

A Shaman of Our Time, Choi Xooang

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Choi Xooang is an artist who sculpts concrete bodies. This may sound somewhat banal at first, but we come to be surprised at his ability to grasp the world pathologically. Choi's understanding of the world began with his 10-20 cm miniature figures displayed at his first solo show. These miniature figures, suffering from an expansive delusion, do not realize their relative diminutiveness, and tend to overstate their ability and situation. They have a bloated musculature, partly enlarged bodies in macho-like gestures suited for revealing such megalomaniacal symptoms. Their effort to emphasize their existence through bragging and exaggerated gestures at times seems pompous, but they are too diminutive to impact the world, despite their attempts.

Choi's concern with society's pathological state later moved to an interest in vegetative states those making utmost efforts in living everyday life undergo. A person in a vegetative state cannot perceive or affect his surroundings at all due to serious brain damage, although he looks like he's breathing, laughing, weeping, and awakening himself. Choi likens an individual's mental state intimidated by an unidentified force, to a person in a vegetative powerless state. The artist's perception of this state is confirmed in the work titled *Vegetative State* displayed at his second solo show. A bare tree grows from the head of a vulnerable man who has fallen down. This work, depicting a man changing into a vegetative state, like Daphne who transformed into a laurel, appears realistic and elaborate in its finishing, through its amazing figurative imagery and the meaning of the title.

In his second solo exhibition Choi saw contemporary people as vegetative persons in a state where they can do nothing by their free will in a highly standardized, controlled society, Choi now uses his accute sensibility to shed light on how an individual's deeds and consciousness influences society and others. Choi's third exhibition entitled *Itching* refers to symptoms causing persistent scratching or rubbing the skin. In this exhibition Choi diagnoses our state, likening this pathological state to a human's mental condition.

A message he wants to convey through the exhibition is that our current condition is not caused merely by external elements. In the same way we try to momentarily relieve itching by the repeated act of rubbing the skin, aggravating the situation, we often resort to rash measures to remedy social inconvenience and irrationality. This recognition is confirmed in *The Wing* depicting a wing with innumerable rough hands. As an enormous ideal is only completed through the efforts of each anonymous person, the sacrifice of an individual is indispensable for any social progress. It is cruel for

each individual, but this kind of sacrifice has continuously been required for the achievement of social ideals.

Since the third exhibition, Choi seems to focus on the individual rather than any systematic problems. The artist has examined the dual meaning of each individual's activities seemingly based on their own free will, and the accomplishments of a society's ideals through their sacrifice. In *Asperger Island* however, Choi highlights the formation of social characters based on each individual's personality. Through the pathological term 'asperger', referring to a state of impairment in social interactions, he visually represents human's universal attributes, unveiling our social persona and concealed human desires.

Choi visualizes the properties of each individual through one [spreading rumor](#), one who has a huge head too heavy to stand up, one who begs for money with huge hands, one who has an extraordinary sense of smell, and one who has huge feet. In this series, Choi employs a partly hyper-realistic technique as well as other methods of exaggeration, abbreviation, and modification, using his own formative language.

While Choi's work arouses our admiration with its extremely realistic rendition, in a sense his figures, at times seem pessimistic in that aspects of our lives and times are shown only in pathological terms. However, we can call him a shaman. Choi's work has the power to make us look closely at our world and situation. Although his pieces do not present any strategies for healing, we can expect his following work will lead us to make efforts towards healing.