THE LIVING WATER

A Thesis
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by
Jung Hae Kim, M.A.

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The Ohio State University
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Master's Examination Committee:
Clara Creager
Carlyle Johnson
Georgia Strange

Approved by
Adviser
Department of Art
VITA

February 20, 1958 . . . . . . . Born - Seoul, Korea

1980 . . . . . . . . . . . . . B.A., Fashion Design,
Ewha Woman's University, Seoul, Korea

1983 . . . . . . . . . . . . . M.A., Textile Design,
Ewha Woman's University, Seoul, Korea

1984-present . . . . . . . Graduate School, Weaving,
The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

EXHIBITION

1981 . . . . . . . . . . . . . Work 4, Seoul, Korea

1983 . . . . . . . . . . . . . Wearable Art Show, Columbus, Ohio
Wearables 83, Ann Arbor, Michigan

1984 . . . . . . . . . . . . . Fiber Wear '84, Columbus, Ohio
Central Ohio Weaver's Guild Spring
Exhibition, Columbus, Ohio
Ohio State Fair Fine Arts Exhibition,
Columbus, Ohio

1985 . . . . . . . . . . . . . Wearable Art: Handmade Clothing,
Midland, Michigan

HONOR

1986 . . . . . . . . . . . . . The Edith Fergus Gilmore Materials Fund
Awards, The Ohio State University,
Columbus, Ohio
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I. Introduction

Artists often have turning points in their artistic life. They can change their intent of expression when they establish new values because of certain personal experiences, or they find new materials and techniques, or participate in new art movements. This phenomenon happened to me after I came to the United States from my native country, Korea.

In Korea, I studied Fashion Design and then Textile Design. I focused on 'Applied Art'\(^1\) rather than 'Fine Art'.\(^2\) Fashion Design is always functional, because the clothing is designed to be worn. What moved me to choose such a practical art as fashion design is that it can be applied to our daily life. When I studied fashion design, I made garments and accessories which were intended to be worn. For example, I used ready-made fabric for material and designed party-dresses, coats, and symbolic dresses which express the Korean heritage.

I became more interested in artistic garments, however, as I studied textile design. I learned how to represent garments more creatively when I designed whole garments from the yarn to the dress shape. I developed my own weaving and dying techniques and at the same time I

\(^1\)Applied Art: Art put to practical use; e.g. as used in textile designs, for pottery, etc.

\(^2\)Fine Art: The visual arts that appeal to the sense of beauty, esp. painting and sculpture.
tried incorporating into the dress the imagery inspired by Korean
traditional pattern: 'The ten immortal beings'\(^3\) in drawings, lattice
patterns in architectural structures, and symbols and language
characters in art form. For example, 'Moonbeam Dress' is a loom-shaped
garment made of beautiful silver yarn, colorful wool yarn and beads.
The pattern applied to this dress is from the hexagonal pattern on the
back of a turtle, one of the ten immortal beings. I combined two
techniques—double weaving and netting—to make this dress. I continued
to experiment with many materials and techniques; as a result, I mixed
wire with thread for the three-dimensional netting dress.

Later, I had strong spiritual experiences as a Christian by the
Holy Spirit in the United States. I desired to express my spiritual
world by religious inspiration. I changed the intent of expression
dramatically because of these spiritual experiences. About that time, I
began to work only with wire to create the abstract three-dimensional
clothing form. This work is not wearable due to the materials used and
the abstraction of the form. It gave rise to represent something
beyond the visual aspect of the art work. At this point, I realized
that my work was heading toward 'Fine Art'.

This turning point in my artistic life divides my works into two
different categories; 1. my earlier work that deals with realistic
clothing forms or 'Wearable Art', and 2. my recent work which involves
abstract clothing form, or 'Clothing sculpture'. Wearable Art is

\(^3\)The ten immortal beings: Korean traditional symbols of immorta-
lity; e.g. turtle, mountain, sun, deer, water, rock and cloud, etc.
defined by Joanne Mattera, a weaver, as "Hand-made clothing by an artist" or "Art for the body". It must concern itself with functionality and wearability. On the other hand, I defined Clothing-sculpture as "Woven sculpture which has a three-dimensional clothing form intended as a personal metaphor". This concept is quite different from the concept of wearable art, though both of them art works which have clothing shapes. Clothing-sculpture looks wearable, but it is not intended to be worn. It does not demonstrate any functional qualities, but it suggests human body form. The eye of the viewer looks to the negative space contained by the clothing form as much as at the clothing form itself; therefore, both the real and the suggested form became more abstract.

To make my work more understandable, I would like to explain 1. the materials and processes used, 2. my intent of expression, and to introduce 3. my clothing-sculpture in full by using examples.

II. Materials/Processes

In my clothing-sculpture I wanted a transparent material for the expression of the invisible spiritual world. I chose wire-fabric as the medium because of its transparency and its endlessly varied color, pattern and form. The wire medium is also easy to handle, it is

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flexible, lightweight and totally dimensional. The wire would allow the work to retain its form permanently without additional supports, and aesthetically the color of its coating adds richness and subtlety to overlays. I strongly agree with the statement about wire by Arline M. Fisch, a jeweler working with wire, "The interlacings of round and flat elements of metals produce reflective planes with structure which appear and disappear in changing light."

I found that I could change the feeling of the work depending on the types of wire used. In my most recent work I've chosen to use four types of wire, heavy or fine coated copper wire, brass wire, aluminium wire and metal screen.

The process of the work is weaving and manipulating the woven wire material into a three-dimensional sculpture form. I weave diverse wire and brass in a mesh form until the woven material is like a plain fabric or screen. According to the material used, some fabrics are very stiff and heavy, and likewise some are very soft, light and shining, because it is made of very fine wire. These fabrics sometimes have the same effect as nylon monofilament fabric which Kay Sekimachi, a fiber artist, weaves for her multi-layered textile-sculpture. The layers, when removed from the loom, curve and move to create airy, clear and organised fluid sculptural shapes.

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5 Patricia Malarcher, "Inspired by Fiber", Fiberarts vol. 10, no. 6 (New York: Lark Communications, 1983): p. 34.

By hand I make the abstract clothing form out of the woven wire to make convex and concave shapes. Sometimes I add unwoven wires or other materials, ready-made screen, paint or beads. This process allows the delicate and spatial characteristics of metals to remain a part of the image.

Through these processes I am trying to invest my clothing-sculpture with vitality in order to express the truth of my spiritual world visually. This attempt was very ambiguous at first, therefore, I consistently prayed for inspiration, such as the triumph of my spirituality, until the completion of my work. As a consequence of manipulating woven wire-fabric by unconscious spiritual power, Triumph I was born as a first Clothing-sculpture. (Plate I.) Triumph I was not presupposed, but it gave me new artistic insight and a deeper artistic inspiration. My spiritual Clothing-sculpture originated from this piece and has evolved through the use of varying imagery, shape, color and texture. As the Spirit prompted, I would cut the hand-woven wire fabric, connect the side seam lines with heavy wire and shape concave and convex surfaces for volumetric form according to the human figure. Although sometimes, I would make small models prior to the real piece to create the gesture of clothing form. I was able unconsciously to reflect in my pieces not only my personality but also the sense of tradition which I developed from my past experience in clothing design. I could not have done this without the spiritual power, and by praying to God.

In presentation, the installation of the works bears a great importance. Height should be carefully chosen so that people can look down to a sculptural piece on the ground; or straight at it, confronting the
piece directly; or up to it, as to imply something larger than the viewer. The earthy beings are presented near to the ground because of their low status. Beads around the work accentuate the earthyness of the beings, merging the form with the ground. **The Living Water** which represents the Christ who bridges heavenly and earthy beings although attached to the ground, towers over the viewer with its tallness. (Plate V.) It is filled with greatness and power. The heavenly beings, however, are fully detached from the earth and exhibited higher than the eye level of the viewer, evoking the awesomeness and grandeur of Heaven.

The lighting effect is also important for presentation. The stronger luminosity, the more alive the effects on the works will be. An intense light projected onto the sculpture will cause it to shine and sparkle making it come to life. The shadow that is produced by the light on the background is an effective means of bringing out my intention of each work, connecting the work and background three-dimensionally.

III. Intent

The purpose of my works is to express in visual form the faith in my spiritual world. In creating works, I am really frank with myself; I have been absorbed into the spiritual world consciously ever since I came into a closer relationship with God.

I believe that the spiritual world exists and is the most important part of human life. Spirituality is unrecognized by many people. My desire to bring my truth to art, combined with my artistic sense,
strongly motivates me to create images that will communicate this to the viewer through the visual language.

I have tried to express diverse abstract states of the spirit such as heavenly beings and worldly beings in broad outline. To express this image visually, I put the inner spiritual vitality into my works, expressing it by the color, texture, shape, gravity, pose, height, angle, scale, and effect of lighting and shadow. Generally the worldly beings (Temptation, Agony, Arrogance and Authority) are of luxurious color, ruff texture, and great weight; they are looked down upon and, therefore, presented at lower than eye level; they create shadows on the ground. On the other hand, the ascending heavenly beings (Resurrection, Triumph I, and Triumph II) have a monochromatic light color with a fine and silky texture. They are larger than life and, therefore, presented not only on a large scale but at higher than eye level as well. They are light weight and are designed to create shadows on the wall rather than on the ground. The heavenly beings which bridge life and death (The Living Water and Rejoicing) are at an intermediate stage in color, texture, gravity, and scale. The shape and pose of the works have the human figure form, which their titles suggest.

All the Clothing-sculpture in The Living Water series are individu-ual pieces, or groups, but they are interrelated each one being a part of the whole. For this reason the posotioning of each work is also important. The Living Water, which Jesus gave to the Samaritan woman, is a metaphoric expression of eternal life (John 4:7-28).7 Whoever

drinks this water will never thirst again, that is, whoever believes in Jesus Christ as a savior will be saved and have eternal life. The title confers the whole meaning to my work. Temptation, Arrogance, Agony, Authority, The Living Water, Rejoicing, Resurrection, and Triumph I and II all participate in this theme: Jesus as source of the living water.

My work, therefore, is intended to be a challenge to unbelievers because the title puzzles them, and if they realize what it means, they will hopefully be exposed to God's bright light. My work, on the other hand, is a blessing to believers, bringing out the light that they possess inside of themselves. Enlightenment and the grace of God will be the experience of those who believe, like the experience that I myself have had and wish to transmit to the viewer.

My intention is for the viewer to perceive the spiritual realm through the visual language, but I do not expect everyone to understand the whole meaning of my work. I will be grateful if the viewer would appreciate the formal aspects of my work, or the visual language itself. My sincere hope is that the viewer will subconsciously, if not consciously, perceive the meaning of my work.

IV. Discussion of pieces

I would like to describe my works as being three-dimensional clothing forms which express spiritual power and vitality. The spiritual world of each piece is represented by color, form, texture and the effects of gravity. The large scale works represent the Spirit of God. The color of these pieces are mostly monochromatic and evoke a
singular powerful emotion. They are strong somewhat transparent material forms, exhibited above eye level to imply power. The works that depict spirits of the human being can be identified with my spiritual self-portrait, which has been changed by several spiritual experiences. The spirits which exist in all human being, whether christian or non-christian, are divided into five groups: 1, Agony, Arrogance and Authority, 2. The Living Water, 3. Rejoicing and Temptation, 4. Resurrection, 5. Triumph I and II.

Agony is the human spiritual figure which is harassed by sin from worldly desires and almost dying. The feeble lying posture that has its two arms together suggests the human being who eagerly thirsts for the savior of itself. The Agony is my metaphor of the wandering stage before accepting Jesus as the savior. The color and lines are very much alive. Yellow, orange and red flow over black, freely drawing curved lines by the tapestry weaving technique. The material consists of heavy black wire and fine colorful wires. The pose of the human figure suggests suffering. An individual who is lying prostrate on the ground is meant to be without hope. The heavy gravity of black wire and the lowest eye level support this pose. The contrast between the luxurious and lively color and the agonizing pose tells the spiritual folly of an overindulgence in the worldly and material. Beads under the figure represent the figure connected to earth, in contrast to heavenly spirits. (Plate II.)

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9 Tapestry: A weft- face plain- weave fabric in which the weft yarns are discontinuous; usually decorative or expressive.
In *Arrogance*, the pose, color and texture express the wandering of the spirit, its ignorance of the eternal truth, and its egocentrism and selfishness. The color is also luxurious and beautiful, meaning that such color represents all the mortal avarice and carnal desire of the mundane world.\(^{10}\) It is very beautiful in appearance but only at first sight. The deeper it is viewed, the more shallow and weary it becomes. The upright angle of the head suggests excessive prides. Arrogance is presented higher than eye level, and it suggests human arrogance that strives to be higher than God. (Plate III.)

Through *Authority*, I wished to visualize the pompous look of spirit which is always eager to dominate other people and parades prestige filled with authority.\(^{11}\) The luxurious colors, yellow, red, copper and brass suggest worldly things. The heavy wires enforce the feeling of gravity connected to earth. The posture represents shrugging its arms and stretching out its hand toward the ground. The viewer might find the work strong and rigid. This piece is hollow, but it is harmonized with tangled colorful wires and outlined thick wires. The tail-like wires that has been transformed from hip and beads around it also suggest earthy conception. (Plate IV.)

*The Living Water* symbolizes the suffering Christ who bridges heavenly beings (life) and worldly beings (the spiritually dead) to serve and to give his life to redeem many people.\(^{12}\) The color of the

\(^{10}\)Ibid, "Mark 7:21-22", p. 1010.

\(^{11}\)Ibid, "1 John 2:16", p. 1261.

weft is from red to brass on the black warp. When confronted with the color red, we might face various feelings according to the sense and perception of each individual. For example, one might be confronted with warmth and passion, while another with wickedness and cruelty. What is expressed in The Living Water, however, is simple: the blood of the Crucifixion. Red copper is attached afterward to the upper figure to represent blood. Heavy black wires dominate in the whole figures and give feeling of gravity. Several plyed wires inside represent the energy and outline shape harmoniously. Also, the configuration represents a body hanging from one arm and abstractly twisted legs. The basal circular lines project with huge magnanimity. This gesture might sometimes give the effect of sprightly dancing. But it is meant to give the viewer an oppressive feeling because of the heavy black wire in contrast to the radiant red wire. This piece is attached to the ground but presented higher than eye level to give feeling of spiritual greatness of the Christ. (Plate V.)

Temptation symbolizes satan who always tempts human spirit to commit sins. It is composed of plain black copper to emphasize the evil of satan. Overlapped black wire-fabrics make strong effect of shade according to the intensity. The pose seems to be vigorously

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^13 Weft: A set of yarns or other material perpendicular to the selvedge or longer dimension of a woven fabric; the crosswise element in a woven construction.

^14 Warp: A set of yarns that are parallel to one another and to the selvedge or longer dimension of a woven fabric; the lengthwise element in a woven construction.

^15 Ibid, "1 Peter 5:8", p. 1256.
moving because of the swirling composition of apart arms and twisted waist and hip. Basal lines curled up tightly to suggest, in comparison with the fully rounded lines of The Living Water, wicked and egoistic mind. This piece is presented straight to eye level lower than The Living Water; since it has much weaker power than God. This piece is supported from the ceiling by transparent lines. (Plate VI.)

In Rejoicing, I have expressed through these pieces the idea that Christianity is praising the Lord with heavenly rejoicing.\textsuperscript{16} Color, shape and texture all give monotonous and restricted feeling. Color, slightly glossy and brassy represents the purity and piety of Christian spirits obeying and praising the Lord. The gesture, suggesting fragment-like clothing, is connecting five pieces gradually raised from the ground. The two arms raised, the knee bent, skirt flying represent the rejoicing and peace of mind. These works are firmly anchored to the ground as if burdened by gravity or a spiritual weight. A visual contradiction is somewhat implied because of the very light weight look of the color and quality of material. Arrogance or Authority represents worldly joy through luxurious color. In contrast, Rejoicing expresses heavenly joy and peace of mind. (Plate VII.)

The work, Resurrection represents Jesus raised after death.\textsuperscript{17} It is a very spatial piece. The materials consist of light green and silver, silky fine wire which illustrate the heavenly image. The material gives Resurrection delicacy and a visionary feeling. The gesture represents the form rising from the earth and both shoulders raised as


\textsuperscript{17}Ibid, "John 5:28, 29", p. 1078.
if overcoming death. The tangled copper wires inside the smooth clothing form represents the Holy energy or power of God. The tail shape made of fine green wire, represents an ascending form. In contrast to Resurrection, Arrogance' tail, a very thick and circular wire twisting on the ground, implies belonging to the earth. In Resurrection, one arm is gradually transformed to very airy flowing lines like water. The Living Water is Jesus on the earth. The tail form draws a flowing circular line around world. The quality of the fiber art, space and texture are well revealed. This piece makes me feel greatly relieved, because of its vitality. (Plate VIII.)

Triumph II expresses the conception of Jesus' triumph over death and ascension to heaven. This work consists of thick and thin copper wire and fine, silver aluminium wire. All over, its color is light and monochromatic. The large scale of the work suggests the overwhelming force of ascending Jesus. The multi-layered transparent and shining materials which provide the texture of this piece create various effects. Several wire fabrics which overlap one other render a feeling of depth to this work. Two wire fabrics overlayed one upon another make a check pattern. In some other places, the wire warp hangs down naturally, remaining unwoven, and this emphasizes the airy and free quality of the material. The outline of thick wires and the center lines of tangled fine wires suggest the strength and power of God. Like the wing of a dragonfly, those lines contrast with a very silky and fantastic wire-fabric. The large shoulder, the wing like arm, and the

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clothing shape of the pose suggest a form ascending to heaven and evoke triumph over all worldly being. Compared with Triumph I, which is my metaphor for my personal triumph and which originates my Clothing-sculpture, Triumph II is my metaphor for the triumph of God, and is therefore on a larger scale and made of overlapped fabric of various kinds, suggesting various feelings, and providing rich texture and power. (Plate VIII.)

V. Conclusion

Weaving has always been my essential means of expression and has given me great delight and peace of mind. Mixing of material allows me to work with the weaving process and extend the concept beyond the functional, wearable art form to a more emotive state.

Changes of material and process have not been the only changes. More importantly, my concept of Art has changed dramatically. In my earlier days, I focused mainly on visual and physical aspects of the artwork—color, pattern, texture and shape—but now my art focuses on the translation of my inner world—personal thoughts, perceptions, and spiritual life.

In my Clothing-sculpture, I have changed my imagery. Unlike my wearable-art, I am trying to invest my Clothing-sculpture with vitality in order to express the belief of my spiritual world truthfully.

Finally, I expressed the invisible spiritual world through visual language by weaving wires and by manipulating the forms. This gave me a new insight as an artist and a deeper artistic inspiration. In return.
I hope that my artistic endeavor and work will contribute some light to our ideas about art and our understanding of the spirit.

In the future, I will keep making fiber-sculpture which has a spiritual aspect. I am very much interested in testing various materials, techniques (such as welding) and other media, such as metals, silver and golden wire, plant fibers, seagrass and so on, to represent the theme distinctively and communicate it well. According to Irene Weller, a English textile artist, "the artist's concern is to communicate abstract ideas and in order to do this he uses materials and techniques." She adds that "the craftsman's concern is to produce practical objects—probably using the same materials and techniques." I made the transition from craftsman to artist. I will make my work from small scale to larger than life, monumental, and I will still express Christian themes and make honest visual forms so that the viewer can share the beauty and experience a spiritual rest.


Plate I, Triumph I, 16'x19'x45'
Plate II, Agony, 35'x60'x21'
Plate III, *Arrogance*, 31'x70'x76'
Plate IV, Authority, 37\'x65\'x26\'
Plate V, The Living Water, 60'x55'x99'
Plate VI, Temptation, 33'x30'x51'
Plate VII, Rejoicing, 14'x31'x30'x31'
Plate VIII, Resurrection, 61'x108'x88'
Plate VIII, Triumph II, 72' x 52' 109'