

## On the Colors That Cannot be Named (2018)

By. Lee Seon-yeong (art critic)

If someone comes across Cheolwon Chang's works in places other than exhibition spaces, he/she may not recognize them as artworks. Although Artience Daejeon is an exhibition that pursues the interactive dialog between science and technology and art, his 'works' appear to be devices for visual perception experiments concerning colors and shapes. However, as exceptional and enigmatic phenomena are needed to stimulate research in the fields of science and technology, artists need a medium to put together and analyze the abundant outcomes of their experiences generated based on their intuition. Chang's works fall under the latter category. [Splitting the Rainbow] at the entrance of the exhibition hall shows repetitions of 12 colors painted with acrylic colors on the canvas. This 'geometrical abstract painting' seen with naked eyes is painted with colors that recall the rainbow. Isaac Newton is the first scientist known to have separated the light that came into a dark room into the colors of the rainbow by passing it through a prism. After that, the colors of the rainbow were divided into pieces and analyzed at the labs.

In [The Enigma of Color], Margarete Bruns saw Newton's achievement as the development of a new model for the accurate analysis of the natural phenomenon by splitting, quantifying and reassembling it. Chang leads viewers to watch his painting of rainbow colors through a piece of acrylic panel in the shape of a smartphone. The painting looked through this simple device does not show different colors of the rainbow but a single solid color such as red, yellow or green, Rainbow has analytical colors, but the intervention of the device reveals a color reverted to its genuine state. The next work, [Stars from the CMY] expanded the room for the intervention of light through colors/shapes printed on multi-layered transparent panels. The combination of colors or lights takes place real-time according to where a viewer's eyes are. The artist says that ink is originally a subtractive mixture, but he has achieved the result of additive color mixture as in the case of light through the transparent device.

[Two Frames] presents the effect of two straight lines interfering with each other to appear as curves. These 'curves' formed by red and green straight lines are the

results of optical illusion known as the 'Moiré effect.' Experiments are primarily carried out by combining the minimal elements to distinguish significant differences. The results should be shared universally and repeated in other tests by third parties to ensure objectivity. In general, art is considered to be the opposite. Art deviates from standards. However, when standards are lacking, art sometimes creates new standards, or provides the starting point for them. The standards last only quite briefly, though. Art is reproductive. In seeking reproduction, it is also scientific. Art history records geniuses who were both scientists and artists. Nevertheless, most of these geniuses pay attention to mysterious phenomena that can't be (scientifically) codified in the latter parts of their lives. It was the same in the case of Newton, who disassembled light.

The true nature that can't be reverted to any other thing itself becomes art. It can be compared to the distinction by Claude Lévi-Strauss of the differences among science, myth, art, etc. through the contrast between structure and accident. Unlike science, art creates structure from accidents. However, science starts from structures. Chang, as a formative artist, must have been interested in phenomena fundamental for the forms of colors. He must have wanted to know an accurate method of classifying the unnameable colors that he saw in numerous famous paintings, and he needed to overcome his personal weakness of not being good at using colors. The scientific and artistic theme in which he has been absorbed for the last few years was the standard for colors. His collaborators in the project were scientists from the Korea Research Institute of Standards and Science. It is also a philosophical topic, concerning that it involves accurate definitions (or naming) of certain phenomena. In addition, the question of who establishes the standards recalls 'the relationship between discourse and power' (Michel Foucault).

The reason Chang could focus on the issue for a long time is because it is a fundamental issue, and not a peripheral one. He may not have gotten a satisfactory answer until now, but there are always some accomplishments derived from such an attempt. It would be reckless to imitate Ludwig Wittgenstein in his later years and say 'The color that can be named is not the color,' citing the experiences of various painters. In his previous works, the artist tried to get standard colors by painting dozens of color paints and measuring them with color calibration devices. Through experiments using the matter of paint, which poses numerous variables, the artist realized that the basic color particles do not exist individually but interact with one another, and that measurement is relative. Of course, being relative does not mean

being indeterminable. Determination is not causal but probabilistic. Contemporary science, which has broken away from Newton's paradigm, is known to be dependent on probability.

Meanwhile, it is necessary, but not sufficient, to define colors from the perspective of science and technology. According to Chang, 'Colors are related to light and light is defined as wavelength,' but the physical receptor that perceives them differs from people to people. The result of his research shows that the conditions of sunlight are different in various areas of the earth, which has a somewhat oval shape. Above all, a color never appears alone. Colors also change according to the context. As they come into view in combination with matters including the materials that constitute paints, they are exposed to a variety of variables. Colors may have no constants, just variables. However, these uncertainties are the charm of colors. Novelty and diversity come from such uncertainties. In today's world where everything gets systematized, humane and artistic freedom may be found in such an area. We can't argue about colors as easily as we do about shapes, which can be connected to meanings. It may well be said that a painter's weapon is not the shape (meaning) but color (style).

However, people's naked eyes can't always be the standards. Our environment is transforming into the display environment, as it happened to printed matters in the past, and new systems have their own standards. For example, by entering a certain number, you can get the color that you want. 'Objectivity' in this sense will be further universalized as the territory of machines such as AI becomes wider. The goal of these systems will be to gradually eliminate factors of uncertainties including human nature and expand phenomena that can be numeralized. Many things in the human domain, that used to be untransparent, have become transparent little by little in the gleam of enlightenment since the modern era. The enlightenment efforts did not end at some point in the past, but they are becoming stronger in the advent of an age in which machines wrap around our bodies and minds. Chang's [Residency Diary], a work made of printed OHP films, is the record of his thoughts related to his work for five months, where transparent printed films interfere with one another to substantially diminish readability.

It's a documentation that started when he first joined the Artience Daejeon program, and it must be containing details of his attempts to find the standards of colors and his intentions related to the works he created using the standards. However, the

artist wanted to merely see rather than read it. Still, we can see the numerous layers that filled up all those hours. It looks like some kind of a lump, but those who have the will to read it may be able to read it by separating the films and inserting something bright below one of them. To see and to read are two different activities. To make something that one saw readable, to understand it in depth, and to reproduce it or enable its production, comprise the process of symbolizing the intransparency of objects so that it can be transparent. Today's world is more transparent than the world of the past. However, it's not clear whether this transparency further diversifies the world and enriches people. Chang's work/research is one of his attempts to understand the untransparent phenomena including colors in a more transparent way. That may be an extremely difficult task of determining the possible boundaries, in an attempt to cross beyond them in the end.