

In This Unclear World

As it should be, a solo exhibition by Ritsue Mishima

Review by Uraka Hijikata

The crystal clear glass, the light, the air and white walls. These are the only elements in the exhibition space, yet the exhibition provides the viewers an unforgettable experience—which is still engraved in my heart.

It starts from the narrow stairway to the basement. Walking down the stairway, one would realize there is a whirl of glass suspended by a rope in a corner of the landing, ushering his or her gaze to its bottom. Moving forward, one would be greeted by a line of uneven dull silver glass beads, resembling a straight japamala, extending upward from the basement. What follows after the path in front of the wall is a small sacred space where a glass-made PAGODA is installed in front of a heptptych-panel mirror, reflecting infinite light. What is more spectacular is the exhibition space at the center. There are twenty glass sculptures solemnly sitting on the huge white altar. When the viewers enter the exhibition space, they naturally look up at these three dimensional objects, which are installed above the eye level, emitting heavenly lights. One can go up the step surrounding these artworks to see them at his or her eye level. This is the first time when the viewers would realize that these artworks have curvy contours, giving the viewers a sense of inexplicable familiarity.

The shapes of these artworks remind me of various objects from different parts of the world, including the microscopic world, the ancient world and the natural world. When honey-thick melted glass meets with primitive movements of life, they give birth to a form that has never been seen before. Since the lights are lit from underneath the artworks, they create dramatic shades on the clear glass sculptures while highlighting the ends of each sculpture, which look like some kind of organism with its tangled tentacles. In her recent works, Mishima has seemed to incorporate more various surface textures including those of dewdrops or rocks in addition to her pursuit up to now: to create sculptures that are organic and voluptuous. It also surprises me that SACRO SOLID, a series of mineral-like multidimensional objects, and other polished minimalistic objects in the next room give me the same density and tense atmosphere that overwhelms me in the main room.

Jun Aoki's design, the architect of the exhibition space, takes the visitors up and down the space while blocking and liberating their views. Once the viewers go through the gap at the end of the route, they

would find the above-mentioned silver glass japamala extending its reach upstairs. Thus, the journey comes to an end by coming to the starting point. All the supporting materials such as the wood pieces painted in white, the cloths adhered to the handrails and the salt sprinkled like sand generate a sense of comfort and underscore the contours of the glass sculptures that tenderly disperse the light. The slight scent filling the air also contributes to the monochromatic environment.

The process of glassmaking is full of unpredictability. It is said that there is only a small window of opportunity to breathe a new form into a piece of hot glass because it becomes cold and unmalleable soon after it comes out of the kiln. The glassmaking of Murano Island which has been succeeded from generation to generation for over a thousand years could be the result of the constant trial of manipulating this material with skills and techniques. The artist has visited those glass foundries many times and collaborated with the artisans there. Considering this context, “As it should be,” Myoe Shonin’s quote and this exhibition’s title, gives me a strong impression that Mishima is willing to accept the unclarity of others and given situations with persistent passion, which even suggests her stance is rather active than passive. The absolute that was born out of the relative that has accumulated over time. Along with the tiniest decisions she has made for the installation, perhaps, this exhibition has also been realized as it should be.

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Translated by Ion Yamazaki