



Renowned video artist Bill Viola is holding a solo show at Kukje Gallery in central Seoul. Among the exhibits are "Water Martyr" (2014), left, one of the four "Martyrs" he co-created with his wife, Kira Perov, for St. Paul's Cathedral in London, and "Inverted Birth" (2014), right, a video projection. Provided by the gallery.

Seven of Viola's videos shown at Kukje

BY MOON SO-YOUNG

Kukje Gallery's K3 space in central Seoul is entirely dark. Only a large vertically mounted screen can be seen, showing a man drenched in black liquid.

The fluid begins to slowly flow upward, as if sucked up by some mysterious power. As time passes, the fluid rises in roaring currents, while changing color from dark brown to red to



Bill Viola and his wife and producer, Kira Perov. By Keith Park

white and finally becoming as transparent as pure water.

This video installation, titled "Inverted Birth," is one of the latest works by renowned U.S. video artist Bill Viola. The fluids symbolize earth, blood, milk and water, which are indispensable to human life, according to the gallery.

Deluged in the liquid, the man seems to feel both agony and joy. In slow motion, his expressions are shown delicately. He seems to go through the seven basic emotions according to Buddhism — happiness, anger, sorrow, fear, love, hatred and desire. At last, most of the fluid disappears. The man stands dry and clean, with the last drops of water shining in the air and ascending.

Viola, 64, has continuously explored time, the human life cycle and emotions through his art. He has often slowed or reversed time in his videos to show "many things we disregard ... things we cannot see," the artist said during a meeting with Korean reporters at Kukje Gallery earlier this month.

The museum is currently hosting Viola's solo show. Seven of his video installations are on display at the gallery's K2 and K3 spaces.

"Time is so interesting because it's going in one direction," Viola said. "That's why we need this technology, video and all this stuff to understand it and try to realize what its power can be, whether good or bad."

"But I personally feel there is something beyond time, although I don't know what it is," he added. "So I've been working with time my whole life."

In the "extended time" in Viola's works, the subtle changes in a performers' facial expressions, which would have been missed in a normal time flow, become visible and deliver the depth and complexity of human emotions to the viewers.

Nature, including basic elements such as water and fire, unveil their startling, beautiful details in the extended or reversed time flow of Viola's works.

"There are creativity of animals, creativity of plants and creativity of water ... they are very powerful," Viola said. "We are part of the very deep place that is invisible but is with and for us at all time."

When he said this, he looked like a Taoist philosopher. And when he talked about human suffering, which is a motif that penetrates many of his

video pieces, he seemed like a Buddhist monk.

Among the works now exhibited at Kukje, "Water Martyr" shows Buddhist philosophy of the East combined with Christian iconography from the West. The piece is one of the four "Martyrs" Viola created with his wife and producer, Kira Perov, for St. Paul's Cathedral in London. In the pieces, four individuals suffer because of the four basic elements of water, fire, air and earth.

"The Greek word 'martyr' originally meant 'witness,'" Viola said. "Today's mass media turns all of us into the witness to the sufferings of others. Martyrs pass lives of action, which can eliminate our modern life's inaction. They also accept pain and even death to remain faithful to their values, beliefs and principles. These pieces represent the ideas of actions of perseverance, endurance and sacrifice."

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Admission is free. Opening hours are from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Saturday and to 5 p.m. Sunday. Go to Anguk Station, line No. 3, exit No. 1, and walk for 10 minutes. For more information, call (02) 735-8449 or head to www.kukje.org.