

LEE UFAN The Subjects of Sculpture

One subject of modern sculpture is the self-portrait. Even if the face of an unknown person is chosen as the model, the work must be a form of self-expression by the artist. Modernity has conferred absolute value on making because of the belief that the world does not exist outside of representation of the self. Sculpture has been an object created by the ego as a self-sufficient world.

Around the beginning of the twentieth century, Marcel Duchamp put a readymade object into an exhibition. This action partly liberated sculpture from the need to be perfectly made, that is, from self-representation. From then on, the sculpture has entered into a process of self-dissolution, of restricting the act of making and greater incorporation of the outside world. There has been a growing recognition of the world existing outside human beings. Ultimately, sculpture cannot exist without a relationship to the outside world, but how long did it take in the history of sculpture before this obvious fact was realized?

The sculpture I attempt to make is an ambiguous world. For example, I begin by borrowing a stone from nature that has not been worked by human hands and bringing it into the exhibition space. (Such a use of stone has nothing to do with the stones used in oriental gardens or personified stone objects. The context is entirely different.) Through a certain procedure of setting the stone in relation to a steel plate or to space, I engage in a dialogue with the outside world. My work involves creating relationships between transparent and non-transparent things, making and non-making. Through this process, the work comes to incorporate the unknown and the uncertain. In my work, sculpture has finally recovered the living body.

The subject of my sculpture is the attachment of wings to the imagination at a point of connection between inner and outer realms.

(1982)

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