

JungHyang Kim's Work

Nature Brimming with Life and Mysterious Woods

ChungHwan Kho (art critic)

Aristotle divided nature into the two realms of physics and natura. According to him, physics refers to the realm that can be perceived with the five senses, and natura serves as the source that keeps the realm in existence. Aristotle's idea is equivalent to the concept of *yin* and *yang* in Asian philosophy. *Yin*, which is the source of *yang* standing for the realm of senses, does not have any shape, color or sound. However, *yang* becomes able to take on certain shapes and colors and produce sounds due to the force of *yin* moving in an upward direction and thrusting energy above its outer layer to stimulate the five senses. Therefore, *yang* cannot exist without *yin*, while *yin* can only be embodied by *yang*. The two forces in combination form depths of layers of nature, each consisting of its own outer layer and inner layers. The shape and meaning of that outer layer may seem defined and set at first glance, but they are in actuality undergoing constant change driven by energy moving underneath.

In short, the embodiment of nature is all about representing the implicit inner layers through the outer layer, bringing attention to a world (it may be a primitive world or a world in its primitive form) that exists beyond the realm of senses through the medium of senses, and highlighting changes currently taking place through (supposedly) fixed, definitive facts. Only with the highly fine-tuned senses can such key components of the embodiment of nature be perceived.

Then, what are the inner layers of nature, especially the ones close-woven with the layers of senses and thereby indistinguishable? How can such inner layers be sensed and concretized with symbols (because nothing can be represented with symbols unless backed by the five senses)? Generally speaking, *qui* and energy, life and breath (*anima*), and the intensity and interaction of the forces are regarded as the codes providing glimpses of nature's inner layers. To better interpret nature's inner layers, it is needed to identify and explore these codes with all the five senses, rather than focusing on a mere representation.

The notion of the inner layer is associated with storage (phenomenologically, storage in which words, senses, and ideas are piled up and kept). It is a storage place for words, consciousness, senses, and the silence. Consciousness that is submerged deep within and yet to surface, substances of incomplete words that have not yet gained final definitions, the silence that cannot be captured or demarcated, and monologues represent a world of certain possibilities (*dynamis*) where seeds of words are stagnating. As it is a world of possibilities that are yet to be realized, it opens up new visions removed from reality. It is a world that embraces an array of different meanings, and modifies, replaces, exaggerates, or transforms the existing meaning (the meaning fixed by biases and prejudices). It thereby thwarts the attempt to keep nature confined within the boundaries of a finalized definition. It is a potential world that inspires and elicits people to come face to face with nature itself, which is nature as opposed to non-nature or nature before nature. (_____ (_____) _____)

JungHyang Kim said she aims to create a poetic space within each painting. This poetic space must be the primitive world, the world of possibilities, and the potential world existing beyond the realm of senses. It must be a space and a world where nature becomes rearranged and realigned into formless shapes, which arouse different types of sensation and generate different sets of meaning every time. Such different types of sensation and different sets of meaning come to form an interesting mixture with no cause-and-effect relationship and no claim to superiority, and this mixture again brings forth another series of sensation and meaning – an unending process of both unexpected and inevitable turns intimately connected to one another. According to Martin Heidegger, when a world is gazed at in an intense manner, the world itself opens. (_____) (For Heidegger, a world

clearly stands apart from a world itself, just as differences are witnessed between a being and existence or existence itself. This idea bears a close parallel to the distinction between physics and natura as well as the distinction between nature and characteristics of nature or the primitive form of nature.) It is a world abruptly coming into existence by tearing the curtain of meanings contaminated by prejudices and biases, a world that emerges to modify finalized meanings, a transient world that becomes evaporated after demonstrating its visions in a temporary manner, and a world that exposes itself to be explored with the senses through such momentary visions. Presumably, it is this space, world and vision that the artist aspires to open up through the notion of poetic space.

Then, what approach does the artist take to open up and reveal a poetic space, world, and vision? The *Abacada* series provides a clue. This series, exuding an atmosphere quite different from the other collections, serves as an incubator and epicenter, from which the other paintings are generated, derived, and developed into variations. The most notable feature is the set of stains with no distinct shape. These stains work as chance factors and secure room for the intervention of the artist's imagination. Leonardo da Vinci is said to have envisioned not only natural landscapes, the globe, and the entire universe, but also sounds such as the peal of church bells from stains on a wall. Stains function as an implication of everything defined and fixed due to their unique undefined and formless characteristics.

The stains are utilized to represent the shadows cast over the inner layers of all visible natural motifs, including the ones shaped as geometrical figures, as well as the force and vitality that brought the motifs into being. Think of the stains as the primitive form of chaos from which the world was born, and it will be easier to understand. Thanks to the stains of various materials and textures, Kim's paintings enable the spectator to feel the layers and grains of nature, which add vibrancy to the paintings. At the same time, disparate components and layers appearing in the paintings are entwined to form an organic whole, and this organic whole emits unique vitality.

Kim also appears to be experimenting with the stains by making gradations with charcoal to add a richer texture and adopting the brushstrokes of traditional ink-and-wash paintings in an attempt to convey (poetic) inspirations through their formless characteristics. Some pieces focus on highlighting the organic relationships between parts and the whole, displaying a technique often seen in mosaic art. On these pieces that resemble Korea's traditional patchwork cloth consisting of the five colors representing the five directions (i.e. blue for the east, white for the west, red for the south, black for the north, and yellow for the center), the artist planted an array of natural motifs, both in determinate and indeterminate shapes: dandelion spores blowing in the air, frog spawn floating on the calm surface of the water, and glimmering sun lights forming waves of concentric circles and overlapping circles. The artist add different shapes, textures, layers of colors and organic drawings to these formless, suggestive motifs afterwards to originate more natural motifs.

The artist utilizes stains (representing nature's primitive form) to depict the foundation of nature and adds colors (indigo blue and pure green) to better identify it. Wind has its own color (stem green), and dewdrops also gleam in violet. Night air envelops each being with the depth of its transparency (September Night); the gently rustling woods reflect light and emit fragrances (Fragrant Woods); and the sunset dances joyfully (Dancing Sunset). The flesh of nature, which is like a living organism, is fully exposed. While this exposure is the result of the artist's observation of natural phenomena, it is also the consequence of the artist's continued effort to blend into nature and blur the boundaries. It can also be viewed as the execution and realization of Gaston Bachelard's materialistic imagination. Materials, which are the substances of nature, are employed as the medium by the artist to penetrate her imagination into nature, to blend it with nature and to incorporate the result into art works. Monet was able to identify the interaction between water lilies and different components of nature such as light, the surface of

the water, wind and air as well as the artist's emotions and biorhythm, and to view the organic whole in a holistic manner.

Monet did not merely reproduce water lilies on the canvas as seen in real life. Similarly, Kim does not portray individual natural motifs as are. She focuses on tearing down the boundaries of such individual motifs and reinterpreting the organic structure newly created by their realigned relationships. She paints her alter ego (born of her imagination) completely absorbed as part of nature. Gently rustling woods and "dancing sunset" must be understood in this aspect. Woods serve as the womb that bears and grows secrets and mysteries. Woods are mystical because they still remain virgin soil that has never been defined by human perception - in fact, they are undefinable. The artist embarks upon a journey to greet the sacred dawn on that virgin soil (Mysterious Journey-Dawn) and to breathe in the vital force of a full moon (Mysterious Journey-Full Moon). There is something about the act of capturing scenes from woods, especially woods full of vitality, that connects to the mysterious experience of travelling.

The artist calls this collection of paintings *spiritoso*, which means "spiritual and mental", to highlight vitality permeating the entire collection. *Spiritoso* refers to *qui*, or energy, and vigor that make up nature, and is the complete opposite of still life, or dead nature. The artist aims to portray the undefined, formless vitality and constantly changing dynamism of nature, rather than providing lifelike images. That is why her paintings appear to float somewhere between representational and abstract, serving as a point where nature as perceived and nature in its primitive form overlap. Today's people are becoming increasingly isolated from the natural world. They are being deprived of the joy of exploring and admiring the mysteries of nature. Kim's work attempts to rebuild our bond with nature and rediscover simple yet magical pleasures of nature.