

The Paintings of Park Inhyuk

Painting of the Body, Landscape of the Body, and Paintings that Testify the Existence

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When one gazes upon nature (landscape)—which appears disorderly yet possesses a strange sense of order—it often evokes the human body. As these images of nature expand, they manifest to me as points, lines, and planes. My painting is a record of a cycle: beginning from the body, expanding into nature, and returning once again to the body. It is a language before language; like a musical melody, it contains repetition and variation, and like the trembling of life, it vibrates incessantly. Within this trembling, within this unfinished rhythm, I wish to continue inscribing the energy of the body and the time of nature. (Artist's Note)

According to the modernist paradigm that heralded the emergence of abstract art in the early twentieth century, the minimal unit of plastic art is reduced to the point (cf. Wassily Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*). Every form and image originates from a single point, and through the expansion of that point into lines and planes, forms are constructed and images are composed. This reflects a mode of thinking consistent with Western analytical logic.

The Eastern perspective, rooted in the long tradition of ink painting, reveals a different orientation. From this viewpoint, the minimal unit of plastic art is closer not to the point but to the **stain or blot**. All forms and images originate from a single blot, and these blots gather freely and contingently to form shapes and images. While a blot may be regarded as a kind of point in a broad sense, strictly speaking, a point and a blot possess different characteristics. If the point is determined and fixed, the blot is indeterminate, amorphous, accidental, and variable. If the essence of nature itself lies in such indeterminacy, contingency, and mutability, then the Eastern perspective is perhaps better suited to painting that follows the vital flow of nature.

Park Inhyuk studied Korean painting and practiced calligraphy in his youth. Through this process, he likely internalized the spontaneous vitality inherent in the blot. This vitality became the nourishment for his current practice, which is grounded in the variations and transformations of calligraphic gestures. The artist describes this vitality as “trembling” and “unfinished.” This trembling refers to the flowing energy of nature—the energy of circulation and vibration. Likewise, the notion of the “unfinished” points to the **vital pulse of nature** itself—constantly flowing, circulating, and perpetually coming into being. At the very least, his work aims toward the boundless horizon of an indeterminate and open nature. In this sense, as his painting attempts to depict nature in the very process of its emergence and movement, it may well be described as a form of **generative painting**.

The artist refers to his paintings as landscapes. He titles earlier works made with collaged newspaper—representing everyday time—as *Landscape of Time*, paintings of faces emerging from dark surfaces as *Landscape of Being*, and his more recent works as *Landscape of the Body*. Landscape is distinct from nature. While nature in itself is self-sufficient and leaves no room for human cognition, landscape is the conceptualization of that otherwise ungraspable nature. In other words, landscape is a conceptual device and a humanistic framework that objectifies nature—originally beyond cognition—as an object of perception. Maurice Merleau-Ponty argued that because the world is constituted by what he called the “flesh of the world” (*la chair du monde*), the world and the subject cannot be clearly separated into subject and object. From this perspective, the relationship between nature and landscape inevitably contains a certain paradox. Yet, paradoxically, it is precisely such contradictions that often become the generative moment for the birth of art.

Through landscape, the artist paints time, being, and the body, ultimately painting himself. To paint being is also, in a sense, to paint the face. In Korean etymology, the face (*eo/gu*) can be understood as the visible form (*kko*) through which the spirit (*eo*) or being reveals itself. Although their outward appearances differ, these works are essentially paintings of the self. They are self-reflective works that testify to existence. The recent *Landscape of the Body* series, in

particular, can be described as **"paintings of the body."**

These works partly recall Abstract Expressionism. If Expressionism paints emotion, Abstract Expressionism paints sensation. What is depicted is the experience of the body—sensation embodied—and the trace of bodily action itself. It is the body standing at the front line of an encounter with the world, or the body that is already part of the world. If the calligraphic basis of Park's recent work is understood as an Eastern version of Abstract Expressionism, his painting can be seen as a site where East and West intersect and merge.

The artist calls his recent theme **"The Landscape After the Body."** It signifies the landscape left in the wake of the body, the landscape drawn by the body, and the landscape that proves the existence of the body through its very absence. He moves beyond the landscapes of time and being to paint the landscape of the body—the time through which the body has passed, the place where it once lingered, and the self-existence embodied through sensation.

The artist's "body paintings" can be categorized into three versions: those emphasizing layered brushstrokes, those highlighting free-spirited drawing, and those focused on atmosphere. In the version where layered brushwork and drawing predominate, the elements are not separated but interwoven. The process involves a base layer of pastel, over which brushstrokes are superimposed and rhythmic drawings are added—revealing and concealing the layers beneath. This creates a **"movement within stillness"** (*jeong-jung-dong*), a harmony of reason and emotion.

This process of revealing while erasing, and drawing while erasing, resonates with Roland Barthes' metaphor of the **palimpsest** (the tattered parchment). In the past, when paper was scarce, parchment was used and reused—written upon, erased, and rewritten—until it became frayed. Such a parchment contains the total history of affirmation and negation, testifying to the self as a whole. For Park, the pastel represents the inner dimension, the vigorous brushstrokes represent the *pathos*, and the free drawing represents the vitality of existence.

Finally, there is the version where **atmosphere** is emphasized. At first glance, the subject is elusive, like a distant mountain shrouded in mist. Depending on the

angle, the shadows shift, appearing and disappearing. The artist first coats the canvas in silver and then overlays thick white paint while it is still wet. The resulting silvery-gray tone creates a dreamlike, distant atmosphere. Silver is a self-luminous pigment that responds to the surrounding light.

This resonates with his earlier graphite portraits. Graphite, like silver, responds to light; the hidden faces appear and disappear depending on the viewer's position. This evokes Walter Benjamin's concept of "**aura**"—the experience of a distance, however near it may be. It is not a depiction of a particular being (*Seiende*), but an attempt to capture **Being itself** (*Sein*). Park Inhyuk's silvery landscapes and graphite portraits attempt to evoke this elusive dimension of Being and landscape.