

Grain of time

The French poet and artist Alain Bosquet has said that he "spent all of [his] time to try to understand time". Likewise, many people have spent a long time researching time; but time still remains an undefinable domain. An artist that has spent maybe as much of his time as the poet in searching for time is Jang Kwang-bum. Jang passes most of his time on a work on the putting and drying of layers and layers of paint on canvas. His time is spent not only on the layering of paint but also on the delicate process of shaving it off again and revealing those multiple layers. Just as earth is piled up stratum by stratum to build up a mound, or as a tree forming annual growth rings, the artist accumulates his time on to the canvas only to shave it off again, as if wanting to turn back time. In this way, his work is questioning temporality.

For Jang Kwang-bum, a way of visualizing and materializing the grain of time was found when he came across a cross-section of worn traces of layers of paint that had built up over a long period of time on the inner wall of an old atelier in the Paris Ecole des Beaux-Arts. If his first attempt to visualize time was this process of transferring the worn-down inner wall in that old building on to canvas, currently his work consists in the forms of time that accumulate in all objects and all nature that he is seeing, as well as in his own paintings.

The ancient Greeks divided time into three categories: Chronos, Kairos and Aion. If chronic time is chronological, horizontal, flowing, and kaironic time is concrete, a time period filled with meaning that is expressed by "that moment" - time expressed as a point in time - then aionic time is time as an eternal circle, in eternal movement. Time in Jang's work also appear in three forms. First, the chronic time of the accumulation of paint - the linear, flowing time that the artist takes in the making of his painting. Then there is kaironic

time, where we pay attention to the accumulated time within the object, a time given meaning. Lastly, there is the aionic time, restoring time, a time when we dig into those prior times through the layers of paint and discover time anew. In fact, looking at Jang's canvases, small circles sometimes combine with bigger circles and sometimes dissolve, giving rise to a sensation of everlasting circulation.

The forms of time obtained by the artist's careful and repeated consideration are organic forms resembling circles. The forms time has made in nature are also organic. His work of bringing time to a domain where it can be visualized and of trying to materialize it may seem abstract and superficial, but it is not only that. The repeated pattern, a characteristic of monochromatic paintings, fill the canvas, but by seemingly repeatedly expanding and contracting, it is active and animated rather than static or restrained.

The aim to expose the temporality in all objects was driven to the fore in Jang's sixth solo exhibition, « Île irisée », in the Galerie Françoise Livinec, Paris in 2018. The works conveyed a richness and density as if proving the time the artist had spent on the study of temporality. As can be glanced from the exhibition title, "Iridescent island", the canvases contain all the colours of the rainbow, emitted by nature itself. The blueish, reddish, greenish and yellowish colours of the paintings evoke the natural colours of water, earth, trees, hills and rocks; and the paintings of complementary colours recall the brilliance of the mother-of-pearl used in traditional Korean lacquerware.

The time that the artist is trying to express through this process of layering and shaving off paint in multicoloured hues is an organic form that seems to incorporate movement and carry various colours. The colour of the moment that the artist senses can be that of the seasons, of spring, summer, autumn, winter; or that of a moment in the day, like morning, midday or evening; or also that of a sunny, overcast or rainy day. As Claude Monet expressed the multiple colours that he sensed of the façade of the Rouen Cathedral, depending on the light conditions of the various moments he

depicted, so Jang seems to show the viewer the various imagery that came to him, though unlike Monet, not as a depiction of a concrete object, but in that "moment" in time, layering paint, layering the colour of that time.

Another thing to note in his work is the presence of whiteness. In between all these multi-coloured layers is the colour white. The layer of white in between the different layers of various colours may seem nothing in particular, just supporting the other colours. But as all the colours of the rainbow are combined into white when light passes through the spectrum, white in his canvases is the colour corresponding to light, embracing all colours. Also, the light is the colour of the moment, the colour of the instant, and it enhances or hides the shape of objects or their unique colours. So in Jang's work, white holds the meaning of light and it makes the forms of the objects he is expressing not concrete; floating, invisible yet visible.

Light was also the theme of the Impressionists, who made us aware that the colour of objects are not one, and considered that the true nature of things lie in the innumerable colours that varied according to the light. In the work of Jang Kwang-bum, white seems to serve, like the light of the Impressionists, as a guide towards finding the true figure of the object. If the Impressionists tended to express this light through small dots, Jang inserts a white layer of paint between the layers of different colours to give direct precedence and more weight to the light. Each different layer of colour, enhanced by the white light, tells us that all objects around us, apart from their visible form, are in essence beings accumulated by the colour of a time that can never for a moment be the same.

For the artist the presence of light, *i. e.* whiteness, is also a vivacity that sustains the form of time. The reason we can feel a stillness and quietness like breathing in the rhythmic feast of gorgeous primary colours is precisely the presence of white, that is to say, the light that the artist has persistently inserted that brings out and supports each layer of time. In this sense, Jang's

work is a combination of the Impressionist study of light and the study of the visualization of time. From an art historical viewpoint, his work is the expression of a contemporary form of Impressionist painting as a prolongation of the investigation into the interrelation of light and time; in other words, the possibility of a contemporary impressionism.

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