



Jaye Rhee Technology is Just the Vehicle in Flesh and the Book – Artlyst Interview

Last week in Chelsea, NY, Doosan Gallery – a non-profit space dedicated to exhibiting Korean contemporary art – debuted new work by their latest artist-in-residence Jaye Rhee. The Seoul-born, New York based artist is mostly known for her work in video, photography, and elements of performance. For her exhibition at Doosan, *The Flesh and The Book*, these disciplines converge in the form of a meticulously edited four channel video installation featuring an unlikely performance by some of the original dancers of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company.

Artlyst: In your earlier work *Notes* it appears as though you cast non-dancers in the video piece. What inspired you to work with the former Merce Cunningham Dance Company for *Flesh and the Book*? Is this the first time that you have worked with professional dancers in a video work?

Jaye: This was my first experience working with professional dancers, and I loved it. When I first started the project *The Flesh and the Book*, the work did not have a name yet. The first thing that was 100% sure for me was that I wanted older mature dancers. Dancers usually train themselves from early years and are typically forced into changing their career much earlier than other disciplines. I would like to raise questions about “beauty” as part of the artmaking process and about the role of illusion in “art” and also about art as a momentary gift, like life. When your attention is immersed in the “present,” even in just a fleeting moment, you can be aware of the gift of life.

Secondly, I love Merce Cunningham because of the geometry of his dance. And there was a story: while still in the process of researching a new, unnamed project, the Merce Cunningham dance company disbanded. It made me want to work with them more.

Notes, which I produced in 2007 and this new work arise from two very different environments, but started from the same seed. If I had not made *Notes*, *The Flesh and the Book* would not exist. One work brings another work.

Artlyst: For your exhibition, you incorporate various media into one piece including sound, video, movement, and sculptural elements. Were these elements already part of what you envisioned for the work or did they develop further as you went along in the studio?

Jaye: Works are born with their own media, form, concepts, etc. – whatever it takes to make the works. What I do is just take the time to really find out what is the strongest part that they are born with and then I take good care of them until they became “grown-ups.” Many times, when I take care of one element, it takes care of another element by itself.

Sometimes during the process of growing the works, I discover that some parts can be emphasized or developed. It is like when you think you are never going to be good in a certain school subject but when you really study, you realize your true interest.

Artlyst: Within your body of work, there are many moments when something is not what it really seems or the definition of something becomes an experiment. For example, in *Cherry Blossom* the flowers that are shown are not really plants but chewed gum and in *Flesh and the Book* the “notes” are not musical characters but actual bodies. How do you think this concept relates to what we experience in our technology-obsessed generation?

Jaye: As technology develops, especially video, we have increased resolution to see things more clearly. But I think what we really see or want to see is images. And for images, technology and clarity do not matter so much.

Imagine something you want to see, something that you love, maybe a person. You are not going to remember it by how many pores and hairs the person has, or every single detail down to the millimeter. What you think of is rather abstract images. It is like language. You can spend so much time to describe a thing, but you cannot draw the thing perfectly.

But with poems, yes- with shorter sentences, even with fragments, you can draw things more closely. Technology is just a vehicle. I take subways to go to places, especially when I want to read. I take subways but occasionally I take a cab when I don't have much time to get there, or I ride my bike when it is sunny. The experiences are all different, but you get there in the end anyway.

Artlyst: You have worked with Elliott Sharp in the past. How important and beneficial do you think it is for artists to work with people in different creative fields other than art?

Jaye: It is like a surprise gift from life for me to work with others from different creative disciplines. It can be quite interesting, actually. There is always some conflict, and room for improvement, what I want never happens at once. Collaboration is a process of learning from each other and learning about each other. As a result, in the long view, the work expands from whatever original vision I may have had for it.

When I communicate with others, there can be “misunderstanding” because our languages are abstract. So it is just like another kind of artmaking: we deal with abstraction and we gradually reach an understanding. We can always talk and communicate what we want in order to narrow the gap. Then what remains for us is an essence of some original idea. I enjoy the process.

Artlyst: For artists living in New York for some time, it is easy to feel tied down to the city as if there is no other art world outside of it. Being that you have shown your work in various cities and countries, do you think this has helped to broaden your perspective and artistic practice? If so, could you explain?

Jaye: Though NYC offers a lot culturally to people including artists, sometimes I need to be out of it so that I can look at where I really am. If I were living in another city I would need to do the same. Moving allows me to see myself objectively.

Interview Lizanne Merrill © Artlyst 2013 Photo: Courtesy Doosan Gallery

Jaye Rhee @ Doosan Gallery Chelsea NY
