

KINFOLK

의견 Choi Byung Hoon

Five questions for the contemporary artists.

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According to the prominent New York design gallery Friedman Benda, Choi Byung Hoon is “a pioneer who synthesizes traditional Korean craft and contemporary design.” After graduating from Hongik University in Seoul in 1974, Choi became a leading figure of contemporary Korean design, both in his own practice—producing sculptural works that blur the distinction between artist and designer—and through teaching positions that he has held at his alma mater since 1990. His work is found in numerous collections throughout the world, including Hong Kong’s M+ Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Vitra Design Museum in Germany.



FIONA BAE: How would you describe your work?

CHOI BYUNG HOON: It’s an encounter between primitive nature and modernity that, through the touch of my hands, gains a specific value. I like to use rocks, for example; when I’m asked how long it takes to complete a work, I answer that it took eternity. There is also something typically Korean in my work—just as with the humble moon jar, I like to make work that has subtle charm and inner depth, and which can revive Korean traditions while introducing something modern.

FB: What does identity mean to you?

CBH: My work is a continuous process of figuring out my identity. On the morning of the opening of my first overseas show in Paris with François Laffanour at Galerie Downtown in 2010, I walked through the streets of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, which are lined with dozens of design galleries. Looking through the windows, I instantly felt that my works are different. I knew I should not try to mimic French furniture and wanted instead to do something simple and light, like moon jars. People at the opening told me my works felt like Oriental paintings.

FB: What's your creative process?

CBH: With every object and experience, I think about where I am going next with my work. Everything can be an inspiration and having worked now for 30 years, I have come to trust my eyes and intuition.

FB: What do you think about the approach of young Korean designers toward tradition?

CBH: There are many young talented designers but I feel they lack the depth needed to find their own language; they need to melt tradition into their work in order to create something of their own.

FB: You have lived in Paju, to the north of Seoul, since 2000. Do you still feel connected to the city when you visit?

CBH: I am often in Seoul for meetings and to experience the dynamic cultural scene. Living outside of the city can be somewhat stagnating at times and going back to Seoul recharges my batteries. It's extremely lively, but sometimes it can be hard to breathe.

