

## Opening speech *Between Red*

by Tonje Haugland Sørensen

The connection between of war, landscape and art is and old and established triumvirate. Perhaps we should start by asking why, because when you approach it from a military perspective this trio seldom gives either strategical or tactical insights. By this I mean it is not directly applicable in a manner which can help formulate military plans or battle maneuvers. Subsequently, the triad of war, landscape and art is seldom included when politicians and generals draft their plans and strategic approaches. But perhaps it should be.

Because even if this triumvirate - art, landscape, war - is not of seemingly direct use, it can be of use in highlighting some of the larger and often hidden truths about the motifs under depiction: aka war, landscape and art.

I'm proposing today that we see Sea Hyun Lee art - his red and white landscapes - as just such examples of how this triumvirate can bring forth these hidden truths. Let's start with the one part of the triumvirate. Let us start with war.

If we think of war, we often visualize a combat scene. A sight of explosions and sound. Soldiers running. Bombs falling. People screaming, and action, action, action! In truth we often visualize war as an action film, or as a highlight on a newsreel. In equal truth, war is often boring, quiet and even invisible.

One of the most surreal things about a battlefield is how it a few years after the de facto combat can be experienced as a rural bliss. Visit the trenches of world war I in Flanders and France and be struck by how beautiful it is. How quiet it is. Part of this is because the war in question ended many years ago, and the clearest signs of military engagement have been allowed to turn green with grass and poppies.

However, the bucolic bliss is also there in some present battlefields. Such as the DMZ between North and South Korea. Even the name appears peaceful - demilitarized zone. It sounds like a zone without a military. It designates a border where there is no current hot combat going on. It designates something which at first can appear peaceful and calm. But it is not. It is war - and war using its ability to turn itself invisible. To get us to stop noticing that it is there. It is only when we step back, or when we look really closely that we realize that war was there all along. Embedded in the landscape and influencing the people inhabiting it.

In *Between red* this dance of war, of being visible in one view and invisible in the next comes to the fore through the many little scenes that dot the landscape. That emerge through it and within it. Captured through Sea Hyun Lee art war is denied the chance to mask itself in invisibility. It is brought out of its hiding place and exposed in both its destructive and banal elements. War is made present.

It does so largely through war's interaction with the landscape. I've talked about landscape - but what is it. Is it the same as nature?

Wiser people than me have called a landscape a collection of strata, which are made up as much from memories and impressions as from dirt and plants. Subsequently one of the central things that differentiate landscape from nature, is that landscape is infused by the people inhabiting it. Their actions and emotions form the landscape even at times when they are not present. Or perhaps even especially then. A landscape is a topography. But is a topography of memories, impressions and media.

With this in mind, how do we approach a landscape?

Do we approach it from a place high above - and overview that allows us to look down. However, distance can also be deceptive. If we go too far up, we lose sight of the details. We need to get up close and identify the minutia and individuality of what is depicted.

Thereby, engaging a landscape is like engaging in a dance. Backwards and forwards - from a distance and up close. Too myopic and we do not see the whole, too far away we lose sight of the individuals. In scale and expression the landscapes in *Between red* allow us to participate in this dance. It allows us to reflect on how engaging with a landscape is always a slow tango of back and forth. In this it brings to light how war is sometimes visible, and other times not. How we must both look at it from high above, and close-up. And it makes visible how the echoes of war are present in the topography of memory long after the physical action has passed.

It is here we come to the last of the triumvirate: art. It is difficult and dangerous to say anything specific about art, but I will try none the less. Art can be a frame, or a lense that focuses our vision. It is way of allowing us to see the world and become aware of our sight, our dance of back and forth - high and low - that lets us see a fuller or more nuanced picture.

Sea Hyun Lee chose the colors of red and white in a memory of the infrared night vision goggles that he wore while serving his mandatory military service as a border patrol of the DMZ. It was a piece of mechanics - a set of mechanical lenses - which influenced how he saw the land around him. Lenses which literally tinted the land around him it a different color than what he was used to. In *Between red* the lense of the night vision goggles become part of a larger lense - the lense and optics of art. In this case it is art as a way to let us engage with landscape - with the memories and strata around us - and with war - in all its hidden and invisible iterations. It is through this interplay that I propose that the triumvirate or war, landscape and art bring forth truths that would otherwise be difficult to see and allows us to reassess the world and conflict around us.

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