

THERMOCLINE OF ART. NEW ASIAN WAVES

Wonil Rhee. Korean curator, co-Curator of the 3rd Seville Biennale 2008, Curator of *Thermocline of Art:New Asian Waves* (ZKM Karlsruhe, 2007) Germany, Artistic Director of 4th Media_City Seoul Biennale (2006) and co-Curator of 2006 Shanghai Biennale (China), among others.

ZKM, one of the leading contemporary art museums located in Karlsruhe, Germany, presents an Asian contemporary art exhibition from June 9th until October 21th to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the institution. Under the title “The Thermocline of Art- New Asian Waves”, Wonil Rhee, the artistic director of this exhibition, will introduce about one hundred artists not only from East Asia, but also from South East Asia and Central Asia.



The thermocline indicates the area where the temperature of the sea dramatically changes. As the sea surface absorbs the heat, wind and waves circulate generating warmth in the ocean. Due to such a physical rule, we consider water to be warm and serene. However, this tranquility is deconstructed and shattered in the thermocline process.

This natural phenomenon implicates the current contemporary Asian art scene. “The Thermocline of Art - New Asian Waves” will be an opportunity to explore contemporary Asian art in depth. The influence of Asian art gradually expanded creating a new wave and transcending the dichotomy between western and non-western worlds. Through humanities, archaeology, anthropology, and religion, the current Asia phenomenon such as coexistence between tradition and modernity, the confrontation between globalism and localism will be explored.

Surpassing the Dichotomy Between Eastern and Western Worlds

Is there a standard Asian value agreed by everyone? What exactly is Asian identity? Each Asian country has their respective unique identities, yet these identities are constantly changed by external circumstances. Hence, it is difficult to merge and consolidate Asian identities into one.

By carefully exploring Asian history, especially conflicts between countries and experience of colonization, the different layers of the Asian identities are revealed, opening up the possibility to delineate what Asian identity is.

Beyond the Post-colonialism

Most of East and South Asian countries share a painful history of being colonized. Since the modernization process of these colonized Asian countries was imposed by force rather than being a voluntary process, people suffered from confusion when they were liberated, and even faced situations of modernization being absent.

Expansion of globalism and changes in the Art scene in the 1990's allowed Asian countries to open up and discuss and proclaim their newly constructed identity based on their localism. Asian countries overcame hardships and are now active and significant participants in the process of modernization.

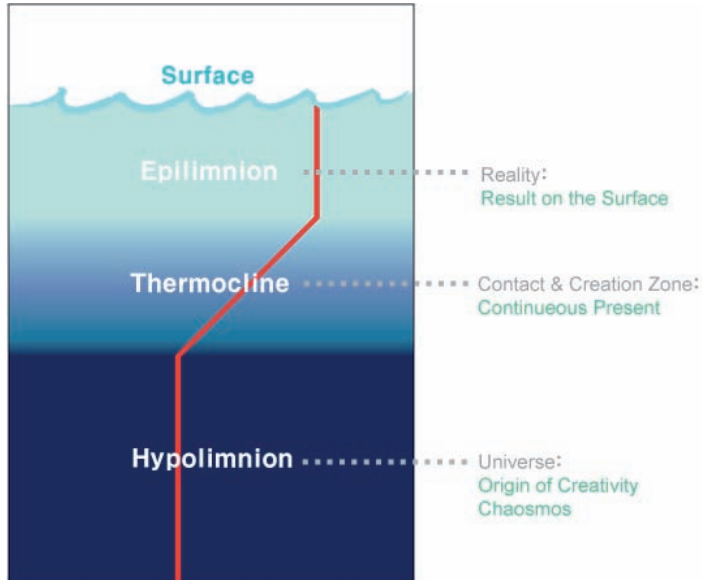
Why 'Thermocline'?

Water has long been considered the source and the driving force of all things living in this universe. It flows everywhere, relieving thirst for what it touches. Water is the main element of a mother's milk and life itself. Water purifies on its own, passing on to another world and deterritorializes where it dwells. All water in the world flows to the ocean, and regardless of where it has originated, whether it be from on high or down low from which it came, it ends in equilibrium.

Thermocline is a stratum of seawater between the upper epilimnion and the deeper hypolimnion. The temperature sharply drops in this middle layer, caught between the epilimnion, kept warm by the sun, wind and convection, and the hypolimnion, where the temperature is at its lowest and pressure its highest. The unique features of the thermocline and its special place in the vast ocean make it a fitting symbol of interface between reality (as represented by epilimnion) and the universe

(hypolimnion). This exhibition borrows from the distinct characteristics of thermocline to make a compelling presentation of contemporary Asian art.

Thermocline and Contemporary Asian Art



One of the leading philosophers of the East, Laozi, expounded that people should live like water. According to Laozi, water does not contend (Zheng), which means that it does not set the other as its opponent. Meanwhile, Hinduism, another important pillar of Eastern thinking, views respect for all things living as its key tenet. Its belief in more than one god makes it a religion of great power to absorb and embrace. The philosophy of Laozi and Hinduism exemplify the traditional spirit and

thoughts of the Eastern world, in which is absent the dichotomy predominant in the modern rationality. It is true that such dichotomy has deeply penetrated the history of the East, but it originates from the modern Hegelian dialectics and the related concepts of an-sich and fuer-sich.

The theme of this exhibition, thermocline, is the contact zone of the reality and the universe. Thermocline does not head to external purpose and it is a vast area, pervaded continuously by intensity and spanning across an unlimited expanse in a flexible manner. The intensity is not something that peaks then suddenly drops in this body of water. With consistent strength it creates powerful structures that can be connected to various points in space. Here, no dichotomy can take root, and the split between peace as opposed to war, institution as opposed to anti-institution, the West as opposed to the non-West, and the global and the local becomes meaningless.

Aquesta ponència fou presentada el dissabte dia 10 de novembre de 2007 al Macba, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, amb motiu del III Simposi Internacional Crítica d'Art en un Món Global, organitzat per l'ACCA.

Esta ponencia se presentó el sábado día 10 de noviembre de 2007 en el Macba, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona, con motivo del III Simposio Internacional Crítica de Arte en un Mundo Global, organizado por el ACCA.

This lecture was presented on Saturday, the 10th November 2007 at the Macba, Barcelona Museum for Contemporary Art, on the occasion of the III International Symposium Art Critics in a Global World, organized by ACCA.