

## In the Midst of Life - Reflections on Au bord de l'infini (At the edge of infinity)

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I hold a profound reverence and deep gratitude for artists. The world of art, which can only be encountered when someone at its center beckons those of us lingering at the periphery, has always appeared enigmatic to me. The generosity of artists, who share their unique inner realms rather than confining them, provides opportunities for others—like myself, who might otherwise never engage with such worlds—to experience their creativity. What remarkable courage it takes to reveal and invite others into one's own universe! These acts embody the altruistic beauty inherent in the relationship between artists and the broader human experience.

Among these artists, Myung-Joo Kim stands out as particularly exceptional. An internationally recognized figure beyond Korea, she has distinguished herself in the ceramic genre. However, her significance transcends mere recognition; it lies in her authenticity. Despite my lack of religious belief, I have found myself instinctively folding my hands in front of her work, a response that resonates deeply within me. What I encounter is not a divine visage, but the authentic face of life that I have long imagined.

### Art that Celebrates Life

The faces presented by Kim are reflective explorations of human existence, mirroring her inner self and personal experiences. Her latest works, on display in this exhibition, radiate a compelling energy that fervently celebrates life, employing varied methodologies to achieve this aim. Kim's celebration of life transcends the dichotomies of good and evil, beauty and ugliness. Instead, she illuminates the brilliance found in shadowed spaces, the beauty of flesh beneath a stripped surface, the wonder inherent in time's passage, and the strangeness that arises from emphasizing hidden dimensions. These elements are central to the pieces that comprise her artistic vision. Through her work—praising life through the lens of mortality, and exploring the finite yearning for the infinite—we gain insight into the multifaceted nature of existence and the complexity of life.

One of her hallmark works, the busts—particularly the deeply evocative <Tête pensive> series—compels viewers to confront the essence of human existence, unaltered by any adornment. The mysterious gaze that observes us in silence evokes a profound resonance, symbolized by the disorienting pink of blood—a testament to birth—and the flowing glaze that signifies the finite nature of life. This prompts reflections such as, "Why does life begin to fade from the outset, and why does light recede the moment we approach it?" Simultaneously, Kim's busts confront us with primal anxieties, suffering, and unarticulated questions that emerge from deep within, bearing witness to life's transitory nature without shying away from it. In this very transience, they beckon us to honor the essence of existence.

### The Relationship with Nature

Another salient aspect of Kim's oeuvre is her endeavor to dissolve the boundaries between humanity and nature. The anthropomorphic plants she creates explore the interactions between humans and the natural world, serving as reminders of the life force that emerges from within and the purpose of birth that begins to fade from the moment it comes into being. The dew-laden leaves capture both the continuity and transience of life, converging with forms of glaze that resemble eternal tears. In her sculptures, the flowing glaze symbolizes the currents of life and the depths of emotion, capturing moments suspended in time. Throughout her practice, Kim expresses both the delicacy of nature and the resilience of life.

The name of the flower "pansy" derives from the French term "pensée," meaning "thought." The plants featured in Kim's works are not mere representations of nature; they visually embody the processes of life and introspection that stem from the artist's inner experiences and reflections. By granting eyes to her botanical creations, Kim reveals that nature is not merely an external backdrop but an interactive presence that contemplates life, death, time, and eternity alongside humanity.

### **Crossing Boundaries**

Kim's work particularly manifests its aesthetic power within the tension of contrasting elements, as exemplified in her <Libelleaf> series. This title, derived from a blend of "libellule (dragonfly)" and "leaf," reflects her childhood memories. These pieces, infused with symbolic imagery of nature's vitality and freedom, intertwine the elements of plants and humans in a fantastical manner, appearing as crosses, angels, or even primitive life forms. "Libelleaf," as a protagonist in a silent drama, metaphorically explores the boundaries where life and death converge, embodying transcendent entities that navigate the realms of nature, humanity, time, and space.

Through this series, Kim manifests a free form of existence that is both transcendent and universal, prompting us to reconsider the myriad boundaries of a world we have imposed upon ourselves. Her work visually articulates the infinite energies of life that permeate our existence, often unnoticed. In this context, the faces of life encountered in this exhibition may represent family members, plants, animals, you, or me. Are these faces living, deceased, finite, or infinite? Kim's creations silently gaze upon us, compelling us to confront our own existence and the very essence of our lives.

### **From the Edge of Infinity to the Midst of Life**

In Kim's works, opposing concepts such as light and darkness, control and chance, warmth and cold, consciousness and the unconscious coexist harmoniously, heightening the tension characteristic of her preferred medium of ceramics. Created at high temperatures, ceramics possess the potential to transform beyond the creator's control; yet Kim embraces this unpredictability, seamlessly integrating it with her own intentions. This process transforms her ceramic sculptures from mere objects into living entities that encapsulate the artist's inner self and emotions. Through Kim's works, we gain insights into the human experience, oscillating continuously between existence and non-existence, life and death, the moment and eternity. This experience transcends simple aesthetics, demanding profound ontological reflection, as her works, attuned to her inner voice and the essence of her creations, reveals intrinsic truths about our lives.

For a considerable time, I believed that art lay beyond my grasp. However, the lives that emanate through the artist's works convey a silent message: the purpose of life is not to encapsulate some ultimate truth beyond infinity, but rather to exist in the here and now, alive within our souls, embodying truth itself; thus, the world exists within ourselves.

Through my encounter with Kim's works, I ponder whether the "edge of infinity" is not a distant notion but a question that emerges at the very core of our lives. In engaging with Kim's practice, we confront infinity within the nature of life, prompting a profound reexamination of our being. The gestures, gazes, and breaths that propel me toward the edge of infinity—this experience, where I willingly embrace it all and leap fearlessly into the light, the warmth, and the depths—can only be fully appreciated by those who have engaged with the narratives, personal experiences and materials central to Kim's practice.

### **A Celebration of Existence**

The title of this solo exhibition, 'Au bord de l'infini' (At the Edge of Infinity) was selected by the artist and is derived from Victor Hugo's poetry collection 『Les Contemplations』 (1856). This work is acknowledged for its profound reflections on life and death, the nature of finite existence, and the principles of infinity, written in the aftermath of the tragic death of his beloved daughter Léopoldine. In Volume 6, "Au bord de l'infini" the journey of human existence

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unfolds from the mysteries of the cradle to those of the grave. Leaving behind youth, love, illusion, struggle, and despair, the soul's journey, walking "from light to light," ultimately arrives at the edge of infinity, overwhelmed by the unfathomable mysteries of life—much like our experience when we stand before Kim's works.

I extend my deepest respect and infinite gratitude to the artist Myung-Joo Kim.