

“Non-hierarchic picture”

Throughout its long history as an art form, paintings have existed either in the flat surface or as the flat surface itself. Today, many painters continue the effort to forge a future for this archaic medium. At a glance, Park Kyung Ryul’s paintings may appear to bide within the framework of conventional paintings. While Park’s works indeed accomplish the objectives of traditional art in ensuring painterly unity and dramatic composition, they also veer away from the “meaningful form” that Roger Fry and Clive Bell so lauded and from the “flatness”¹ that Clement Greenberg evangelized as the final goal of paintings. How then, should we interpret such works by Park? Park’s description of her art as “a process of shedding the conventions that make paintings painterly, one at a time” is interesting, as her flight from the painterliness remains ever painterly. Perhaps this raises the need for a new set of criteria that can interpret works like Park’s. Indeed, the moment calls for “another criterion” for examining paintings.

For the purpose of this writing, I will dub Park’s paintings as “**non-hierarchic picture.**” Non-hierarchy has been consistently spotted in Park’s works as she continued her painterly experiments with her brush and canvas. In her early works, Park employed elaborate tactics to paint her forms while omitting the narrative duly expected of paintings. Through such “post-narrative figurative paintings” (2012-2018), Park attempted to create a “piece of brushstroke”. In her more recent solo exhibition *On Evenness* (2019, Baik Art Seoul), Park presented objects that fled from the canvas and lined up to establish a sort of a painterly space. Park then has been removing each conventional elements and orders that make paintings painterly, such as colors, lines, composition, form, narrative, and spirituality. Each painterly element in Park’s works exists as an independent entity without any hierarchical or mutual affiliation with the others. Such non-hierarchical attitude can be seen in the titles of the works featured in the current exhibition, *To Counterclockwise*. For instance, titles like *Picture 1* and *Picture 2* are different than a title like *untitled* as the common noun used herein becomes the pronoun to refer to the painting. Such titles bear some meaning while also not bearing any overly significant meaning, much like the titles for anonymous objects. This provides insight on Park’s painterly attitude.

Not a representation of anything, Park’s painting is devoid of totality, which enables it to effortlessly graze past the conventions of traditional paintings. With every element maintaining an equal level of pictorial field, Park’s paintings do not indicate or signify anything in particular. They’re just what they are. What is important to Park is the kinetic movement of the

¹ Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss et. al, *Art Since 1900*, trans. Bae Suhee and Shin Junghoon, (Semicolon, 2007), 517.

brushstrokes against the canvas and the exhibition as an event manifested by the gesture of hanging the paintings in the exhibition space. To Park, a canvas is merely a “shallow space,” just as the exhibition space is a “deeper space.” Here, Park drifts yet again from the absoluteness of modernism. In *To Counterclockwise*, Park continues her painterly experimentation while also attempting to limit the space to “within the canvas.”

“From linear to planar”

In traditional paintings that create basic planes by stacking coat after coat of paint on the canvas, lines provided the trajectories and reference points for the eyes, i.e. bringing meaning as tangible outlines for the viewer.² For the purpose of this explanation, let us say the objective of lines is to provide a clear **representation** of form. Modernist paintings forfeited the representation of perceptible three-dimensional objects in the given space, thereby assuming absolute flatness itself as an independent factor of paintings. Normally, traditional paintings presented something “within the painting” as the main subject, whereas modernist paintings presented “the flat surface itself”.³ However, Park’s paintings are not aligned with either of such conventions. Instead, they show interest in the spatiality of two-dimensional planes while also refusing to represent any forms.

The 12-piece *Pictures* series in *To Counterclockwise* feature lines that have existed independently and sculpturally begin to shift into more painterly forms without clear limitations. This is characterized as the transition from the linear to the planar. As always, Park places her works rhythmically instead of opting for a linear flow, thereby leading the viewer to inspect every nook and cranny and encouraging the viewer to discover the transformation from sculptural paintings to painterly paintings. With less layers and forms than before, the *Pictures* series is largely comprised of lines and color. Here, the role of the lines is to serve as an independent form and traces of instinctive physical sensation, rather than provide the tactile model for the outlines of the form. Color becomes something that “seeps”, rather than “coats”, becoming one with the plane while serving as the ground that attempts to unveil, in a painterly manner, the depth inherent in the planes. As such, while this exhibition may appear to be a return to the traditional painting solely comprised of planes at a glance, it’s more of a progression to the next chapter instead of a retrograde movement. The exhibition is the manifestation of the interest in the space inherent in the “ground” or the canvas, and an experiment on depth. A premise for such efforts is the experimentation with the medium, such as minimizing the foundation, and using canvases of various materials, thickness and weaving, and varying the use of paint and the physical movement of the artist. The intersection and collision of the various painterly elements in this process creates varying compositions and

² Heinrich Wölfflin, *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, trans. Park Ji-hyung, (Sigong Art, 1994), 32, 71.

³ Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” *Art and Literature*, no.4, Spring 1965, pp. 193-201.

context, which even Park cannot fully predict. After this, even the existence of the artist as the creator grows faint as the work enters the phase of speaking for itself.

“Walking with the eyes”

This brings us back to the question: how should we perceive Park’s works as she insists on the traditional while also attempting to dismantle the conventions that follow, and exerting efforts to interpret the ensuing extension of painterliness? Park sees painting, not as a medium of representation or completion but as a performative medium which continues from the moment paint is applied to a certain ground, to the present moment of it being placed in the exhibition space. Such outlook on painting makes it something present-progressive. All we can do is look at the space beyond the canvas, standing somewhere near it, or perhaps below it or above it, and tread between the brushworks or the “images of form that do not represent anything”. The work finally becomes complete when we end this experience by exiting the gallery. So then perhaps we can say that another criterion generated by Parks’ work is a way of reading the painting through the gesture of confronting the work in the exhibition space, and through the transformative experience of such ‘happening’.