

ARARIO GALLERY Cheonan, Seoul | Samcheong  
 Tai-Jung UM Solo Exhibition  
*A Stranger Holding Two Wings*

- First generation Korean abstract sculptor Tai-Jung UM's solo exhibition opens jointly at Arario Gallery Seoul and Cheonan
- Features about forty sculptures and two-dimensional works from 1969 to 2018 representative of the artist's career
- A story of a "stranger," a remedial space, told through metal (copper, steel, and aluminum) sculptures and two-dimensional works



Tai-Jung UM, *Serene Wall and I, 2018*, aluminum, steel, 300x300x200(h)cm

Title	Tai-Jung UM   A Stranger Holding Two Wings
Period	[Cheonan] January 22 – May 12, 2019 [Seoul   Samcheong] January 22 – February 24, 2019
Location	[Cheonan] # 43 Mannam-ro, Dongnam-gu, Cheonan-si, Chungcheongnam-do, Korea [Seoul   Samcheong] # 84 Bukchon-ro 5-gil, Jongno-gu, Seoul, Korea
Exhibited Works	About 50 works including sculptures, paintings, and drawings
Viewing Hours	[Cheonan] Monday – Sunday 11:00 – 19:00 (Closed when department store closed) [Seoul   Samcheong] Tuesday – Sunday 10:00 – 19:00 (Closed on Mondays)

ARARIO GALLERY Seoul | Samcheong and Cheonan are pleased to present *A Stranger Holding Two Wings*, a solo exhibition of Korean abstract sculpture's first generation pioneer Tai-Jung UM, opening on January 22, 2019. Featuring approximately fifty works, the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery includes various aluminum sculptures and two-dimensional pieces created over the past fifty years of Um's career as an abstract sculptor, along with recent large-scale aluminum works produced between 2017 and 2018. Opening simultaneously in Seoul and Cheonan, the exhibition provides a multifaceted overview of Um's oeuvre that has pursued a remedial space built on performative practices opting for the materiality of metal. The exhibit will be on view through February 24th at Arario Gallery Seoul | Samcheong, and May 12th at Arario Gallery Cheonan.

Since his fascination with the materiality of steel during his undergraduate studies at Seoul National University in the early 1960s, Um has devoted himself to metal sculpture and investigated materials and resources throughout his career that continues to the present. In 1967, he caught the art world's attention as his emblematic steel sculpture *A Scream* won the Prime Minister's Prize in the 16th National Art Exhibition, and in the seventies he presented copper sculptures that revealed a remarkable contrast between the material's internal and external sides in terms of color and texture. In the 1980-90s, Um's abstract copper sculptures with a prominent vertical structure referred to Eastern philosophy concerning the ideas of the celestial and worldly, as exemplified by his *Heaven, Earth, and Human*, and the 90s' *Bronze-Object-Age* series reflected the shapes of Korean traditional wood furniture and pillars. From 2000s on, Um has put more emphasis on form-based works made of aluminum boards and steel frames that illustrate coexistence and reconciliation of mutually exclusive elements—such as Yin and Yang, and time and space—through the formal language of the vertical and horizontal, sculptural qualities of lines and planes, and harmonious palette of silver and black.

For a comprehensive coverage of Um's art world established over the past fifty years, the exhibition has been divided into two venues according to the medium—the sculptures in Cheonan and two-dimensional works in Seoul | Samcheong—in order to shed light on the interconnectedness between the two fields. The 4th-floor exhibition space in Cheonan will display major steel and copper sculptures produced between 1969 and 2010, such as *Energy 69, No.1* (1969) and *Bronze-Object-Age* series (1997), while his new large-scale aluminum works created since the 2000s will be on view on the 3rd floor. As a neutral material, aluminum aligned fittingly with Um's pursuit of Mandala, a world of unity that he has sought to reach through his work. The four sculptures, each representing one of the four seasons, transform the exhibition space into a sculpture park encompassing all the seasons within a single site. Premised on a relationship between 'a wall as an other and I,' *Serene Wall and I* (2017) explores the time-space in which an other and "I" coexist through the structural combination of disparate elements—specifically, a silver plane of a smoothly refined aluminum panel and a black line of a steel pipe. *A Stranger Holding Two Wings* (2017), a recent work that shares the title with this exhibition, envisions Um's

philosophical embrace of an isolated "other" (stranger) through the composition of a black linear steel pipe holding two sheets of symmetrical aluminum panels. The other works, *A Peaceful Space* (2017) and *A Meditative Space* (2018), continue to generate a dialogue with their surrounding space, drawing the viewer in to the unique space-time, which expands into a kind of a new universe, embodied and realized by Um's sculptures.

In the gallery's Seoul | Samcheong branch, Um's two-dimensional works constantly produced since the 2000s will be exhibited. The small drawing series *Crack* (2000-2002), while reminiscent of cheerful gestures and bodily movements of a person or a character, was completed by a repetitive performance of drawing lines infinitely with an ink pen on a white paper. Also on view in the basement-level exhibition space are two-dimensional color band pieces such as *Heaven, Earth, and Human* (2018), *Endless Column-Mandala* (2018), and *Heaven is Round, Earth is Round, and Man is Round* (2018). As shown in the drawings, the method of accumulating layers of numerous ink lines, overlaying color bands with intervals of 1 cm, and coloring again closely resembles not only the formal qualities of Um's sculptures but also the production technique of striking, welding and polishing a piece of metal. In regard to this, Um has stated, "the process of sculpting, to me, is the process of healing." Upon encountering Um's various works that are intricately connected to each other, the viewer will come face to face with his yearning for a personal remedy and ideals of unification that lie beyond his life-long pursuit of the materiality of metal and sculptural orders.

Born in 1938 in Mungyeong, South Korea, Tai-Jung UM graduated from the Department of Sculpture in College of Fine Arts at Seoul National University, studied at Saint Martin's School of Art in London, and held positions as a research professor at Berlin Fine Arts University and professor in the Department of Sculpture in College of Fine Arts at Seoul National University. He was awarded the Prime Minister's Prize from the National Art Exhibition (1967), Grand Prize from the Korean Art Grand-Prix Exhibition (1971), and Mirok Li Prize from the 7th Mirok Li Award (2012). Starting with a solo exhibition at Gwangju Gallery (1972), he has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions including the 12th Biennale de Sao Paulo (1973), Woodstock Art Gallery (1980), Georg Kolbe Museum (2005), and Sungkok Art Museum (2009). In 2004, he was appointed Emeritus Professor at Seoul National University, and since 2013, he has served as a member of The National Academy of Arts of the Republic of Korea.

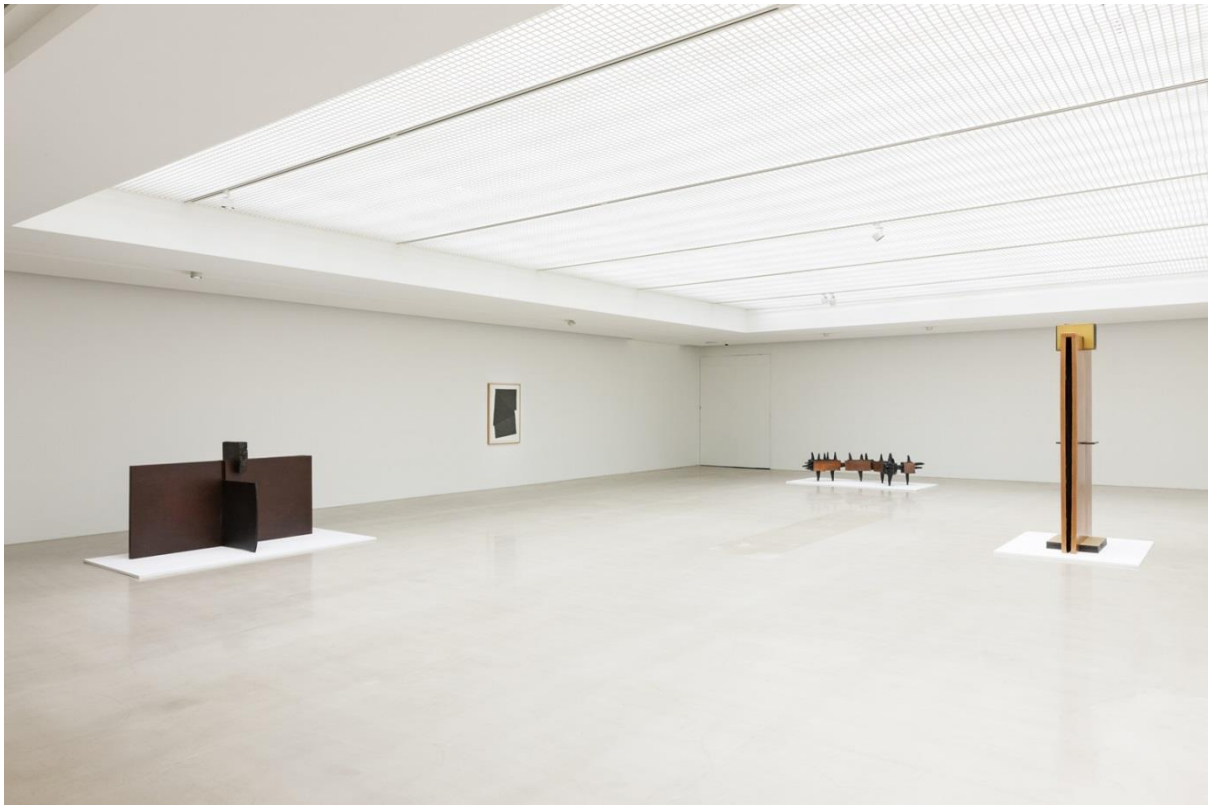
[APPENDIX 1] Installation View



Installation view of *A Stranger Holding Two Wings* at Arario Gallery Cheonan, 2019



Installation view of *A Stranger Holding Two Wings* at Arario Gallery Cheonan, 2019



Installation view of *A Stranger Holding Two Wings* at Arario Gallery Cheonan, 2019



Installation view of *A Stranger Holding Two Wings* at Arario Gallery Cheonan, 2019



Installation view of *A Stranger Holding Two Wings* at Arario Gallery Seoul Samcheong, 2019



Installation view of *A Stranger Holding Two Wings* at Arario Gallery Seoul Samcheong, 2019

**[APPENDIX 3] Artist's CV****TAI-JUNG UM**

b. 1938, Mungyeong, Republic of Korea

- 2013- Member, The National Academy of Arts of the Republic of Korea
- 2004- Emeritus Professor, Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea
- 1981-2004 Professor, College of Fine Arts, Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea
- 1991-1992 Visiting professor, The Berlin University of the Arts UdK, Berlin, Germany
  
- 1979-80 Research course in Fine Arts Sculpture from Saint Martin's School of Art, London, UK
- 1966 Graduated from Graduate School of Education, Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea (M.F.A)
- 1964 Graduated from Department of Sculpture, College of Fine Arts, Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea (B.F.A)

**Awards**

- 2014 Main prize from the 8th Korean Artist's Day by Korean Fine Arts Association
- 2012 Mirok Li Prize from the 7th Mirok Li Award by Korean-German Association
- 1989 Sculpture Prize from the 3rd Kim Se-choong's Sculpture Award by Kim Se-Choong Cultural Foundation, the Republic of Korea
- 1971 Grand Prize from the 2nd Korean Art and Grand Prix by Korean Daily Newspaper, the Republic of Korea
- 1967 Prime Minister's Prize from the 16th National Art Exhibition by the Ministry of Education, the Republic of Korea
- 1962 Participation prize from the 2nd Young Artist Award by The Ministry of Culture and Information, the Republic of Korea

**Solo Exhibitions**

- 2018 Arario Gallery, Cheonan / Seoul Samcheong, Korea
- 2013 Shinsegae Gallery, Busan, Korea
- 2009 Sunggok Museum, Seoul, Korea
- 2005 Georg Kolbe Museum, Berlin, Germany
- 1997 Hyundai Gallery, Seoul, Korea
- 1991 Duson Gallery, Seoul, Korea
- 1984 Duson Gallery, Seoul, Korea
- 1980 Woodstock Art Gallery, London, UK
- 1979 Hyundai Gallery, Seoul, Korea
- 1975 Muramatsu Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 1972 Gwangju Gallery, Gwangju, Korea

## Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2018 The 39th Fine Arts Exhibitions of the National Academy of Arts, Seoul, Korea  
Fine Arts Exhibition of the National Academy of Arts of the Republic of Korea in Japan, Osaka, Japan
- 2017 Special Exhibition of the National Academy of Arts of the Republic of Korea Invited by Asia Culture Center, Gwangju, Korea
- 2015 Untitled Exhibition, the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Gwacheon, Korea
- 2014 Jeju International Sculpture Symposium, Seogwipo, Jeju, Korea  
Ulsan International Sculpture Symposium, Ulsan, Korea
- 2013 Korean Contemporary Art, Jeju Museum of Contemporary Art, Jeju, Korea
- 2012 "Steel Life", Pohang Museum of Steel Art, Pohang, Korea  
Taipei Art Fair, Taipei, Taiwan
- 2011 Review on Korean Sculpture, "Amplitude and Oscillation" Seoul Olympic Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea  
Sculptor's Drawing, Seoul Olympic Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea
- 2010 Strength of Korean Art, Space Gallery, Seoul, Korea
- 2009 "The Passage and Aspect of Korean Contemporary Sculpture", Gyeongnam Art Museum, Changwon, Korea  
Mental Arts in Korea – Pounding and Polishing organized by Ewha Woman's University Museum, Seoul, Korea
- 2008 "8808 Outside In", Soma Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea  
Contemporary Sculpture, Kim Chong-Yung Museum, Seoul, Korea
- 2007 "Critical Review (From Modern to Now)", Insa Art Center, Seoul, Korea  
The Express of Artists and Creative Relationship, Museum of Face, Gwangju, Korea  
Invited Exhibition of Gwangju Museum of Art, Gwangju, Korea  
Korea International Art Fair, COEX, Seoul, Korea
- 2006 "100 Years of Korean Art (Tradition, Human, Art, Reality)", Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea  
Nanji Open Air Environment Sculpture, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea  
"Art at University, 60 Years of Art Education" Museum of Art, Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea  
Korea-Japan Contemporary Art, Korean and Japan Art Association, Sejong Center, Seoul, Korea  
"20th Anniversary of Sculptor Kim Se-Choong", Sungkok Art Museum, Seoul, Korea
- 2005 Korea-Japan Contemporary Art Exhibition, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan
- 2004 Korean Contemporary Art Group Exhibition, Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea  
Korea-Japan Contemporary Art Exhibition, Takashimaya Gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
"Status of Korean Contemporary Sculpture", Moran Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea
- 2003 "New Horizons of Drawing", National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea



- The Korean Contemporary Art, Insa Art Center, Seoul, Korea  
 Modern Gallery, German Culture Center, Seoul, Korea  
 Traditional and Innovation III, Museum of Asian Art, Berlin, Germany  
 Korea-Japan Modern Art Exhibition, Gana Art Gallery, Seoul, Korea  
 Seoul Art Exhibition, Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea
- 2002 Tradition and Innovation II, Museum of Zollverein, Essen, Germany / United Nations, Geneva, Swiss  
 Korea-Japan Contemporary Exhibition, Takashimaya Gallery, Yokohama, Japan □  
 Grands et jeunes d'aujourd'hui Seoul, Sejong Center, Seoul, Korea
- 2001 International Sculpture Symposium, Santo-Tirso, Porto, Portugal  
 Art Exhibition in Paris, Paris, France  
 "21 century of Korean Contemporary Exhibition", Sejong Center, Seoul, Korea  
 Traditional and Innovation I, Korean Cultural Center, Berlin, Germany
- 2000 The Korean Contemporary Art from mid-1960's to mid-1970's, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea.  
 "Grand et jeunes-salon 2000", Eiffel Branly, Paris, France
- 1998 Sculpture Symposium, Gyeongju World Culture EXPO '98, Gyeongju, Korea
- 1997 Today's Sculpture Exhibition, "Depth of Manas", Moran Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea
- 1996 '96 Seoul Art Exhibition, Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea
- 1995 '95 Seoul Art Exhibition, Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea
- 1990 "Mediterranean International Sculpture Symposium", Labin, Croatia
- 1989 The 4th Asian International Art Exhibition, Korean Committee of the Asian International Art Exhibition, Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea
- 1988 International Open Air Sculpture Exhibition, Seoul Olympic Open Air Sculpture Park, Seoul Olympic Game Organizing Committee, Seoul, Korea
- 1987 Contemporary Art, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea
- 1986 '86 Seoul Asian Contemporary Art Exhibition, Asian Games Organizing Committee, Seoul, Korea  
 Exhibition of "Now and Past" of the Korean Modern Art, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea  
 '86 Korean Contemporary Art Trend Exhibition, Asian Games Organizing Committee, Seoul, Korea
- 1985 Exhibition for the 40 Years of the Seoul National University, Seoul National University Museum, Seoul, Korea
- 1984 "Exhibition of Modern Korean Art of the 70's Trend", The Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, Taiwan
- 1983 Korean Modern and Contemporary Art Exhibition, Milano, Italy
- 1982 The Korean Modern and Contemporary Art, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea
- 1981 Exchange Art Exhibition between Korea and Germany, Seoul, Korea  
 '81 Korean Art, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea
- 1979 Korean art "Today's Method", Arts Council Korea, Seoul, Korea
- 1978 20 Years of Korean Contemporary Modern Art Exhibition, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea□

- Environmental Sculpture Exhibition, Space Gallery, Seoul, Korea
- 1977 The Contemporary Art Exhibition of Sculpture by 8 artists, Space Gallery, Seoul, Korea
- 1975 The 13th Biennale de São Paulo, Brazil
- The 2nd Ecole de Seoul Exhibition, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea
- 1974 Korean Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea
- 1974-77 Seoul Exhibition of 70's, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea
- 1973 Korean Modern Art of the Formative Arts in 1957-1972, Myeongdong Gallery, Seoul, Korea
- The 12th Biennale de São Paulo, Brazil
- 1971 The 2nd India Triennale, International Exhibition, India
- The 2nd Korean Grand Prix Art Exhibition, Seoul, Korea
- 1970 The 1st Korean Grand Prix Art Exhibition, The Korea Times, Seoul, Korea
- 70 Special Exhibition of EXPO Korean Pavilion, Osaka, Japan
- 1967-70 The 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th National Art Exhibition, Seoul, Korea

## Public Collections

- 2014 Seogwipo Park, Jeju, Korea
- 2011 Bluemore Motel, Gyeongju, Korea
- 2010 Pohang Museum of Steel Art, Pohang, Korea
- 2008 Yudalsan International Sculpture Park, Mokpo, Korea
- 2006 National Museum of Contemporary Art, Gwacheon, Korea
- 2004 The Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea
- 2003 Embassy of the Republic of Korea. Shanghai, China
- Scholar Sculpture, Mungyeong, Korea
- 2002 Prime Minister Public Hall, Berlin, Germany
- Incheon International Airport, Service Zone, Incheon, Korea
- 2001 International Sculpture Symposium. Santo tirso, Porto, Portugal
- The Judicial Research Training Institute, Ilsan, Korea
- Korea Electric Power Corporation Art Center, Seoul, Korea
- 2000 ASEM Tower, Seoul, Korea
- 1999 Woori Bank, Head Office, Seoul, Korea
- 1998 Ssangyong Motor Company, Pyeongtaek, Korea
- 1996 Bank of Korea, Head Office, Seoul, Korea
- 1995 Supreme Court of Korea, Seoul, Korea
- 1992 Seoul Metropolitan Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea
- 1990 Dubrova Sculpture Park, Labin, Croatia
- Citizens Investment Trust Management Co, Ltd., Seoul, Korea
- 1988 Sculpture Park in Olympic Main Stadium, Seoul, Korea
- 1986 National Contemporary Art Museum, Gwacheon, Korea
- Jamsil Olympic Main Stadium, Seoul, Korea
- Independent Memorial Hall, Cheonan, Korea
- 1978 College of Fine Arts, Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea

# ARARIO GALLERY

[IMMEDIATE RELEASE]

1975 Hoam Museum, Yongin, Korea  
1974 Sejong Cultural Center, Seoul, Korea

**[APPENDIX 3] CRITIC ESSAY****Um Tai-Jung's Theory of Sculpture  
Diving Into the Wide Creek between Materials and Their Immaterial Essence**

Sim Sang Yong (Ph.D. in Art History)

"... Only you can bring unruly will and the passion of the sinner into the domain of order."

- Silentio-

**Sculptor Um Tai-Jung's Prayer**

According to American philosopher Harry Frankfurt (1929~ ), our identities are determined by 'that which we are concerned about, sufficiently, and seriously.' The question of 'what we are concerned about' is akin to asking 'what qualifies as the most crucial among one's interests.' This is what the Frankfurt School is referring to, in their emphasis on 'the importance of what we care about,' for "the fact that someone cares about something arises from a complex matrix of the faculties and conditions of cognition, sentiment, and will" The question of "what we care about,' as such, is also a critical step one must take before arriving at the fourth and last question Kant posed at his logic seminar: "Was ist der Mensch" (what is human). Then, what does Um Tai-Jung care about? To Um, the focus of care is mainly directed toward the act of sculpting, and living as a sculptor. Since his debut as a sculptor in the 1960s, Um Tai-Jung has led a life where sculpting remained the utmost priority.

There were always two branches on the path to facing the world, living in the world with integrity, and also purifying the world – one was that of politics and militaristic ventures, and the other was the art of sculpting. The former is a path where one must combat, subdue, and tame the enemy by mobilizing strategy and force, while the latter is a path on which one must face oneself along the trail within the interiority of existence. The path of strategy and force, which served as the predominant way throughout the greater portion of human history, invariably led to distress and tragedy. Contrarily, the path to sculpture is peaceful, free, and beautiful. The particularities of Um's reflection on the path sculpting art must take was concretized through his encounter with Brancusi's sculptures. Um notes: "his [Brancusi's] sculpture art is redolent with the aroma of beauty, peace, and freedom, permeating all terrains of the earth with the primitive eternity of art and the sincere manifestation of truth." Um was strongly drawn to the reflections on the reticent yet deeply inherent essences that reside within the relationality with all entities of the world, and the

figurative foundation and atmosphere that gladly surrenders all splendor, visual charm, or sculptural ornateness seen in Constantin Brancusi's sculptures. Also, Um was moved by how Brancusi found his aesthetic wellspring in his mother nation Rumania's ethnic and folk tradition, despite their somewhat exaggerated tendency. Brancusi's Endless Column still remains a frequent reference in Um's drawings and paintings.

The meditative tone of Brancusi's sculptures clearly originates from the philosophies of Jetsun Milarepa (1040-1123), a saint in the Tibetan Buddhism by which Brancusi himself was deeply fascinated. Born in the town of Gunthan near the Nepal borders in 1040 to become one of the four most prominent theorists in Tibetan Buddhism, Milarepa is depicted as touching his ear in Lamaist icon. The gesture illuminates his sainthood, who always heeds truth. Records state that he had committed the indelible sin of learning black magic at the behest of his mother, only to promptly repent and devote himself to Buddhist practice for life, eventually achieving the greatest level of enlightenment in Tibet's history by assiduously applying himself to the extent of subsisting on mere nettle porridge until his entire body turned green. The vision of the sculpture as such a figure who fully embraces the identity of a seeker of truth, and sculpture as an act of constantly plowing away at the path of truth-seeking were the very image and path that Brancusi yearned for, and Um hoped to follow.

The vision of sculpture as an act of 'truth-seeking' and sculptor as a 'seeker of truth' becomes reconfigured into the ideal of sculpture as a 'pilgrimage,' and sculptor as a 'pilgrim,' as evident in the titles of the works presented in the exhibition – such as Route of Pilgrimage-Kaaba No.1 (2015) and Route of Pilgrimage-Kaaba No.2 (2015), and Song of Kaaba (1999). As Kaaba refers to the name of the central temple at the Islamic world's holy land Mecca, the route of pilgrimage to Kaaba would mean the path to enlightenment (rather than the temple of any specific religion). The very idea of pilgrimage is near-obsolete concept in our time, which is a spiritless age that is teeming with dry rationality devoid of sincerity. Um's work suggests that only those who have the identity and spirituality of a pilgrim may "explore the essence of time and space with guileless humility," and tread the path of sculpture, which is neither declarative nor magnificent.

Such faith and attitude became the foundation of his theory of sculpture, which dictates that sculpture cannot be confined to three or four-dimensional space-time in its relation to material properties, structural exploration or formal formation, and instead must be open to all – "the cosmos, the sky, the earth, mountains, humans, rivers, the blooming of flowers, or even the chirping of birds." This is what Um Tai-Jung cares about as a sculptor, as effectively reflected in his poem "I Pray to Become a Sculpture."

"I pray everyday

That my prayer would  
Become a sculpture.

...

I pray that grief would become a sculpture,  
And unhappiness be turned into a sculpture.  
That falsity would become a sculpture,  
And evil turned into a sculpture.

His theory of sculpture, wherein destitution or even suffering is embraced, is based on the sincerity of a seeker who sets out to find 'the truth of truths,' extending beyond the domain of aesthetics. See another passage from Um's poem Seeking a Stranger: "The I... calls out toward the Other./ Deity is the Other ... / Art also, in its work/ seeks out the beauty of the Other."

Diving into the wide creek between materiality and its immaterial essence!

Over time, that which sculptor Um Tai-Jung cares about has emerged in crystalline form – sculpture as an exploration of foundational issues such as materiality, structure, and space within a minimum range of formal variation, while maintaining distance from emotional pursuit or the sense of "electrifying stimuli, savory palette, or innovative ideas." With time, he emptied out the dramatics of life, the banalities of ordinary routines, and especially opportune narratives—a sense of denouement, outcry, declaration, or message—that spring from acts such as joining politicized marches. This process is also the very one by which the aesthetic creed of refraining from enlisting material for persuasive or rhetorical purposes has been established. This approach is more akin to an ethical rather than aesthetic stance, imparting the humility of positioning oneself as a "mere guest, hailed by sculpture, and metal." Part of the implication here is that sculptors are not people who freely express and spout everything they feel in the way they feel, but those who never ceases to approach truth through moderated expression and emission.

It must be noted that the above stance, meanwhile, does not aspire to Mersault's cold composure in the face of his mother's death as seen in Camus's 『The Stranger』, or Lord Byron's idea of 'the heartless.' Sculptor Um's gradual recession from carving off, polishing, and brushing materials does not point to an intent to realize 'material in and of itself' in a state of severance from the external world as proposed by modernist theories of sculpting. We must not confuse his abandonment of the lexicon of the open plaza and adoption of a more minimalist mode of speech with the attitude of placing material or materiality on the pedestal of ultimate value, as if "preferring hanging to misguided marriage."

This tendency becomes more apparent in his drawings and paintings. Um has been producing drawings and paintings in his spare time while beating, shaving, and welding iron. He explains these attempts as an opportunity to move away from 'the heaviness of sculptures' to further immerse himself in the movement of energy itself. In other words, the relative lightness of materiality in drawings or paintings allowed him to seek out new possibilities in his view of 'sculptures as poetry.' Coming from this position, he does not shy away from the joy of drawing's tendency of emptying out, and the intuition that arises from the spectrum of colors, for faith is fundamentally the matter of the heart – albeit a moderated and filtered enjoyment, a form of play. It is a far easier way to counter the falsity of 'sculptural reason' in modernist theories of sculpture. Um's drawings and paintings quietly orate the fact that his path distinctly differs from the Stoic vision of Apatheia – freedom from passion.

Um's world is intricately interconnected to the external world. His theory of sculpture is unrelated to modern rhetorics that aim to evince nihilistic indifference to the world. Instead, it goes so far as to serve as an invitation of revelation beyond mere openness to the world. For instance, iron or aluminum function as a space where worldly cognition and metaphysical aspiration intermingle. His iron and aluminum can even be seen as holy vessels that contain supernatural order, such as Chi or force. Um confides that he "sees the divine providence of creation in all material, and therefore fears and marvels at all material." His sculptures are, as such, a form of sincere devotion offered in search of a certain metaphysical leap, as in the act of diving into the abyss— or, what Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) once called 'a wide creek'—between materiality and its fundamentally immaterial essence.

**A Stranger Holding Two Wings: Artist Um Tai-Jung's Sculpting toward Emptying and Filling**

Dr. Yeonhwa Joo (Executive Director, Arario Gallery)

"My work is material. Sculptures are material. As art requires materials for its formation, art itself is none other than material. One could even say I am a material enthusiast.."

- Um Tai-Jung -

As one who considers sculpting his very calling, artist Um Tai-Jung has been working with metal materials such as steel, copper, and aluminum for over five decades. The results are testaments to his reflection on "what sculpture is," and the product of his ceaseless maneuvering with metal, with his own hands and body. In his long journey in the area of sculpting, working on and with materials, Um attempted to demonstrate his view of the world through that very material, or as that very material. His post-war steel work, the bronze pieces in the 1990s, and the aluminum productions in the 2000s are the product of the times, something that is material and made of that material as shown in the title of a piece called Bronze – Object-Age, and also the projection of the body and mind of Um himself as a human being. Now in his eighties, Um views his work as material but also the unknown beyond the domain of material – his production process is a play, and a contemplation that falls somewhere in between.

Um, who won awards at the National Exhibition in 1967 and 1969 (the highest honor) and hosted his first solo exhibition at the Gwangju Chamber of Commerce in 1972, cemented his position as a member of the first generation of abstract sculptors in Korea with metal sculptures made of steel and bronze in the 1960s and 1970s. The following excerpt from a record from the 1970s effectively articulates the potentials he found in metal sculptures, and the significance of his pursuit of abstract sculpture.

"Metal engraving is the art of fire. There exists the resistance of metallicity in the flames, and the strong spirit of fight in fire. The raw material may be scrubby copper boards, but cut up into various forms, melted down with fire and welded together, they become an airborne object as slender as a bird, and crystallizations that are more solid than a rock. Also, connected and conjoined, they generate a wave of force like a writhing gesture of a dragon, and emit a powerful resistance like a wall. I want to investigate the secret of form nestled within the copper plates to the very end. They have their own form, language, and expression. To me, sculptures are the very embodiments of the lives of one who seeks the essence of form."



Um's comment illuminates the joy of identifying the potential of steel as a new material beyond the scope of stone or wood, and his desire to uncover the language and expression of the pure materiality of the copper plate. Moreover, his words demonstrate the modernist perspective of the first generation of abstract sculptors in that he seeks the form of the material itself, and the essence of the form instead of considering the material as a means of representing the external world or creating a certain form. Still, some of his works from the period are subtitled "Energy," as seen in his piece *Untitled*, which was awarded the highest honors at the third National Art Exhibition in 1969. Um has noted that the subtitle exhibits the Eastern conceptualization of Nature, which he harbored at the time.

In the mid-1970s, Um switches over from steel to bronze. Softer than steel, resistant to corrosion, and semi-permanent in its durability, bronze opened up a new horizon for him. His time as a student in the UK in the 1980 was when he was working on Bronze; his bronze sculptures and drawings were exhibited together at the Woodstock Gallery in the 1980s. These pieces feature the overflows produced in the process of welding in raw form. Um asserts that his intent was to reveal the properties of the material. From the mid-1980s on, the traces of the welding process and its results are removed through repetitive grinding.

The material and the product of the artist's "treatment" of it are the result of the body and its action, but they are also more than that. Um harbored the desire to make works wherein consciousness directly becomes Nature instead of opting for a pre-existing object; this conceptual reflection becomes further structuralized through the idea of the Sky, the Earth, and the Human in the 1990s. To Um, who believed that art should reflect not only its materiality but also the customs, religion, and life of the human beings entangled in the process, the productions from this period were strong expressions of his intellectual desire of his youth.

The pure material interest in the materials he uses, and the yearning to illuminate said material naturally led Um to the artworld of Brancusi, who is known as the father of contemporary sculpture. Even now, Um maintains that Brancusi is both the origin and goal of his own work, and appends that Brancusi himself commented on his own pursuit of the essence of objects. According to Um for instance, *Kiss* (1923), which Um considers to be the best in Brancusi's entire oeuvre, "may be produced by chipping off stone from an external perspective, but in fact it is something that dropped off the sky just as it is." Brancusi's works, wherein the form reveals itself while also disappearing into the material, fall in line with Um's recent art world as it veers toward the aesthetics of emptying out and filling in.

Um Tai-Jung's solo exhibition *A Stranger Holding Two Wings*, hosted by Arario Gallery, comprises about forty pieces of Um's works, from ones produced in the 1970s up to his most recent productions. The exhibition takes place in two spaces, Cheonan and Seoul. The Cheonan exhibition begins with a piece produced in 1969, leading into his signature works from each

period, and then his most recent productions made of aluminum and steel. According to the artist, aluminum and steel never become rusty even when installed outdoors, because they are "corrosion resistant" (in a complementary manner). In particular, Um sees aluminum as a material that relates to "weight," which therefore does not exhibit strong materiality unlike bronze or steel. Among various metals, steel or metal are ones that display their material property conspicuously, and are therefore not optimal choices when one wishes to go with a minimalist expression.

Since the 2000s, Um has endeavored to capture the philosophy of emptying-out, vacating all characteristics and instead opting for the serene and poetic. In this regard, aluminum was seen as the optimal material. Appearing to be lighter in heaviness and presence but still retaining the sense of weight (Um's aluminum pieces are, in fact, masses with full insides), aluminum was a material that could most effectively convey Um's pursuit of "that which is empty yet still full" while demonstrating the "artistic quality and materiality of weight" in its emptiness. The discovery of aluminum was the most significant event in Um's art world; since then, he has attempted to crystalize the idea of that which is empty yet full, or in other words his philosophy of emptying and filling, by embracing aluminum as both his subject matter and material while revealing the essential characteristics and language of the material through its use. As shown in the titles of works such as *Serene Wall & I* (2017) or *A Stranger Holding Two Wings* (2017), Um objectifies and observes as not only the creator but also an "other" to his own production. This stance tells us that his philosophy has crossed boundaries, moving on from the conceptual to the ideational over the past two decades.

The Seoul exhibition, which opens simultaneously with the one in Cheonan, presents his two-dimensional works, which he comprehensively calls 'drawings.' Apart from the term's literal meaning that it refers to work drawn by hand on paper, however, not all of the pieces should wear that label. A more fitting term for the works shown at the underground exhibition space in Seoul, in this regard, would be 'two-dimensional work.' There are certain sketches to be used for sculptures and drawings as study (mostly in the case of the works shown at the 1st floor exhibition space in Seoul), the two dimensional productions – which are based on his recourse to repetition since the 2000s, the difference in concentration arising from the results of his action, and the delicate difference of feeling/sensitivity coming from difference in color – are conceptually aligned with his sculptures in their repetitive delicacy, and the subtlety that originates from endless repetition. The repetitive act of striking steel or grinding aluminum-made expressions are yet again repeated on his two-dimensional pieces. The subtle color difference coming from the grinding technique shifts toward an exquisite difference in color, taking on the shape of 1x1cm sized squares in repetitive patterns. The forms that emerge from this subtle color difference range from basic formal units such as circles, lines, and planes, or abstract figures. The act of filling in over 21,000 squares, stationed in a square plane of 145x145cm, almost seems like an act of meditating on Brancusi's *Endless Column* (1938) as it connects with the sky.

Um Tai-Jung called himself a material enthusiast, but perhaps a more fitting way to describe him would be a meditator who creates and contemplates the relationships between materials and the sculptor himself, and among people who encounter the sculptures he makes, and the very spaces they occupy through his sculptures—a kind of a new living presence in its own. Certain materials exist within the fabric of time and space. An artwork, however, can reside in a certain space while transcending time. Some artworks could even transcend not only time, but concrete spaces – these would be works that continuously generate new meaning and space within the physical relationship with the beholder. Um's works are positioned between time and eternity, space and that which is not spatial in that they allow for the existence of invisible space while itself occupying space, and also in that this invisible space is formed through its relationship with the viewer. It is something that creates space within space. Like Um himself, his works begin with but transcend the material, and seek to fill by emptying out, reaching beyond the bodily traces even as they are born of the toils of handcraft.

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### **Image Courtesy of ARARIO GALLERY**

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