

CONCERNING ORIGINS¹⁾

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In 1962, Insik Quac was about 45 years old. At this age, many mediocre artists either are persisting in their youthful adventures or on the contrary, start to turn against their past and retreat in the name of maturity. Yet, for an extremely few gifted artists, this becomes the time when they make their first step onto an entirely new trajectory that exceeds all expectations. The situation for Quac is perhaps the latter. At the very least, one can denote that it is in this year that Quac carried out a huge transition. This transition, albeit a sensible one, still can be called a rebirth without shedding the old skin, as it retains the essential traits of Quac's works. Without fear of exaggeration, I would say that at this time, Insik Quac, as an artist who has found his own language, made his first appearance in this world.

It was probably after March, an important change emerged from Quac's tableau, as he introduced things such as wire, *go* stone, light bulbs, and glass pieces, and created irregular patterns out of these foreign objects. A piece of plank glass cracked by a steel ball was embedded in a layer of thick paint, occupying the middle of the surface. This might appear to be a mere continuation of his works up to the previous month, in particular, the group of works in which he put together fractured pieces of glass panes. However, it is not that simple; this work bears the seed of something new and different. In short, we start to see a reverse relationship between materials and tableau. In opposition to the logic of the tableau, in which that presentation (or representation) is established by organizing things as signs or materials into order, in this work, objects do not just assume subordinating roles as materials, but rather, they constitute the whole field where events occur. In other words, it is at this point that a "logic of things" quietly began to surface.

This transformation was not a simple negation of tableau. Nor was it a part of the general trend that aimed for complete destruction of form at that time. A piece of plank glass that bears the event of having been

1) This text is an edited version of "CONCERNING ORIGINS" by Toshiaki Minemura in *INSIK QUAC EXHIBITION* Brochure(1975), Osaka Formes Gallery(Tokyo), as a text file. Please note that the corrected errors in the original text are marked as footnotes in this version.

cracked by a steel ball is sealed in the middle of the work, causing an unpleasant sensation at first glance. Surrounding it are the glass fragments, employed as natural materials and woven together within a paint-plaster mixture. The shape of fragmented glass as supplementary materials soon disappears; the thick paint stops asserting itself; the cracked glass pane starts to obtain autonomy as if it is about to gobble up the tableau. That is to say, instead of conforming to the form of the tableau, the objects, in fact, transform the form of the tableau entirely and establish the “logic of *things*.” The transformation from materials to objects was perfected in the summer of the same year. At the latest, it was in July that Quac’s glass work, a work that sufficiently represent the rebirth of Insik Quac—a tableau that was not a tableau—was created. It might seem an abrupt transformation for it started only a few months since the inception, but if one considers the steady process, one can say that the time was just enough.

Ironically, Quac's first art book was published right after this. Since the book only collects his works from 1956 to May 1962, a point when the artist made a half step into a period of drastic transformation, the book does not showcase the full picture of Quac's works. In other words, due to the time of the compilation of the artbook, one cannot delineate in a lucid sense the state of Quac’s works from 1961, when he began his “irregular painting with foreign objects,” to 1962 when he initiated the fundamental transition “from materials to objects.” It is not surprising that great trust was put into the paintings imbued with intense colors and tinted by a strong sense expressionism, as Quac absorbs Surrealism, Art Informel, and Monochromism in his own distinct manner throughout the preceding five years. For instance, in his article “An Avant-garde Artist: Insik Quac and his Works” that was included in the artbook, Takachiyo Uemura introduces Quac's works between 1961 and 1961 in the following words:

- * “The next step—works which exhibit his most recent intentions, is exemplified by his experiments in works of *Matterism*..... in which he found special interest to utilize materials freely without restrictions. For example, in “Sakuhin” (“A Work”), white-painted light bulbs are lined up on a black and yellow background. In other words, we see a thin wire floating upon the white monochrome background, or *go* stones scattered on the white monochrome surface. The canvas that delivers the mysterious figures of wires and hemp is painted in golden monochrome, generating an interesting semi-relief feeling as it seems to vividly convey the body odor and inner voice of the artist. Aside from these, there are works of beads attached to silver and yellow monochromes, and works made of black braids and white paint. There is also a group of works created by Quac’s free usage of wire brush, spangles, and chopsticks.

When we look back from the present on these *experiments with Matterism*, they seem to have reached a final stage in Quac's works of fractured glass. In these works, there are fragmented pieces of a glass bottle glued onto white background. We also see sharp edges made out of special glass that are stuck on plaster.

These works that experiment with *Matterism* are still in a stage of development, and from this point on how they will unfold remains unclear. *That is to say, as works, they have not yet attained the level of crystal clarity as it is achieved by his previous series of monochrome paintings.*" (Italics by the author.)

It is not solely Uemura's fault to take Quac's works at this period as "experiments in *Matterism*." Because Quac's transition in 1962 unraveled from the inner dimension of his previous works, in the eyes of close observers, his later works mark a strong continuity from the "irregular patterns of foreign objects." Furthermore, "free utilization of materials of one's interests without restrictions" has long been an established belief of the avant-garde milieu. Starting in 1954, Quac has displayed his works in the Yomiuri Independent Exhibition for a few years, and is known to be in conversation with Ushio Shinohara, Masunobu Yoshimura, and Tomio Miki, a group of young men who perhaps have not entered their twenties. It is certain that Quac, in a slightly distant position, was observing with keen interests the activities of these younger colleagues of his. Moreover, if we consider the temporal juncture between 1954 and 1962, when the Japanese art world was undergoing drastic transformations such as the deconstruction of form and the liberation of materials, it may be quite natural to view Insik Quac's transition as a delayed conversion to "*Matterism*".

However, it is precisely because of this that we, who are currently reevaluating Quac's works from a temporal distance, must firmly reject such a view. The crux of the issue is not the free, unrestricted usage of materials; instead, it is entirely the opposite: the overcoming of the concept of "materials." At first glance, Quac seems to be occupied with the same mission as his younger colleagues who, at that time, were creating semiotic transformations of real things and objects that were loaded with meanings, as they either were taming objects to be their own materials for expression, or on the contrary, trying to unleash the objects from any form of containment; however, the fact was that Quac was standing on the side of the logic of things. In this situation, Quac was working against the concepts of material and *objet*. Material is subordinate to the formative process, and *objet* is

subordinate to semantics and semiotic operations. Around 1960, almost all of Japanese *avant-garde* artists followed one of these two trajectories. This is not limited to the three artists that are mentioned previously. This also applies to the Gutai Group, Shusaku Arakawa, Tetsumi Kudo, Jiro Takamatsu, Natsuyuki Nakanishi, and Genpei Akasegawa (Although the last four artists showcase a distinct interest in the autonomy or self-propagation of things and events, we should understand their interests as rather an extension from the automatism in Surrealism, and have a fundamentally different point of origin compared to Quac's "logic of things"). Destruction, action, *objet*, rupture—all of these concepts that are familiar to the young *avant-garde* artists in the 1960 may seem to have appeared in the works of Insik Quac in 1962; however, the connection is rather loose. On the note of the loose connection, we can say that Quac was anticipating without realizing it, the works of the younger generation that entered the world several years later at the end of the 1960s.

When we try to link Insik Quac's works with the works of the artists associated with the "Mono-ha" ("The School of Things") movement at the end of the '60s, we may be confronted with problems from both sides. Yet this is not the place to go into a detailed comparison. It is without a doubt that U-Fan Lee, the main theoretical contributor of the "Mono-ha," obtained many insights from his exchange with Quac, and conversely, that many of Quac's works were placed in a new light because of the reception from Lee. In Lee's piece titled "Phenomenon and Perception", displayed in 1969 and later shown at the 1971 Paris Biennial, a sheet of glass pane, smashed by a large stone, was placed on the floor and exhibited in this state. This specific work cannot fail to remind us of both the technical and conceptual aspects of Quac's 1962 landmark work. Lee was making a conscious attempt to give to structure of the "logic of things," a path that Quac stepped into spontaneously. Of course, considering Lee's work to be inspired by Quac's previous work does not mean that it should be discredited. Rather, isn't it true that this type of relationship—something modern Japanese art milieu should have held as its internal structure, has ultimately fallen apart nowadays? The fact that both Quac and Lee are Koreans who moved to Japan when they were young should not become an excuse for us to treat the connection as a special one.

Quac's transition in 1962 was both a turning point for Quac as an individual and a foreshadowing moment of the following transformation in the Japanese art world at the end of the 1960s. We should probably consider it as an intricate yet profound event.

In the works of fractured glass, which were to some extent perfected in the summer of 1962, two perspectives concerning objects emerged. When the two unique perspectives are obtained from within a single artwork in close entanglement with each other, they cannot be grasped as separable insights. One of them, as was mentioned in the previous section, is that objects are responsible for the totality of events and their emergence, so it should be treated as a unified field. The other point concerns the preservation of identity.

These works remind one the worldwide current of New Realism and Neo-Dadaism around 1960s, when many artists who are informed by the concept of “event,” experimented with the accidental creation of paintings. The Japanese art world did not even wait till the appearance of Niki de Saint-Phalle's “Feu-de Volonte” (“Shoot at Will”) in 1961, a painting that was created by an “event” caused by a carbine rifle. Toshio Yoshida from the “Gutai Group” had shot through a board with an air-rifle (1955), and in the following year, Shozo Shimamoto from the same group used a canon made from an iron pipe to leave colors on a huge screen. Because of these works, people said Quac's works were made of glass that had been cracked by an air-rifle, and these dramatic interpretations have drawn much attention. Although Quac did not use an air-rifle, it is perhaps that Quac is good friends with Ushio Shinohara, the creator of works like “Boxing Picture” (1960), people see their career backgrounds as interconnected.

However, when we look back upon Quac's works, an essential point that we must guard ourselves against is the superficial mismatching between Quac's works and the anti-art movement which occurred at the same time. Whether it be Niki, Shimamoto, or Shinohara, each of them ultimately stayed with the basic premise of painting—that is works created by applying colors onto the surface. They did nothing more than attempt to deviate from traditional procedure and form. Consequently, this type of anti-art is just an episode within the parameter of painting. In opposition to this, although at first glance Quac's works are working around the form of tableau, in fact, they end up negating the principle of dualism (expression and material, reality and representation) in painting. Perhaps he did shoot a glass pane with an air rifle. And even if he did, it probably has nothing to do with any act of expressionism or anti-art statement. This becomes clear when we consider how his other glass works focus intensely on one point, the preservation of identity—something I will discuss later.

2) The position of chapter 2 was incorrectly written In the original text(1975). So In this version, the author has corrected the position of a chapter 2.

Quac's fractured glass pane is both a sign for the occurred event and the very field of its occurrence. This unification overcomes the principle of duality of painting, and because of this, has a positive meaning that is associated with the concept of the event. Furthermore, the tension of this work lies in whether "the totality of happening" can illustrate the "the unification between the sign and the field," and is independent of the dramatic nature of the event itself. The cracks on the glass, according to the artist himself, are done via a slow and patient process of hitting it with a small steel ball. Rather than compromising the tension, this procedure should be seen as a more attentive process: Dig a hole in the ground, cover it with a glass pane, lay a sheet of wet paper on the glass, and drop a steel ball. Or, attach a glass pane to a wooden board, and while the paint still retains degrees of softness, strike it with a steel ball. Once, twice—without guarantee for any success, Quac accumulates all the preparations and efforts.

What, after all, was the goal of these efforts, efforts whose aimed for a total natural-looking result? The other, previously mentioned unique point of view offered by the work is directly related to the question. Via cracking the glass, the identity of the glass is preserved. In other words, in order to materialize the unification of "the sign and the field" of the event, one has to preserve the singularity of the object. Or perhaps this relationship should be diagrammed as the relationship between two operations which mutually attract each other as follows: on the one hand (the side of the action), the action of breaking the glass seeks the unification of the site and the sign of the event, as well as the preservation of the identity of glass; on the other hand (the side of the object), the glass calls for its own destruction in order to realize its identity. That is to say, perhaps we can say that the drive for objects to self-preserve and to self-transform are intimately connected, and became a unique motivation for Quac's works.

In fact, between 1962 and 63, Quac created several pieces of glass works apart from the cracked glass, but all of these, regardless of the variation in style and shape, all aim to affirm the coherent identity of glass as an object. For instance, there is a work with small, varied fragments of glass glued to a large rectangular piece of frosted glass as though they were scattered on it, and a work with two kinds of small glass pieces piled on top of the other and placed in the center of a square glass. Moreover, we see works composed of several pieces of small, square glass attached to one another in the center of a glass mirror. All of these works that are made from putting glass on top of glass showcase, in other words, "glass as the field," and "glass as event". This is precisely the reason why I evoke, at the beginning of the piece, the "logic of *things*".

I don't know to what extent Insik Quac was consciously enacting this "logic of *things*" at that time. However, we can see from the coherent

production of glass works throughout 1962-63, and later, how Quac started to create a group of works with brass panes, that this is not just a whimsical idea or a thought experiment. The pursuit for the identity of the object not only anticipated the previously mentioned works of U-Fan Lee, but also the 1968-69 works of Nobuo Sekine ("Phase--Mother Earth", "Phase of Nothingness--

Oily Clay"),³⁾ and the works of Kishio Suga starting with "Paraffin". These works demonstrate that such a pursuit would expand and reach a higher dimension. If the term "higher dimension" might sound flawed, it might be better to say that the vision of one idea as a singular concept may be developed. This is because this younger generation departed from a moment when the two perspectives of Quac, mentioned at the beginning of this section, were already merged into each other. Hence, for them, the "logic of *things*" was surpassed., and they have already reached the stage of seeking aimless actions and the self-identity of play. (This is also the reason why I hesitate to call them the "Mono-ha" ((School of Objects.))

In a short period between 1962 and 1963, only a few of these glass pieces were created. Rather than being created, perhaps we should say that these works, one by one, offered new perspectives to be comprehended. There are only a limited number of works that we can scrutinize at present. Yet it is certain that the achievement of Insik Quac's career was not limited to these few glass works. However, I can say without hesitation that the best of Quac's art emerged from these few pieces of glass work. Above all else, the series of fractured works achieved the highest level of tension. As I discussed earlier, this is not because of the dramatic nature of the action of striking glass with either a steel ball or an air-rifle. This level of tension comes from the unity of "*sign and field*" achieved by the thing "glass". At that time, Quac was already expecting "the aimlessness of action" in illuminating the self-identity of objects.

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Although the works of Insik Quac branched off into several heterogenous directions after 1963, we may still be able to view Quac as advancing on the continued path of developing the "logic of *things*," which Quac exhibited in his glass works. For example, A work in which he drilled small holes into an iron plate in a circular pattern appeared around 1968.

In the original Japanese and English texts published in the 1975 book, the title of Nobuo Sekine's work was incorrectly marked. The author has corrected "Emptiness The Earth" and "Emptiness Clay" as "Phase-Mother Earth" and "Phase of Nothingness—Oily Clay"

Instead of treating this as influenced by Fontana——certainly, we should fully consider the possibility that Quac had studied Fontana, and this could be extremely likely—— it is still more productive to understand Quac's moves after the glass works as continued explorations and pursuit of the identity of object. First of all, Quac's works lack Fontana's spatial dimension; and secondly, Quac's fondness for asymmetrical circle cannot be located in Fontana's works.

However, at first glance, the previously mentioned two perspectives, which were integrated into Quac's initial fractured glass works, were pursued separately in his later works for a short period. Along with that, the spontaneous character of the glass works faded away, and the solidification of ideas began to appear. We can perhaps say that 1967 marks a crisis period for Insik Quac. The group of works in which brass objects are attached to a particular surface while giving a glimpse on conceptually colored panels, even showcase a regression from the "logic of *things*" to the "logic of tableau". At the very least, these works no doubt showcase a conceptual detachment between the field and the sign. It was likely difficult for Quac to fully grasp the true outline of the "logic of *things*" after he initiated it in 1962, and his negotiation with the idea back and forth may have been inevitable. Symptoms of this negotiation seem to have appeared right after the fractured glass pieces.

In 1963, Quac produced a piece of work of a pair of sunglasses which is cracked by *geta*. The sunglasses are stepped upon, and embedded in a canvas whose surface has been rendered in the style of Art Informel. There is also one work created by a piece of burning charcoal rolling over the undercoat of a painted canvas. If we examine these two pieces of work, we might put them immediately before the 1962 glass pieces on the timeline of Quac's career. Both of them try to record the trace of the event to avoid the mimetic representation of reality in artworks. To this extent, they demonstrate the same critical concerns inherent within the fractured glass works; however, the concern with "identity of the object" that can be found in the glass pieces is absent. Because they lack this component, neither of the two works can capture completely the totality of field and sign. As a result, this duality nonetheless persists in the artworks.

In this respect, the works with brass pieces began to offer a solution as they are endowed with the identity of the object. More flexible than glass, brass can be cut, fractured, pinched, twisted, and bent, but unlike the cracked glass, it cannot record events that happen to the materiality of the object. The scratch marks by nails that are frequently found on the surfaces of Quac's brass plate might serve as a solution for this. In any case, while hardness disappears from the work, thanks to the plasticity of the material, it becomes viable to materialize the event, whether it is intentional or not, to

form a structure of the “logic of *things*.” The most successful example may be the work in which a sheet of engraved brass was divided in two, and then bound together with a wire as if it is a loose leaf notebook. The carved lines on metal pieces, albeit fragmented, showcase a profound unity of the object—in this case, via an exquisite imperfection. We are vividly awakened to the original unity and singularity by fragmentation and separation - a world unraveled with the “logic of *things*”.

Nevertheless, here, Quac, who has grasped such a structure, came to crossroads. On the one hand, one can argue that although the surfaces of the works are fragmented, they still belong to the same surface, more or less. On the other hand, one can think about Quac’s work as demonstrating the same phenomenon on different surfaces. The former has been a problem since Quac’s works of fractured glass; the latter seems to began when Quac, in order to pursuit the “depth” of brass, cut, tore, and drilled holes into sheets of brass. This interest in “depth” or “other surfaces” gradually began to take shape, and gave birth to the previously introduced series of conceptual tableau in 1967 and 1968. Although they are rare, perfected, and large among Quac’s works, it is hard to say that they are successful. For, it goes without saying that in those works, the varied surfaces are not examined closely from the viewpoint of the “logic of *things*.” Space, which should emerge as a problem hinted at by the diverse surfaces, is lacking its prominence in these works. Fontana, Quac’s predecessor in cutting, tearing, and drilling holes in surfaces, also attempted a framed painting in 1965 because of an interest in “other surfaces”, but this Baroque painting achieved its goal by making space itself into an object. On the contrary, the lack of space and the desaturation of color are essential characteristics of Quac’s art. For works like the one just discussed, this may appear as a defect, but for other artworks which have no intention of mimicking space, this is not a defect at all. Insik Quac cannot be considered as pursuing the concept of “other surfaces” under the premise that art intervenes into objective space.

In fact, there are three times when Quac’s work returned to a specific form of simplicity: his works of steel plates after 1968, and in his *washi* paper pieces from 1969. Notedly, these works are not too different from his fractured glass works. They are motivated by the same question of how to juxtapose the identity and transformation process of objects to experiment with the unity of field and sign. In the works, we see pieces of steel plates with drilled holes, like the top of a tin can, as well as *Washi* paper glued to flat surface as if it refuses to be cut off. When I visited Quac’s studio, Quac pointed at some patches of rust on the steel plates that he picked up this year to use, and said in a joking way, “Seven years of rust is part of the work.” This joke unveils the reason behind his works and illustrates a different problem that is touched by Duchamp’s accumulation of

dust (time).

However, the most remarkable feature within these steel plates and *washi* paper works is that after 1968, a circular form gradually appeared. I am not sure about the origin of this circular form. In January of 1962, prior to the production of the fractured glass works, Quac created a tableau in which tiny light bulbs were embedded in a circular shape. In this work, Quac has already formed the imperfect circle with one part open, a form that he frequently evokes in his most recent works. But on the other hand, we can also see the development of circular shapes simply from the drilled holes, which were produced as Quac switched from working with brass to steel plates. Just before stamping out a circle, we see the imperfect circle like the lid of a tin can. If we were to trace the origin of this circular shape, perhaps we can also say that this open circle is rooted in the archetypal image of Zen painting or even the cultural consciousness of the Far East.

However, there is no need, at this early stage, to comprehend the circles in Quac's art from the context of cultural history. What we have discussed, namely, the necessity to make a connection between the artist and emergence of the imperfect circle remains on the level of the problem of the individual; instead, the question should be, how does the image of the painted circle, or the painting of the circle, acquire the unity of the thing? One then has to investigate the structure of the artwork. At this time, what kind of position is given to the image by the artwork? If we recall that the "logic of *things*" came into being at a point where the image was excluded, it appears that Insik Quac now is grappling with the most challenging question he has ever encountered through his creation of the images of the circles.