

The critic and art historian Norman Bryson, using semiotics in the interpretation of a visual art, characterizes in-focus photographic images as figural and out-of-focus ones as non-figural and asserts that an imageless image, which falls under the category of the latter, is discursive while being embedded with imagination and a story. Having been devoted to representing an object as it is for a long period of time, the medium of photography has given priority to the figural. However, today's photography, which no longer serves to reproduce the real, intends to tell the story beyond the figural while being indifferent to the fact that the subject is in focus or out of focus.

Most of the photographic works of English photographic artist Veronica Bailey (1965- ) render, according to the categorization of Norman Bryson, in-focus, figural images. For the images are so clear to capture even the delicate texture of paper used for the book or the letter. Their emphasis on the primary, geometric shapes of objects makes one perceive their images as abstract and non-figural and hear the abundant stories hidden behind the images. Bailey's photographs, which are figural and non-figural at the same time, are received by the receiver as some sort of visual signs that allows each receiver to apply his or her interpretation and imagination to them. And as linguistic signs of titles are interveningly added to those visual signs, multi-layered significations occur in her photographs.

Let us start with *2 Willow Road* (2003), which is Bailey's important photography series. In these photographs, the pages of the books vertically standing are enlarged. Obviously, these photographs show figural images as even the texture and wear and tear of paper can be perceived owing to the position of the camera at a very close distance to the object. Also, each photograph has a slightly different expression as subtle difference and change are produced by the different angles used to books, the combination of the different thicknesses and colors of the cover and the pages and the difference in the distance between pages. Yet, one's primary attention is paid to the vertical pattern. For most of her photographs fill their picture planes only with the straight lines produced by the edges of pages—though small parts of illustrations or letters are exposed in a few cases. In other words, in *2 Willow Road* it is only through the physical presence of an object that simultaneously figural and non-figural images are created.

The exquisiteness of *2 Willow Road* lies in the intervention of titles. One's first attempt to interpret these works is to relate the connotations of the word 'road' in the title to the vertical form of the images. Yet, as soon as one sees the title of each photograph, different correlations flit across his or her mind. When one sees the titles such as 'Human Response to Tall Buildings,' or 'View from a Long Chair', she or he connects the images to the representative connotations of the words of 'building' or 'long chair' instead of 'road'. But then, in front of the abstract titles such as 'The Arrogance of Power,' 'Woman in Art,' and 'A Girl Like I', one keeps bending his or her head as he or she looks at the titles and the images by turns. Finally, when one encounters such concrete titles as 'Art of The Avant-Garde in Russia,' 'The War's Best Photographs,' and 'Hungarian Cookery Book,' or the titles with persons' names such as 'Goldfinger,' 'Man Ray,' and 'Essential Le Corbusier', he or she can gather that the titles of the photographs are the titles of the books in those photographs.

All of these books are from the bookshelves all over the house of modernist architect Ernő Goldfinger (1902-1987), and from their titles one can infer his tastes and interests and further his journey of life and his relationships with other human beings. '2 Willow Road,' the title of the series, is the name of the house of Goldfinger—designated as a national treasure—located in Hamstead, London. Bailey photographed the books in the house while working as a tour guide from 1997 to 2001. Goldfinger who was an Austro-Hungarian architect and furniture designer studied in Paris around from 1929 and made close acquaintance with such artists then residing in Paris as Le Corbusier and Man Ray. Having married artist Ursula Backwell, he went to England in 1934 and built three 'Willow Road' houses in a modern style in the area of Hamstead before the outbreak of World War II. He lived at '2 Willow Road,' which is one of the three house with his wife. The meanings of the titles of *2 Willow Road* can be understood when one realizes who Goldfinger was.

In *2 Willow Road* multi-layered significations are possible without prior knowledge of Erno Goldfinger. Despite the common denominator of geometric patterns, each photograph possesses its own expression,

and one reads the photographs from his or her own point of view while comparing the images and the titles as if applying the names in the titles to the faces in portraits. Sometimes one's feelings awfully correspond to the titles and other times they do not. In fact, these photographs originate from Bailey's impressions of the titles of Goldfinger's books since she selected some of Goldfinger's books, composed the shape of the books in the way to agree with her own feeling about the title and then photographed it. Yet, they embody just significations based on Bailey's subjective impressions, and different receivers are entitled to diverse interpretations of it. For instance, someone might see a haughty and erotic woman in *Woman in Art* in which red and white pages form a triangular composition against a black background. But does it represent the original intention of Bailey or the impressions made upon all the other viewers? Every photograph by Bailey is understood differently according to the subjective minds of viewers and the interpretation of them depends decisively on the imagination and preconception of the viewers. It is not exaggerating to say that the charm of Bailey's photographs lies in the open possibility of infinite subjective interpretation in spite of their unquestionably objective looks.

*Postscript* (2005), Bailey's another major photography series, is connected to *2 Willow Road* in various aspects and it solidifies the distinctive characteristics of her art. In these photographs, letters are put in their open envelopes, and the vertical form produced by the layers of paper generates the impression of geometric abstraction as in her previous work. Nonetheless, the figural aspect is emphasized through the hurriedly torn fragments of the envelopes, the worn-out texture of paper and the representation of such details as letters and stamps. On the other hand, these figural images are also non-figural since the most parts that contain the information of the letters are out-of-focus—according to the categorization of Norman Bryson—and it makes one to concentrate on the forms of the images, and thus they are subject to many different discourses. Primarily, the interpretation of them is, however, much more facilitated by their images of relatively easily recognizable objects in comparison to the previous work, the word 'postscript' used for the title of the series and the use of such phrases usually used for postscripts as 'Goodnight Sweetheart,' 'All My Love,' and 'Missing You' for the titles of individual photographs. From the images and their titles one can easily infer that these photographs render the letters between lovers. Moreover, the relation between the titles and their images is more explicit. For example, a light kiss is reminded by the slightly open, horizontal form of the envelope in *Awakening Kiss* (though it is actually from her writing for *Vogue* to describe the liberation of Paris as like an awakening kiss). And in *I Love You*, the shape of the open side of the envelope resembles that of the heart. Besides such photographs that invoke certain concrete representative images, most of the other photographs in this series emanate secretive eroticism through their sweet titles, the pastel colors of the envelopes and the cracks that quietly disclose the insides. Yet again, these are no more than subjective observations and each viewer is entitled to have his or her own mental images and feelings.

As in *2 Willow Road*, there are many stories behind the titles and images of the works of *Postscript*. Most of the letters shown in *Postscript* are the letters exchanged between American photographer Lee Miller (1907-1977) and her second husband and Surrealist Roland Penrose (1900-1984). Miller's experience of photography started with her occupation as a model. As a photographer, she worked at first mostly in the fields of portrait and fashion photography, and during her career as a freelance photographer for *Vogue*, the war broke out. As a war correspondent, she made photographic records of the hard-fought fields in Europe. These letters composed largely of the ones exchanged between Miller who was staying in such places as Paris, Athens, Cairo and St. Malo from 1937 to 1945 and Penrose in London, and the titles reveal the circumstances of that time and the passionate love between Miller and Penrose. Bailey could use the letters as her subjects with the permission of the Lee Miller Archive located at Farley Farm in East Sussex.

Interestingly enough, Bailey's interest in Miller was formed during the process of her previous work, *2 Willow Road*. It was started by *The Real Woman*, a collage of Miller's photographs made by Penrose, who was a friend of Goldfinger. Bailey discovered it during her stay in Goldfinger's house of '2 Willow Road' and she was fascinated by Miller's life through research on her. After all, Miller was an artist of her own artistic creativity while making friends with Picasso, Man Ray, Miro and Tapies, a woman war correspondent during the war and a woman who fell in ardent love with a man. Bailey chose the letters which are most private

objects among various things of Miller and photographed the form she made to agree with her own feeling about each letter. The letters against dark backgrounds possess slightly different appearances as if they were the indirect portraits of Miller captured by Bailey.

As examined so far, the photographs of Bailey evidence the presence of a certain person through the things that once belonged to the person. The books in *2 Willow Road* and the letters in *Postscript* tell about, as the vestiges of the lives of 20th-century artists Goldfinger and Miller, not only those individuals but their acquaintances and even the social circumstances of the times. Bailey says, “All of my works are about relationship,” and her photographs possess immeasurably rich texts as well as external aesthetic beauty. For when one keeps following the thread of curiosity as the titles leads beyond the simple images of linear abstraction, he or she discovers numerous relationships and historical facts that encompassed the life of an individual. That the books and letters of Bailey are closed might indicate that there are rich significations of texts veiled by images. Having more invisible things than visible things, Bailey’s photographs manifest the feature of contemporary photography to pursue the discursive beyond the figural.

Hyeyoung Shin | Curator of Gaain Gallery