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Over the rim where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?

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OVER THE RIM

WHERE DO WE COME FROM? WHAT ARE WE? WHERE ARE WE GOING?

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

The School of Art

By
Jungrim Yea
B.S., KonKuk University, 1991
May, 2010

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my father and mother, who pray for me in heaven; they are two people whom I thank most of all. I also want to dedicate this work to my husband, Je-ho, and son, Tae-soo, who pray for me and have shared joy and sorrow with me.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank God more than anyone else. My sincere appreciation goes to Professor Michael Crespo, who has encouraged me throughout all of my undergraduate and graduate studies. I would also like to thank Professor Christopher Johns, who helped me with deep consideration and whenever in time of trouble, gave me good advice without hesitation. Also, deep appreciation to Professor Kelli Scott Kelley, who has given me unconditional help, just because she loves students. Special thanks to Professor Gerald Bower, who has given fresh advice on my works ever since my basic design class. I want to express appreciation to Professor Michelle Wang, for her warm concern for my work whenever I asked her advice. I really appreciate Professor Darius Spieth for recommending the exhibition book, "COSMOS". It helped me to gain confidence in my work. I also want to extend my gratitude to Professor Melody M. Guichet for her deep concern for my work since undergraduate school. Finally, I would like to thank Kristin M. Krolak, Hunter Roth, Jonathan Pellitteri, Catherine Wells, and all the graduate students at the School of Art.

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Abstract

My paintings are about the short span of human existence in comparison with the rhythms of the eternal cosmos based on Christianity. To illustrate this, I explored the icons of the moon (soul) and the iceberg (physical body). The painting technique used is the juxtaposition of passages of heavy impasto with thin glazes of earthly monochromatic colors, which represent time and age. I am seeking a depth of spiritual space. My works consists of ten large-scale oil paintings on masonite/canvas, and a series of small oil paintings on panels. In order to represent the unpredictable fate of human beings, I sometimes work on separate and bendable panels.

Introduction

Infinite dark blue space, stars, moon, and me...

I wonder about the unbreathable, huge, open, wild, and spiritual space around me.

While watching the night sky when I was young, I always had questions about the universe like: What if humans do not exist? What if the earth does not exist? What if the moon and stars do not exist? Without all of those things, what is it left?

After I accepted Jesus as my savior in 1994 and was baptized with the Holy Spirit in 2004, I found the answers to these questions in *Genesis 1:2-3*.

The beginning

In the beginning God created heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

My thesis started with questions about the universe, human beings, and what we are made of. I have tried to find the visual answers to these questions. I believe that every human being has a unique universe because each human being lives his/her life according to different perspectives. In my thesis, I tried to gain a clear picture of my unique universe which may be displayed only through visual language.

My intention is to address two opposing ideas (temporal & eternal) of human life within one image through the simplification and stylization of icons (moon & iceberg). The moon is dream imagery for a visual language of my soul which always holds the past, present, and future. The iceberg is an image of my physical body, and each painting represents a passage in time in my life.

The following paintings inspired me by both composition and spirituality. *Monk by the Sea* by Caspar David Friedrich is a powerful meditation, a symbolic message of human life: tiny figure, huge space, and mysterious dark energy around him. *Fisherman at Sea* by Joseph Mallord William Turner makes me feel mankind's inability to control the sublime forces of nature-shining moon like hope, and darkness surroundings the fisherman.

Iceberg

An iceberg is an icon of my physical body and the short span of human existence. I have never seen an iceberg in real life, but I want to represent it as myself, because an iceberg has a similar life cycle as a human. The ice layers melting as time goes on is similar to aging; the melting water evaporates to make clouds, then precipitates and freezes to make other icebergs, like human generations.

I have developed the idea of an iceberg from Antarctica which has severe weather conditions- the lowest temperatures on our planet reaching 70 Celsius below zero with winds up to 300km/hour, and icebergs which have strong muscular bodies and mysterious silent beauty are made in this harsh weather. Like our life, an iceberg flows along the ocean stream without resistance and its body melts slowly. Even though an iceberg looks like it is firm and stands still forever, it is getting smaller. For emphasizing the limited ability to control the circumstances of life and death, I usually place an iceberg on the bottom edge of the picture frame. We can look back and remember, but we cannot retrace a single moment of the year that has past. Nobody can go back to the past or to the future according to universal law. We cannot change our destiny but we can carry on our ordinary life in the cosmos like an iceberg.

In the beginning of my graduate program (2007), I was inspired by Gregory Amenoff's *Labrador Sea Series*, 2004. Professor Melody Guichet recommended his painting to me for the poetic awkwardness of the forms and space, and the way he handles the paint. His lonely iceberg in the dark silent deep blue ocean with the starry night was the very picture of me under the night sky, and the abstract flat shape of his iceberg seemed

too simple to show its character, but it has enough rough texture to indicate the severe condition around it. After looking at his painting, I made up my mind to replace an iceberg for me in my paintings as my icon.

So I kept looking for iceberg images and found John Paul Caponigro's photographs, *Antarctica 2005/2007*, which gives a visible form to a hidden dimension in nature and spirit by no specific horizon line and a neutral remote mood. One of the most exciting images is a small iceberg at the very bottom of a photo with a new moon, and a horizontal thin white cloud above it in the calm blue sky. It reinforces my basic concept of painting: how small I am in the eternal space.

The images of icebergs were made from the photographs and my imagination. Once I figured out the positioning of an iceberg with a moon to create the flat surface and simple shape of an iceberg, I used a palette knife and a rubber brush. For the color, I started with whites and glazed them with earthly colors.

It was not easy for me to make such a small iceberg on the edge of the picture frame, but whenever I did, it reminds me of how small and limited physical life is in the universe.

Moon

The symbolic idea of the moon is rooted in Byzantine art, where the halo is used as an iconography for the glorification of God, and of his son, Jesus. The gold disk behind Christ in *A Bust of Christ* which is the oldest known icon of *Christ Pantocrator*, encaustic on panel, represents his power, energy and open door to eternal world-heaven.

The reasons I chose the moon are that it represents the endless rhythms of the eternal cosmos, and the harmonious oneness of the universe. The full moon symbolizes the state of wholeness that humans attain at full self-realization. It is the state when our self-realization comes into full circle just as the moon after going through its phases finally reaches the all glowing full-moon stage. Also, I regarded the moon as my old friend watching over me in the sky since I was young.

I often transformed the moon into powerful abstract images to combine the emotional intensity and self-expression of its surface, exploring the colors of light and dark forms of the moon with physical actions (a vivid color brush stroke over the blue-grayish or warm earthy tonality, after various physical actions using tools like fabrics, a puncher, a rubber brush, gliding with a squeegee in the underpainting) because my energy could get into a work through my direct physical activities. I believed that the abstraction drove the viewer away from the external toward the internal with rising questions of objectivity and subjectivity.

My inspirations for the color, shape, and texture of the moon came from Arthur Dove's *Me and the Moon*, MaryBeth Thielhelm's *Ebony Sea*, Hiroshi Sugimoto's

photographs, *7 days and 7 nights*, and Emily Nelligan's *abstract landscape charcoal drawings*. When I looked at Arthur Dove's *Me and the Moon*, I was impressed with the way he arrived at essences of the moon and space by simplifying abstract forms and colors to show some inner principle of universal reality. I tried to capture his instinct in the curvilinear forms of nature. MaryBeth Thielhelm's *Ebony Sea*, oil painting on panel from the sea of her memories, displays the range in color from the grey of the North Atlantic to the Persian Sea. I was shocked by how she treated the surface of the sea in the deep space with emotional brush strokes and limited colors. After I saw it, I wanted to limit the colors of my palette to blacks, whites and browns, because its simplicity produced more powerful images. Actually Thielhelm saw an exhibition of seascape photographs by Hiroshi Sugimoto in New York that inspired her to take on the ocean as a subject for her paintings. His photographs, *7 days and 7 nights* are all about air, water, and light which are the basic elements of the beginning of life. The most dominant impression is the spiritual mood and delicate changes of colors from black to grayish white. The last artist is Emily Nelligan. She only uses charcoal and eraser on ordinary letter paper, and restricts her palette to blacks, grays and whites, so that it produces natural light and shadows of distinctions between the water's edge and terra firma, or between the clouds in the sky and their reflection on the ocean's surface. I learned how to approach my subject's textures like her confident strokes, pushing and pulling the images.

To get inspired beyond the image of the earth, I attached numerous images of a moon in space, Antarctica sunset, moon landscapes, iceberg photographs to my studio wall. I also checked out Astronomy Picture of the Day (www.apod.nasa.gov/apod/) supported by

NASA, which contains the largest collection of annotated astronomical images on the internet almost everyday. I sketched the moon through a telescope (MEADE 50AZ-P, 50 mm and 2 in., 625 mm f/12.5) or through the naked-eye in pencil, pen or ink whenever or wherever the weather allowed me to. I didn't look at all the photographs and drawings while I worked, but I am pretty sure that I absorbed the cosmic energy, and the harmonious oneness of unviable forces ruling in the universe while I was in the painting process.

Once I found some interesting forms, colors and textures in one of them, I sketched it to find dramatic compositions with light and dark in as many as I could do in various sizes. After I had begun the moon painting, I was not aware of what people were going to think about it but I just thought about the process of painting. I was not thinking it was the moon, but thought of it as my memories, dreams, emotions, and love of Jesus who forgives my sins and gives me eternal life.

While I was resting in the midst of painting, I sometimes read scriptures, which I wrote down on index cards every morning to clean my mind and to find peace and joy. I designed the moon's surface with vivid color brush strokes like the writing or designing of beauty, it seems like the moon is reborn from a fuzzy form. This part was the funniest thing in my painting processes and it makes me happy, even though it produced a flat surface of the moon.

The following are the titles and descriptions of my paintings. Since I was working with big and small sizes at the same time, I just wrote about ten large-scale oil paintings on masonite/canvas here, for these are the main focuses of my thesis. The small oil paintings are always accompanying the large ones as experiments.

1. **In the beginning** is the first moon of my thesis. It represents my first step for eternal life; cells are created in a dark and formless world.

2. **I stood upon that silent hill**: When I was young, whenever I saw the moon, my heart was always filled with overwhelming emotions, because it seemed like I was in space, out of the earth.

“I stood upon that silent hill

And stared into the sky until

My eyes were blind with stars and still

I stared into the sky”

This is from the Song of Honour by Ralph Hodgson (1871-1962)

3. **The Moon Shepherd**: Just like this moon, my soul marches through obstacles (edge of the canvas) stronger than me with God’s blessing (Blue streaks).

4. **Moon in the Rain**: One day, it was down pouring all day, I couldn’t see the moon or any other things in the sky except the clouds and rain. There was strong, cold wind, but I knew the moon was up there and kept watching me.

5. **Blue Moon**: This moon is from my memory of the Blue Moon Eclipse on December 31st, 2009. It was a very bright and huge full circle, leading our way on the dark path.

6. **Appreciation for Beethoven's Moonlight:** Moonlight is composed by Ludwig Van Beethoven in 1801- Piano Sonata No.14 in C-sharp minor, Op.27, No.2: I Adagio sostenuto (5'30) Nodar Gabunia, Piano. While I was painting, I always listened to this. This Piano Sonata made me think of how Beethoven composed melody even though he was depressed about his hearing problem. Like him, I had never seen or touched the moon closely yet I painted the moon.

7. **Quiet Forest:** My first name (Jungrim) means quiet forest. When I was working on ground surface, it reminded me of a quiet forest landscape.

8. **Christmas Eve Moon:** Based on my quick sketching with the naked eye at 5:54pm, Thursday on December 24th, 2009. It was after heavy raining, so a very bright half-moon with no cloud was above me and my son.

9. **In my Dream:** Before I started my moonscape painting, I saw the moon one day while I was asleep in my dream. The moon was so colossal that it filled up my entire vision.

10. **Yesterday:** This moon is based on a simple sketch of the moon above the Pennington Lake with the comments made on May 8th, 2009 about it. The colors are pale orange, yellow, and a red halo glowing around the big full moon. It was very strange colors before the sunset on 7:10 PM. It is the last moon I painted in my studio (#127 at the South Stadium).

Color

It is a key for me to concentrate on the painting process to emphasize the luminous and ethereal volumes throughout dark-toned works, suggestive of the silent stillness of outer space. I juxtapose passages of heavy impasto with thin glazes.

According to Wassily Kandinsky's color theory; the color directly influences the soul. "The Blue is the heavenly color and if it is lighter, it is shown in different, remote, neutral fashion. The White is the absolute silence, pauses in music, temporarily breaks the melody, nothingness before birth like ice age. The Brown with Red is a powerful inner harmony; if they are skillfully blended it is going to be inner appeal of extraordinary indescribable beauty".

I choose the colors based on Kandinsky's color theory and the substance of the handmade paints, originally made of crushed earth, melted stone, and special characteristic information of the colors, so that the paint itself can freely work in the picture. It is a pleasure for me to work with good quality paints, because they are doing their jobs from the start to the finish by themselves without my specific efforts. I am not trying to create unusual colors for my painting but trying to find out their hidden originality.

As an under layer, I used earthy black tonalities: Van Dyke Brown, German Earth or Slate Black. The Van Dyke Brown could be shown as a dark grayish yellow brown to dark or olive brown, and provided a rich tooth for the second layer. The German Earth dried with a soft matte surface and turned bluish like moonstone when white was added. It was used for the darkest areas and I sometimes mixed it with brownish colors for

smoothing surface connections overall. If I didn't want the black colors to overpower the light area, I used slate black which is rich, warm, and not heavy.

After I took some paints off of the ground with fabrics, pulling positive images, I put Soft White, Zinc Buff, or Unbleached Titanium Pale on the same spot or drew the interesting shape of the moon on the other area for the basic composition. The soft white is too strong for me sometimes, so I mixed it with Zinc Buff (pinkish off-white and extremely subtle and beautiful) or Unbleached Titanium Pale (cleaner and lighter than Unbleached Titanium). After I mixed them, I got a very mysterious yellowish pinkish off whites with a rich ice cream texture.

For the glazing, I used Italian Pink, Dutch Brown, Stil de Grain, or Alizarin Yellow. The Interference Blue and Red, transparent brilliant blue and red, is used for the spiritual atmosphere around the moon. The Italian Pink (the highlights in the reddish hair painted by Titian, a semi-transparent orange earth) is for the lighter area, and the Dutch Brown (smoky or atmospheric with very crisp texture) is for the middle dark area like the shadows on the moon. The Stile de Grain (the Dutch made this with roots and is a warm, transparent gold) and Alizarin Yellow (a clean, transparent yellow with light earthy quality) are for a light weight yellowish moon. I sometimes mixed them with the black colors to adjust the light movement on the surface.

Painting Process

The most important job for me is to open possibilities of my subject, my medium and myself. I usually start with sculpting the image of the moon on the wetness of the paint loosely to capture the light and texture. This process takes the most time and requires physical actions with the tools to create various textures. These marks are like my emotions from my past and present. I gradually build layers of paint, pulling my image together yet leaving areas of earlier layers showings through, revealing the depth and mass. I felt forgiveness and healing while glazing because it created balance, harmony, and peace. What I expect from my last stage of work is to show a richer combination of textures and a personal touch. The colors represent time and age with monochromatic colors; gray, white, black, and earth tone, because space-time develops in the direction of movement of color. Like two opposite sides, temporal and eternal, of the human condition, the result of my work also has opposing elements; finite/infinite, real/unreal, quiet/dynamic, and chaos/unity. Usually I work on 2 or 3 paintings at the same time, so that I can stretch out the potential ability of colors and techniques. This flexible painting technique lets me have a refreshed vision for each painting and free my tools and me. I sometimes work on separate and bendable panels, so that the image itself floats in real space and creates illusions when viewed from different angles.

Conclusion

I always think that I am living in the infinite universe, not just on the earth, especially at night, when I look up the dark blue sky with the moon and stars. It makes me feel clear about this; just unbounded space from me to infinity, nothing there. I can see myself in the mysterious universe; how small and weak I am physically, yet how big and strong I am spiritually. I try to capture these various emotional and spiritual connections in my works. The moon holds my past, present, and future at the same time, because my body is always changing, but the moon has always been the same ever since I first saw it. So it is a thread in my history, dreams, prayers, hopes, and a guiding light to my eternal home.

My title, *Over the Rim* is from the poem, “The Wind in the Willows” by Kenneth Grahame (1859-1932), British author. **The Rim** has two meanings; one is from my first name (Jungrim), and the other is the limited ability to control time and space.

**Over the Rim of the waiting earth the moon lifted with
low majesty till it swung clear of the horizon and rode off,
free of moorings...**

When I look back at all 3 years, 2007-2009, it was the most sparkling time in my life, like the stars in the night sky. I was disappointed, encouraged, and challenged, and then I finally found what I have been looking for since I started painting- my universe, my true cosmos which is made with the love of God-forgiveness.

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Images



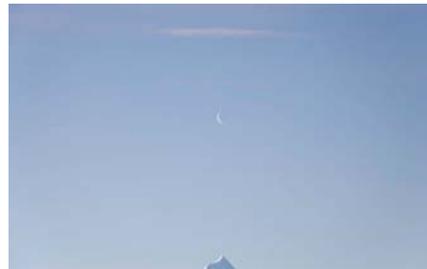
1. Caspar David Friedrich,
Monk by the Sea



2. Joseph Mallord William Turner,
Fishermen at Sea 1796



3. Gregory Amenoff,
Labrador Sea X, 2004, oil on
panel, 20 x 20 inches



4. John Paul Caponigro,
Antarctica, 2005



5. *A Bust of Christ*



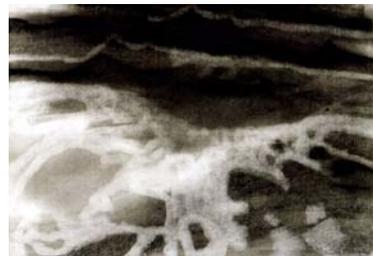
6. Arthur Dove, *Me and the Moon*, 1937.
Wax emulsion on canvas, 18 x 26 inches



7. MeryBeth Thielhelm, *Ebony Sea*, 2008, oil on panel, 60 x120 inches



8. Hiroshi Sugimoto



9. Emily Nelligan



10. *In the beginning*, 2009, oil on four separated masonite, 40x40(each top panels), 30x40, 40x50 (bottom panels) inches



11. *I stood upon that silent hill*, 2009, oil on two separated masonite, 40 x 48 inches each



12. *The Moon Shepherd*
2009, oil on canvas, 72 x 48 inches



13. *Moon in the Rain*
2010, oil on masonite, 36 x 60 inches



14. *Blue Moon*
2010, oil on canvas
72 x 54 inches



15. *Appreciation for
Beethoven's Moonlight*
2010, oil on canvas
60 x 42 inches



16. *Quiet Forest*, 2010, oil
on canvas, 54 x 72 inches



17. *Christmas Eve Moon*, 2010,
oil on canvas, 60 x 42 inches

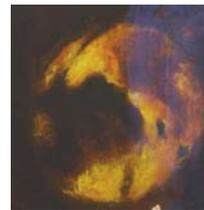


18. *In my Dream*, 2009, oil on bendable masonite, 12 x 72 x 5 inches



19. *Yesterday*, 2010 oil on bendable masonite,
36 x 34 x 5 inches

20. A series of moon paintings on small panels





Vita

Jungrim Yea was born in Seoul, South Korea, in November, 1967, raised by her parents Young-sook Noh and Jong-du Yea. After graduation from Jinsun Woman High School in Seoul, Korea, she attended KonKuk University in Seoul and received her Bachelor of Science degree in dairy science in 1991, and worked at Non-Immigration Visa unit as an administrative clerk in the United States of America Embassy at Seoul, Korea for 5 years and moved to Louisiana State University September, 2001 with her family, Jeho (husband), Tae-soo (son).

She started to seek a bachelor's degree in fine arts in 2001 at Louisiana State University. She enrolled at Louisiana State University in 2007 to pursue a graduate degree in fine arts. She is now a candidate for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the School of Art at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, under the supervision of Professor Michael Crespo.