

"Haraguchi Noriyuki: or the Movement of Weight"

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In the late night of 1968, 21-year-old Noriyuki Haraguchi encountered a large trailer slowly transporting a military aircraft on the street in Yokohama. Due to its immense size, only the tail section of the military aircraft was visible. Immediately, Haraguchi jumped into a taxi and began to chase the trailer.

Various themes can be interpreted from this scene. One can reflect on the scale and structure of military planes which are not seen often, the surrealistic combination of fighter aircraft and urban landscape, and considering the era, concerns on Vietnam and base-related issues of the military was on everyone's mind. Among these, Haraguchi was captivated by the overwhelming scale, and he immediately started creating a mock-up using plywood for the tail section of the aircraft, which led to his early work, "A4-E Skyhawk." However, I interpret a different narrative. I feel what fascinated Haraguchi the most was the situation itself in which a massive weight was in motion on the late-night streets of Yokohama in 1968.

Haraguchi's first solo exhibition was held in 1967, he initially began his artistic career as part of the "Mono-ha" group, but more as a peripheral figure. Haraguchi's works are never straightforward. Unlike Lee Ufan, who focuses on the relationships between materials, or Jiro Takamatsu, who engages in conceptual manipulation of objects, Haraguchi's use of materials like iron, water, waste oil, and polyurethane are truly expressionless, presented in a casual manner, and lack consistency. Let's list some motifs Haraguchi used in his early attempts: air pipes, warehouses, freight cars, aircrafts, pools. What is a common characteristic among them? They are all empty containers waiting to be filled by something. (Consider, for instance, the aircraft made of plaster; it's originally an aircraft that should be filled with various equipment, yet it is presented empty, suggesting hollowness). Here, emptiness and fulfillment are contrasted, and what decisively separates the two phases is weight.

In one of Haraguchi's famous work "Oil Pool," he pours waste oil into an iron frame; this process can also be viewed as the movement of weight. In 1977, this work was widely recognized around the world at "Documenta 6" in Kassel, which was completed with the pool filled to the brim with waste oil. The pool gains weight, and the shapeless waste oil which is initially contained in drums, is molded into a rigid rectangular form. This transition is a highly static process, and we hardly notice the involvement of weight. The theme of "invisible weight" undergoes variations in a series

of works where wire ropes are stretched almost to their limit. However, since 1975, the concept became clear through the artist's act of moving a slender iron plate, less than 2 meters in length, using their own body within the indoor space in the event "Iron Movement" which was conducted multiple times within gallery spaces. Yet, this is more of an exception, and in many of Haraguchi's works, the concept of weight emerges in silence with overwhelming presence. In this regard, his works remind me more of earthwork, similar to Michael Heizer's works, rather than minimal art. Think about a giant boulder rolled into a large hole dug in the desert. Consider the movement of weight, the time and labour spent to reach that point. The scene presented might be mundane, but it implies a colossal weight and burden.

Haraguchi filling the pool with waste oil gives the pool itself a presence as an object. The waste oil, with no surface tension, is seen as a perfect horizontal plane, reflecting the surrounding landscape like a mirror. The waste oil integrates with the iron frame, transforming from substance to object. It's like a horizontal weight placed on the ground, resembling a tablet or slab. At this point, it becomes evident that the piece presented in 1990, referred to as "FCS," is a towering H-beam embodying vertical weight, offering a stark contrast to the "Oil Pool." Both assembled with linear-shaped steel, one representing verticality and the other horizontality, clearly suggesting the motif of two positions and the movement of weight. Although it is purely coincidental that two works, "Oil Pool" and "FCS" appear to be in the same venue, considering Haraguchi's intention, one could say that these two works, these two weights, met here at "Maruju Art Hangar."

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