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MINCHUL SONG, How to Make the Biggest Circle. A Tool to Look Through



How to Make the Biggest Circle, 2014

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While during these days I was going through Minchul Song's work, I accidentally caught up with this book entitled *The Human History of the Mathematics* [1] by the Italian writer Chiara Valerio.

At some point (roughly translated) the book says: "[...] Everything Euclid says doesn't exist. There is no straight line without thickness and no perfect circumference. The imagination Euclid requires to those who approach his *Elements*, from the 3rd century before Christ till today, is bigger than what you actually need to follow the stories of all gods and heroes. The reasonings, the theorems, and the proofs by Euclid can only be applied to these nonexistent forms. Every time that I drew a triangle or marked a segment, from that world of perfection, what I actually did was imagining." [2]

This reminds me of Minchul Song's *How to make the biggest circle*, to its powerful imaginative world and its capacity to build, among everything, a big narration. Doesn't matter if true or not, the artist puts us in the conditions to believe it and, if we believe it, is true.

"The false is the key of our century. Almost everything is false. The art that assumes to be true is surely false. The art that claims to be false is always authentic. [...] If you want to say something, you must dress a mask, and if you want to be honest, you must indeed live a lie. Being yourself is overestimated. People say: "I'm myself" as if it is a sort of goal, but this is not being honest: this is a lack of imagination."^[3]

If we must believe it, then it is an act of faith.

How to Make the Biggest Circle, claims the artist, can be a "bowl for many elements. Time, circulation, absence and presence, finite and infinite, whole, whole in me." All these elements that actually lie down on a rainbow which goes from everything to nothing make his works (*Half Mirror - Rotation Axis*, *Flat Eclipse*, *Corner Mirror*) a tool to look through. A tool able to influence the audience behavior in terms of conceptual participation – complete or (re)invent a story –, physical interaction (walk around and through the installation), and analysis of the formal elements and materials. "First of all, I think the spectators can see the formal aspect of my work and think at the devices along with the meaning of the elements such as the mirrors and the circles."^[4]

Despite the rigor of the formal structures, mostly made by mirror, glass, and plywood, these works are everything but rigid. The approach to the materials is quite crucial in this sense. He, in fact, chooses the materials that are the easiest to handle just as an artisan involved in a continuous research. For that reason, we can consider Minchul Song's artworks quite incomplete and porous. They hide somewhere a sort of calculated error (as part of the research) which triggers what we can call a performative integration or the conceptual participation of the audience, as mentioned above. In this trajectory, the artist not only investigates – this is a paradox – the realm of the imagination but also rethinks the realm of the real.

Although, in fact, the size of these works is always renegotiated according to the place they are going to be exhibited, they are all human scale (so far). Hence, the physical and conceptual interaction – walk around or complete the story – also involves the notion of time and space.

A space which comes from its negative, from the emptiness, from the absence; a notion which, in this case, doesn't exist as a pre-determined form but changes according to the place and the size of the work itself.

Put it in this terms, we can consider Minchul Song's work at the border between sculpture and architecture.

"I have heard about this story one day. If you extend the curve of eaves of Korean style house, it will eventually become the biggest circle in the world. This is why the line of Korean style house seems natural and comfortable to us. I didn't validate it but I decided to believe the story at that time. Ever since then, I have gotten this habit to picture 'the biggest circle' in my head whenever I see a Korean style house."^[5]

For that mean, he explores the phenomenology of the structures and deliberately blurs the margins between the art object and the everyday environment positioning indeed his contribution between art – re-organization of the structures and construction of a new space – and reality (the culture and the meaning present in each specific object and the materials itself).

In their quasi-functional position, *How to make the biggest circle*, prompts a certain lack of coherence: a sort of request for a small shift of perspective which may broaden the gaze and make the things more interesting and exciting.

What actually Minchul Song proposes us when we approach his work is, in fact, an exercise. The same as in the case of Euclid in the words of Chiara Valerio:

“Mathematics, and I think about this every time I caught up with a drawing on the wall, on the bridge or on the asphalt of any city, is this sort of imagination that nurtures the invisible, the love and the death, the utopias and all the ghosts that have brought us so far away, in the time and in the space. It is precisely this exercise of imagination that makes us stay human and, at the very end, doesn't matter if everything that Euclid talk about don't exist, if we are all here.”[6]

[1] C. Valerio, *Storia Umana della Matematica*, Einaudi, Torino, 2016

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] C. Zecchi, *Cantieri d'Arte, Ridisegnare i luoghi comuni*, an interview with Eva and Franco Mattes, 2006

[4] The quote is part of a short interview I made with the artist by e-mail

[5] N. B. Shin, *An essay on How to make the largest circle*

[6] C. Valerio, *Storia Umana della Matematica*, Einaudi, Torino, 2016