The Aesthetics of 'Proliferation': Sóley Ragnarsdóttir's Art Practice

Yesterday becomes today's history, and today becomes tomorrow's history. This is a daily phenomenon without common exceptions. 'Living' is 'history.' I am continuing to practice looking at the boundary between these histories, that is, the point at which change takes place. Strictly speaking, it's keeping an eye on the inflection point where transformation occurs, and there are always interesting movements in terms of form and concept around this area. Reading the social/structural system, defined as 'historicalization' in art, is the so-called process of getting to know humans. Thus, for me, it is the practice of collecting 'human history.' In particular, artists are fundamentally rooted in humanism, which seeks to build external reality into a visual form corresponding to the human spirit and continue the work of calling various beings, and demonstrating them, in the language of art.

The reason I'm paying attention to Sóley Ragnarsdóttir is that her work, in terms of visuals and conceptualizations, is 'proliferating' at historical boundaries. And, the performative act stands out. First of all, Ragnarsdóttir's works both take the mind and catch the eye. People's hearts and eyes are fascinated by her sculptures, inspired by objects found and collected in Thy, a coastal town in North-Jutland, where the artist lives and works. Her paintings also beautifully unravel life's images and natural patterns, with additional decorative napkin works[1] that began with the history of personal collections. Beach elements 'proliferate' as they connect to life (as seen in Ragnarsdóttir's works) as lines and abstract patterns of elegant ribbons are repeated across screens, embodying their own aesthetics in front of the viewer's eyes.

The mechanism, which 'proliferates' itself, can be said to be a unique practice of Ragnarsdóttir's work. The artist shows the aspect of this 'proliferation' through sculptures and paintings featured in the exhibition *She likes to collect rocks*. Made of pine, the sculptures are connected to both floor and ceiling as they appear to continuously grow upward. Ragnarsdóttir freely arranged and attached casted, shell-shaped pieces on the wood, which were objects she encountered while cleaning the beach. The shells that seem to be multiplying in each tree are a kind of symbol that signals that our lives are historicized through growth and reproduction with nature. The artist collaborated on this work with Strandet, an environmental company that seeks an economically/socially sustainable and circular environmental structure to reduce plastic pollution on Denmark's west coast.

In addition, Ragnarsdóttir used a method of expressing an image almost identically on painting canvases. In one work, the face of a bird is revealed in the same shape as if looking in a mirror. In another, paired birds 'proliferate' four times in order to have continuity with each other. What is very interesting to me at this point is the principle of *Yin and Yang*, an equation that is established as 'one and two, and two and one.' In the so-called Eastern philosophy, *Yin and Yang* are not fixed but relative and dynamic energies; they constantly move with each other, through the relationship between the two, in order to form a cycle of creation and extinction of all things. To see it as two refers to the spatial phase in which *Yin and Yang* oppose each other, while seeing them as one reveals the temporal dimension that coexists and changes

[1] These works began with the napkin collection that the artist inherited from her grandmother, who began collecting napkins in the 1960s while working at Hotel Saga. With each celebration, her collection grew until the next generation of her family continued the practice. As an individual narrative, this collection reminds people of memories and relationships about time and place, while also growing macroscopically toward social issues such as migration, generation, and absence.

with the pair. In other words, the artist's paintings encompass space and time, and thus can be interpreted as 'proliferation.'

Most of Ragnarsdóttir's work in production consists of a handcrafted process of fully controlling and delicately shaping and testing various objects and materials. Prior to traditional sculptures and paintings, the artist's attitude of emphasizing handicrafts, or using natural objects and even plastic sculptures (found on the coast together without distinction), reveal her willingness to rescue and revive all things beautifully, free from everyday prejudices and the hierarchy of art. This process is always accompanied by repeated performance such as a daily routine. Through the artist, who unifies all names of the works as *Untitled*, we see a balanced paradox that is 'empty' on one side, contrary to the appearance of the works. Thus, through an act that infinitely multiplies the interpretive possibility of work, and empties what is full from the point of view of silence, her *Untitled* encompasses human history at various levels.

Similarly, both 'East and West' and 'past and present' intersect and mesh in Ragnarsdóttir's work practice, further crossing the realm of 'art and craft.' Especially at the end of the 20th century in art history, it was this 'pattern and decoration' that served as a bridge in abstract language during the transition from a modernist period to the postmodern era. Repetition of patterns functioned as an element of planar composition, and through the realm of feminine handcraft, it also led to reconsidering the male/hierarchical centralism of modern abstract art and the spiritualism that is its basis. Through this lens, it is expected that the analysis and interpretation of Ragnarsdóttir's work, in terms of historical legacy and form/concept, will be further deepened in the future.

Seolhui Lee (Curator)