





Yee Soo Kyung is an artist that foresaw the power the tradition holds in modern art. She sets an example with her art with implications from the folk art and enchanting mythical features and believes they will be man's new form of art. She realized that artists would become the new shamans, asserted the public that art should be the medium for healing the wounded soul, and acts upon her beliefs with her art. Although the foundation of modern art originates from Western philosophical laws and principles, and viewing art with these manners were once thought to be the only way the world should be viewed, the core belief is that there are traditions and cultures that derived from these beliefs. LSK is known for using a mineral known as cinnabar for her paintings and her reformation of vases from broken clay titled 'Translated Vases' (2006-2007). Her works not only connect herself with others, but to the world as a whole. Moreover, Yee is able to connect the past and the present by filling in the details even when an incident has been forgotten. Yee projects a person's entire life, the good and the bitter, onto her presence, and brings out the forgotten past. Behind all her works, is a foundation that has been interwoven by the theories and materials used in our traditional folk art. Yee continuously studies a subject, the history and society involved behind an incident and asks the audience why we sway these events so much when we, ourselves are the ones blinded by the sensory overload. Her work uses our traditions and methods to unfold the mystery of our fate, and one of the ingredient she uses for her works is cinnabar, which is an ink usually used to write on amulets. Another method she uses is the 'Translated Vases,' where she reattaches a broken vase, which signifies an object that has lost its purpose from external damage healed by the artist's imagination and is reborn a new masterpiece. The core belief in her pieces is 'rebirth through healing,' and at this point is where Yee looks through a mirror called



the very best statue 2008 Mixed media approx. 190cm(h)

of pure art and art alone, but now the views have changed. In other words, art that only existed in philosophy was trapped by its own standards, unable to free itself of change. Yee's works exists in this gray-area. For her recently published works, 'The Most Fantastic Sculpture,' she surveyed the citizens of Echigo-Tsumari in Japan and Ahn-Yang in Korea. She asked the citizens to pick out from a list what they thought were their ideas of leaders, both cultural and spiritual, icons, saints, and gods were. From the peoples' choices, Yee picked out the most popular images and combined them to make a sculpture, 'the Most Fantastic Sculpture' at that. The most fantastic sculpture, in fact, is the most holy sculpture. Yee described the sculpture as the most beautiful, yet if we dig deeply behind the meanings, we see our desire to depend on the holy image we created for ourselves. This idea also ties to the 'Translated Vases,' reattached from broken pieces of clay. The only difference is that the object of interest has been refocused from pots



the very best statue 2006 Mixed media approx. 190cm(h)

to saints or gods like Confucius, Lao-tzu, Virgin Mary, Jesus, Buddha Muhammad and Ganesh. Through these, Yee connects and breaks apart the culture, religion, ethnicity, and history of all countries. His curiously strange notions on the image of the sacred and The Fantastic Sculpture let us ponder about the intrinsic nature his work embodies. Her recent work 'The Moving Temple' also let us let us glimpse at her beliefs. She paints various images of the Buddha in a traditional methods used in the Koryeo-era. What's unique about her paintings is that Yee paints the backside of Buddha instead of the usual front side. With his back to the audience, the five-fold screen holds a mysterious power that jumps over the barrier of



translated Vases (detail) 2006 Broken white Porcelas, epoxy, goldfoil
380 x 380 x 90cm installation view Gwangju Biennale

reality. The space Yee creates could be seen as a meditation area, or as a holy land where worldly sins cannot enter. Like the title 'Moving Temple,' this area is full of solace and desires, and it's hard to refrain from being pulled into the force. All of Yee's works have a mysterious power that is hard for people to approach. There isn't a certain word that describes what this power is exactly, but at least the power her pieces emit are undeniably insightful of the world we live in. In an era where the roles of artists and the authenticity of art is at question, Yee Soo Kyung is still shining bright on the art and the future holds. Since her first solo exhibition in 1992, Yee has had numerous solo exhibitions in Seoul, Tokyo(Japan) and Chicago(US); and she has shown her works in a number of exhibitions in Korea, Japan, the US, Germany, England, and Denmark. She also participated in such international art festivals as 2007 Anyang Public Art Project (Anyang, Korea), 2006 Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial (Echigo-Tsumari, Japan), Gwangju Biennale 2006: Fever Variations (Gwangju, Korea), and Art in Life: Public Furniture, Busan Biennale 2006.

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Yee Sookyung: The Way of Communication and the Power of Optimism

In the last few years, it is apparent that Yee Sookyung's career has entered a new phase. A new force that did not exist in her previous works is now clearly evident: in drawings of images derived from a picture of Buddha or a talisman; the Flame drawing series (2006-2008), expressed in simplified lines of cinnabar; drawings inspired by variations of a circle, produced like a daily journal since 2004; and in Translated Vases (2006-2007), made of discarded fragments of white porcelain recomposed by the artist.

Yee's renewed sense of energy is apparent in her drawings, full of flames painted in cinnabar. Cinnabar is a mineral from which pigment is derived and commonly used in paint for talismans. It was also used for medicinal purposes with a known tranquilizing effect that, at times, it is said enables one to communicate with God. From this red color, reminiscent of fire, Yee projects a divine efficacy into the red flames in her work. It would be apropos to call it qi, or the energy of life. This life energy is disclosed through her actions, as if she is in prayer or training, and is indeed the process through which the artist keenly seizes upon and meticulously records vibrations and fluctuations of her own mind and body against the external world. This energy is manifested upon the surface of the paper, variously transforming into figures such as clouds, grass, dragons or monsters, and often a girl's face, and thus repeated in patterns that may be called "undigested images by the artist herself." By disentangling these images on a pictorial plan, Yee generates a kind of affirmative, productive and regenerative energy.

Through this energy of life, even the space where her drawings are displayed becomes incarnated with an energy that evokes and intimates what is original, fundamental, basic and primitive. In contrast, in *The Very Best Statue* (2006/2008) and *the Portable Temple* (2008), Yee's highly skeptical attitude towards established ideals and traditional systems is straightforwardly asserted.

Yee produced two such pieces of *The Very Best Statue*, one for the city of Echigo-Tsumari, Japan in 2006, and the other for the city of Anyang, Korea in 2008. *The Very Best Statue* represents a mixture of religious statues from diverse cultures around the globe. To create the "best statue," Yee conducted surveys with residents of Echigo-Tsumari and Anyang. In the survey, bodies of gods and saints such as Confucius, Lao-tzu, the Virgin Mary, Jesus, Buddha, Muhammad and Ganesh were disassembled into the head, eyes, nose, mouth and chin, face shape, right and left torso, legs and overall color. The respondents selected their most favorite components or body parts from these representative deity figures. The final product is a combination of the most popular choices or preferred body parts. *Portable Temple*, meanwhile, shows a painstaking representation of Amitabha, Bhaisajyaguru, Maitreya, Ksitigarbha and Avalokiteshvara in traditional natural pigment. The piece conveys a familiar but strange feeling, much like *The Very Best Statue*.

This may be because while each picture of Buddha and Bodhisattva is based on a traditional Buddhist painting from Goryeo, it is not the normative frontal view but an imaginary representation of the back. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who have metaphorically taken back their gazes from viewers and have literally turned their backs on them constitute a titulary portable, meditative space in the form of six-fold screen.

In these works, seemingly unapproachable, divine and idealized beings are fragmented and these fragments are reassembled by Yee into a crystallized version of the viewer's desire and reproduced a completely new context. Then, the eternal gaze of these Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, embedded in history and hierarchy, customs fixed according to rigid rules, is overlapped with the gaze of the contemporary viewer. Through this process, what has hitherto been holy and religious and has existed as an abstract idea is presented to the viewer from a counterbalanced, even hands-on perspective that invites conversation and compromise. Yee has always had an interest in religion and has frequently worked from an extension of this interest. However, these works communicate a kind of refined energy beyond mere religious fascination to broach the power of optimism. This energy enables the artist and viewer to respond to her works, to be awakened in every moment of time, and to exist replete with the feeling of the here and now.

These ideas of repetition and reproduction, akin to processes of cell division and biological reproduction, are displayed in her manual or craft-based and training-like technique; strategies of dialogue and transformation evident in her work are displayed by breaking and twisting age-old tradition and custom. With these works, Yee engages the spiritual realm, in the energy of life, the power of optimism, or what she calls the "paradise hormone." It is something that one can express through an individual practice of art (as well as, in her case, a large dose of the energy of optimism), which is regarded as another side of art's social function. And, one cannot deny that Yee is committed to communicating the power of optimism through her individual practice of art, through the work she creates. It is in Yee's inimitable way of communication and singular power of optimism that brings our mindful attention to Yee's works again.

Yun-Kyoung Kim, Director of Mongin Art Center

I for an I, other for the other: The Theory of Yee Sookyung

In Hwang Art Activist

"I am I, the other is other"--Nishida Kitaro

From the beginning, a distance exists between the artist and the work of art. Although the work of art emerges from the expression of the artist's intentions, the work has an autonomous object-hood, just as the artist has a personhood. Such an objecthood is fated to inhabit the space of viewers, who form a condensation of interdependent individualities. If the space of the artist is that of the self, the space of the work of art is the world of the other. The task of producing a work of art becomes that of the artist negating the self and making "an other similar to the self." When viewers sense an artist's particular expression, what they may be describing is a world of the self that has been exteriorized through its long inhabitation of other's space.

However, occasionally there are works that have not been externalized but remain firmly a part of the world of the artist's individual self. In this case, the possibility for predicting the work becomes difficult. How protean and capricious is this self that has not been opened out to the other. Yee Sookyung is of this nature. Her works are difficult to categorize, considering the myriad of changes they have undergone. She has shown works in all media, from objects and videos to painting and drawing. Hers is a rare case among Korean artists. From "Getting married to Myself," (Indeco Gallery, Seoul) her first solo exhibition in 1992, to her latest show "Paradise Hormone," (2008, Mongin Art Center, Seoul), the change and variety of work makes it difficult to connect them with a particular personal style. This is most likely because the time needed for the world of the self to be exteriorized and digested by others is constantly overtaken by another hidden world within her that manifests itself. On a more fundamental level, it is important to point out that several complex but uncompromising layers exist in the space between her works created of the self for the self, and those of others and for others.

The Japanese modern philosopher Nishida Kitaro once used the expression, "I am I, the other is other," to suggest that this individual "I" could never become the "other." Thus, it suggests that the space that makes up the world of the self and the world of the other forms absolutely different dimensions. If the space of the former is an individual topos (*basho*) made up of a condensation of fragments, the space of the later is a cosmos beyond a homogenous space that is continually expanding. No matter how many topoi overlap, they can never make a homogenous space. Although these two worlds can never mix on an essential level, on an everyday, basic level they communicate with relatively little conflict. The reason why a coherent sense of individuality seems so faint in Yee's work is that in the majority of cases of other artists, a sense of personality is that state of flux where the world of the self is caught up in the world of the other. For Yee, she begins by questioning this notion and from the very beginning distinguishes clearly between the world of self and the world of the other. This kind of attitude of the self for the self, and the other for the other can perhaps be called the secret of her work.

I for I

In Yee's "Flame" series, she shows an extreme world of drawing. Drawing is a completely self-engrossing act of individuality. Another person cannot partake in it, while the medium perhaps most directly reveals a sense of bodily space.

Because the body includes the territory of the self, that space cannot be traversed. The body is also the vessel that contains the soul. In this sense, drawing is the most effective means of revealing the hidden aspects of the artist's individual selfhood.

In most cases, drawing takes over the entire space of the canvas in an instant. This is because the artist's body is thrown toward the picture without resistance. Thus the body itself becomes expression. However, in the case of Yee, the body that appears in her drawings is manifested as threads that thin out to resemble something like lines of information. Is it possible to call this kind of drawing a form of "expression"? On a more subtle level, is it an act of abandon rather than a self-controlled form of expression? Within our bodies are thousands of cells that each contain a destiny, a function and habit. But like data that has been put through a document shredder, she breaks apart these lines into individual, single files that fly onto the picture plane.

This act of drawing is similar to the terms of a religious confession, where the individual self is gradually negated. Just the amount of time taken to produce the larger works she has done is months. For making drawings, this is a considerable amount of time. The reason why this cannot help but be the case is that the body is torn to the extreme into thin and long pieces of information, know-how, judgment; all of the records contained in that body and soul must be cast aside. In order to do this, a larger surface of canvas can't help but be used.

The body and soul are one and the only way to determine whether the soul resides within the body is to divide it into cells and to show each of those individual tiny particles. This way of bringing the body to bear upon the picture plane is different from typical drawing methods. Instead of expression it is a form of negation, while the act of negation becomes a religious form of self-disciplining.

In order to accomplish this, a line is drawn every time energy is received from the body. But this energy is different from that used in the traditional calligraphic techniques of ink painting. The energy comes from the topos of the I, from the invisible within the body. In order to capture this other energy, Yee looked at the supernatural energy found on Goguryeo cave paintings. The notion of *yeonggi*, is a kind of invisible, supernatural vital energy in objects that is not palpable, but that has a definite existence. It describes a kind of essence within the space of topos. One can only call it a kind of noise.

It is said that when the body's central processing unit becomes conscious of its surroundings, only about 30% can be grasped by logic. The remaining algorithms appear as noise. Who knows whether our individual existence is not itself made up of these masses of noise.

If we want to become receptive to the world around us, we have to become open to the invisible, spectral world, a world of noise that is not perceived by logic alone. Although the world of noise is invisible, it is one that exerts a strong control over us. Is it not that the *yeonggi* that appears in her work an attempt of bringing the invisible world into the visible?

However, this kind of noise does not stop at the simple act of painting with Yee, unlike in the Goguryeo cave paintings. Painting has physical properties. Matter moves beyond the artist and aims toward otherness. Thus instead of such matter becoming rarefied, the topos of the body becomes more present in drawings.

Although most of these lines of noise resemble waves, at times different formations appear as if nodes of energy have created them. Dragons, monsters and women appear among other images, forming the patterns of a repetition compulsion. They are like glimpses of the invisible, of images compressed within the zip file of the artist's personal topos. The artist confesses to this and by unfurling them proceeds to erase the noise of the self. This is because the world of the other is a world where the self has been effaced and released.

Other for the other

In a sculpture project, Yee made a public work of art by asking the local residents of Echigo Tsumari in Japan and Anyang in Korea to participate in a survey, an exemplary instance of a public work that started from her world and was given to the world of the other. The survey asked people to choose among the body parts of different religious founders such as Confucius, Lao Tzu, Mary, Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed, Ganesh, and which icon's body part would be the most suitable for the sculpture. She made a new icon from the results of the survey.

Is this not the very definition of the world of the other, a world of self-sacrifice for the public good? This is the public sphere. This is the form of the ultimate public work of art. There is no space for the artist's self in a work like this. From the first, it is a clear, transparent and rather noise-less world. The more others participate, the more I disappear and the noise completely disappears.

The heart of the reason for choosing the subject of religious icons resides in this as well. Such icons are individuals that left the world of the self in order to become part of the other. And these icons teach us by example to throw away the world of the self in order to obtain the world of the other, to become the world of the true self.

However, Buddha and Jesus have been seized upon as the more iconic even among other icons. In other words, these supposedly self-less icons appear to take on the form of individual selves. Excluding herself from the process as much as possible, she used the survey format so only others would participate, undoing the individuality of the icons by turning them into a new, truly public icon.

In her "Translated Vase" series, she shows the step-by-step process of turning the world of the self toward the world of the other in an elaborate and complicated way. The artist asked a ceramicist if she could pick up and use the discarded, broken ceramic fragments found around the kiln.

What are those fragments? At one point dirt, they gained a viscosity upon contact with water and when meeting the hand of the potter and the spinning wheel, achieved a solid plate form, then when meeting the fire of the kiln hardened into a ceramic form and after deemed a reject, broken apart. At the beginning it was an other similar to the self of the potter. Ceramics are a form of art closer to the world of others, because unlike the fine arts, ceramics must be made while paying attention to function rather than just expression. And when the ceramic vessel is broken up into fragments, it can no longer rely on its function as

a useful object and thus has become something completely other.

Yee gathers such fragments and makes a new ceramic vessel. There is of course no reason that these fragments should fit together. There is an original shape that they retain from the original intentions of the ceramicist. And ceramics have a limit on what shape they can assume, as a result of the physical motions of the potter's wheel. Thus the fragments can't help but come with a certain symmetry and curvature. In order to make these reconstructed vases, thousands of fragments are needed and must be fitted together. What results are ceramic forms that do not retain the original symmetry and curvature of normal pieces, but are deformed and misshapen.

But it is at this point that something strange occurs. A balance emerges from the attempt to piece together parts that don't fit. Perhaps it could be called the order of others, created from bringing together different pieces. It comes from the gilded glue used to join these fragments, from a noise that doesn't belong to the safe order of space of the original whole pieces. However, this noise is not unstable. This is because it is a noise that has passed through the third person. And it emerges from a new sense of beauty that Yee has created. This stable noise that emerges from letting the different shapes of the fragments come together rather than imposing a form upon them shows a different world from the opaque topos seen in her more personalized drawings. Looking at the process alone, one can say that a homogenous space without noise has been transformed into a topos with noise.

However, the result is a work that is neither completely the state of otherness, nor that of the self. Rather than saying that there is a particular expression that links all of her works together, they are connected by the notion of negating the self. This kind of stance allows the works for the self and those for others to be equally observed. One can say that in the attempt to create works where the self is rejected, they are extremely religious. This tendency manifests itself in yet another way in her recent work, "Portable Temple."

The portable temple is a personal temple for the artist. In this work, we see the backside of five Buddhas on a six-part folding screen. All religions teach us to throw away the self and become one with the other. Thus the space that religions aim for is a "space at one with the other." However, by arranging the self within the space behind Buddha, the space is filled with noise and transforms into a pre-meditated topos space. This work is similar to the later translated vases series, in its insistence on transformation and the way it changes the flow of the space.

Religion, which always demands a transparent world of the other rather than the artist's opaque world of the self, would understandably make an artist nervous, for fear that their power of expression may fade. Many artists today have considered this problem of the encounter between religion and art. Yee Sookyung is a rare artist who creates works of the self and of the other at the same time. Most artists would try to indicate works for others as the official works and hide the works of the self. In a way, pop art, which lessens the power of the self, may be an art form which manifests one of the most religious tendencies. One can even say that the popularity shown for pop art shares a point of commonality with peoples' enthusiasm for religion. Confessional works of the self thus become hidden away. Yee makes both of these kinds of works and firmly shows both of them. Yee is different from the pop artists we are familiar with. Interpreting the many dimensions of the

relationship between the world of the self and the world of the other in new ways, Yee offers the beginnings of a new possibility of resolving the conflict between religion and art. Perhaps this is the greatest gift that her works give to us.

Yee Sookyung's "Fire-works"

2006 One and J. Gallery, Jung Hunyee, art critic, translated by Iris Moon

1. Fire, flames!

Yee Sookyung has spent no small amount of time going from her show *Burning Elephant* (1993) to *Mandala* (2006). Although the central part of the present show is comprised of the "Flame" series, drawings done with the red ink used by shamans to inscribe paper talismans, it also includes other drawings that read like the pages of a daily journal, done in conversation with the artist's inner feelings over the years, as well as her 1993 piece, "Burning Elephant," where the image of flames first appeared. In a certain sense, the show can be seen as Yee recounting an extremely private "story of fire." "I am drawing fire. So that I can burn it all." Upon hearing this from the artist's voice, a feeling wells up inside of you.

Fire. The things that fire symbolizes are extremely composite. The fire that Prometheus stole from the gods to give to man represents civilization, knowledge, tools, science, and instrumental reasoning. To punish Prometheus for helping man, Zeus chained him to a rock to have his liver eaten by an eagle. Because his liver would regenerate the next day, and he knew that it would be eaten again, his was a painful knowledge. However, in the Enlightenment conception, fire, or the lamp, symbolizes not simply knowledge but light, liberation, wisdom, understanding, and thus extends its meaning. In contrast, a fire that burns everything represents madness, and calls to mind the fires of hell. For the little match girl, it is the sad wish for warmth that has been denied to her, while for the poet who says not to take for granted the ashes, who asks whether you have ever been warmed by another, fire is the spirit of altruism or love that burns for the sake of others. Fire

thus consumes a myriad of symbols because it is a golden key, a sign that can symbolize anything.

Although Yee Sookyung is an artist who knows how to work her way through the "codes" of 1990s art, she has a unique body of work that does not sacrifice private experiences and personal fantasies to the prevailing conceptions of art. While her works share certain features with the artists of the 90s who created works that connected a kitsch sensibility with a public quality, thereby launching a new means of critical art, Yee's works had an earnest, existential heaviness rather than being characterized by an "unbearable lightness." In that sense, her image as an artist could be described as being almost old-fashioned. Because Yee's work contains a sharp awareness of the problems of communication in the public domain at the same time that it is private and has an existential-critical mind, it maintains a certain distance from the codified cultural discourse of the 1990s, the practical politics of the 1980s, and the branded "originality" of the 1970s. Opening a unique channel of communication with the world, her artwork perceives the world around her with ultra-sensitive antennae, and her work cannot be comprehended through art theory or knowledge alone. She creates a disorderly "chaos" whose form cannot be arrested...And to touch all of that with flames.

However, the fire that one looks for when regarding her "Flame" works does not appear at first glance. Moreover, permeated with thin, shaking lines, the drawings at times resemble water, or at times landscapes, or the waves that show up on a seismograph. Rather than the fire paths created from a fury of "burning it all," they seem the sleepy whimpers of a child who has fallen asleep after crying. The surfaces of the drawing have been repeatedly covered with thin reddish lines, like the smooth cracks forming on the surface of a ceramic form shaped from earth and emerging from a pit of fire. From one work to another, following the rhythm of the lines filling the surface, the fire disappears and one senses instead the minute movements, perhaps the very movements of the mind, or the vibrations of energy

(chi). Then again, fire can have no form. Fire's essential form does not exist per se, for if it simply takes on the vibrations of energy in each instance then its so-called shape cannot be drawn. That is to say that if one goes beyond a certain point of energy (the fire point or flash point), the force that binds matter in its state of sameness will burst up in flames. I see Yee as dissolving the material unity of self and trying to draw this transferred energy, this force of life. This was something more powerful than simply crying out, "I want to live."

2. The woman who has all the world's gifts

In Greek mythology, the first mortal woman "Pandora" was created when Zeus, in order to punish mankind, asked the blacksmith god Hephaestus to shape a woman out of clay. To this clay woman Athena gave life and clothing, while Aphrodite gave her universally admired beauty, and Hermes the ability to speak and hide her inner thoughts. In addition, Zeus gave a box that she was never to open, and sent it away to Epimetheus, the brother of Prometheus. The name "Pandora" means "the woman with all gifts," and she was both the woman who received all of the gifts from the gods and at the same time was a blight and gift from the gods given to mankind. As is well known, despite Prometheus' counsel to his brother to never receive gifts from Zeus, Epimetheus, taken by Pandora's beauty, took her in, and Pandora in turn, unable to quell her curiosity, opened the box from Zeus, from which sprang forth misery, disease, strife, pain, malice, envy, and all of the world's evils. Although the surprised Pandora hurriedly closed the box, all of these vices had already gone out into the world while only hope remained still inside. Even before the story of Eve's temptation by the serpent, woman in Western mythology had already been designated as the origin of all vice. Just as in films where the beautiful heroine presses the wrong button at the wrong instant, or twists her ankle and slips in a crisis situation, or makes some kind of mistake that places the male hero in greater difficulty and danger.

However, the reason why the Pandora story has been related is not to immediately cast Yee in the category of feminist art. It is in fact not easy to discern her addressing women's issues in the specific content of her work. It is possible to say that the works shown in the 1997 show "Domestic Tailorshop," such as a wine glass filled with urine or a tiara made of chewed gum, constitute feminist art. But for me, instead of declaring feminism as her position, these come across more as the expressions of the particular physicality, existentiality of Yee Sookyung's artistic vision. To put it in another way, it is that "womanhood" does not constitute the "content" of her works, but rather come across through the "structure." In Yee's "Translated Vases 2" series (2002-), she took fragments from the ceramicist Lim Hyung-taek's kiln and pieced them back together using glue, placing gold leaf in between the cracks to create a series of deformed vases. Rejected from the status of "works of art" in the final inspection after they emerge from the firing kiln, these "failed works," beaten by the hammer and covered with tiny broken pieces, these lumps of clay or cancerous cells proliferate in an erratic way. However, just as Baekja (Korean white porcelain) served as a metaphor for the Joseon woman for art connoisseur and critic Yanagi Muneyoshi who became captivated by them during the Japanese occupation, the Kim Sangok poem "Baekjabu" used by Yee in her series, especially the line where the poet sings of how "That skin as white as ice even after being cooked in the fire!/ Even if an impurity comes down you maintain that power/That day lost in the clay was so simple and pure," is the most exemplary work of art where Baekja is a metaphor for the simple and beautiful woman. Is it that she wishes to become a woman as graceful and simple as a Baekja? Instead, what Yee shows are scarred masses of flesh pieced together with glue, bodies made of fragments that are only picked up again after being buried in the ground or simply abandoned. Although calling to mind Hans Bellmer's world of amputated and discarded dolls, these ceramic masses are also less surrealistic and more humorous and amiable. These masses are the reincarnated flesh that

emerges after failure, error and death, and they are also the uncanny but cute and realistic chunks of desire. Thus the myth of the Baekja becomes both haunting and comic.

While ceramics are placed as "works of art" in the luxurious museum displays, they are also placed within the specifically non-art area of "crafts," made by craftsmen who are at times separated into another field from art by their technical training. Additionally, while ceramics or plates are often discussed as symbols that represent women, they are also the tools used in the daily lives of ordinary women who have to come up with the dishes for dinner. These diverse possibilities in the interpretation of ceramics and tableware are probably what continually attract Yee as a female artist to them. In "Translated Vases 1," (2001) Yee recounted poems and narratives on ceramics to a foreign professional ceramic artist, then allowing her to create her own version of Joseon pottery based on her fantasies, while in "Parental Plates" (2003), she had people bring particular plates with personal significance and asked them to recount the circumstances surrounding the plates. After having the ceramicist reproduce these plates, she prepared food and served them on the reproduced plates during the opening. As well as raising questions regarding artist and craftsman, fictional fantasies about the East, problems of translation and other such institutional and discursive issues, these projects also recorded the situations of the individual owners of the objects and their private narratives. These plates were not simply dishes for holding food, but were texts of the circumstances of an individual's life. Although the notion of "woman" is not inscribed in the contents of these works, there is a strong feeling of it being programmed structurally. In real life and experience, "femininity," like Alice in wonderland, can never arrive on time. It's an encounter with the established rules of womanhood that is always "too early too late." Yee's works thus awaken us to a politics of gender that is too early or too late (or perhaps too great or too narrow) by giving it a physical texture. It is no coincidence that a piece Yee created from

delivered flowers and scented fruit that she allowed rot and decompose in the gallery, was precisely called "Too early too late."

3. From inside the mandala, to outside the mandala

The drawings included in this show were selected from daily diary-like drawings Yee made throughout 2004. The artist said that the drawings were part of a long healing process. That is to say that these drawings are the materials of flames, things that blazed inside of her before she burned them up. A young girl emerges throughout these drawings. At times the young girl seems to resemble the artist's daughter, while at other moments she appears the image of the artist regressed to her daughter's age. At times she wears a wig or a mask, probably used to protect the self. As the girl cries, jewels fall from her eyes. At times she takes on the form of an old fetus, or she seems to have the countenance of an old witch, or at times tumors pour out from her shoulders and all her organs seem to have been turned inside out, with nothing but her eyes rolling around. She transforms into a banshee and then into ET, then into a marionette, or a cat's tail inexplicably emerges from a face that shines like a gem; then there is thorny tree that sprouts from the top of the head with a bird crying on its uppermost branch. And then she turns into a female acrobat in a Chinese circus troupe, spinning bottles on her hands and feet. I discovered for the first time that this drawing, of the Chinese circus girl, the girl playing with the bottles, extended to form a series of 24 figures that appeared in the solo show that Yee had in 2005. What appears to be a body of work that is the result of sudden transformations turns out to have long, internal connections. There are a number of instances where seemingly sudden changes are instead inevitable results. The fragmented ceramic series that began as therapeutic work thus forms a part of the drawings shown in this exhibition. After healing the fragmented vases, she has leapt into the fires of the kiln in order to draw the flames that consume her.

The starting point of the drawings lies within the circle. However, the drawing soon moves outside the circle, and the circle rests only at a marginal part of the drawing. The circle transforms into a mandala on the canvas. Was the circle drawn on the canvas a battle between the circle and the square? The square speaks. "If it was the same, then there wouldn't be any problem. You have to be different for something to happen. Difference makes that vantage of difference more interesting." Then the mandala becomes a fire work and goes up in flames.

When you meet Yee, the thought that comes to mind is that she seems like a combination of all of mankind's religions. Within Yee there is Jesus and Mohammed, Maria, Confucius, Lao-Tzu, Qi-gong, Dahn-hak, shaman, fortuneteller and even Nichiren Daishonin Buddhism and Scientology, all combined. Why, for example, did she need to make a piece that combined all of these religions, and why does she need so many religions and gods? In the Neolithic age, the ancestors of man used art as a means to protect themselves from and control fears and horrors and other such strong emotions. It is said that even ornaments developed from magical uses, and seen in that sense, that magical property is deeply embedded in the origins of all the arts, including music and theater. The aim of magic was self-protection, wish fulfillment, and the healing of ailments. Twentieth century art became strongly institutionalized, with art critics like Clement Greenberg claiming that "the cave paintings done by a primitive man and the drawings that an artist does today are completely different acts." Of course, art is not magic. However, drawings do have a power. The act of drawing maintains a primitive form of communication, and as form of communication with the self, bears an intimate relationship to self-healing. It is possible that the difference between a professional artist and one who is not lies in whether the drawing stops at self-healing, or whether it can go on to heal others as well. "Healing" here means communication with others. Ultimately, if one can heal others, that means that one's own self must become that much stronger. Whether one feels sympathy because contemplating a drawing is an act of healing,

the mentally stimulated endorphins increase. It might only be on a small scale, but it allows one to hope and to dream.

In one of Yee's drawings, a young girl opens a box and peers into it. Inside the box are flames. Perhaps the moment she opened the box, in that moment of birth, the evils of mankind had already escaped out into the world. "Womanhood" is not something she chose, but a condition she was born into, a structure of existence that like language existed before a choice could be made. The girl regards the flames remaining in the box with a look of childish curiosity. What could be burning? The psychologist C.G. Jung said that "To draw the things that we see before us is different from drawing the things within us." Actually, the problem lies with the things that cannot be seen. The things that make us sad, the things that make us happy...she may have passed through and know all of the codes of art of this age, but Yee uses the power of restraint in order to be liberated from those institutional rules. It is so that she can find a different kind of communication, one that only she can claim for her own. One can say that in the digital age, these flames are an experiment in the possibility of a new kind of communication. In Yee's work, I can faintly detect the possibility of a primitive, animalistic, instinctive communication, one where one doesn't need to worry over a computer's hard drive capacity or CPUs. She has the strong potential for healing. This is why these red flames protect her and moreover are artistic talismans that comfort and heal viewers. Thanks to her flames, I have become stronger. At the edge of despair, Yee remains and bestows to others the still-living sparks of hope.