

## **Wrecked civilization and the space stroller**

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The highly stacked books of the library fall down and in the midst of all the books and objects from the shipwreck drifting across the sea, a puzzling situation of carnivores fighting with books occur. This very unrealistic scene is an impression from Jeongsu Woo's solo exhibition, *Grave of Books*. The great library that is falling down in his picture is reminiscent of the 'Library of Babel' imagined by Borges. Interestingly, the origin of the word Babel is Hebrew meaning confusion. It seems Borges predicted the future of mankind while conceptualizing this library. The endless world of civilization and the human desire to be rescued through knowledge, however the tragic situation where that cannot be reached can also be seen in the works of Jeongsu Woo. In his picture, as expected by the metaphor of the stacked of books, the culture humans built, civilization is implicated. The linear historical view, which did not doubt the evolution of civilization has already collapsed. There is no expectation of the knowledge of mankind to overcome difficulties and suggest a bright future in the middle of crises, disasters and catastrophes happening all over the world. The attitude of the artist, who is aware of such situation, is neither in despair nor in search of hope. "A mediocre situation that is neither falling down nor escalating" does not pertain only to the structure within the picture. This leads on to the will to define the individual situation of drifting in the middle of the world's chaos. The exhibition 'Grave of books' begins from skeptical thoughts of mankind, unsettling signs detected worldwide and most importantly from an individual's existential agony that senses all of this.

### **From a single picture to an exhibition**

At the starting point of his work is a shipwreck. This imaginary situation goes back to a drawing book he personally created in 2010. The 100 something drawings he worked on as if gushing all the images out of his head are filled with scenes of the world's paradox and social irregularities, such as death, violence, confusion, suppression, destruction, confinement, fight, etc. The drawings presented like a fantasy literature was inspired by the numerous books the artist read obsessively to understand the world. Similar to his reference to 'Universal History of Infamy' of Borges for his private exhibition 'Paintings of Villain' in 2015, references to numerous books he indulged in areas of literature, comics, plays and history can be seen in the titles of his works this time as well – 'Floating shadows' (Pascal Quignard, 『The Roving Shadows』), 'Time and the room' (Botho Strauß, 『Time and the Room』), 'Time for meat' (Daijiro Morohoshi, 『Night Fish』). Perhaps books being the subject of his works is natural. Because to an artist, book is the civilization of the world, mirror of desire, construction of fantasy, as well as a living spirit at the same time. In one of his drawings from then, books from a shipwreck are piled up in a mix of skeletons, while two men holding long poles are confronting each other. This drawing is the 'Grave of books'.

In his confession "I wanted to show one picture" lies a small pen drawing in the basis. The artist, who has practiced drawing using various materials such as pen, pencil, charcoal, oil color from his early days, has been focusing artwork using ink since 2014. To the artist who aims to reflect heavy subjects of the world with his light pen strokes, ink is a handy material

that boldly shows his thoughts in intuitive lines. In small drawing works, the strength of the hand, intensity and feelings are freely experimented, while the mocking and satirical atmosphere deriving from the subculture forms the general ambience. In his recent works such improvised strokes are suppressed to a minimal level. It seems while drawing 'one picture' the artist developed a patience of controlling the senses created when the ink meets the hand. In such manner, he completed the large painting 5x5m in size, 'Monkey library'. The process of controlling the gravity of black ink calmly was perhaps not an easy task. Since he worked by posting up one paper at a time on the narrow walls of his studio, he had to meticulously calculate its composition in between chaos and order. One can assume that such work process was a time of practice to control the balance between his 'realistic senses' and 'imaginary senses' for the artist. The exploration of duality is studied not only for the senses of handling the materiality of painting but also in the process of building the image. 'Monkey library' is a piece of work by the artist, in which he controlled his personality and attempted to express the spreading 'sense of disassembly' and the opposite 'sense of building' that gathers such efforts. Such static and active composition is carried out on a comprehensive level, not only in the picture screen but also throughout the exhibition, featuring a mix of drawings and murals.

### **A world of lunacy risen from a wrecked civilization**

Returning back to the shipwreck, 'ShipwreckG' brings its initial from the artist's ship of imagination Gloria. Presumably glamorous from its name, Gloria is utterly destroyed due to sudden disaster and is broken down to pieces drifting away on the ocean. It is a situation where statues, relics and books that symbolize the glamorous civilization of the past are all drifting along with fragments of various objects. The "sinking and disappearing glories (memories)" he intended to express does not end with sinking. This is where Jeongsu Woo's pictorial senses are well expressed and the light strokes that satirically describe the violent situation wildly emerging from the devastating situation is precisely that. A wrecked ship does not sink easily. Like one side of our society, tragedy leads to more tragedy and even makes impersonal miseries surface. In 'Time for meat', a group of crocodiles suddenly appear and attack books. However the book also has sharp teeth, so in the end only violence where it is impossible to tell whether it is the book eating the crocodiles or the crocodiles eating the book remains.

What stares at the secretive tree of violence is a full moon left hallow. The trailing image of this moonlight continues further on into several other artworks that follow. The existence of the full moon gives a prelude to the main incident following the shipwreck. Lunatic situations occur, such as a ship being wrecked to pieces due to the attack of a giant octopus ('The Battle of Ponta del Kota'), a cannibal eagle eating up its own kind ('Time for meat II') and ghosts flooding out of a book drifting in the ocean ('Ghosts of the book'). The strange situation in which monsters, spirits, ghosts, and beasts emerge uncontrollably arises in a situation where the order of the world is being destroyed. They make the unsettling situation into greater chaos, and the swarm of strange beasts eats up even the drifting meanings. In the midst of all this, in the enormous 'Monkey library' introduced earlier, a chaotic situation of books flying, falling, and drifting away takes place. While confusion and order are in conflict with each other, monkeys take over the place as if mocking the human civilization built one at a time. The primeval world and flood of strange fantasy emerging from the chaos of civilization lead to the main incident.

## Whirlpool and the world of choasmose

The 'Night owl', which is the first piece one encounters at the start of the exhibition, remains at the borderline time of before and after the main incident. The composition of the exhibition is categorized into the future and present of the wrecked objects with the picture of the owl in the middle. The artworks introduced thus far are stories pertaining to the latter half of the present situation of the shipwreck. The owl that sits on top of the grave of books staring at us seems to express an omen or a forewarning to an accident. This unsettling silence is only for an instant and the broken pieces of the shipwreck get swirled into a strong whirlpool. ('Floating shadows') In the whirlpool, the books, statues and relics act merely as remains swept into the whirlwind without other meaning of symbols. The speed of the whirlwind that goes round and round forms a white band in the picture surrounding the floating objects. From this artwork onward, the full moon no longer appears. Has the hole of the moonlight caused a ray of whirlwind? The white ray of light raging in the dark reminds us of Paul Virilio's words. About images in pictures and films, he has categorized the former as the 'aesthetics of appearance' and the latter the 'aesthetics of disappearance'. The projector-like hole of the moon, and the immateriality in the form of light ray of the whirlwind converge the appearance of objects with the whirlpool of extinction.

All of the story up to now leads to the highlight of the exhibition, which is a 9m large mural the size of a wall, 'The duty of the narrative'. This large mural one encounters past the whirlpool, is in the form of a wall drawing that combines 5 pieces of drawing made beforehand and a mural that was painted on the spot. 'The duty of the narrative' spread out like the vast outer space can be seen as the world after chaos. The various objects of the shipwreck float about in space beyond the open sea. What changes the situation of floating with no center, fall or rise is the emergence of a great meteor. The meteor calmly passes through the state of chaos in the speed of light, creating a great band of light. The band created by the meteor traveling in the speed of light provides another form of order that brings together the state of chaos. This is a type of choasmose, which brings about the cosmic flow that is both chaos and order at the same time. We can now assume why the artist planned a large scale mural at this point. In terms of perceiving the pictures, Jeongsu Woo induces the condition where the viewers' body can enter into the situation of the picture. He presents the picture of this world where he wanders in the city as a stroller and experiences among the crowd, in a form that can be experienced in the exhibition hall. The body of the viewer can enter in the world of the picture as they walk ahead and can be a part of a large band like the floating objects. The boundaries between the world of representation and fantasy, and reality, which is a dimensional world, falls apart by this point. Benjamin spoke of the phantasmagoria of the modern city and "in dreaming, precipitated its awakening." The picture (or exhibition) Jeongsu Woo drew embodies the fantasy of tearing down the picture of the world and the fantasy of raising it at the same time.

translated by Yena Cho