

The Trauma and Ecstasy of *Adjumma* (Middle-Aged Korean Women)

For the past few years, Im Heung-soon has undertaken community arts work projects in conjunction with local residents in low-income apartment houses in areas such as Seongsang-dong, Mapo-gu and Deungchon-dong, Gangseo-gu. He has taken the concept of public art in the broadest sense possible as a cultural space to communicate and exchange ideas through the participation of residents, reflected in such activities as hosting painting competitions for young children, cinematography classes for youngsters, village film festivals, and map-making and essay contests. Residents who participate in these projects begin to discover their own dormant instinct and restore life memories that had fallen into the well of oblivion. Furthermore, by experiencing these things collectively, the ethics of the community can be restored while they share their affection with neighbors with whom they were previously unconnected. Most of these projects such as exhibitions and video premieres end up reflecting the character of a particular village.

Since taking up residency at Seoul Art Space GEUMCHEON in October of last year, the artist held *Very Private Museum*, taking the opportunity to work in conjunction with local residents on an interim closing project. Though it was a small exhibition, the displays were wonders in and of themselves which suggested a 'curiosity room' (Wunderkammer or Cabinet de curiosite) the type of which existed prior to the birth of modern museums.

Rather than artwork, the exhibition featured individual pieces created from broken pieces of plates and glasses, the 'fragments of life,' from the 'middle-aged women' near the Seoul Art Space GEUMCHEON who participated in this project. Their life (bios) becomes written (graphy), however does this type of writing lead to injuries as some writers claim? If you dig too deeply into your past, it can wound you. Project planner and host, Im Heung-soon's role seemed to lead each of the middle-aged women to the very edge of their boundary without going too far.

Perhaps the most unforgettable work from *Very Private Museum* was the installation performance video *Flying Plates*. Housewives who participated in the project threw plates they brought from home at a white veneer wall. Their passiveness and hesitation in the beginning soon gave way to them flinging the plates decisively and without shyness. They take turns throwing their plates; laughing as they do (the fixed camera shot allows us to only hear the sound of their laughter as the women are standing off camera.) The plates hit the wall more loudly, and the shattered pieces fall to the floor. The repetitive action amplifies their amusement and enjoyment, but the game always demonstrates their individual trauma and wounds.

The continued impact of the flying plates on the white veneer wall has badly damaged the wall. The wounds, deep-rooted in each of us, begin to reveal themselves in the excitement and enthusiasm of the middle-aged women. This work by Im Heung-soon cannot simply be viewed as a collective curative experience for those involved. This video remains a resonating and lingering image to all those who viewed it as well as the middle-aged who participated, because there is a coexisting relationship between trauma and ecstasy in each of us, and that relationship is strained so that it can only be relieved rather than cured. Norwegian video artist Knut Asdam's 1995 work, *Untitled: Urination* is considered a masterwork of this type of video.

The 'results' that Im Heung-soon achieved at Seoul Art Space_Geumcheon must not be a coincidence. Beginning with works like *Seongnam Project* and *Mixrice* he has examined the 'masculinity' of Korean society, something he continued in 2004 with works such as *Homecoming Box* and *Letter From Vietnam*. Now he seems to have reached a stage where he is examining the other side of this 'masculinity' and exploring 'middle-aged women'.

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