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중앙일보

Choi Byung-Hoon's sculpture, alongside world masters at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

By Eunjoon Lee
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The 'Scholar's Path' by Choi Byung-hoon installed in front of the new building of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Photographed by Richard Barnes. [Picture MFAH]

The sculpture of Korean art furniture designer Choi Byung-hoon (68, former Dean of the College of Fine Arts, Hongik University) in the new building of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), designed and opened on the 21st by contemporary architecture master Steven Holl, 'Scholar's Way' was permanently installed. Along with world-renowned artists Olafur Eliasson and Ai Weiwei, he created works under commissioned by the museum, and was listed on the permanent collection there.

According to a report by designboom, a media specializing in architecture and design around the world, MFAFH recently opened the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, 'The Nancy and Rich Kinder Building' after completing extensive expansion work. In addition, the work that was commissioned by the museum to fit the interior and exterior space of the new building were also released. In addition to Choi, Eliason, and Weiwei, eight artists from around the world such as El Anatsui, a contemporary artist representing Africa, and Carlos Cruz-Diez from Venezuela, participated in the commission work.

Sculpture and art furniture break the boundaries



Choi Byung-hoon's art furniture 'Afterimage of the Beginning 018-504', 2018, basalt. 1930 x 820 x 770 cm.



Byung-hoon Choi, 'Afterimage of the Beginning 017-482', 2017, basalt, 1600 x 800 x 750 cm.



Byung-hoon Choi, 'Afterimage of the Beginning 015-430', 2015, basalt, 3700 x 880 x 550 cm.



Choi Byeong-hoon, 'Afterimage of the Beginning 9637', 1996, 1750 x 540 x 430 cm, 1470 x 380 x 420 cm, 900 x 460 x 410 cm. hard maple. natural stone. Photographed by Byeong-woo Bae.

Choi Byung-hoon, who served as a professor in the Department of Wooden Furniture at Hongik University and served as the dean of the College of Art, is a pioneer in domestic art furniture. Art furniture itself is an art object for appreciation, but refers to furniture that can be actually used. Since the 1980s, when only mass-produced products and traditional crafts were considered furniture, he pioneered a third path through furniture design combined with art. His works are housed at the Vitra Design Museum in Germany, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the National Museum of Decorative Art in Paris, and the M+ Museum in Hong Kong.

Strictly speaking, however, the Houston Art Museum commissioned a furniture designer, not a sculptor, to make a sculpture. It is an 'unconventional' that does not happen easily in our art world. This is possible because the museum side only focused on 'workability'. After spending more than 40 years in art furniture, art museums dealing with fine art first recognized him as an 'artist'.

Eunjoon Lee, "Choi Byung-Hoon's sculpture, alongside world masters at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston," JoongAng Daily, November 23, 2020.

This project was triggered by the Museum of Fine Arts Houston curator Cindi Strauss' attention to his art furniture exhibitions held at the Friedman Benda Gallery in New York, USA in 2014 and 2016. "At the time of the exhibition in 2016, the curator of MFAH came and said, 'I have been watching your work since two years ago,'" said Choi. "I said. "The museum asked me to make a sculpture, and I was surprised myself."

Inspired by the old chief



Curator Cindy Strauss of the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, who visited the studio of Choi Byeong-hoon (left) last year.



One of the draft drawings of 'Scholar's Way' by artist Choi Byeong-hoon with ink on Korean paper. [Photo by Byung-Hoon Choi]

The Kinder Building at the Houston Museum of Art, USA, designed by Stephen Holl, a master of modern architecture. Artist Choi Byung-hoon's sculpture is seen in front of the west entrance. Photographed by Richard Barnes. [Photo by MFAH] His sculpture 'Scholar's Way' is in the shape of three tall pillars measuring 3m in height and 70cm in width. Basalt from Indonesia was used as the material. "It is dark brown on the outside and dark black on the inside, because it can express both rough primitiveness (surface) and smooth modernity (inside)." The artwork was installed above the 13.5m, 4m shallow water space at the west entrance of the museum. In July 2017, it took a total of 2 years and 6 months to complete through field trips, spatial research, and discussions on the direction and scale of the work.

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But why was the title of the work called 'Scholar's Path'? He said, "I was inspired by the work from Scholar's Rocks, an old Korean scholar culture." He explained, "The subtle shape of the chief from nature bears the reason of great nature made up of yin and yang," he explained. It is explained that the spirit of pursuit of high ideals and strong convictions is expressed with powerful ridges in the form of high columns, deep pan valleys and holes.

Early drawings were drawn with ink on Korean paper, and later completed with pencil drawings. To make the plan drawing three-dimensional, a model was also made by reducing the size to 1/10. "It was best of all to be able to expand the breadth of my work through this project," he said. "For me, this work was a very meaningful opportunity in that it went beyond the frame of the genre.

"Believe in yourself and go steadfastly"



Artist Choi Byung-hoon sitting in the art furniture he has worked on.



Choi Byeong-hoon, Afterimage of the Beginning, 08-282. 2008. 1,630x550x980cm, carbon fiber, glass fiber, vinyl ester resin, balsa, black granite.

Choi Byeong-hoon, who works with stones and trees as the main materials, has been evaluated for creating a natural and concise formatively by embedding Tao, Zen, and awe for nature. It is not flashy, but natural, and shows a Korean beauty that is clearly different from those of Japan and China. When the exhibition was held in Paris in 2016, Olivier Gabbé, director of the National Museum of Decorative Art in Paris, summarized Choi Byung-hoon's work as "The vitality and originality of Koreanism." Director Kabe wrote, "Byeong-hun Choi reveals his creativity by breaking down artistic boundaries. His works tell us the message of breaking boundaries, that is, openness." It is said that the Houston Museum of Art also appreciated the 'Koreanness' in Choi Byung-hoon's work.

Choi, who retired from retirement in August 2017, is still a 'active'. Works for the Seoul Craft Museum, which will open next year, have been recently completed and installed, and collectors are also receiving requests for works through the Friedman Vanda Gallery in the US and the Gallery Downtown in Paris, France. "As a writer, retirement is just another beginning for me," he said. "I am also curious about where and how my work will evolve." Next, when I asked for the advice I would like to give to young creators, he said, "Believe in yourself above all else. I want to tell you not to be aware of the wall of the genre, and to challenge yourself with something different from others."



The Houston Museum of Art, designed by Stephen Holl, 'Architect of Light'. Expect to become Houston's premier landmark. Photographed by Richard Barnes. [Picture MFAH]

Meanwhile, the Museum of Fine Arts, located in the heart of Houston's 'Museum District', was founded in 1990. The site is 14 acres (about 17,000 pyeong). The newly built building is 2 stories below ground and 3 stories above ground, and has an area of 237,200 square feet (a total of 6,700 pyeong).