

ARTFORUM

Lee Ufan

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Left: Lee Ufan. Right: Lee Ufan Space. Photos: Hyo Won Park.

On April 10, 2015, Space Lee Ufan opened at the Busan Museum of Art in Busan, South Korea. It is the second permanent venue dedicated to the artist (after the Lee Ufan Museum in Naoshima, Japan); for this project, Lee chose the site, conceived the initial design of the building, selected the works to display, supervised the installations, directed the size and location of the wall texts, and even designed the wooden chairs for the café. In sum, the space is a Gesamtkunstwerk, one of the most significant projects of the artist's career.

I'VE ALWAYS been suspicious of any proposal to build a museum for my work, because a "museum" is fully charged with the preconceived idea as a privileged establishment. I am against the notion of the museum as a place for artworks to be presented and appreciated. Whether painting or sculpture, my work is meant to incorporate its surrounding space. Therefore, I don't want my work to look like an independent artwork in a gallery. This is why I was initially against idea of Naoshima, but the architect, Tadao Ando, persuaded me by emphasizing that he would create a "space" for my work, instead of a "museum," although it officially became a "museum."

So, when Ilsang Cho, director of the Busan Museum of Art, offered this vacant lot within the museum campus, I thought an annex to the museum would be acceptable. As the relationship between the space and the works is crucial, I conceived the basic design of the building, and architect Yongdae Ahn took charge of the structure and construction at site, dealing with all the difficulties, including all the red tape.

This is a space for vibration: One can feel the vibration between the works and the space when strolling about. I am interested in relations and began using the word relation to refer to my art in the late 1960s. I was influenced by ancient Greek philosophy, which claims that every object originates

not from things but from relations among things. These days, a lot of people are talking about such “relations,” and relational aesthetics. I am not sure whether those ideas are relevant to my work, but I think it’s also problematic to be restrained to “relation” too much. For I believe a relation should be concealed rather than exposed. My recent use of terms such as conversation and vibration all point to the existence of the surroundings beyond the scope of the art object. In short, my work always exists outside of itself.

Not all audience members understand or appreciate my work. For them, this is not a sculpture but a piece of stone. Some have even been angry. But I would ask those people to question at least once why an artist would place a simple stone in a gallery, and try to forget about any of their preconceptions and look differently. Still, I don’t want to force anyone to accept my intention. Contemporary art is a present progressive form. Its value is still under determination.

Being an artist is a lonely path. You basically do everything by yourself. But when you delve to the bottom of art, you see it is connected to society. No matter how lyrical or surreal, all artworks engage the world. An artist’s job is to challenge everything. Therefore, an artist cannot justify reality or conform to it. In other words, an artist by nature is anti-institutional, and to participate with certain social movements or political activities is not within art’s dimension. That is more of a civil dimension. As an artist, I’m always trying to reduce my ego. When people see my works, such as From Winds or From Dots, they frequently ask, “To where?” For me, there is no end, but only beginning.

— Translated from Korean and as told to Jung-Ah Woo

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