A Homage to Beethoven Piano Concerto No.5 "Emperor"

Young-Ji Shin

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A Homage to Beethoven Piano Concerto No.5 “Emperor”

by

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Date: December 1998
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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to explore my personal experience with the reciprocal relationships of the various fields of art. The media of art includes the fine arts, crafts, visual arts, theater, film, music, dance and literature – all genres commonly considered “the arts.” These different fields are not isolated in and of themselves but rather have mutual connections amongst them. This thesis elucidates my concept of art as one.

A vague fondness for the arts drew me to the Seoul Arts High School in 1987. I had a broad interest in art in general, and did not limit myself to any one field even though I majored in sculpture. During three years of my high school days, I experimented with Western Painting, Traditional Eastern Asian Painting, basic sculpture and design and in other arts related courses that combined music and dance with the visual arts.

Loyalty to the fundamentals is what I have considered ideal in art since my high school days. Though “fundamental” cannot be described in a single word, it can be said that the basic underlying theme of art itself is humanity – humanity in reference to everything being created by mankind in any field of art. The meaning “art” comes from the Latin “ars.” The Latin word simply defines itself as aesthetic beauty; however, we have expanded that definition to include the fine arts, music, film, dance and literature – all genres commonly considered “The Arts.” The arts communicate and interconnect amongst their various fields. For example: a composer may create music for a work of poetry; a choreographer may express himself or herself by using specific music; a literary work may serve as the basis for a theatrical work. These seemingly different fields of arts do not possess clearly defined boundaries but rather interact with each other to
communicate reciprocally. Thus, I have considered combining different fields of arts, which include fine arts and other fields of art, to seek the fundamentals of art from the aesthetic point of view.

My intent for this thesis explanation was to create a body of large-scale, hand built sculpture inspired by Beethoven Piano Concerto No.5 “Emperor.” I used the repetitive and sequential use of forms that provide an auditory sense of feeling by visual unity.
II. HISTORICAL REFERENCE

I started to study art at the Seoul Arts High School in 1987. During my first year of high school, I experienced with western painting, traditional eastern painting, sculpture and basic design. At this time I came under the strong influence of an Eastern Asian Painting teacher. This teacher emphasized the drawing of the Four Gracious Plants: plum, orchid, chrysanthemum, and bamboo. These oriental paintings possess the beauty of moderation inherent in the theory of "mimesis." Mimesis means not merely copying but forsaking the negative meaning of the superfluities of an artist's personality. While drawing the lines of the Four Gracious Plants, people hold their breath, empty their minds, abandon their distracting thoughts, forget themselves and create spatial proportion. In the teacher's words "the artist's personality without the superfluity can be said to be the precious diamond well-polished, carved from the rough stone." Since I have idealized the drawing of the Four Gracious Plants, Minimalism's cerebral and self-refining exclusivity strongly attracts me.

The Minimalist emphasizes the beauty of moderation as well. In the 1960's, Minimalism dominated artists with its solemn purity and pitiless logic; it sought absoluteness. Persuaded by the Miesian dictum that "less is more," Minimalism has been the most self-referential and Platonically pristine art. Minimalism influenced my thesis piece. The simple diamond shapes in my piece convey nostalgia to many urban intellectuals because of its simple and natural form; but it also establishes intellectual superiority. Repetition of the same shape seeks whole body of one absolute unit so that the systematic arrangement creates the geometrical ordinary structure. In 1978, the ceramic artist, John Mason exhibited his minimal sculpture entitled, Hudson River Series
VIII <figure 1>, using firebricks as object at Hudson River Museum in New York City. This work represents spatial experience, architectural remains, visual perception and illusion. He expanded the ceramic sphere to Minimalism with his fabrication of space and systemic transformation. Ed Meneeley, unlike most minimal painters, uses powerful colors – contrasting hues of the same tone. This complexity enables him to get away from the monumental scale much Minimal painting seems to demand while still reaping the optical benefit of his carefully calculated contrasts. These two minimalists support my piece to be applied the contrast of colors and the use of repeating of the geometric shapes.

Likewise, the sculpture of Constantin Brancusi (1876-1954) exerted a crucial influence upon my piece. While Brancusi is not considered a Minimalist, he did emphasize simplicity of form. From traditional sculpture came Brancusi’s figure Sleep <figure 2> and the theme of the Sleeping Muse <figure 3, 4, 5>. In the next and later versions, the figure’s head was transformed into an egg shape, with features lightly but sharply cut from the ovoid mass. He sought “the Essence of Things.” In Brancusi’s words, “One reaches simplicity in spite of oneself...All my life I have sought the essence of flight.” For him, beauty followed not from herculean power but from “absolute equity.” My ideal is to pursue the nature of art; to me the nature of art means the essence and absolutism of things. My theme in this thesis piece is far different from Brancusi’s, but his subsequent use of the egg shape is echoed in my subsequent use of the diamond shape in my thesis piece. Minimalism’s controversy about the nature of art relates to the Barancusi’s “absolute equity” in some respects. Thus, the effect of

3 Varia Radu, Brancusi. (Metuchen, NJ: Composition by David Seham Associates, 1986), 18
4 Anna C. Chave, Constantin Brancusi. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 53
John Mason  *Hudson River Series VIII*
*Firebrick, each square* 63", 1978

C. Brancusi  *Sleep*
White Marble, 10¼" × 17½" × 12¾", 1908

C. Brancusi  *Sleeping Muse I*
White Marble, 10½" × 7" × 8", 1909-10

C. Brancusi  *Sleeping Muse III*
Veined Marble, H7¼" × W11½", 1917-18

C. Brancusi  *Sleeping Muse II*
Polished Bronze, 7¼" × 11¾" × 7½", Mid-1920s
Minimalism related to Brancusi's thoughts and my experience of the Oriental painting created my thesis piece, *A Homage to Beethoven Piano Concerto No.5 "Emperor."

My thoughts on art drew me to create my thesis piece. Art is about beauty and my central theme comes from this content. A book that discusses Art and Beauty, "Aesthetics for Secondary Education" clarifies the definition of beauty. Beauty can be defined as natural beauty, social beauty and artistic beauty.\(^1\) The natural beauty is the beauty from nature itself and primary beauty that we cannot change. The social beauty is the spiritual beauty of human's inside that constitutes our social life. The artistic beauty reflects the reality of human nature. The artistic beauty which represents visual forms, sounds, linguistic senses, rhythmic movements, etc evoke people’s pleasure, delight, gladness and admiration. These joys are the very picture of people who permeate with exultation the feeling of love. The artistic beauty unites form and matter into its ideal shape.\(^2\) Every field of art originates creation and imagination. Sublime objectivity combines artists’ subjective outlook and beauty of reality. The artists deal with restoration of their emotion and their bottle up emotion inside can be analyzed and arranged in particular forms. Music that contains rhythm, volume, tone, harmony and melody expresses the artists’ undulation of emotion and their thoughts and experiences by the transition of sounds. Musicians create the musical configuration by using the tool of the musical language. Dance represents the artists’ emotion and concepts by using the rhythmical movements of human body as a mean to an end of art. This field of art is closely related with music and visual art; its expressive motion connect to the visual configuration and its rhythmic movement is expanded by music. The other field of art, Literature, is completed with linguistic sense. Linguistic art creates its figure indirectly;

\(^1\) Bum-Song Lim, *Aesthetics for Secondary Education*. (Seoul, Korea: Korean Culture Press.1994 ), 19
the language as a vehicle enables the readers to imagine understand and recreate its contents. Film as a composite art is in need of music, literature, dance, performing art and visual art for the stage. Thus, all fields of art are linked with each other to relate reciprocally and have commonness of creation and imagination for the joy of beauty by human beings. My thesis piece, *A Homage to Beethoven Piano Concerto No.5 “Emperor,”* depicts Art as one and focuses on the relationship between music and visual art.
III. DEVELOPING MY ATTITUDE

I have dealt with the theme of the combination of two different fields of art since my undergraduate days. During the fourth year of my university, I created a musical sculpture titled, Work for Cello <figure 6>. This piece is completed with the sound of the cello, a contemporary musical piece. The relationship of music and fine art is demonstrated in this multi media presentation. This first attempt, however, does not seem to completely describe my emotion on the music for cello because the realistic sculpture is limited to only focus on presenting playing cello.

In the first year of RIT, I had a concern about the boundaries of different fields of art. Mankind instantly seeks beauty and has given birth to art, divided into several genres – dance, music, visual art, and literature. However, art is one; the border of the different fields of art should disappear. The existence of all genre of art as one can be said to be the highest form of art and ideal beauty that mankind has genuinely sought. In my mind, I had an image of destroyed boundaries. The sculpture, entitled The Boundary I <figure 7, 8>, illustrates the remains of the artificial border between all fields of art. I employed the slab-building method to create walls of the border and fired at cone 6 reduction for the natural brown and gray colors.

I attempted to bring the concept of 'the box' for the next work, The Boundary II <figure 9>. I used several ceramic boxes to build the wall of boundary because, at that time, I was heavily influenced by the work of John mason, a Minimal Ceramic sculptor. The wall divides one into two different spaces and hides the other space from one viewpoint. One space represents fine arts, which I have dealt with, and the other hiding space designates art not as fine arts but as the newer form of music, dance, theater or literature. Adding optical beauty to artists’ meritorious concepts, the cultures in which they are and their personal histories, one art piece may be born: the visual art. The
auditory beauty and the multi-sense of beauty such as music, dance, theater, etc, are the styles that express beauty. Loving beauty in all of its senses following by loving the concepts of the beauty, is art which aesthetics depicts. Fine art has been considered as art in a visual sense, but, because art is one, I have sought the coexistence of the multi-sense in my pieces. My intention of making sculpture is to create the expressional styles of the infinite art in which I have sought to express my artistic world through fine art while studying art. When I completed this piece, however, I started questioning to myself why I was making walls while insisting on their uselessness. Also, these forms of wall cannot describe the forms of art. When I look at my two pieces of wall, I already know my concept and the meaning of works. However, other people cannot understand what these walls mean unless I explain my thoughts in detail. The message I attempted to convey was vaguely communicated as in abstract forms of wall. During this period I was uncertain, perhaps even confused regarding the walls, therefore I decided not to make walls.

The third piece in RIT, Musical Notes <figure 10>, attempted to elucidate my concept of relationship in different fields of art. From this moment, I started to concentrate on the combination of music and sculpture. I placed stress on the quality of mass and volume in terms of sculpture from the form of the musical notes, but the piece does not contain the image of the musical sounds. I admitted that the shape of musical notes present the form of music, but cannot express the musical emotion.

During the summer after I finished the first year of RIT, I took time to experience the other fields of art such as listening to music, watching theaters or reading books. At that time, I thought about the first experience of the other fields of art with the fine art simultaneously that I had in high school. For my secondary education, I went to an arts high school in Korea and could experience the atmosphere of music and dance. I had a broad interest in art in general, and did not limit myself to any one field even though I
majored in sculpture. I loved to listen to the Beethoven’s concertos and Schubert’s songs, especially Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No.5 “Emperor” op.73 because the sounds are powerful, dignified and profound.

Ludwig Van Beethoven (1770-1827) constructed his unique music world based upon traditions of Classicism, founded by F. J. Haydn (1732-1809) and W. A. Mozart, and founded Romanticism with his superior creativity. Beethoven composed five pieces of piano concerto, and No.5 “Emperor” is considered the best one amongst his concertos. Its title, “Emperor” is not by Beethoven nor does have a specific story about it. No.5 is named “Emperor” because its solemn and magnificent scale can be related to the emperor’s majesty. Beethoven composed this concerto after war against France (1808-1809) so that this concerto has a mood of battle in its sounds.

For A Homage to Beethoven Piano Concerto No.5 “Emperor” I attempted to create the musical form which successfully expresses my emotion and the atmosphere of this music. When I first started to make small models for the thesis piece, I was thinking about rhythmical movements, undulation of sounds, the image of the emperor and the musical character of Beethoven. Expressing all of these matters could make the piece intricate. Brancusi’s words, “Essence of things” gave me the solution to focus on the most important main aspect for my thesis piece. The major matters for my piece is to elicit the image of the emperor’s dignified majesty and the musical rhythm. The first movement represents the image of the emperor’s majesty and absoluteness. The second movement consists of slow and solemn melody and shows the link to the third movement. The major matter for the third movement is a repeat of the same structure. These three movements compose a whole piece of A Homage to Beethoven Piano Concerto No.5 “Emperor.”
Work for Cello
Painted Resin, Wood Veneer, Objects
H80" × 20" × 40", 1993

Boundary I (front view)
Stoneware Reduction,
H28" × 45" × 30", 1996

Boundary I (side view)

Boundary II
Stoneware Reduction,
H24" × 20" × 58", 1997

Musical Notes
Glazed Earthenware,
H58" × 30" × 35", 1997
IV. DESCRIPTION

For my thesis show, I created one large-scale installation sculpture representing three movements of Beethoven Piano Concerto No.5 “Emperor.” Each movement depicts its own musical structures and rhythm by using the contrasting shapes and colors on each surface. Three movements are connected to each other while they present the contrast of structures and colors that explain the character of each movement.

When I first started making this piece, A Homage to Beethoven Piano Concerto No.5 “Emperor”, I was thinking which colors and shapes the universal images of the emperor are. For my Asian point of view, the gold is a right color of the emperor, or royal family, and the shape of dragon is a symbol of the emperor. My professor Rick Hirsch recommended me royal purple for his western point of view. Also, Professor Hirsch and I both agreed that silver and diamond shape are a strong image of royal family. Thus, I selected these three colors of the emperor’s image and diamond shape to express this music by sculpture. Using exact colors properly was very important for this sculpture to address the musical feelings so that I tested many colors in gold, silver and purple of the acrylic lacquer, not glazes.

The first movement<figure 11, 12, 13>, Allegro, attempts to depict the Emperor’s dignity and majesty. In this movement, I emphasized the Emperor’s absolute authority and used the shape of diamond and gold color to reflect the powerful royalty of the universal image of the emperor. I selected deep, antique gold color for the traditions of the royalty and applied eight coats of the acrylic gold lacquer on the surfaces so that viewers can be attracted to its richness of the gold color. The reason that I used the acrylic lacquer instead of the glaze is the lack of variation of the gold glazes. The separated nine elements are made in different sizes to express the musical notes and
rhythm, but present as one sculpture because they are arranged in a large diamond space in altitude order. Entire piece of the first movement shows the solidity of structure. The shapes of each element are seemingly similar but have their own characters because the musical movements give people different feelings every moment. The largest four-foot tall element represents the emperor's absolute dignity. I applied comparison of rough and smooth texture on the surfaces to express the emperor's powerful authority and supernal majesty. Simplicity of color and complexity of the surfaces simultaneously exist in this movement.

The second movement—figure 14, 15, 16—Adagio, expresses the solitude and sublime of the conqueror. As I mentioned before, Beethoven composed this song in the depression after Napoleon subjugated Austria. Beethoven attempted to explain the sadness and loneliness behind the absolute authority in the second movement so that this movement flows slowly and sensitively. The feeling of this movement is dark and heavy. I chose royal purple color to consist the image of the darkness and the magnificent elegance. The second movement also consists of nine diamond-shape elements. These diamond shapes differ from the first and third movements. However, all of the movements are from the image of diamond so that these movements are not isolated but interconnect to each other. The viewer's perspective becomes lower in this movement because the eleven inch-high nine elements are laid down on the flour. These nine elements are arranged in order on three pedestals divided in three. Each pedestal has a two-foot distance to others so that this movement enables viewers to access into the piece. Since feeling auditory sense by visual sense is one of the main purposes of this thesis, this access into the piece takes a very important role in this sculpture. Slow sounds of the second movement present as three lines flow. Each line carved on three elements is completed as one line that not only expresses the sounds of
the second movement but also represents the connections from first movement to third movement. For this representing of connection, I used gold and silver colors that were applied on other movements. The middle bold gold line links the first movement, and the both sides of silver line flow to the third movement.

The third movement, Rondo. Allegro, evokes the feeling of the image of glorious and gallant hero. This movement consists of six elements. The shapes of these elements are similar to those of the first movement, but they are all same sizes and heights because I thought that this same scale represents the meaning of Rondo, repeat. Silver and black colors imply the image of glorious and gallant hero. I applied silver on two sides and black on the other two sides on each element. This utilizing of two different colors address both feelings of the vigor and majesty of this music. Also, I manipulated vertical lines on the surfaces of each element for the emotion of the third movement. These manipulated lines imply that each musical note has a different sound and tone. For presenting musical notes and rhythms, I staggered six of three-foot tall elements in order. The staggered arrangement creates the continuation and repetition of this third movement. From any perspective, the contrast between two colors captures viewer's eyes and shows the image of heaviness and power of this music.

For my thesis show, I used several proper pedestals to heighten each movement to enhance the emotion of this music and the image of emperor. Also, I installed A Homage to Beethoven Piano Concerto No.5 "Emperor" with walking spaces so that the viewers could access into this installation sculpture and be exposed to my concept of 'music in space.' Interacting in a space, the musical elements compliment each other, reinforcing the images of majesty, absolute authority, solitude, sublime and gallant, glorious hero.
The First Movement

I Allegro
A Homage to Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 5 "Emperor"

Painted Earthenware, H48" × 50" × 50", 1998
Figure 12

Figure 13

I Allegro

I Allegro
Adagio

A Homage to Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 5 "Emperor"

Painted Earthenware, H10" × 110" × 40", 1998
III Rondo Allegro

A Homage to Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 5 "Emperor"

Painted Earthenware, H36" x 28" x 56", 1998
V. CONCLUSION

To me, my thesis sculpture was the concentration of expressing the relationship between music and sculpture. Since music is the auditory sense of art, I had difficulty presenting music in a visual form. The main project was to express music through sculpture, which is abstract and has no form. Rhythm, melody, harmony and movement are the criteria of music and I focused on what people feel about the music. I chose the universal images of the music, Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5, combining the ideas from both western European and eastern Oriental people. The shapes and the colors of my thesis piece depict the image of this music, and the arrangement and the structure of this sculpture shows the rhythmical movement. I solved the problem of expressing musical rhythm and structure by installing the elements of the same shape in order.

The problem I had was to scale up my piece so that the piece can have powerful presence for the viewers. The scale and the height were the major matter. It was suggested to use the pedestals to solve this problem. The pedestals enable me to enlarge my piece, and the piece looks better with the applied colors on the pedestals.

I want to extend my concept starting from the relationship of music and sculpture to other fields of art. I will unfold the coexistence of all fields of art by developing the commonness of each field of art based on the common structure of music and sculpture.
VI. TECHNICAL INFORMATION

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<td>Coarse Grog</td>
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**Acrylic Paint**

- **Gold**
  - Matte Gold, Antique Gold - Acrylic Lacquer
    - Universal Blend, Tempo Product Company
  - Gold Metallic #1910 - Acrylic Enamel
    - Painter's Touch, Rust-Oleum Corporation

- **Silver**
  - Blue Silver - Acrylic Lacquer
    - Universal Blend, Tempo Product Company
  - Silver Metallic #1915 - Acrylic Enamel
    - Painter's Touch, Rust-Oleum Corporation

- **Black**
  - Flat Black #1976 - Acrylic Enamel
    - Painter's Touch, Rust-Oleum Corporation

- **Purple**
  - Royal Purple #RS052K H1 - Acrylic Lacquer
    - Universal Blend, Tempo Product Company
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