

Galerie Barbara Wien

Schöneberger Ufer 65 10785 Berlin www.barbarawien.de

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Politics of Ambiguity

When I look back on my almost fifty years of artistic life, I can broadly classify my work by decades, into my '70s fabric work, '80s red plywood and cardboard work, and the dot works that I started in the '90s.

In the 2000s I started to avoid producing art in the form of so-called 'objects' and started paying attention to art's social role as a public artist.

I neglected all the artworks that I made between the '70s and the '90s and did not store them properly.

I cannot justify myself clearly, but I think it must be because I believe from the bottom of my heart that one should control the excessive love for one's own work.

Anyways, the consequences were discolouration; sometimes they even went mouldy and rotted.

I brought out these works around 2010 and realised that my 'era of creation' was over.

The era of development was over and the era of preservation arrived. As an artist, I had an intuition that the era of editing and reappropriation had come.

After that, I stopped creating new works and replaced them by reappropriating my old works.

Looking back now, I'm wondering if the keyword that best underpins my work is 'ambiguity'.

The '70s fabric work is ambiguous, with drawn wrinkles and real wrinkles overlapping.

For the '80s work, it is hard to tell if the cutouts from the cardboard are lines drawn with a ruler. For the red plywood work, it is also hard to tell whether the clean, red-painted side or the roughly painted side is the front.

The existence of the dots on a roughly painted background in my '90s work is also ambiguous.

Also, from far away, the canvas works look like an abstract/square modernist painting, but from close up we can notice the slight handwritten letters and sentences on the surface of the canvas. The ambiguity of modernism is present in the painting.

The canvas works installed with the wall drawings permeate into the space and recede, making themselves scarce.

I cannot tell if my pursuit of ambiguity is conscious or not. That is also ambiguous.

Once, I tried to give political meanings to this concept of ambiguity but ended up giving too many meanings.

Nowadays I dimly wonder if clarity is the virtue of the era of development, and whether it might be ebbing. In compensation, maybe the positive side of ambiguity should be highlighted.

If people tell me that these vague thoughts constitute a politics of ambiguity, then I won't deny it... (On the other hand, I could write an artist statement about 'clarity' that would be totally different to this one!)

Kim Yong-Ik