

## **A painting aims to be a forest, and that will be my playground.**

Kenjiro Hosaka\*

Mitsuhiro Ikeda's paintings depict a somewhat fantastic scenery abound with trees, leaving the strong presence of paint on the picture surface. Ikeda, an artist at a mere 28 years of age, sweeps his eyes over formalistic ideas that exist for painting's sake and chooses to pursue further. It is as if Ikeda is advocating that one should not be fixated on methodology so as it becomes the purpose. If painting is at all a form of art, he suggests, there is so much more that needs to be done.

We must not look away from these paintings. There is a forest too deep to be seen in full, too high to be fully understood. There are also people without faces; they could be images of "me," but then again they are anonymous. Although the story is just beginning to unfold in the picture, this uncertainty postpones the ending. The forest that lies before our eyes is dominated by a story with a broken form.

Ikeda's paintings, which are pregnant with such forest imagery reminds me of the music by Sibelius. By no means is this a simplistic association drawn from the image of forests. It was Sibelius who led Adorno to say that accepting Sibelius' music would nullify all the standards incorporated in the works from Bach to Schonberg. I cannot help thinking that the dash of poison that Sibelius slipped into his music — his beautiful antithesis to formalism — can be seen altogether in the paintings by Ikeda.

How exactly did Ikeda arrive at this state of mind? The artist first meddled with the all-too-common media of installation. Apparently, what pulled him away from it and led him to explore paintings was the sight of rice ear from train window. This was not in autumn, but in early summer, where the rice boughs were swaying like waves. Ikeda thought that the fresh rice ear were just "awesome (*yabai*)" and decided to paraphrase his experience into a painting. To depict what must have been a vast rice paddy within a flat and limited canvas space was for sure a foolishly bold effort. Yet in retrospect, it may have been that Ikeda was able to understand some things only because of this hard work. In other words, the artist probably realized that what needs to be created through painting is not just the fresh color but the depth to contain that very color. It was from here that Ikeda decided to go into the mountains.

Nature, which was until then a mere subject of observation, thus became a place to enter into. In the forest however, the artist neither fished nor climbed, but chose to just stand there. He did not intend to take over, but simply wanted to sink into the forest. Ikeda calmed his body that was bustling with the desire to verbalize and observed the forest through the silent human body. And this is how the painting came to be.

Perhaps this explains why, when standing in front of this painting, one is overcome with a similar sensation as when reading the scene that takes place in the Shikoku forest in Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*. This is different from the Shikoku forest that Kenzaburo Oe wrote of, as a forest enveloping a community. This one is a forest that exists outside, which seems to enter into one's inside as he walks into it.

This is not 'our' forest but 'my' forest — the forest that exists within the individual. Although the forest should have an outer edge, when one wedges his/her way into it, he/she feels as though he/she is walking neither to the center nor to the other side, but towards the "depths" of the forest. In this strange place, time and space are suspended altogether, which makes one's dream more primitive than it usually is. This is very close to the experience of seeing a "painting."

What Ikeda aimed for was to make the painting itself into a "forest." And for those who play in the "forest" — in the ontological sense — fatigue shall never come. I believe that a dream that is both nostalgic and unknown will soon come to them.

(translated by Haruko Kono)

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