

## Time of Drawing

For the last few years, Woo Jeongsu has been focusing on producing drawings in black and white. In other words, the artist has been progressing through time while creating hundreds of drawings. Let's start with an example of three small A5-sized drawings titled *Painting*. The drawings depict a tiny figure of a person drawing a painting on an easel and the shadow of the person, which repeatedly appears in front of three different background images respectively showing something that resembles a waving sea; a meadow with thick grass and sky covered with smoke; and a mountain range that unfolds in rugged shape. These landscapes can be the nature that the tiny painter encounters in the drawings, or it can also be an image that the little artist is drawing on the small canvas. Whatever is the case, the drawings seem to depict a painter struggling with a certain sublime scene. But prior to that, they are also mere pictures that juxtapose a symbol of a painter with symbols of the sea, a meadow and smoke, and a mountain range. In the small drawings, the symbols of the sublime that do not look much sublime are unfolded in front of a symbol of a tiny painter.

The artist's pictures look as if they were symbols, and they are interpreted as graphical patterns rather than experienced as optical phenomena. But the artist has not been daring to overcome them. Rather, he focused on pulling the forces out onto the canvas as if the most evident effect of pictures – hidden behind thick brush strokes and vivid colors – emerged when they operated like symbols. The images in black lines were divided and reunited, building up an aggregation of identifiable vocabulary and grammar. Thus, it seems that Woo Jeongsu's works mostly resemble part of a book or writing note written in a certain incomplete pictograph. For example, the artist's solo exhibition at the OCI Museum *Grave of Books* (2016) showcased his most book-like works. A ship loaded with books was wrecked by a gigantic sea monster, and the books floating among the broken pieces of the ship fought tooth and nail with monsters with sharp teeth and nails. Titled *Cosmic Turmoil*, the drawing series developed into *Monkeys Library* where monkeys sat on books and read them while books with teeth flapping their covers and jackets were flying all over the image and *The Duty of the Narrative*, a wall painting in which a substance that looked like a comet moved through the darkness where pieces of a broken ship and books were drifting around. A series of pictures were integrated with the wall in black and white and continued to other walls, showing the most self-contained narrative world that the artist could construct with the language of painting she had explored until then.

However, in his solo exhibition *Flâneur Note* (2017) at Gallery Lux, the artist chose to reopen the writing note from the past, rather than to expand the narrative world of his work or to increase its density. The exhibition reviewed the artist's pen drawing series *Grave of Books* (2010-2012) by organizing, adding, and rearranging his works under different categories. In the exhibition, pictures were reexamined as individual vocabularies or immediate gestures of response before being seen as a medium to deliver stories. Here, pictures in large scale did not complete grand narratives. Rather, they appeared as recombination of small pictures that resisted the grand narratives. For example, a picture of two hands that blew wind over burning books in *Burning Books* was juxtaposed with *Invaders* where people on a small boat fought a gigantic squid. At the same time, the picture was layered with *The Crown of Fools* where a snake was eating its own tail. These large panels of paintings were not really a development of existing drawings into paintings. Rather, they were close to large drawings where the artist tested what survived when drawings were arbitrarily recomposed and enlarged, and how they looked like.

So, what do we see? In the exhibition, the artist depicted a ship that was not wrecked, which was a rare occasion in his works. The depicted ship might have been before it was wrecked; a reconstructed ship; or a ghost ship that appeared like a mirage of such hopes and lingering attachments. Although the artist produced pictures depicting a ship that signified a 'ship,' they at least acquired certain symbolism based on the narrative world that the artist has depicted. In other words, the viewers could conjure up different stories with the depicted ship. The thin and wide brush strokes that covered the ships somehow reminded of the white tail of the comet that eliminated the darkness in *The Duty of the Narrative* and part of the snake that ate its tail. It also seemed to be a certain transcendental flow, which turns the time back to repeat all the vacuous destruction or gives another opportunity for a different kind of time. As such, it eventually is the artist's act of making brush strokes. The ship is already consumed by the waves, but it still maintains its shape intact. Maybe, what is really important at this point is about holding the very time and reactivating it, not about acquiring painterly characteristics by obtaining a certain level of visual completion to make the image look sufficiently self-contained by itself.

From the start, Woo Jeongsu's black and white drawings were a little different from being a preparatory stage for becoming paintings. Such direction was started after the artist's charcoal drawings series between 2008 and 2009. It seems that the artist thought that they were "overtly well-made works" and could not understand how he drew certain things. In other words, he might think that he created the works by chance. Thus, the artist made a detour to diverse media

and subjects and took time to read books and study them, instead of reproducing his previous charcoal drawings. At that time, he also produced drawings as a personal channel for making an output. As a way to organize thoughts about what the artist has seen, heard, and read and often to resolve his emotions - the artist's drawings made around that time look as if they were rapidly multiplying the existing charcoal drawing series, thus generating the foundation for the works to come. However, until 2013 when the drawings received a title *Grave of Books*, the artist seemed to have been uncertain about how he could develop them into works to be exhibited.

During this period, Woo Jeongsu's drawings used to construct a complete scene by borrowing cartoonish techniques or cinematic directions. However, seen from the present perspective, what is more distinguished from that period is a small series titled *Ubi sunt umbrae*. The series lay out the sea or a plane composed only of a mixture of white and blue in front of a flat turquoise background. Then, a man pulling on the oars on a small boat without a sail is depicted in black lines. The artist repeatedly drew the image for a number of times. The paintings are difficult to understand with regards to why the man is doing what he does in that place. The man's face also shows embarrassment as if he knew about the incomprehensibility. In the end, the repetition is generated between incomprehensibility and a will to comprehend something. The angular man that cannot become a color field and his boat expose the background color as it is. However, they are not crushed by the waves and simply remain attached flat on the surface of paints, possibly because of their incapability of becoming a color field. It is difficult not to see the paintings as the artist's self-portraits. The ship is not yet wrecked. But it is not even at the sea yet.

From there, in the productive path of time toward *Flâneur Note*, the artist completed a cycle where he set a ship afloat the sea, broke it, removed the mess, and reflected on the process. There, the drawings became a means to wrap up a cycle and prepare for the next cycle. The waves have not subsided, but the artist load the ships with people and send them to the sea. Currently, the artist is working on *Calm the Storm* series. In it, people on the ship are trapped in the wavering sea and cry out loud. The god that would subside the waves has been lost his halo. Or the god is concealing his halo and hiding among us. Or it is just a picture that alters and repeats itself. In other words, the artist has not given up everything yet. Such endless rewriting continues the time of drawing. And it is one way to cross the wavering time.

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