

Synchronized Contradiction

Loreta Visic's work has disturbing effects on a viewer's mind; a small seed tucked into the deepest corner of your heart begins to ache.

Loreta Visic has dealt with mainly domestic issues as the theme of her work. Houses, clothes and dolls are some of the examples of her motifs taken from everyday life. In Japanese, the word "homey" carries nuance laced with warmth, tenderness and innocence. However, we must question whether home is truly such a place. The word "home" has neither a positive nor negative connotation. In the dictionary, the word is defined in neutral terms as "family gathering, or a place of residence for the family." So it is the viewer's own personal hopes and wishes toward the definition of "home" that paint a positive meaning to the word. Visic's work highlights such vision through her thrust of rough reality against an idealized illusion. In the work entitled "Beer (Bear)" plate 1., made in 1999, a teddy bear with footmarks engraved on the body is placed casually on the floor. The view of the lovely teddy bear looks as if a child has just carelessly left it there, but the clearly imprinted footmarks on its body invoke another, not so lovely, kind of story; a story where the innocent bear begins to assume a tone of sadness and violence. This is the recurring theme in Visic's work where she uses innocent, peaceful objects to uncover a paradoxical narrative. "Huisje (Little House)" plate 2, made in 2000, is made of a small brick house with a smoking chimney. The traditional brick house with its smoke laden chimney give the aura of a cozy home. Yet, the house has no windows, nor a door. The pleasant house that protects its residents from the harsh realities outdoors simultaneously stifles the closed-ness of the house that is trying to shut itself from the outer world. The symbol reminds us of those now adult children who were, in many circumstances, crushed by "family" and "house" in the name of a "Sound Home."

On the one hand the story surrounding the "House" based on domestic issues, gradually developed into a larger context of social irony. "Kind(Child)," plate 3, made in 2001, is a sculpture of a seemingly disciplined child with white tights and black buckled shoes, covered in a red cloth. At a glance, it looks as though the child is playing in harmless innocence, however the facts are revealed, under the cover, she is found pointing a gun to her head. Here the two extremely opposing realities of children, one as a symbol representing peace and the other as the manifestation of occasional violence prone activity, are incorporated making a distinct contrast. In the work entitled "Vrouw (Woman)", plate 4, made in 2002, a life-size womanly figure without a head is hung from the ceiling. The figure is wearing pajamas and is bare-footed. The view immediately makes one think of a suicide of a young woman. The work is at first glance a choking image of death, while looking up at the figure hung from the high ceiling, one can see thin underwear beneath the skirt (plate 5.) That of a garish sex/life soon replaces the image of death and sentimentality is taken over by curiosity also reminding us of the occasional transformation and distortion of tragedies by the media.

Dealing with home and domestic issues in ways which sometimes involve a larger context of society, Visic's work often reveals a darker side of reality such as hidden aggressions and inverted closure that often emerge in tragic situations. As an art historian Johan Pas has pointed out(1) that Visic's work essentially deals with the

ambiguity of the meaning or issues of transformation. The ambiguity of meaning is one of the characteristics of art in general, but in Visic's work this trait is actively pursued. We wonder then whether personal domestic issues led her to the ambiguity of meaning, or she chose them in order to explore the nature of it. Considering she reveals that the themes she deals with relate to her own experience, we should conclude that the former applies in her case. However, ambiguity is in another words uncertainty which provokes a sense of anxiety. This is why the viewer feels upset and disturbed; it calls up in the mind of the viewer unsettling narrative implied in the work.

A work made at Aomori Contemporary Art Centre (ACAC) does not involve domestic issues but rather focuses on the ambiguity or the process of transformation of meaning. The work entitled "Poem", is a sound installation utilizing the surrounding forest in which she placed a "moon" made of glass fiber among trees between the Creative Hall and the Residential Hall, along with hidden speakers from which eight different recordings of birds singing are heard. It is a site-specific work that is most powerfully activated at night, as Visic refers to it as a "night installation". In fact, she had proposed a plan based on her well-known "house" motif before coming to ACAC. But with view to creating sound installation, combining environmental elements such as trees and forest, and thereby to incorporate a theme of "Vernacular Spirit" of the current ACAC program, domestic issues were executed. The work, however, similarly evokes a sense of instability that seems to emanate from the inherent ambiguity.

The round moon hanging in the dark forest looks like a yellowish full moon seen in the low sky. But the real full moon is high up in the opposite direction. Here and there in the forest we hear birds singing in unnatural liveliness. In this work Visic juxtaposes the contrasting essences of Japan and Europe, which Visic expresses each through the birds and moon. The moon has a cycle of its own by wax and wane. For Visic, this cycle represents the Japanese concept of time. Coming from the tradition of a linear concept of time based on the period before and after birth of Christ and where seasonal changes are considered as polarities of summer/winter, Visic felt that the constant repetition of death and recreation in the circular cycle exemplified by the notion of spring/summer/fall/winter and a system of naming the era after the name of the emperor, that the new era comes with the new name, is the symbol of Japanese essence. The moon was used as the emblem. The singing birds in the moonlit sky comprised of eight different kinds of Japanese summer birds and eight kinds of birds found only in Europe. Even those who are not very knowledgeable of bird sounds could feel somewhat unfamiliar with the sound of European birds. In a highly symbolized manner, the bird singing from two different continents was encountered in the forest. Furthermore, it feels very peculiar to hear the bird singing in the night at such an off-season of the year. Especially the sound of a warbler singing in the late fall forest would strike one as odd. In the cyclical transition of spring/summer/fall/winter, at a time when one cycle of the season is about to "end" or "die," to fill the forest with the sounds of birds singing in high tones of "life" or "rebirth" implies the cycle of death and rebirth that resonate in the relationship between the birds and forest. As such, multiple cycles are layered within the installation.

The sense of instability in the work does not seem to derive only from the opposing changing seasons. As Visic points out, the combination of the moon shining in the pitch-dark forest and the birds singing in inconsistent, high pitches made one feel an

unusual degree of oddness. Yet, there was more to it; the work emanates a lyrical sense of beauty; clear, crisp darkness, wind blowing through the forest making subtle rippling sounds of leaves; the hazy “moon” hanging among the trees and the singing birds. After some time, one begins to realize that the lyrical vision is actually produced artificially and what one enjoyed as the moon was a glass fiber globe with a light bulb and the bird singing one heard was recorded and played through speakers; and the viewer is swept with a sudden feeling of awkwardness. Knowing that some of the elements are not real and a vague feeling of emptiness and desillusion ensues, undermine one’s sense of an ideal beauty represented by the four elements of “flower/bird/wind/moon.”(2) It is a nature artificially created. As if to forcefully awaken the nature getting ready to sleep, shadow and darkness is lit by the intrusion of artificial light, silence is broken by the electric sound. Thus, quietude becomes noise, peacefulness is transformed into crudeness. There is a hovering sense of ambiguity and instability of meaning, which is easily interchangeable.

On the other hand, a soothing effect of the vision remains intact. It is similar to those moments when one looks down at the expansive city lights from the darkness of a mountaintop. No matter what goes on down there under the glittering lights, they are the traces of human affairs in the distance and it gives one a sense of warmth, strength and encouragement. The artificial moon suggestively simulated the real city lights under the moon.

Darkness and moon, forest and bird-singing; there’s nothing special about this combination. Yet, the moon is seen in an unusual placement and lively bird singing is heard as if in spring, in spite of the darkness of the late-fall. In both cases, the presentation is slightly off from their intrinsic placements. “Dépaysement” is a notable technique of the Surrealists, which means uneasiness, confusion and the feeling of being out of place when something is displaced in an out-of-context situation. The word derives from “déplacement”, which means removing something out of its ordinary context and placing it in a different location. A slight displacement seen in Visic’s work has created an out of the ordinary and untimely vision that is at the closest proximity to the ordinary. In this sense, the title “Poem” evokes spiritual and emotional elements in the installation as well as reminding one of Magritte and other Surrealists attempts at capturing “poetic images” through such techniques.

What kind of story would one find in Visic’s work and how would one feel the displacement? It may be that the answer will tell each viewer the seeds of their respective sense of anxiety.

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(1) Johan Pas, “Crucifix & Cuddly Toy, Catastrophe Domesticated”, XIX in MMI in Higher Institute for Arts (HISK), Antwerp, 2001.

(2) These four elements represent not only the beauties of nature but also the sum of things in universe for Japan.