

## The Mirror of Nostalgia

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Taewon Jang's work is derived from the way of 'training the artist himself for looking things squarely' as he started studying abroad. By things he means not only possessions but also objects, people, and his viewpoint toward the world. It must have been quite a shock to find him within unfamiliar surroundings. Jang then realized that it was himself who has been located in the center of irrational reality that was rather strange to him and needed to be solved, and he came to understand that self-perception is the starting point to initiate change of thoughts. Accordingly, the artist's choice of main subjects shows evolutionary progress in the course of work phase. At first he began to work with gender difference, social groups that he was involved with, and then his interest for subject has been finally fixed to himself. And also the recent interest that draws his attention is working with reminiscence from his childhood to present time. Bringing back recollection from the past is the best choice to reflect self image on new environments. The method to draw the past into presence means not only remembering the past time but it also means returning back to one's core of the mind. It begins with pursuing absence that does not exist in present time. Nostalgia is the strongest remnant of remembrance from the past. The artist compares nostalgia to circumstances he is facing without realizing it, and this process gives him chances to look into himself and people around him in reality through different perspective. Jang's family, who is the closest to him, is placed in the middle of his artistic viewpoint and is the main subject in his productions. He sees his self-portrait in his family for family is one's other self in a broad sense.

"Letter to Mother I" is the work that the artist produced to remind that his mother and he coexist in this world in some space they share. The space implied in this work is the birthplace of the artist, and those two souls of his mother and him are brightened up by the light. "Portrait" represents his creative techniques using images of his family. It is a series of photographs created by the technique that is cutting out shadows from the photos of his parent, his older brother, and himself and gluing them to his face prior to taking pictures of him. He also tries this technique to put together his family photographs and his body in "Family Portrait of My Back". It is a picture of him that his family photo from his childhood pinned on his back, and it could be interpreted as an abusive attitude to his body. And yet the excessive use of body reflects modern art's trend using one's interest in body actively or overcoming one's limit to their bodies. The artist's body is used in a slightly different

manner in "A Man with No Shadow". It is an image of his entire body coiled up with light bulbs. He took this picture in his studio, and it is a factor that is relatively connected with his previous works about the group he belonged to. This series of works are taken from various positions and angles, and it creates an effect as if a performance is in progress. In this piece of work, the body image that is encircled by lights represents radiating energy, and it is expressed through shadow or backlight.

The extreme contrast between light and shadow is related to his memory. He recollected his fear of fire, and then produced quite a lot of works that had to do with a conduct with fire. A ceremony for burning objects, "Pray- Incense", an image burning Ji-Jang-Kyung (Sutra of The Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva) with incense, are pieces directly connected to fire. Taewon Jang treats fire and light as the same artistic language, and it supports concept for existent image remaining in the best condition for radiation and ignition. His obsession with fire develops into intense study for shadow. Shadow subject often symbolizes extinction of substance, and it is also connected to images that express trace of existence. The technique of eliminating or exaggerating shadow is a strong denial of shadow, and this way of expression creates an extreme contrast with other works that deal with light and fire. Study for light and shadow is a natural consequence from inevitably experienced medium for the artist's primary method of producing is photography. However, the artist's extreme elimination or exaggeration of shadow proves that emphatic denial is an affirmation. He is equally fascinated by light and shadow in his creative mind, and does not intend to conflict them. This is to say Taewon Jang uses duality of light and shadow properly for his productions.

Duality in subject and concept can be explained in light and shadow, existence and extinction, life and death, good and evil, etc. And it comes from the artist's objective thinking toward subjects and society. He prefers to choose subjects and materials that can give him capability to juxtapose two opposite things at the same time. Typical examples are incense that burns and leaves ash behind, light and shadow when it comes to material; and he uses materials wisely in different situation or condition. Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva, which he uses quite often for his piece of work, is a good example of duality revealed in. It is a Buddhist sutra written for chanting at Buddhist funeral process 'Chun-do-jae'. Ksitigarbha's vow and his effort to save people in both heaven and hell are portrayed in this Buddhist sacred book. The sutra is a symbol for boundary of life and death to the artist's mind for it describes details of hell, rescuing parents and ancestors from hell, and good deeds to pursue an easy passage into eternity.

The artist's effort to look into things truthfully is not just to emphasize particular parts of subjects. The image he creates naturally reveals his own perception to it and the subject's

unique characteristics. In fact, Jang deals with memories that are rather dark and unpleasant than joyful and bright. He discusses that dark memories often become clearer when he concentrates on subtle memories, and he is able to see through those memories better in the course of completion. The artist's nostalgia can be realized into definite optical language because it is about his own unclear yet existent memories. His attitude toward reminding nostalgia continuously can be explained in his ego's overcoming reality from a narrow point of view and also his healing process for loss caused by modern society's material civilization in a macroscopic way. In other words, Taewon Jang handles the world of loss that is much bigger than his own trauma through his works of art. His intention is to suggest that the audience too lives in an era of loss with their trace of wound, and he insists to communicate with them. The effect on the audience might vary for each and every one of them has various personal backgrounds. Nevertheless, the artist's working process and outcome imply his effort to overcome his loss through symbol of ego, and those are much expected to communicate with the audience while the artist presents himself as an 'injured healer'.