

The domain of Jewelry the vision of nine artists

Jewelry is considered 'small art'. 'Small' means 'dwarfish', 'scanty' and 'insignificant', but it also means 'intimate', 'sensitive' and 'precious'. The words spoken by jewelry are not public speech, but rather a whisper communicated across a table. They are associated with teacups rather than with a megaphone. Sensitive and intimate jewelry are compared closer to nerves than they are bones or muscles. The saying that artwork is the other self of an artist cannot be more true than in the field of jewelry, because jewelry is the art that is united with the human body. Jewelry is the other self not only of an artist, but also of its wearer. That is why jewelry has mainly existed as an art of private collection, making personal relationships between individuals.

Human body is the base of jewelry. However, the human mind has added symbolic layers onto the jewelry. Jewelry was an emblem of social status, power and engagement in the ancient times, and it has transformed into a flower of wealth and consumption as the capitalistic industry developed in modern times. In present time, jewelry has accumulated multiple meanings, such as social emblems, visual ornaments, and material value. The last thirty years since the late 20th century have brought changes in modern jewelry that cannot be compared to any times in several thousand years of jewelry history. Intellectual reflections on jewelry produced numerous discussions. The formation of modernity in jewelry emphasized autonomy of expression: it tried to separate jewelry from the human body and its ornamental function, and emphasized the concept of the jewelry as artwork. Despite controversy, many jewelry artists use their artwork as a medium for their autonomous statements in the stream of the contemporary art world. Through their jewelry, they express themselves, their society, and their opinion of today's art.

The Korean Jewelry has two faces, dynamics and infirmity. The deep-rooted tradition in ornaments, the outstanding techniques in handicraft, and the public interest in jewelry and fashion are keeping the dynamics of Korean jewelry. The enthusiasm of many college graduates in and out of Korea also gives hope to Korean jewelry. However, with the exception of human resource, the infrastructure of this field is weak. The poor condition of professional art galleries and journals, absence of criticism and closed college society impede the improvement of quality of jewelry. Jewelry artists are controlled by consumers' limited preference and their pursuit of a passing fad. Excessive pursuit of formal beauty and absence of concept, which are against the current of the contemporary jewelry, also arrest the development of Korean jewelry.

The six jewelers, who participated in the group exhibition, 'Jewelry Suggestion in 2001', are concerned about the possibilities and problems that Korean Jewelry face. Their suggestions go on in the 'Jewelry Suggestion 2003', joined by three more artists.

Jung-Gyu Yi's jewelry shows his intuitive vision on materials. His control over the materials and their combination creates the beauty of balance. There is a calm and meditative aura in his recent work with a Buddhist statue, which is placed in the center of the work. Sung-Hae Yun's work is a narration relating the artist's identity. The window, the double space, and the opened and closed structure suggest the artist's vision, inner world and private life, and they attract the observer. Yeonmi Kang also consistently asks about her own identity through a series of self-portraits. The human face, which is reminiscent of the dreamy face of Rene Lalique, creates a surrealistic atmosphere with rich colors. Hyun-Seok Sim inserts his personal message and humor into his work by partly transforming and applying road signs to his broaches. The familiar objects, expression of transposition and the text related to the human body are humorous. Eun-Mee Chun makes her work by electroforming. She pursues primitive and playful touches in her jewelry. It is atypical and emphasizes properties of the material. The rich texture and intentional traces made in her work reveal the process from the raw material to the finished artwork. Hwa-Jin Kim creates strong optical effects using the Ashanti casting technique, which is originally a traditional technique of Ghana in Africa but introduced by European artists. Her artwork makes the observer realize the importance of the technique even in the contemporary jewelry. Dongchun Lee, who has created jewelry with iron plates and using a folding technique, shows a series of variation. Once emphasized structure is slackened, and colors and pictorial images are presented with the introduction of materials like cow bones and colorful stones. Jin-Soon Woo, who has pursued optical beauty in her artwork, makes a new attempt to describe geometrical figures in her recent work. Like two-digit digital language, the opened and closed spaces created by sawing disorganize and reorganize the outside form in a lattice pattern. Yong-Il Jeon inquires about space and human body. The projected and suspended form suggests liquidation of a plane figure, gravity, and communication between spaces. At the same time, it shows that these activities are taking place in the human body like urination through the genitals.

It might be hasty to attempt to generalize these nine artists' work or to judge the characteristics of Korean jewelry based upon their work. Most artists are young- in their age or experiences- and they regard their work as a process rather than a completed object: it means Korean jewelry is still young. If their research in jewelry and their sincerity to keep it are continued, their cooperative efforts will activate serious discussion on jewelry in Korea. However, a cultural task such as this needs a lot of time to be advanced and established. In spite of quantitative growth, Korean jewelry is just advancing into the entering phase in the contemporary art. When there are more talented artists, active discussions, and keen introspection of artists, Korean jewelry will find its legitimate place in the today's art. 'Jewelry Suggestion' is significant enough when it suggests some ideas to the artists themselves.