

Standing Spray Dedicated to Culture in the Era of Nature, Shaman, Technology, and Hybrid

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At the Border of City and Nature

This impressive title, "This Obscure Side of Sweetness is Waiting to Blossom" is another artistic experiment based on the ecological philosophy that Pascal Barret has long sought. While residing in Artist Residency TEMI ("TEMI") for about three months since summer, Barret observed the contradictory culture of Korean society. The contradiction arises from the shadows of shamans who are ubiquitous behind the curtains of a technocratic society, that is, Korea's custom of intersection of science and witchcraft. Korean people, who dream of becoming an advanced country in science in the 21st century, still carry on the tradition of ancestor veneration. In Korea, ancestor veneration is a traditional culture, showing respect to ancestors or ghosts, that is, spiritual beings. Korea's hybrid culture of technology and shamanism today obscures Korean people's identity in the modern world. The location of TEMI would be a good description of the situation: TEMI is located on mountain ridge, but a little further down by foot will lead to the city because it lies directly on the border of nature and city. It is at this border of city and nature, Barret seeks to speak of the "obscure side of sweetness" that modern civilization presented to humans.

"Obscure Side of Sweetness"

What are the things that Barret asked and answered at the border of nature and city, or nature and culture?

From the perspective of ecofeminism, Barret in a series of previous works – *Leaving by Sea*, *Endora*, *Anthropocene*, and *Avatar* – has been contemplating the reflection and healing of serious situations we face due to industries and capitalism. Also in the relationship of nature and culture, which is the topic of her exhibition, she

approaches the topic from an ecological point of view. In one of the three exhibition rooms where she only worked on the walls, Barret shows her obsession with "green." Thinking that Koreans still living in traditional Korean houses might want to paint the roof green, she parodies green as a way to reproduce and duplicate the city's desire for nature. Furthermore, Barret scans objects she wishes to express in 2D and 3D images; solidifies with a 3D printer; and photographs them again. By doing so, she wishes to think about the relationship between nature and culture, or between art and science. The photographic images feature fruits like dragon fruit, flowers, windows, old houses, old buildings seen as a ship, and landscapes from the location of TEMI or on top of the mountain. This is a collection of images from Barret's view as an outsider in Korea, and as a result of being filtered by her choice, the images feel more exotic and unfamiliar than realistic. Moreover, some even feels mysterious as if it is foggy, and the images printed in light cyan are perceived as paintings even though they are photographs, and appear to exist in a virtual world transcending time and space. By intentionally making them look transparent like x-rays, Barret creates these photographs into a poem that lies on the boundary between art and science.

Meanwhile, the artist overlaps cultural images in one plant. At first she saw an image of "crying out or screaming" in the rugged shape of ginger. The artist then uses metonymy to replace the rugged image of ginger to something that of chicken or a monster. Thanks to the multiple images of ginger, we come to read some kind of a cultural code. But why chicken? Chicken bones are associated with a new geological epoch that modern ecologists call the "Anthropocene." This unofficial term, started by chemist Paul Crutzen, who claimed that "global warming and climate

change begun with man-made greenhouse gases as a result of a large-scale use of fossil fuels." According to Crutzen, humans are "destroying the ozone layer in the stratosphere," causing an unprecedented impact on humanity. In other words, some characteristics of "humanity tax" include "radioactive fallouts, plastics covering the earth, soot emitted from thermal power plants, and chicken bones produced by large-scale plant breeding." In previous exhibitions, Barret dealt with "humanity tax," acknowledging the influence of social philosopher Bruno Latour. Latour's philosophy that oppose all dichotomous reasons, such as nature and culture, natural sciences, humanities, and human nature, suggests to take up those between the confrontations, such as those on the border. In that sense, his philosophy also acknowledges the existence of non-human beings, animism, and shamanism that exist between man and nature.

"Fab Lab," Makgeolli and Standing Spray

Barret naturally expressed interest in shamanism in Korea. In particular, Daejeon, where she stays, is symbolized as a city of science, but ironically, shamanism and astrologers are the largest in the nation. Although Korea seems to be a technologically superficial state, there are still funeral ceremonies decorated with standing sprays for the deceased, visits to see the shamans, making wishes, and to comfort the dead. Although technology civilization and shamanism coexist, Koreans only regard themselves as modern people. Barret is interested in the minority communities of shamans and buddhist nuns in Korea. She visits the shamanism museum in Seoul and draw images of the shaman's clothes, tools, and even the ghosts they communicate with. Images created by Barret are produced in bricolage, mainly using digital tools such as a video player, 3D scanners, 3D printer, and laser cutter. Using such things, she created images of shamans, ghosts, and standing sprays. Barret installed large standing sprays in one of the exhibition rooms, as tall as a man's height. Barret makes Koreans look at what is dominating Korea's spiritual world in this era by letting the standing spray catch

attention with the background music of gruesome sound as if calling for a ghost.

As such, Barret materializes spiritual things with the help of technology and science, but for Koreans, they have always been in our lives. In the Korean culture she experienced nature, shaman, and technology engaged in a hybrid culture mixed with one another. Buddhist nuns and shamans who have been exiled to the mountains are hidden behind the modern civilization of science. But as Barret picks up flowers from an abandoned funeral home and scans it and reproduces it with a 3D printer, shamanism revives again as art by science and technology. Barret created makgeolli using the scientific technology of fermentation in one of the exhibition spaces she calls "Fab Lab". Makgeolli is a scientific and magical effect that makes people drunk. Through these witchcrafts or art, is not Barret trying to liberate ourselves with light and energy, ultimately reverting the "obscure side of sweetness" this era provides?