

Ahn discovers paradox from everyday objects

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A chair with legs made of paddles ("Paddle Chair"), a bicycle with two handlebars and front wheels and the other with two seats and rear wheels ("Two Bicycles") and a bell made of felt that cannot produce sound ("Silent Bell"). These ordinary yet paradoxical objects are part of artist Ahn Kyu-chul's solo exhibit "Words Just for You" at the Kukje Gallery in downtown Seoul.

Ahn, 61, is one of the top conceptual artists in Korea. The modifier "conceptual" is often associated with being abstruse, but Ahn's works are straightforward with a twist.

Some of the works on display look like children's toys. "Lingering Time I" consists of wooden tracks installed in a zigzag course and a wooden ball that rolls down the track. Visitors can climb up a ladder and try rolling the ball from the top. The title refers to the time a viewer has to stay in front of the artwork to see the ball slowly rolling down the track, which would take an instant if dropped vertically.

This piece was inspired by the sound of running water near his studio in Pyeongchang-dong, Seoul, after heavy rain. He thought the time of the rain remaining on the ground makes living things alive and visualized the lingering moments through the sloped tracks.

"Words Just for You," which shares its title with the exhibition, is a relief-like sculpture on the wall. The dark gray object made of felt absorbs sound, as if the artist invites visitors to get worries and thoughts off their chest.

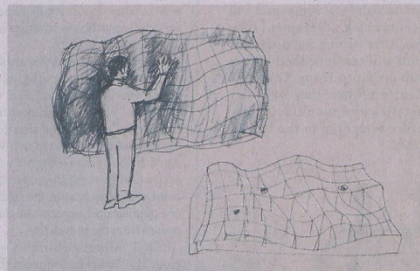
"Box II" is similar to "Paddle Chair" as it bears an impossible dream of an object. The artwork features four wheels installed inside a wooden chest. The box dreams of going far away, but the wheels inside cannot move the box at all.

Ahn held a major solo exhibition titled "Invisible Land of Love" as part of the MMCA Hyundai Motor Series at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in 2015. The exhibit, featuring participatory artworks such as "1,000 Scribes," which made volunteers transcribe literary



Artist Ahn Kyu-chul with his works on display at the "Words Just for You" exhibition at Kukje Gallery in central Seoul.

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery



A sketch of Ahn Kyu-chul's "Words Just for You"



"Two Bicycles"

works, was a big success and attracted over 340,000 visitors.

In Korea, conceptual artists are not much welcomed by collectors, but Ahn's works are starting to garner interest from collectors due to their intuitive nature.

Ahn always carries a small drawing book and sketches his ideas, some of which develop into scul-

tures and installations. Some of his sketches are also on display at the gallery, giving a glimpse into the artist's mind.

The artist introduces himself as an intermediary between an object and a story. The works were initiated from the artist wondering why the language is strong yet powerless at the same time.

"Each object is like a book and I interpreted what objects would say if they had their own language and grammar," Ahn said. "If you observe closely, you can read the stories told by the objects. I am interested in the state of in-between, in which things are stuck and stalled. It's like the situation we live in."

Though he speaks like a

cool-headed conceptual artist and abstruse philosopher, Ahn wants to deliver his thoughts more intuitively and clearly. "If the viewers feel distant from the artwork, I am responsible too," he said. "I am looking for the language that is more accessible to the public, understandable without a complicated philosophical process."