

MIDORI HARIMA & ANDREA COTE

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Andrea: Midori, I'd like to start by discussing the installation you exhibited in the back room of the gallery, "Transparent Story," in terms of presence and absence and the viewer's activation of this constructed space. Projected on the wall, and reflected in the window, is the video of rain- an image made of light, endlessly in motion and at the same time still, a natural image reminiscent of television static. A second component is the landscape imagery (inkjet print) on transparent film, flat reproduced images layered in space. While the imagery is naturalistic, its limited palette distances it from reality and connects it to the mediated image. The scene is idyllic, untouched by humanity. The only "3 dimensional" object in the space is the deer, constructed again of flat images - photocopies, its whiteness suggesting an absence. Finally, as viewers we activate this scene by standing before a free-standing window, a threshold providing a view that is both structured (it frames a vision in space for us) and free- it highlights the autonomy of vision and our movement in space. As viewers we can choose a fixed position- you might say the "optimal" view, and in that moment "possess" the piece in its totality. Or do we?

Midori: When I make an installation I am always very much aware of where the viewer will stand and how the work may mold their body's form and its movement. I believe that the body's position creates feelings, such as when you physically look up to something you may feel a sense of holiness. I think action using the body brings logical understanding so it is very important to be aware of where we see the artwork from. (The "where" means not only physical place but also social position of the viewer). When I come up with some idea for an installation there is always a viewer standing at a certain point in the space. For me, the viewer, like each sculpture, is one of the elements of the installation. I regard my work as very theatrical and in some ways it is very much similar to design. Usually the vantage point I set for the "optimal" view is very limited but not universal because everyone has physical and ideological differences. I have the desire to control everything precisely but at the same time I understand it is impossible since I start from my own preconceptions and the limitations of my physical body. This "limit" creates a suspended space and that space is open to the viewer, including myself. This space is created unintentionally. While structurally we are part of it and we play a key role in making the structure function no one can really possess it.

Andrea: You've previously mentioned the attempt to "transform information into experience." All of your imagery comes from secondary photographic sources. Can you talk a little about your background and encounters with images that cannot be traced to any root- copies of copies? How does your selection of certain imagery correspond to this idea? I wonder if you have chosen the deer in particular for its assumed innocence, its inherent connectedness to the land, and the fact that we are more likely to see an image of one before we are physically confronted with one.

Midori: I grew up in the suburbs near Tokyo. Usually suburbs are built on a place that has been cleared of its history and inheritance. They are designed for a convenient and comfortable life according to political and economic requirements. I grew up in the artificially designed town disconnected from the "real" identity and the original nature of the land. The landscape is too superficial to rely on and that was my reality. Most of my experiences are only through my eyes. I experienced pictures in books, magazines and TV. These mass media images were not the original objects but these were original for me since that was the only source for me to experience them. According to my reality, I have to start from information edited by someone else. I try not to involve my perspective so I collect some images and cut and mix them up then make one anonymous figure. You may think the choices I make are a contradiction but I want to defer judgment on this now and move forward. Using a copy machine instead of using my hands for the process also corresponds to the same reason. All the sculptures or landscapes in my installations are not made from one source or representing one

particular thing or place. I usually pick an image not related to me, having physical and physiological distance. An animal like a deer represents the distance between the object and viewer. Deer are typically seen only from a distance being cautious and protective animals.

The sculpture in front of the viewer is seen as an object but it is made of fragments of information. While you experience it, you still "read" the information. As you mentioned, deer belong to the land, a land different from ours so we can not purely "experience" them.

Andrea: Last week you and I met at the Drawing Center to hear Joao Ribas speak about the exhibition of Gego's work, "Between Transparency and the Invisible." He mentioned that her while her 3-dimensional work strives to be read as 2-dimensional drawings in space, her 2-dimensional drawings move toward 3-dimensionality. Mari Carmen Ramirez, the curator, states that Gego's work is "characterized by the permanent back-and-forth from the second to the third dimension and from here to an in-between zone which results from this dialectical position. (She calls) this oscillation from the plane to real space the in-between dimension." Your work also oscillates between flatness and dimensionality- I am thinking not only of the elements in "Transparent Story," but also the recent work, "Hanging piece" in which a fabric ocean is suspended horizontally from the ceiling by hundreds of fishing hooks, warping the field of the fabric. In a different way, this relationship is explored in "Lost Acquisition," where you take the 3-dimensional figures (constructed of faceted photocopies) and flatten them again and place them in frames.

Can you expand on the relationship between the two and 3 dimensions in your approach, and in the evolution of your work? Do you relate to this idea of an "in-between dimension"- or would you use different terms to describe your relationship to space and surface, and even reflection and transparency?

Midori: Gego's idea of an "in-between dimension" seems to be describing the third form of the object, what we can not perceive nor categorize but we are in. For me it is a contradiction. I strongly relate to the idea and agree it can be sensed only through the continuous process of taking some action and thinking. It is very much a relative idea.

First, there is a physical difference between 2D and 3D and the process of transforming between 2D and 3D. Second, there is a perspective regardless of the physical dimension, like when we feel depth in the screen at the movie theater. Then a question arises, what is the perception based on and what does it correspond to? This is the territory of social and personal desire.

The structure of "Transparent Story" represents a camera's perspective, as depth is transformed into surface. When I look at something, sometimes I feel like there is a transparent veil in front of me and the space on the other side becomes one layer on the veil. This idea is the same as the system of photography. In an information intensive society the camera's eye is deeply involved in our perspective. I make work based on a camera's perspective. Usually I don't put surface on the part of a sculpture that the viewer cannot see. For me it is more important to trust the surface of the sculpture and not the inside. The surface is the only layer open to the viewer and it represents the elements inside and the surrounding space.

When I made "Hanging Piece" (the ocean piece) the original idea concerned gravity and buoyancy. I explored the physical gravity involved in the art making process. Fabric is one of the most transformable materials due to its flexibility and neutrality. In the next work, "Free Fall", I expanded the idea of gravity and buoyancy to 2D and 3D. I set a canvas vertically in the air and from it suspended a dress with fishing line and hooks. It was made to look like someone was in the dress.

The idea behind "Lost Acquisition" corresponds to the last question; "what is the perception based on what does it correspond to?" I posed a question, as the title refers to, the process of transformation between 2D and 3D based on the idea of possession and what is acquired and what is lost through the process. My personal theory is to possess something we have to transform 3D into 2D. We have to "re-write" the object or phenomenon to fit some idea or system. Most of the units we use to measure reality have no substance in and of themselves. While re-writing to possess something, quite many things are lost. For example, particularly in this piece, physical mass, space and depth are lost. Through the dynamic process of making the figures flat and framing them, I tried to visualize the process of transformation itself.

Andrea: The subject of contradiction keeps coming up, and in relation to the last piece discussed- it is interesting to think of an acquisition in relation to loss. There is the tradition of capturing or collecting animals and preserving them- I am thinking of butterflies and insects that are pinned, in their most perfect moment, inside glass frames. You have chosen rather wild animals - an owl, snake, buck, fox, and wolf that are often hunted and preserved as taxidermy- items of conquest. It is a strange act to take something that is alive, and in order to possess it, we must kill it and then show it as frozen in its aliveness. It has been noted that the same structure is enacted in photography - we "shoot" reality to capture and preserve it, and to later re-experience it. As you have said, your experience- and I might add our contemporary society's- is acted out in a world of images distanced from their source. To turn it around, can something be acquired through loss? You have asked "who possesses art?" Art can set up the conditions for us to have an experience- does this resonate with your intention to have us act in a "beginningless story?"

Midori: Taxidermy is very interesting to me; the paradox of making a dead object look alive. It represents "form molded only from the outside". It is made from "information" about what kind of mode of life the animal had or what kind of environment it was in. It is a very symbolic example for me of how when we acquire something as information we have to kill it in a physical or social sense. Objects such as dolls or androids also are made from the outside and their appearance reflects a one-sided social desire. Their existence is not self-conscious, such as "I want to be recognized as I want to be", it is a non-conscious existence so they are always involved in some kind of power relationship in our world. The surface of their existence is always bare and exposed. I am strongly attracted to their lucid way of existing. It is simply beautiful, a kind of functional beauty. The thing acquired through loss is a temporary understanding. It is not pure understanding but is like a written statement, "This is". It can prove the negative space around the object but it can never prove the object itself. It exists on a different layer than the object.

While I am aware of the violence of our system of recognition, I am interested in how our recognition will construct a new landscape in another layer. This is not a simple transfer of inside to outside but it is a more fundamental change of inside to outside.

Andrea: Finally, I would like to hear you comment on the figure in the show, especially as it seems that, without naming it, we keep returning to the place of the body, the seat of experience. You have used figures before in your work- often naked, usually women. Are these figures made from many sources as well- anonymous? I'm sure you have heard comments that they do look a little like you - is this intentional or just inevitable? And finally, can you comment on her gesture? The gestures of your figures seem very deliberate- in this case, she stands with her toes facing inward, head and eyes downcast- she seems to have a melancholy appearance. She is completely on display for us, and yet perhaps a little uncertain or saddened by the framed creatures around her.

Midori: A work that is only referring to personal things is closed to the viewer. Also if a work is made for a particular group or about a specific incident the work will tend to have an exclusive structure and is difficult to share with people who didn't have the same experience. Since the artist is an individual there is no way to avoid involving their personal background or sense of beauty in the art process but I don't want to explain a particular work by relating it to my personal experience. While I carefully remove elements coming from my personal perspective I still have to make work according to my reality otherwise the work will lose its reality and inevitability. My work can not be too far nor too close to personal things, it should be neutral and anonymous. This is my rule.

The faces of my figures are not decided from the beginning. My sculpture is separated in two layers, as body and surface, so I never know what kind of face it will have until I actually put the surface on it. One thing I intend is to make a figure of unspecified race. The girl figure in Miami had an Asian body and an American face on the surface. The pose is decided during the first process of construction. Usually I collect images separately for the shape of the body and for the surface. When I make the first model it is just white clay without any surface information so I tend to pick some ambiguous pose. I'm not concerned with conveying a particular emotion with the pose or expression. It is similar to an actor in the theatre, for the actor it is more technical and

physical than emotional. People read the visual information, create something from it and experience it. I am hoping that the oscillation between information and experience will create a new landscape in another layer. *This conversation took place over 10 days by email. It is an in-depth extension of the two NY artists' ongoing conversations before, during, and after the run of Midori's recent show at Kevin Bruk Gallery in Miami, March 10 - May 5. Andrea Cote will be having a show at PanAmerican Projects in Miami Oct 8 - Nov 24.

REFERENCES

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