

Drawing is Constantly in Flux

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I am a Drawing experimenter. From Korea to New York, I have been studying and experimenting with drawing in multiple ways. Drawing has always been a familiar medium for me, partly because I used to enjoy seeing my mother's doodles on a memo pad next to a traditional, wired telephone, and also because I was a kid who wanted to be a cartoonist. In Korea, I was only aware that drawing was limited to images in a two-dimensional plane. But in New York, I could read about the new attitudes and ideas toward drawing that people showed me in their work while meeting various artists, and they became an important issue in my work. My thesis project will put together various aspects of drawing that can cross over diverse media. This is just like a line composed by linking dots; taking each group of drawings as a dot creates an invisible line that connects one group to another, thereby making their own space.

I ask myself "how to make a 'good' work?" What is good work? These are important questions that to motivate us to create work. They are very simple, but also difficult to answer. The last several years I have been a continuous process of finding diverse answers to this question. If we think about it, "good" work is defined on an extremely personal basis. I always approached the idea of "good" work based on different concepts. So I have drawn the lines of these concepts in different ways over the years while following that rule. The reason why I have been seeking an answer is not an attempt to find the right answer. The only reason is to continue being able to work stably and continuously through constant searching. There is no absolute right answer to this question. That would be impossible. Nevertheless, I was able to continue making artwork while searching for multiple answers to the question. The question asked is a tool and provides a motive to allow me to continue working. In a way, my process of finding answers to problematic questions is similar to that of redefining stereotypes or existing systems that are suggested by the artist.

By the time I arrived in New York two years ago, I could see various works of art in different forms. Ideas and inspirations in this new environment stimulated me and made me rethink the existing questions. New questions were following one after another. I have been asking endlessly: What is drawing? and What does it mean to make an artwork?

What is drawing now? How are drawings defined today. During the twentieth century, the conception and function of drawing has been radically transformed from a supporting role to a realm of inquiry in its own right by many artists and critics.

A. Works in Korea

My works in Korea can be categorized as below:

- a. *Surplus Labor* series (Image #1), a labor intensive invention that involved enhancing the skills used when dealing with a pen.
- b. *Kartoon* series (Image #2), an attempt to take the format of comic books and combine it with traditional Korean paintings.

- c. *The Moment You Drew* series (Image #3), which was drawn to convey emotions such as depression and sadness by using poetic metaphors.
- d. *The Picture You Drew* series (Image #4, 5), an attempt to create a new form in order to combine various techniques on a large screen by using the main materials for drawing, such as charcoal, graphite, ink, pen.

In each case, there have been several different experiments in terms of a. Attitude, b. Subjectivity, c. Emotion, and d. Form. These were attempts to overcome the apparent weaknesses of drawing by doing it in various ways. At that time, I unconsciously perceived drawing as a preliminary sketch for a painting. Therefore, I thought drawing looked more lightweight than painting and other media. However, this perception limited the tremendous possibility and expandability of drawing because it saw the drawing merely as subordinate to painting (or other mediums).

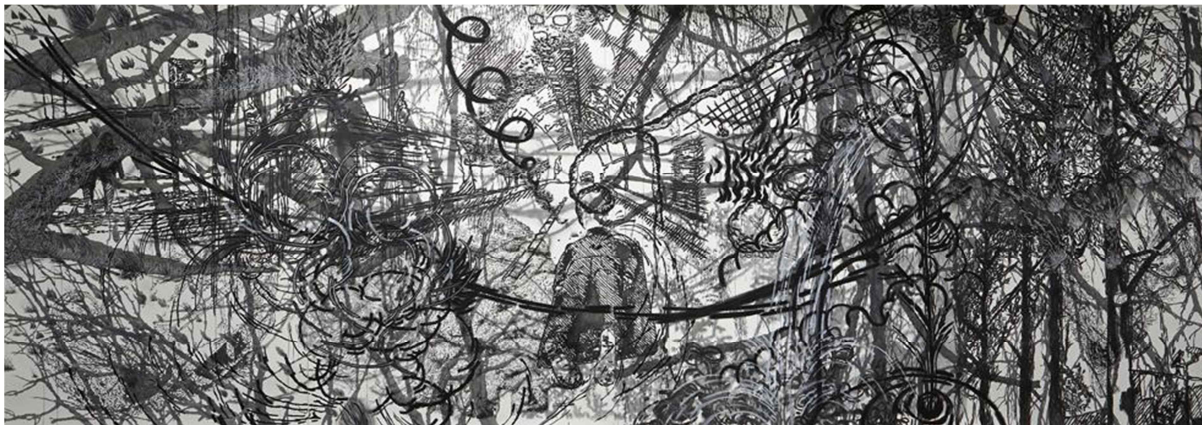


잉여노동 시리즈 1-6_pen on paper_각 151x35cm_2011-2012

1. Surplus Labor series 1-6, pen on paper, each 151x35cm, 59.4x14.7inches, 2012



4. *The Picture You Drew 1*, mixed media on paper, 151x41cm, 59.4x157.4inches, 2014



5. *The Picture You Drew*, mixed media on paper, 203x605cm, 80x238inches, 2015

B. Moving to New York

After I moved to New York, I was walking through the city to adapt myself to my new surroundings every day, and I recorded certain glimpses of my encounters in small drawings (Image #6). I was also working on a large drawing of the cityscape of New York based on these small drawings. This was a working process that I established as one of my primary methods in Korea. However, during this period of observation, my perception of drawing has gradually changed. If you are an artist, you might be sensitive to a new environment and create a response to it. New York was a completely different environment for me. There were two main things that struck me in my first impression of New York.

Firstly, it was that New York is a cityscape of architecture and roads composed of numerous straight lines. It was interesting to me that the ceilings in some buildings are much higher than in Korea, especially because the architecture is quite different in my country. I also discovered that the first floor of many buildings is higher than that of other floors. Most galleries in New York looked approximately 5 meters (16.4") tall, almost twice as high as the ceilings of most Korean galleries, which are less than 3 meters (9.8") in height. When the ceiling rises, the impression of space becomes markedly different. So why? Even though

New York City was big, the gallery's space in New York seemed to be getting bigger and closer to me. "How can I fill this wider space with my drawing if I held an exhibition here?" Because the city's buildings and ceilings were so tall, I was overwhelmed in my first impression of New York.

My second impression came a little later. As I saw many of the artworks here, one word came to my mind: materiality. It came from the overall atmosphere, rather than from talking about specific artists. Among them, Sarah Sze's exhibit in Chelsea remains in my memory. In the show, there were clusters of work that consisted of tiny pieces in the large gallery space. Small images on the floor and wires coming from the ceiling filled space high and wide, regardless of their own size and weight. It was a huge material feast. She managed to occupy a large gallery space and digest it well.

The works of Richard Tuttle, who I happened to know by accident, have also had a lot of influence on me. The shock of his *Wire Pieces* is still vivid in my mind. The drawings, produced by thin pencil lines on the wall, a wire drawn into space as a thin line, and a shadow coming from the wire, brought a shudder down my back. It was the ideal form of drawing that I was looking for. The *Wire Pieces* and other experiments with materials by Tuttle have begun to give me a fresh start to try and do something new. These two things drove me to a challenge.

C. Playing Drawing

My Thesis project the *Playing Drawing* series, began with these two inspirations. *Playing Drawing* comes from asking questions about what drawing is and attempting to find answers. These found properties suggest new aspects of expanded drawing which are not limited to specific media. The new possibilities of drawing are a: Potentiality as a starting point, b: Materiality as the material itself, c: Flexibility achieved across the space of the medium (image #6).



6. *Playing Drawing* project, work in progress 2017¹

¹ In the process of making *Playing Drawing* series, I adopted the formal efficiency of minimalist art. It was natural for me to find the subject of work in the surroundings of the environment, and I was in New York where the minimalism was born. In addition, it is also associated with the fact that drawing is a basic language. I felt that using English as a 2nd language was not enough to explain my works to viewers than using my mother tongue. I should take away unnecessary elements of the work for immediate understanding without the mediation of language.

a. Potentiality as a starting point

The initial plan in creating an expanded drawing was to broaden the perspective of the straight lines of buildings and roads. The work was carried out by adding and linking linear objects to the three dimensional space in front of an existing, completed cityscape drawing (image#7). It was always pleasant to do a new piece of work. However, as the work progressed, I felt something was somewhat lacking. This transition showed only a mere 3-dimensional representation of a drawing, but it was not enough to simply bring lines into the third dimension. A formal extension had to be advanced in order to discover the new substance and the meaning of drawing.



7. *The City You Drew* mixed media on paper, 2016

During this struggle, I saw a retrospective exhibition of the work of Peter Fischli and David Weiss at the Guggenheim museum. In their show, I was captivated by some 200 small clay sculptures. The condition of the unfired clay that they made with their hands looked like that of a drawing. Although I couldn't touch them, I thought they might be reminiscent of a tangible drawing made of clay. Plasticine suddenly burst into my mind. Plasticine is a clay mixed with oil, which is typically used by sculptors in casting and not used in the final result. I immediately went to the art-supply store and bought clay mixed with oil, which immediately made clear why the phrase "never hardened" was printed on the package. During the process of working with clay, I was able to feel the joy and happiness of playing from my childhood. (In my childhood, my mother used to make clay crafts as a hobby.) These sorts of emotions are closely interwoven with the pleasure I feel in the work process. The *Tangible Drawing* series (Image #8), made with Plasticine, were 3-dimensional drawings with the potential to be constantly changing forms.



8. *Tangible Drawing* series, plasticine on clay-board, size variable, 2016

I often find greater pleasure in the process than in the outcome of the work. I was fascinated by this "*starting point*," which seemed to have infinite potential, and where it is difficult to predict the end result. After moving to New York, I realized that the "*starting point*," in all its pleasure, cohesive energy, and unpredictable possibilities, bears a close resemblance to drawing.

b. Materiality as The Material Itself

During the installation of these new drawings, I did not use a classic pedestal. Instead, I inserted charcoal sticks, pencil lead, and big nails into the wall and put the sculptural drawings on top. These tools for drawing lines already are drawings themselves due to their own linear shape. Sometimes, these sculptural drawings exist as individual pieces and sometimes they form a large group that totally occupies the space, regardless of size (Image #10)



9. *Tangible Drawing series*, installation view, 2016

With this concept, I continue to expand my selection of materials into the works. Basic materials for drawing such as paper, pencil, charcoal stick, eraser, and even eraser rubbings can be made into drawings themselves. Even debris found in the studio and smudges on the studio wall are drawings and contain drawing elements. By redefining drawing, it ensures the freedom of choice of material, genre, and subject.

Where The Wind Blows (Image #10,#11) is also an expanded drawing work done with this concept in mind. The work consists of paper and natural elements such as wind and gravity. With two types of paper, I made a new drawing with minimal intervention. One sheet of paper is left without any intervention as a surface suspended in a space. Then I created paper cranes and put them on the paper. Paper meets paper as a space and as an object. In the process of giving volume to flat planes, origami also calls for minimum intervention in generating a material prototype: it is important never to cut or harm the paper, and to make as few folds as possible. I chose the form of the crane because, to me, it represented a highly sophisticated sculpture that was generated out of the eminently simple process of origami: it seemed to be simultaneously a container of complexity and simplicity. Sitting on a piece of paper like a slide, the paper crane rolls constantly against the wind and gravity.



10. *Where The Wind Blows*, paper on paper, size variable, 2016

11. *Where The Wind Blows*, detail, 2016

c. Flexibility as a Media Fusion

Freedom of material selection enables the convergence of media. Thus, my drawings are now separated from the realm of preparatory sketches, and span a range of media, from sculpture, installation, and performance. *Straight Invisible Line* (Image #12) was an improvised performance work that I had never done before. I had a chance to participate in a pop-up show at an experimental space in Bed-Stuy with my New York colleagues. The space was not a typical white cube, but a studio with a red wall. The owner of the space did not want to change the red wall, and it was a one day pop-up show, so the installation time was insufficient. I had to figure out how to do other things instead of bring artwork to hang on the red wall. I asked my host to buy the same red paint as the wall. The performance was simple. I painted over the wall with lots of red paint. The paint on the wall ran slowly down to the floor, drawing a vertical red line. The red shiny line was alive and very easy to see at first, but by the end of the show, the line dried, flattened slightly, and was much more difficult to make out. Even under space and time constraints, I discovered drawing can vary and adjust flexibly according to its environment. A drawing can move through space and time as a performer itself, interacting with its surroundings almost autonomous to my intervention.



12. *Straight Invisible Line*, performance work, 2016

If my previous work in Korea was made against drawing's apparent lightness compared to other mediums, my later work was made to take full advantage of it. This property of drawing should not be recognized as a limitation. Because it is lightweight, drawing can easily mutate, and can freely cross over to any medium.

Since drawing became a starting point for me, it meant that its status never hardens, and therefore can never end. For me, drawing is not a preparatory sketch to be finished. It remains unpredictable in its flexibility. This condition as a beginning makes drawing quite individual. But it is also *unindividual* because it never approaches the end as a final result. In other words, drawing is impossible to define because it is constantly in flux. Through this realization, my drawing acquired a freedom that is not fixed in terms of genre, materials, or formal aspects.

I often feel exhausted after finishing one project, but this exhaustion is also a necessary preparation to enter the next phase. During this period, however, I cannot not tolerate the process of suffering before inspiration, and tend to repeat my earlier work just to be doing something at all. To be inspired by new stimuli, I deliberately pushed myself into a new environment: New York. One of my colleagues here asked me what kind of artist I wanted to be. My answer was an artist whose upcoming work people are curious to see. In order to do that, I think we should constantly ask questions, find answers, doubt any found answers, and *re-question* by always maintaining a flexible perspective. The question "how to make a good work?" that I originally asked to sustain my work eventually led me to ask concrete questions about drawing after coming to New York.

From now on, instead of remaining satisfied with found answers, I will continue to search for more answers and keep asking questions. I believe that this is the "starting point" as an artist.