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The Appearance of My Abstraction and Exploration of Its Identity

A Thesis Presented

by

Ye-seul Choi

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

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Abstract of the Thesis

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In order to specifically articulate my work's progress, I will organize this thesis focusing on the experience of my inner point of view as an artist. This will provide the intimate interaction and communication between me and my work. I have arranged the order of development to show how my work has changed since 2009.

Each chapter will deal with procedural subjects in the advance of my art. I began with the inspiration of materiality, and this interest was evolving in the exploration of paintings by focusing on pictorial materials. Major streaming of its whole structure will be built on the relationship that I have been making with the elements in my artworks. Therefore, I will describe the progression of this relationship as it unfolded during the development of my recent installation. This thesis will provide the conclusion on the overall perspective of my work's progression, and indicate the direction of my work's concentration in the future.

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1. Introduction

In 2009, when my painting began to become more abstract, I had to figure out my position within the context of abstract art¹ and my relationship to this form of expression. Up until this point, I had not been especially attracted by the work of abstract artists. Though I could identify the formal abstraction in my visuals, the meaning behind my work did not align with any of the conceptual concerns of abstractionists.

Rather than having been inspired by abstract art, I had been inspired by the anxiety expressed in Rembrandt²'s self-portraits, specifically in his eyes, the strong red in the painting "Red room"³ of Henri Matisse⁴, the embellished drapery of Gian Lorenzo Bernini⁵'s sculptures and from the improvisational qualities of Joseph Beuys⁶'s scribbled drawings.

I loved the temperamental personality of Louise Bourgeois⁷, but above all, I was stimulated by the textural qualities of her painting and installation objects, which showed evidence of her touch and hand manipulation. In 2010, when I entered Kukje gallery⁸ in Seoul⁹, I saw her work for the first time. I already knew about her and her art, but it was the first time when I saw her work in person. The exhibition consisted of her recent work including sculpture, painting on paper and printmaking. While her work articulates significant ideas about sexuality and trauma, my primary obsession was not with her subject matter, but with her use of material. What was important to me was the identity of the material and how that was revealed by tactile quality of her treatment. She chose not to polish and perfect surfaces for the sake of a pleasing aesthetic, and this allowed the character of the material to show through. This is the moment I became interested in the form of abstraction that informs my work that lies on the surface between the material and the observer.

I arranged each chapter in the chronological progression regarding the relationship that has affected the progression of my work. This thesis will demonstrate how my artistic inspiration based on the materiality has been changed. My abstraction derived from the materiality, and I have remained curious about how the interest of materiality turns into my abstraction. Within the evolution of my work from painting to installation and performance, I found that I am at the center of the relationship with my artwork. The relationship between myself and my work was the focus of my exploration in the past three years of my MFA Program. The main inspiration for my work from the beginning was always related to the materiality and characteristics of the medium. Without a specific blueprint for the final work, I started to manipulate the material that inspired me. Most of the time, it is a spontaneous moment to begin, regardless of the kinds of

¹ Abstract art uses a visual language of shape, form, color and line to create a composition.

² Rembrandt (1606 – 1669) was a Dutch Painter.

³ Red room is an oil painting by Henri Matisse.

⁴ Henri Matisse(1869-1954) was a French Artist.

⁵ Gian Lorenzo Bernini(1598-1680) was an Italian sculptor and architect in 17th century.

⁶ Joseph Beuys(1921-1986) was a German Artist.

⁷ Louise Bourgeois(1911-2010) was a French-American Artist.

⁸ Kukje Gallery presents Korean and international contemporary artists.

⁹ Seoul is the capital of South Korea.

mediums. The initial relationship created is with the materials, and this first relationship will produce the subjects that I will focus in this thesis.

The chapter 2 will articulate how my work resulted from the exploration of material. I had to carry the attribute of materials that I discovered, and connect them to the subject. In chapter 3, I will discuss how abstraction was created in relation to the material. I did not want my work to be a representation of a recognizable object ¹⁰ because it will hide the attribute that I found from pictorial elements. Instead of visualizing a certain object, I would rather give a new life by the characteristics of the materials. The new life that I gave them generated abstractive art. This idea of the life of abstraction led me to explore its identity, and as a result, I was able to change the art form. Chapter 4 and 5 will describe how this consideration created this transformation. Also, this context will discuss the idea of the drawing performance within the curiosity of abstract identity developed.

The generation of abstraction in my work created similar inspiration as the materials had given me. In other words, the abstraction still reflected the same perception that I saw from the materials. However, it also meant that the appearance of abstraction would contain its own characteristics, and gave me different responsibilities and concerns. In chapter 6, I explore the relationship of identity and performance.

At the beginning, my awareness grew because the identity of my artwork became stronger as my awareness of abstract increased. There were two things that I was concerned about. First, the ambiguous characteristics of abstraction made me carry nervousness in my work. I had to take onboard the issue of the unstable identity of the abstraction. My initial approach was focused on just materiality, because the abstraction only made by its materiality without specific intention or purpose had no clear identity. I perceived that they had an unstable identity due to their ambiguous attributes. Also, because the initial approach was focused on the materiality itself, the abstraction only made by its materiality without specific intention or purpose had no clear identity. This main consideration in the curiosity of abstraction grew during my time the MFA program. This thesis will investigate the specific direction of my artwork as regards to my consciousness toward my work.

¹⁰ The object used a representation in paintings was referred in Modernist Painting written by Clement Greenberg.

2. Materiality - The Original Dominant Inspiration of How My Abstraction developed

As I gaze at materials, I am able to perceive its attributes through my visual perception. The impact of the materials that I call its “nudity”, has given me an essential inspiration through all my art activities. To me, the “nudity” of the materials means it is from itself or from rough, raw and fragile characteristics. My childhood memory of playing with stones explains the sentiment that I found from materials. Because I have been finding an absence of this destination from the materials, the sentiment of its lack of direction is a similar sense that I receive from the materials. There is a note that I wrote in my sketchbook about the emotional illustration.

“When I was a child, I secretly collected stones around my home. When I looked at the stones, I wanted to pick them up and collect them. My selection process has a disagreement in the relationship between me and the stones.”

One of the emotions I had was uncomfortable guilt by moving the stones without their agreement. However, at the same time, the fact that I could not hear from them caused me to touch them.

“They look lonely, but cute. They seemed like they were aimless and their life seemed to be unsettled.”

Therefore, I had to move them from their original territories, and it was a mysterious experience to give the stones change through my decisions. The only way to communicate with them was my action. I had believed that this is one of the best ways to interact with the materials without any verbal language.



Figure 1. Ye-seul Choi(b.1987), Nudity, 2010, Wood and Velvet, Variable size, Kookmin Art Gallery in Seoul.

The materiality of certain objects has been a motivation for my work throughout my overall work progression. By 'materiality' I define the nature of the material including its inherent attributes, and also their potentiality to stimulate my consciousness. This is why the selection process of my materials is important to me. This process will not only affect, but define how I work with them.

In 2009, when I was walking through the sculpture building at my college, I saw piles of abandoned pieces of wood. I looked closely at them, and grabbed about 16 x 19 inch pieces of wood bringing them into my painting studio. After that day ended, I went back to the sculpture building again, and brought more wood and collected them more wood to my studio. At that time, my studio was very small, about 11 x 12ft, and I worked on my body sized canvases on the wall, easel and sometimes on the floor. My studio was covered with dark red colored fabric all the time, dividing it with another member's space. I covered all the stools with dark red velvet fabric, and I worked on the body sized canvas. This was because I used to collect objects that inspired me in the studio. I played with them, however, I always had to pack and pile them to make enough room for paintings. Thus, I was struggling with space all the time. This is why the collected pieces of wood needed to be piled up and stored in the corner of the space between my paintings and other objects that I had collected. When I was just sitting in the room and taking a break, I took them out from the box and spread them on the floor. I would rearrange them and play with them. This is how I felt intimacy with the objects because they became part of my surroundings. When I finished acrylic painting on paper, I painted some parts of the wood too. Most of the wood, that I brought from the sculpture building were cut pieces, therefore, certain parts of the wood had soft skin and texture that I liked to paint on.

This is how I built the intimacy with the material that inspired me. Due to the small space of my studio, many times, I had to work outside, in the open lobby. When I brought some of the paintings out, it allowed me to work on the pieces of wood in the studio. First, I worked on the wood by grinding it. I used sandpaper, and I could feel its texture. After I ground the piece of the wood, it became a doll sized spherical shape. The raw quality from grinding also left a soft and smooth texture at the same time.

The duality of rough and soft texture has always stimulated my visual consciousness, because the rawness of the material remained in my mind as a tactile memory. Roughness reminded me as a creator. It gives me an attachment. The way these raw qualities attracted me is similar to the roughness that I found from the artwork of Louise Bourgeois. When I saw her installation, I was intrigued by all the roughness of her pieces while I was insensitive to the tragic narrative of her life in the work. When I saw her drawing, I had a long time to stare at her painting, and its loose speed of lines and texture of pigment.

To me, no matter what the media of artworks are, overall the pieces reveal the time engagement between the object and the handmade aspect of the artwork. This is the materiality that inspires me. When I am working, I either like to stay on the paper for a long time in order to leave the loose texture of pigment rather than make a sharp texture or to see the raw quality of the painting elements as a trace of my hand.

As well as my painting, while I was grinding the wood, I was aware that a relationship had formed between me and the wood. I could smell the wood, I could feel the texture of the wood

and I would like to see the powdery remnant from grinding. Due to the time, and how I interacted with the wood, a special relationship and memory was created. When I grabbed the first piece of wood, it was an unpredictable event to be a piece of artwork. When I started to hand-manage the piece of wood, I had no vision of its final destination, or if it had the potential to become artwork. Although I could not determine whether it would become an installation artwork, the number of pieces increased.

The final decision of how to combine these two materials, the woods and velvet, was made in the end. In fact, the combination of the two collections of materials was natural. I was drawn by the depth of the dark red of the velvet, and I enjoyed the unique texture of the velvet which had smoothly streaming and reflecting light within its depth and weight. When I decided to bring the wood to the gallery space, I brought the velvet which covered part of my studio. Finally, I combined and arranged both materials together as an installation. Just like the experience when I built the intimate relationship with the wood, my artwork is informed both from the originating material and from the space which it inhabits. The intimacy that I obtain through living with it leads me to discover its final form. By the choice of materials, by its appearance or characteristics, this can give influence to my two-dimensional work, which I am working on it at that time. For instance, the painting “Crescendo” was painted from 2009 winter to 2010 spring. At that time, I was bringing the wood and velvet to my studio. I was intrigued by the texture of wood and dark red of velvet. Thus, it was a natural inspiration to create “Crescendo” with its relationship of the heaviness of wood, and softness of its grinding texture, and the color of velvet.

3. Painting - Internal visualization and the relation of three painting elements



Figure 2. Ye-seul Choi(b. 1987), *Crescendo*, 2010, 51x63 in, Oil on Canvas.

My painting “Crescendo” consists of the fundamental painting materials that I brought into it. Many pictorial variations make up this painting. I was overlapping tons of thick and thin, big and small and fast and slow strokes stretched into the painting. Also, dots, stains, and spilled oil paint were given their own roles as parts of the image. This painterly approach creates depth and extends the movement of painting elements on the surface.

With a variety of variations, it also presents several similarities by maintaining its consistency such as the shape of brush strokes and in the appropriation of the color palette. The colors that I used were red affiliates, light oranges and some green tones such as viridian and sap green. I was dripping the oil paint by rotating the canvas, and I added the heavy texture of oil paints by piling up brush strokes. Diverse brush strokes stretch into all different directions in the painting.

The change happened in the interaction between the variation of colors and stroke. It created an unexpected result when the painting was finished, because I was painting with the pictorial elements and without any representation of recognizable objects. This is the abstractive transformation which began with the inspiration of the basic materials that I had used. However,

in the process, I could recognize the presence of visual consciousness whenever I was making the visual activities with the fundamental pictorial mediums. The visual consciousness was very ambiguous to see and hard to regulate if it is true that they existed. I could not deny that they are always there in my consciousness. This is why the painting “Crescendo” is a very good example about how the relationship between me and my painting has developed.

There is a lot of diversity in terms of the mediums in paintings, however, I would divide them into three main pictorial elements for the interpretation of relationship. The three pictorial mediums; brush stroke, registered stain and color. These three pictorial mediums are categories that contain different capacities.

First, brush stroke holds time by revealing the physical moments and movement. From the stroke created by my body, I recognized my past moment when I encountered visual qualities of the stroke. In my opinion, to leave a visual stroke on the surface is a confirmation of my intuitive temperament¹¹. I control myself very sensitively, leaving each different brush stroke in order to set them up for accurate placement. The time I am working with strokes makes me maintain the rationality and nervousness simultaneously.



While stroke is more relying on my technical hand control, my use of registered stain or mark making is relying on instinctual activities of the painting mediums. The trace of the combination between pigment and mediums, and spilled pigment of variations of dye concentration are made by my automatic and intuitive approach.

Figure 3. Ye-seul Choi(b.1987), Drawing, 2010, 22x15 in, Mixed Media on Paper.

¹¹ Temperament of artist is discussed by “Studies in Temperament : III: The Temperament of the Artist”. *The Lotus Magazine* 9.6 (1918)

This is due to the different reaction between each pictorial elements in time. In other words, different time spent consuming each creation of stain and stroke made the individual attribute of each painting material. To be specific, in the process of creating a stain, I need to wait one or two days for results. I will use more liquid mediums in order to get stains. It is the main difference between stroke and stain. Therefore, compared to the brush stroke, the creation of stain is more unexpected and harder to control. This unpredictability always leads me to explore making another stain. Once the stroke is created, the condition remains the same as it looked initially until it is entirely dried. Once it is dried, the condition of it is totally changed from liquid to solid through the absorbance of the surface. This change makes me wait until it is dried in order to add another layer on it. It is because stains are created by the fluid properties by the mixing process. Based on the time of the medium takes to dry, I face every different visual consequence at the end, and it will direct me to build another stain.

Based on the different characteristics between stroke and stain, I have developed a different relationship of paintings on the surface of paper and canvas. Each object as a surface leads me to play with the particular pictorial materials. For instance, at some moments, I would prefer to work on the paper, but I would stop to work on the canvas. It means, rather than rely on the preference of the paint medium, I would start to paint making a decision between paper or canvas. Depending on the absorbability of each surface, I will also decide whether I create a poured stain or a brush stroke. When using poured stains, the visual effect as a result of spreading and seeping on the paper stimulates my internal visual activities. The fragility of the paper stops me from building a heavy stroke on it. I would rather maintain the seeping stains by constructing other pictorial elements beside one another. This particular approach on paper forces me to become reluctant to push all the materials to be built or compacted by piles of strokes. This is the reason why the paperwork is constructed by paratactic placement and defensive layers of stains.

The process of painting produces all the decisions that I have to take. In the process of painting, all the decisions are made without any representational objects. Also, I have to be decisive to make better choices between all the variations. For example, when I am making a stain, I have to think about the concentration of the medium to get better results. When the medium and color are combined, the formation of stain and color is changed by its concentration. The variation of the ratio between paint and medium will decide its outcome. If I increase the amount of water rather than watercolor paint, it will lose its pure color, but it will make more variable effects on the paper or canvas. In this case, I am primarily focused on the formation of the stain rather than being obsessed with the color. It means I am relying on the interesting effect of the stain rather than to get specific colors. This is similar to the relationship between stroke and stain. Just like the creation of stroke, making specific colors also required technical proficiency. In order to create unpredictable results, I cannot rely on color, since I can catch its result easily. Even if color itself can stimulate my vision, the process of making color cannot stimulate my visual consciousness, since I can easily predict the color I will get. Color itself is a very impulsive inspiration in my overall working process as well. However, it will be a different sort of inspiration compared to stain. For instance, as I demonstrate in my previous paragraphs, I covered my studio with red fabrics. At that time, I felt comfortable with the dark red from the unique sense of depth in the color as like the particular visual reaction that I had from each

different color. I can motivate myself to create abstraction with the specific color. This is another dimension of stimulation which stain doesn't do for me.

With these three dominant pictorial elements, I could articulate the relationship with my paintings. The combination of the three elements and my visual consciousness create the movement of images in my paintings. When I am painting, my visual tension becomes meticulous. In this process, I am watching my painting as a movement in the pictorial space. At this moment, I bring my visual tension to make a perfect scale of stroke, perfect concentration between drip, and a perfect color palette of each of the other colors in the composition. I also use a perfect shape of stain or spilled paint, which looks to be left accidental.

In addition, by overlapping innumerable strokes and by loosening and fastening them, I carry the tension that will construct its depth. In this perspective, I discovered how I encounter my painting. I watch my painting develop as if I am looking into the separate space from real life. When I am painting, I used to back away from the painting in order to see it from afar. As I stepped back, my eyes reacted differently to the canvas. At that moment, I perceived that I looked at them the same way I would look at a different space through a window. It is like watching separate space by looking into the frame.

Therefore, I regard it as if I am watching an inner visualization which is happening inside of the canvas. I imagine it as if the pictorial entities are making the automatic movement even though I am the one who is composing them. It is because I am trying to follow its flow by encountering its movement. While I am highly focused on the movement of the painting, at the same time, the movement is visually internalized in my consciousness. This is why the process of concentration is important to me.

Nevertheless, this visual activity which is happening in my consciousness is not always obvious. In order to obtain its ambiguous imageries, I have to carry the tension at the moment of creation, because there are visual clues in my consciousness to be visualized. This is undeniable. This inner visualization is very prone to disappear, and impulsively and temporarily reappear, but they are strong enough to be visualized. Thus, I can pull them out from my consciousness, and put them on the canvas. My distinction between the pictorial space from the reality helps me to recognize the strong connection between the pictorial space and my view. Creation of the pictorial scene with the elements is attractive to me as a creator, this is why I can push myself to create many of them. However, the pictorial scene is very unrealistic and uncanny. It is because the image consists of the pictorial elements of this spontaneous moment. It makes me divide the pictorial space as independent existences.

4. The Beginning of Transformation

Such as Gorky¹² felt the need to escape from the frame of the rectangular canvas, I also suspected I was trying to escape from the rectangle frame of the painting. However, when I started to explore with cutting paper pieces in 2014, I gradually realized that rather than escaping the frame, I had been trying to dig into it. With the experiment of cutting, I noticed that pulling out and grabbing the abstract figures in my hand from the painting was offering a very intimate relationship between me and the pieces. Through cutting the painting into pieces, I felt that I was reaching into the painting and grabbing each of the physical abstract pieces.

a. Cutting paper pieces



Figure 4. Ye-seul Choi(b.1987), From the Sterile Space(detail), 2014, variable size, Mixed Media on Paper.

In the spring of 2014, I began to cut my drawing from the curiosity of the abstraction that I had created. Every time I was painting on canvas or paper, I had to make the image strong and heavy in order to make their identity prominent enough. Most of the time, I motivated by the tension between me and my work. Visually, physically, mentally, I needed to carry my nervousness in order to predict all the things to be at the right time and the right place on the canvas or paper. At some moment, I felt I tightened myself too much in order to set up all the substances on a surface

¹² Arshile Gorky is American Painter. Clement Greenberg mentioned him in his book “Art and Culture”

not to be disordered. All the substances contained the potentiality to be able to be disordered without me noticing if it happened. I did not want them to be out of my control. I wanted to stand on all the events that are happening in my painting. In other words, I had to become aware of every visual variations that were created in my painting. It will allow me to reach for another gesture of stroke, depth of colors or density of oil and water, which was something that paintings need. Also, I could keep the desire for creation by their movements, so I could continue dedicating my physical and mental condition to my work. In addition, the process led me to be in a safe moment because of the fact that I can create my works continuously. This was why the cutting process was a totally different approach for me.

When I first began to cut my paperwork, it was the second semester of my first year in the MFA program. During the summer, I saw that my paper palette was attached to the wall after I painted an acrylic painting. Usually on the wall of my studio, I would attach fragments of paper; they were garbage look like, the paper palette that I have used and some of the memos. When I saw the paper palette on the wall, I took it and started to cut it, by following the arbitrary shape of the color mixture. I attached the piece that I cut on the paper, and I painted beside the piece. There was not a good connection between a cutting piece and non-cutting fragments. I was not very happy with the final work. On the other hand, it was a somehow strong experience to cut a painting's trace that had remained in the palette. After the experience, I started to cut another paper, which I didn't like by following the ambiguous outline of the abstract shapes. When I took the shape, it lost the rectangular painting quality. I saw that the abstract figure was popped out and transformed. It looked ugly and strange, but cute, lovely and not very unfamiliar. After this time, I started to cut another paper and the number of the cutting pieces was increased.

To me, cutting them seems to give a new life for my abstract images. By losing their composition in a rectangle, they appeared as their own abstract figure even more clearly. I could see its ambiguous form, and I could see the abstraction in it more obviously. Also, I could have another kind of intimacy with them. It was different achievement compared to the previous form of the rectangular surface. This was how I started to play with the pieces of the cutting paper.

Before, while I was painting, I had to keep the tension more sensitively so I could make paintings stronger. After abstraction was created with the fragmental painting elements, I was considerate about its own identity. I spent a lot of time figuring out the abstract visualization, which was formed by the ambiguous pictorial elements. As the leader and creator of the creatures of abstraction, I decided to play with their independent identities. Originally, they had to be strong, heavy and they had to shout spectacularly to me in the rectangular space as abstractive figures. Also, they had to coincide in the space together. By cutting the paper, they started to detached from others. I tried to make the form stand out more, and I could exaggerate the shapes by cutting it. It allowed me to see the abstract figure without the interruption with the composition. Even though they seemed to be lost its original identities from their original environments, cutting allowed their color scheme to pop out and get more focus.

b. The Movement reversal

My MFA first solo exhibition, the “Movement Reversal” was held in Lawrence Alloway Gallery to explore about the ambiguity of abstraction. In this project, I displayed the ambiguity of the abstraction itself. In addition, it was to show my responsibility as a creator.

The “Movement Reversal” project gives personality to abstraction by extracting their ambiguities. My works did not rely on reality as I was not trying to bring the obvious representation of a specific object or subject. I extracted the ambiguity of the abstraction by emphasizing, revealing, decreasing, and condensing their characteristics. Using this approach allowed me to make variations to the identities of the abstraction. Furthermore, my works made me stay in the moment where the invisible abstract reality was evolving through the creating process. The “Movement Reversal” project consisted of different media; one was the daily drawing project, and the other was the Monoprint. For each media technique, I established rules to intensify the identity of the abstraction.

The daily drawing project began in the summer of 2014. I started to make a watercolor drawing on 9 x 12 inch paper every day. The watercolor drawings were around 5 x 5 inch in size, since the abstraction reveals its ambiguity in its limited conditions or minimized scale. The creatures looked more like figurative abstract images.

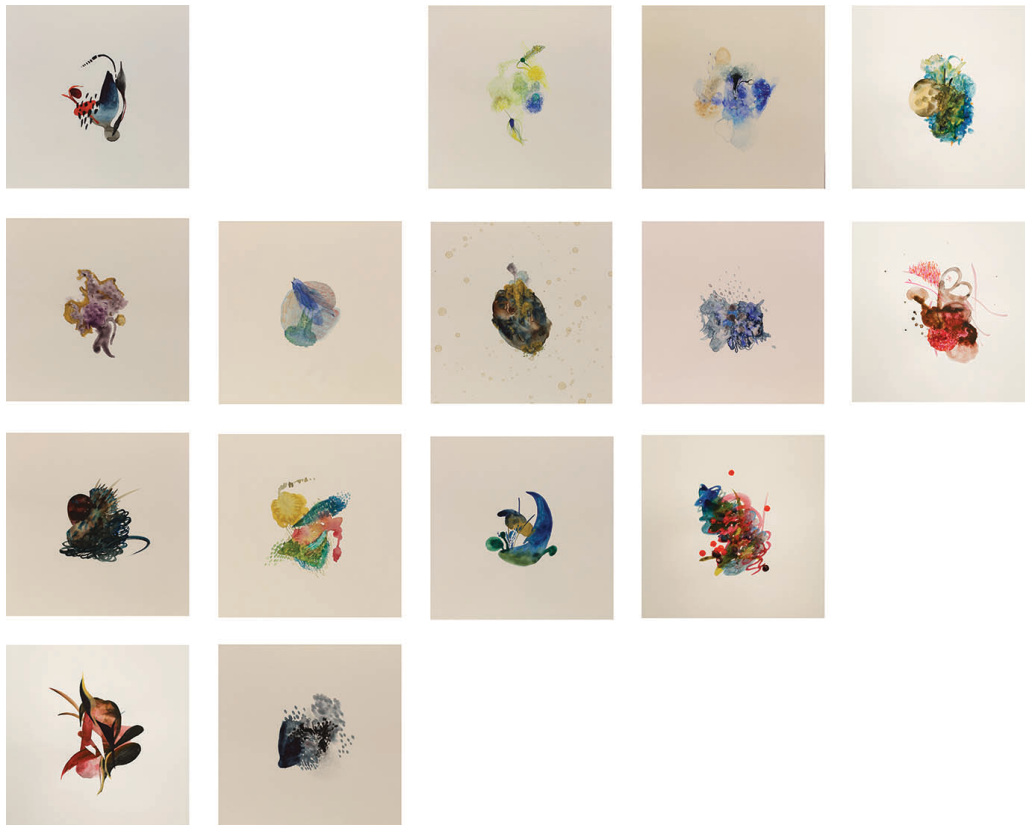


Figure 5. Ye-seul Choi(b.1987), Movement Reversal drawing series (daily drawing series), 2015, Watercolor on 12 x 9 inch's Paper.

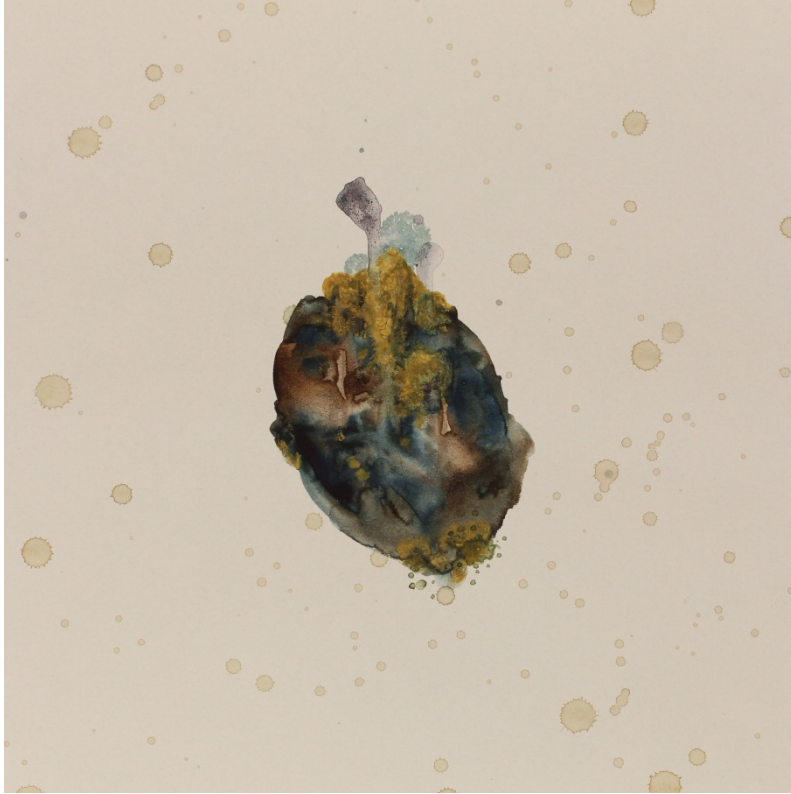


Figure 6. Ye-seul Choi(b. 1987), One of the drawing of The Movement Reversal drawing series (daily drawing series), 2015, Watercolor on 12 x9 inch Paper.

Similarly, Monoprint¹³ helped reveal the abstractive effect in distorted shapes. Triangles, rectangles, and circles are all basic shapes, but they were not all perfectly shaped. These shapes were made up of lines that may not be straight or perfectly rounded, and did not represent semiotic shapes. At a glance, the images appeared to have basic figures, but they were made up of broken and distorted shapes. These shapes were hard to repeat and remember. Through these figures, I wanted to establish an unstable condition to allow them to preserve their own identities. In the simple limitation that I established, the figures showed their ambiguous characteristics even better. The limitations that I made for this projected worked as rules, but it can be broken easily; the figures keep their way to go in certain directions as far as they have a tendency of consistency.

¹³Monoprint is one of printmaking forms.



Figure 7. Ye-seul Choi(b.1987), 2015, Linkable Entities, Watercolor, Monotype print, 15 x 11.7 in.

5. Installation - Physical Transformation of the Art Form

Since 2010, I have explored with heavy intensity materials; however, I was attracted by the different attributes of materials. When I was working with cutting pieces, I focused on the weight of the identity in my abstraction. I was always curious on the abstraction that I created. This exploration led to the transformation of the paper as the body of work. I began to see papers as fragments, similar to the way I saw the pictorial materials in my paintings. Paper was a way to relax myself from the tension of canvas work. Papers, a familiar object, were good enough to be the main material. The roles of papers and pigments changed during my solo exhibition at the Lawrence Alloway Gallery in 2015. The paper became the body of the entire installation, with the pigments as supportive materials. This did not mean that color lost its importance; due to the transition of its roles, I was able to achieve a more active relationship between color and paper.



Figure 8. Ye-seul Choi(b.1987), Transformation, 2015, Installation , variable size, Acrylic, Korean Paint, Watercolor, Handmade paper, Interfacing paper, Lawrence Alloway Gallery, NY.

The exhibition, “Transformation” was constructed with dyed handmade papers. The process to create this piece was well organized. At the beginning, I ripped the papers apart to distort their shape and original purpose. After, I crumpled the papers, they remained an arbitrary quality evident on the surface and the shape of the form. This process was made in order to get automatic results. In addition, the crumpled and ripped texture of the paper would get its color in the next process of dyeing. All the pieces of the papers will have their distinct figures and sizes. They were hung in the 23ft x 23ft x 9.9ft space. Due to the fragility and emptiness of paper, I came up with the idea of hanging since papers are light enough to make a gentle movement of air and the viewers. This approach of combining papers and pigments helped me to work on the identity of abstraction. I acquired the arbitrary in the consistency of the system for randomizing its effect.

After I had all the materials ready to be installed, I still had to arouse my visual consciousness to set all the fragments up to the right place. The way of giving its placement was based on my painting experience. I made the placements by relying on my intuitive visual consciousness as if

I was painting. It was helpful because I saw my painting in another space to distinguish from the reality. My approach for the installation related to the specific time and space, because I aroused the visual consciousness in the specific moments and place.



Figure 9. Ye-seul C hoi(b.1987), Transformation, 2015, Installation(detail) , variable size, Acrylic, Korean Paint, watercolor, Handmade paper, Interfacing paper, Lawrence Alloway Gallery, NY

My installation has a similar approach to Andy Goldworthy¹⁴'s installations. His methodology of installation begins with the fragments that he brings from nature. After he chooses the organic materials, all the fragments are formed to sustain each other. I also began with the fragments of the materials that I created. In my case, I installed the fragments so that they barely touched. In this way, the papers exist individually, but are still in the same moment of space.

During the installation, I established own methodology more specifically in the 2016 MFA Thesis Exhibition at the Paul W. Zuccaire Gallery. Based on the idea of strengthening the abstract identity, this project consisted of the association between the automatic methodology and the rules of repetition and simplification.

In this exhibition, I assigned specific roles to each material because I knew the materials would help reveal the ambiguity of abstraction. Interfacing paper¹⁵ was a good material to use due to its characteristics (good absorption, high durability, light, and fragile). The reaction between pigments and this paper was strong enough, and the absorption was high. The durability helped create different arbitrary stains during the dyeing process. I dyed the paper after I cut the paper

¹⁴ Andy Goldworthy (born 1956) is a British photographer and environmental producing site-specific sculptor.

¹⁵The interfacing paper in the installation is a kind of tracing cloth to get pattern without any grid lines or dots.

into imperfect rectangular shapes. Once it dried, I attached the short side of the rectangles to wooden sticks. I made a total of 223 pieces for the gallery exhibition. I made repetition in these pieces to reveal its ambiguity and lightness.



Figure 10. Ye-seul Choi(b.1987), An Aerial Scene,2016, Installation on 48 x 22 ft. wall, Acrylic, Korean Paint, Watercolor, Interfacing paper, wooden sticks, Paul. W. Zuccaire Gallery, NY.

For this particular project, I already had the overall appearance in mind before I started. I installed the pieces in a simple way. Based on the first idea of breaking the perspective of paintings, I raised the paper to the wall to help them lose the parallel relationship with the wall. In addition, by losing the parallel angle to see its rectangular shape, the viewer will see the piece differently than viewing a painting. The consistency that the pieces show on the wall not only come from the rule of repetition and simplification, but also has its characteristics by the arbitrary stains.



Figure 11. Ye-seul Choi(b.1987), An Aerial Scene(detail), 2016, Installation on 48 x 22 ft. Wall, Acrylic, Korean Paint, Watercolor, Interfacing paper, Wooden sticks, Paul. W. Zuccaire Gallery, NY.

The scale of the piece was measured from the space. A 22 ft x 24 ft wall was enough to make the extension of each paper piece. The scale ensured that I can make each piece have its independent moment within the accommodation. Every single material had its role in the rule that I set up. Also, my roles to visualize them were also simplified within the rules so that the identity of my work could stand out stronger.

Moreover, I added one more element in order to bring myself into the moment of creation. I brought a strong inspiration of yellow in it. Since the “Movement Reversal” project, I discovered that I have always been trying to carry all the trivial inspiration that I had received in my working process. All the ambiguous interest that I had in my abstraction should be the core of my work. Therefore, I was trying to catch all the forgettable inspiration. I will not discard my small thoughts and viewpoint on the abstraction. The combination of yellow and blue gave an extraordinary inspiration to me since the fall of 2015. Just like Goethe¹⁶ mentioned about the effect of the mixture between yellow and blue in “Theory of colour,¹⁷” I was also attracted to its disagreeable effects at that time and started to use these colors in my paintings. I gradually perceived the fragile attribute of yellow; I liked the distinctive attribute of its weakness to be easily affected. Especially when I mix yellow and blue together, I could see the mysterious moment that only the colors can create. This is how I brought the color yellow to the entire pieces of interfacing paper. I believed that the colors will take their responsibility by dyeing into the paper, but they will also expose their presence individually. Originally, the inspiration of color was easy to be ignored, but was easy to recall within the organized process because the materials were light to play with.

¹⁶ Johann Wolfgang(1749-1832) von Goethe was German writer and statesman.

¹⁷ Theory of colours is a book by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

6. Performance - Challenge of My Abstraction



Figure 12. Ye-seul Choi(b.1987) A Drawing Performance 3 (holding hands with a volunteer), 2016, Paul. W. Zuccaire Gallery, NY.



Figure 13. Ye-seul Choi(b.1987), A Watercolor Drawing, 2016, Watercolor on Paper, Painted in “A Drawing Performance 3” from the second volunteer.

Performance was another factor that I tried to appeal in my two MFA solo exhibitions and MFA thesis show. The main idea of the performances was from the curiosity of my abstraction that derived from misery as a sole inspiration. In addition, heavy tension between my consciousness and my work led me to seek another approach to bring out the abstraction outside of me. Lastly, it also offered the clues of the moment of abstraction to the public, and it allowed me to stay in the moment of creation. In order to make these ideas happen, I decided to utilize people's presence in the exhibition spaces. In each of the three performances, I brought in a person to make a connection and to stimulate my visual inspiration. When I was working by myself in the studio, I was always looking for the inspirational perception. I had to focus in myself in order to be in the moment of creation; otherwise, I would get lost.

The first performance was during the time of the "Movement Reversal" show. I decided to keep the idea of the movement reversal daily drawing series. Based on the rules of the drawing series, I used 12X9 inch paper with watercolor, and the small abstract figure was drawn in the center. The first performance, I had three volunteers. When I started, I made eye contacts with the first volunteer until I was able to visualize the clues of the picture in my consciousness. The second volunteer was a cellist. I wanted to engage with her, while she was playing her cello. For this performance, I tried to make all the people in the space feel engaged in the situation through the music and my drawing performance. I titled this particular performance as "A drawing performance for artist", because I know the impact of music for artists. Thus, it was also my gesture toward the artists by sharing the moment when I am painting with the music as an inspiration. The third performance was in the same context with the first performance, but I changed it a bit by holding the volunteer's hands to bring the clues. I held the volunteer's hands to get the clues of image in my internal view.



Figure 14. Ye-seul Choi(b.1987), Three Watercolor Drawings, 2015, Watercolor on Paper, Painted in "A Drawing Performance 1(from three different volunteers), Lawrence Alloway Gallery, NY.

Through these connections, I got certain images in my head. Once I saw the clues, I directly began to paint on the paper. I was only trying to get the imagery from the person, but the volunteer was also inspired by the overall activities. When the act was over, the volunteer stated that they were actually getting the inspiration through the performance. I was able to engage with the volunteers during the time of my painting. Also, it was the experience of obtaining possibility that I contain the clues of the abstraction in my consciousness. In fact, the watercolor gave me a lot of influence for my visual inspiration. Using the effects that I have made with watercolor

helped to connect with the volunteers when I am in the temporal moment of performances. Exposure to the moment of painting was a big challenge, however, it was also the time I ensured myself the presence of abstraction, which was my curiosity for a long time.

7. Conclusion

During the three years of my MFA program, I trained to extend my vision as a creator; therefore, I take the responsibility for all of my works. This is the reason why I tried to keep the curiosity about the origin of my abstraction. I know myself as a temperamental creator; I know how much I rely on my intuitive consciousness; thus, I always changed my mind when I am working. However, I know the other side of me as a creator: I will hold my interest once I have become captivated with it.

From an inspiration of the materials, I could transform its identities to another. I go with this idea of materiality and the materiality of abstraction without limitation until everything makes sense to me to be finished. My exploration of my work had been made in different genres, but all of the art works still functioned within the curiosity about the identity of my abstraction. I could develop this idea by an experimental approach with painting, also by bringing my original inspiration to materiality. It led me to play in a space for making my work to become a 3-dimensional formation. I am still interested in the transformation of my work with the idea of a specific place and moment. I found myself changing my view as a creator within the time, because I tried to be a viewer of my work rather than see my work from only the creator's perspective. I believe that this change will direct me to create another transformation by considering the presence and moment where my work will be.

Plus, I also aware of my identity as a painter. When I began to work for the Movement Reversal project, I found the motivation to direct myself to continue to create abstract paintings. Also, performances that I directed gave me a will to bring the abstraction out of my consciousness. Also, I could see the possibility of interaction of my abstraction. I would be involved with more people by continuing this idea of performance.

My work is comprised of certain materials that I have found inspiring. As a combination of specific materials that have inspired me, my work contains a property of transformation. The combination is able to be increased, extended or accumulated, and most of the time it is from the very small fragments merged together. After the combination, they are still containing their individuality. Thus, the fragments reveal their own complexion in the moment of diffusion. Therefore, it becomes a strong combination of integral independences.

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