

PARK, DAA WON / Now here

Eun Young Ahn(Australian Art Critic)

Daa Won Park was born in Daegu in 1957 and studied painting at the College of Design and Art, Yeungnam University. Park is a petite woman with a gorgeous girly smile. In contrast to her feminine physical appearance, her work is intriguingly masculine. The masculinity of her recent body of work such as "*Now Here In Blue*" and "*Now Here-Becoming*" series is manifested in the boldness, dynamics, vigour and energy which are expressed by her confident brushwork, as well as the carefully staged tensions between the painted image and empty spaces and the mobile and static. This masculinity is perhaps derived from her aesthetic foundation largely shaped through her early childhood exposure to the Korean literati painting ('*Muninhwa*' in Korean and '*Wenrenzhihua*' in Chinese), which was traditionally predominately practiced by men, especially scholar-gentlemen during the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910).

Growing up with a mother who ran a gallery, Park was extremely fortunate to see the original works of the last eminent Joseon literati masters like Byeong O Seo (1862-1935) at very early age. In her first year at university, she had also a rare chance to see the original painting of "*A Wintry Scene*" (*Sehando*) is held in a private collection. *Wintry Scene* is one of the best known works by Jeong Hui Kim (1786-1857), who was a powerful scholar-official, an influential art critic and connoisseur, an acclaimed calligrapher and importantly, the most prominent literati painter of the late Joseon period. Kim painted this piece during his exile (1840-1848) on Cheju Island. The deliberately sketchy wintry scene, thereby creating an austere atmosphere, is designed to express the artist's lonely inner self and his integrity. Park's "*Now Here In Blue*" and "*Now Here-Becoming*" series, despite of their contemporary medium and idioms, are connected to the essence of the Korean literati tradition exemplified by Kim.

Park is, of course, not the only contemporary Korean artist who rediscovered the contemporary relevance of the calligraphy and brush-and-ink painting originated in ancient China and practiced widely in East Asia. Not only Korean artists but also other Asian artists like Zao Wou-Ki (1920 – 2013), as well as Western artists such as the French Art Informel painter Georges Mathieu (1921 – 2012) and the American Abstract Expressionist Franz Kline (1910–1962), found inspiration in the tradition of East Asian calligraphy and ink painting in their search for an authentic way to express their emotions, inner world, psychological states and spirituality. According to the East Asian literati painting theory, first formulated in the 11th century by Su Shih (1036-1101), a Northern Sung painter and calligrapher, the distinctive use of an individual artist's brushwork could and should reveal *chi*, the spirit of Nature or the spirit of the artist herself or himself.

Park's "*Now Here In Blue*" and "*Now Here-Becoming*" series are a contemporary reinterpretation of this theory. Each piece of these series captures the arrested momentum of the varied breath, rhythmic energy flow, emotion, spiritual strength and psychological force of the artist, which is meant to animate or be re-produced in the mind of the viewer. To arrive at this state, Park has refined necessary skills and techniques. Her seemingly spontaneous and 'natural' brushwork is in fact a result of numerous rehearsals of swiftly making an image without drawing over the same line twice. Before the performance of painting she meditates, and thus she has a clear vision of the images she is about to create. Through this diligent practice regime, she has achieved a fine balance between the opposition of control and freedom or dynamism in the "*Now Here In Blue*" and "*Now Here-Becoming*" series.