

## **Biosphere of Botanical Body: Transfiguration in Tai Hwa Goh's Sculpture**

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In the fall of 2023, during my stay in New York City for research on contemporary sculpture, I encountered Korean-born artist Tai Hwa Goh's work at Art on Paper. Lots of works shown at the art fair were basically realized in two-dimensional paper-based media, such as drawing or printmaking. Among those, I got interested in some paper sculptures by Goh, not only because of their glowing colors but also because of their distinctive trans-dimensional character.

This amalgam of the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional is achieved through articulating a large amount of papers on which microscopic patterns are printed. Combined together, those papers transform into one porous object that looks like a honeycomb, coral, or hydrangea. Goh, who has an educational background of printmaking and sculpture, prints the patterns one by one on sheets of paper with silkscreen printing in advance of pasting them together into the layers of pleats to let this biomorphic form flourish.

Tellingly, this procedure of reproduction of elements that leads to the trans-dimensional configuration seems to have some link with the works of Japanese American sculptor Ruth Asawa (1926-2013), whose show focused on drawing (*Ruth Asawa Through Line*) was held in the Whitney Museum of American Art around the same time as I encountered Goh's sculpture. The show introduced me to the path between Asawa's drawing and her sculpture, that is, the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional. In some drawings or paper reliefs, a stamped shape is repeated many times on paper, or like in the folding process of origami, topological exchanges between in and out or front and back are executed. That type of dynamic configuration correlates with her sculptures formed by interlacing wires and repeating translucent oval shapes inside and outside.

However, in addition to the dimensional and topological crossings, Goh's sculpture takes on another in-between character which is formed around the theme of nature and artifact. In terms of this, Goh's sculpture or sculptural installation like *Asymmetric Arrangement* (2019-2020) is composed of two different qualities. On the one hand, there is naturalness in the botanical motifs and the spherical shapes with biological tissue mentioned above. On the other hand, there are artificial parts like tubes and pipes made of industrial materials. These two types of elements are connected together into biomechanical configuration that could be seen both as a cyborgish visceral circuit of body and as a mutated environment with poisonous plants which reminds me of the one depicted in animation film *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984).

This patchy bodily environment will become the figurative entity that refers to our urbanized world. Sprawl of suburbs is engulfing the natural biosphere, and in our age, it appears that most of primeval nature has been modified. Although the concept of "pure" nature has always been a fantastical ideal, we are more than ever facing a globalized situation where objects, information and people are extensively transported across borders, which demands the redefinition of locality.

Plants separated from their indigenous environment such as indoor foliage plants would be the suitable figure of this situation. And Goh's sculptural objects that represent plants prosthetically modified or sealed in plastic dome, like the *Trans-Plant* series, seem to represent such separation, modification, and transportation. Goh's bodily environmental sculpture, often parasitically growing along architectural surfaces, might be the portrait of our transnationally interlaced or interdependent status.