport, but walked with friends or family to get there. This gave me a strong impression of identity and belief.

Alma Mansion had a big front garden where children would usually play football on Saturdays under the old trees. The back garden was used to cultivate organic vegetables. There was also a hen-house in the corner so I had the chance to share eggs and to listen to the hen's early song in the morning, together with the chorus of a flock of sparrows. All this was to be found in London, a business center not only for the UK but also for the world. In this environment, I had some calm times and peacefully enjoyed nature. The place also gave me a chance to look at the old Christian beliefs and

way of life and to observe the elements which remain, including the priest's family's way of life, since they shared the same compound.

Through this experience of meeting people from different backgrounds I began to take an interest in common human views which exist in all religions, ideas and cultures. In my print and weed series of paintings I started to look for what humans think about nature. Later, in my series of doll paintings, I questioned who we are. At that time, I was not restricted to a certain style of painting or print, such as realism or abstract. I felt that the approach which expressed my ideas and feelings most closely was the best tool to use. Whilst at Alma Mansion, I was studying on the MA Printmaking course at Camberwell College of Arts, and the main subjects of my artworks were 'Who we are' and 'Where we are'. I experimented with these two subjects, and produced some figurative (Figs 48, 49 & 52) and abstract images (Figs 50 & 51). For the 'Who we are' topic I produced two representative works entitled 'Who are you?; Do you know where we came from?' and 'Who are you? Know yourself' (Figs 48 & 49). These are relief print series which show the different origins of human culture since man's appearance in the world.

Print 'Who are you?; Do you know where we came from?' shows the stone age, when humans began to make use of their environment to help them, but the other print, 'Who are you? Know yourself' is the story after men developed reason and culture through anthropocentrism; the point at which they began to make not only tools for farming but weapons to kill others in the name of development and to help them flourish. Whether in the East or West is unimportant to me, but the way our forefathers accepted who they were and who others were seemed to me to have an influence on how we should live. I like to think about that point having experienced the different cultures and ways of thinking which make up London's unique society.

Another subject of my printworks was 'Where does everything come from?'. The work entitled 'Genesis I' (Fig 50) shows three lines in the form of a circle printed in gold, and comes mainly from the Eastern idea of life, space and time. The circle is a symbol of the unfinished reincarnation of life and death. There is no separation of creator and created. Everything comes from the same origin, which is expressed differently in terms of materials and principles. I used triple circles as a symbol for three different time zones - past, present and future - on a background of different tones of gold. The background consists of images of water which seem to take the forms of cloud, steam, and water as a reflective medium. In Eastern philosophy, even though time and space are always changing, essentially this is not important because they are everlasting. This idea is represented by the different colours and tints of gold all

together in the one print. Gold is also a symbol of consistency, so I chose it to express eternity.

‘Genesis 1-1’ (Fig 51) was inspired by the Bible, Genesis chapter 1, verse 1-2;

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

2 Now the earth was [a] formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.²⁵

According to Genesis, a definite separation exists between the creator and creation. Before the earth began to form, God existed on the waters. I was interested in these verbs so expressed God, as formless above the face of the water - the origin of life. These two printworks are my interpretation of different views of the origin of life. The print ‘Let’s go home’ (Fig 52) was inspired by a sunset which I saw whilst travelling on the M1 motorway. I had been visiting a Korean friend’s house by car, more than an hour away in the north of London, and was able to enjoy the gradual change in the sunset landscape through the window. When darkness settled over the earth, the street lights suddenly turned on. It made an impression on me. This scene motivated me to make a monoprint which portrayed my wish to reach the perfect world (represented by ‘home’) before it was too late.



Fig 48. ‘Who Are You?’: ‘Do You Know Where We Came From?’, (Relief Print series, 1991), exhibit Sapporo International Print Biennale Exhibition, Sapporo, 1993

²⁵ Genesis 1: 1-2. Spring 2008. <<http://www.ibs.org/bible/verse/index.php>>.

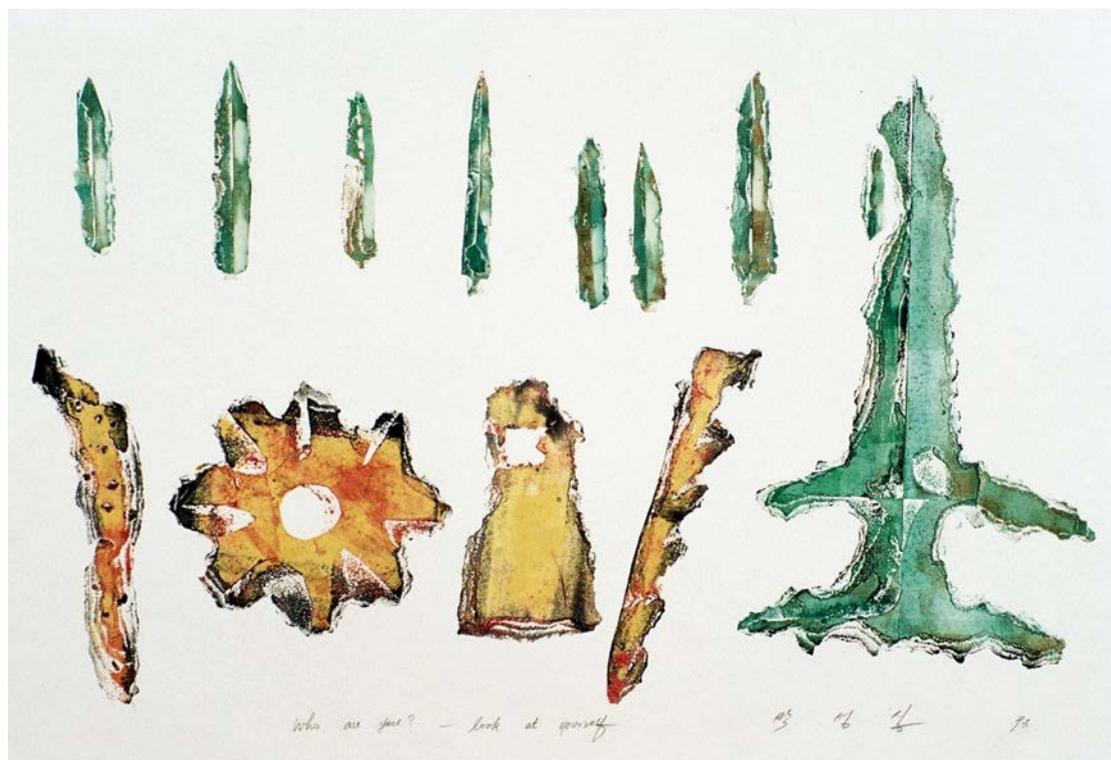


Fig 49. 'Who Are You?: Know Yourself', (Relief Print series, 1991), exhibit Sapporo International Print Biennale Exhibition, Sapporo, 1993



Fig 50. 'Genesis' (Lithography, 1991), solo exhibition at the Indeco gallery in Seoul, 1992



Fig 51. 'Genesis 1-1' (Relief Mono Prints, 1990), solo exhibition at the Indeco gallery, Seoul, 1992



Fig 52. 'Let's Go Home' (Mono Print, 1992), solo exhibition at the Indeco gallery, Seoul, 1992



Fig 53. 'Food Chain', Silkscreen Print, Camberwell College of Arts (MA), 1990

The influence of Christianity and culture is clear to a foreigner in London. Although the popularity of Christianity has declined in the city, the evidence of traditional Christian beliefs can be found in life in general, its ethics, values and culture, and in works of art (buildings, sculpture and paintings). My impression of Western history was a product of the Christian belief system. When I looked for the roots of Western culture, man was at the top of the hierarchy of all beings, but his belief system governs his life, so religion as a symbol of human ideas is the controller of the Christian world view. This is a very different approach to that of the East, which is based on commensalisms and confers the same value on all things. One of my silkscreen prints, 'Food chain' is my interpretation of the structure of Western culture and its views (Fig 53).

To understand Western people and culture, I felt it was necessary to know the Bible which is the origin of Western religions and their world view. In 1994 I decided to study the Bible again without preconceptions. I joined a Bible class at a Korean church in London and another one at the Kensington Temple church, members of which came from more than 120 countries all around the world. It was my first experience of the Western Evangelical Church, which emphasized the Holy Spirit which exists and works today in our daily lives. This concept is similar to *Ki* in the East (Figs 54 & 55).

I began to think that one's experience of God depends on how one perceives Him. I wondered whether a powerful God might be created and empowered by our own will, although I cannot explain how this might be. The concepts and characters of God differ from religion to religion, but all have their own word for 'God'. Although I cannot be sure about what or who God is or whether God exists, as an observer I became a witness to some miraculous things which took place in that church. I guess the power or God exists separately from man's ability to understand and from human will, because the story of one's personal experience of God varies from one person to another depending on their concept, belief and cultural background.

I continuously think about this issue (relative truth) and man (as an experiencer) in daily life. By chance, in the midst of an aquarium shop, I received sudden enlightenment on the subject of relativity. Fish cannot live without water. The fish and I exist in the same place and time, but the fish can live in water and I need air instead. My series of works 'A cat looks at fish in a tank' (painting and print) symbolizes this idea. Instead of me, I show a cat as a third being which lives under the same conditions as I do. That cat looks at living fish, which can only survive in the water (Figs 56 & 57).



Fig 54. 'Genesis' (Mono Print and Silk Screen Print, 1992), MA Printmaking degree exhibition, Camberwell College of Arts (held in 'Art for offices Ltd' in London), 1992

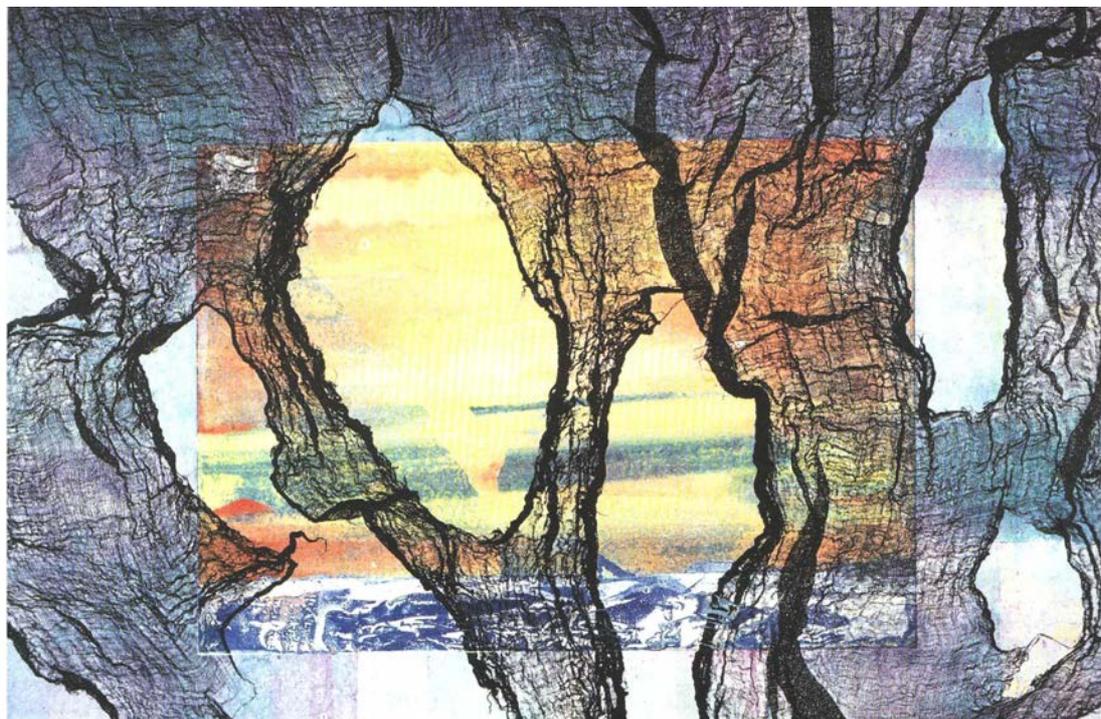


Fig 55. 'Genesis' (Silk Screen and Relief Print), solo exhibition at the Indeco Gallery, Seoul, 1992

I hybridized two different images of the world using a transparent glass fish bowl which divides the aquatic world from the airy world. I wanted to illustrate the coexistence of diverse human approaches to living, and those of the fish and cat when each accepts the other's way of life. This was highlighted by the glass fish bowl. Two totally different worlds coexist in the same time and place.



Fig 56. 'The White Cat' (1996), solo exhibition
at the Choheung Gallery, Seoul, 1998



Fig 57. 'A Cat Looks at Fish in a Tank - II', 1997

- **Doll painting (to understand others)**

Whilst I was interested in human relationships and in comparing them to different religions, cultures and races, I looked seriously at all kinds of toys and dolls which perfectly reflected our values and ways of thinking. I began to collect Disneyland toys which were given to children with their meals at McDonalds. The toys are animated creatures, but their characters are humanized in terms of mainly Western values. At that time I visited a doll museum to look at traditional antique dolls and toys as a heritage of former generations. The reason for painting toys and dolls was that I felt I perceived the original maker's view and concept of life and human relationships. I wanted to show the intentions of the doll maker through the image of the doll's character.

There are two main thrusts to my doll painting: one is concerned with popularity, which reflects modern people's values, feelings, thoughts and wishes, and the other is the reflection of human history. Doll collection books, especially the collector's *Encyclopedia of Dolls*²⁶, helped to familiarize me with the values and concepts of each period.

I used a realistic painting style to express my feelings and thoughts about the dolls. For example, the painting entitled 'What is Pluto Looking At?' (Fig 58) shows the Disneyland dog figure 'Pluto' whose face is very happy. Pluto opens his mouth wide and smiles with his tongue out and his eyes wide open to express his happiness. Instead of painting his image on the canvas from the front I painted him from the back, from his tail to his head. In this way, I ask the viewer what kind of countenance he has, what makes him so happy, as expressed by his whole body? In this painting, I also thought about what makes me happy in the real world. 'Who was I and what did I have to feel so happy about?' I questioned my evaluation of happiness and thought about my daily relationships with others. Another of the doll painting series is 'How Beautiful I Am!' (Fig 59), which is an image of Minnie Mouse and similar to a typical beautiful Western woman on TV. She wears a lovely violet party dress with a pearl necklace and long-length white gloves. Her long, thick eyelashes curl upwards. She also has a delightful smile which implies she is satisfied with her beauty. This doll is also given by McDonalds as a present to children. I liked this simple character of her image so began to paint. This painting is, to me, just a happy female, but it was an unwelcome surprise for one of my guests. When she looked at the oil painting of Minnie Mouse, she felt it was a portrait of her in search of life-values based on extravagance.

²⁶ Dorothy S. Coleman, et al. *The Collector's Encyclopedia of Dolls*. (London: Robert Hale) 1970.

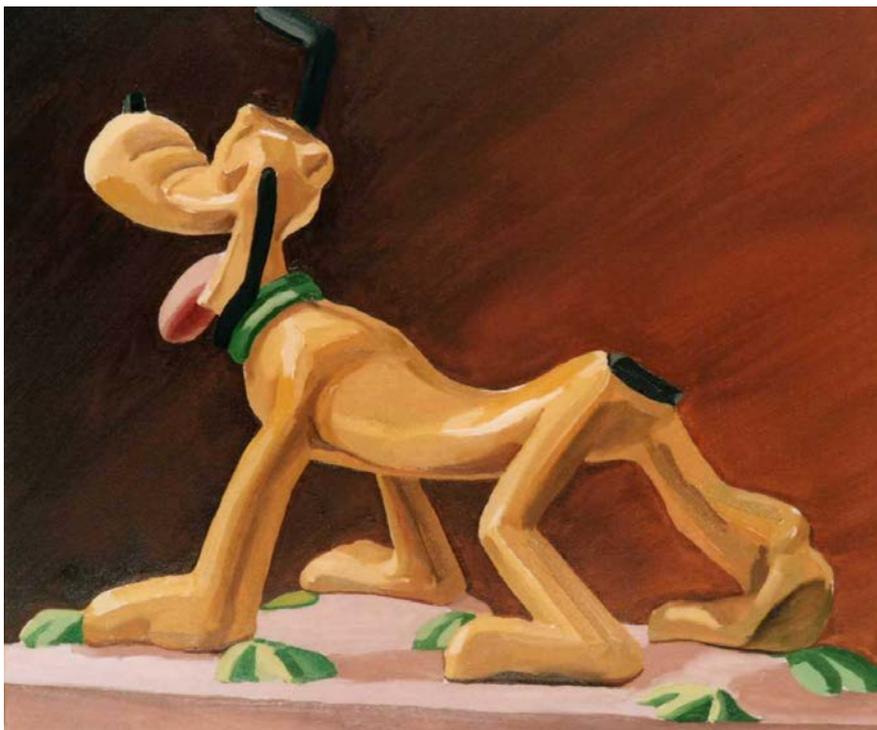


Fig 58. 'What is Pluto Looking At?', 1995



Fig 59 'How Beautiful I Am!', 1996

It was not actually my intention to make the lady feel guilt or regret. I had painted it because of my interest in Minnie Mouse's gesture and facial expression and their great similarity to people's faces in real life. The painting had made my friend cry because of her self-reflection, and the experience gave me cause to think about the power of art. Until that happened, I used to think that painting belonged to the artist, but my experience had shown that art can work independently of the artist's purpose; it can reveal its own message to different people. All depends on personal views and interpretations. The object does not have fixed meaning, but depends on the viewer's understanding based on their experience of the world.



Fig 60. 'What a Dangerous Game!', 1996

Another example of my doll paintings is an image of the Disney characters Sylvester and Tweety Pie. The painting is entitled 'What a Dangerous Game!' (Fig 60). This toy was also given to children by McDonalds and depicts Sylvester locked in a washing machine by Tweety Pie, a sweet baby bird who escapes capture by Sylvester in the most amazing ways. This is a children's toy, but the content seems cruel and sends a violent message. If I were a mother who wanted to teach her children the difference between right and wrong, maybe I would not give this toy to them to enjoy and play with. Sylvester and Tweety Pie are used as a children's toy because of the familiarity of the cartoon images. When I received the toy, I realized that we pass over dangerous ideas which might promote racism or animal maltreatment in real society. The doll paintings showed two different things. One is the world of painting children's toys, but the other is the message that we should wake up to what we have thoughtlessly done without having asked the permission of others.

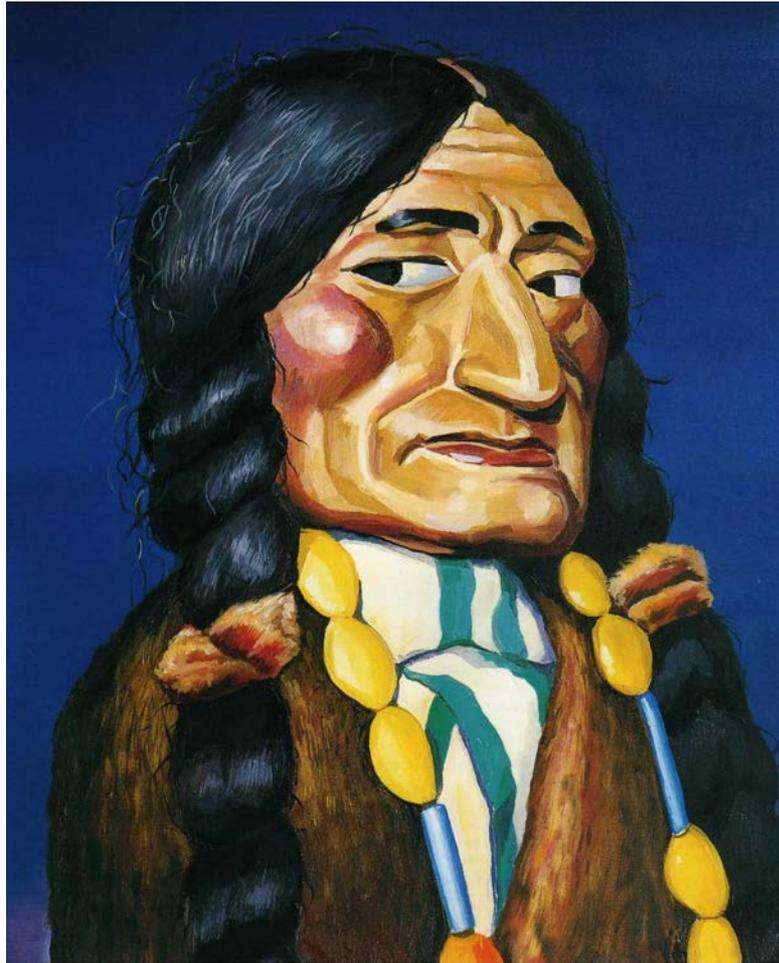


Fig 61. The American Indian Doll' (1997), exhibit at solo exhibition at the Choheung Gallery, Seoul, 1998

I was also concerned about mankind's historical way of living, as shown by an indigenous North American Indian. I found the photo image of this Indian doll in a book on doll history.

The 'American Indian Doll' (Fig 61), which I painted, was made in the early 20th Century in America. His face showed the main characteristics of an American Indian, with squared cheeks, a braided hair style and brown coloured skin, but an extraordinary thing about his face touched my heart. His eyes looked nervously to the side instead of to the front. He does this as a precaution, because he is conscious of the threat to his safety. Most dolls' eyes face the front. The book said that this doll used to be played with by white American children in the early 20th Century. This reference exposed the history of the doll and touched my heart, making me sad as a human being.

It is commonly asserted that we 'should not steal from others' but history shows that we do not adhere to this. This made me think about absolute and relative

truth. The latter is often believed to be the real truth by many people. I feel sorry for the Indian people who passively handed over their land and rights. The Indian painting is symbolic of a big question for me about the values and manners I would like to adopt and how to show the gap between knowledge and actions.



Fig 62. 'Japanese Traditional Doll', 1990



Fig 63. 'Korean Traditional Doll', 1997

Other doll paintings were concerned with identity and culture. My paintings 'Japanese Traditional Doll Painting' (Fig 62) and 'Korean Doll Painting' (Fig 63) belong to this subject area. I saw a traditional image of a Japanese doll when I was invited to a Japanese friend's house in London. The doll successfully expressed the typical characteristics of the Japanese, such as the small, long eye line, small lips and small, flat nose. I liked it very much because of its sincerity about the Japanese identity.

I compared it to my Korean traditionally dressed doll which was bought from a duty free shop. She has no typical Korean characteristics or identity in her face. The only thing which marks her out as Korean is her traditional dress. This made me think about identity and the influence of globalization! The Korean doll has large eyes which cover almost half of her face; this is pretty, but bears no similarity to a typical Korean's eyes. In contrast to the Japanese doll, when I looked at her face, I could find no Korean characteristics at all. These two doll images reflect the designer's ability to characterize who they are.

The doll series of paintings is a visual diary, filtered in terms of 'Who we are'

and ‘What we think about ourselves.’ Below is Francis Tinsley’s comment about these paintings, which were shown at a solo exhibition in Seoul in 1998:

‘Park Sung-Sil’s eye does not fall casually upon her toy objects, they are chosen carefully and brought forward out of their daily existence and isolated before us. They are painted in the bright cartoon world which they inhabit. What are we to interpret from these tiny creatures? It is a parallel world in which these toys represent an equivalent meaning in our own world.’²⁷

The doll paintings were my way of questioning our identity through representations of different doll characters. They were my main project and subject matter between 1993 and 1997. In 1993, however, a strange experience involving a plant began to change my work.

- **Weed painting (dialogues with plants and goldfish)**

When I studied art in London, I came into contact with people from a number of nationalities and cultures from all around the world, all living together in one place.

I returned to Korea in 1992, shortly after finishing the MA printmaking course, and discovered that I had changed when faced with Korean nature (the mountains for example) and situations. When I look back at my memories of home, people, environment, hometown and so on, they are no longer as they were. They have changed but I have also changed after living in a foreign country, with another set of views in another environment. As a mountain bike has different gears, when I am in Korea the Korean concepts begin to work, but when I return to the UK, I slip into another gear of understanding. There is no right or wrong, it is just that a different set of value cycle operates in each place. I have visited Italy, France and Spain and although these are all part of Europe and like one family, they have their own energy, mood, and relationship with nature.

I experienced something similar when visiting Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Shanghai and Beijing. All are East Asian cities in China and in all there was a different mood and atmosphere. As a foreigner, my inner cycle was unconsciously ready to work and to make me understand the nature of the people, their culture and recent ways of living with nature.

²⁷ Francis Tinsley. The Preface to Park Sung-Sil Solo Exhibition. (Seoul: Chohung Gallery, 1998).

I found that I was a stranger and a foreigner in Seoul - my own country. I wanted to seek out my identity; it was more important to be a human on the earth than to be called a Korean. I accepted my identity as a human rather than as British or Korean and realized that my views on and approach to the world were very different from before I went to the UK to study. One day in 1993, after I had had this idea about identity and had again begun to enjoy and appreciate nature at home, I experienced something new and unusual.

Dialogue with nature

It was an ordinary day like any other. I visited my parents and was relaxing in their big bedroom which was surrounded by a lot of plants in pots. I was enjoying classical music and lay down on the warm traditional Korean floor; I was really relaxed after a long period of tension whilst studying abroad. Whilst listening to the music I suddenly heard a voice calling to me. It was a bright, friendly voice - a clear, energetic and pure voice which called "Hey!", but it was not a voice from outside which could be heard with the ear. The voice shook the whole of my senses (I cannot describe exactly where it came from). I sat up and looked around me and immediately replied to it. It was neither imagination nor a dream. This was happening in my ordinary waking daily life. I was concentrating fully, but not analyzing the situation, which would only have slowed down the telepathy like senses with which I directly communicated with the voice. I liken my condition to the Alpha brain wave state, proven by Dr. Hans Berger²⁸, which maximizes creativity in the relaxed and thinking mind. In this condition,

²⁸ The Alpha Brain State: In 1910, German Psychiatrist Hans Berger (1873–1941) proved that a human brain has four different levels of consciousness which are determined by brain wave frequency. He counted how many brain waves occurred in a second and distinguished the four levels of brain activity, which can be seen on an EEG (short for electroencephalogram or electroencephalograph). The four brain wave patterns which are visible on an EEG –monitor consist of oscillating electrical voltages in the brain, but they are very tiny voltages, just a few millionths of a volt: Delta (0.5~4 cycles per second), Theta (4~7), Alpha (7~14) and Beta (14~21).

The Beta condition is associated with the five senses (sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch). The Alpha condition has mainly to do with our mentality when we contemplate, research, and meditate. It is accepted as the level of inner consciousness, which surpasses the limitations of time and space. But Alpha brain waves are not always present. When someone is in a deep sleep or feels fear, anger, anxiety, depression or worry, no alpha brain waves are detected. The Theta condition is a state of deep- inner-consciousness, usually accepted as the level of awareness, and of healing and creative power. Delta brain waves are seen only in the deepest stages of sleep.

a person is not asleep, but their inner consciousness is working effectively to achieve a deeper level of thinking, beyond the limits of space and time. The Alpha state is a state of deep concentration, meditation and contemplation.²⁹

At that time my mind was quite relaxed and peaceful. I felt no need to analyze or seriously question what was happening. It happened so quickly and so perfectly without rational thought or the need to 'jump' into the moment. This was the first time I had seen this being. Instead of being afraid of the 'stranger', I was curious and happy to come face-to-face with it. We were able to communicate intuitively and telepathically, without speaking. When I thought about what I wanted to say, it immediately read my mind and replied straight away without the need for spoken language. The process worked like a game of table tennis. Its appearance was very different from my own. It explained to me that instead of a human body, with one head, two hands and two legs, it had many thorny hands, no head and no legs.

It told me to touch its skin and to feel how fresh, content and healthy it was. I did, and when I asked "Who are you?", instead of telling me its name, it answered telepathically, saying that we had been friends since I was a child.

Our conversation was not based on logic or knowledge learned from school and this made it clear that, although our ways of existing seemed different from one another, all individuals are precious. When I felt that our friendship was filled with happiness and trust, the being said that it was time to return to the normal world. I did not want to let it go because I really liked it and felt that it was a faithful friend. So I begged it not to go, and asked it to come and live with me. It laughed and said "I will never live without you. I will always be with you".

This all occurred so quickly and unexpectedly that I almost believed it was a short dream or my imagination, because when I readjusted to the ordinary world I found that the thing with which I had held a conversation was a cactus; my mom's favourite plant. The symptoms of amazement and shock did not disappear even though I tried to believe my experience had not been real. Afterwards, I looked around at the detail of the room with a critical eye. Everything appeared unchanged; the clock on the wall was still moving, Pavarotti was still singing, the towel was still on the hanger, and none of the plants had changed position, not even the cactus. The shocking moment passed, but my feelings could not be erased. There were two different ways to think about what had

²⁹ Shin Yong-Chul. "To Overcome IMF Stress by Ki-Kong," *Shin Dong A*, April 1999, Dec 2008.
< http://www.donga.com/docs/magazine/new_donga/9804/nd98040220.html>

happened. One was to ignore it and treat it as a short dream (although I felt sure that it had been real), and the other was to question myself about it and to ponder the idea that the world was different from the world I knew! Since that time, I take two views on all that happens in my life. I started to believe that there is another dimension of truth and the world, which cannot be explained or understood by human fixed logic and reason.

This kind of conversation with other beings occurred once again a few days later. This time, a goldfish in a huge fish tank in a coffee shop explained to me by telepathy that genesis has not yet finished. Genesis is in progress here and now, whether in Korea or the UK. People who are conscious and have their eyes open to this are able to witness the living genesis every day. “You live in a live genesis now.” I could not share these kinds of experience with others because they were inexplicable and nonsense even to me at that time, but they really happened in my life independently of my free will. Thinking rationally, I asked myself, ‘What was this? What was it for? Why did it happen to me? These events had changed my view of other living beings, including plants and goldfish; maybe nature consists not only of materials and physical systems, but has its own mind and spirit, just as we do. I was looking for rational answers, but there were no clues to help me understand. I began to accept that I may have had a spiritual experience similar to those of other religious believers and spiritual seekers throughout history. This might be called an encounter with the Holy Spirit in the West or facing the inner-self, ‘Real I’ or Buddha in Eastern philosophies and religions.

After I met with Zen Buddhist monks in Seoul, Korea, and later read some spiritual books, I began to understand what had happened to me, and also something of my spiritual state. I introduce the idea of different levels of spiritual consciousness and ‘the Zen Circle’ diagram in Section B, Chapter 3, under the heading ‘Who am I and Who are you?’. According to Zen practice, when a person opens their mind and is released from the ‘egoistic I’, s/he naturally experiences a state of calm, peace and clear consciousness. This is called ‘great I’ or ‘nothingness’. In this state of mind, a person is able to perceive the truth, when things appear as if reflected in a mirror, just as themselves, without change or distortion. This condition can be reached not only through meditation and chanting but also in daily life, whenever the mind does not belong to the ‘egoistic I’. This level of consciousness stops all thinking and judgment, and requires complete contemplation with a clean mind which is unaffected by conditions or situation. This is real freedom from all knowledge and fixed consciousness, which are strongly influenced by the outside and by others. According to Zen, this level of consciousness, without preconception, is our real-self position, and shows that we are all one even though each figure exists separately.

When my preconceptions are suspended, free of self-control I have access to the truth, just as a mirror reflects whatever is there. The kind of experience in which the fish let me know the real status of genesis can be compared with the Buddhist state of 'sudden enlightenment', in which a clear understanding is achieved without education or any effort to attain it. When I listened to the goldfish, another part of my brain realized that this could not be happening in terms of my rational ability to think or imagine. It was happening beyond my ability.

Even though these great things had happened to me, I could not fully define them or decide on how to reflect them in my day-to-day living. I was left to observe them and at the same time to move on with my daily life. Nobody could help me to accept these occurrences. As previously, I read many books and researched the spirituality of different religions, mainly Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism and modern Hinduism. In my painting I became more concerned with my true feelings about the life around me.



Fig 64. From a series of 'Cactus' paintings, 1993

Having experienced communion with a cactus and a goldfish, I was no longer content to use abstraction, but chose figurative painting instead - not to describe outward appearances as photography can, but to portray visual meanings. I believe that

the shape of a thing is not only a vessel for the content but also naturally reflects its inner being. How can I express the real vitality which emanates from cactus skin through abstract expression? I do not think it is adequate. So with paint I describe the healthy skin of the cactus on a wide canvas, using a mix of oil paints, and employing all my emotions. This is something beyond reality, something that my six senses (sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell and feel) interpret. I tried to convey its cheerful but modest character against an empty background which is symbol of silence and calmness (Fig 64). From 1994 until now, I have experienced similar moments wherever I go sometimes with plants, sometimes with insects and animals. Plants were my main subject in this period (1993-2000). Whenever a subject touched my heart, I stopped to 'feel' it and would later paint it. This became the 'Alien' series of works. I eventually began the 'Weed' series because of the variety of ways in which weeds could exist and because of the annual cycle of plant life which was unique and had a beauty of its own. The smallest weed in the street follows and must live according to natural law. It seemed a miracle to me since my view had changed (Figs 65, 66, 67 & 68).

Every living thing looked like an evangelist or a magician to me, quietly letting me know what was the truth and how it worked. I began to think about the status of man in this world, not as the creator but as one of the creatures who feel, enjoy and think. I found a great deal in common with the teachings of the Eastern world. Chapter 3 discusses this in more detail.

The painting 'He and I' (Fig 68) is an example of my work in this period. In 1994, I returned to London after a year in Korea and settled down in Raynes Park which is near Wimbledon and Richmond Park. Here, I was able to enjoy nature as a living environment. I started to cultivate plants in the porch near the large-paned living room window which looked out onto the rear garden. When winter came, it seemed that nothing had survived in the porch and garden, but one day in April the next year I realized that a weed had started to grow there by chance.

Two spindly plants began to grow without any care from me. Two of them looked like my husband and me because, where one was very healthy and sturdy, the other was thin and sensitive, like my husband. They were both the same Kind of plant but their individuality and character showed through, just as it does with humans. Sometimes, when I stopped in front of them, I received the message "life is just like this." Later I read in a book that this message is the main teaching of Zen Buddhist master, Seung Sahn.

Another warm spring came and new weeds began to emerge from the withered

old bodies. It make me cry and taught me that even though the shape of the new plant seemed different from the old ones, it was not different in every way. Shape may differ, but the origin remains the same. To me it was as if an inner being had chosen to live inside a new body, but the original life itself had continued. I accepted the teaching of this cycle of life as a golden natural law which can also be applied to human life. My body is separated from my father and mother, but am I really different from them? I began to look at all beings from this point of view, although when I met bad people I sometimes strongly wanted to deny that we all come from the one.

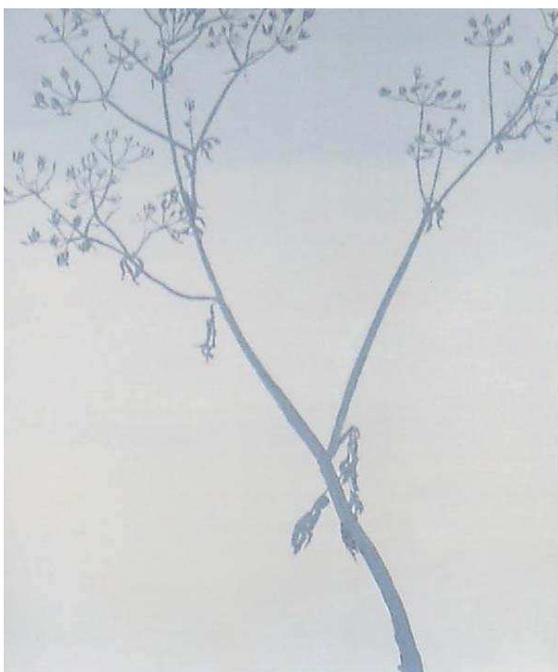


Fig 65. 'The Weed', 1998



Fig 66. 'The Weed', 1998



Fig 67. 'The Weed', 1996



Fig 68. 'The Weed (He and I)', 1996

'Untitled' (Figs 69 & 70) are important paintings for me because the dried wild chamomile taught me to submit to nature. This flower was in the front garden near the gate to Alma Mansion when I returned to live in Hendon between 2000 and 2007. Whenever I passed through the gate I saw this flower. It illustrated for me various energy levels and stages in the cycle of nature through features which varied according to the season: as a little bud, an open flower, a withered and disfigured bloom and a crumpled and disintegrating plant. One cold winter day, I felt that the spirit of the flower was about to leave the dried-up body of the plant. The petals had already fallen and only traces of the desiccated calyx and stem remained. The scene was reminiscent of a sacred spiritual ceremony. The impression was so precious and holy that I just had to paint it.



Fig 69. 'Untitled', exhibit at the solo exhibition at the Artside Gallery, Seoul, 2002



Fig 70. 'Untitled', exhibit at the solo exhibition at the Artside Gallery, Seoul, 2002

Chapter 3 Alien Painting Series (2000-2007)

- Introduction

I completed the doll and weed paintings mainly between 1994 and 1999 whilst holding down a teaching job. In this period many unexpected things happened, including the sudden death of my mother-in-law.

I decided to drop out of social activities in South London, and returned to Alma Mansion (which in my mind is my home in the UK) where I quietly faced what had happened to me, meditating and concentrating on painting as a diary to confirm who I was.

- **Who am I and Who are you?**

Biblical scriptures did not help me to understand the phenomena in my life. Every day, when writing my diary, I would ask the question ‘What is God?’ and wish for an answer. I was looking for a wider view or paradigm for personality and others, and the interaction between these. Gradually, I began to put together a definition of my identity based on ideas from many books. I was interested in the Zen Buddhist approach to world views and identity especially those of Zen Master Seung Sahn (1927-2004). The main difference between the teachings of Buddhism and Christianity lies in the definition of ‘I’, which is interpreted as ‘the Buddha (God)’ in Buddhism, and as ‘the sinner’ in Christianity.

In Buddhism, true-self is beyond the mind, which can be used to realize real-self or misused to believe and follow non-reality. All depends on one’s knowledge and control of one’s own mind and on realizing the transience of life.³⁰ To know oneself is a common teaching of Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism, and modern Hinduism. Wang Shou-Jen stressed the importance of spiritual cultivation which needs us first of all to understand that each and every one of us possesses the original mind, which is one with the universe.³¹ These views on ‘I’ are similar to some of the teachings of modern Hindu philosophers: Osho Rajneesh Chandra Mohan Jain (1931-1990) and Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986). Also, as a BA student in Korea, I had had a chance to become familiar with Sri Ramana Maharishi (1879-1950) and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897-1981).

³⁰ Seok Hea-Yun. *The Teaching of Buddha*. (Seoul: Hyunamsa Press, 2001) p. 38-39.

³¹ Fung Yu-Lan. *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*. (London: The Free Press, 1997) p. 315.

Sri Ramana Maharishi's approach to questioning identity was fresh and understandable. He pointed out what is not 'I' to help the reader understand and distinguish it from the real-self.

'The body, which consists of bone and flesh, is not me. The six senses are not me. The five activities, seeing, speaking, holding, excreting and reproducing, are not me, and Prana³², which controls five combinations of *Ki*, is not me. Mind of conscious and unconscious thought is not me. What am I, if all things are not me? After denying everything else, only 'awareness', which observes these things, remains. It is I.'³³

This view is shared by Taoism which also accepts the mind as 'consciousness'. According to Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897-1981), there are two different forms of 'I am': one is 'the verbal I am' which means 'I' (small I, or physical identity) and the other is 'the non-verbal I am' and is the glue of individuality, the primal illusion which holds the mirage together. 'The non-verbal I am' has no thoughts, memory, emotions, associations, perceptions, attention or intentions and is the gateway and touchstone of nothingness. Non-verbal I am is the stateless state that is prior to the verbal I am.³⁴

Witnessing is a phenomenon, which is an aggregate of thinking. It will disappear when 'I' (the verbal I am) disappears because it is originally an illusion.³⁵ So spiritual practice is a consistent attempt to cross over from the verbal to the non-verbal I am.

These teachers explain that individuality appears when we think of the body as 'I'. But if there is no body, then no chemicals can come together to form 'I am'. If there is no 'I am', there is no vehicle for 'consciousness' to project thought, and at last no ego remains.³⁶ Zen Master Seung Sahn gives an example to explain why all different beings are one. When we buy a pack of animal shaped cookies we can distinguish one from the other (the cat is different from the dog), but originally the cookies all came from one dough. So there is no 'you' essentially separated from I. We are all a different reflection of one thing, the true-self, which is the thing to look for and also to be shown. This teaching helped me to understand that my true identity 'I' (Buddha) is different from

³² Prana: Prana is a Sanskrit word that refers to a vital, life-sustaining force of living beings and vital energy in natural processes of the universe.

³³ Sri Ramana Maharishi. Who Am I, Trans. Lee Ho-Jun. (Seoul: Chunga Press, 1992) p. 15.

³⁴ A fascinating discussion of these concepts can be found in Stephen Wolinsky. I Am that I Am. (Capitola, California: Stephen Wolinsky PhD, 2000).

³⁵ The reader should consult Sri Ramana Maharishi. op.cit pp. 23-71.

³⁶ Stephen Wolinsky. p. 39.

‘the ego.’ Instead of existing forever, the small concept of I, ‘the ego’ comes and goes. In truth, the viewer is one with the object. Even the tree which I look at is ‘I.’

Zen Master Seung Sahn drew a diagram which shows different levels of understanding of oneself through Zen circular meditation (Fig 71). He points out five different positions on a circle, with the last of these overlapping the first. The points are numbered 0, 90, 180, 270 and 360 degrees (the last of which is in the same position as 0 degrees). He explains the degrees of understanding as follows: At 0 degrees, the world of Small I is attached to name and form. In this condition, man associates with thinking and attachment. Thinking, in this position, is linked with desire, and agony. In here all things are divided relatively, as, for example, good and bad, like and dislike, and happiness and distress. The second level is the world of ‘existence and non-existence’, which is called ‘Karma I.’ In this understanding of the world, people accept that ‘everything is empty.’ Instead of the attachment to name and form at 0°, at 90° it is easy to cling to ‘thinking’. The third level, shown at 180° degrees, is the level at which one realizes there is no form and no emptiness. This is known as ‘Nothing I’ where there is ‘True emptiness’.

‘Nothing I’, may seem like real nothingness, but it is false. This level of I is attached to ‘Nothingness’ as well as to the ego, which still exists to control it. It is the other form of attachment to ‘Nothingness’. The fourth level of understanding (270°) is ‘absolute experience Free I’ which is the world in which magic and miracles happen. At all of these points, whether ‘Emptiness’, ‘Nothing I’, or ‘Freedom I’, each clings to its own attachments. The 360° degree level which is the fifth level of understanding appears to be the same as the 0 degree level, but has turned a whole circle and returned to the same starting point. The difference between 0° and 360° degrees is ‘attachment’. This level of awakening was expressed by a monk as ‘Mountain is mountain, water is water.’ It seems exactly the same as the normal level of discipline, and the world seems the same as before, but the depth is different.³⁷

These teachings reminded me of when I was seven years old and felt that even though the mountains and fields seemed different in material form, they come from the same *Ki*. I was surprised to remember what I told myself a long time ago.

³⁷ Mitchell Stephen. The Compass of Zen (Zen Master Seung Sahn). (Boston & London: Shambhala Press, 1997) p. 291.

The Zen Circle

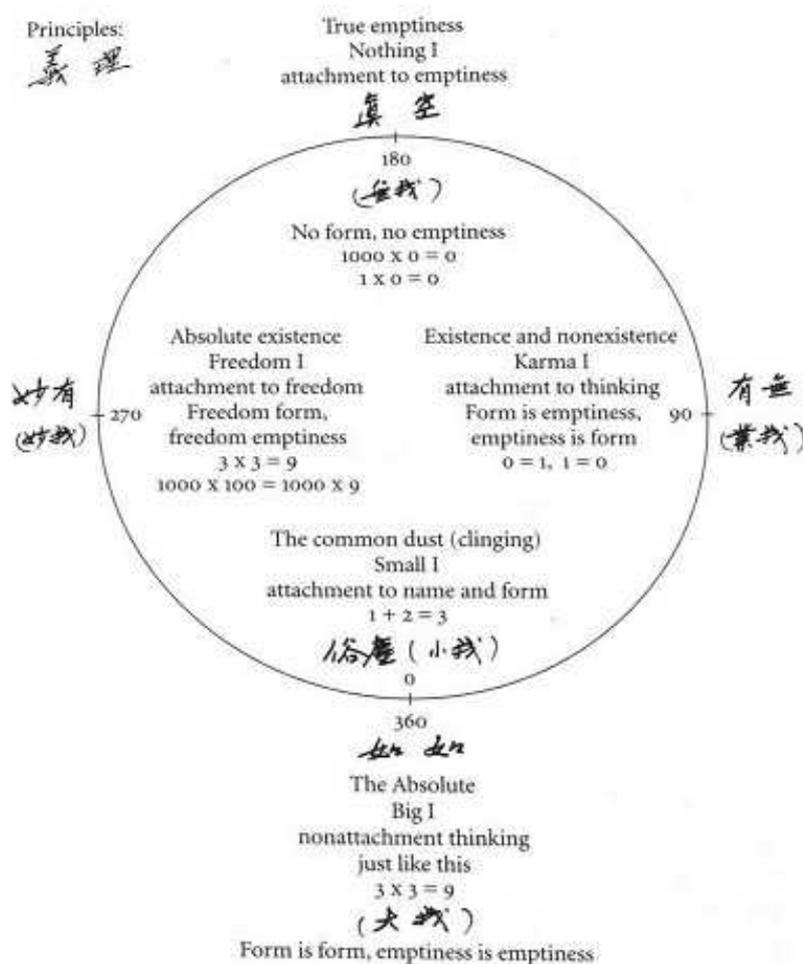


Fig 71. The Zen Circle, 1998

- **Existence and recognition**

Alma Mansion was a community of at least 80 people living together in one building (four main buildings facing onto a garden in the middle). Living there gave me lots of experience of different people, their understanding and values because the tenants, many of them missionaries, were from the USA, Brazil, Scotland, Poland, the South African countries, China, Hong Kong and Korea. There were also mixed generations, so not only cultural, but also generation gaps were in evidence. Ways and styles of clothing, eating, and housing were different but the most important thing I discovered was the difference in people's inner minds, which existed above all gaps of culture, nationality or race. I began to realize that my concepts of right and wrong, values and ways of understanding were not absolute but were part of an array of such things.

The environment at Alma Mansion was precious to me because it allowed me to feel the connection between natural beings, one to another. Most of my time I spent in the garden observing other living things, cultivating the vegetable garden, reading books and painting. When I came into contact with pure, natural things, I would automatically abandon my fixed views. This was a fresh and happy approach to knowing other people and beings. In this way I was able to fully sense the object I was looking at and to distil its essence, which was unique to that living thing as an individual but also exposed natural law. In observing the object I also became witness to myself; just as one recognizes winter and summer as different seasons (relative knowledge), I realized who I was and how different physical objects can exist at the same moment and be recognized by other beings.



Fig 72. 'The Snails' (2007), exhibit at '2007 Seoul Art Fair', Seoul Arts Center, 2007

For example, the snail (Fig. 72) I met in the morning on the way to my studio seemed a curious figure, moving in its own way along the ground. We exist at the same time and in the same place in totally different ways, not only do our appearances differ but our physical systems as well. How wonderful and magical this is. I observed it for long enough to fully appreciate it for myself, before painting its image on canvas.

The main purpose of my research was to study the differences in status of 'life and death'. Dying usually has a negative image in real life but, as I mentioned before, I

had become a witness to the ongoing vital power between old generation and new, through the annual changes in the plants around me. So I painted dried weeds, which touched my heart. Examples of this idea can be found in artworks of mine which were shown in a solo exhibition in Bremen in 1999 and Seoul in 2002.

My painting 'The Weed' (Fig 73) is an image of the dollar plant which has a specially shaped seed. A few seeds are displayed within a circle of silver tissue which looks like traditional Asian transparent paper. I found this plant in the corner of the front garden in autumn. When the sun shone on the plant from the front, the seeds would suddenly appear in silhouette, their existence given away by the light. Even though it had started to dry out, this was a perfect display of the plant's essence and beauty. The aesthetic view and materialistic figure harmonized and coexisted in one dollar plant and could not be separated.

To express the essence of subjectivity in my artwork of this period, I used media which need to be worked quickly. A mixture of Indian Ink and simple water-based colour, for instance, requires a careful balance between the fluid, intuitive speed and action. My great interest in painting these images was to express the whole sense of an object rather than to mechanically describe what was seen. In traditional Eastern painting, simple colour and simple expression have long been the preferred media for distilling spiritual intuition. I also find that it is easier using this approach to express freely what I wish to show - like writing poetry rather than a novel. I painted sensitive lines which symbolized reality, humanity and ontological character in the vertical lines of the plant stems. The Korean art critic, Kim Mi-Jin stated that these paintings describe the spiritual world. One representative painting is 'Untitled IV' (Fig 74). The background is painted white and tinted gray, and on top of this there is a thin line drawing of a weak tree pictured in dark grey tones in the middle of the paper. It represents 'being and non-being' and 'natural law and materialism', which cannot be separated from nature itself.³⁸

She mentioned that the characteristics of my weed and doll series paintings revealed two different elements: Asian identity from the West; and the spiritual and material, natural and human, being and non-being, in time, space and matter. These works illustrate my search for the spiritual, universal and metaphysical world which are connected with the ideas behind the doll painting series. The doll paintings show two sides of the human world (for example, right or wrong) which is governed mainly by

³⁸ Kim Mi-Jin. The Preface to Park Sung-Sil Solo Exhibition. (Seoul: Artside Gallery, 2002).

materialism and reality, whereas, the plant series seeks out the world of metaphysics, which demonstrates simplicity and a significance reminiscent of the world of meditation.

These two painting series reflected the laws of the universe, human and natural, by harmonizing *yin* and *yang*, the two relativities which were known to circulate elements and to affect balance in reality. My understanding of existence and death is based on the painting ‘Corn fields in Seoul’ (2003, Fig 75), which is connected with a memory of my father. This image is linked with a visit to Seoul when my father had an urgent health problem in 2002.

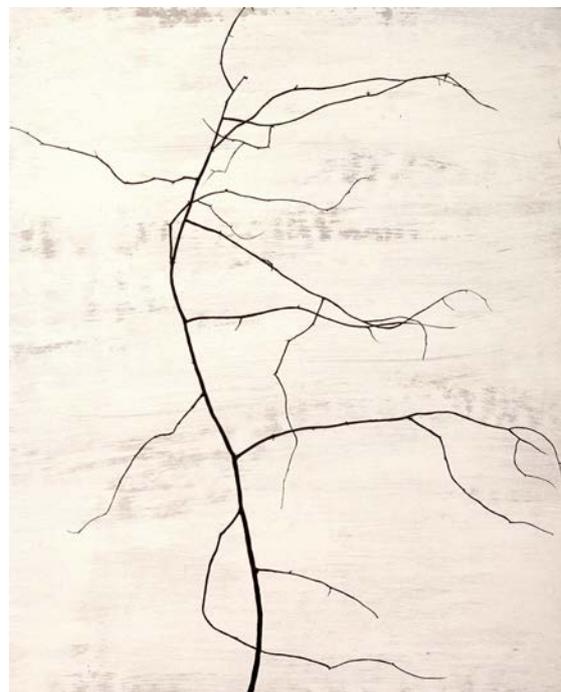


Fig 73. ‘The Weed (Dollar Plant)’(2002), exhibit at solo exhibition at the Hakgojae Gallery, Seoul, 2007

Fig 74. ‘Untitled IV’ (2001), exhibit at solo exhibition in the Artside Gallery, Seoul, 2002

Like others, I respected and loved him not only as my father but as a human who was warm hearted towards other beings. I have a clear memory of his assertion that we should ‘kill animals for food and sympathy’ when I was a little girl of seven, but I remember what a soft, Kind soul he was from my memories of everyday life. When we lived in the country Muju-Ahnsung was too small a town to have its own butcher’s shop. When my grandmother asked my father to kill a chicken for dinner, I had a chance to watch. The first time he suggested I go away, but I stayed because I was curious. Even though he practiced Taekwondo and Judo, he could not hit the chicken because he was too gentle.

My grandmother complained and suggested he kill the chicken with one blow and pass it to her to prepare for dinner, but as time passed the chicken revived and ran as the boiling water was prepared. A couple of times we tried to catch the bird and at last we had a delicious chicken meal for dinner, but my father did not eat it. He did not explain to us directly, but my sisters and I, despite having enjoyed the meat, could feel his deep sorrow about that chicken's demise. That father, who was a well known pharmacist and Chinese doctor, healed cancer patients but could not cure himself of Mediterranean thalassemia from the age of sixty. When I went home to see him we had a conversation about who we were and the connection between body and mind. One day we looked at a book of photographs entitled, 'sky burial',³⁹ which showed images of a Tibetan burial service; it was both shocking and challenging. In the Buddhist tradition, when people die, they believe that the body is made up of four elements (earth, water, fire and air) which need to return to nature. The real self is the spirit which goes home to the sky. The corpse is given to the eagles as food. My father was upset and angry about this alternative concept of the body, but at that time I was too young to know about physical death and lightly replied to him "body is body and spirit is spirit". I eventually lived through my father's death and funeral service and now my aim is to understand the existence of life and death in my daily life and also in my paintings.

The context for the painting 'Corn Fields in Seoul' (Figs 75 & 76) is a memory of a day at hospital with my father in 2002. He suggested I look around and relax whilst he was being seen. The Samsung Hospital is famous in Seoul. It is near a mountain and there are plenty of cultivated vegetables, plants and trees nearby.

It was the middle of autumn, but there was full sunshine beneath the light clouds. I was sorry about his plight and a little angry about man's fate: Why must we die? As I walked, I stopped in front of a corn field. The plants were huge, tall and regularly planted and seemed like trees. When I looked more closely at the scene, I discovered that all the corn had been removed from the stalks. The harvest was finished. Suddenly I understood the meaning of 'unconditional love' on their part. Man treats them as a food provider and not as individual beings. Although they are different, we share the same cycle of life and conditions. As a member of the human race I was sorry for them.

³⁹ Park Ha-Sun. Heavenly Funeral Rites. (Seoul: Communicationswawoo Press, 2002)



Fig 75. 'Corn Fields in Seoul', 2003



Fig 76. 'Corn Fields in Seoul' exhibit at the PhD degree show at Brighton University, 2006

Telepathically I understood the message from the corn, “it is love”, given to us without boast or conditions. The feelings bound up with this scene overlap with the memory of what my father gave me. He gave his love, wholeheartedly, without condition. The corn stalks which stood firmly under the sun seemed like martyrs, waiting for the end without complaint after their work was finished. I cannot interpret exactly what I felt in language, but even after a year had passed the image was still in my mind. I painted the moment on large format tripartite Korean paper with Indian Ink and water-based colour which effectively reflected my mindset and the gesture of the corn directly on the surface. I chose monochromatic black and white with large images of the corn stalks, closely displayed. This emphasized the various grey tones on the huge white background, helping to distinguish prominent objects as spiritual subjects (paper size: height 210 cm x length 450 cm).



Fig 77. 'The Bee' (2006), solo exhibition at the Hakgojae Gallery, Seoul, 2007.

Fig 78. 'A Striped Mosquito' (2007), exhibit at the '2007 Seoul Art Fair', Seoul Arts Center, 2007



Figs 79 & 80. Photo images of 'Duck and Duckling in the front and rear gardens of Alma Mansion' in the spring in Hendon, London, 2006

As a result of this, my relationship with other living things became more meaningful. I had an opportunity to meet homeless cats, chickens (belonging to Mr. Flood, an old gardener at Alma Mansion), a duck, who regularly visited the house to lay her eggs in spring, foxes who eventually killed Mr. Flood's chickens, pigeons, sparrows, many flowers and plants, ants, snails, and at the public telephone box, rats, mosquitos and dogs. It was as if they had been sent to show me nature and its laws. They became models for my paintings, which are a continual visual diary recording feelings and thoughts on who I and others are (Figs 79 & 80). The painting of the dead bee I found in my front room, prompted me to imagine how different it must be not to be alive, and also to wonder what is life's power? (Fig 77).

During the time I experienced telepathic conversations with other beings, another mysterious thing happened to me involving healing power. It began when I visited Korea to see my father in 2002. Although he was terminally ill, I found I was able to mediate and channel a healing power which helped him. I knew his condition

was a natural thing, to be accepted and not to be interfered with by humans. However, for patients who are not fatally ill, my healing works strongly. It does not work for everyone. I knew an individual at that time who was later to be healed by me.

I also sometimes have the ability to practice remote viewing. Without the need for the other person to explain, I can feel his personality. Like mixing oils to make a certain colour, I can see each element of their character and personality and can distinguish where it came from. I was surprised at what was occurring between my two worlds - the rational, real, world and the spiritual - without the aid of a teacher; I believe it stems from the power of love. I bear in mind the teaching of Zen Master Seung Sahn's circle of spiritual levels. According to his explanation, when a mind reaches the spiritual level of 270 degrees, 'Freedom I', it has some discipline over what happens. When denied the power of 'egoistic I', the natural identity of 'I' expands and miraculous things begin to happen naturally.

After the solo exhibition, on visiting a Buddhist temple to refresh myself, something similar happened with someone else. He was a former monk who had returned to the mundane world because he had married. When his first baby was born disabled he determined that this had happened because of his greed and desire to return to the everyday world. He was confused, felt guilty because of his fixed concept of religion, and had suffered for the next 17 years. He was unable to sleep for even four hours a day. I did not know the reason behind his discomfort, but when I first met him I could see an image which showed him folded up in a tiny space, inside a very small box which he himself had made. So when we shook hands as he left the temple, I sent *Ki* to him. He also was surprised to realize that there was energy coming from my hand and passing into his body. It was not my interest in his life history that prompted this, I just wanted to help him with the mistaken ideas he had forged for himself, which were the cause of his long-term suffering. After he had confirmed that he was healed he began to cling to and worship me, but I shared the truth with him. I am not the god he had imagined - just a person, who is sometimes used by the ultimate reality (God). I am not perfect, and do not know why I was able to help him. I felt sympathy for him and all this then happened by chance. So thanks to his Buddha. I pointed out the wrong in his fixed preconception which had caused him suffering. He believed that all bad things happen as a punishment from Buddha, when in actual fact his problems came from himself, not the Buddha. The baby was born with a problem with some material part of the body, but this was not a punishment. After healing, the monk relaxed and sobbed and was unable to speak, so I wanted to ease his mind with a hymn which I had learned in church when I was a child at the Buddhist temple. How wonderful it is: I had learned that various doctrines of belief do not matter and that there are many ways to go to the

same place. God is everywhere which includes people, nature, the church - and the Buddhist temple as well.

Also, I started to believe in non-dualism between the spirit and body after I experienced my father's last day on earth. It happened when I returned to study in London after a trip home to Seoul to see my father in September. After I sensed that I had the power to heal, even though I was in London I was able to send healing power to him. I knew that he could not recover from his sickness and that his symptoms were those of his fatal illness. I had no information or resources which could help me to understand my ability or what was happening in my life, so I just accepted what I had at that time and learned how to use it myself. The power of remote viewing also came to me by chance. I often meditated, which can calm the mind and clean and set it free from preconceptions. I usually imagined my father and visited him (in spirit) to give him vitality. One day I saw the image of his body like burnt wood with no remaining vitality. I looked for a spiritual channel to connect with his body. My soul accepted that this was the last time I would make this journey, but as a daughter in this world I wanted to share life and vitality with him. During my meditation I (my soul) would visit his room, send energy to him and return. On 14th November, 2002, when I meditated about my father, he was not in his room or in the house. His bed was empty. Next day I received a call from my family to say that he had died in the night in hospital. At the time of his death, my father visited me in London in spiritual form. He was very cheerful and explained that after he had left his body, he was blissfully free from the limitations of space and time. (There was no confusion in my mind about what was happening. This was real and could not be explained with the limited language at my disposal!)

I could feel how happy he was at that time so I made up my mind not to feel too much sorrow that his body functions had stopped. I was able to accept that as father and daughter we could communicate with each other as spirit and body, where originally we had come from the same place. He and I are the same, only we exist in different bodies in different situations in time and space. He also explained to me about the real world. We believe life is the only reality, but in contrast to this it is only a short dream. The real world was the one to which he had gone. I felt his happy release from the restrictions of disease and pain very strongly. The next day, as before, the sun rose and I bought an air ticket to go home to Seoul for his funeral. When I met the members of my family, even though the style differed, all my sisters had had similar experiences to mine about my father after his death. In day-to-day life, I cannot explain this to everyone I meet. Like Paul in the Bible, who ate no meat because of his concern for others who believed it was wrong, I did not talk about my views with those who could not accept. Depending on their level of understanding, I shared as much as possible to

prevent confusion or misunderstanding.

These miracles happened, but I was still a small person with worries about future financial difficulties, despite, on a couple of occasions being aware of the ‘instruction’ from the universe, “do not worry, it will be provided whenever you need it so just dedicate yourself to your work”. Until recently one of the hardest habits for me to throw away was worry about uncertainty, but I already have the answer and also I am a witness to the fact that worry is unnecessary because I have lived in London, the most expensive city in the world.

2002 and 2003 were the years in which I recognized the intuition and inner power within myself. All humans have the power of telepathy, but most people do not believe in or use it. It is like water in a river, anybody who has trust can use it. These things happened to me and I accepted them as ordinary occurrences in daily life. I did not tell anyone else at that time. When I heard about the theories of Rupert Sheldrake (1942-) and his research into human telepathy I was happy to learn that new ideas exist which cross spiritual, ecological, and scientific boundaries.

British biologist Rupert Sheldrake is known for his contentious scientific research into human telepathy and his explanation of the invisible world in terms of the theory of ‘morphogenetic fields’. When investigators research a phenomenon, the mechanical and scientific methodologies they treat that phenomenon as a visible object. This entrenched approach is, however, unsuitable for invisible phenomena, which clearly cannot be observed, so Sheldrake attempts to explain them in terms of the concept of ‘morphic resonance’. According to this theory, the more frequent an occurrence, the more likely it is to be repeated, and after that a pattern of occurrences will appear, which is based on previous events. Sheldrake applied this idea not only in the field of biology but also to human consciousness and later to telepathy.

Sheldrake attributed more value to vitality than to mechanisms, which try to explain all phenomena as material-centric, and he valued both the Eastern traditional view of the universe and the ancient Western view of the world, both of which are forms of holism.⁴⁰ He is a new vision of the biologist; he points out the problems of mechanisation in the history of Western science and its role in our current ecological crisis. It is, in his view, the result of capitalism, consumerism and politics, which have changed the shape of our lives. The Western holistic view (up to the seventeenth

⁴⁰ Rupert Sheldrake & Kim Jae-Hee. “The Evolution Universe by Its Custom,” The Green Criticism (Jul & Aug) 1998: p. 107.

Century) admitted was that the spirit existed both inside and outside the body. Even when looking at a dog's eye we are aware of the individual spirit as a living being, not as a machine, as implied by modern-day biology. Neither man nor God is a machine and Sheldrake believes that if we want to survive on the earth, instead of accepting mechanisms, we must replace them with vitality when dealing with all living beings in the same place. What is required is a change of paradigm and pattern of thought.⁴¹

Even in the history of science and spirituality before the 17th Century, an object consisted of the idea behind it and was manifest as the materials used to create it. However, implicit in the principle of making a figure is the spirit within. This idea was accepted in the East until recently and also, I can confirm, in the Findhorn community which I visited in Scotland in 2002. Their social activities demonstrate their new vision of life and this gave me confidence, helped me to believe what I had experienced and to decide what to believe. I speak further about the Findhorn ecological community in the next chapter.

One of their great teachings taught me much about existence and how to recognize aspects of it in others in society. The 'non-resistance' and 'non-violence' philosophy of Gandhi and Martin Luther King showed me another way to resolve our conflicts from a different view of history and with a different set of values. This was an amazing humanistic idea which suggested we think about not only 'what' we believe to be true, but also 'how' to deal with facing our problems with others based on human love in the real world in which we live. When I first read 'Chief Seattle's speech of 1854', my soul was shaken; how could one man forgive and understand another who invaded and took his land and livelihood 100 years before? Chief Seattle explained that the native American Indian's concept of god is quite different (based on their own values and philosophy). White people believe that God only loves white people, but Seattle's concept of god is that he is the father of two different peoples (white and red); even though he may seem to love one side, he also loves the other. Chief Seattle points out that even in their concept of nature, the two peoples were very different: to the white, the land could be taken from another in the name of God, to the Indian, nature is holy. It provided all things to them but could also disappear. His people treated nature with justice and respect and would settle land disputes through negotiation. In his view, death was not the end, only a change because Indians believed that the soul is the real self and lasts forever.⁴² In his speech, I found a model I choose to follow in life.

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 106-107.

⁴² W. C. Vanderwerth. *Indian Oratory; Famous Speeches by Noted Indian Chieftains*, Trans. Kim Moon-Ho. (Seoul, Kumolko Press, 2004) pp. 170-179.

- **How and what?**

After these experiences I needed to examine two things. One was how to reveal my idea of oneness (a belief in respect for other beings and harmonious coexistence in this life) in my artwork. The other was how to apply my knowledge to daily life: clothing, eating, and housing.

I decided to research these things actively and to change so that I might follow what I believed rather than what I used to believe. I needed to learn whether I could accept each individual as a part of oneness. The questions remained, how would I respond to the world and how could I exist with other beings in real life? I was looking for a structure of ordered concepts, like the traditional wooden Russian doll, which contains nested figures, one inside the other. It seems like one big doll, but when it is opened various other dolls come out from inside. I was looking for the big concept which would contain all the other parts of concepts in one place. When I was bitten by a bed bug at a B&B in Brighton, I questioned this still further. At that time I had to be taken urgently to A&E because of a serious skin reaction. I could not find the right way to rationalize the situation because I knew that the bed bug had sipped my blood by instinct, but my body hurt and I was hospitalized as a result. At the same time, I am a being, so how can I justify extinguishing the life of a vegetable or other living thing as food? The bed bug and I exist in different ways, but we both need the same things in order to survive.

This questioning influenced me strongly to think about the works of young British artists, mainly those of Damien Hirst and Michael Landy who questioned identity and consumption in society. We are all of the same generation and their artwork topics seemed similar to mine, but the approach and methods are very different because of their cultural background. I discuss this view further at the end of this chapter.

To establish how I should live in this life and my new identity, I collected information from many resources and visited various places which involved organic products, organic houses and living styles. Some books introduced me to wide views on how to live. The book, *The Findhorn garden*⁴³ confirmed that my spiritual experience was also common to others. I could related especially to stories about contact with the Holy Spirit, Deva, elementals and natural spirits who cooperate to cultivate vegetables together, and also to the suggested new lifestyle. The *Indian Oratory* gives a

⁴³ The Findhorn Foundation. *Findhorn Garden*, Trans. Cho Ha-Sun. (Seoul: Siatulpurinunsaramdell Press, 2001)

comparison between the two different paradigms of the West and the American Indian's. Also of interest was *Living with good life*, by Helen and Scott Nearing who live a new lifestyle in industrialized and consumption-centered American society, where they seek harmony between body and nature. It prompted me to find a community with new vision, which has changed the pattern of the old concepts and life of the world. *Builder of the dawn* is a great guide book about the eco-communities of the world with detailed items on how we might live. The *Conversations with God* series gives a long distance view of the meaning of life and how to change, and also asks who we and God are?

Between 2000 and 2005, I also visited different religions and community centers such as the 'Findhorn Community' (Scotland), 'Taizé' (France), 'Indra's Life Community' (led by Shilsangsa Buddhist temple, Korea), Hwagyesa Buddhist temple (Korea), and 'Byunsan Community' (Korea) which is an eco-agricultural group.

I realized that I had a tendency to criticize my previous values and lifestyle when I started to take an interest in my new ideas, so I took advice on the right approach to take from Buddhist Zen Master Seung Sahn and Daokwan, who were happy to give interviews. When I visited Hwagyesa temple, I was open about what had happened in my life and asked how I should live from that point forward. It took about three hours, to share the summary of my experiences since 1989 and what had been happening in the UK. Instead of receiving good advice and answers, they repeatedly told me to "drink the tea". I did not know what they meant at that time. However, after I joined the 'winter prayer session' (18th November to 16th December, 2000) I began to understand. It meant: do not cling to the past and 'I', which no longer exists and is not real. Only concentrate on the here and now. My past experiences, happy or sad, have already passed and here was a new opportunity to experience a new version of 'I' and 'new things.' 'Drink tea', then, was their way of telling me not to cling to what had happened before, but to awaken and concern myself with the here and now!

Main teachings of Zen Master Seung Sahn were 'If not now when?' and 'Die before dying'. These words should be understood not only in terms of rational ideas. They express the view that we should not waste time and should realize who we are here and now. His teaching 'Die before dyeing' means we need to overcome the 'egoistic I' before the end of our physical lifetime arrives. His doctrine includes 'Don't know' and 'Just do it.' His 'Don't know' teaching means we should not think too deeply or take note of artificial or rational ideas which usually originate in 'egoistic I' or from education. This state can be reached by 'non egoistic I' meditation. Without thinking, analysis and rational judgment and by establishing a habitual thinking pattern, the mind can be reduced to a state of 'non-separation'. In this state, dualism cannot

exist; it is the place of origin of our real mind and identity. The identity, which emanates from this level of consciousness, is known as 'true self' or 'great self'.

He who follows the 'true self' (also known as 'Buddha's mind) without prejudice, will always do the right thing. For example, when he meets a hungry man, he will give him food to eat without hesitation. If somebody needs help, he will give unconditional assistance, because man originally possesses the enlightened nature of Buddha and already knows what is right in any given situation. In a state of non-enlightenment (or ignorance), men may mistreat one another. The teaching, 'Just do it', tells us not to separate ourselves from reality or to think egoistically when we do the right thing. In each moment of a situation, we should just do the right thing. For example when we sleep, we should completely sleep and when we need to work we should just work without clouding our minds. This is also referred to as 'ordinary mind', or real Tao. This explained who I really am so how I live intuitively. The root of Zen is to know and understand the real self from inside. Nobody knows where we come from and where we are going to.

Zen is the ability to maintain this 'Don't know' attitude all of the time. Whenever we are doing something, such as standing still, walking, or moving, in all times and all places, if we keep the 'Don't know' frame of mind this constitutes Zen meditation. When we do something 'just do it', like driving, just driving, or eating, just eating, or working, just working, this is also real Zen practice. Finally, when we achieve the clear, 'Don't know', state of mind, we can see the sky is blue, like a mirror which reflects whatever it faces. At this stage, natural things begin to happen. At this level, there is no desire for the self, only for all beings.

As I explained the idea of oneness earlier with the story of the animal cookies shaped from one piece of dough, monk Sueng Sahn explained that this also applies to all creatures of the universe. In the universe, the sun, moon, mountains, rivers, people and so forth, all of which have different names and forms, are made from the same substance. The universe is arranged in terms of two main elements *yin* and *yang*, which come from the same substance. Names and concepts about ourselves are a product of our thinking, which are not real. They merely make it easy to connect a name and form. If we cut off all thinking by adopting the 'Don't know mind', there is no distinction between us.

Zen Master Seung Sahn gave an example to demonstrate that we all have the same substance by hitting his stick on the floor. This could be heard by many

individuals at the same time, not through words, but because they could hear the sound of the teaching stick hitting the floor. This exemplified 'we are all one', because all those present listened to it at the same time and in the same place. According to his advanced teaching, what we call substance is energy, mind, god or matter; it originally had no name and no form. When we label things right or wrong, good or bad, we base our decision on a certain limited view point, so we are not always correct. For example, a knife when used to save a life in the hands of a doctor during an operation, is good. But that same knife, when used to kill someone in a burglary, is bad. The judgment of right and wrong depends on different conditions and situations and we need to examine them in terms of the whole world-view rather than a specific-view. Some people, however, cling to fixed ideas, insisting that theirs is the one true view. This is analogous to the blind people who each touch part of an elephant and are then unable to agree on what the object is.

Having achieved the 'oneness' view of the world, I felt I must start to live according to my beliefs. So I began to take care of my body, a precious tool in life which contains my soul. I also started to care about the connection between food and my bodily health. First of all, I visited the ecological agricultural community at Findhorn in Scotland and the Byunsan community in South Korea. I arrived at Findhorn on 26th July, 2002 for a one week workshop with 15 other people who came from all around the world. Without the need to explain, we all recognized one another by feeling. The workshop included programs concerned with organic agriculture, angel meditation, the healing game of transformation and communion with nature.

The 'Eco Village', a model for sustainable living, was particularly impressive. The eco-house, has a roof covered with grass instead of tiles, which uses local elements, (stone and straw bales) and seemed exactly like the traditional Korean houses of my hometown. Long ago in Korea they would have used mud, stones, and straw to cover the roof after harvesting the rice from the fields. There were also a couple of houses made from old whisky barrels. Another distinctive eco idea was the living sewage system, which reused waste water from every house in the community (they use no chemical liquids in their homes). Waste water is filtered by snails and weed for a week and then reused for agriculture. The people of Findhorn also have solar water energy heating systems which harness the power of nature.

I was surprised to hear that 14,000 visitors came there from more than 50 countries each year to learn holistic living in harmony with the environment. The most precious aspect was their Community-Supported Agricultural (CSA) system, the oldest and largest of its kind. Their supporters unconditionally accept produce from the

organic farm on a regular basis. Changeable weather can mean that product quality sometime appears to be below standard for a demanding consumer society. When I was there, there was heavy rain one day, the farm was waterlogged and the spring onions in the field collapsed and looked ugly. All of us helped to replant them, but they did not look very good. The farmer explained to us, however, that the customers trust that the community will do their best under all circumstances and that they always strive to produce good quality vegetables. They invariably accept the results without complaint. What wonderful trust and sincere faithfulness between producer and customer. The Findhorn Community also use four wind turbines to generate electricity from nature. They are concerned with environmental, social, economic and spiritual issues (Figs 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86 & 87)



Figs 81, 82 & 83. Findhorn Community (House and Ecology Project), 2007



Figs 84, 85 & 86. Findhorn Community (Ecology Project and Farming), 2007

This kind of effort to maintain a closeness between nature and humans is also to be found in the Byunsan Community (Fig 89) in South Korea which I visited in September 2003. The founder, a professor in the philosophy department of one of the Korean universities, felt that there was a gap between what he taught and life in the real world. His conscience was so affected that he decided to be a farmer, to do what he believed he had to do instead of merely talking about it.



Fig 87. Myself at the Findhorn Community, Scotland, 2002

I found out about this community through the ecological agricultural book, *There is no weed* which was written by the founder Yoon Koo-Byung (Fig 90). When I discovered this book I was very happy because of the link with my ideas about the weeds.⁴⁴ At that time I decided to change the general title of my plant paintings from ‘Weed’ to ‘Alien’, because the concept of the weed was also a human centered value which defined natural things in terms of their efficiency for human use. In my mind, all plants exist by themselves; there are no weeds. The definition of weed (*Chapcho* in Korean) is: a plant which is in competition with crops and garden plants and growing where it is not wanted. I did not like that idea so since 2003, whenever I have shown my plant paintings I have used the concept of the ‘Alien’ rather than the weed.

Given my ideas, the Professor’s book, *There is no weed* (published in 1998), was an excellent resource and I decide to visit him at the community. Anyone wishing to meet him must stay for more than three days and join in with the community’s farm work. On arrival, I immediately changed into my work suit and went to the rice field with a sickle. The community’s method of making rice products centers around treating the plants in the same way as one would one’s fellow man. That is to say, there is no hierarchy. The community’s land is mixed with other farmers’ land, but easily identifiable by the lower density planting. (Fig 88).

⁴⁴ Yoon Koo-Byung. *There is No Weed*. (Seoul: Bori Press, 1998) p. 90-91.



Fig 88. 'The Reflection - Byunsan Rice Field' (2006), solo exhibition at Hakgojae Gallery, Seoul 2007

They treat rice as a being which needs sun, water, and soil and enough space between the roots of each plant for the wind to move freely in between. When I compared this with other fields which were planted more densely, with each plant set within a limited space, the community's rice looked healthier and stronger. Using their experience of farming, even if the community plants only a few roots of rice in the field, the yield is much higher than that of other fields. Each family has its own house within the community, but, in accordance with Korean farming traditions, when planting or reaping crops, they work cooperatively together. At these times the family whose field is being worked prepares food for all its helpers. Of course, each family has their own family life, but traditional Asian culture is based on the custom of agriculture, and also on the large family concept, so in this way both independent and cooperative living styles coexist. Even now, it is customary for people to speak in terms of 'we' instead of 'I'. For example, 'let's go to our home' instead of 'my home'. Families live together, but eating facilities are shared and people work together as they would in a large traditional Korean family. Even the toilet is built in the traditional style which does not waste water but mixes straw with the night soil. I first encountered this when I visited a German friend's house in Bremen. The couple are also artists who built their house with their own hands and recycle everything.



Fig 89. Byunsan Community, South Korea, 2003

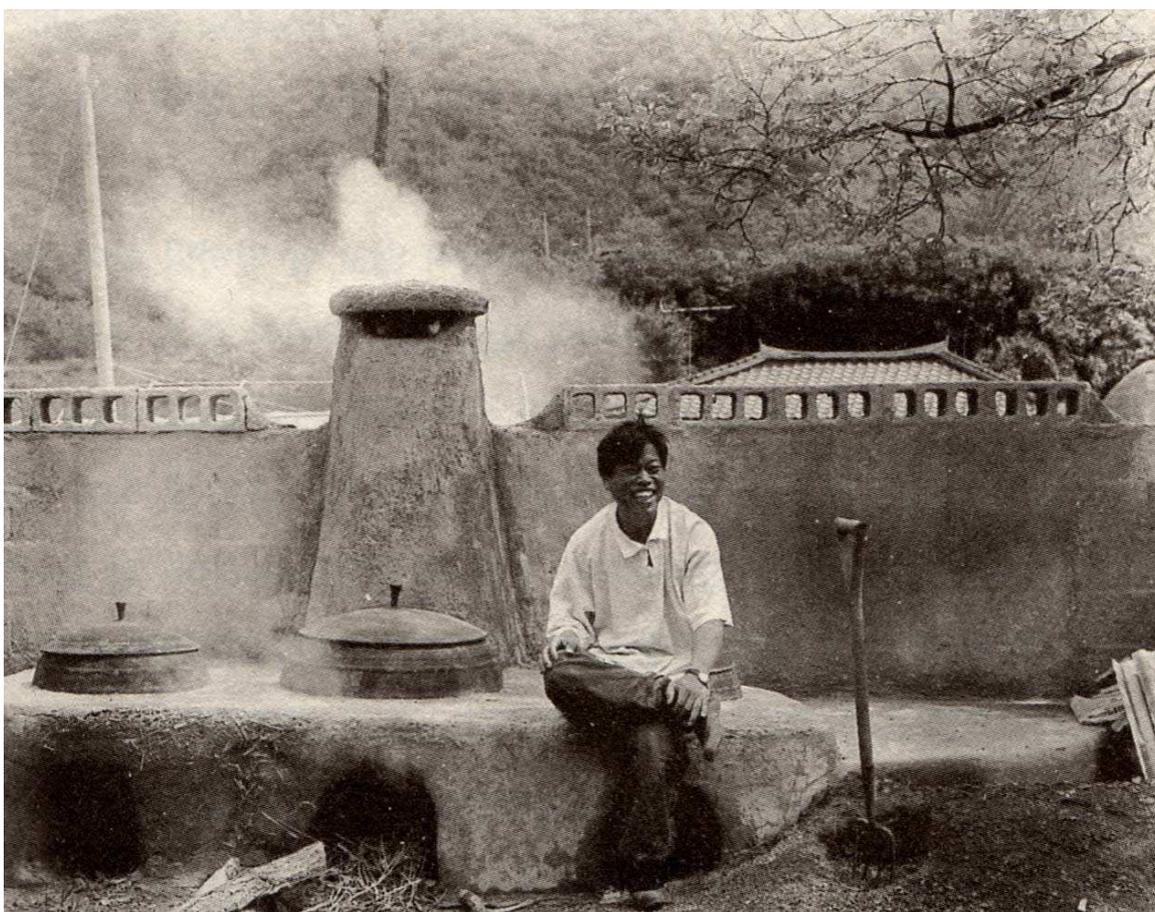


Fig 90. Professor Yoon Koo-Byung, founder of the Byunsan Community

They produce night soil which is left for more than three years and is then used on their vegetable garden which is free of chemicals. Professor Yoon understands culture in terms of two main philosophies. The first is 'foster culture', which was the prevailing cultural concept for about two million years and involves the 'community lifestyle' as a way of living. The second 'made culture', has a history of only 200 years, and is a way of dealing with the capitalistic lifestyle. The essence of 'foster culture' is nature, and 'the value of use' is the main issue of the natural economy. The essence of 'made culture' is capitalism and individuality, based on 'the value of exchange' and the central issue of acquisition.⁴⁵

Professor Yoon pointed out that one of the disadvantages of 'made culture' is that it changes the values of man and nature so that they become merely elements of commerce. Even though a product may be harmful to human health, if it can make a profit, financially oriented organizations will produce and sell it to make money. This way of thinking treats humans and nature as articles of commerce, and replaces the 'Society of community' with the 'Society of capital benefit'. Yoon suggests that the solution to this problem requires an "absolute change in civilization's human values". Instead of the 'made culture' which emphasizes the value of exchange, we need to move towards 'foster culture', which stresses the value of use, and also the supplanting of currently dominant 'capital' with 'nature'. To achieve harmony and maintain a balance between these two different views of culture, we have first to concentrate on harmony in nature.

The professor's main aim was to set up the Byunsan community in a place of harmony with mountains, fields and the sea, such as exist in South Korea. My visit to the Byunsan community confirmed for me that there are many 'nature recovery' movements all around the world, from the East to the West. I was very impressed that instead of talking about ecology they were taking action to enable the earth to recover. Participating in the fields together with others helped me to appreciate the primitive happiness of the farmer. Having company and being with nature whilst enjoying the mountains and fields inspired many thoughts which I later expressed in my painting; paintings which, for example, showed the beauty of meaning and visuality in regularly planted rice images, which existed in harmony with their reflection on the water.

Some individuals have taught me lessons and influenced my views on how to live my life. First was a couple, Helen and Scott Nearing. Their self-cultivated organic garden and the principle of living in harmony with nature are a model of how to live.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 240-241.

They believe it is especially important not to give value to labour alone because relaxation is an important part of life. This touched my heart. Life is meant not only for hard work but also for enjoyment and happiness. They work for half a day to make money to live and the remainder of the time they spend on themselves. They also taught me about satisfaction. When they had sufficient money to live for the year ahead, they stopped and set themselves free of the habit of needless work. They prefer simple food, are concerned about the amount of salt and sugar they consume, and live as vegetarians. They also practice meditation to maintain a clean hearted approach to daily life.⁴⁶



Fig 91. The 'Waldspirale' residence built by Hundertwasser in Darmstadt, Germany

As an artist and ecologist, when I heard about Friedensreich Hundertwasser (1928-2000) I was also very happy. He placed emphasis on feeling and intuition rather than reason and was a great example to me. He also highlighted the intimacy of nature and man.

His characteristic style of work stemmed from the harmony and beauty of the irregularity of 'spontaneous vegetation'. He also stressed that we should live according to the laws of vegetation - self-sufficiency, peace and natural order - instead of artificial products such as religion, dogma and politics. He hated modernist architecture, which was based on reason and rationalism believing that it rids man of his imagination and breaks the harmony between nature and humans. Hundertwasser also blamed the manipulation of nature, which is strongly opposed to Divine Providence due to man's limited understanding. In his artworks, instead of straight lines he chose bright colours,

⁴⁶ Helen Nearing. *Living the Good Life*, Trans. Yu Shi-Wha. (Seoul: Bori Press, 2000) pp. 219-220.

curved lines and organic forms as a means of reconciling humans and nature. He also accepted the concept of man in nature as a guest and promoted tree planting in urban environments (Fig 91).

Finally, one of the most powerful lessons for me about man's will and the meaning of life came from Viktor Emile Frankl (1905-1997) who expounded not self-actualization but self-transcendence. He had lived under extreme conditions in Auschwitz. There, he concluded that the man who has will can choose his actions by free will, and that that facility cannot be taken away from us. The great thing about existentiality is not our destiny, but that we should receive our destiny with meaning and ambition. This idea is developed in Viktor Frankl's 'Logotherapy' which is a type of existential analysis. It focuses on 'the will to find meaning', as opposed to Adler's Nietzschean doctrine of 'the will to find power' or Freud's 'will to find pleasure'. Viktor Frankl believed that the elements of the condition of human existence were spirituality, freedom and responsibility. He believed that one of the motivations behind healthy human life was to find meaning, and that to find 'self' we must 'self-transcend' rather than be 'self-centric'.⁴⁷

The characteristic of 'self-transcendence' is that it surpasses the limits of the egoistic self, like the eye which cannot see itself but can see the outside world.⁴⁸ To see is self-transcendence and to work perfectly is to look outside oneself. This idea is very close to the philosophy of Buddhism and to the Bible teaching, 'to love others as yourself'. If we accept that all humans are divisions of the same body, maybe this does not take into account the way we live with one another or how we survive together in the world. We just do what we need to do for ourselves.

Frankl's view is quite the opposite of other scholars who insist that the purpose and motive of discipline are self expression and discipline or self actualization. According to Frankl, a person's original nature is based on three elements: 'freedom of will', 'the will to find meaning', and 'the meaning of life.'⁴⁹ Where most psychologists insist that the human condition is determined by biological instinct, experience of childhood, and outside influence, Frankl believes that human 'freedom of will' is the most important element in deciding one's views on the environment and one's fate.

He explains that the 'will to find meaning' and the 'meaning of life' do not

⁴⁷ Viktor E. Frankl. The Unheard Crying for Meaning: Psychotherapy and Humanism. Trans. Lee Shi-Hyung (Seoul: Chung-A publishing Co, 2005) p. 51.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 52.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 7.

work together to achieve 'self-actualization'; rather that a human can dedicate himself to reality and human relationships through 'self-transcendence'. Frankl explained 'the meaning of life' in terms of the relationship between 'self-actualization' and 'self-transcendence': if a person seeks to find the meaning of life from within himself or within his own psyche, he will not find it. Only when he searches for the meaning of life in the world can he find an answer. Likewise, if a person sets out on a purposeful search for 'self-actualization', he will not find it. When he reflects on his value to others, and makes a commitment towards other people, the meaning of life actualizes, as does service to society.

Happiness and pleasure (amenities) are things which bring joy in life, but should not be the purpose of life. Happiness should not be the ultimate goal, but an automatic byproduct of practising meaning and the search for a purpose which is outside oneself.

There is another characteristic of the healthy man. It is his disposition to seek a target and duty for the future. Humans need targets, because their specific characteristic is that they survive best when they look to the future. Life loses meaning when people have no reason to live and have no future target to achieve. Frankl observed this in his period in the camp. When in that terrible situation, his mind encouraged him to think of positive images of the future as a goal and a dream. In this way, he was able to raise his spirits and to transcend the pain and despair of his situation. He had the freedom to choose how he would react to his position; it was his choice. He also believed that the other characteristic of transcendence was devotion to his work. One of the ways to gain meaning was to create values which would give something to the world. This value would be expressed efficiently through his works; we can all devote ourselves to society in different ways.

Nobody can deny our spiritual freedom. If we believe something, we can act, feel, and think according to this belief, which may be a prophecy or a personal concept. Spiritual freedom is an essential element for both psychological health and also simply to survive. Individual responsibility is connected with spiritual freedom at the level of human existence. To have meaning and purpose in life mainly depends on us, and nothing can relieve us of this burden. Psychological health depends not on seeking 'self' but on transcending 'self.' Frankl had similar views on identity and the world to those of Buddhism and Contemporary Hinduism. His identity of 'self' is mentioned again in the conclusion in comparison with the ideas of others.

I introduce the subject of my artworks and communication through examples of

my paintings which were shown at a solo exhibition in Seoul, London and Beijing between 2000 and 2007. I was concerned with the big questions ‘what is this (self)?’ and ‘was it so?’ I was mainly interested in observing what I had experienced in daily life and in expressing it through my paintings, like a diary. My painting was not an experiment to describe something aesthetically or logically based on the value of art history or research of the subject. It was my visual language for interpreting what I feel and for distilling the value of ‘who am I’ and ‘what is this?’ from physical and spiritual beings and phenomena. I have been painting for more than two decades, so whenever I begin work, instinctively my intuition knows ‘how’ to maximise ‘what’, which is the main and most immediate thing I seek to express. I have developed and experimented with other tools, materials and techniques (computer and photography), but they do not satisfy me because they lack the feeling of directness. Even oil and water based colour are media which intervene between the subject and me, but they are real tools which instantly expose my feelings and my message.

The objects I painted were various plants, insects and animals in different conditions and situations, wherever I might encounter them. Everything I met in nature seemed perfect and complete not only in terms of its own unique appearance but also in the way it existed. Whatever I looked at (bird, plant, landscape), it seemed completely perfect in itself: features, colour, texture, shape. Any fault or disfigurement was hidden from me. It was so perfect! I remembered one of Zen Master Seung Sahn’s teachings, ‘Just like this!’ and also some words from the Bible. In Genesis (Chapter 1: 31), after God had created all things, He said ‘It was very good!’ I understood how good it was as I visited different places and came face-to-face with beings with their own characters and ways of existing.

Of my bird paintings ‘Toward Ipswich’ (Fig 92), ‘Geese with a Crow in the Lake District’, ‘Hello! Geese with a Duck in the Lake District’, and ‘The Seagull in Inverness’ are representative works, painted in 2002. At that time I was visiting many places in the UK to paint landscapes and experienced more deeply the different energies from nature. I became open and spiritually untied, and felt an easy friendship with other beings rather than with other humans. Sometimes it made it very difficult for me to control sudden reactions to objects, scenes and people I met in the street. I would easily cry with joy, smile, laugh, and was sensitive to pain. Occasionally, when in public, like an analytical computer I would be over-sensitive and would intuitively recognize other’s feelings, thoughts and situations.

This would leave me tired and exhausted and could also bring pain. I did not know how to deal with it but felt I was like someone in alpha brain wave state (a

condition in which the brain is awake but the body is relaxed so that even if the person wants to move he cannot do so, although the brain continues to think and work). I could feel what had happened to others, but could not always do anything for them. I learned from this phenomenon that everybody has responsibility for themselves. I wonder if anybody is able to look at my level of intuition, thoughts and actions. If so, what do they feel about this? and how do they react to it? It is natural to me that I do not, or need not, become involved in the personal lives of others without asking, even though sometimes I want to help. So I do not paint many human images because (with the exception of some innocent children's faces) generally speaking, most adults contain very negative energy and give the impression of anxiety, anger, depression, hate, tension, resistance to the unexpected, and worry, rather than anything positive. Being aware of these expressions and energy hurts me and I feel pain, although I know that deep down we all have loving, warm hearts.



Fig 92. 'Toward Ipswich' (England), 2002

My meetings with other beings in daily life filled me with happiness, cheerfulness, joy, and comforting friendship because they were less greedy than we humans. They were very simple and honest: duck, squirrel, sparrow, pigeon, crow, dogs (generally) and cats (very independent characters); they seemed to open up their beliefs and hearts to me. Sometimes I became so excited about falling in love with them that I forgot the time. One winter evening I became lost in the Isabella Garden in Richmond Park, because the sunset had arrived quickly as I was concentrating on the ducks and other birds. It was four o'clock but already dark. I tried hard to find the road to the gate

through the middle of the woods and, luckily, met a policeman on his rounds, who helped me to find my way out. This was an experience of a totally primitive environment in the middle of London in the dark! I was frightened because of the concept of the unknown, but also excited about the new adventure.

‘Toward Ipswich’ (Fig 92) is an image of some geese which joined me on a rail trip to Felixstow. I went by train, but the geese flew in the sky and kept me company until I got off. I enjoyed their cheerfulness and being with them, so took a photograph and quickly drew the detail in my diary as preparation for a portrait of my new friends.

The paintings ‘Swans with a Crow in the Lake District’(Fig 93) and ‘Hello! Swans with a Duck in the Lake District’ (Fig 94) were inspired by a journey to the Lake District. It was April, but the Yorkshire spring was cold and cloudy and some days there was even snow. When I met them near the lake it was clear that they naturally coexisted with one another: the first image shows three swans with a crow which shared their home. As I approached them they were not particularly cautious. I felt joined to them through the friendly *Ki* energy of another existence which shared the same time and space in nature. How generous they were.



Fig 93. ‘Swans with a Crow in the Lake District’ (2002),
solo exhibition at the Hakgojae Gallery, Seoul, 2007



Fig 94. 'Hello! Swans with a Duck in the Lake District' (2002),
exhibit at solo exhibition at the Hakgojae Gallery, Seoul, 2007



Fig 95. 'The Seagull in Inverness' (2002), solo exhibition at The Hanmo Gallery, Beijing, 2005

'Hello! Swans with a Duck in the Lake District' also shows the coexistence of geese and a duck. As we approached, they came towards us asking for food and making an honest and urgent noise. The first time they approached there were only swans but later a small white duck, approached us, sharing their same situation. The swans at the top of the picture, turned his head towards the white duck, noticing the outsider who had come to join in. I felt that even animals have their own manner and way of living, existing in harmony and understanding others' situations. Each has a different character, just as we do. I included 'Hello' at the beginning of the title, because I wanted to emphasize the duck as a symbol of another species amongst the group of swans, and to highlight their coexistence.

'The Seagull in Inverness' (Fig 95) was a gull I saw when travelling to Findhorn. I had to change buses on the way from the airport and saw this lonely but pretty seagull behind the glass of the bus window. Its features were different to those of seagulls from southern England, which are large and generally white with yellow bills. This seagull had a brown head and a small white body, like a toy. It was my first visit to Inverness, which is not a well known place, and the gull greeted me with curiosity. I learned from this bird that environment has an effect on existence. It was July, but I felt cold. These paintings were made with Chinese ink, acrylic and mixed media on paper to convey instant movement and the situation. The three earlier paintings were mainly

concerned with objects which taught me intuitive lessons, but the last painting, 'The Seagull in Inverness' placed emphasis on the seagull and also showed the beauty of vast emptiness through the monochromatic empty background. The sky is not only a background against which the seagull flies and exists; it has its own being and authority. The sky was cloudy at that time, which differed from the mood in Seoul or London. I used large sized brush strokes and dripped water on the paper which I then lifted to give the impression of tiny rain drops dripping down the window.

'My Geese Friends' (Fig 96) is a triptych, showing the energetic movement of some ducks on Edgeware pond. Although I used oil instead of water based colour, I enjoyed streaming the oil to expose the strength of my hand movements and the energetic figures of the ducks. Since being bitten by a bed bug, I had a fear of, but was starting to become familiar with, insects which could be found nearby. As I took an interest in them they became easy to find. As I walked through forests and parks, I would easily meet different forms of insect, including ladybirds, bees, dragonflies, cicadas, ants, spiders, pond skaters, gold bugs, snails, beetles, praying mantis, butterflies, flies, grasshoppers and so on. Wherever I went the insects were different, so I documented their story by painting and recording the memory of where and when I found them. This information allows me to trace the world in which they exist. Some of them I met in Seoul, London, Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Bremen, Shanghai and Beijing. Wherever I meet them I am sensitive to their existence.

For example, the painting 'Striped Mosquito' (Fig 97) was painted in 2005 in London. I came across the mosquito at dawn in mid-November in the bathroom of our London house. When I turned on the light, I notice a minute thing which suddenly appeared on the wall. I had a strong impression of its existence because of the light and shadow effect. Standing in the darkness, I could not distinguish myself from its being in the bathroom, but because of the light our difference revealed the natural law of what we had in common - our own bodies - even though they were very different.

Immediately, the shadow was revealed as an opposite to the light in the room, but also, because of the coexistence of light and shadow, the volume of our different bodies was clearly revealed. This was a big mosquito, which was worthy of my cheerful greeting 'Hello!' and my curiosity about how it had endured the cold days of winter. He did not move but I knew he was alive and was joyful about his existence and way of life. I took a photograph and in the morning I began to paint. It was so beautiful and alien to me at that time.



Fig 96. 'My Duck Friends' (2003), solo exhibition at the Hakgojae Gallery, Seoul, 2007

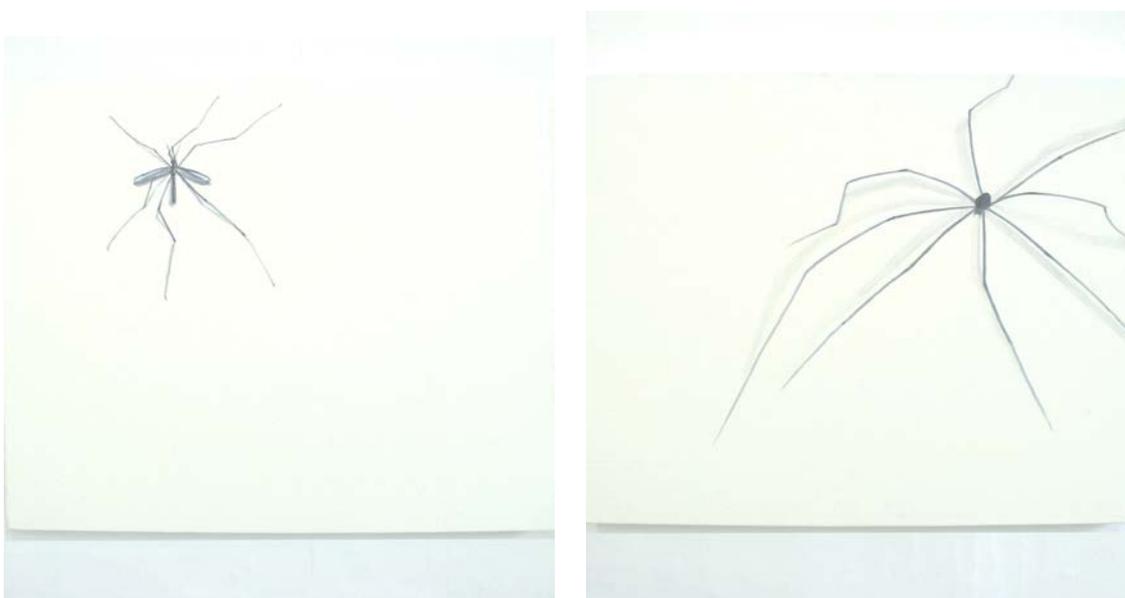


Fig 97. 'Striped Mosquito' (2006), solo exhibition at the Hakgojae Gallery, Seoul, 2007

Fig 98. 'A Thin Spider' (2006), solo exhibition at the Hakgojae Gallery, Seoul, 2007

My painting 'A Thin Spider' (Fig 98) is of a spider I met at my German friend's house when we were spending the summer together in Bremen in 1999. They gave us a small summer-house, which they had built. My husband and I lay down on the floor and noticed a very long, thin spider moving across the ceiling. It was the first time I had seen such a spider. We marveled at the way how it did not fall down on us and were intrigued happy to look at its thin legs moving like a robot's. It did not seem possible that it had muscles which were capable of moving his body, but he had. What power of life made him move so curiously? We admired both his manner of existence and his appearance and wondered at the variety of life on earth. I was deeply appreciative of all this, so painted this alien friend who shared the present with us.

‘Tiger Spider’ (Fig 99) painted in Seoul in 2007, shows a spider with very different characteristics.

At Tsinghua University in Beijing, there was a huge pond where I came across water boatmen (Fig 100). These were familiar to me from my childhood when it was easy to find and play with them in the stream. I was happy to meet a relative of something I had known in Korea. Water boatmen are unique beings which can ‘ride’ on the surface of the water and are also great ‘alien’ friends of mine. In most of my insect paintings, I have left the background white to emphasize the ontological view of the insect, which seems weak and fragile but which perfectly fits it for this world (Figs 100 & 101)

My other main project is landscape and plant painting. After living for a long time in London I found it easy to identify the differences between cities in China, the UK and the West in general. When I visited Hangzhou, Shanghai in 2004, I had a feeling of returning to my past. Although China had opened its gates and Westernization had begun, in the countryside, there was much evidence of its agricultural background, in the houses, the way of life and in people’s characters. These were similar to when I was a child in Korea in the 1960s and 1970s. I had a chance to visit Shanghai and Beijing in 2004 and after that more opportunities opened up for me. I did not think about China until 2003. Until recently, there was no available information because of the political situation, so even though China was close to South Korea it felt very far away.



Fig 99. ‘Tiger Spider’ (2007), exhibit at ‘2007 Seoul Art Fair’, Seoul Arts Center, 2007

Fig 100. ‘Water Boatmen’ (2007), exhibit at ‘2007 Seoul Art Fair’, Seoul Arts Center, 2007



Fig 101. 'Insect Paintings' at the '2007 Seoul Art Fair', Seoul Arts Center, 2007

When I compare the geographical energy of England and Korea, I feel the *Ki* of England is *yin* and the *Ki* in Korea is *yang*. On visiting China, however, I felt immense *yang* energy everywhere. I recently compared distinguishable differences in the level of land energy after visiting Japan, Hong Kong, and China. One day in 2003, as I returned to Seoul by air from Amsterdam, I observed the sun rising over the high and mountainous north-eastern part of China. As the sun shone on the surface of the earth, it revealed the shapes and the outline of the high mountains out of the darkness. It looked like a clutch of giant, dark wrestlers emerging from dark water. It was an amazing thing to witness.

I was thankful to nature which was revealing part of its beauty, truth and power to me. It also reminded me of my grandfather who used to live in Manchuria in the early 20th Century. I could intuitively imagine how he felt and how he lived in that cold, snow covered land. I sensed this locality was full of wild *yang* energy. A few minutes later, there was another view outside the airplane window. In less than thirty minutes, like a beautiful reclining woman, the calm and cautious Korean mountains appeared. The silhouette of the mountains was soft, curved and gentle. I was surprised at how different the *Ki* was between the two places and thought how wonderful it was to be themselves. I understood why the old name of Korea was 'Chosun' until the early 20th Century, which means the beautiful morning country. I cried uncontrollably because of the perfectly different truths and beauties of the world which existed and had until then

escaped my notice. It is a blessing to be an observer in the middle of a miracle as it happens. I also accepted how small we humans are as a part of the earth and that we should not disturb the perfection which already exists. Those impressions were so strong that until now I have been unable to digest them and to re-produce them as paintings. Painting is the filtering tool which enables me to visualize what I have faced! The feel of the energy from the land and the air varies greatly from country to country. Wherever I go, I distinguish the character of the locality, much as I would a human's personality.

In England, I visited Tunbridge Wells and discovered an area of many ponds in a place of absolute silence. When I moved around the place, I noticed that, unwatched, the seasons were changing, the plants were growing but some parts of them had started to wither. On the surface of the water, white flowers fell from the tall trees above, but the water was crystal clear and I could see through to the bottom. There was a layer of fallen leaves down there and the warm blue sky reflected on the water's surface. Whenever the wind blew, the reflection moved and then all returned to stillness again. It was gorgeous, holy and peaceful. Just by looking, my mind grew quiet and merged into a single entity with the other beings in the water. The oil painting 'The Reflection I - Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone' (Fig 102) is my interpretation of this experience. The sunshine, the place itself, the plants which were reflected so beautifully and the shadow of the weeds revealed a natural law which has been in existence since the dawn of time. Others of my works, 'The Autumn Rain on Hendon Park I, II and III' (Fig 103), capture the momentary image of reflections on a rainy pond. As the Buddha taught us, though we believe a river is the same now as before, it is different from second to second. When I looked at what was going on, each drop of rain changed both the feeling and image of the pond.

In each second a new pond appeared. It is exciting to read the inconstancy implicit in a word such as 'rain'. I was also appreciative of the natural law which means that rain can be experienced everywhere on earth. As God's unconditional generosity and love for all is explained in the Bible: "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous"- no preference is given to any individual.⁵⁰ Andrew Buchanan summarized this view in 2007 in his preface to my solo exhibition in the Hakgojae Gallery in Seoul: 'Park Sung-Sil seeks to show us we are all part of this living world of nature. And for all of us, whether we live in Seoul, Beijing, London or almost anywhere really, a gentle rain still falls and patterns the surface of the pond'.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Matthew 5: 45.

⁵¹ Andrew Buchanan. The Preface to Park Sung-Sil Solo Exhibition. (Seoul: Hakgojae Gallery, 2007).



Fig 102. 'The Reflection I - Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone' (2003),
exhibit at '2005 Seoul Art Fair', Seoul Arts Center, 2005



Fig 103. 'The Autumn Rain in Hendon Park I, II and III' (2002), exhibit at the Alexia Goethe
Gallery 'Summer Exhibition', London, 2007

Other examples of *Ki* energy from the earth are illustrated in my works 'Wandsworth Common' (Fig 104), 'Hong Kong Goldfish' (Fig 105) and 'Alma Garden' (Fig 106). These images are painted in quite different styles. Where 'Wandsworth Common' is painted in black and white oils which communicate an empty and humble *Ki* feeling, 'Hong Kong Goldfish' and 'Alma Garden' were full of positive, vital

elements. The first image was caught from a train on the way to Brighton from London. I was absent-mindedly enjoying looking at the scenery.



Fig 104. 'Wandsworth Common', 2004

It was wintertime, so the leaves had fallen and the main tree branches were distinct against the sky. It was late afternoon on a cloudy and windy day. One gentleman, who seemed quite old, was slowly enjoying a walk with his dog which seemed not to care about the melancholy mood. To me, the image of the tree, suggested that its function in life had been stopped by outside agencies, and the gentleman seemed prepared in his mind for the end of his life - all this against the cloudy sky. My intuition read this scene as a perfect part of the circular phenomena of the life cycle. It seemed to signal the end, but another message also occurred to me with regard to the life cycle of other beings; that moment was also a scene at the end of *yin*, which is just the turning point for moving towards *yang* energy and the time of spring and birth. It was also a precious moment in its own right. Even dying is a beautiful phenomenon when we realize what it is. Life is the place where the true self exists but experiences the physical limitations of the here and now, as the 'self I'.

'Hong Kong Goldfish' and 'Alma Garden' are representative of fulfilment through *yang* energy. When I travelled to Hong Kong in December 2006, I visited Kowloon Park where I found some colourful goldfish which are great favourites of East Asian people. When I was a child, we had a pond in the front garden of our home in the countryside, where we could enjoy watching the Koi swimming around. I also saw these fish in London but they were different in size and character.



Fig 105. 'Hong Kong Goldfish' (2007),
solo exhibition at the Hakgojae Gallery, Seoul 2007

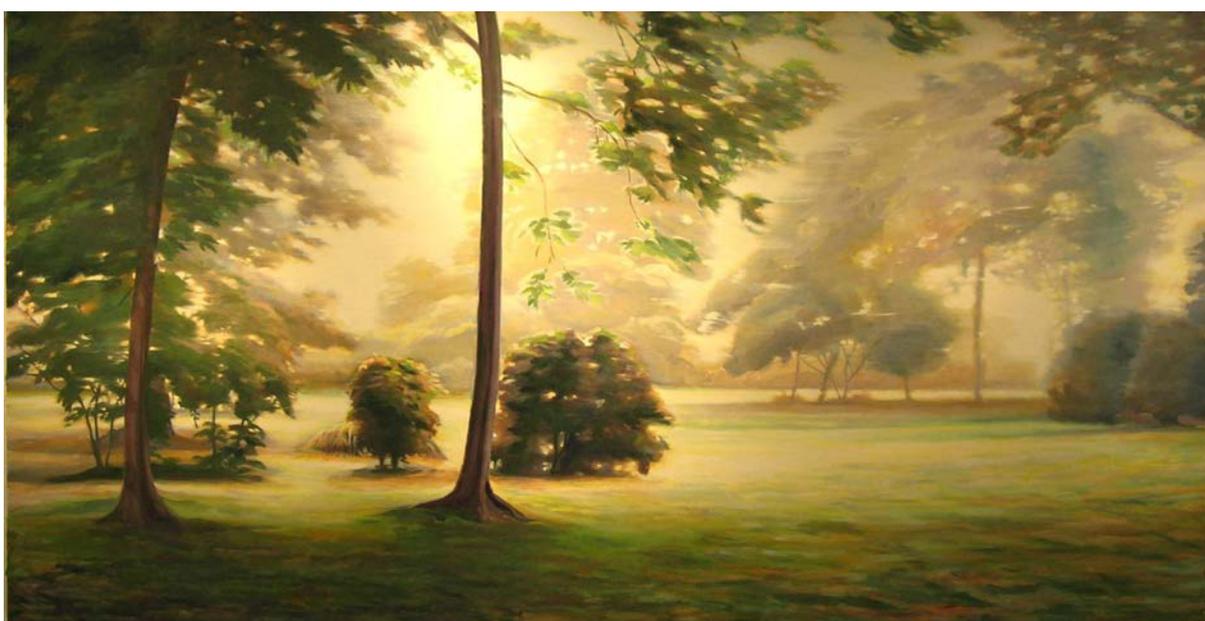


Fig 106. 'Alma Garden' (2006), solo exhibition at the Hakgojae Gallery, Seoul, 2007

Mirroring the *Ki* of the Hong Kong people and the land, they seemed energetic, strong and vital as they moved around the lake. This was a unique experience for me, who was used to living in London with its heavy, oppressive air, clouds and grey moods. It contrasted with the over-bright coloured plants and flowers, the clean, high sky, and the cheerful atmosphere exuded by the trees and people of Hong Kong. My visit was in early December, but the temperature was 23°C.

In the park, people learned to sing songs and to dance, and practiced Kungfu and Taichi in the open air. They knew I could not speak Chinese, but still suggested that I join in with the public dancing. I understood that this intimacy was rooted in their agricultural background. 'Hong Kong Goldfish' (Fig. 105. 2007), as an image, is full of energy which emanates from the Koi with their strong yellow, orange, red, white and black coloured skin and their vital movements. It reminded me about the different characteristics of *yang* energy and how it is equally as precious as *yin*. *Yin* is characterized by modesty, calmness, stillness, and introversion which I perceived in the dying plants and cold weather of the UK. It was not my intention to distinguish these different characters of *Ki* in the East and West but, without fail, each time I painted, concentrating on the questions 'where am I?' and 'what is it?' and my intuition, my work naturally reflected these differences in character.



Fig 107. Alma Mansion, home to my studio in London from 1989 to 2006



Fig 108. Alma Mansion, home to my studio in London from 1989 to 2006

‘Alma Garden’ (Fig 106) was my last image of where I lived in London (Figs 107, 108). The owner decided to sell the property so all the tenants had to move out. At the end of December 2006 when I had an opportunity to see it before it was demolished, I went to visit my old friends the roses, pine, oak, acacia and lots of small plants with which I had spent time and which all held memories for me. We had shared some tranquil moments together and I was deeply appreciative of them all as friends and spiritual teachers who had shown and given me bounteous and unconditional love. Whilst there, I painted an early morning image of the front garden - I suffused the whole with generous early morning *Ki*

For a long time my main interest in painting has been ‘life’. When I look back over two decades of artwork, I have always been concerned with finding out ‘who I am’ by observing and recognizing the existence of other beings, such as plants. When I review my subjects I was once deeply concerned with death, but in a different way to my current understanding, which stems from having observed the cycle of annual plant life, and experienced the death of people who were known to me. Generally speaking, up until early 2003, most of my works reflected the feelings and understanding which come from accepting that death is a beautiful process which results in a beautiful status and is not just a final destination. As it is for the dragonfly and cicada, death is another step towards resurrecting the spirit through metamorphosis. Since I visited Hong Kong, Tokyo and southern parts of China, including Shenzhen, Hang Zhou, and Shanghai in 2003, I have begun to look for the power of vitality which is present not only as energy

in natural orders but also in individual items in nature, as the sum of *Ki* energy.

My interest in dying can mainly be seen in the paintings ‘A Weed in the Kemp Town Enclosure, Brighton’ (Fig 109), ‘Alien’ (Fig 110), and ‘Dried Wildflower near a Railway’ (Fig 111). All of these subjects exposed to me the calmness with which they faced their physical demise. I painted them all from below, looking upward, rather than looking down on them, because I wanted to meet them ‘face-to-face’, and to sense each plant as a whole.

The Kemp Town weed was growing in a patch of untended, wild lawn. When I was there in late autumn the plants had begun to die. I could see one stem standing firmly toward the sky, displaying its strong spirit. The stem of another was a dried-up and already folded in half by the heavy head which had formed a seed.

The implication was that ‘life is just like’ this in this world. The work entitled ‘Alien’ illustrates the status of a completely dried and broken dollar plant in the cold and wind of winter. ‘Dried Wildflower near a Railway’ is an unidentified wild plant in a lonely lane near New Malden station. It was quite a large, tall plant with hairy, fibrous seeds. I also witnessed the way in which this plant changed with the seasons. Professor Roderick Whitfield commented on my views on plant painting in the preface to my Beijing solo exhibition (2005).

‘Park Sung-Sil has long been a Korean resident of London. Over the years she has developed a very distinctive artist’s identity and an immaculate technique, employing both Korean and Western concepts to create her paintings. She brings a sensitive eye to observation of nature, depicting various stages of plant life with the accuracy of botanical illustration. Through her eyes we can observe the intensity of a plant’s struggle for existence, verdant and unstoppable in spring and quickly lapsing into desiccation in autumn and winter. Her grasses and stems may be isolated but still spatially related to their surroundings, through the use of background textures, sky or water. The interface between the stems of reeds or rushes and water surface is rendered with particular attention. Those still verdant are sharp as sword blades thrusting upwards, while dead and decaying stems crack and bend back at sharp angles. But whether this season’s live stems or last season’s withered, floods and frozen ponds are brought vividly to mind in these silent meditations on the annual cycle of vigorous spring and summer growth and inevitable but decorous autumnal decay.’⁵²

⁵² Roderick Whitfield, The Preface to Park Sung-Sil Solo Exhibition. (Beijing: Hanmo Gallery, 2005).



Fig 109 'A Weed in a Kemp Town Enclosure, Brighton' (2003),
solo exhibition at the Hanmo Gallery, Beijing, 2005



Fig 110. 'Alien' (2003) & Fig 111. 'Dried Wildflower near the Railway' (2003),
solo exhibition at the Hakgojae Gallery, Seoul, 2007

The other form of existence, 'life' is illustrated by a different style of expression in 'Unknown Wild Plant at Findhorn' (Fig 112), 'Bremen Reed' (Fig 113) 'The Green Plants at SOAS I, II, University of London (Figs 114 & 115), 'My Friends and the Wind' (Fig 116), and 'High Noon' (Fig 117). Two paintings, 'Unknown Wild Plant at Findhorn' (2003) and 'Bremen Reed' (2003), opened my eyes to the beauty of other beings as themselves, to consider not only the wonders of natural law but also their individualism.

In the heavy, cloudy weather of Scotland, the very thin, tall plants stand on in the wind. 'Bremen Reed' shows the beauty of the situation and its harmony with the reed, whose leaves flap in the wind under the soft sunshine. They are scenes which portray harmony with others, already perfect and beautiful without any need for human involvement. These two paintings persuaded me not only to seriously observe the principles of daily life, but also to enjoy and spread happiness at all times and in all places with others.



Fig 112. 'Unknown Wild Plant at Findhorn' 2003,
exhibit at the Hanmo and Hakgojae Galleries, 2005, 2007



Fig 113. 'Bremen Reed', 2003, exhibit at the Hanmo and Hakgojae Galleries, 2005, 2007



Figs 114 & 115. 'The Green Plants at SOAS - I and II' (2005),
exhibits at the Hanmo Gallery, Beijing, 2005

I painted 'The Green Plants at SOAS I, II' (Figs 114 & 115) as a result of having experienced a telepathic connection with them. Whenever I visited SOAS University to look up references and books, I came across them in front of the library building. They were planted, for decoration, on the tops of pillars near the stairs. There were two plants, one on the left and one on the right. The one on the left-hand side was urchin-like and emitted telepathic vibes which were both cheerful and full of curiosity. I was curious to know about the plant and aware of a strong feeling of trust and intimacy, responded to this feeling. I am always aware of the plant when I visit. The one on the right-hand side seems calmer and gentler although its body is large and very healthy. Parts of their anatomy were damaged and some leaves had started to wither but they naturally accepted this as a truth of the material world. Their energy was pure, vital, fresh, and modest, so I painted them as my friends in 2005.

'My Friends and the Wind' (Fig 116), and 'High Noon' (Figs 117) were painted more recently. The first was painted while I packed for a house-move. Most of the tenants had already moved out of Alma Mansion, so there was a quiet and vacant mood not only in the huge building but everywhere else as well. In the corner of the front garden, however, a long-leaved plant made a noise with its leaves as they moved in the wind on a bright sunny day. I had to move out of the house, but the plant would continue to 'be' in that location, regardless of the fact that the tenants had to move out. It was so beautiful, made bright and glossy by the sunshine and dancing gorgeously in the wind. 'High Noon' is a painting showing small red fish in a pond in Hendon Park and the reflection of aquatic plants on the water's surface. It reminded me of the Koi in Hong Kong and Beijing and the differences and similarities in feeling between the two. Their *Ki* was more passive and cautious than that of others in other countries, but their image was also unique and beautiful in itself.



Fig 116. 'My Friends and the Wind' (2006),
solo exhibition at the Hakgojae Gallery, Seoul, 2007



Fig 117. 'High Noon' (2007), solo exhibition
at the Hakgojae Gallery, Seoul, 2007

- **Views on life and identity in the art in UK**

Lastly in this chapter, I would like to discuss the views on ‘life’ and ‘identity’ in the work of a British artist of my generation as a contrast to my own. When I first lived in Hendon between 1990 and 1994, the Saatchi collection was near to my house. The first time I looked at British artist Damien Hirst’s (1965-) works, I found his approach to the question ‘what is life?’ very different to my own. I began to study his artworks.



Figs 118 & 119. ‘Just as it is – the Glass Beads’,
from a series of oil paintings, 1994-1996



Figs 120 & 121. ‘Shell’ series of paintings, 1994-1996,
exhibit at the Battersea Art Fair, Battersea Park, London, 2002

At that time I was concerned with the beauty of natural things, such as beads, which reflected the permeability of sunlight so beautifully and different shaped shells from around the world, and had been painting these since 1994 (Fig. 118, 119). I enjoyed the relationship between the objects - which I felt revealed their reality through the permeability of light and different shapes of the shells - and myself, as an observer

and interpreter through my paintings (Fig. 120, 121). I could read mathematics, geometry and also natural patterns, colours, and textures not through the camera's eye but through my sharpened senses. It gave me great happiness to be a part of the truth.

One day I looked at his work entitled 'Forms without life' which consisted of a showcase (Fig. 122) which displayed very large and beautiful kinds of shell. It was amazing to me and I thought maybe it was typical of the expressive tendencies of a Westerner when compared with my shell paintings. I unconsciously tried to filter the truth and beauty of the shell not only spiritually but also with my brain and hands; this was something of a magic tool to me, inventing something from nothing. I also like to paint privately as a method of expression. In Damien Hirst's show case, instead of painting or transferring images to create abstract or realistic styles of work, he chose the shells themselves as the object to display and to show his intentions; this is primarily an approach used in Conceptual Art. Although we were dealing with the same subject, he chose to display it and to show it to the public in a similar way to Marcel Duchamp's 'fountain' (a urinal); that is, as an object. Through his work I was able to verify what I liked and to identify the best way to put over my own message. I told myself 'Yes! I like to paint what I feel and think'.



Fig 122. 'Forms Without Life', Damien Hirst, 1991

Looking at his artwork, which involved the body of an animal, I questioned whether that was the only way an artist could show what was life and what was death. What was the difference between that and the butcher's shop? What was the value to him of 'life' (being)? Man has always taken animals for food and until then I had not been a perfect vegetarian, but after I heard a pig screaming as I passed a slaughterhouse

in a small town near the Byunsan community, I could not deny that the pig had the right to live.

The 'value of life' has always challenged me due to three memorable experiences in my own life. One was in 1980 when my mother collapsed due to overwork and too strict an adherence to vegetarian food and had been working too hard. She suffered a stroke and could not move any part of her body except for one finger. She received three months' treatment in hospital, but her symptoms did not improve. At that time my father, as a pharmacist skilled in Eastern and Western techniques, knew the natural medicines well, and was seriously looking at a Chinese pill which contained real bear's gall, horn of rhinoceros, and musk. In Korea it was very difficult to get these. At that time there was no international relationship between China and Korea, so I do not know how, but at last he obtained the pills and was able to save my mother's life. Her body is not the same as it was, but she has almost recovered. This event makes me question the value of human life when compared to that of plants and animals. If I say it is worthwhile saving one human life through the deaths of plants and animals, am I placing humans above other forms of life?

The second occasion on which I asked the value of others' lives came as I watched the news about the 'World Trade Revenge project' - a buyer's strike against products from East Asian countries which exploited endangered species. The strike was coordinated by CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) in 1993. Of course I accept the protection from extinction of wild plants and animals which have almost disappeared because of our misuse, but I believe we should protect them not for decoration or clothing, but to save the lives of other human beings. Is it right for the West to conclude that there is a need to stamp out savage practices through trade revenge?': what about the innumerable animals killed for food in the West? Is it acceptable, when an animal is used for food, to manipulate the numbers and mistreat them, whereas to kill an animal to make medicine to save a life on the other side of the world is wrong? The issue is quite understandable, but the solution and its application I struggle to understand. There is no justice in the arguments. If somebody makes a golden rule for others, he must also adhere to it. Restrictions on killing to preserve animal populations are important, but is it right to overproduce for food? Isn't this also mistreatment of animals? From this contradiction it was easy to divine Western people's ideas about others. I have a very good English friend who used to live in South Africa. In South Africa, if someone comes onto your land or even into your garden, you can kill the stranger because people who trespass without a permit from the land or house owner are considered invaders or thieves. Until recently he strongly believed that it was acceptable to kill people in this case. If this is true and a

golden rule, why, until now, has that great and powerful country taken other people's land and natural resources without permission, right, or negotiated agreement? How can we accept the Iraq War, instigated by America without evidence of nuclear weapons, which killed people and resulted in an invasion, and how do we all remain silent about the invasion of Tibet by China, which was another man's land and under his authority? I understand the nature of hegemony and the teaching of Jesus: "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her!"⁵³ I strongly believe in looking at the contradictory concepts which exist between human and human, and between humans and nature.

The third impressive lesson came from a conversation with Professor Jae Gaho in Hang Zhou, China in 2005. Thanks to Brighton University, which provided sponsorship for a researcher, I had an opportunity to visit China to meet artists and art critics to research different views on art and philosophy in China. Professor Jae Gaho worked in the calligraphy department at the famous China Academy of Art. We talked about the originality of Western and Eastern art, culture, and the philosophies which help to structure people's feeling, thinking, understanding and values. In the Chinese history of art, which has much in common with traditional Korean and Japanese art history, artists aim to express the original power (*Ki*) by moderated, simple brush marks with figured or non-figured styles. Actually Chinese calligraphy is ideographic, and began with the observation of others' inner and outward energy and appearance.

'Life' is the subject of the artworks which follow. These are classified under the heading 'Foster Culture'. The paintings include 'Bamboo Forest in Kew Gardens' (Fig 123), 'My friends in Alma Mansion' (Fig 124) and 'Red Fish in the Early Morning' (Fig125).

The bamboo forest image was inspired by a visit to Kew Gardens. It was such a wide and curious thing to look at. I read about the Asian character of the garden in the guide book. Due to the long history of this garden, there are many tall trees and various kinds of plants. It was early summer in 2003 and a sunny, bright day and the soft sun shone on every corner of the garden. When I looked upon the Asian bamboo forest, which was full of harmony, the sun, bamboo, warm air, and soft wind all seems to coexist as one. It was so pure and beautiful that I unconsciously and naturally became unaware of my own small identity. It was as if I was not owner of a body which existed separately from all I looked upon, as if I had disappeared. At that time even I did not recognize what was happening.

⁵³ John 8: 7.



Fig 123. 'Bamboo Forest in Kew Gardens' (2003), solo exhibition at the Hakgojae Gallery, Seoul, 2007

I just 'jumped' into the scenery and became a part of it. When I review that moment and place, there was no separation in time and space between myself and other beings. Although each thing had its own form - bamboo, leaves, sun, shadow and movements - all were as a perfect whole which consisted of many different elements. I felt that each different being was god itself and I was a receiver and also a part of them. Also, as the cactus had explained to me previously, I have many different parts to my own body but they are all parts of one body; even though all beings exist separately in the physical view, they are all one. I felt this was perfect oneness but, at the same time, a void! The harmony of all different elements has existed for the observer since history began, but the harmony I had experienced was not the same as others' experience, for the moment in which I witnessed it has passed. It is now a memory, so exists in a void. This reminds me of a chapter from the Heart Sutra, which is one of the Bibles of Zen Buddhism.

'Form does not differ from the void,
and the void does not differ from form.
form is void and void is form;
the same is true for feelings,
perceptions, volitions and consciousness.'⁵⁴

Since my experience and overwhelming enjoyment at being as one and in harmony with others, I am sensitive to this teaching. I think that when we realize something, our senses immediately read the truth from the present and all that has gone

⁵⁴ "The Heart Sutra," Dec 2007. Available: <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/heartstr.htm>.

before. The brain starts to work and to analyze. Reason cannot, however, describe or properly explain all things that are felt by the senses. So, before I began to rationalize my views on absolute oneness, I expressed it through painting because the feeling was one of absolute happiness. I produced a huge canvas work of almost four meters in length, so I was unable to paint it undercover. I supported the canvas against a wooden fence in the garden, and concentrated on expressing my feelings through meditation and intuition rather than by rational thought and memory. As I concentrated in this way I fully and naturally expressed myself on the surface, so that the images were painted by themselves. I was full of joy and my whole body and spirit were awake, so beauty and truth can automatically be read there as if the sun had reached every existence to reveal its own truths: identity with shape, material, texture and pattern, and so on. When I paint I open my heart wide and stay in the sunlight as if I am a part of it. I can feel wherever the sun goes and experience the full joy of recognizing and enjoying different existences. When pure energy and feeling are reflected in a painting, I believe it is not only a beautiful painting, but also a product which contains spiritual healing and teaching. The power of the painting comes not only from the artist's manual dexterity but also from deep intuition and observation with an awakened heart. Whether it is landscape painting, a plant, insect or animal image on canvas, it is the record of the journey of sunlight and intuition which expresses the visual elements: shape, materials, texture, characters and the message which comes from all of them.

This painting (Fig 123), is full of sunshine which is expressed by rich white oil colour in the background. From a distance, the sun is mixed in with the bamboo shapes. The nearer bamboo images were painted step by step. I did not want to show the sunshine and bamboo existing separately, so each time I painted bamboo images at a different distance, I used a huge dried flat brush to 'run on' (paint on top of) the previously painted layers, creating a series of scattered, independent images at different depths which showed the sunlight between the bamboo stems. In this way the picture shows not only the elements - bamboo, sunshine, wind and leaf reflections - but also a unity which exists harmoniously on the canvas. Oil paints take a long time to dry so each day the process could easily build on the work of the day before. To me, oil is the best material with which to paint coexisting past, present and alternative and connected presents, because of its characteristics. At that time not only did I enjoy painting the work, but the tenants of Alma Mansion were happy to look on as the painted image developed. Some people gave me tea break snacks; others took photographs of my changing work and talked to me about it. It was a spiritual communion for me with both nature and other people. It was also a precious lesson and a source of joy to me about the meaning of being one with others.

'My Friends in Alma Mansion' (Fig 124) and 'Red Fish in the Early Morning' (Fig 125) were painted in a totally different situation to the bamboo painting. As I wrote earlier in 2006, I suddenly had to prepare to move out of Alma Mansion at short notice, which came as a shock to me. Alma Mansion had been my home and studio for 17 years, since my arrival in London in 1989. The notice to move out within 2 months was bewildering and I did not know what to do next. I asked myself, 'What does art mean to me in this situation, and what can I do to keep a balance between reality and my artist's work?' This was a serious situation for me but, even then, I believed that my painting was a tool which could be used to wake up my consciousness in the here and now. It was also a reflection of the truth and beauty of different times and space. So in the middle of packing I kept painting, both things going on together in my living room.

As mentioned above, this was to be the end of my residence in the house so I carefully visited everywhere I could. 'My Friend in Alma Mansion' (2006) was painted in the middle of June as I faced a large maple tree, which had been my spiritual friend and comforter for a long time. It was massive and one of its branches had a swing rope attached for children to play on and there was also a basket ball net under the tree. Even my husband's boxing sack was near this tree. There was nobody there, only this huge tree, sunlight, the green leaves, and the smell and sound of each leaf as it touched another. Most of the tenants had left. It was so beautiful and I hoped that, if possible, it might exist forever. There was no gap between what I saw and myself. To me it was heaven and a state of meditation to stand and feel all these things through my senses.



Fig124. 'My Friends in Alma Mansion' (2006), solo exhibition at the Hakgojae Gallery, Seoul, 2007

Finally the moving day was near and I could not move my tree friend when I left, so I collected fallen branches which I consider to be a material part of its tree spirit. There was an incineration place in the garden where I burnt the fallen branches and ground them up to make a soft powder which I mixed with glue and Chinese ink. As a memorial to my friend of 17 years standing, and so that I might paint the existence and beauty of the tree as a record, when I moved out I used this mixture as a medium on paper.

This was means of resurrecting its being and interpreting my friendship in painting. I painted it onto very large paper, which consisted of 10 A1 sized sheets fixed together. The reason for painting such a large picture was that, instead of describing its outward features, I wanted to express my oneness with my friend (the tree), which had a giant sized body. There was too little time for oil paint (which is my favourite medium) to dry, so I chose water-based media to express what I wanted to show before I left my friend in Alma Mansion.

The easy fluid characteristic of water makes it one of the best materials for reflecting the efficiency of full sunshine, as one with the multitude of leaves. I used white acrylic colour mixed with different amounts of water to control the density and I painted this onto the surface first. Then, I used different tones of black ink to express the leaves, which were displayed from the front to the far distance. The painting is big (150 x 275cm), but I did not want to lose the feeling I had when faced with the tree, so I tried to finish painting as quickly as I could, stopping only to sleep. Despite my efforts, it took a few days to finish and whilst painting was underway I needed to keep the paper wet to facilitate the natural phenomena between black ink and white colour which reveal the vitality of sunshine, leaves and foliage.

I was short of time for packing for the move, and at the same time keen to paint some lasting images of my favourite places. This situation reminds me of the teachings of Zen. Even though things which happen to me may seem unfair or make me depressed, I can change my view and regard the situation as a temporary happening which will give me a chance to experience all kinds of feelings and senses whilst in this world. This view helped me come to terms with my immediate reactions and feelings of confusion. Another example of the value of life can be found in my painting 'Red Fish in the Early Morning' (Fig 125). One day in the early spring of 2006, I was at Alma Mansion and feeling depressed. The Pillar of Fire organization in America had given us two months notice, from early December 2005, to move out. Some tenants had lived there for more than 15 years, so we were looking for some legal advice about our rights to stay there. The process was underway, but the two month notice period had passed,

so the new administrator of Alma Mansion came from the USA and began to cut off the showers and heating in the public areas (kitchen, bathroom, and corridors) as the building was adapted to USA law, which is different from that in the UK.



Fig 125. 'Red Fish in the Early Morning', 2006

It was cold and I can imagine the cost of the electricity, water and other bills he needed to pay. We continued to pay rent and I was angry about their treatment of the remaining tenants. This had been a Christian community until recently where we taught and shared love with one another, but now I could not detect what Jesus had taught to the Christians. In this situation I tried to keep an open mind and to look at both sides, but to move all my paintings and belongings, which had built up over 17 years in this huge space, was not easy.

In the morning, whilst meditating, I suddenly felt a strong urge to go and look at the small pond in Hendon Park. It was too early, so I was inclined to postpone the visit, but this was so strong a feeling, not rooted in my will or imagination, that I accepted it and made the trip. The surface of the earth was frozen and everything seemed dead in the damp, cold air of Hendon Park in the early dawn. I wondered and fretted about why I felt compelled, almost ordered, to make the visit. At that time I felt almost ordered to go to the pond. I knew it was stagnant and that there were dead water plants and rubbish there. As I approached, there were thin, frozen pieces of ice here and there on the surface. It was a symbol of death to me. But when I moved closer, I was surprised to see about 200 small red fish actively swimming around in all levels of the water. They looked like fallen autumn leaves, reddish, orange and yellow fish, all vigorously swimming. There are no words to describe that shock in the chilly darkness and I recall their message to me; “How long will you want to play this false game (worrying about the future)? You have already spent enough time playing this way. Why are you satisfied with what you see now? Is it not time to go to the sea and enjoy another game, with a whale instead of playing with small things and worries?” I knew what this telepathic message from the red fish meant. My life was not given to me so that I should be worried and solely concerned with resolving where I should live and what I should eat. There is a more precious purpose to life. If I wanted to satisfy myself on this level, that was fine, but my mind could also go in search of a deeper, wider truth. Their message to me was not to worry and to keep going on my journey without fear. As before, this was not a dream or my imagination.

These realizations came to me through a ‘conversation’ with the red fish which involved the whole of my senses. After that experience I decided to entrust myself to the natural stream of life, grasping another chance to know the wider world and find out who I am. That morning, I was empowered by the red fish, so that I need no longer need to worry about and prepare for emergencies which may never happen. That message was precious and worthwhile not only to me but also anyone who thinks that today is the end of their world. I immediately painted this as a valuable message from the red fish to we humans. My red fish is not the same as Damien Hirst’s shark, sheep and cow, which show the final result of physical death. Rather it is an alive, witnessing friend - and a messenger, telling me what life is and how I can live a life filtered by my spirit and using my hands to paint. Thanks to these experiences and Damien Hirst’s different approach to works on life, I decided to take a positive view rather than a negative and material centered approach to art and values. The world is much bigger than the things we see! Also, how great is the capacity of the world which accepts everything that happens! Our view of the world may seem difficult to change, but I have discovered that it is possible if we change our individual perceptions of who we and others are, in both

a natural and positive way.



Fig 126 'Wild Plant at Alma Mansion', 2007

Andrew Buchanan, the director of Fairfield Art Center, introduced my ideas and way of painting in the solo exhibition catalogue in 2007. He distinguished my artworks from picturesque pastoralism and said that they were different from botanical reality works, animism and dry academic anthropology (Fig 126).

'In her work there is such extraordinary vivid sense of presence. This intensity in her work arises directly as a result of the intensity of Sungsil's very deep empathy with her subject matter, her beloved plants. I cannot think of a single famous Western artist who evokes such a deep personal relationship with nature as Park Sung-Sil does. And while her work clearly also brings an essentially Eastern sensibility to composition and design, nevertheless, Sungsil gleefully, but still respectfully, appropriates techniques from both East and West. Her vision of our common world transcends whatever culture she adapts and whatever media she uses, which help her deservedly and increasingly international reputation in Asia and in the UK. Sungsil seeks to show us we are all part of the living world of nature.'⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Andrew Buchanan. The Preface to Park Sung-Sil Solo Exhibition. (Seoul: Hakgojae, 2007)

Conclusion

My thesis consists of my paintings backed by a historical overview about Eastern and Western approaches to depicting nature in the 20th and 21st centuries. It also includes more direct reflections on my work based on autobiography and a working diary. I realize that a part of me has not changed or grown, but has observed my progress and, in so doing, has come to recognize a new reality and truth.

Even when I was in a situation I did not understand, some part of me accepted all that was happening as an opportunity to transcend the small I. This bears similarities to monk Hui-Neng's (638-713) example of the mirror (mind), which reflects all things as the truth, but is not itself influenced.⁵⁶

There are three frames of mind which we can experience. These are 'Chimera (wild fancy)', 'One mindedness', and the 'Clean mind'. The 'wild fanciful' mind changes according to conditions and circumstance,⁵⁷ whereas 'one mindedness' is the possession of a mind which surpasses life and death. The 'Clean mind' requires a strong center from which one maintains great sympathy with all other beings. Zen teaches the clean mind which knows on a daily basis that, for example, 'cold water is cold, hot water is hot'. Those who do not purposely look for a way to practice Zen have this kind of clean mind. At any one time within that mind, there are no subjects or objects. If a person needs to seek out the truth it means they are already lost because it exists in all beings and we do not need to look for it in any artificial way (this leads to separation again). If all this is so, then one can know the way. Eckhart Tolle discussed the mind in his book *The Power of Now* as follows:

'We live in such a mind-dominated culture, most modern art, architecture, music, and literature are devoid of beauty, of inner essence, with very few exceptions. The reason is that the people who create those things cannot - even for a moment - free themselves from their mind. So they are never in touch with the place within where true creativity and beauty arise.'⁵⁸

When my mind is still and not thinking, I feel everything is already perfect in itself and that all beings contain their own truth and beauty. I have experienced this

⁵⁶ Huineng. *The Sixth Founder Huineng Tunhwang Platform Sutra*, Trans. Chung Sung-Bon (Seoul: Korean Seon Culture Research Institute, 2003) p. 63.

⁵⁷ Hyun Gak. *Only Don't Know*. (Seoul: Moolbyungjari Press, 1999) p. 31.

⁵⁸ Tolle Eckhart. *The Power of Now*. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1999) p. 80.

since I was a child when I realized that nature existed beyond my understanding and thought. Sharing the connection between nature and my experience as a whole in Section B, gave me an opportunity to feel and think about my identity and to ask questions such as ‘What is the present time?’, ‘What is the great value of being?’ and ‘How do I accept and live this life?’ In this chapter I would like to summarize what I think are the important issues in my artworks of nature.

- **What nature means for me**

My memory of nature (the Asian concept of nature is mountains and riversides) in my hometown is that there were many living things. Nature was not only a material, geographical object, but also a principle, the creator of which was not totally separated from myself. It was unfinished and was always changing from day to day.

I now have a different perspective. Nature is my friend, accompanying me wherever I go and whatever I do. It is my spiritual guide and teacher. It contains all the secrets and truths about who we are and how everything works and, like a mirror, reflects where we are now and how distant we are from our origin. In 2005, when I visited the Dukyu Mountain near my hometown, I was aware of the present reality. It was clear from the mountain how sad and hurt she was as a result of human ignorance. Dukyu was no longer as it used to be. It is now a national park in recognition of its worth and in an attempt to preserve it, but one side of the mountain was fully covered with vinyl greenhouses for cultivating specialist plants and the other side had been excavated and denuded of its trees to build a holiday ski resort. My soul was fully aware of her despair and cries for help. A radical ecologist prophesied that, someday in the future, if we do not recognize what we are doing and we keep going with this mistreatment, nature will take its revenge. I think differently. The elements of nature will not take revenge, because they are humble and modest, as Gandhi wanted to be. Although we have treated them wrongly, they have patience and repeatedly understand. They endure and will keep giving us unconditional love, again and again, until the end. The end of time, which collapses all systems, structures and existences, will come as a result of our dullness and selfishness and our inability to see nature as it truly is. Nature is a convergence of body and soul and involves all creatures, including man. She is the mother of our existence, body and spirit. This level of communication existed before rational thought. Thinking has limited and shrunk the truth with its incomplete knowledge of concepts and language.

The parts of nature are our brothers and sisters, which I have termed ‘aliens’, whose shapes and ways of existence differ from our own. We do, however, have our

originality and vitality in common. When I was a child, I expected to meet an alien who came from another planet and universe. When I changed my consciousness, I realized that they had already arrived and have long been living with us and our ancestors as other creatures. I still expect to meet other forms of alien, but until now I have not fully known or understood our old alien friends which we call nature. Can I, and can we, understand other aliens with this consciousness if they visit us again in other forms?

Today, nature is apparent in the rising sun, earth, plants, insects, animals, inanimate objects such as stones, wind, water, air and energy, and also as man and natural law. Nothing, apart from we humans, has touched the golden rule created by nature. In separating our minds and views from other existences we have lost our memory of who we are.

Nature is also the mother provider which allows me to exist within my body. Our bodies are the tool with which we experience this relative world journey. Just as I existed without realizing that I needed air to breathe - an essential element of life - there is a vast range of elements and systems which support my being in the here and now. How precious and beautiful all of this is and well worth painting.

● **Art: deciding who I am and how to live**

As mentioned previously (p114), according to Viktor Frankl's philosophy, man is not a body alone. He specialized human's identity by 'self-transcendence' and 'self-detachment' ability as spirituality, which main elements of the condition of existence. The case of Maximilian Kolbe (1894-1941) is a famous historical event which illustrates one person's decision to choose unconditional love.⁵⁹ When confined to Auschwitz, one of the prisoners from Kolbe's barracks went missing, and it was announced that ten men would be starved to death to deter further attempts to escape. Sergeant, Francizek Gaiowniczek was one of the men selected to die, but when he cried out, grieving for his wife and children, the priest Maximilian Kolbe volunteered to die in his place. Here is an example of a man who exercised 'self-transcendence' (surpassed the limits of egoistic self), and who showed man's will "to love others as himself". In the way that he transcended 'self', his life was representative of his definition of 'self' - the way he thought of himself and others. In extending this approach to others he was the opposite of 'self-centric', or Small 'I', as it is called in Zen Buddhism.

⁵⁹ Kim Kyung-Sang. St. Massimiliano Maria Kolbe. (Seoul: Seasanguachim Press, 2006) p. 19.

My first experience and memory of consciousness, mentioned in the first chapter of Section B, reminds me that there were definitely differences between my body (as a baby), experience (the six senses) and consciousness (recognition of activity), but these were not separated one from another. They worked simultaneously, so that it was easy for me to be confused and to misunderstand what was the real self. A glass of lemonade seems to be just that, a glass of lemonade, but originally the water and sugar were separate from the lemon. My true-self exists separately in me as an observer, with no experience or organs, but the common ideas, majority views and teachings of history mainly accepted the definition of identity as ‘the body’. Even in my case, the power of habit and dulled consciousness meant it was easy to lose the truth and to follow the educated preconceptions which were deeply ingrained in me, rather than to trust and follow the teachings of my real experience.

It took sensitivity to sort out the ‘habits of I’ from the ‘true I’, which had not been indoctrinated by others’ beliefs. This is known as self-awakening or meditation. For me, art (my painting activity) is a reflection and record of the growth in my intuition and awareness under the tutelage of outsiders who provided me with chances to recognize the truth in nature. Descartes defined the identity of ‘I’ as the ability to think: “I think therefore I am”, although he still did not understand where thinking came from. Zen Master Seung Sahn challenged our identity by questioning: ‘Where does thinking come from? Who are you? When you were born, where did you come from? When you die, where do you go?’⁶⁰

This means that the thinking self is not the real ‘I’. From my personal experience, ‘I’ is a combination of body (senses), experience and intuitive consciousness after life begins, but honestly speaking, ‘I’ (present) am unaware of ‘I’ before this life started, and do not know whether or where ‘I’ will physically or spiritually exist after I die. Also, I knew this ‘I’ was not fixed, but was an expanding, ever changing concept. My paintings are works which arise from the coexistence of feeling, ideas, beauty and truth. In my paintings, nature is treated as an object which is mixed with interpretations of each distinct time and space. The visual images are created by my different visions and interpretations on canvas. We tend to think that every morning is the same, but when we sharply open our senses, each is unique and has a beauty of its own. Similarly, my paintings are feeling rather than logic based works; they do not depend on a resemblance to or realistic description of what I see, but on what I feel. They reveal a message which is unique to a time and space, and my hands serve as tools to translate my sensual perception of the object or being. They are

⁶⁰ Hyun Gak. p. 19.

not painted as art alone, which is assessed by the public and art critics looking for new styles. I believe that content has not changed since humans began their artistic activities. Only the style (means of expression) has changed. For me, the act of painting sprang from individual reasons for communicating the great values and messages which came to me from nature. Mine is not an experimental field in which I seek to change, manipulate and develop a style.

My painting of certain images and figures is a private tool for recording my diaries; messages from nature of the various miracles which happen in different times and spaces, with myself as interpreter. I exist as a person, and limited view holder of the unlimited truth of nature, but I feel it is worthwhile leaving my perception of the present truth on canvas. Many artists deal with topics from human society (this world), but my paintings deal with nature. I ask questions not only about natural beings and landscapes ('what is this?'), but also about man's ontological beingness. I observe, feel and interpret other beings, right now, by painting 'who I am' as the subject. Zen Master Seung Sahn said 'Being attached to words and using words are different'⁶¹ and there is also a Zen teaching 'When you look at the moon, you do not cling to the finger which points out the moon.'⁶² These highlight my final point.

When I became concerned with who I am I started to examine the truth that I did not make my body, nor part of any flower, bird, vegetable or anything else which exists. My body was already given, and what a miraculous wonder it is. I was able to recognize this reality but I already had a body, an existing tool, which was not created by me. It was not man-made, but was *by* man made (by my parents)!

● Here and now

A Zen monk asked, 'Where were you before you came to this world?' which in turn prompted me to ask 'Who am I?' and to realize the answer 'I do not know without guessing.' As previously mentioned, I remember my first moment of consciousness as a baby, but who and what was I before that time? I (present I) was unable to answer this. My heart keeps beating, my stomach is working and I keep breathing, but I (present) do not know why this is so. What I do know is that, firstly, 'I do not know', and secondly, I can decide the answer and meaning while I live in this body and in this world. That is the only thing I can do now! According to Zen, knowledge and understanding of 'true I'

⁶¹ Providence Zen Center. Only Don't Know, the Teaching Letters of Zen Master Seung Sahn. (Cumberland, IL.: Primary Point Press, 1991) p. 12.

⁶² Hong Ywa-Moon. Do Not Cling to the Boat After You Cross the River. (Seoul: Koryo Press, 1996), p. 101.

comes not from thinking but from continually asking ‘who am I?’. By thinking, you and I are separated but if that thinking is eliminated, then no ‘I’ remains. This ‘I’ (the I which is not separated by thinking or the mind) can be found by concentrating the mind and perpetually asking ‘who am I?’. This state is known as the ‘Don’t know mind’, in which thinking and distinction do not exist.

When the mind is calmed by meditation or chanting and the ‘Don’t know’ mind state continues, man can achieve a condition in which all preconception and judgment disappear without a need for thought or feeling. In that state, there is no ‘I’ (as the subject), ‘you’ (as the object) or ‘they’. You alone become one with the situation you face, like an empty space with a clean mind.⁶³ I try to meet all beings without preconceptions and I concentrate fully on each second. As Zen Master Seung Sahn explained, when you are doing something, do only that thing: when I paint, I concentrate fully on my painting, when I eat I am concerned only with eating. Later this will become a habit and quite natural, like learning to ride a bicycle.

When I achieve my aims I will visit old places and meet people I know, but experience them in a totally new way. I will be the new I. When I can maintain a clean mind, whoever I meet, it will be like meeting them as a new acquaintance, whatever I do, I will be able to do in a new way, and wherever I visit, it will be a new experience each time due to each new version of the fresh ‘I’.

I am trying to awaken this new existence and my painting is a diary of my progress. It records who I am in each different time and space on the earth. There are many living witnesses and much history all around us in the name of nature. Nature is the totality of unique creatures, truths and laws which coexist and which I meet every day. They surprise me and I worship their creative power. Each of my artworks reflects and records a unique moment and great teaching from nature. It documents what I have learned and also my senses and enjoyment at the union between our spirits.

- **Nothingness and somethingness**

When I cease to be a being on this earth, will the natural things which surrounded me also disappear? Physically I am a witness to what happened when my father’s body left this world. His belongings were left behind, his house, his books, his glasses... but what about him - his dead body? Does any former possession or

⁶³ Hyun Gak. Only Don’t Know. (Seoul: Moolbyungjari Press, 1999) pp. 27-29.

connection involved with him maintain a relationship with him since his spirit left his body? In my body in the present view, I can say that he disappeared and his belongings remained, but if I change my identity from the bodily to the spiritual (as the real owner of identity), the situation changes: even though the material world is real to me now, to him it is not an entity. From his point of view, my present is not a real world but is like a dream and present values can only be accepted here. So I accept that what is me and what is life are not absolute realities. They are only some of the worlds which can exist given a certain set of unique variables and conditions. The spirit (the true self) and mind (recognized one) within my body (experienced one), constitute a precious being, whose origins lie in endless probabilities and variable conditions introduced by other beings (my parents). I am very conscious of this miracle, which occurred in the name of an ordinary, everyday event, so I choose to live fully alive, (like an alien from another world) to fresh conceptions whenever I find my consciousness is heightened. This is a way to live my life and to daily enjoy with others the new version of my identity (I). Everything experienced in each new day could be interpreted as an art work, possibly as spontaneous Performance Art (Happening Art), somewhere in the universe and appreciated by the new and ephemeral version of 'I'. Just as 'the wormhole theory'⁶⁴ suggests that two separate times and spaces can be connected by a 'traversable wormhole,'⁶⁵ I had the experience of having communicated with my father after his death. I have also communicated with plants, including corn, fish and insects; beings which exist in a totally different dimension of this world. How is it possible for me to maintain my old understanding of these things? Nature does not speak to us about its truths in human language, but it has already, in many ways, revealed the truth. Some scientists, artists, spiritual people, and those who have sharpened senses realize that the gap between all dimensions and conceptions is beginning to collapse. There is not always a right and a wrong. In the case of my father and the corn, which communicated intuitively with me, they no longer exist in their old forms. But I cannot say it is impossible to connect with them because their physical bodies are no longer here. I believe that a spiritual connection is possible when each of us really wants to make contact.

Thinking laterally about beingness, I believe that painting is not just painting

⁶⁴ The Wormhole Theory: In physics, a wormhole is a hypothetical topological feature of spacetime that is basically a 'short cut' through space and time. A wormhole has at least two mouths which are connected to a single throat or tube. If the wormhole is traversable, matter can 'travel' from one mouth to the other by passing through the throat. While there is no observational evidence for wormholes, spacetimes containing wormholes are known to be valid solutions in general relativity. Dec. 2007
<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wormhole>>

⁶⁵ Jim Al-Khalili. *Black Holes, Wormholes and Time Machines*, Trans. Lee Kyung-A. (Seoul: Science Books Press, 2003) p. 30.

but ‘what I used to think’, man is not just man, but ‘what I used to think’. Is it possible to change my identity and live and in a new time and space as a new version of ‘I’?

● **Duality and oneness**

In the documentary ‘We are all sister and brother: A gene’ which was broadcast at KBS 1 TV in Korea on 20th November 2007, Geneticist and Anthropologist Spencer Wells researched the original gene of Homo Sapiens by looking for roots in the different races of each continent.⁶⁶ Through this process he found one of Genghis Khan’s (1162- 1227) genes in many Western European people, who are a totally different race from those of the East. Not only that, he also found that Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), who was the third President of the United States (1801–1809), shared a gene with Middle Eastern tribes. This was another precious truth for me, confirming that our appearance is not the only truth.⁶⁷ At the end of this documentary, surprisingly, he almost traced the origin of the human father whose genes were passed on to all men living on the earth today. The conclusion was that although we are now so different from one another, in terms of race and skin colour, we actually came from one father. If this is true, think about what mankind did to one another throughout history in the forms of hatred, stealing, invasion and killing. We are all members of a big family and have many brothers and sisters. Each one of us is a clone of all the others; we are just divided and exist individually. What a wonderful message to all human beings from the positive functioning of science and technological development. Through these, we can get closer to the truth. This is one of the most important messages I wanted to send through my research. It traces my understanding of all beings in nature and it mirrors my feeling about the aliens which exist with me on the earth; which came from the same spirit, but are divided and appear in different existences. They are also my sisters and brothers. When I accept this, I do not need to ask myself how I should treat them. As far as I can, I live with and embrace them with a loving mind! As Zen Master Seung Sahn suggested, when we cut out thinking (which acts as a separator), we meet ourselves, who can exist in different forms and shapes in this world.

No subject or object exists separately. A tree is ‘I’ and ‘I’ am the tree. This means that I can be part of a real family of others. I have sometimes felt my individuality (ego) disappear for a moment when faced with unique beings and beautiful scenes. If this level of existence could continue then only love would exist and the world I live in would be the heaven which exists when all things come together. Many

⁶⁶ Spencer Wells. “Adam’s Gene”: A Master of Documentary. KBS 1, Seoul. 20th Nov. 2007.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

teachers explain that true-self status can be gained by letting go of the small ego (separate mind).

I believe that these experiences and life challenges are not peculiar to me. When I travel around the world, I meet many people who share my vision. It requires a great deal of change to return to the perfect world and nature which are the essential base of our existences. For me, the most important thing was my awakening, from not-knowing and forgetfulness to knowing who I am and what is happening in me. To be awakened through Zen meditation is like tasting a real watermelon instead of looking at a photographic image and trying to understand the concept. Nature is the real watermelon, the provider of various tastes, but I also now recognize the person who enjoys it. This may seem a contradiction, but because of that, I paint what I taste to record and share it with others who have never even heard that the watermelon exists. My painting has three functions. One is as a record of what I sense from all my alien friends on the earth; the second is to observe the person who has experienced and realized; and thirdly, painting and my life itself are real artworks (Fig 127).



Fig 127. 'My Friend, the Thistle', exhibit
at the Fairfield Art Center, Basingstoke, 2008

Since my new interpretation of truth and identity can be applied naturally in this society and environment, my thoughts, way of life and manner are my real works of art because they reflect my philosophy and the friendship between myself and nature. It is living art to express oneness with all members of the alien family, each day, without colour and canvas.

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