Nature

Hye Sin

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Nature

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Abstract

For years, people have used art to transform images of nature into symbols of life, benevolence, reverence, creation, and death. In my life, nature means freedom. It has offered me meditation and power, and enriched my life. Perfect freedom is my ultimate goal. I have tried to express this in my art forms.

Early in my life, I was not skilled at observation. I was not fully aware of many of the intricate details that can be found in the beauty of nature, although I was always surrounded by it.

When I lived in Rochester, New York, the landscape had a great influence on my work. The environment opened my eyes to the details of nature. I had observed more closely the wind, birds, insects, lakes, streams, and leaves. I felt relaxed and refreshed during these visits to natural settings.

My thesis reveals the ways in which I developed my understanding for nature. I am primarily interested in two characteristics of nature: the physical structure of natural forms and the intangible characteristics of air, wind, sound, smell and so on.

The first thing I focused on was the physical characteristics of structure in natural form. These characteristics change every season and have everlasting beauty. Each form in nature has its own unique color, shape and texture. The “invisible” characteristics of air, wind, sound, and smell offered me a poetic sensibility such as happiness or isolation, which I conveyed in my art.

My art works consist of metal pieces, jewelry, and paintings. Through them, I am expressing my feelings about nature.
Artist History

I was born in Seoul, Korea. I grew up surrounded by Korean traditional art. The core of Korean art is beautiful harmony. When I was young, I could not explain the characteristic of the art, but I wanted to capture a harmonic rhythm that was created by smooth lines from oriental painting and calligraphy. These lines, which make a very natural structure and image, communicate energy and beauty. I believe that my childhood exposure to this type of art influenced my work.

As a child I studied oriental painting and calligraphy for many years before going to high school. This practice gave me time to meditate and express rhythmical lines by drawing. Calligraphy is more than just a method of writing Korean characters. It is a way to practice self-control and grace, and to observe the spaces in between brush strokes. Calligraphy has often been incorporated into my metal work.

During my BFA and MFA courses in Korea, I learned and practiced metal craft skills and design concepts that were based on utility or function. I think that this practical experience gave me the confidence to express myself as a craftsperson.

However, I wanted a new challenge. I decided to look for a new way to advance as an artist and decided that I needed to create new work in a different environment.

Rochester’s natural environment stimulated my creative passion. Creativity is acquired from observation. There is birth, life, and death in nature with the
passage of time. The process was similar to a gesture, a picking up of traces from nature. I think that this new creative process offered me unlimited artistic possibilities.

I wanted to hold each beautiful moment forever. I imagined ways to express the fragile natural forms that I observed in the forest. Because these forms disappear with time, I realized that it would be hard to recall the natural phenomena if I was not in nature. Thus, I enjoyed expressing natural forms and phenomena with a strong material like metal.
Development

1. Inspiration

1) Nature Artists
   (1) Karl Blossfeldt

Karl Blossfeldt (June 13, 1865 – December 9, 1932) was a German photographer, sculptor, teacher, and artist. He worked in Berlin, Germany, and is best known for his close-up photographs of plants.

Blossfeldt photographed flowers and plants with large cameras that he built himself. He preferred wild plants and weeds, since these showed nature’s primal forms better than cultivated flowers and plants. He also documented flora at various stages of development. Blossfeldt cut unnecessary twigs and leaves away before photographing his specimens close up against a neutral background. This enabled him to register their regular geometrical patterns.

Blossfeldt never received formal photography training and used a homemade camera designed to significantly magnify his subjects. He focused on flowers, stems, leaves, buds, tendrils, seeds, and seed pods, meticulously arranging them to show the intricate, elegant architectural structure of their natural formations. His photographs were taken using either a vertical or horizontal perspective and could be magnified up to 27 times their actual size, revealing extraordinary details within the natural structure of the plants. In the process, he created some of the most innovative photographic work of his time. The simple yet expressive forms captured on film affirmed his boundless artistic
and intellectual ability. He once said, "The plant never lapses into mere arid functionalism; it fashions and shapes according to logic and suitability, and with its primeval force compels everything to attain the highest artistic form."

According to the Encyclopedia of Twentieth Century Photography, Blossfeldt did not foresee his artistry as a photographer but hoped the release of his work would inspire people to look more closely at art. He was quoted as saying, "My flower documents should contribute to restoring the relationship to nature. They should reawaken a sense for nature, point out its teeming richness of form, and prompt the viewer to observe for himself the local plant world."

(2) Andy Goldsworthy

Andy Goldsworthy (born 1956) is one of the best exponents of land art. He works exclusively with natural materials, including rock, wood, ice, leaves, thorns, wool, blood and excrement. Goldsworthy says, "Each work grows, stays, and decays, and process and decay are implicit." He lives in Scotland and produces outdoor site-specific artworks near his home.

Goldsworthy is deeply engaged in nature’s three-step cycle of growth, permanence, and death. However, he experiences the cycle in person as he
looks for materials when he walks in nature.

Whenever I went for a walk in a forest, I picked up natural objects. I collected leaves, branches, flowers, stones and sketched what I observed. Invisible phenomena like wind, sounds, and smell involved me deeply in nature. I opened all my senses to the earth and listened to its whispers so that I could learn how to better communicate with nature.

In the beginning, I was interested in the organic shapes, colors, and textures that I observed in the forest, and then I started to incorporate my own feelings about nature into my work.

Birth, life, and death in four seasons are a regular cycle. Needless to say, it is not unusual for this cycle to provide a strong motivation for art. I sensed a calm but vigorous movement in nature. It is very slow, yet happens in a moment. I tried to contain these images and my feelings in my work.

(3) Jae-Cheol Jeong

Jae-Cheol Jeong was born in Seoul, South Korea. He graduated from the Sculpture Department at Seoul National University in 1987 and from Graduate
School at the same university. Jeong had his first solo exhibition at the gallery of the Korean Culture & Art Foundation in 1992 and has participated in 80 international and national group exhibitions. He is a past winner of the Asian Artist Award from the Vermont Studio.

Wood has been the focus of his sculpture work from his earliest pieces to his work in his sixth solo exhibition. He used natural wood itself for work in his first solo show, Hide & Show. He gathered and used wood from nature outside his studio rather than buying wood from a lumber company. It is somewhat humorous that he used a wood column that had once supported an old house. He learned how to forge a bond between materials and the artist through his nature collection. Jeong made an effort to focus on the originality of natural wood in his work rather than the artificial transformation of wood into a sculpture.

I also gathered primal forms from nature and recreate the natural forms with their unique textures colors and shapes into my sculptural jewelry pieces. I think that was the most similar point between Jeong’s work and my work.
2) Line

I incorporated calligraphy and oriental painting (Image 3; 4) into my artwork. Calligraphy and oriental painting are not only methods for writing and drawing but also the artistic dance of brush on paper. Beauty in calligraphy and oriental painting is represented by brush strokes and the line, which can sufficiently express the sense of movement. In calligraphy and oriental painting, each stroke has rhythm and movement making these art techniques more than mere writing and drawing. In this manner, I rethought the methods for tools and metal techniques and treated them like musical instruments. In other words, I no longer worked the tools but played them.

I collected, observed, and sketched found objects. These objects had unique physical characteristics that I sometimes exaggerated or retrenched in my sketches. I focused on translating natural objects into rhythmical metal works. Further, I created a new form with a natural line and angle using fundamental craft techniques. I focused on transforming natural objects into elegant and rhythmical metal art forms.

Image 3. Jeung Hee Kim

Image 4. Ho Han
2. Creative Process

1) Idea Development
My work reflected on five life stages: planting, growth, budding, blooming, and withering. This choice was based on my observation. I was also interested in textures, colors, and especially the connection between two branch structures. I collected many natural specimens and always found a variety of material. Textures and colors varied by season, although all possessed a similar shape. Plants bloomed in the spring, revealing a new sense of hope. When I observed the buds in spring after a hard winter, it was as if I was like the bud, because I also was ready to enter a new space with a new work process. Therefore, spring meant hope.

I did many sketches (Image. 5) of buds, leaves, and branches with seed, making an effort to depict the process of budding and blooming. The working processes for this art are die forming, chasing, and fabrication techniques because these techniques allowed making expressive shapes for flowering plants.

Summer seems to make all things green. When I walked through the forest in summer, the trees had millions of green leaves; flowers sit upon green stems and even birds looked green in color. Summer forest gave me energetic powers and peaceful times. Summer revealed its many vivid colors, so it was challenging to figure out how to choose meaningful summer colors for my metal works. I tried enamel and patination, but I sometimes applied acrylic painting to the metal or experimented with other color applications. The richness of the summer season enabled me to collect a variety plants and other
natural forms, which I expressed by giving volume to metal with the die-forming technique; I expressed the plants’ full bloom with thin metal wire. Summer gave me the courage to try diverse color techniques on my metal works.

I liked to take walks in the fall because I felt at that time I could get away from human civilization. Fall season made me calmer and I could better concentrate on my work. During the fall, nature prepared itself to endure the hard winter; nature cuts out the unnecessary parts of its body and minimizes its shape and mass. Natural forms changed both their shapes and textures. Branches became cylindrical having textures like small dots and lines on the surface. Flowers wither dry, and became stiff. When I walk in the forest, I find new forms and ideas from the changing textures and colors from the fallen leaves. I was charmed by the variation of fallen leaves, tree bark and the blue moss. Their color transitioned from green to brown according to changing time of day. I tried to capture the branch shapes of the fall season in metal with the use of liver of sulfur patina, heat patina, roller printing, sanding, and chasing.

During the long winter season, the trees looked thin like calligraphy brush lines on the paper. In the white forest of winter, I saw the spaces between linear shapes of trees. When I looked at more detail, I found white branches had red budding at the end of their stems. I wanted to capture this beauty in my art.

I selectively collected many branches and various barks and put them on the paper to more easily look at them. The branches had stiff shiny surfaces with small dots and the bark remained shiny and strong. I marveled at their shapes, textures, and colors. I drew the shapes in a sketch book and sometimes
exaggerated them as blooming flowers, and beautiful seeds from thin branches. My work process enabled me to actually be involved in nature rather than just expressing the beauty of natural forms. I enjoyed winter, but I sometimes wished for spring while I made a snow covered forest of white from sterling silver.

Image 5. Sketches

2) Material Development

I use sterling silver and copper as primary materials because they are easily hammered into new shapes. After heat-treating, sterling silver and copper changed to a malleable metal, I could more easily make the full blooms, buds of oval shape and hollow branches. The white color of sterling silver was relevant to express the re-birth of budding plants, and the red color of copper enabled me to obtain various forest colors through patination techniques. However, I also used wood, fabric, and glass in this new work. Using various materials
added warmth to my forms, despite the fact that I was using metal as my main material.

Furthermore, I applied the use of natural materials like moss, bark, branches, and pine cones in my work. I enjoyed a combination of forest materials with traditional metal. During this period, I actually regarded my work as play. I really enjoyed observing, gathering, choosing, and using the natural forms to express my imagination in my art forms.

3) Process Development
To express my feelings about nature, I made soft form prototypes to develop an idea from my drawings of natural forms. This first step was critical to making an accurate shape that I remembered from the forest. I then began making two metal works, water pots, several jewelry pieces and paintings. In the beginning of making the jewelry, I did not consider function because I thought this could interfere with the ideal image that I hoped to capture. Thus, I referred to my jewelry as “sculptural jewelry”. This jewelry consisted of brooches with elegant long lines, necklaces with the sensation of movement, and three-dimensional rings that looked like budding flowers. I also made many paintings; painting was the medium through which I could reveal my feelings about nature and to refresh my tired mind and body.

I changed my work process to help me look for unpredictable forms and new ideas. My process had been observation of objects → sketch → modeling → making a major work. However, I had changed that process to observation of collected branches, flowers, barks and so on → designing idea → making work
re-designing idea → making the work. I created a figure and drew a new image, modified it, and refined it. This process allowed me to avoid shortcomings. My work more resembled the natural forms, and this made me enjoy the working experience. My art changed from describing the natural forms to depicting feelings of nature.

4) Technique Development
I used hammers as drawing tools. Metal sheet was shaped into three-dimensional form by hammering. I applied many metal techniques to my works: folding, dapping, chasing, sinking, stretching, scoring, die-forming, soldering, welding, marriage of metal and patination. These techniques were developed through seeing, observing, and capturing images from nature and rendering natural shapes, lines and angles in metal forms.
Discussion of work

1. Sculptural Jewelry

1) Late Winter, Early Spring – Images of the Bud (illus. 1, 2 and 3)

In these pieces, I concentrated on the reconstruction of nature. Plants consisted of a root, stem, and bud. Shoots formed in spring (illus. 1), and buds opened (illus. 2), and bloomed (illus 3). The beauty of spring was the harmony between a smooth stalk and elegant bud.

As the bud and sprout flowered (illus. 1, 2 and 3), their volume gives a sense of tension to spring plants. To shape the volume, I made a root, budding flower (illus. 2 and 3) using the die-forming technique. I used sterling silver as the material, because of its ability to stretch. Its color also united the color of ivory (illus. 1) and the fabric (illus. 3) that were found objects from nature depicting the flowering of buds.

As a way of final finishing the sterling silver, I made the surface into fine silver. I repeated the following process: heating the sterling silver pieces → putting them in the pickle → putting them in the water with baking soda 10 times or more in order to make up for the shortcoming of sterling silver’s color change. I used chasing to give a sheet of metal the detailed surface textures of trunk or branch shapes, and I used a fabrication technique to make long sculptured jewelry.
2) Summer – Images of the Blooming (illus. 4, 5, 6 and 7)

Natural plants sprout buds. The buds popped up in summer (illus. 5) and after blooming, the buds had thin stamens (illus. 4) and changed into dry flowers with a woven texture (illus. 6 and 7). To express these natural forms, I used die-forming (illus. 5) and fabrication (illus. 4, 6 and 7). I made a ball shape for the summer blossom with fine silver wire (illus. 6 and 7), and then combined that with an outer frame created from sterling silver wire. I placed enamel on the surface of the ball then I applied the granulation technique on top of the ball. I could embody the images of blossoming flowers by using these techniques. Other jewelry pieces included a flowered long ring (illus. 4), a hairpin with an image of a bird on the branch (illus. 6), a necklace with an elegant long stalk and blooming flower (illus. 6) and a flowered brooch (illus. 7).

3) Late Fall, Early Winter – Images of the withering Natural Form (illus. 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12)

Nature starts dying in fall, a season that provides plentiful colors of yellow, green, red, and black. As the leaves withered, the bark peeled off the trees, and the branches lost their leaves. I painted the fall colors. First, I made a necklace of withering flower images with sterling silver and copper (illus. 8). To make colors, I sweat soldered the sterling silver and copper, raising the edge to make a flower by hammering. Then I made a brown color with heat patina and finished the surface with wax (illus. 8-detail).

After the sweat soldering, I made several pieces of metal. The work, bark, used the same technique (illus. 9). First, I did sweat soldering sterling silver and
copper, and then I did the roller printing with sand paper, fabric, and thread because the mediums could give texture and pattern to the metal surfaces. Finally, I melted the edge of the bark using reticulation to look more natural. I also made branch shapes using not only sweat soldering, but also welding to pattern the sterling silver surface (illus. 10).

I used a range of colors, including sepia and black (illus. 11). The variation of colors from liver of sulfur was regulated by temperature and quantity of water. Moreover, I sometimes got a rare bluish green color from liver of sulfur as I made the fine surface or the rough surface using sand blasting (illus. 11).

I needed to capture the variety of colors that I saw in the forest. I started to paint acrylic on the metal, but the acrylic peeled away. After I created rough textures with filing and heated the metal, I could paint perfectly on the surfaces of metal (illus. 12). It was gratifying to realize that I could make textures and colors that were similar to forms found in nature.

4) Winter – Images of the Re-birth (illus. 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23)

The thin trees in winter helped me to transform my work. The collected natural objects like branches, barks, and pine cones were not only imitated in the metal but were also used in the metal work. For the first time in this thesis work, I made a necklace. Pine cones were arranged in the center of the necklace with pine needles crafted by sterling silver wire (illus. 13).

To express the branch, I mixed two red metal colors, with mokumegane technique (illus. 19), and created textures with overlaying, chasing, and
stamping; I then rolled up the sheet of metal to make straw shapes through hammering.

Next, I designed two branches. One branch had a curved line. I made a streamlined metal form to represent vital power, then I joined the form to the curved branch (illus. 14) and in the straight-line branch, I connected a straight-line metal form with the branch to induce tension (illus. 15). I also made three rings that used mossy branches, bark and stone (illus. 16, 17 and 18). The rings were made with circles, triangles, and squares.

I applied the natural objects, which built a sense of rhythm into my work. Those branches composed one work (illus. 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23). When I organized two branches, I wanted to expose harmony and elegance like Korean calligraphy. To join the metal parts to natural forms, I soldered the metal wire to the main body of metal forms, and drilled to the natural forms to make holes, then connected them with epoxy.

2. Metal Work

1) Branches (illus. 24, 24-Detail, 25 and 25-Detail)

In the sculptural jewelry pieces, I focused on how to convey shape, texture, and color of natural forms. However, in the metal, I was interested in the shapes of plants, especially the structural connections between two branches.

First, I modeled this idea with pink foam. The trunk had a sense of movement and a glossy surface; I made the trunk with die forming, and then welding. The leaves from the trunk had a delicate stripe texture, and I expressed this by
“marrying” sterling silver and copper (illus. 24-detail). This technique was suitable because it could make a stripe pattern in metal with hard silver solder between these two different colored metals. Then, I applied die-forming to create volume, and soldered the stripe leaf and smooth trunk with a medium solder (illus. 24). I used sterling silver and copper because they were easily raised.

Next, I made a dry branch form. The dry branch had an uneven surface because of insufficient water in winter. I imagined how best to make dry branches, as I cut the pink foam with a knife. When I shaped the branch, I found the surface interesting, so I scored the branch (illus. 25). To do the scoring, I used the 10mm copper sheet, and cut out eight and ten lines, I then soldered them after rolling up the sheet. I did soldering because I wanted to get a delicate connection. Moreover, I cut the middle of branch body, and gave about fifteen degrees, then soldered again to express a sense of movement in the branch (illus. 25-detail).

2) Late Fall Leaves (illus. 26, 26-Detail, 27, 27-Detail, 28, 28-Detail, 29, 29-Detail, 30, 30-Detail, 31, 31-Detail and 32)

I went to Bristol Mountain and observed the natural forms from the forest. I wanted to capture the natural atmosphere from the environment as I studied the branches and leaves on the ground. I modeled these collected forms with the aluminum foil because that made the modeling process easy and speedy. I sketched fifteen [15] models of leaves with the aluminum foil. I then chose 10 shapes. This process allowed me to effectively capture the sense of natural forms. The leaf models were three to six feet tall (illus. 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31 and
I bent the leaf forms where they originated from the branches. The idea was actualized with hammering, die forming, and scoring (illus. 27, 27-detail, 28 and 28-detail). The branches were made with raising and sinking, and I rolled up the sheet of metal without welding (illus. 26, 26-detail, 30 and 30-detail).

After I shaped the form I smoothed the textures with a finishing hammer (illus. 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, and 32), and applied acrylic paint (figure 26), liver of sulfur (illus. 27, 28, 29 and 31), and heat patina (illus. 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31 and 32). After coloring the metal, I coated the metal surface with wax that gave it a shine and prevented discoloration. After finishing, I assembled the works together just like in their natural setting (illus. 32).

3. Painting / Furniture

1) Painting

Nature has its own beauty; I felt limited trying to express this beauty. Metal was very hard to handle and needed many techniques to create natural shapes. So, it took a long time to develop my ideas. Therefore, I chose to express these phenomena through painting. Also, Painting helped me refresh my tired mind and body.

I painted an image of the winds of spring (illus. 34), and of the four seasons (illus. 35). The metal work was arranged near these paintings the paintings were not independent works, but I also experimented with textures and colors (illus. 35).
2) Furniture

Metal can be naturally matched with wood and I designed and made a table using metal and wood (illus. 33). This furniture piece was a freestanding sculptural form. Trees rise from the ground, they receive nutrients from the soil, and bear fruit.

To create the table, I selected ash wood because it had distinct annual growth rings, and I used a rough branch for one of the legs. The wood branch was divided into two parts; the screw was put inside of the branch, and joined again (illus. 33-detail). The bud was made of copper wire. To make the hollow, I first made a bud with pink foam and wound copper wire around it. I then burned out the pink foam with weak caloric power. Finally, I colored the metal wire with liver of sulfur.
I learned many techniques like rendering, modeling, hammering, etc. for metal works in Korea and America. Each of these countries has a unique culture. I believed that these two experiences allowed me to advance my work. The main subject of my art was communication with nature. I learned how to communicate through nature. In my life I was not always skilled at observation, however I obtained this skill to capture nature’s beauty and the ability to transfer to new art forms poetic sensibilities. Also, I made an effort to create new art works which possessed a variety of textures, colors and structures influenced by natural objects. These newly acquired techniques helped my mind express fresh ideas. I was interested in developing advanced skills and I thought about the role and importance of the techniques for my new metal work. Technique was the bridge for a transition from communicating concepts to making artworks. Thus, I began to emphasize the importance of communicating the values of nature between myself and in my artworks.

In communication with nature, there existed a calm meditation, a collection of precious fragments, a happy play with natural forms, and synchronization with a new environment.

My artworks consist of sculptural jewelry, metal works, and paintings. Sculptural jewelry and metal works constitute the main contents of this body. They focus on expressing the art form’s physical characteristics through diverse metal techniques and design played an important role. My artwork reflected upon the simple shapes of plants. I developed an interest in the long stems of
plants, and the elegant lines between stems and leaves. My paintings were influenced by these same shapes and colors creating a harmony between the mind and the physical metal forms. These paintings reveal the details of colors and texture influencing the accuracy in how I apply these attributes to the metal works and furniture forms.

Although I was accustomed to working with silver, gold, copper, and other kinds of metals, I was open to trying new materials, techniques, and shapes to express my feelings about natural forms. I tried to create new pieces with non-metal media, like wood, paper, fabric, and even organic materials that I found in nature.

My art became much more than beautiful pieces made of metal, and this development made me aware of a sense of challenge giving me self-confidence. To improve as an artist, I will never forget the challenges that I will meet in every stage. Moreover, I want to reawaken peoples sense of nature through my artwork.
Illustration 3
Illustration 4
Illustration 8 - Detail
Illustration 11
Illustration 22
Illustration 28 - Detail
Illustration 29 - Detail
Illustration 30
Illustration 33 - Detail
Illustration 35