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A Sense of Eternity in the Work of Choi Byung Hoon : Feeling Eternity at the Moment of a Passing Instant

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I. Introduction

Korean modern craft and design were revitalized by the introduction of the Western design movement and industrial reconstruction, which had slowly made themselves felt as a result of the sociopolitical upheaval at the beginning of the twentieth century. Wood craft and design in particular inherited the aesthetics of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1900), characterized by the use of the wood grains, rational structure and functionality, all of which were venerated and looked upon as elegant idioms. At present, the goal of wood craft and design is to continue that tradition while strengthening new aesthetics of contemporary wood craft and design. Accordingly, the National and the Commercial Art competitions were established, venues in which most of the works exhibited tend to be functional vessels or tables based on objective forms. Consequently, a new vocabulary emerged in the early 1980s to signify the new plastic expression rather than function itself, while the original aesthetics of Korean artists contributed to the establishment of fine craft as a mainstream of contemporary wood craft and design.

Choi Byung Hoon, a pioneer of art furniture in the history of modern crafts and design, has led in the field of contemporary wood craft. Initiating a genre of art furniture, he is a third generation Korean artist. In addition, his perspective on plastic form has influenced other areas of craft and assured him of a significant place in the history of contemporary art in Korea. This designer has produced a series of art furniture pieces entitled *Afterimage of the Beginning of the World*, articulating the minimal plastic form of the Korean Sun (Zen in Japanese) Buddhism, in which he combines natural stones in the structure of the work, resulting in organic modernism through naturalistic minimalism, leading the observer to serene meditation of his work. Choi's art furniture pieces, inspired by prehistoric Korean dolmens, are endowed with modern function. The shapes are objectified as organically formed natural stones weathered over a long period of time, that is eon or kalpa in Sanskrit. Inevitably his works make the viewer feel a sense of eternity. The artist reinterpreted and transformed these ancient dolmens, where the head of clans performed ceremonial rituals at a funerary tomb, as a contemporary art piece evoking a "Monumental Sculpture" and consequently serving as a reminder of a gathering place. His works embody a New Orientalism epitomizing Korean aesthetics with a more inclusive and softer visual vocabulary than the Orientalism by which Westerners have approached Japanese design in the past. I will chronologically explore Choi's oeuvre with respect to the development of plastic visual form, function, and materials, and then I will examine their embedded meanings.

II. Matière, Function and Nature: Exploration of New Visual Plastic Form

Choi Byung Hoon was born in Gangwon-do, a town located on the outskirts of Taebaek Mountain in the Kwangwon Province in Korea. He spent his childhood looking at the magnificent, embracing shape of the mountain. One can easily see the unfolding soft lines of the mountains in Korea, much like folding screens, as well as natural stones weathered over time by rain, wind, and water. The organic curved lines found in the stones and the tree rings reveal lines made by time and nature, much as all living creatures evolve organically for survival. The artist might have unconsciously been exposed to these organic, curved lines corresponding to a mode of ecology in nature or inherently various *matière* properties, all of which underline the foundation for his visual art forms. These elements flourish in the "organic modernism" of his art works.

1. In Search of Matière and Function (1970s)

Upon entering the College of Fine Arts of Hong-Ik University in Seoul, Choi Byung Hoon immersed himself in the study of function, the property of materials, artistic formal vocabulary and originality, and developing manual skill, in order to begin to grow as a designer. During this period, the young artist learned about the natural characteristics of trees, such as their intrinsic colors, their wood grains, and the strength of various species such as the zelkova tree, ebony tree, rose-tined lumber, and ginkgo tree. He scrutinized the innate qualities of materials, which enabled him to create functional objects at will. At the same time, Choi thoughtfully considered how he could deal with the relationship between “practicality and aesthetics.” He began with conventional ideas about art and crafts, associating them with practical purposes—a bowl to fill with something or fruit plates—and gradually focused on the artistic aesthetic, directing himself towards “the plastic form for a society.” Interested in the “intellectual Telesis” that Victor Papanek developed as an element of “function complex” and as a designer’s social calling, the artist considered the visual form as an object in relation to space and balance in addition to its utilitarian function. “Telesis” connotes the object’s functionality beyond the basic utilitarian requirements, as well as its visual form, quality of materials, and technique; it enhances society’s aesthetic sense.

During the 1970s, while in his twenties, Choi traveled and experienced foreign hybrid art and learned about the ancient cultures of the Mayan and Incan civilizations, as well as African primitive art; he came to construct his own visual idiom with an international eye. He accomplished his theoretical objectives in the Society of Contemporary Craft Creation in 1977. There, the artist pursued the object-centered new style which the postindustrial society demanded, together with other outstanding, emerging artists from various art schools. His works produced at that time are in the same vein as “functional object” or “object as sculpture,” found in the New Wave style in the West.

2. Presenting Art Furniture Reminiscent of Nature (1980s–1992)

Choi pioneered a new genre of art furniture for the first time in Korea in order to embody “arts for a beautiful life,” an eternal goal of design since 1981, through his pursuit of combining new global art forms with traditional Korean culture. For instance, A Piece of Drawer-82 breaks with the stereotypical idea of a drawer being of a somewhat square shape, presenting it triangular-shaped as a functional object for items such as medicine, keys, accessories, and stationary. Compared to other works depicting “geometric forms for drawers,” works after 1983 bestowed organic forms of natural beauty with the function of drawers.

A series called Collected Insects portrayed his childhood memories of catching insects in a wild field in his hometown; it consisted of works of art furniture, transmitting the organic form of nature escaping from objective forms as a result of exploring new plastic idioms. In 1987, the Korean Craft Competition awarded Choi its Grand Prize for his Wind of the Beginning of the World, which further expanded the material properties of wood and formal, plastic beauty. Since olden times in Korea, a zelkova tree could often be found at the entrance to a village serving as a guardian deity for the community, giving people a resting place. The wood’s concentric rings were formed annually, enduring wind and rain for eons. The Grand Prize piece, made from zelkova and ebony trees to create the visual effect of blowing wind, was more effective in highlighting the natural beauty of the wood’s grain than the practical function of the vessel. Observers were able to feel a sense of timelessness. I believe that the curved lines of the wood grains and patterns found in his work evoke gently undulating waves such as that found in the wood furniture of the Joseon Dynasty. This is Korean beauty. After receiving the Grand Prize for this piece, the artist embarked more seriously on a quest for organic forms. The subject matter called Afterimage of the Beginning of the World remained in the consciousness of the designer and eventually blossomed into the formal plastic vocabulary.

In the meantime, Choi Byung Hoon worked on issues of contemporary furniture design as a research professor at the University of Art and Design Helsinki in Finland in 1988, and then as a visiting professor at the Rhode Island School of Design in the US the following year. His research

experience at these internationally prestigious design institutions provided him with a solid foundation for his plastic language to become universal.

Returning to Korea, Choi was appointed professor at the College of Fine Arts of Hong-Ik University, and he immediately began to explore furniture as a functional object through courses on art furniture, experimenting with various visual forms and materials. Such efforts in academia played a significant role in the acceptance of art furniture as a mainstream contemporary design in Korea, and socially enhanced the aesthetic view of it for ordinary people. The CD organizer, *Wind of the Beginning of the World*, 9012, 9013, 9014, created around this time, further advanced Korean aesthetics; it is in the shape of pine trees and a pole signifying prayer for a good harvest in folk customs, while converting an ornamental hairpin to crossbars. Moreover, in a mirror such as *Wind of the Beginning of the World*, 9122, 9123, organic lines curve in harmony, the entire balance representing a multifunctional vanity table or a wall mirror with narratives of storytelling. More minimal feeling is conveyed despite its being postmodern furniture.

3. Speaking of Art Furniture in Natural Stones (1993–1995)

Choi's solo exhibition at the Sun Gallery in 1993 vividly testified to the complete transformation of plastic methodology. At this exhibition, the artist formidably constructed intrinsic Korean aesthetics with international universality with his choice of materials and formal method, stemming from his research experiences in Finland and the US, as well as his own progressive perspective on contemporary furniture. From this point on, natural stones of granite, appearing as the second formal method after wood, solved the structural, engineering problems while presenting a mysterious and calming ambience: the wood explained earlier contrasts with stones, exposing the surface textures honestly without artificial manufacturing. Unadorned simple naturalism* was transformed. Organic forms of granite, smoothly rounded by the abrasion of wind and water in the course of kalpa, became the subject of the organic modernism that the artist had been striving to impart. Viewers could finally indulge themselves in silent contemplation of the beauty of nature from the beginning of the world, and on to eternity.

On the back of a chair in *Wind of the Beginning of the World* 9301, 9302, 9303, the horizon is portrayed on the surface of a square screen much like a painting, while natural stones completely support the front and back of the chair. The artist also introduced folk artifacts as a third visual element. Choi not only experimented with textures other than wood in a painterly expression on the back of the aluminum bending chair, but also further considered its painterly effects, contemplating how it was to be harmonious in the space in which it is placed as a * (Translator's note) "Naturalism" in Korean art and its context is completely different from the use of the term in Western art. The term connotes Korean's longing to be close to nature in a Daoist sense. compositional element. The CD organizer, *Wind of the Beginning of the World* 9326-9330, replaced its wooden support with natural stones and then arranged stones in the upper part and handle, resulting in a natural juxtaposition of ebony wood with natural stones, reminding us of the Korean folk custom of constructing stones to pray for wishes. Whereas the works arranged like this evoke Monumental Sculpture with totemic atmosphere, the work 9522 is reminiscent of a primitive altar by horizontally placing a CD rack made of rough textures of pine trees on the erected poles of natural stones.

One work that cannot be overlooked during this period is *Wind of Beginning of the World*-9421, the first Chaise longue created by the designer. By using one piece of plywood and following the natural curved lines of human bodies at rest, on the basis of natural stones, Choi achieved the perfect effect of plastic form with a minimal compositional element that excludes superfluous ornament. The Chaise longue is still a key object in that the designer endeavors to articulate "plastic simplicity for the most part while meeting functional and comfortable purposes." Another chair 9523, 9524 is a bench drawing images from a piece of traditional thick board, upon which one pounded rice cake in Korea, and yet it is a multifunctional art piece.

As noted above, whereas Choi Byung Hoon pursued art furniture in his early series of works such as *Collected Insects* to visualize "a plastic form filled with narratives," he gradually transformed art furniture with his series *Wind of the Beginning of the World*, which was characterized by minimal

organic curved lines found in primitive forms of nature, leading the viewer to meditate. Thus, visual arenas filled with extreme simplicity, the very formal vocabulary grounded in his artistic intention, and function, are evocative of the Korean mountains, clouds, dolmens, and a pole signifying a prayer for a good harvest.

It is also noteworthy that Choi employs granite, which is commonly found in the Korean mountains, in order to balance the engineering weight of the structure with wood materials; and the encircling outlines of natural stones, weathered for centuries, give rise to “soft simplicity.” In symbolizing the beauty of a nature that recalls tranquility and eon or kalpa rather than artificial beauty—artificiality in the arrangement of formal vocabulary and the vital contrast of colors—the artist suggests serenity by juxtaposing the unique properties of materials chosen vis-à-vis unadorned simple natural stones. The way he invites the viewer to participate in his serene Daoist art for further interpretation, which seems to omit the formal ‘process’ under the artist’s thorough preparation, is apparently to be found in traditional Korean arts.

With regard to this approach, critic Park Soon Bho in his article “Art Furniture and Reinterpretation of Tradition,” states: “Choi Byung Hoon’s art furniture challenges the weak ties of the interaction of viewers and artworks, which is caused by transience, fun or fantasy, characteristics and problems of Western postmodernist works; conversely his pieces clarify the forms in a reciprocal harmony.” Park further noted that “the artist created “nothingness visually,” abandoning imitating “something visual” as the essence of things (artworks).” The critic posits that “Choi’s art calls to mind the sense of the sublime felt in nature and the artist’s aesthetic foundation for “the way nature speaks of on its own is the best and most” derives from Daoism and Son (Zen) Buddhism in East Asia. I interpret “natural beauty” in this context as organic order evolved in the course of surviving life in nature, and I believe that Choi’s priority lies with the way people can utilize and feel at ease exposing the natural status of wood. As the artist intended, his formal idiom speaks of the duration of kalpa in addition to the innate properties of materials to users or observers, who can achieve peaceful meditation while appreciating everlasting natural beauty. When all these things come together, one can finally say the “interpenetration” was derived from Buddhism.

III. Serenity: Peaceful Meditation

Since 1996, Choi’s art furniture has crucially developed “the embodiment of organic modernism through the formal language of Telesis” in a series, *Afterimage of the Beginning of the World*. The title of the work is not literal but rather symbolic, standing for some distant, vague time quite distant from our memory. The work *Afterimage* comprises abstract, mysterious images of the beginning of the world.

1. Formalizing Organic Modernism (1996-2006)

The series *Afterimage* denoting Choi’s formal vocabulary and aesthetic perspective, candidly attains the Korean emotional world with new encounters with wood and stone in simple minimalism. The work consists of a long wooden oval form, influenced by the shape of natural stones, as well as long oval shapes in natural stone, reminding us of dolmens. The size and scale of the work is much larger than before, and because the artist grafted two different grains and textures well enough to be continued, the juxtaposition of reverberating colors of a maple tree with the unadorned simple surface of granite yields soft aesthetic feelings. According to the designer, in his response to these formal developments, “My research experiences and thoughts, formed when I was working at the University of Art and Design Helsinki in 1988 and as a visiting professor in the field of furniture design at the Rhode Island School of Design, were germane to my works. Since then, I have made efforts to combine what I thought of at that time with Korean sensitivity. In particular, I assayed to epitomize the elegant aesthetics of minimalism of the Joseon Dynasty as well as the beauty of modesty and purity, all of which literati scholars highly regarded.” The designer gave up postmodernist storytelling, colors and straight lines, minimizing formal elements consisting of limited lines, leading

the viewers to fill in meanings on their own. After his exhibition at Galerie DOWNTOWN François Laffanour in Paris, Choi said that he more seriously pursued simple and natural “organic values” as well as organic modernism.

Afterimage of the Beginning of the World gets critical attention because the work suggests the artist’s idiosyncratic voice condensed with subtle Asian sensitivity, absent in the Western art world. Critic Michel Nuridsany said, “I have never seen any lyric art furniture piece coexisting avant-garde with tradition, heaviness with lightness, smoothness with roughness. The designer attempts to create sophisticated works preserving original textures and material properties rather than distorting them.” Needless to say, “sophisticated works preserving original textures and material properties” are derived from Choi’s carefully designed sketches and ideas, although it seems that wood and primitive natural stones are arranged spontaneously with chance effects.

Right after this exhibition in Paris in 1996 Choi, based in Paris, traveled to other European countries and to India and Nepal in order to enrich his cultural and artistic experiences while refreshing himself. I suppose that direct observation and participation in both Asian and Western cultures played a significant role in the development of his formal language, contributing to the universality of his work.

We cannot help but speculate how the artist found the image of the beginning of the world in the ancient dolmens in Korea. What kind of meaning do the dolmens—rare in the Western world—carry to Koreans and why are dolmens receiving attention again?

The dolmens, Goindol in Korean, indicate the marked stones of burial tombs for the ruling class, that is, those with political and economic powers as a Megalithic cultural component signifying the enormous stone carrying spirits. The altar of dolmens was the first plastic art form embodying a spiritual function, and people performed ancient rituals at a place for gathering or meeting. Since 70 percent of the dolmens are concentrated in Korea, they are registered with the World Cultural Heritage by UNESCO. Choi must have regularly seen these ubiquitous stones in Kwangwon Province where he spent his childhood, and in Kwangha where his current studio is located. The dolmens consist of the even, enormous horizontal slab supported by two raised pillars, and on the top of the slab one can easily find a natural concavity, symbolizing the wish for fertility and a good harvest.

Choi rediscovered new plastic possibilities, in addition to artistic and cultural interpretations in these dolmens that he has seen everywhere in his childhood and that carried both aspects of “the beginning of the world” and “the first primitive spiritual art form” as a “Monumental Sculpture.” Post-industrial society after the 70s in Korea found contemporaries longing for a return to primitivism, and a number of artists produced works exploring the “thoughts of Totem.” This idea is immanent in Choi’s creation of Goindol. In other words, the artist provided the dolmens with primitive, abstract and natural aesthetics, and functional qualities as a gathering place, as a bench or a table, noting that the life-force of this reinterpreted ancient artifact or artwork is timeless throughout the ages.

The typical art furniture pieces during this period, Afterimage of the Beginning of the World 9637, 9757, imbue benches with a primitive atmosphere, minimalism, sophisticated organic curved lines, employing long, wood material in the shape of natural stones on the side with one small uprising natural stone. The artist further adds two or three natural stones, making the works as the dolmens in Afterimage of the Beginning of the World 9866, 9971, 0087. Whereas the simple Afterimage, 9971 is imposing and profound with low natural stones, Afterimage of 9866 uses three legs of natural “built up stones,” with the upper slab covered with plywood. The latter is sharper than the former, and carries the unadorned primitive beauty of black-toned natural wood material.

In the summer of 2001, Choi’s stay in Carrara—the main production site for the most famous Italian Carrara marble—persuaded him to alter his choice of material and the direction of his artwork. By depending on this new material, the designer departed from Afterimage of the Beginning of the World 9752 and developed Afterimage 01-101, 01-104 in order to formulate the contrast of colors and material properties of the surface texture of marble and granite, abandoning wood in this case. As in Afterimage 01-105, 01-106, Choi’s Chaise longue transformed the shape of “W” like the blowing piece of fabric, giving the long chair more comfort and sophistication than the previous version. The critic Yoo Jae Gil in his article entitled “Naturalism and Minimalism,” clarified Choi’s ideas, saying

His art furniture requires the composition of space full of new environments and changes, and his Chaise longue presents a metaphoric space in the middle of nature... Nature is consistently considered and interpenetrated in its entirety from the moment of the creation and its process until the location where the work is placed in the constantly changing environments. The way the dichotomy of two opposing elements of heaviness and lightness, roughness and sleekness, hardness and softness is naturally melting leads us to think of Naturalism in Asia.

Yoo further adds: Because Choi's minimalism gives rise to function and the effects of theatricality, the work is completed when the viewer participates in this functional and theatrical language. In other words, the psychological relationship between the work and participant or the user is significantly involved. The designer encourages artistic exchange, finally forming the organic relationship of artist-art furniture-society.

2. Contemplation in Search of True Self

Looking at the horizon, the sky, or climbing the mountain, we absentmindedly face the distant mountains—overlapped like wild geese—constantly moving forward and backward. However, “we see something that we can't see with our eyes.” We do not see the phenomena of natural objects such as the horizon, sky, or in this case the mountain; rather we see “something” as an abstract, formless thing, hidden in the meditation of the moment. I believe that Choi infused his own empathy into his work in order to be indulged in Theosophy. In this sense, his context is that of Mondrian's Theosophy in which the observer (the sage) perceived the inside of natural phenomena to understand original principles of creation in the universe. Considering this, we need to understand what is underlined in the philosophy of his formal decision.

Earlier, I accord Choi's art furniture with the word “serenity,” connoting tranquility, sublime sensitivity, and a feeling of awe. The mysterious ambience found in his work, in the form of dolmens using natural stones in realizing an afterimage of the beginning of the world, makes the viewer indulge in tranquility and then meditation, similar to the way the Sun sect (Sun Zong; Zen in Japanese) Buddhist monks sit and meditate, firmly as a rock, upon entering temples. In Sun Buddhism, “serenity” in this case means “serene silence (symbolizing Shakamuni)” or Nirvana (nirvana in Sanskrit; santi in Pali), the goal of Buddhist practice. It means that practitioners half close their eyes to meditate toward the path to peace. The Buddhist words “jhana and samadhi” describe the path to peace best. They are meditative states necessary for reaching profound stillness and concentration. The mind is then completely engaged and absorbed in the chosen object of attention while at the same time prepared to interpenetrate the essence of reality. The purified mind, released from attachment, desire and defilement, is peaceful, tranquil, serene, calm and luminous.

Appreciating Choi's art furniture, combined with Sun Buddhism and serenity, users find a real meditative tranquility and contemplation, free from suffering of the present reality. It is closely related to the spiritual world of Koreans, which is different from that of Japanese and Tibetans for which westerners longed for. I define this unique Korean aspect of spiritualism as New Orientalism, which focus on “inclusion” and “mildness.” In this point, I agree with Park Soon Bho who noted “[Choi] penetrates the religious serene tranquility in functional art furniture with the involvement of the user/viewer.” Park added, “Naturally we almost feel an obligation to meditate in front of this solemn art furniture, which keeps the ancient spirit of Stone Age's dolmens.” The critic commented further, “It seems that the work is left before us as a barrier between life and death, reality and ideal, truth and illusion, arousing Korea's ancient religious awe.” Likewise, Choi introduces the natural stones as the main formal entity symbolizing the beginning of the world, and interpenetrates the peaceful path of tranquility and mildness into his functional art furniture, with which one can contemplate and meditate.

IV. Eternity (eon): Kalpa and Ksana

Choi Byung Hoon, who is now in his fifties, became an established artist as a forerunner of

New Orientalism and as a furniture designer excelling in his skill and formalism. He has worked on “organic modernism advanced from knowledge,” enchanting us with the natural beauty of the beginning of the universe. For a time, particularly in his current monochromatic style, it seems that the Sun Buddhist painter inundated his aesthetics with one compelling swift brush stroke, exerting organic circular lines in wood. It is natural to feel the timelessness, kalpa upon seeing this work at the very brief moment which is called ksana, an extremely brief period of time in Sanskrit, as the subtitle of this article has noted.

1. Concentrating on the Intellectual Progress

Choi has constantly attempted to produce a series of art furniture embodying functionality and his aesthetic points as objects of art. The juxtaposition of contrasting material properties—which is the designer’s idiosyncratic visuality—are gradually interpenetrate from one another, as reflected in the way the opposing elements work in heaviness and lightness, the unadorned natural beauty of granite and the soft, sleek surface of marble, the deep dark lacquered colors and the bright marble. This Buddhist “interpenetration,” which completes a oneness embracing differences, is applied in the artist’s intentional choice of two opposing materials, and in the correspondence of “art” and “design.” The designer’s recent works are much more stark in form and monochromatic; the serenity however is still potent. He’s departed from his previous works in encouraging tactile experiences so that the meditating viewer desires to touch the object, which is different from Afterimage of the Beginning of the World. The artist has embodied the long duration of kalpa with the use of natural stones; on the other hand, his recent work reveals one curved line in marble and stone, which has been inspired by (and evolved from) the former. The surface line is soft and light as seen in his works Afterimage of the Beginning of the World 05-224, 08-279 and Zari-0808.

Choi has recently been focusing on creating tables. They bear a similarity to his previous works such as a bench but the designer dissected single elongated natural stones in half to make the top panel even. The works made include tables for 8 people or 14–16 people, and the method is rather unique. By jointing two organic curved planes of stones, he achieves what looks like a C-shaped, unusually long oval table, whose surface almost deceives the viewer’s eyes, giving the illusion of plywood. This table could be used in an office for a meeting and it can also be opened up as a multi-functional table. I believe that in this work the designer has projected the original cultural meaning of the ancient dolmens playing a community-based role as a gathering place for reunion, since rituals or ceremonies were being performed for clans. The oval-shaped form, produced as a result of scooping out the center of the table, is reminiscent of the natural hole on the large flat horizontal capstone (table) of dolmens, which of course symbolized fertility and good harvest.

2. Speaking of Kalpa at the Moment of Ksana: Feeling Infinity at the Moment of a Passing Instant

The subtitle of this article is “speaking of kalpa at the moment of ksana” because I believe that idea is inherent throughout Choi’s works of art from the beginning. To put it simply, this has been true as soon as the artist thought of natural stones effloresced in the course of an eon, kalpa, and the apparition of time. The accumulated memory and visual experiences of Choi’s childhood, for instance, the intimate outlines of mountains and rounded stones of granite that he saw in the rivers, fields, the splendid capstones of dolmens, and the infinite time which created all the natural phenomena, etc., are rendered in the form of art furniture in our time.

I have attempted to identify two opposing concepts of time in relation to my analysis of Choi’s oeuvre: One is the meaning of kalpa, as a synonym for eternity, which is denoted by the materials he chose, and the other is ksana, an instant or moment. The latter is a more metaphorical concept for the creativity of Choi’s transformation of plastic language into (wood) art furniture: the moment of his creation giving a life to everlasting materials. Although the natural stones the artist chose came into being long ago, this is still a vague period of time. We can only refer to the beginning of the world or “genesis.” The Eastern concept of kalpa is more incalculable than these words. Kalpa is Sanskrit,

and translated as “Geob” in Korean. How long is kalpa? In India, it is equal to a day of Brahma, which is 4.32 billion years, and it also means the duration of time from one creation to the next. Accumulated kalpas are called one hundred million kalpas, eternity in the Buddhist sense. Kalpa is the duration of time from the moment the cloth of the heavenly deity touches a rock until the moment the rock becomes dust. In short, kalpa is a different cosmological time, far from the linear time we experience everyday. Kalpa is the measurement of time found in the process of creation-persistence-destruction. Immeasurable, unimaginable time is kalpa.

Koreans describe the creation of the universe as the “the mystery of kalpa” or the “time of kalpa” and relate their life to the moment of ksana” compared to the long cosmological time of the universe, meaning their lives are shorter than a glint of light.

At present the kalpa we live is also called “Bhadrakalpa”—bhadra meaning “auspicious” or “blessed,” and kalpa meaning “age.” Similar relevant words have been found in the Korean perception of time throughout the ages, demonstrating that Korean traditional thought emphasizes the perception of infinite time. The contrary concept of kalpa is ksana, the brief duration of passing time. According to Buddhist scripture, “from one infinitesimal to the other, when a strong man flicks his finger, 65 ksanans are taken.” Keeping this in mind, we can conclude that Choi’s art furniture is an interpretation of the duration of two kinds of perception of time in a series of a much simplified Afterimage of the Beginning of the World, using the natural stones and images of dolmens. Therefore, in Afterimage of the Beginning of the World, 07-254, 08-279, and Zari-0806, the artist expresses the kalpa of eternity and the apparition of time, in the passing moment of ksana which is represented by the organic curved lines of weathered natural stones.

V. Conclusion

Choi Byung Hoon, as a furniture artist, has contributed to the development of contemporary art and design theory, emphasizing functionality. He has synthesized natural beauty, rational structure, practicality, and aesthetics with wood furniture of the Joseon Dynasty. In this way the artist formalized Korean aesthetics in contemporary art.

In his youth, Choi sought to find a new plastic vocabulary in his creative imagination, the technical skills required in design, the material properties and a functionality of design demanded in contemporary society. In his thirties, the artist presented art furniture confirming both functionality and formal idiom with an interest in nature. In his forties, Choi established art furniture in Korea and employed natural stones and the shape of dolmens in his work. His style was in line with minimalism of Sun Buddhism in the maturity of organic modernism. By evoking a mysterious serenity, Afterimage of the Beginning of the World in natural stones and the image of dolmens, leads one to meditate and go on a journey in search of self. In a way, the artist rediscovered the ancient dolmens widely found in Korea and conferred with contemporary aesthetic value natural stones created in the course of eternal kalpa. Choi’s formal exploration reaches its climax as a forerunner of New Orientalism and internationally active prominent artist.

From his intellectual point of view, the theme of Afterimage of the Beginning of the World gives rise to art furniture of organic modernism evolved from his own subjectivity and knowledge; his artistic will is apparent in the organic curved lines. This artistic creativity realizes the two opposing durations of time of kalpa and ksana; the former in materials and forms and the latter in the process of his creation. Choi’s place lies in the originality evident in his ability to produce in a sophisticated manner the Korean sensitivity, tradition and natural beauty inherent in Korea throughout the ages in the name of New Orientalism. Currently the plastic world of the artist has garnered international and universal importance, and he has successfully developed his own distinctive visual style. Choi’s oeuvre, characterized by such words as naturalism, simplicity, mildness and tranquility, lay out important artistic concepts for the future.