

Borderless & The Magazine Full Statement

Haleen Lee believes that the act of viewing, whether directly or unconsciously, inside or outside of architecture, can evoke countless emotions or associations. Furthermore, he thinks that the spatial concept of architecture is unconsciously connected to our psychological interactions and can be related to expansive senses like the sixth sense, fantasy, and emotions. Overall or partial structures and forms are composed of body structures, conveying optical effects according to shadows, reflections, and light, offering opportunities to express complex and emotional structures. Among various architectural structures that can best express this, he particularly focuses on intentionally penetrated structures provided by windows and passageways, and he is interested in features designed to allow the exchange of light, sound, and air passage. Especially when modern people look for new homes or apartments, open parts like windows become one of the essential elements for checking the room's condition and can be considered the most basic 'door' to ensure light properly penetrates without being obstructed. Referring to these ideas, he applies various colors to the background to create an overall atmosphere, and the background colors, illuminated after being depicted by different timelines, represent key elements.

The frames of passageways or windows in each painting are sublimated with the characteristics of their original materials, thus expressing the work in two directions—monochrome and figurative—subtly revealing within a single color, both reflecting "untreated" terms. This technique avoids the audience instantly recognizing the background color of the painting and the window frame, providing a process for them to explore precisely what the work's form is. With the surrounding space omitted, only the essential objects of window frames or passageways are expressed, excluding the linked redundancy with the already

existing surroundings within the overlapping space between virtuality and reality, thereby designating the work itself as an independent object and inducing it to become part of that space. This omission of surroundings and exclusion of redundancy originated from the Taoist philosophy of emptiness (비움 사상) within Eastern thought. Among the material and immaterial distinctions made by Taoism, the latter specifically integrates a series of processes that involve erasing material associated with desires and freeing oneself from attachments to achieve a true state of matter. The philosophy of emptiness soon influenced the "beauty of negative space" widely used in East Asian painting. Haeleem Lee is gradually exploring the philosophy and scholarship of Eastern, especially Korean, aesthetics, and although he primarily creates works based on Western art techniques, he is creating opportunities to appropriately incorporate elements of Korean aesthetics without solely pursuing Western aesthetics. This attempt seems to have been facilitated by his study abroad environment in Germany. Considering the environment he actually saw and heard, he became familiar with Western aesthetics and theories while simultaneously being fascinated by Eastern aesthetics, which possess opposite qualities. Furthermore, it provided a good opportunity to naturally introduce Korean aesthetics while active in Germany. One notable characteristic is the application of *Geomibullu Hwaibulchi* (儉而不陋 華而不侈 / 검이불루 화이불치), one of the aesthetics actively pursued since the Joseon Dynasty, to his current works. This literally translates to 'simple but not shabby, splendid but not extravagant,' applying a neutral artistic philosophy that rejects the pursuit of excessive aesthetics while also not accepting impoverished aesthetics.

Analogously to Western aesthetics, one can imagine Expressionism, which uses extreme colors and heavily distorted forms to evoke emotion, appearing simultaneously with Minimalism, which radically excludes external elements. This neutral aesthetic is particularly evident in temples, palaces, and overall urban

systems of the Joseon Dynasty. It shares a similar definition with Minimalism, which emerged in the history of Western modern art after World War II, and the commonality between the two aesthetics is the removal of all unnecessary elements, leaving only the essential parts to reveal the inherent nature of the object. However, crucial differences also exist. While Minimalism is an aesthetic that embodies the essence of an object by minimizing artifice through simplicity and conciseness, the beauty of negative space and *Geomibullu Hwaibulchi* considers practical aspects simultaneously. If one were to focus solely on essence like Minimalism, questions might arise about whether practical design exists in traditional architecture. Therefore, he reveals his willingness to mitigate the differentiated dichotomy between East and West through a process of not insisting solely on Western artistic characteristics but also blending in Eastern artistic philosophy.

Additionally, another series that is further and definitively derived from his work is stairs, where vertical perspective is felt from doors or passageways. Stairs are an important part of architecture from a practical perspective of going up and down, but they also greatly affect visually depending on the surrounding structural form and imply various meanings depending on the intention. Based on this complex cognitive ability, there are many references to stairs viewed from various perspectives. The stairs of ancient Orient are an example, connected to the human instinct to occupy high places. Ascendancy implies the strengthening of power, consistent with the process of reaching the highest authority in various religions. Focusing on this, the symbolic meaning of stairs can be confirmed through scenes where religious rituals, involving sacrifices to get closer to heaven, were performed by climbing the long stairs of Mayan and Aztec pyramid temples. Stairs convey the perception of 'ascending,' and humans possess the unconscious cognitive ability to interpret this metaphorically. Therefore, by emphasizing spatial sensation through stairs and visually conveying repetition

and unity, the audience unconsciously feels satisfaction while simultaneously wondering, 'What will be there if I go up this way?' This stimulates another goal-orientedness and arouses curiosity.

After examining the basic background of the artist, we will now look at the core content of the Borderless series. First, the artist's new perspective on space and structure considers it not merely as a physical place, but as a sensory and experientially based framework established as a philosophical background. In other words, 'space' is not confined to its dictionary definition but functions as a subject of expression and a language. Immediately following this, a directly observable characteristic in the work is the creation of a new, empty space within which tension resides. This is achieved by symmetrically dividing and densely coordinating overlapping voids into a balanced structure, much like the 'facade' design that emphasizes symmetry, widely applied in architecture. In European history, such as Ancient Rome, the Renaissance, the Baroque period, and especially during the era of absolute monarchy, facades were a visual declaration expressing the degree of power. As the outer wall became more organized, it conveyed an impression of stable state authority and governing order, thus serving as a device to control both the king's gaze and the people's gaze. Furthermore, they were not merely symbols of absolute power but were also used as political, quasi-propaganda elements. For instance, at national and corporate levels, government buildings, museums, and courthouses all designed grand facades with the purpose of visualizing the 'legitimacy' of power through repetitive and symmetrical architecture. The French postmodern philosopher Michel Foucault, based on structuralism, viewed space not simply as something to be seen, but as a tool to organize and operate power, arguing that repetitive and disciplined structures actually 'regulate and monitor' individual behavior and perception. That is, architecturally expressed compositions visually manifest order and authority, thereby asserting legitimacy to their inherent existence. From

these actual repetitively formed spatial facades, other geometric elements can be seen to derive: straight compositional lines formed by separation, and the repetition of architectural characteristics, which are expressed differently in each work along with a staircase structure. Considering all the aforementioned general characteristics, it is discernible that the paintings in this series are not merely intended to decorate real space or define a 'place to stay' that reveals existence. Instead, they offer another space as a 'contemplated scene,' meaning they constitute object-like paintings with their own individual roles, forming a unique gateway created by symmetrical elements, and containing another freely functioning gateway within.

Secondly, regarding the aesthetic of Han (恨), it can be stated that symmetrical architectural elements are found not only in Western but also in Eastern architecture. But the important point is that they play a completely different role compared to the West. Even if the structure is similar—at least from the perspective of Korean aesthetics—was designed with a philosophy of incorporating layers of Korean sentiment, including restrained emotions and natural adaptive condensation, into repetitive and symmetrical structures, due to similar symmetrical structures are adopted, the aesthetics and philosophy inherent in those structures cannot be the same. In Western architecture, symmetry symbolizes vertical structures such as control, order, and divine authority, whereas in traditional Korean architecture, symmetry and repetition are closer to a horizontal sensibility that embodies circulation and harmony with nature. In particular, 'Han' (恨), a uniquely Korean emotion, manifests in a restrained structure with internalized suppression, longing, and alienation, and these emotional layers quietly permeate the balance, negative space, and repetitive rhythm of the architecture. Looking at specific characteristics, for example, dark green, deep navy, hazy beige and other calm colors are chosen that do not strongly express emotions and emphasize harmony with nature as an

important aesthetic element. These are primarily colors derived from nature such as mountains, earth, clouds, and wind, reflecting subtle changes in natural light, indirectly revealing a restrained approach that deeply conceals the interior with colors that are not excessive, not jarring, and comfortable. This nature-friendly and spiritual pursuit, as well as indigenous and natural texture-preserving methods like *damchae-hwa* (light-colored painting), the influence of material properties and handicraft techniques, and the aesthetics of moderation and restraint due to Confucian influence, also play a significant role. In other words, rather than adopting contemporary techniques based on qualities like short-form videos on Social Media platforms that use strong, kitschy colors to instantly inject and quickly consume content, he has chosen an approach that creates a new environment for slow contemplation and subjective thought, using low-saturation and calm colors that are closer to meditation, allowing them to slowly engage with and explore the artworks themselves.

Thirdly, the adjective 'tranquility,' which directly stems from the first and especially the second core themes of a restrained environment, can provide additional explanation. Here, tranquility (한적함) does not simply mean 'stillness,' which is a physically static state of time and space. Instead, it refers to a state of **calmness** (靜寂) created by the absence of relationships, which can be directly observed through the work itself. This includes an intuitive understanding, through the painterly nature, that there is no movement within the superficially presented static scene composition; a delay of senses where the negative space within the disciplined rhythm functions like music; the centrality of the scene where space, structures, and objects are presented as subjects rather than figures from the subjectification of the background; and an intention to indirectly convey energy as if capturing moments like the space before the wind blows or the stillness before words arrive, and the flow of light and air. After applying all these subtle philosophical considerations, the artist intends for his paintings and photographs

not to 'deliver' any specific message to the viewer, but simply to provide another unique space for them to pause and gaze. This gaze, in turn, creates a spatiotemporal void that gradually overlaps with the viewer's own memories, emotions, or imagination. As already mentioned, tranquility, or static content, does not imply merely staying in the present; rather, it signifies moving towards a destination, aiming for something. However, while that destination is not precisely defined, the crucial point is to maintain that direction and keep moving continuously. In other words, the world of the artworks does not simply flow without purpose to create a complete narrative; instead, through movement, exploration, and transition, most works have an open composition, consciously aiming for continuous development and change while avoiding a completed narrative. For example, within the serial structure, even amidst formal changes or repetition of materials, 're-seeing' and 're-combining' are central and repetitive, yet subtly changing elements can be captured in a single flow, and the attempt to 'cross' a boundary or the act of 'breaking down' boundaries itself is continuously pursued as a theme. Thus, he can be seen to practice an aesthetic attitude that values 'heading towards' over 'arrival.'

Finally, the exploration of the work's content will conclude by examining the concept of 'boundary' that was just mentioned. The definition of 'boundary' cited in the Borderless series is not merely a physical line used to divide one section, but rather a gap that holds the potential for two states to intersect. This gap is not only faintly visible within the work but is also considered to exist between the work itself and the viewer. This creates a new energy by generating a conceptual void in the empty space between the artist and the viewer. This energy does not forcefully impose itself in any direction, maintaining an imbalance, but instead creates another spatial element that allows the viewer to engage in unconscious meditation and contemplation. Similarly, as the boundaries within the work encompass more meaning, self-questioning and a fluid attitude towards

materiality and emotion, East and West, painting and photography, and private and public, lead to shared themes between painting and photography, as seen in The Magazine series. Furthermore, one can observe the blurring of boundaries between art and publishing, painting and media, and exhibitions and commercial media publications. He also reveals his identity as both a designer and an artist by rearranging private emotions into public forms (design, exhibitions, etc.). This is not merely a complexity of positions, but rather leads to the very act of deconstructing and reconstructing boundaries, maintaining a middle ground between linguistic explanation and visual sensation, thereby revealing the artist's unique spirit.

If all these philosophical elements reflected in the work have been confirmed, what remains unknown is the philosophical purpose itself. Why did the artist choose this technique and a minimalist genre based on Eastern thought, and why and how does he present it to the audience? The reason can be seen as a resistance to the unconsciously acquired anxiety, sensory overheating, and fatigue of perception due to the excessively rapid flow of information in our contemporary era of transitional chaos—especially in Korea, where the artist was born and currently resides. Rather than directly reacting to this sensory overload and speed of consumption, the artist aims to propose a new spatiotemporal rhythm that calms the inner self through slow contemplation, static structures, repetition, and negative space. This can be interpreted as Byung-Chul Han's 'philosophy of lingering' (Han, 2017) or a form of visual resistance to the sensory collapse warned by Jonathan Crary. Both emphasize the need for pause and stillness in response to the threatening impact of rapid digital culture and the speed of visual information on human ontology. Furthermore, akin to the concept of space mentioned in Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (*La Poétique de l'Espace*), where the viewer's inner self contemplates, remembers, and imagines, internalizing existence—that is, space not merely as a functional area but as an

emotional space, an inner refuge—and echoing the context within Arden Reed's *Slow Art: The Experience of Looking, Sacred Images to James Turrell*, the works that slow down the pace of appreciation in contemporary art serve as a form of resistance to the age of immediacy, providing a temporal gap for introspection, and thus become a device that expands the time of appreciation and restores emotional depth. This attempt is not merely a choice of visual aesthetics; it is also an ontological practice that restores the sense of 'lingering' to the audience within the flat surface of painting. The artist intends not to inject a specific message into the viewer through his work, but rather to open up an empty space for contemplation, thereby providing an opportunity for them to project their own memories and emotions. This is an attempt to seek the possibility of a new order amidst the chaotic and directionless reality of today, on the level of aesthetic contemplation and intuition. For the artist, this is the role that art should play now, and it is the core of the philosophical practice he believes to be a condition for sustainable aesthetics.

After exploring the core Borderless series, it expanded into another series, 《The Magazine》, primarily focusing on fashion collaborations, further expanding the artist's worldview. The idea for this series emerged while he was briefly working as a graphic and branding designer for a fashion company, dealing with numerous fashion materials, mood boards, and comp card photos. This was not merely a conscious decision, but rather a characteristic derived from the minimalism inherent in the monochrome nature of the Borderless series, which is currently intertwined with many connection points in fashion, making it fair to consider it not as a standalone field but as an integrated entity. In other words, it is sublimated into an artistic expression beyond a superficial view as merely a practical medium or one that interacts with external environments. This reflects Gilles Deleuze's concept of deterritorialization, where existing systems of meaning are deconstructed and reconfigured in new contexts. Just as objects

and concepts move beyond fixed meanings and generate fluidity within constantly changing networks, the way painting and fashion merge also reflects a process where specific genres are not fixed to a medium, but rather transcend and reinterpret each other's boundaries. Therefore, the way painting and fashion merge is also a process of transcending and reinterpreting each other's boundaries, not being fixed to a particular genre or medium.

Currently, new brands are being established globally, and among them, minimalist fashion, which features simple and restrained designs born from an interest in sustainability and ethical consumption, is accelerating in shaping a new fashion trend. Fashion editorials, while seemingly reflecting reality, construct a virtual world separate from reality. Unlike the simulacrum system of continuous productivity of specific lifestyles and idealized identities, they explore the actual clothing worn by models and reinterpret it painterly, questioning the essence of fashion and its aesthetic meaning. His work emphasizes that fashion is not a mere repetition of style, but a constantly evolving visual language within individual identity and social context. While establishing itself as an aesthetic medium for contemporary social communication, the meaning of clothing, unlike in the past, is also newly interpreted as a kind of object beyond a simple functional item. This process, where fashion expands from a mere consumer item to a subject of painterly exploration, and painting functions as another type of object, can be seen as a deterritorializing practice that deconstructs the boundaries of traditional art genres. Consequently, many current fashion designers are greatly influenced by nature or other artworks, and can be seen as operating as part of an artistic network connected to various fields, rather than an isolated practical and material realm.

To explain the working process, he utilized non-physical contact, communicating with people on social media platforms that are highly accessible to the public, and also using it as a means of recruiting models, a form of exchange. After

reviewing whether their usual fashion styles matched, he selected a small number of models and, considering suitable clothing close to the monochrome characteristic, aimed to create a record of an exploratory process that consistently reinterprets his own painterly works by referencing not just the models' aura but also the form and aura including the clothing, and then arranges them as comparative examples. According to Heidegger's "Being of Things," objects are seen not as mere tools, but as mediums that reveal existence itself. Haleen Lee explores both the materiality and conceptual meaning of fashion simultaneously, rather than viewing it as a practical or commercial object, and reveals the existence of things through the process of transforming fashion into a painterly object. A prominent difference from general commercial model photography, meaning most fashion editorials, is that all environmental, clothing, and makeup settings pursue artificiality, which is unrealistically adjusted and is their main concept. Alternatively, some editorials exist to establish a brand around 'luxury' and 'nobility,' containing a semi-real concept that blurs the line between reality and illusion to the point where it's difficult to distinguish them from reality. In contrast, this project, while initially seeming to approach commercial outcomes by recruiting models, is considered closer to artistic photography due to its comparatively experimental process where the models themselves choose their actual clothing, hair, and makeup, thus giving them more weight than the photographer.

So by considering the inherent characteristics of Haleen Lee's work—that is, its essence—models choose minimalist clothing, and then a specific location is selected to pursue a natural concept by recording reality as much as possible. In the photographic works featuring individuals, the process of capturing and interpreting the aura emanating from the clothing and surrounding environment—that is, the act of recording to explore the essence in between—is performed. In the sense that the painting works interpreted from these results are

arranged side by side, Haleen Lee gained the core of typology: a record that arranges models and painting works with visual similarities, grouping a series of concepts and forms, and classifying them according to how they appear. In this context, a typological composition summarizes a series of images, including continuity, openness, frontal perspective, and objectivity, using a descriptive method, and becomes a series of works in a paired format. Thus, as long as there are similar or comparative subjects in a series, it is a format that allows for infinite reproduction. A contradictory point in this process is that while models in the real world of film, drama, commercial fashion, or commercial modeling are often artificially active in various glamorous positions, Haleen Lee's intention is to resist the unreality of fashion editorials by having these professional models, whose job it is to create and embody artificiality, minimize that artificiality as much as possible. Also, since the selected clothing is based on what people actually wear, it is highly probable that these fashion styles are commonly worn in daily life. Thus Haleen Lee's intention to reinterpret them as artistic mediums functioning as objects, as mentioned above, is embedded in his work.