

## Still Life That Plays Music

Min Oh's videos are portrayals of strict rules and regulations, the variables that break away from them, and the intersecting situations of controls as they react to them once more. In these whimsical situations the pressure of delicate tension is conveyed not through high-pitched voices and heat but through rational, unemotional vibration. Such tension is doubled thanks to each freestanding scene that was delicately designed, composed, and edited. Restrained colors, artificial backgrounds, minimal elements, and compositions featuring either a part of a thing or a body appear on the borderline between suffocating regulation and breathtaking beauty.

Displayed at her last solo show, Trio was an exquisite work that showed the tension and regulation stemming from a performer's inner side that is disclosed in the process of performing with three separate videos. In terms of content it can be seen as this work's theme whereas the use of the structure of a musical piece (Chopin's Piano Sonata No.2 in B flat major, Op.35 the first movement) for the composition of scenes and the structure for editing can be seen as the subject in terms of form. Oh also made forays into making visual scores by playing a musical piece based on the original score in Sonatas.

While Trio represents tension at moments when regulation intersects deregulation, she constantly experimented in her previous pieces. The works on show at this exhibition concentrate far more on visually interpreting the formal structures of musical pieces. In Sonatas a piece of music in sonata form was adopted as its main component however it is hard to presume that this was the original intention as the artist applied many interpretations to her work. The artist mentions that sounds from videos are not derived from musical notes but from other symbols. These sounds are the results of transferring six indications for dynamics in music (pp, p, mp, mf, f, ff) to six notes in the diatonic scale while the sounds of percussions also refer to a change in tonality. Music in videos is a translation of symbols in a music score, irrespective of the playing of an original musical piece. A bit of narrative may arise if a performer appears in a work of art despite their deadpan face. In contrast, any emotional factor can be found in this work featuring only inanimate objects such as a plant, cup, bottle, and a piece of cloth.

Sonatas with its three interlocking videos set up on three walls in the shape of a resembles a still life in a triptych form. A still life is a work of art that brings forth aesthetic effects through a depiction of mostly inanimate subject matter, their arrangements, hues, volume, and material quality. In this work this rather classical genre of painting forms each dynamic scene through a minimalistic deployment and succession of quotidian objects that are used in contemporary everyday life. The scenes paralleling that of a still life show a formal aspect that is interesting and enables viewers to grasp its components with ease, all while demonstrating a fusion of the disparities



between classical and modern times.

In each scene of this work Oh creates a composition comprised of things, the direction from which such things appear, the patterns in the background scenes, and the time they last through her own interpretation and arrangement of factors that have already been determined in the structure of the background music. As such, creating a visual score based on a specific piece of music entails adding her own interpretation of the music to that of the performer's, structuralizing their interpretation. The possibility of another performing is innate in this new visual score. Even though the term "still life" usually refers to inanimation, the still life images in this work simultaneously appear static (still) while possessing a dynamic element (life) that promises a new performance in the future.

Many have made forays into representing music with color. They have mostly tried to express music in painting by associating a specific tone with a specific color. A well-known Kandinsky work was an attempt to codify color and form. He painted as if playing a piece of music with colors, while substituting specific colors for specific emotions. Oh's concern in doing Sonatas is not to transform musical notes into color but to visualize the structure of a musical piece. Music's abstract language is translated into concrete visual idioms, specific things, and scenes in this process. That is, analytical forms different from musical emotion and ambience are created as her attempt is not to represent any musical imagery but to alter its structure into something visual. What she represents here is thus closer to the beauty of structure and form than the beauty of abstraction. If we understand that we may feel some pleasure in listening to music, particularly contemporary music while discovering the structure of music and reading a repetition and spread of specific melodies, any visual rendition of such structure not only works as a device to interpret music more clearly but also can be associated with the appreciation of visual arts in which experiment and development of form is more significant than any inspired representation.

The sonata is one of the forms of musical pieces whose structure is most clear. The sonata form usually consists of an exposition, a development, and a recapitulation. Two or more themes are presented in an exposition, the first of which is rhythmically dissolved in the development. Dissolved elements in the development are then recombined in the recapitulation as a reproduction of the exposition. Oh used the first movements of sonatas composed by Haydn, Schubert, and Prokofiev in the 18th, 19th, and 20th century respectively as the foundation of this work. She has completed three sonatas that derive from different musical ideas and ages with modern visual performances, referring to each piece's vibration and length, mathematical thoughts like proportion, and the dichotomy of the two themes. After seeing this work I felt curious about the performance and scores of their original pieces. It is possible to appreciate this work without any knowledge of sonatas but it would be more interesting if one were able to analogize the artist's interpretation of the structures, scores, and performances of the original works.

For the artist who has played the piano for a long time, crossing the temporal arts with the visual arts through a shift of a musical structure to a pictorial one was perhaps a natural process. Her new experience of reading

through an integration of sight and hearing was made possible thanks to her comprehensive understanding and interpretation of the common points between two different artistic languages. The process of precise and extremely difficult work – that of arranging each scene without redundancy and suturing each scene together seamlessly – is of course required in order to construct such complex experiences. Her work *Sonatas* offers a rare experience to see images through musical scores and listen to pieces of music played with visual images.