

Kyujung Kim, self_reflection 11, 2014, 16" X 16", interactive LED (seen here in four stages of processing)

Inner Workings

An Interview with Korean Artist Kyujung Kim

by D. Dominick Lombardi

While touring the galleries in Hudson, NY, I happened upon the serigraphic prints of David Roth at Hallam Bruner gallery. Roth's works, which has roots in Bauhaus, fall somewhere between Conceptual Art and what was once called Neo Geo. All this aside, it was the uncanny similarity to the newly made LED art I saw just the evening before in New York City that had me thinking about collective consciousness.

Kyujung Kim's art is solely Conceptual. His LED installations are interactive by way of sensors, micro-controllers and various other electronic devices that are programmed to respond differently to each viewer. In the case of Roth, the square matrix of tightly formed, colored dots is static,

yet they imply movement, suggest place and prompt thought. In Kim's highly reactive patterns of LEDs we see electronic 'life,' an almost emotional, albeit deliberate response to the viewer's presence. And in each response, there is a different outcome as we might become whole in our meditative contemplation, excited about things to come, or perhaps, somewhat anxious as we fall into a state of pensive bewilderment.

Recently, I had the opportunity to discuss with Kyujung Kim, his intentions and the response he hopes to achieve.

DDL: *Your art has quite a bit of reference to the psychedelic art of the 1960s and 70s, especially in works such as self_reflection 11 and self_reflection 12. I also see a remarkable similarity to the aesthetics addressed in the prints of David Roth and I wonder how much you have in common with those two*

decades and how the art then, was so tuned into the response of the optic nerve. Is there a connection?

KK: Although my LED works are similar to David Roth's serigraph from the visual perspective, my interactive LED installations currently on view at Tenri are quite different in terms of a subject matter as they allow the viewer to aspire to a state of visual immersion, which is equal to the supreme aesthetic appreciation through Kantian universality. Although the implementing mechanism of my work is turning LEDs on or off randomly according to the value of the distance between the work and the viewer's standing position, the LED screen has the sole purpose of converting those characteristics into an abstract color composition. I would say there are many differences my LED works and those of Roth's in dealing with material. Roth uses the trick of color composition in order to trigger the viewers' optical illusion. For me, I use a strategy consisting of the visual form, which requires the viewers' minimum recognition, and the frozen state of perception in which the viewers can be immersed into a dialogue with bright LED illusion physically as well as psychologically – an aesthetic method that allows the viewer to immerse into the state of minimum contemplation.

DDL: *There is a considerable amount of impact in your work when it comes to the aspect of interactivity. I also understand that there is quite a bit of difference between each piece indicating to me, that there is a pretty big investment of time on your part to program the variance of the response each piece puts forth. Do you take into account such things as peripheral vision or ambient space when you design your work? Is it that site specific?*

KK: Interaction between the work and the viewer in my recent media installations is very important. I think interaction is a kind of physical and direct dialogue in comparison to the indirect dialogue of the traditional static art form. Therefore, I believe that there are distinct differences between aesthetic taste such as the viewers' perception towards traditional static

arts and how the viewer perceives audio-visual information from electronic media. When I adopt new media like LED as an aesthetic object, I consider the representation of the traditional art method, but I do not remain within the boundaries of any traditional art form. I do not think the interaction is the final purpose for art creation, although I maximize the elements of dynamic illusion and the viewers' expected reaction in order to set a better inter-active environment in my work. Rather I make a plan for an installation environment delicately, in terms of time and space in order that the viewer does not recognize the fact that the expression or outcome of the work can change according to his or her physical intervention directly and positively, but passively and indirectly. In Oriental ink-and-wash painting, we leave more meanings in empty space than figurative images. Also, in Korean philosophy, there is virtue in concealing. I don't think art is only the rational stuff produced by calculating superficially, but that art can be shared with the viewer in terms of free association of the work or free reaction to the work. I intended to use LED media in my work as a material like one would use traditional pigments, which prompts the viewers' contemplation of a painting. However, I also must consider LED media within the metaphysical level in connection with the viewer's body, and then, my work can always be variable in terms of time and space.

DDL: *I see on your resume that you have been educated both in South Korea and in the U.S., and that you are a Professor at the School of Global Media, Soongsil University, S. Korea, and I am wondering how much social media and youth culture influences your art since light and color, "electronic contemplation" as you call it, is so pivotal in current forms of communication. Or, are you working outside this realm of social communication and purely as a Conceptual artist?*

KK: Currently, I am struggling with the convergence of current new media and my identity, which has been

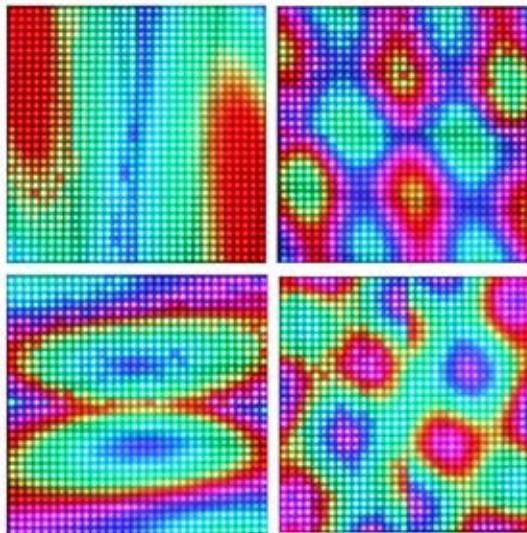
reconstructed within the traditional art creation method. That is to say, I am still considering a work of art conceptually. I went to Time Square and wandered around the electronic advertising sign boards that overwhelmed the street and I fell frustrated regarding the difference between the people's point of view about sign boards and my interpretation of them. 100 years ago, like Duchamp considered the definition and function of daily commodities differently than those of the people, and 50 years ago, Paik used TV as the utmost media expression for creating art work differentiating from publicly accepted daily use of TV, and I am considering the artistic use of those new media which people accept into their daily life without criticism, just the way I excitedly found a good color materials for drawing in my childhood.

DDL: *Finally, can you share with us the genesis of your interactive LED installations, or more specifically, your self_reflections series - how it all came about and what initially inspired your current artistic direction?*

KK: Perhaps, the main idea in my work process has been influenced by the experimental, the avant-garde spirit in many contemporary art works. Nevertheless, I am still looking for the answer to the definition of beauty.

These two dialectic aspects always pose a key problem in my creation process. Nevertheless, I believe the creation process is a sort of philosophical investigation, that is, the process toward truth. I start by questioning the new media around me, then I endeavor to think about the extension of expression that new media can create. Within that range of my recognition to new media, I try to translate that into an aesthetic form. I have been working with the convergence of the traditional creation method of art with a recent physical computing method as a research area of electronic engineering and computer science. It requires amounts of time to implement an aesthetic expression form by applying a logical computer programming consisting of an understanding of electronic schematics and devices, hardware and software, etc.

I am trying to adopt LED media as an aesthetic form beyond advertising and daily functions as I continue to experiment with various methods of expression. In some instances, when an artist uses LED as an aesthetic expression method, there is a reference to past styles of painting. However, I am trying to produce an independent dialogue through my *self_reflections* as I continue to work with new media.



Kyujung Kim, self_reflection 12, 2014, 16" X 16", interactive LED (seen here in four stages of processing)