

Quiet accusations:

Lee Kit's exhibition at the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art

Lee Kit "We used to be more sensitive"

Review by Minoru Shimizu

Projection Mapping that is used across various genres has become increasingly sophisticated in recent years. While this sophistication has all but led to refining techniques that so to speak magically transport people to another dimension, one cannot help feel that the original impact of projections is lost. This impact I speak of is catabolism. With projections, the identity of 'A' is disrupted and multiplexed through projecting the image(s) of 'B' (and or 'C,' 'D'...) onto it. In other words, they illuminate the presence of invisible ghosts, hidden tattoos or spiritual stigmata that had been sealed away, overlaying an inherent sense of darkness upon A. This 'A' for example, is the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art. The darkness that corresponds is colonialism.

A while ago, when Kishin Shinoyama held his solo exhibition at the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, I found myself to be ultimately disappointed despite my high expectations of the show (refer to my review featured in the 2016 November issue of this publication). Shinoyama was a "more sensitive" photographer who had responded to the emptiness of postwar Japan by engaging with the nation's entertainment industry as an environment directly descended from Washington Heights (Johnny's entertainment, pop idols, and the idolization of half-Western individuals), and using it as a bright mirror through which to reflect. Emptiness in this context refers to the "lack of reality" permeating Japanese Society that was transformed into a mere colony of the U.S. army due its defeat in the war, and thus had been deprived of its "very own nature".

As it is well known, many Western-style buildings like the Hara Contemporary Museum of Art, which had been owned by the Japanese upper classes prior to the war, have a history of being confiscated by the GHQ. The Japanese upper classes that performed liked Westerners against the backdrop of such Western-style settings, had been literally intruded upon and evicted by "real Westerners" who were beneath their social standing. What is engraved there is the violent and humiliating trauma of losing the war, while also sharing the same sense of "lacking reality." That being said, Kishin Shinoyama was no longer sensitive. Before long, his bright photographs had ceased to capture the "darkness."

Lee Kit was born in Hong Kong during the British rule, and currently lives and works in Taipei that is a former colonial territory of Japan. He is an artist who develops variegated work, drawing connections between the diversity of the term “framing” as it is used in artistic expression, and the catabolism of projections. For this exhibition, Lee Kit took the Hara Museum of Contemporary art itself as his theme, using minimal materials and spatial compositions to create a remarkable installation that incorporated the entire museum.

While the technicalities involved in these projections are quite simple, the dimensions of the frames, as well as the positions of shadows cast by visitors, have been calculated. The videos repeatedly convey the spaces and objects observed within the museum, causing reality and video to coalesce with one another. A video of a window in one of the rooms of the museum is projected in the same architectural dimensions as its original, complete with the scenery that is observed beyond and outside it. The subtitles on the video read, “We are killing each other. In the pale light of shadow, we put together a house. But my hand is not so long enough to reach the cup.”, and written on an actual mug on the windowsill are the words, “Full of joy.” The minimum text and video footage that is projected serves to highlight the traces of darkness that the museum continues to bear (“Deep inside, you never let go”), the bright hypocrisy of postwar Japan (believing in the ‘edited version’ of life), and the rifts within our minds as those who exist in the contexts that follow (“Hello, Hey, I am sorry. But I am happy”).

The subtitles are naturally in English, which is attributed to English in effect being the common language of the art world. Furthermore, if one were to delve deeper, the space of the museum is also an English-speaking colonial territory. In other words, the entire exhibition is constructed in a way that irritates and reopens our old forgotten wounds, as viewers (Japanese people) return to their former residence (the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art), only to see that it has transformed into a museum = English-speaking colonial territory. There is indeed no accusation that is as quiet as this.

Translated by Kei Bengner

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LEE Kit 'We used to be more sensitive.' installation view, 2018, Hara Museum of Contemporary Art
Photo by Shigeo Muto ©LEE Kit

LEE Kit 'We used to be more sensitive.'
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Hara Museum of Contemporary Art