

To hear the story of In-sun Park

In-sun tells her stories as if they were just days ago, even though they took place 20 years ago. The stories are of every kind and description, making it hard to get a grip of. Moreover, they are so short that they are just done with some brief shouts, far from any narratives. Added to that, she is mostly drunk and so full of anger, great patience was needed to hear her stories. And how she hates to sit still, she often leaves in a midway of telling. It is reasonable to say that bringing out her life story and recording it thoroughly is almost impossible. For all that, I had a reason to tag along behind her to hear her story.

One time I was wandering about the alleys of Kiji-chon with a camera to film some scenery, and came across In-sun, roaming around with a kitchen knife in one hand. Terrified, I ran away, and In-sun kept following me. She whirled around me with some hostile glare while I was photographing on a tripod. After some time I asked her about the incident, and her answer was that she was delighted to see a camera, and wondered why I was not filming her. In fact, women in Kiji-chon, the U.S. military prostitutes, extremely hate cameras. They fear that their faces might be displayed somewhere and hold vigilance against visitors. But In-sun does not. It took more than 10 years to get to know why she liked cameras so much and why she wanted to be in a film. Even the film *Me and the Owl*(2003), since I partnered with a civic organization working for Kiji-chon women, was focused on military prostitution and human trafficking. We held interviews of five Kiji-chon women including In-sun, and at that time it was in itself grateful to bring up women who would face the camera and testify. I thought In-sun was just one of those who accepted the interview, but there was another issue. The interview was interrupted as In-sun refused to answer as a victim, which was the intention of the interview, and spoke like some child. Instead of the interview, I followed her to the mountains and fields, to film her gathering wild greens. I turned them into a documentary film with her paintings from Durebang art psychotherapy programs.

In-sun's paintings mirror her way of saying. They look like childish drawings, but in a way like some avant-garde work of art, and also some kind of vulgar graffiti in a lavatory. While other women in the program tried to draw things in real life the way they look, In-sun paints just as she pleases, shouting "Ssip-damn-mi."ⁱ A painting is completed within 10 minutes of scrawling with a supplement of some

ⁱ A jargon of the Kiji-chon women, which is transformed from "it is up to me." They caught the sentence from U.S. soldiers and combined it with a Korean swear word 'ssip' and English swear word 'damn.' It is assumed that 'it' was missed out due to the pronunciation. Another jargon is "ssip-damn-you" or "ssip-di-you," which is from "it is up to you." They choose from various forms following the emphasis and pronunciation of the context. In-sun used these jargons so frequently, but

liquor, and when fellow painters criticize her for wasting paints she just replies, “not your fucking business,” not yielding a bit. So unique that nobody could copy, the paintings have some interesting respects once we have conversation over them. Strange and unfamiliar they might seem, the images are not just from her imagination. Rather, they are expressions of the world she herself encountered. In-sun’s memory is kept in the paintings, and if we could weave the unfamiliar images and ‘signify’ them, it might become a key for reconstructing her life story. Yet, considering memory, rethorics such as ‘(not) based on reality’ do not fit In-sun’s case. Memories, reconstructed or not, include objects and events that are based on reality, but her paintings do not seem to have any symbolic relationship with reality we know. Thus, with a viewpoint of pure creation and the ‘transparent reflection’ of reality, In-sun’s paintings are at the state of incomprehensibility. This is also a doubt that creation is after all related with text, or to say, education and learning. For pure creation, acquiring symbols through the most difficult process of learning is needed, and appreciation of them is also formed by education. In other words, the imagination we believe in and desire for, and its base stem from the acquisition of knowledge. For instance, when we look at a figurative art faithful to scenography, or an abstract art which destroys it, or some installation art and pictures, we ask “in what academy did they learn.” And if they are displayed in a gallery or a museum, we would think of them as works of a famous artist. This is what members of the Durebang art psychotherapy program thought of as an art. They wanted to learn the basis of art, which was in their thought, realistic drawing. They have seen somewhere scenes where students hold their pencils with an eye squinch, learning how to sketch a plaster figure of David or Venus, and thought those are namely the ‘art education.’ Meanwhile the goal the therapist considered was for the members to use art as a means to take care and heal their wounds. As a result the therapist excluded art knowledge learned in academies, and instead wanted members to freely paint and express their wounds. But the members, not having any art education, thought their paintings were childish and valueless, and thus wanted to learn how to paint like those in academies. There were many compliments and encouragements throughout the program, but in my eyes the members were not accepting them. At least, only In-sun was painting freely with all her strength, drunk.

After all, ‘free creation’ might be merely a made-up notion. Thus for In-sun pure creation or fiction is never possible to make, and nonetheless realistic paintings that represent reality as itself are too. The ‘reality itself’ which we believe to be perceived transparently and the representation of it are impossible without education, in other words, acquisition of symbols. Again, if we view the world

it was impossible to figure out the meaning or context. Yeon-ja Kim, who was once in the field at Pyeong-taek and now an activist, informed us. Yeon-ja recalls In-sun as the strongest and the best fighter among Kiji-chon women, whom no one can control.

from In-sun's eyes, creation without knowledge is not possible, nor the reality as itself is. Instead, knowledge becomes the basis of creation and reality. For In-sun who is excluded from knowledge – if that is genuinely possible –, painting is one means for 'telling' between fiction and non-fiction. Thus, in her paintings we can spot the fictitiousness of fiction, with knowledge added. In-sun's paintings are archives of her memory, and tell her life stories not through diaries nor statements, but through images. On top of all this, drawing has been In-sun's habit for a long time. When she was straying about the Seoul station or when sold to Yongju-gol, or anywhere she went, she used to draw with twigs and her fingers on the ground. We thought at that time In-sun's paintings started at the art psychotherapy program, but in fact she has been drawing as much as she wanted. It was only that there were no records of them. In her paintings, countless events and people In-sun encountered in her life are all mixed up with no time order: a hungry bird, pregnant tree, distorted owl, devil on a shoulder, rotten body and bugs, goblin, bag of strawberries, teeth, fountains, and other images she just simply drew. The paintings are full of odd symbols, containing the history she lived through. Yet the history will never be discovered without the reconstruction and comprehension through conversation with her.