

## LEE KIT INTERVIEW PT II

*What are the qualities of light that you appreciate?*

Light provides an atmosphere I can anticipate but can't control. The best way to control is to not control. Even if I like the sunlight on the wall here, I can't really control it. At best, all I can do is open the window. But maybe I can put some object there to enhance the feeling or atmosphere; in this case, it's a painting. Then it makes me feel my work has some shared relevance to the light. It wouldn't work if I put a painting there with a spotlight on it, because all the paintings are also elements in the exhibition as a whole. They are material, just like the light. And the light is somehow more important.

*Light creates space.*

Well, if I build a wall, then that creates shadows, which creates another perspective on the space or another experience of walking in the space. But that would be the case regardless of the light. On the other hand, if I don't add the walls, nothing would be different, not even the light. These are the problems I set for myself. Then I can play around with them, get closer to the things I want to capture in the exhibition. I recently realized that adding walls can actually make the space feel bigger. This means I can manipulate the space. And, conversely, building more walls in a big space can make it feel smaller.

*The picnic cloth, the table cloth, the curtain – these are also ways of making space.*

I think I used them as if I were a dog – as a way of marking territory. I want to have a picnic *here*. It is an open space of course, but I doubt anyone else would spontaneously join us, because we are smoking and drinking and enjoying ourselves. It's the same as the table cloth. When I had the table cloths in my studio, sometimes my friends would invite their friends to come by, and even though I would say, *Please, join us*, they usually didn't. I didn't do it intentionally, but it is intentional: *This is my space, if you want to join me you can* – but usually people don't want to.

*The picnic cloth is collapsible space – foldable and unfoldable space. You put it in your bag and nothing happens, but when you take it out you can create space anywhere.*

When I was younger and angrier I even brought a picnic cloth to the piazza at the Times Square development in Hong Kong to have a picnic there. We really were like dogs that time: *This is our space, fuck you!* Someone called the police but we talked to them in English. Of course we were capable of speaking in Cantonese, but we did it on purpose. When we talked to them in English the policemen were like, *Oh, so you are not from Hong Kong?* Obviously we are from Hong Kong, stupid! We did it intentionally to attack the ownership of the land and the sociopolitical issues. But technically it was as you say: when we unfolded the cloth on the street, it became our space.

*Foldable and unfoldable space is like time in relation to music. Through your architectural interventions and the use of light and space you excavate the existing space to reveal the potential hidden within it. Similarly, when a musician composes a song, he or she excavates the different possibilities for dividing a certain amount of time, from one bar to three minutes or an hour, into a musical composition.*

I play music sometimes. I was in a band when I was young. And I still write songs, although I never perform in front of people. I'm too shy, and too old to play in a band now. But take the song by the Carpenters: everyone knows the melody. Actually, it's not really about the melody. It's about the empty spaces, the gaps between the notes. So I agree. I am making use of the empty space, or the negative space. But there actually is no negative space in physical space. Someone could say the window is negative space, but if I consider the light to be an element of the work, then it is not negative space. It is filled with things. So how can I make use of it? As a metaphor the light is the echo, if we're talking about music. The echo is like the light, in that it is related to the so-called negative space, musically or physically.

For me, there are two kinds of echo. One occurs in physical space. The other that happens more to me is the echo in my mind. I often hear music in my mind – I think we all experience this. This is the real music that influences me and captures my life. And no one can tell what it is. Even if I try to share this experience or my feelings with others, I'm sure no one would get it. And vice versa. If you told Nina, *Oh, this morning I heard some music in my mind and I feel so down now*, the most she could say is, *Well, don't be sad, blah, blah, blah*. That's the dilemma that becomes the drive or purpose for me to keep doing exhibitions. That's the really important thing to be captured.

*The soundtrack to your exhibition could be John Cage's 4'33".*

Oh, now you're making me into a master!

*Well, just in relation to the appreciation of negative space as positive space.*

This is another dilemma or constraint. I know John Cage and his concept of music. But actually Cage seldom used the word music. He called it "sound." I know about his ideas, but I also love songs: punk songs, indie songs, love songs, old songs. This is a totally different world. If I followed the path to becoming a more so-called conceptual artist, I would feel I was getting away from life. I don't want to leave my life or people's lives. I'm still an observer of the city. That sets the limitation or the frame for me. It is a frame that I can move around in order to get things done and look for ideas.

So if John Cage is the perfect soundtrack for this show, then it means this show doesn't need a soundtrack. I just discovered that. I used to come up with soundtracks for every exhibition I did. The soundtracks never actually appeared in the exhibitions. They were more like a frame than a backdrop. If I was working on two projects and wanted to

concentrate on project A, then I would play the soundtrack for project A, and it would frame my mind. Later, when I worked on project B, I would play the soundtrack for project B.

But over the past few projects I have stopped making the soundtracks. There are some songs I listen to, but I don't see them as corresponding to a specific project. Before, when I worked on a project I would loop the soundtrack in the space while I was working. But here, once the music stopped I left it so that everything became quiet, and then I found the silence to be really enjoyable and full of content – like the calls of the birds outside or the noises from the construction site. It can be noisy but it also provides a certain distance. That is, I can sense the distance through the noise of the construction site. Because it's not right outside. It's on the other side of the building. The noise comes all the way around and through the window. So I don't hear it as noise. It's a medium for me to feel the distance.

*It's like a drum. You hit the surface and then the air inside amplifies the sound.*

And the drum is actually right in front of you. It resonates *in front* of you. I don't know. It's hard to describe, and I'm not actually sure what I'm describing. You mention John Cage – I think it's there, but at the same time I don't do it intentionally. Simply, if I don't repeat the soundtrack, then there must be time for silence.

*The soundtrack is 4'33" with someone humming the Carpenters as they walk through the space.*

Sure. What happens now is that if people forget to switch off their mobile phones, some other noises enter the concert. But I would say it's more about learning to be humble. I don't know why, but recently I've started to think I should learn to be humble. Maybe it has to do with age. I've gained a better appreciation of all the elements I've used in my so-called art practice – music, paintings, space, light, the idea of the "frame" – and I realize that if I can be humble, all these things will always stay on the table for me, and can never be taken away. Like the light here. I can take away the table, but I can't take away the light. But if I take away these cups, this phone, move the computer a bit, then the view will be different. So in a way, although it may seem like I disappear, I am actually very present when I do these rearrangements of objects or elements in the space. This is what I mean by learning to be humble.

*You didn't think you were humble when you were younger?*

I was very arrogant. Even now I think I'm very arrogant. The one who says he is learning to be humble is actually very arrogant. It means I am still thinking about my ego, or still controlled by my ego. But this is the temptation as an artist: *I want to show the best; not show the best; show the best; not show the best; I want to show you something; don't want to show you anything.* It's a tension.

*The other night we debated a speculative question: If you were to open a café, would you try to make the best coffee possible, or just make the coffee you can make?*

I would just make the coffee I can make – better than normal.

*Wanting to be the best can be a constraint.*

It becomes a burden. How to keep the quality? Which I cannot maintain all the time in the first place.

*So you become indifferent.*

Yes. But then I realize that this is my arrogant part. I like all the projects I've done. I won't say they're all good, but I really like them. There are artists who want to make the best presentation every time, but – come on! It's illogical. When you do a show in Tokyo it has to be the best, and then the next show two months later in New York also has to be the best, and then the next and the next. So what are you talking about the best? What is the best? It's just illogical. In my case, I can be so rational that it's almost irrational. It's like a pendulum, sometimes I am here and then suddenly I am there. But I think that's normal. *This time I think it's not the best but I really like it.* Then it goes back to the rational side, *Ok, think about it again, what should I do, what do I want to do?* Then it goes back to the irrational side. It's ok. It's just a pendulum. Indifferent. I cannot say this is the best pendulum. There is no best pendulum. The pendulum is the pendulum.

*Time is another important element in your work. In your case, the passage of time can be felt through the changing light and shadows in the space, but on the other hand the paintings do not move, nor do the projections really move – often there is just a still image with subtitles, and it's looped, so there's no beginning and end. It's like you are searching for the point where time meets stasis.*

It's the same. I mean, they are different, but also the same. It's like music, again. You might like a song that is only three minutes long, but when it's looping in your mind it can keep going forever. I experience this all the time: I'm listening to a song and keep hearing it in my head. Let's say I'm playing the Carpenters' "Close to You" in the space while I'm working, then I go to the toilet and think, *You know, I wasn't playing the music so loudly, so how can I still hear it, even though I'm here in the toilet?* This is stable–unstable. We experience time through our bodies, so the actual time is not really what we experience. It depends on the condition of your body or state of mind.

Another example: walking for hours can be enjoyable, but walking for even three minutes can feel arduous. This is my actual experience everyday here. When I walk to work, I like to take different routes. Usually it takes 10 minutes, but sometimes I walk around for an hour. It is so enjoyable. But every time I leave the gallery after midnight, that 10-minute walk home takes forever. I am so damn tired. It's not physical exhaustion. It's just that I'm

mentally tired. Because I've been thinking about all these things. This relates to our perception of time. And of course our experience of time is always related to space. So how can I capture that in an exhibition? I don't think people could experience time if I just put works on the walls for them to look at.

*The white cube is out of time?*

It will never really be out of time, but the white cube is like a hotel or an airport lounge: they are all inhuman in a way, they all look the same, but we have to discover something in them. No – not even discover something. But there is something hidden in these spaces. It depends on whether we see it or not. It's nothing new. It sounds very Kafkaesque. Kafka also discovered many things in the office. He discovered the poetic moments in the office. I'm trying to do the same thing.

So I extend the time or stretch it. There are of course some viewers who will come into the space, take a quick look and then leave. That's fine – just like some kinds of music. Although I'm a music lover, there's some music I really don't like. I won't even spend a minute listening to it, and I don't get anything out of it. It's the same thing. But if visitors can find something they respond to in the exhibition, they will spend time there. That's when the video starts to work. That's when the painting on the wall starts to work. It introduces the feeling of time – even though there's no end and no beginning, because it's looped. It depends on the person. This is something I cannot control. But at least I provide a one- or two-minute video for you to look at, and if it can create something in your mind, then it might feel like five minutes or even an hour. And then when you look at the painting –

Actually, I don't think people look at the paintings for more than a minute, so what happens next is that they look around at the corners, or the wall beside it. That's what I really want. I want people to look at the white wall.

*The work supports the wall.*

My paintings are complete, but they don't really ask to be looked at. That's too much like the master who says, *I will show you the world*. I can't show you the world. I *mention* the world to you. People used to see painting as the "window" that frames the narrative. I can't do that, because I already have some windows here.

*And now with smartphones everyone has their own window in their pocket anyways.*

Yes. So I also need to ask myself, why am I so special? I'm not that special. I'm just stupid. And then everything comes back to reality, as opposed to the contents of my so-called art practice. We talked about it before – privileges and opportunities, *blah, blah, blah*. But I try not to think about all these things.

*The nothingness in your exhibitions is the nothingness of concentration. When you're concentrating on something, nothing happens. You start out looking at the painting but then*

*you stop seeing the painting and then you stop seeing even the wall. You become lost in thought. The exhibition is an attempt to materialize thought.*

Or make it more visible. For example, the story in the video projection here with the image of the hands only has five lines of text, and the two paintings hung on the wall inside the projection do not have any content. When people go closer to inspect them, there is nothing to see. They are paintings anyone can make. I'm not providing anything for people to really look at or appreciate. But they enhance the projection a bit. They register the changing of the light because their color is slightly different from that of the wall and both appear differently in response to the colors of the projection. So this projection wouldn't work without the paintings inside it. It would become a very boring projection work: *I'm trying to tell you something through the story.*

Actually, I'm not saying anything in the story. Recently, I've been trying to make the stories so fragmented people would not be able to remember them. I should say that all these stories start out much, much longer – like two or three pages long. Then I keep editing them, take something out, maybe two sentences or some words here and there, and make it so fragmented that even I cannot remember it.

*In English we have the idiom mental space. If you think about its actual, physical dimensions, the brain is a tremendously small space – less than 15 by 10 by 10 centimeters. But when you go into your mental space, it can encompass worlds. This is also what happens when you use the projector in your exhibitions. It expands the space.*

The projector is like a lens or a filter. I think it is a mental space. For example, the show I held in 2016 at the Walker Art Center had the karaoke soundtrack for Elvis Presley's "I Can't Help Falling in Love" looping in the space. It should be very annoying – especially for the security people who have to be there all day. I felt bad for them, but they said it was fine, it's really enjoyable. The space at the Walker is much bigger than here. Visually, everything was softer and more colorful, and with that karaoke-style soft oldies music, I thought it should be very intimate, but not too intimate. In terms of mental space, you could say I approached this very big space through a filter that initially makes everything seem blurry, but when you walk closer you realize all the details are saying, *Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you, you're down, you're down.*

The show I held concurrently at SMAK in Ghent was relatively smaller in terms of mental space. It had a lens that made you see everything clearly. There was no avoiding it – even from a distance. Sorry, you'll see it. But the content was still the same: *Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you* – something that makes you really annoyed. The title of the show was "A small sound in your head," but there was no sound in the space. It's like when you have a sound in your head even though you don't actually hear anything, or when you see something on the street or you see a work so clearly from a distance that you find it really annoying, insulting or embarrassing. So the mental space was clear, relatively more compact, and more complex.

Here in Tokyo, I think the mental space is softer. The floor is kind of soft too, but there is also something really difficult to catch there.

*The floor has a white, reflective finish.*

It was an obstacle. Obstacle means that I could easily think about making the projection brighter, in which case I could double the space because people would see the reflection in the floor. But if I can think of it so easily, then it's not good, because everything becomes too apparent. So then I realized that the floor should be soft –

Ok, I have all these stupid or childish terms I use when I'm doing exhibitions. When I say "soft," it doesn't mean I want to put a carpet on the floor, but just that I think this corner should be "soft," and the other one "harder" or darker.

*You used blue carpeting in the Hong Kong Pavilion in Venice.*

It was quite unusual to have that kind of carpet on the floor. First, blue is not really the color for Venice – that's my impression. But if the exhibition space is a canvas, then I have to prepare the canvas. So we constructed the space, which is like priming the canvas, and then I had to apply the first layer of background color, so I put some blue there, which was the carpet. Then I could start to make things happen.

Having the carpet, I thought it was necessary for someone to clean the floor every day, because it's so windy in Venice that the carpet would get dusty with the doors open all day. So vacuuming is one thing, but then vacuuming creates noise. Actually, the only person who really feels the noise is the one doing the vacuuming, because we feel it through our bodies. And then I realized that doing the vacuuming is one of the quietest moments possible, because in feeling the noise I can feel my own mental space. So I kept adding things to the space in response to the carpet, like the vacuum cleaner, and the video of someone vacuuming the carpet.

Originally the plan was to carpet the entire floor, but at the last moment I decided to leave part of it empty.

*Because it would be too blue?*

Or too direct. As we were laying the carpet on the floor the question came to mind: *Why do I need to cover the whole floor?* I had no answer for it. Then that means I don't need to cover the whole floor. It happens all the time: if you start to hear questions in your head but you don't have an answer, then you shouldn't do it. You can just leave the question open. Then I have to think about how to make use of the empty part. I think it's the same here: how to make the whole environment or atmosphere so that it moves? Movement is important.

*It won't move if it's perfectly balanced.*

Right. I don't want to make it perfectly balanced, but neither do I want to make things too extreme. So, again, in the case of music, I don't make very loud music. If I were to make loud music, it would be loud for a whole hour with variations. But usually it's quiet. I'm like a mellow indie band, only I make either very long songs or very short songs – like 10 minutes

or 10 seconds – which I put together in the same concert. I won't even say album, because in an album you have track one, track two, track three. My exhibition is a concert because even though there is a long song here and two relatively short songs there, they are all linked together, so that I don't even think of them as three different songs. That's what creates movement.

*How is it making projects all around the world, constantly on the move?*

I travel almost every two weeks. It gives me a different perspective on our industry or society compared to when I was just starting out. Because if I travel, that means I have projects in different places, so I'm the capital. But on the other hand, am I the only capital traveling around the world? No, I'm just one among millions – not only artists, but also businessmen, clients or what have you. So I'm indifferent.

Of course, there was a honeymoon year at the start. *Oh, I'm traveling!* I enjoyed staying in the hotels. I enjoyed getting upgraded to business class. Now I don't feel there's any difference. Well, the food is better in business class. But that honeymoon period was quite short, and then it was gone. Then I realized the first thing is to just focus on what I have to do. Traveling so frequently changed my so-called studio practice, and it changed my understanding of time and space. For example, in Taipei I work at home. There's a room I use as my studio, but basically I can work anywhere in my apartment. The thing is that now I usually spend no more than two days or a week in my so-called studio at any time. I had to start making works on site, or even in hotel rooms. In the beginning it didn't feel good – particularly in hotel rooms. It felt like taking a shower in the kitchen. And making works on site felt like taking a shower, naked of course, in front of other people. It's still manageable – but taking a shower in the kitchen feels too strange. So then I needed to adapt my practice further: both in terms of time and space and in terms of working in different locations and situations. But the more I tried to tackle it, the more the problem itself became the main concern, which is less about art, and more about life: how can I manage my life?

Then I realized I don't need to think about art all the time; yet everything I think about also informs my art. For example, when I tackle the feeling of working in the space with other people around me, it can still feel weird or off even when they're all my friends. But when I start to think about why and how to tackle it, then I see the same thing again: loneliness, solitude, sadness – all these keywords that used to be in my works are still there. So it's another situation of indifference: working on site is no different from my previous practice, in a way. I'm just tackling more and more things that I have to tackle or deal with. It took me around two years to work through these so-called daily issues or problems.

*So you come to Tokyo. You've been here several times now. It's also similar to Hong Kong and Taipei in terms of atmosphere or urban form. But when you go to places like Wellington or Kathmandu –*

Kathmandu is the only time in my short career I've ever had such a human experience. I had a really strong feeling I was making art there, which is strange, because I wasn't working all the time, nor was I particularly focused. But I felt very religious. It's not that I'm turning to Hinduism or Buddhism, but I felt very religious somehow. That's why I learned to be



humble. It feels like I shouldn't do too much. Not that I *couldn't* do much, but I *shouldn't* do much. So that was a coincidence again. There was a learning curve in tackling my life, from the honeymoon of traveling to all these related issues, and then it became quite spontaneous, all these things happened, and suddenly I was in Kathmandu. I didn't expect to have such a strong reaction. Of course, it also included losing my baggage for five days.

*From Tokyo to Kathmandu and Paris, what stays consistent between these different places?*

I still think about how to make use of the space, how to make use of the light, how to put something on the walls, how to make some paintings, for example. But in a way every place is different, because I always try to make myself disappear wherever I go, and different contexts require different approaches for that.

If I'm at an exhibition opening here in Tokyo or Paris and I want to disappear, it's easy. I just go outside to have a cigarette. Then I can disappear for five or 10 minutes. Also, I always prepare a second smoking location, which is relatively hidden. So if I really, really want to disappear at the opening, I will go to the second spot. This is what I usually do in a city. But in Kathmandu, no, I can smoke everywhere! So how to disappear?

The best way to disappear in Kathmandu is to not make myself disappear. I just have to be there. Because in talking to the local people I learned that they are not talking, they are *sharing*. If you don't want to answer, you just sit there and smile, listen to them – that's the best way to disappear. Even there, I tried to turn myself into the background, or use the space so that my work would be the background. But when I do that in Tokyo or in Paris, instead of being humble, it's *pretentious*, let's say. I'm trying to tell people I'm the background in my own solo show. It's hypocritical.

*You turn yourself into the background, but neither is your exhibition an "interpretation" of any one city.*

No. I would never say that my exhibition represents my experience in Tokyo or Paris. It's just too arrogant. I don't live there. Even though I've been to Tokyo 15 or however many times, it doesn't mean I really understand it. I can't even say that about Hong Kong, where I was born and lived for 35 years. I shouldn't. This is not even a notion I care about. If I have a wife or a partner, I wouldn't even say I know her very well. She will change, I will change. I am changing, she is changing too.

*Now we are in the age of the post-national or post-local artist. You have something like five galleries in Asia alone, not to mention galleries in the US and Europe.*

It could be constructive and destructive at the same time. Some galleries try to control you, but if you say no to them, it can be destructive. The problem is not the galleries, the problem is the system, the industry. It's a brainwashing machine, constantly creating desires for everyone. I have to ask myself, can I destroy this machine? Of course not. Then what can I do with it? Maybe it's just providing something destructive as a way to construct something. It's like the negative space we mentioned. I don't say no, and I don't say yes,

either. Things keep happening. Then let's see what happens. Institutional shows are another issue, but for me it's the same, being destructive in a constructive way. I didn't say yes; I didn't say no. I just keep producing new works.

*Is it possible to overproduce?*

I can't overproduce, because I keep producing. Overproduction can apply to international exhibitions as much as the market, but I honestly don't know how you would define it either way. For me, writing is another way of producing things, but nobody would tell a writer he is overproducing because he writes every day. I actually spend more time writing than making paintings or videos now – because of all the time I spend in lounges or in planes or in hotel rooms.

*What do you write?*

Mostly short notes – two or three sentences, and then if I have time I combine them together or develop them into a story or several stories. Other times I just jot down ideas.

So writing is another space to work with. The notebook wasn't that important to me before. It was just a record of something. Now it has become another canvas, which is quite complicated to explain, but it gives me one more layer of privacy or disappearance. I have started writing in Chinese. I used to write in English, even though my English is not that good. My Cantonese is relatively better, but I never wrote in Chinese. Then, after I moved to Taiwan and began to speak Chinese more and travel more, I found that writing in Chinese is a good thing, because even if I'm on the airplane in economy class, the person beside me has no idea what I'm writing, even though it's right in front of them. I am transparent!

*In the early works, you would appropriate lyrics from popular songs, but now it seems you use your own writing more often.*

More and more. For this show I think all of the texts came from my notebook – although “breathe in, breathe out” doesn't really count. Ultimately it was too easy, I think, to use other people's writing or lyrics. Again, the question came to mind: *Could I use it forever?* Yes, I can. That's a problem. I could just keep making use of other people's lyrics on and on, in videos, paintings, show titles. If I can apply it to anything forever, then it's wrong. It's not a marriage at the end of the day.

I usually compare the relations between my materials and my works and working with other people to a marriage. But doing the same thing forever is not a marriage. I think it's horrible. I need to escape. Again, I don't say no to it, but I just don't want to say yes to it forever. Maybe I will return to using lyrics sometime. But when I stopped using the lyrics and looked at my own writing, there was so much to discover, because until then I had been writing and writing, without looking at what I wrote.

*Are these notes personal reflections, or do they include ideas about art as well?*

In between. Something that strikes me – a metaphor, for example. I wrote some lines a few days ago comparing the chilliness in Tokyo and in Taipei. I was walking on the street when I realized: *The night in Taipei is chilly, but it's soft, like touching somebody's skin; the night in Tokyo feels like a thin piece of metal, impenetrable.* And that makes me feel really lonely here, as we talked about at the bar.

I write things like that in my notebook, yet somehow it means nothing. These are not ideas for developing my next exhibition, although they do actually relate to how I build a world, if I put it in a very straightforward and simple way. But I try not to write about how I'm feelings, like, "I am very happy today because I met some friends and had drinks with them." If I do, it means I am creating another story out of it. So, strange as it may sound, the notes are also a way of diverting myself from what I'm thinking as well.

*It's like the effect of the projection works: you block the light when you go for a closer look.*

Something like that. But I think at this point the key word is still control. I think I have a much bigger desire to control than to enjoy. I really like to keep control, to have everything under control, and then sometimes I don't control, but how and why I control is because of that distance. I really enjoy that distance. I'm a control freak.

*Putting your ideas on paper already alienates them from yourself. It creates distance between your past and present mental states.*

I think so. Otherwise I would just forget about it. Then I wouldn't even need to think about the distance. But I also don't want it to disappear. Because in that moment when you suddenly think about something you find really important, you just want to capture it or remember it. Of course, two or three days later when you read it again you think, *Wow, so silly!*

But I have to learn to manage that experience of feeling like a genius in the moment and then feeling stupid after. It's ok if we're talking about writing in my notebook, but what if I'm working on an exhibition? To feel like a genius one day, and then feel silly when I see the show again later – I really don't enjoy that feeling at all. It's not that I want to be a genius, but I have to feel the work is important for me. I don't want to feel stupid when I look back at it.

*That's the feeling of performing, right?*

Yes. But I always work to the last minute, and that is when it becomes easy to make the kind of wrong decision where you feel like a genius in the moment and then realize you are such a naïve, stupid guy afterward. That moment is very difficult to grab.

But I'm not only talking about exhibitions. How about in our lives? It's the same. In an exhibition at least I can say I worked to the last minute, but in reality you don't have until the last minute. The last minute comes to you, and you have to do something or make a decision on the spot. I am practicing for that, I think. My artistic practice is not only about

art, because what I am practicing for is something really basic. I am training myself to make decisions in a relatively precise way that does not create problems for others.

*How do you conceive the viewers in the space?*

They activate the exhibition. Without the audience it means nothing. But they are actually in the same position as me, because I am the first viewer of my own show, so if I find that I'm smiling as I walk around, that means it is good. In a way I'm no different from the audience, because I also feel very alienated or isolated by my own projects. So if I think I am important, they are important too. If I think I am not important, they are also not important.

*If the exhibition is your way to practice decision making, what do the viewers get out of it?*

I don't know, honestly. If my exhibitions are concerts, then as the musician I shouldn't ask the audience what they need to get out of it. They just go to the concert. Out of 10 songs at the concert, people might have one or two songs they really love that touch them, and then the rest comes down to whether they feel moved by the atmosphere or feel bored because of the atmosphere or whatever. So maybe I just want them to be touched or moved by something – not necessarily the paintings or the projection; maybe just the light is enough.

*The viewers activate the space and the space activates the viewers. Is the exhibition a choreographed space?*

It's certainly a mutual relationship. I wouldn't use the term you use, but it is true. At least, I feel like I'm dancing when I walk around my own show.

*When there's more than one person, it allows you to feel their presence.*

You can see yourself better, too. You can see how you just moved in that area in the space.

*Now you're moving in response to the space, to the work and to the other people, and sometimes someone else's shadow gets in the way of your view, or your shadow gets in the way of the other's view.*

It's a performance.

*We spoke about your theory of the "platform" before. The platform and the picnic blanket are both arenas for people to –*

You see! No matter how I try to change my practice, it stays the same. Of course, the elements are different now. I didn't use projection or video in the early days. But it is the

same. The interest in light, the pictorial arrangement, composition, atmosphere – they are all still there.

*Where do the images in the projections come from?*

This time it's mostly from a French movie I saw on the airplane. The movie wasn't great, but it had some nice visual compositions, so I took pictures. I often take images from movies, but also from Facebook or anywhere on the Internet, as well as from magazines. And sometimes I use photos I took myself. I use them indifferently. They are all readymade images.

*In your show at Palais de Tokyo in Paris you had an image of naked woman, shot from behind.*

Yes, that was from a Korean movie. It's the same thing again. I had the idea that the show should be about desire, sex – I don't know why. I started looking for scenes from movies. Normally I don't like to watch porno, but I spent a month before the show watching a lot of Japanese AV. I wanted to find a naked woman making love with a guy. But I really don't enjoy watching AV, so I was thinking, *Fuck, do I need to watch it? I don't want to!* I even had to keep my camera ready so that if I found the right scene I could photograph it immediately. But I just couldn't find the material I needed.

Then I remembered this silly Korean movie I saw when I was younger, so I searched for it online, found it, and immediately found that scene. It was in my mind the whole time – because I had seen it when I was young and the image stayed with me. So I did some stupid things like watching AV for a month, only to discover the perfect fragment was already there waiting for me.

*In the entryway here in Tokyo you have an image of a girl sitting on a bed. She could be your girlfriend.*

Her? I found it on Facebook. I think my friend's friend's friend posted it. When I saw it I was like, *Ok, this is something I need to collect.* It was earlier this year. Then, when I was working here, I thought I need something intimate, something banal, something relatively colorful for that corner. So I went through my image collection and found that image. *Ok, suitable.*

That was the start for activating that corner. The image of someone sitting on the bed playing with her phone is quite familiar to people now. It has a particular time element in it. Not everyone understands it, but at least we find it familiar. Then it becomes a frame. And then I can put a story inside the frame. So I was thinking about what to put, and I had edited a few versions with longer and shorter texts, when I realized the real story I wanted to convey from the image was maybe not a story, but just a state of mind. So I put, "Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out." And then finally I added the painting. It's not really a painting, just some painted paper, mirroring the pattern of the girl's pajamas.

*I think when you first used the projector, it was as a light source.*

I was working at the Cattle Depot on the Hong Kong version of the Hong Kong Pavilion from Venice. I was there alone at night doing a painting. All the lights were off. The space was quite big, and I was too lazy to walk over to turn them on. But there was a projector that happened to be on with just the white testing background, so when I finished the painting, I hung it in the light to have a look, and then I realized, *Wait. Something happened.* The projection was only white light – it wasn't even a video – but it still had the pixelation effect. I realized that the pattern of the pixels projected on the painting is something I could never paint on my own – technically I could, but not really. So I took a picture of the painting in the projection and then projected the image of the painting in the projection on the wall and hung the painting next to it. And then that moment happened again. *Oh, genius! Shit! My god!* But it was a coincidence.

*In Venice there was the carpet and the vacuum cleaner and the video of someone vacuuming the carpet. The idea of a self-referential loop between video and space already existed before the projections, in some sense.*

Yes, and in Venice there were also videos with nothing but different shades of blue color, playing off the blue of the carpet. It was about contemplation, I guess. I made people wait to look at a very boring video, and actually it's not even a video. It's a still image, but because I put it on a monitor people expect to see something. So there were already those elements, but then later I realized I could combine them with the paintings and in doing so tell stories without telling stories. When there's a painting with a projection, even if the projection is only white or blue light, it still tells a story, because the sound of the machine in the background provides a sense of time passing, and then people start to look at the painting and wonder if it's real or not. *Will it move?* No, it doesn't move. It's just a painting, but because of the pixels, and because people see their own shadows appear when they move closer to look at it, it activates the moment of contemplation.

*I remember seeing a video you made some years ago of someone nervously drumming the table with his fingers. These small performative videos seem to have disappeared from your work.*

Yes, over the past two years. Maybe again the reason is similar. It seems too easy now. If I can keep doing it for 100 videos or more, then I should stop.

*And that was your hand?*

It used to be my hands in those videos, but now I use found images. This is for a very practical reason. I think my hand looks nice, but also strange in a way, because it looks like a woman's hand. Somehow it becomes complicated or pretentious if I want to use my own hand. I have to take a picture, so I have to put the camera in front of me, and then I'm acting. I don't feel natural. I want to keep the whole process as spontaneous and natural as

possible. Then I figured, why not make use of other people's images? It makes more sense that way, because always using my own hand becomes too performative, which is something I should avoid.

*Why do you keep returning to the hand imagery?*

I don't even know myself. I'm curious why. There is always something I cannot really leave behind – even this sentence. Actually, this is the sentence I wrote for the work I made in Kathmandu earlier this year: *Something you can't leave behind*. It's a sentence that has been in my mind for a long, long time – since I was 14 or 15 years old. I don't even remember where it comes from. But hands are something I cannot leave behind. Even if I intentionally try to avoid overusing them, they keep coming back, again and again. It's actually more important than the so-called baby blue color in my so-called whole practice. It actually has a meaning, whereas the baby blue color doesn't have any meaning.

*The hand means different things in different works?*

First, it's too honest to capture – so real I can't even account for all the meaning it carries. This is what interests me now. What is it that makes it feel too honest? I don't know how to describe it clearly, but this is the only thing I can rely on if I want to get at so-called reality: our hands. I don't only mean that you can tell the details or the real story behind everything by looking at hands. It's like everything happens in our hands, and it's something I can't change, but I can understand more behind the gestures and the image of the hand.

*Driven by consumer culture's obsession with sex, the overwhelming number of images today focus on the body and body parts. The hand has been marginalized from the representation of the human figure.*

The hand was always an important part of representation of the human figure, as in religious painting. I find that the body can also be useful sometimes, but not all the time. It tells too much. There are too many messages. Say you have an image of a naked woman – shot from behind, not even the front. People would say, *Ok, this image is about secrets; it is about intimacy; it is about desire; it represents sex; it is about the objectification of the female body*; and on and on. It carries too much meaning. It's too useful. It's like you have a tool that is so useful you don't even want to use it anymore.

*The hand was one of the most formalized aspects of religious painting, and a place where painters could show their mastery of techniques like foreshortening and perspective.*

Yes, it only had a few gestures. I read that when people at the time would look at a painting – which was unusual in itself, especially for those without power – and they saw the hand pointing to the sky, then they knew it represented humanity and god, and when the hand was cupping an object inside its palm, then it represented greediness. Because of the

religious context it was a language everybody understood, and there were rules for how to use it, but without that context there are so many more possible interpretations, which makes it harder to understand.

*So what does painting mean for you now, after 15 years of working?*

It's a practice. It's not about the picture itself. It is something I can invest my life in – as a practice. I have frequently asked myself over the past few years: *Without working on paintings, would I have become the person I am now?* Maybe not. Of course, when I put this question to myself I can easily identify some other critical moments or turning points in my life: without this person I would be dead, or I would be different, or whatever – so there are many factors involved. But I do think I would have turned out different without painting. But only because it's a practice, and I found that I can discover a lot from this practice: control; technique.

The best technique is not about showing you have technique but knowing when and how to stop. The best moment for stopping is when it feels like nothing happened. That's the best painting. And as a technique for life, the best technique is to make something happen as if nothing happened.

*How about paint as a material?*

That's not as important for me, although I find it magical. But painting is not the only thing I find magical. Projection as well. For example, that small painting with the woman turning away from the viewer. I made that painting on the morning of the opening. It was a magical moment, because I could have stopped working and gone home, but I felt good about making another painting. Even though it was late, I wasn't tired. So I started to paint. The moment I transferred the image onto the plywood, something magical happened. I put some paint here, and then there. It was like I was a child again. But nothing would happen if I don't apply the paint.

*What do you mean when you say transfer the image?*

I was working on my computer. I edited the woman's image first, then printed it and transferred it onto the plywood.

*First you have the idea to make a painting, then you find the image?*

I should say there was a feeling telling me I needed to make a painting for that spot, because without the painting there, all the works would say too much. I needed a painting that would say something without revealing what is being said. That's why the exhibition is called "Not Untitled." That work is also "not untitled." It suggests that the woman wants to say something, but obviously she cannot tell you, and you know she cannot tell you.



I needed that feeling or image, and that feeling drove me to make the painting, and it was necessary to have the painting under that window. Otherwise, when people walked in they would see an empty wall. It's ok, but the empty wall is too open for association. Essentially, I followed a reductive process: *Should I put a print there, should I put a piece of unpainted plywood there, or painted plywood, or even another projection?* None of them seemed like a good option, so, very simply, I concluded I needed a painting.

Then I found the image in the archive on my computer. I edited it, printed it, and at the same time I was already preparing the piece of plywood. A few hours later, it was done. But I could not make this painting in my studio. It could happen only once, in this space, because it came out of all the elements here.

If this exhibition is a song, then one work is the baseline, another is the guitar, and then I need something a bit more – maybe an ending. How to end the song? The ending is also very important for a song. And we don't have many options: sudden end, fade out – which is usually the worst way to end a song – and that's about it. I was looking for an ending for the show, and the best ending shouldn't feel like an ending, because in an exhibition the concept of time is different. A song is linear. It has a beginning and an end. But there's no beginning or end to an exhibition, because we can keep walking around the space. So this painting is an ending, but it's not an ending.

*You talk about transparency and making yourself transparent. Painting is not transparent, it's opaque, but image transfer and using the projector are ways of conveying transparency.*

It's half-transparent. You know, I'm good at traditional drawing technique. I was trained well, and I was the best in school, but even with such strong technique in realist drawing, I cannot imitate the visual effect of the image transfer. It's not only about the quality of the paint or of the drawing. It's also about the nature of it. It is necessary for me to image transfer onto this kind of emulsion paint on plywood or cardboard, just because technically I cannot paint it. It provides the same kind of semi-transparent effect as video, by which I mean lo-fi video.

So image transfer is a relatively lo-fi technique, the same as my choice of video, but it provides that transparency or semi-transparent effect, which is not only a visual effect. It is the other layer of an impenetrable or penetrable world or, I don't know how to describe it . . . *surface*.

*The surface holds all the weight.*

It's a window curtain. You see! Everything is the same! I'm still using the window curtain. I mean, I'm still thinking about window curtains: *privacy*. I think we talked about it before. If you have an apartment or room, the thing that makes you feel private is the window curtain.

*But light also passes through it, and when it moves in the breeze, you can feel connected to the outside.*

There you are. And all these elements are not only about art or exhibitions. They are right here in our everyday lives.