

Weaving Light and Time: Su Kwak's Recent Work

Up to now, Su Kwak's work has focused on light. But recently she has incorporated the element of time, expanding the meaning and surfaces of her work. As a result of thinking about light for many years, her experiences and thoughts have naturally and inevitably led her to grapple with the issue of time.

The way that we experience light and darkness can be seen as a metaphor for the way we experience life. And the way that we experience light, through night and day, past and future, is influenced by the change of time. Therefore light and time are inseparable.

When dealing with light and time, physicists seek the truth through logic and analysis. Kwak uses her faith and intuition as tools of investigation but arrives, ultimately, at similar truths. She uses her own experience and personal symbolism to express this shared understanding.

Kwak's fascination with time began with her realization that one can capture eternity in a single moment. After this insight, she began to expand the focus of her paintings to incorporate the element of time.

In *Harvest* (2008), Kwak uses light to convey her personal sense-memory of the past, thereby joining together her experience of time and light. She creates a warm, luminous field to express the joyous childhood memory of the single harvest her family experienced during a decade of hardship. The painting conveys the sense of a physical landscape, but ultimately, the abstract composition presents an internal landscape—the experience of life and hope.

Kwak came to the United States when she was twenty-three years old and has lived there until now. And yet, Korea, where she was born and raised, affected her in many ways as both a person and an artist. The Korean landscape, in particular, affected her very strongly as did the many Korean ideas about the mystical power of nature.

When Kwak was in graduate school, she became enamored with the one-stroke method of Chinese master painter Tao-Chi. He believed that art originates in the mind, and unless the artist deeply understands the nature of reality, she cannot convey the true essence of life. Kwak has always hoped to share with others her investigations into life and the mind, and to convey through her paintings an immediate sense of her deepest insights.

For Kwak, light has several layers of meaning. She begins by closely observing the natural world and then turning that focus inwards. During the painting process, she combines these deep and precise observations with a mystical open-ness to the metaphorical possibilities and spiritual meanings of light. Her recent work expresses these many levels of meaning and thought.

The physical light depicted in *Eternity* (2009) conveys a sense of spiritual light and absolute time. The first panel on the right symbolizes the past and the beginning of creation. The central panel, filled with slashed lines, symbolizes both the suffering and harmony of the present. The left panel symbolizes the hope of the future. These three aspects of time and qualities of light are

unified into a single image and moment, which suggests both the Buddhist conception of the World of Light and the Judeo-Christian idea of God as the source of light and eternal life. *Eternity* opens the viewer's awareness to these mystical possibilities.

Kwak has continued to develop these ideas in other recent paintings by slashing and weaving her canvases to express the interwoven nature of light and time. These forceful techniques powerfully support and express Kwak's deep understanding of the nature of reality, time and light.

By Rhaikyoung Park

(Translated by Lisa Gross)