

Kim, Hyun Jin. "The Works of Jewyo Rhii, the Artist– Idiosyncrasy in Making Objects, and its Performativity." *Hermes Korea Missulsang*. (2007)

The Works of Jewyo Rhii, the Artist– Idiosyncrasy in Making Objects, and its Performativity_

The current art world in Seoul seems to be divided into two major trends: one which seems to be overpowered by an extremely materialistic finishing and populist communication of art, both from the influence of the reviving art market, and the other being socio-political and geopolitical perspectives which refer more overtly to the scenes of the urban development, the society, and all sorts of political positions while emphasizing the social practice and activism of art. Artist Jewyo Rhii does not belong to any of these two areas. She creates but her artworks do not hold the finishing the market demands. And although her works are political in a certain way, her political insights are embedded in aesthetic details, making them difficult to read. In other words, ethical aspects can be part of her work, but social perspectives are not addressed didactically onto her creations. Rhii reflects a self-politics on the works through and its attitude. Works, but it is definitely delightful to have an artist like her in today's art world.

Despite 10 years of working in the field, Rhii had her first solo exhibition last fall, at SAMUSO (director Sun-Jung Kim). The exhibition presents the artist's main works of the past few years, and bring together all of works produced during her 2-year stay in Amsterdam (2004-2005) as well as the stories she had pondered on during the time. Here, by reviewing the exhibition, we would approach to the various facets of Jewyo Rhii's work. The exhibition is divided into three parts of the house, Samuso: the living room, the kitchen and the bed room. When you step into the living room, currently used as an archive, a large billboard with an undefined purpose greets the audiences. The billboard stands between a bookshelf and a big meeting table, and is propped up with square bars and a plywood panel. It is covered with faint gold-lined wallpaper which looks like a field of shaken reeds, and the artist slightly added hazy line drawings on this wallpaper. The billboard is not cut out



New York 533 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001 TEL 212.242.6343 / 212.242.6484
Seoul 270 Yonji-Dong, Jongno-Gu, SEOUL KOREA TEL 82.2.708.5050
www.doosangallery.com



in an exact rectangle and is made up of relatively cheap wood and plain wallpaper. This roughly-finished piece of wood panel stands across the room, audaciously disturbing the moves and the eyes of the audience who had just stepped in. However, while the whole piece of this boldly-standing obstacle stuns the viewers with its presence, the drawings on it are faint or invisible and look as if something is missing. And the combination of the audacious and strange billboard and the timid, almost blank drawings unresolved life itself, or even it seems to fairly insist the place of ambiguous fragile drawings on purpose. The detailed in meaning and is embodied as the journey continues inside.

Behind the billboard is the kitchen where the artist's video piece, *Lie on the Han River* is played and replayed on a monitor screen. This work has been completed with a more specific narrative. According to Rhii, her last three-year's drawings – based on her own relationship story in the past – were transformed into a video format. An anti-capitalist couple, with no job and therefore no money to date, just needed some space big enough to sit and lie down. They dated on the banks of the Han River but because of the piercing winter winds, they had to break up. The artist, who was part of this very realistic yet odd couple, sends a video letter to her ex-boyfriend, starting off with "Dear my lover." And near the Han River, where the couple spent time together before the winter came, she builds a warm and cozy shelter where they can sit and lie down, protected from the winds. Her various ideas that would keep the warmth and block the wind transform the secluded areas around the Han River Park to private, cozy love nests for her ex and herself. The work shows the installations, the spots and the photos of the Han River while songs written by Son Kyung-Ho, musician and friend of Rhii, are played. The love nests on this work look plain and fragile, as if they were improvised using simple materials with minimum labour, however a closer look enlightens you that particular effort has been exerted and that the heart cherishing the time spent together is embedded in every inch. The artist has transformed the bitter, chilly public part of the winter into a snug nest for lovers which would live up to its functions. After retouching various places in the Han River Park with her love, Rhii hangs a hand-written banner over the entrance of the tunnel leading to the river: "Come back, as it gets warmer." This humorous video ends with drawings of her ideas, which scrolls down like ending credits as if they were actors list of a film.

Like this video work, Rhii works try to re-signify some of the past moment, as another layer of meaning in the present, reminding and giving an attention to her certain point of time in the past she spent with her special ones. Therefore, the relationship with her ex, who was jobless like most people at his age but nevertheless a charming special one to her, is introduced in one of the places in the exhibition, and works relating to Bahc Yiso, a special and important friend and colleague of hers, awaits in another room, the last part of the exhibition at SAMUSO. Rhii's tracks and rediscovers the language used by Bahc Yiso by rendering homage to Bahc and his works such as the *Black Hole Chair* and *The Great Dipper with Eight Starts*. By doing so, Rhii revives the meaning of Bahc's existence to her and tried to fill his absence since he has passed away. The artist, found through her own works, is obviously a very interesting and unique person. And she inserts in her works the affection for or the understanding of the people around her who have a very singular artistic mind and an attitude in life. Such attention and interest in others probably stems from her own experiences; since Rhii has been vulnerable and small, she used to be recognized as a minority, marginalized from the standard of society, Her initial works were made in book publication, which were a kind of manual books for her to overcome all the hardships she faced everyday in physically taller and stronger western world as a petite and weak East-Asian woman. The book contains humorous yet hardship-overcoming gadgets she made for herself, such as warmers and humidifiers for her weak body, sound-proof screaming devices made of egg boxes, and reformed versions of prêt-a-porter goods that don't fit her petite physique; all started from ready-made products to end up being something totally new and customized through Rhii's hands. Another book, *Two*, contains relaxing massage techniques for one or two people, which she has come up with by herself.

The artist's view on the relationships around her sometimes is revealed through the emptiness and longing caused by someone's absence, and in other instances, I shown in humor and in loving. Jean-Luc Nancy, a French Philosopher once mentioned, "The sheer existence of myself and others becomes the calling and answering for each other." And we say that our meanings are defined through the contact of "our" existence and ask what kind of such existence we are going to implement. Jewyo Rhii is aware as one of the artists who contemplate in relationships between others and herself and she reflects her performance of existential being to her work. The begins – including herself- that cannot be underestimated as small and petty, the peculiar relationships and the time



New York 533 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001 TEL 212.242.6343 / 212.242.6484
Seoul 270 Yonji-Dong, Jongno-Gu, SEOUL KOREA TEL 82.2.708.5050
www.doosangallery.com



spent for others are obviously of great signification to her. Her self-awareness and her recognition in her works are resulted from her self-examination on humans as others. And these are expressed in a compressed way in allegories within the aesthetic aspects in all the various objects and drawings created by the artist. For example, the devices for the love nests in the video work, objects and drawings created by the artist. For example, the devices for the love nests in the video work, rather than being perfect, solid, balanced and symmetry in form, appear careless and improvised; as all the material and product harmonized with each other, in a rather heterogeneous way, the devices acquire the form of strange yet idiosyncratic and independent beings. Such are the peculiar making modality and can be seen as an inimitable attitude gained from reflecting on the everyday life around her. Her object making occurs along with the reflective judgment that intervenes all throughout the process of each moment of making. And the resulting details and the aesthetic, sensitive modalities are very important clues in understanding Jewyo Rhii's work. The room, the last part of the exhibition, is where the works that hold such unique aesthetic sensitivity of the artist are featured; all sorts of materials, finalized works, disassembled pieces, delivered from Amsterdam to Seoul, are placed out and each arbitrarily neighbored in the room by piling up five different carts. Instead of displaying individual works one by one, Rhii sets up these different pieces and materials in a heap, all stacked displaying individual works one by one, Rhii sets up these different pieces and materials in a heap, all stacked up one over the other in a sized pile here and there, as if she was putting them temporarily in a warehouse, and had presented quite an interesting landscape of ready-made products and objects as a result. The works thus entitled *Five Carts*, implying her mobile life of last several years. When Rhii was coming back to Seoul from Amsterdam, she couldn't bring everything she had made, so she had to make a very difficult decision of which ones to leave behind. Luckily, with the exhibition offer from SAMUSO, all the work pieces were able to live longer or be saved. Such journey and fate of the works, the working environment of the artist and the physical limits in real life and untold tales about the reality she was facing are revealed by this very room. In the middle of the room lies an installation called *the Unidentified (En) Lightening Object* – named after the original one by Bahc Yiso – which is just a disorderly mass made of miscellaneous things with some lights under it, covered with a large piece of vinyl. As the title suggests, it is a mysterious lightening objet, since a bulky mass, mostly made of small works or leftover materials, is covered with vinyl and has lights streaming out from the bottom. Like this mysterious object, we discover works that have become part of other



New York 533 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001 TEL 212.242.6343 / 212.242.6484
Seoul 270 Yonji-Dong, Jongno-Gu, SEOUL KOREA TEL 82.2.708.5050
www.doosangallery.com



works, or a collection of works making up a whole entity in all the corners of this last room. In this last section of the exhibition, Jewyo Rhii has cast away the egos of the individual works she has given birth to over the last few years and by making them relate to each other in a more group setting, she seems to be searching for the potential meanings that are created when the details or the individual facets of the works are connected, instead of giving a precise description of each individual pieces. This is why the audiences should also capture and understand the artist's singularity by discovering her sensibility, the originality of the languages she uses, the adorableness and stubbornness hidden rather than focusing on the details of the objects.

Jewyo Rhii is very keen on form and materials, but the issue for her is what to make out of them. The artist rejects conventionally inserts some judgment into her works and then hesitate, evades, makes detours or even negates what's there. The artist's understanding on reality, formed with intuition, is reflected or is intervened into the works during the very process of details. In other words, Rhii's process of creation can be seen as a serious moment of keen perception and ethical decision.

As the lives of her works- which could have been part of old history due to the limitations in Rhii's ever-migrating life-are extended for some time through this exhibition, Jewyo Rhii is fully unveiling her artistic identity. It would have been less difficult if her works were for sale or were stored in a large storage or even if she settled down in one place, but the reality is tough for artists like her who don't easily ride with any sides. Rhii, however, accepts these situations as part of her life and as she meets them head-on, she understands and converts the difficulties into her own artistic language. The language of the artist shine and oscillate in the evanescence, the existence, and between these two, her reflexive languages and their humane aspects and humor are all the more special. The objects born from her small and frail manual work, the sensibility and attitude emanating from these objects are exactly what we should keep our eyes on. Artist Jewyo Rhii has indeed occupied a significant space in our art world by performing her singular making attitude.



New York 533 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001 TEL 212.242.6343 / 212.242.6484
Seoul 270 Yonji-Dong, Jongno-Gu, SEOUL KOREA TEL 82.2.708.5050
www.doosangallery.com

