Teaching

Lee Ufan

GUGGENHEIM

ARTIST

LEE Ufan
(lee oo-fan)
이우환



Lee Ufan

BORN

1936, Kyongnam, Korea

LIVES & WORKS

Kamakura, Japan, & Paris

LEE UFAN

THEMES

Materials and Process
Nature

ART MEDIUMS

Sculpture
Installation

"I restrain myself and limit the methods and motifs of my art making as much as possible. Also, I simplify my materials and ideas and use them repeatedly with physical action. Something different always appears."[1]

ABOUT THE ARTIST AND WORK

Lee Ufan was born in 1936 in a rural village in Korea, then under Japanese colonial rule. At age twenty he moved to Japan, where he studied philosophy and aesthetics. This training has been crucial to his artistic practice and the many critical and philosophical writings he has produced.

Lee rose to prominence in the late 1960s as the leading theorist and practitioner of Mono-ha, a Japanese art movement related to international Post-Minimalism that grew out of the antiauthoritarian and anticolonialist tumult of the 1960s. By juxtaposing natural and industrial materials, he developed a radical sculptural language revolving around the notion of encounter—seeing the bare existence of what is actually before us and focusing on "the world as it is."[2]

Lee's series *Relatum* (1968–) features elements often arranged on the floor in site-specific installations. The series title, Latin for "relation," is a philosophical term denoting objects or events between which a relationship exists. The sculptures consist of dispersed compositions of stones together with industrial materials, such as steel plates, rubber sheets, and glass panes, placed in a space to interact with the viewer. The steel plate—hard, heavy, solid—is made to build things in present times; the stone, in its natural, as-is state, "belongs to an unknown world" beyond the self and outside modernity, evoking "the other" or "externality."[3] This radical approach—treating the work not as an object but as a network of relationships—emphasizes the artistic experience as an encounter, an occasion that unfolds around the viewer in a particular time and space.

Relatum—dialogue (2002/10) includes two steel sheets laid on top of one another, slightly askew, and flanked by two large rocks. With such works, Lee does not seek to create permanent monuments but rather spaces for engagement through minimal human intervention and disciplined acts of arrangement.

Consisting of two steel rods and two small stones, *Relatum—dissonance* (2009/11) illustrates how, through a subtle shift in positioning (the stone and rod touch in one instance and lie separate in another), the dynamic of the composition changes. In one situation, there is mutual interdependence and in the other, a detached coexistence. For Lee, restraint in producing art—even letting what has been created disappear—shifts the status of his works from that of material objects to fleeting experiences.

1 "Lee Ufan's Works on Paper and Artistic Practice," audio guide for *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2011, https://soundcloud.com/guggenheimmuseum/lee-ufans-works-on-paper-and-artistic-practice?in=guggenheimmuseum/sets/lee-ufan-marking-infinity.

2 Alexandra Munroe, "*Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*," Solomon R. Guggenhim Museum, 2011, https://www.guggenheim.org/exhibition/lee-ufan-marking-infinity.

3 Munroe, "*Lee Ufan*."



Lee Ufan, *Relatum—dialogue*, 2002/10. Steel and stones, two plates, 3 × 120 × 100 cm each; two stones, approximately 50 cm high each. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Gift, Lisson Gallery, in honor of Lee Ufan 2011.4



Lee Ufan, *Relatum—dissonance*, 2009/11. Steel and stones, two poles, 300 × 4 cm each; two stones, approximately 25 cm and 30 cm high. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Gift, Kukje Gallery, Seoul, in honor of Lee Ufan 2011.5

View and Discuss

→ Look at the sculptures *Relatum—dialogue* (2002/10), and *Relatum—dissonance* (2009/11).

Ask each student to write five words in response to these two works. Combine the word lists, noting which words are listed numerous times.

→ These two works have different subtitles: *dialogue* and *dissonance*. Look up the definitions of "dialogue" and "dissonance." Discuss how the meaning of these words are conveyed in these works.

If you were to provide different subtitles for these works, what would they be?

→ These works are made from only a few elements: steel poles, steel plates, and stones. According to Lee, "The point of the work is to bring together nature and industrial society. . . . The viewer is to experience the tension between the rock and the steel plate." [4]

Do you think the artist has been successful in making this point? Explain your response.

→ Look at the installation views of the artworks.

What do you notice about the placement or arrangement of the steel poles, steel plates, and stones in relation to the Guggenheim Museum?

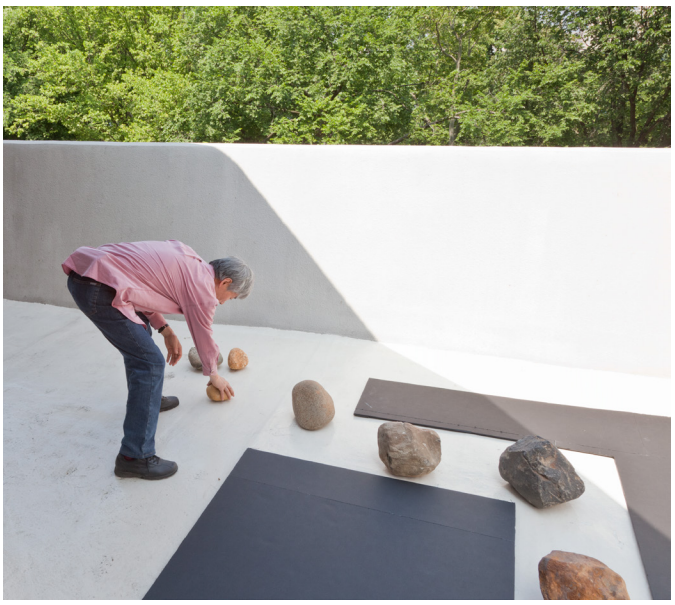
4 Ted Loos, "Squeezing Essence from a Stone," *New York Times*, June 22, 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/26/arts/design/lee-ufan-squeezes-essence-from-a-stone.html.

Classroom Activities

Descriptive Writing

Each time Lee shows works in the *Relatum* series, he visits local quarries and selects rocks from that particular place. Lee said, "The rocks in Tuscany, France, or England are all different and a reflection of that place." [5] He aims to capture local resonance wherever he is, even if the differences among the stones in question aren't appreciable to the untrained eye.

Be aware of the rocks you encounter in your everyday life. Have each student select one no bigger than the palm of their hand and write a detailed description of it on an index card. Once the descriptions are complete, collect the cards and place the rocks together on a table. How many of the rocks can be identified by reading the written descriptions?



Lee Ufan installing work for the exhibition *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2011.

Scale Models

Works in the *Relatum* series focus on the relationships between the objects, the space in which they are shown, and the viewer. [6]

To experiment with the possibilities of the different configurations that can be created from a finite number of elements, create scale models that will allow you to easily manipulate the elements. A convenient scale is one half inch equals one foot (½":1').

The "gallery" can be created from a cardboard box with an open top, painted white or covered with white paper. The sides of the box should be at least four inches high. Also create a "viewer"—a scale model of a person or multiple people. Create a model for a *Relatum* work using both natural and machine-made materials.

Once complete, discuss the configurations you experimented with and how you decided on your final presentation. Note: The Guggenheim Museum uses a process similar to this to decide on the installation of their exhibitions.

5 Loos, "Squeezing Essence from a Stone."
6 To see more works in the *Relatum* series, visit http://www.studioleeufan.org/main/.

Resources

Websites

- Lee's Website. http://www.studioleeufan.org/.
- Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*. http://web.guggenheim.org/exhibitions/leeufan/overview/. See also https://www.guggenheim.org/exhibition/lee-ufan-marking-infinity.

Articles

- Loos, Ted. "Squeezing Essence From a Stone." *New York Times*, June 26, 2011. https://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/26/arts/design/lee-ufan-squeezes-essence-from-a-stone.html

Books

- Munroe, Alexandra, ed. *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*. Exh. cat. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2011.

Visit guggenheim.org/teachingmaterials for high-resolution images, audio, and video, as well as additional historical and contextual information about this artist and others featured in *Teaching Modern and Contemporary Asian Art*.

Note: On page 2, the artist's surname is capitalized to differentiate it from his given name. Colloquial phonetic pronunciations are included, rather than versions in the standard International Phonetic Alphabet, to help teachers pronounce names that may be unfamiliar.

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