

On The Way a Hare Transforms into a Turtle

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The Way a Hare Transforms into a Turtle is an exhibition selected by Art Council Korea to commemorate the 60th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations with Denmark. I have visited Nikolaj Kunsthal in Copenhagen, Denmark twice earlier, and Helen Nybog Bay, director of this institution, visited Korea in 2018 to select the artists for the exhibition.

Nikolaj Kunsthal, located in Copenhagen's city center, is the third oldest church building in Copenhagen, originally built in the early 1200s. Over the centuries, late-Romanesque, Gothic, and Renaissance style architecture were additionally applied, and in the 16th century it became the center of the Reformation. In 1795, most of the building was lost as a consequence of the Great Fire of Copenhagen, but was rebuilt and used as a library. Throughout the 1960s it was the site of a series of major avant-garde manifestations, including some of the first international Fluxus happenings in 1962. In 1981, the building became Copenhagen City Council's official exhibition space.

It was a challenge for me to introduce the works of Korean artists in a building with a long history located in the central part of the city. Danish audience are unfamiliar with Korean culture and have seldom encountered the works of Korean artists. As Korea and Denmark are geographically far away and chances to experience Korean culture are rare, I researched Korean artists, thinking about how Danish audience could enjoy different culture naturally in this huge space.

Aesop's Fables are famous for their didactic stories we are familiar with. Especially, the fable of The Turtle and the Hare was even included in elementary school textbooks. It is a story which a hare who can run very fast defeated in a race with comparatively slow turtle. It gives us a lesson that one should not be arrogant or too confident with one's ability, and the diligent and persistent end up winning. This is one way of interpreting this fable. However, it is also possible to say that it is the hare who really enjoyed the moments of race by taking a nap in a cool shades, appreciating flowers and landscapes compared to the turtle who persistently concentrated on running only. Like the ending of this story, what does it mean to win?

The hare and the turtle quoted in this exhibition can be understood as metaphors for various concepts such as Korea and Denmark, one artist and another, and the situation between South and North Korea, etc. Various aspects of "difference" create diversity through clear distinctions, or have the potential to be mixed or influence one another. This exhibition reveals such a dual structure in various ways.

This exhibition is composed of three different layers in display. The first floor consists of sensory and constructive installation that awakens the five senses of the audience which confirms their existence. In the small room near the entrance, Rohwajeong's sound art was installed along with the actual surroundings. After passing through the everyday sounds that causes the viewers to feel tension temporarily, one can watch live video which records water drops from the faucet in the corner of the Beak Jungki's room. Water falls precisely in seconds accidentally. This is a collaborative video installation by Beak Jungki and German artist Jasmijn Visser.

First floor of the exhibition space is quite spacious and has high ceiling. A chandelier installed by Lee Chunghyung occupies the space with light. Lee, who is creating an object with a by-product of the construction sites by crossing the border of labor and art, has embodied a colorful and atypical structure with the on-site collaterals and various lighting devices collected from Korea and Denmark. Directly below the magnificent stained glass of the church building, there is a wall full of paintings painted on the animal skins by Jang Jongwan, which shows unique sense of Jang to deal with profound subject such as life and death in a humorous and cynical manner. In the space between Lee and Jang's works, another installation work of Beak was placed. Numerous glass bottles with the scientific name of the mammalian species are filled with water. It is a small unit of life that symbolizes the circulation of particles floating in the air as they enter and exit the bottle, diluting and evaporating through water. In this exhibition hall, huge windows are very medieval. Chu Mirim has embodied the landscape of the city she lived through the minimum unit of computer graphics called pixels. Her pixel stencil works were installed in front of the windows. The layers of the cityscapes surrounding the church, windows, and stencils created another mixed environment in which the interior and exterior of the building interact.

The second floor of Nikolaj Kunsthal focused on events and ongoing activities. The whole landscape of this floor seems to be still, but the movement of the audience is awaited. RohwaJeong's Still-Life screened at the entrance shows the landscape captured in Korea in 2016 and the landscape in Copenhagen in 2019. The text 'Still-Life' embroidered in the mosquito net reminds us of the dual meaning of 'still life painting' or 'suspended life'. Also this layer functions as a boundary where inner and outer space intersect. Jang Junho's work is a chess game where he uses a bizarre-shaped pieces as checkers. This game consists of Eastern chessboard and Western chess rules to show that is a mixture of the East and the West. It can only be completed with the active participation of the audience. Cho Hyun's work that embodies VR game is located in the center of this space. In the unreal world constructed by the artist, the player can level up through making interactions with many people. Ironically, however, a lot of exchange means that you lose your energy and die, and the game is over. The work of Yoon Kalim is placed in the innermost part of the space. Yoon created a table for feast which was borrowed form from the Korean traditional way of table setting, and also held a workshop to make Dasik(Korean traditional

pressed sweets) with local people in Denmark. Since Dasik was made with Korean traditional ingredients, it tasted quite unique for the locals. However, after artist left Denmark, prepared ingredients will soon be running out and the participants will replace ingredients which suit the taste of the locals in Denmark.

Between these two floors, the video work of Kwon Hayoun is screened. She visualized the demilitarized zone in Korea, which she has never been to, as 3D image based on interview with a soldier who had searched the place. It was a land of fantasy, neither as the remains of the war zone nor as a tense political zone. These beautiful, majestic and lonesome landscapes served as a kind of physical and psychological boundary between the two floors of the entire exhibition space.

About the fable mentioned earlier, I believe that completely different kinds of animals such as hare and turtle, would be satisfied with each other's results. Most important point in this fable is that they respect, reconcile, and acknowledge each other's attitudes towards the game.