

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: LANDSCAPES OF MY PHYSICAL EXISTENCE

Tai Hwa Goh, Master of Fine Arts, 2004

Thesis directed by: Professor John Ruppert

Department of Art

The body not only acts as a container of my soul but also as a vessel that leads my mind and thoughts into various investigations. My work presents sceneries of the imagination regarding my body, based upon personal and bodily experiences.

Through the layers of waxed papers, I represent the accumulation of markers of life. The complexity of these layers presents the mutation resulting from the accumulation and repetition and the human experiences often alienated in our times.

Most of my work is produced by printmaking. I often create aquatint and silkscreen on thin Korean paper and then combine them in three dimensional ways such as independent sculptures and installations.

I always think the process of making art is the effort to search my identity.

Regarding this point, I hope that this thesis will continue to develop my conceptual arguments and aesthetical methods.

LANDSCAPES OF MY PHYSICAL EXISTENCE

by
Tai Hwa Goh

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Advisory Committee:

Professor John Ruppert, Chair
Professor Foon Sham
Professor Margo Humphrey
Professor Patrick Craig

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my daughter, Euwan, who is the motivation and inspiration of my works.

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1. Landscape of Body

The physical body reveals oneself to the world as well as reflecting aspects of that world through me. The body is a container of elements of the universe and at the same time is placed in the universe. It is neither a full space nor an empty space. The body is neither inside nor outside. It is open, maybe not an undefined “space”, but very wide “site”.

I explore the extensive landscape of the body. I travel the boundaries of inner/outer, young/ aged, alive/dead, contained/released and fragile/ solid world of the corporeal. My explorations are based not upon visible scenery, but rather on personal physical experiences such as the feelings, senses, sentimental details, and rhythms of my body. As in the series, *That Morning*, I express my internal rhythm such as pulse, heart rate, flow of bodily energy, and minute movement of cells. I learned Korean Yoga three years ago. In one of the processes of exercise, there was a training course to imagine the flow of bodily energy that goes through from the top of the head to the palms and the soles of foot. I was trained to imagine the movement of energy between my two facing palms. The imaginary energy between my palms moved my hands and body with pulling and pushing. The corner piece *That Morning I* represents those tensions

of energy by use of the space not only between two black images but also between two corner pieces. Repetition of black cell shapes presents the vibration and the echo of the energy. In *That Morning II*, I incorporate the personal experience on my physical body. I used to have a health problem, where I experienced dizziness and heart-running especially on cloudy mornings. The white little cell shapes represent internal flows that feel very slow at the same moment are circulating very fast in my body.

The images of cells and nerves that I borrow from medical books are realistic depictions of our bodies. But these microscopic images become the elements for the imaginary (i.e. unidentified, internal) landscape because those images are not ones derived from my own body. As such, I have to depend upon my imagination. But the imagination is not separated from our nature but



Figure 1 *That Morning Series*, 12'x10'x10', Aquatint on Korean paper, bees wax, 2004



Figure 2 *That Morning I*, 8' x 75", Aquatint on Korean paper, bees wax, 2004

associated with images of earth such as woods, rain drops, rocks... This is why my

imaginary landscapes are of this world, and

they also look unearthly and mystical.

I also borrow some images from genetic expressions such as Fluorogram (figure 3)¹.

Those graphs that indicate the realistic record of gene give me just visual information that

looks very abstract drawings. The eleven

columns of *That Morning IV* present the eleven fractions in the Graph A and are located at the spots according to the Graph B.

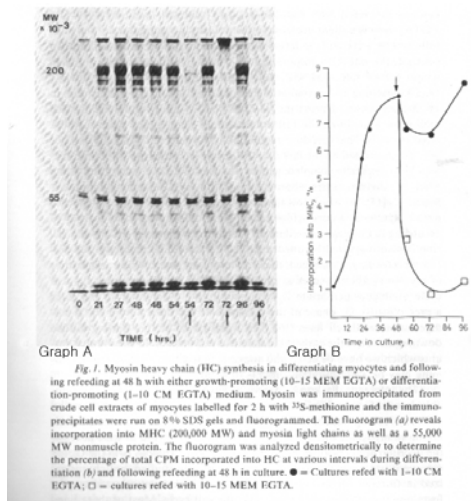


Figure 3 Fluorogram for That Morning IV

2. Layers

Our physical processes, memories, history, and experiences including process of art-making are composed of infinite layers in terms of time or of material. The layers composed with the traces and evidences of life accumulate and reflect the various layers and markings of experience. In modern times, our experiences are alienated, and each layer of our lives seems spattered and disconnected. I recognize myself and my

¹ Editor: A. Wolsky, *Developmental Processes in Normal and Diseased Muscle*, 1984, p3

body not as united, but as fragmented and without identity.

In the works, *Getting Dark* and *In 96 Hours*, I focus on the relationships and gaps between these layers of experience. Especially, in the work, *In 96 Hours*, I incorporate the idea of creation and accumulation of such fragmented experiences, inspired by an Embryology book containing 20 illustrations of the developmental process of an embryo within 96 hours². They are as countless intervals as layers are in our lives and innumerable things happen in the “between-space”. For instant, during the intervals between my heartbeat, there are also countless movements and rhythms going on in my body. In work *In 96 Hours*, the intervals that appear as an edge of each layer convey my question of the minute process that is present between the illustrations that are omitted. The images made on the edges also present mutations produced in the process of the accumulation and omission of layers.

Using thin Korean Paper called Soon-ji, I challenge the material’s limitations by use of paper as a medium for three-dimensional work. Paper for me is no longer a simple material supporting drawing or printed images. With multiple production processes like aquatint and silkscreen, the quality and weight of paper tell about tissue-

² John W. Brookbank, *Developmental Biology- Embryos, Plants, and Regeneration*, 1978, p331

like layers and physiological process of our body. I iron sheets of bees wax on Korean paper to create thin layers of waxed paper. The waxed papers mimic the translucent, impenetrable, but vulnerable body (i.e. skin) that resembles the surface of wax. The layers of delicately waxed papers obstruct and bury the image underneath, and at the same time transmit the echo of the image.



Figure 4 *Getting Dark*, 24"x8",
Aquatint on Korean paper, bees-wax,
2004

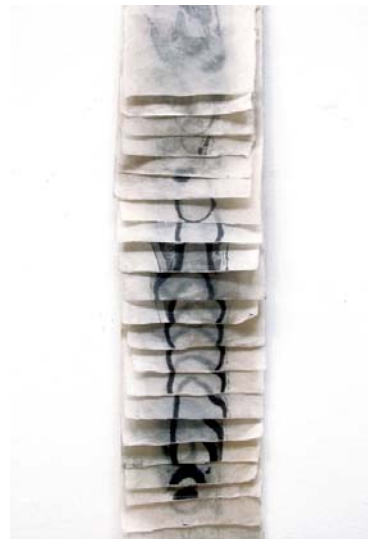


Figure 5 *In 96 Hours*, 30"x6", Ink-jet
print on Korean paper, bees wax, 2004

3. Printmaking in Space

The combination of printmaking and sculpture is a consistent artistic concern in my work. The unique visual effects of aquatint always fascinate me. I started to transfer

the thin sheets of aquatint into three dimensional shapes by reinforcing them with fiberglass or by rolling the sheets in such work as *Nerves*.

Printmaking itself is a play of layering. Several plates for a print are layered on a single sheet of paper. But in my prints, one plate is printed on one sheet of paper. The layers are created by overlaying each sheet of paper instead of multiple printing on one sheet of paper. Each sheet of the papers adds to the vocabulary of my works as if I compose various sentences selecting words from this vocabulary.

In the series *That Morning*, I became more ambitious in scope and scale. I started conceiving my works as part of architectural environments, rather than independent objects. I overlay several layers of aquatint on the corners and wall, and I invite the audience into the tension in the wrapped environment.

I have also worked on experiments with the connections amongst the object, projection and wall, such as *In the Shadow*. In the work, I project a cellular image, which I create in the computer, to the cylinder shape sculpture. On the surface of the sculpture, another cellular image was printed in white. The shape, focus, and reflection of the projected images are pretty much affected by where it is projected. The transformation of the projected image occurs according to the angle of projection and

distance between the sculpture and wall. The light of projector brightens the images on the surface of the sculpture and blocks the images in the shadow of projected image. Some part of the projected image is hidden in the shadow of the sculpture. The other part of the image reflects very clearly on the white printed surface. This variability of projection left me with the possibilities for many other experiments.

In my work, black and white colors are fitting elements for imaginary landscapes of the body, because black and white are very artificial colors that do not exist within the internal body. Those colors mean death, mutation, and mortality. I usually print black images with aquatint and white images with silkscreen. However the white images on the pillars in *That Morning* are printed with aquatint. In the aquatint method, it is hard to get a pure white, because of the chemical problems that happen among plate, ink and air. However I can achieve, very close to pure, white by using sodium hydroxide. I wipe the zinc plate with the mixture of water and sodium hydroxide (1/2 gallon of water to 2-3 table spoon of sodium hydroxide) and I allow it to dry in the middle of the inking process.

In conclusion, the technical variations and experiments with printmaking allow me to visually communicate all that I experience through and with my body. Two years ago, I gave a birth to my daughter. That most physical experience so far in my life motivated me to focus on inside voice of my body. These interpretive body landscapes are the result of these personal experiences and efforts to search my identity I will continue investigate of who I am.



Figure 6 *Nerves*, 72"x 15"x 10",
Aquatint on Korean paper, reinforced
with fiberglass and bees wax, 2003



Figure 7 *That Morning (detail)*, 12' x
12"x12"x 11pieces, 2004



Figure 8 *In the shadow*, 72"x4"x4",
aquatint on Korean paper, bees wax,
slide projection, 2003.

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