

From Figurative to Non-figurative, From Oil to Water-ink

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For anyone who has only seen Park Da-won's recent paintings, it would be difficult to imagine that she once distinguished herself in major figurative art competitions and was the youngest juror for the Mok-woo Society. In fact, until her mid-30s, Park Da-won dominated the canvas with solid figurative skills and adept coloring, having her achievements objectively validated on numerous occasions.

After a hiatus of several years, the first solo exhibition she held in her forties revealed a transformation so profound that it cast doubt on her previous artistic history. Over the roughly two years following her first solo exhibition in 1999, as if to make up for her period of relative rest, she consecutively held four solo exhibitions. Through the course of those four exhibitions, colors gradually faded, and forms disappeared from her canvas. Lines became unraveled, while colors and forms scattered and melted into the canvas. In the void left by the vanishing lines, colors, and forms, only a neutral background surface and the sparse, delicate traces of a brush remained.

The works she presented in this exhibition follow a process of first applying water-ink (*sumuk*) brushstrokes onto a gesso-treated canvas, and then meticulously covering the areas outside the edges of those brushstrokes with acrylic. It is a methodology that reverses the conventional order of painting—an agonizingly meticulous and exhaustive process, as if to re-examine the act of brushing itself and to redefine the limits of the brush and ink. This methodology of hers, along with the transition from figurative to non-figurative, and from oil to water-ink, stems to some extent from her experience at the College of Education, where she handled representative materials of both the East and the West simultaneously.

Just as the history of modern painting erased the image of God from the canvas, then erased and deformed humans and nature, and later erased lines to release the colors trapped within them, Park Da-won has summoned all forms into the background, extracting only the minimal traces of brushstrokes and solidifying them like fossils. This is because she has broken away from the sensory representation and imitation of subjects, committing herself instead to the exploration and contemplation of the very physical properties of water-ink and oil. Furthermore, by confining her brushstrokes within a neutral empty space and constantly controlling them, she seems driven by a desire to manifest a fleeting eternity within her canvas and actions, much like that captured in a photograph.

While Western abstraction is a process of erasing and emptying the subject, abstraction in water-ink is a process of breathing life into the subject and vitalizing it. Park Da-won's canvas delicately juxtaposes the intersection of these two methodologies rushing in from opposite sides. When a painting leans heavily toward humanistic contemplation, it becomes endlessly challenging for viewers and critics alike. However, how her subjectivity will be communicated to others seems to be of no importance to her at present. Regardless of what others say, she is deeply absorbed in her own logic, enjoying the lingering resonance of its waves. Therefore, standing before the canvas where she has erased everything and left only traces, the viewer has no choice but to keep

their mouth shut and listen to her story...
Critique by Yoon Jae-gap