

## On Lee Jin-young's Work

By Seo Jin-seok, Alternative Space Loop Director

**Departure** In the 19th century Nicéphore Niépce and Louis Daguerre conceived a way of documenting and saving the images they saw through the camera obscura and thus became credited as the inventors of photography. Early photography derived from the idea that there should be a means to meet people's desire to live on throughout time. With the invention of photography, the general public was able to enjoy the same privileges the upper class had with their painted portraits. Humans are instinctively aware of their existence and continuously try to accomplish a sense of self-respect. Photography was a magical device that was able to satisfy such an instinct.

Photography is the main medium Lee Jin-young works with. It is an artistic medium that enables artists to remain more intimate with reality as compared to any other genre. Using a lens, it has the ability to transfer anything in reality onto paper. In contrast, there is no constraint on expressive methods in other genres of art giving concrete form to all imaginations. To contemporary artists, created images are dependent on their imagination and a gap exists with the general public in terms of an expansion of aesthetic perception. In photography however, all physical objects constituting reality are reconstructed with the artist's creative power. Lee is afraid of estrangement derived from the loss of self which is caused by the confinement of infinite creative potential to think outside of reality.

*Rodenkirchener Brücke* (Rodenkirchen Bridge)(2004) is a work featuring circumstances the artist met in her daily life in documentary form, hinting at her obsession with reality. The artist discovered a broken pane of glass on the Rodenkirchener Bridge and photographed the images that were reflected in it. The pane with its countless cracks can be regarded as the window reflecting Lee's inner self, modifying the bridge in reality into another subjective form.

Lee studied composition in Korea and made a late debut as an artist. Perhaps to the artist, photography is only an activity enabling her to constantly perceive reason for being in her past, present, and future life. Early photography was a means to leave traces of ourselves or other things in history. A reality she faces is the departure point of her creative activity. She intends to consistently recover a sense of her self-respect through creation, not breaking away from reality.

## Process

With exposure time being shortened from two hours to 1/10,000 seconds, photography has changed at the speed of light with the rapid progress of technology. Only one hundred years after its invention, a photograph is no longer a material composed of atoms but instead digital information comprised of bits. Photography is also no longer an area overwhelmed by experts as the technology involved in the process of taking and printing photographs has become simplified. In this day and age anyone can become a photographer and print photographs anywhere.

Even so, Lee continues to use a 19th century production process to develop photographic images. After applying an emulsion with silver particles to a glass plate, she exposes the subjects of a photograph onto the plate through the camera lens. The exposed original images are printed into two-dimensional images with the use of multiple chemicals in a darkroom. This intricate developing process is of great significance to her work. Photographic images printed through an analog process appear more nostalgic, romantic and emotional than their digital counterparts. Nonetheless, Lee considers a process of lineal performance with condensed temporality more important than the unique texture of such images in analog photographs. For the *Wet Corrosion* (2010) series Lee photographed a variety of objects. The subjects for her photography in this series is everything associated with the artist in her surroundings, such as figures, still lifes, and landscapes. These diverse subjects are realized on a glass disc using the wet-plate printing technique. How to realize and produce images is more important than the subject for photography.

The process of creation has been condensed through a technical progress. Temporality piled up in layers is most visible in her work. Her work also employs incompleteness and looseness (lots of scratches and spreading of images) to achieve its aesthetic goals. In the age of classical mechanics people believed that they could predict results accurately if they calculated the start and process of all physical actions. In the era of quantum mechanics following relative mechanics, we see everything as nonlinear and indeterminate. Lee's obsession for process found is perhaps an attempt to stabilize herself in the uncertainty of 21<sup>st</sup> century society with her belief in predictable results.

## Result

With the development of computing technology in the digital era the formula that reality=photography is no longer appropriate. In other words, photography cannot be defined with past terms such as light, lens, and camera obscura. A photograph today is a virtual image comprised of bits, breaking away from its territorial restrictions through a conflation with other media.

However, Lee intends to maintain purity. She does not use any techniques to transform images digitally. She strives to maintain a proportional relation between reality and photography. She

expands the stereotypic frame of past photography, diversifying ways to display her images. *Historia, Laterna Magica* (2012) showcases the projection of 10 glass-plate photographs, a convex lens, and a lamp. She gets over the restrictions of photography, expanding her territory into three-dimensional and video work. She intends to add value to photography through the preservation and sharing of two opposing elements, “photography as record” and “photography as creation.”

We are now in a transitional period between the analog and digital era. Her obsession for analog and reality in a more complicated and accelerated age seems to be “everyday fragmentary thought continued from the past to the present.” The artist tends to expand the scope of aesthetic value and the reason for its existence, sharing two different eras, surroundings, and ambivalent emotions with viewers.