

## **Interview Questions**

**Can you tell us when and why you first became interested in fine arts and decided to become an artist?**

My father sent me to Hyanggyo (the Confucian temple and school installed to teach local students in the Joseon Dynasty, some remained in modern Korea) to learn calligraphy based on oriental painting at the age of six. It is said that I was always telling people that I would go to Paris to be a painter since kindergarten and elementary school.

**What was it like to be in art school and later a woman artist in the 1970s when you first started compared to now?**

I realised strongly that I would become a painter, and I always lived in paintings (artistic works) but I think that my enthusiasm as an artist nowadays is even stronger than it was in the 1970s due to my incorporation of collage. The artistic world of my works is firmly established in the present.

**Korean and Eastern ideological concepts, such as Taoist ideals, the void or the *qi* spirit, are often discussed when art critics try to understand your work. What are the predominating themes one should have in mind when trying to grasp the meaning of your works?**

When I talk to Korean critics, I refer to the world of works from the start to the completion of my work. As I am Korean, I create Korean-like works. But the fact that I create oriental works does not mean that I am a Taoist. I am a Christian. A work does not come out only through religion. As an artist my aim is to put my message in every single step of the work, so I work with the best endurance until completion.

One day, on the empty canvas, I added a round shaped *Hanji* just like a dot, which was the starting point of my collage work. What I felt at that time was simultaneously 'full' and 'empty'. I found homogeneity from the two paintings; one is nearly perfect as it is filled and the other one is painted with a simple circle on an empty canvas. To me they became the same. It is the aesthetics of 'to fill' and 'to empty'. I could feel 'null' in the work to empty and 'energy' in the work to fill. This 'energy' comes from the work where tens of thousands of circles gather to fill the canvas. However, I am not coming to 'null' the work (to empty) and I don't want to, either. It is because I would like to show courtesy to my works. In other words, I do my very best. Therefore, I stop when it is perfect (to fill). I selected *Hanji* as the material of my work because I could easily relate to it as a Korean. The other reason was circumstantial. Once, I had to prepare an exhibition in New York. I was staying with my son, and he was living in a small apartment house, I could not use turpentine with oil painting. When I thought about work that would not produce odour from turpentine, I started to work on papier- mâché by using newspapers on the canvas. After I returned to Seoul, I developed it by using *Hanji* rather than newspaper. The general theme of my works is 'Happy Virus', as I want people who see my works to feel happy and I would like to make people happy.

**Can you tell us what are some of the inspiring ideas and elements behind this selection of works?**

The person who has influenced me most is my mother. I am inspired by the things that she taught me and the stories that she told me when I was young.

**Was abstraction a tentative before your experimentation in using different materials?**

In college years, some figurative images were revealed in my work, but as I expanded my artistic world, my works were naturally developed into abstraction. Abstract work has become the main starting point for today's 'Blossom' and many abstract elements can be found in my early work with *Hanji*.

**How and when did you start working with mulberry paper – Hanji – in your works?**

I started working with Hanji in early 2012 and selected *Hanji* for collage work.

**What are the different stages involved in producing your works?**

After making basic collage on the canvas, I complete the work by attaching the prepared paper stick. It can be said that a work is completed by collage which repeats attachment and detachment hundreds of times. It is an uncomfortable subject for me to ask how I complete a specific art work. I think if I answer that question, the mystery will be gone.

**Is there any particular way for you to determine the colour of a work?**

The choice of colour is made in advance in harmony in my thought and when I start the work, the multiple colours are put up and then it is developed on the canvas according to the actual colours.

**A lot of your paintings' surfaces are in three dimensions. Can you explain how you work with dimensions?**

A structured paper stick is placed on the canvas. When making a collage what I want is formed during this process, I attach circular shaped *Hanji* on the stick. At this time, various types of spaces are formed.

**How do you choose the titles for your works?**

The theme of my works is circle. I express petals as circles, and I give a symbolical title. As the circle is a 'Blossom', I name them using their primary colour such as 'Red Blossom' and 'Blue Blossom'.

**Can you tell us a bit more what's a day at your studio in Seoul like working on your paintings?**

I talk with my works delicately every day. In other words, I work delicately. The endurance of the artist is made over an exceedingly long time. I almost live in my studio.

**You are an artist who has lived in Korea and abroad. Can you tell us if and how does that experience influence your art?**

When I work in a foreign country, I cannot escape from the influence of the environment. I was filled with the idea that I had to make works that only I could do, whilst viewing various artistic trends in New York. When I returned to Seoul, I found a way to connect the mysteriousness of *hwaseonji* (A kind of *Hanji* usually used for calligraphy, it is sometimes called Chinese paper) to my works through my experiences and experiments. It was a new discovery for me when I applied the colour to 'Blossom', the circle which is the theme of my work, using turpentine oil. When you paint colour on *Hanji*, the circular shape sinks because *Hanji* is touched by water and it is collapsed. However, it was not easy to colour *Hanji* with oil painting. It is because of the weight of oil paints. After many experiments, I applied oil painting with turpentine and could maintain the circular shape of *Hanji*. I did not find much transparency when I used oil colours, but when I used the method on *Hanji*, I could see the clear colour that *Hanji* has. At that moment, I suddenly felt the joy from the colour and wanted to spread the 'Happy Virus'. Generally speaking, nobody thought that *Hanji* and turpentine would be a good match. But paper is from tree and turpentine is also from resin of the tree. Therefore, the fusion of these two made a good match.

**What are some other themes you would like to explore in your upcoming works?**

The theme of these works is 'Blossom'. I want to continue the 'Blossom' series. I also made around 100 structural wood pieces with the help of a carpenter. Of course, the base material is wood, but I develop them as collage, putting together partly finished wood pieces and adding *Hanji* collage on it. But I am still waiting to

harmonise these. So, it is my task next year to see how I can integrate these sculptural structures with 'Blossom' perfectly.

### 3 more questions to come

- What does *Hanji* mean to you?
- How long does the whole process of making a piece usually take?
- Your works are of abstract collage, but do you always have a certain inspiration in mind you want to depict through the work, or is it open to the public to decide?