

Contemplating the Artist Young-Il Ahn

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After graduating from Seoul National University in 1957, Youngil Ahn held a lecturing position at Ewha Girl's High School and Seoul Arts School for a short period before concentrating solely on his art.

In 1966, he immigrated to the United States in pursuit of a grand dream for his artistic endeavor. Although he has lived abroad for 30 years, he returns to Korea frequently to share his work with compatriots—a true mark of fidelity to his beloved homeland.

I met Mr. Ahn at a solo exhibition in Seoul and was overwhelmed by the unconventional colors of his paintings. My first impression was an uninhibited and liberated use of color, tempered with a sense of restraint. It reminds me of T. S. Eliot's quote: "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality." Unbridled passion invites trouble and disorder in life.

All great artists used self-restraint in the process of creation. Vincent Van Gogh is known to have cut his ear off in a fit of passion, yet his art reveals great self-discipline.

Mr. Ahn's work emanates a sense of order and tranquility. His canvas has a clear message: honor and order will guide us through the passage of life.

I was particularly touched by his paintings of musicians at play. The scenes radiate with rhythm and melody. As John Keats once enraptured about unrequited love:

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard

Art sweeter; therefore ye soft pipes play on;

Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,

Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone;

Fair youth, beneath trees, thou canst not leave

Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;

*Bold Lover, never, canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal-yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast thy bliss,
Forever wilt thou love, and she be fair!*

The bliss of Ahn's painting is also the pleasure of music. His painting is imbedded with melody as the fragrance of rose is long lasting.

Percy B. Shelley wrote in his poem,

*Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory-
Odours, when sweet violets sicken,
Live within the sense they quicken.
Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heap'd for the belove'd's bed;
And so thy thought, when thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on.*

It is natural to love Ahn and his work. He harbors music and rainbows in his soul. He seems to gain artistic energy from music more than anything.

Bless him always in heavenly peace!

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