



Underground · 2 hours ago · 9 min read

In Conversation: Eul Lee, Sculpting the Inexpressible Beyond Language

In the ever-evolving landscape of contemporary art, Eul Lee stands as a unique figure, challenging the linguistic and perceptual boundaries that constrain human understanding. As a former programmer who confronted the limitations of language in describing artificial intelligence, Eul's journey toward the world of sculpture has been one marked by a desire to explore the uncharted territories that lie beyond the framework of our verbal expressions.

Lost in Language, Eul's thought-provoking body of work, defies conventional descriptions, embracing the intentionally ambiguous and hard-to-define nature of his creations. His mannequin sculptures, poised between the familiar and the unfamiliar, straddle the lines between life and death, male and female—eliciting a potent mix of discomfort, fear, and curiosity.

This exclusive interview delves into the enigmatic world of Eul Lee, as we navigate the essence of his artistic experiments, each numbered with the non-existent word 'JUXQUILOGY.' By withholding information and limiting any preconceived interpretations, Eul invites the viewers to embark on a journey of self-discovery, challenging them to expand their horizons and embrace a realm where words fall short and emotions run deep.



Eul Lee

First of all, can you share with us the pivotal moment or experience that led you to transition from a programmer to a sculptor?

We are living in an era where we are led by phenomena that are difficult to describe using everyday language. Artificial intelligence and quantum mechanics are two major driving forces that shape our civilization, yet their underlying principles are beyond our capacity to explain them in human terms.

As an undergraduate student, I became deeply immersed in programming, which opened my eyes to the limitations of language. I realized that I could only perceive and describe the workings of the world using the language of mathematics and logic, without relying on Korean or English.

For instance, when I wrote the following code:

```
vec3 applyFog( in vec3 rgb, in float distance, in vec3 rayDir, in vec3 sunDir )
{
    float fogAmount = 1.0 - exp( -distance*b );
    float sunAmount = max( dot( rayDir, sunDir ), 0.0 );
    vec3 fogColor = mix( vec3(0.5,0.6,0.7),
                       vec3(1.0,0.9,0.7),
                       pow(sunAmount,8.0) );
    return mix( rgb, fogColor, fogAmount );
}
```

In my mind (if I dare to translate it into human language), the following image comes to mind: a distant landscape shrouded in fog, with mist reflecting the sun's rays in shades of red. To face the red mist, one must stand at a particular angle to the sun, an experience that feels like a stroke of luck.

This language-transcendental experience made me realize that our everyday language is not the only way to describe the world. It inspired me to become an artist who questions and explores the boundaries of language, seeking to capture a wider world that lies beyond its confines.

Your work aims to exist beyond language and provoke feelings of ambiguity and discomfort in the viewer. Why do you think this approach is an effective way to question the broader world that is not captured within the frame of language?

In 1911, quantum mechanics, an important theory guiding modern science, was not yet widely accepted by the scientific community. One day, the renowned physicist Einstein expressed frustration towards his junior colleague Bohr. Bohr was explaining his discoveries in the quantum world, but Einstein dismissed them as false because they did not seem to follow the traditional concept of causality. Despite his disagreement, Bohr's work would go on to play a significant role in the development of future science.

When we try to explain an event, we often search for its cause and effect. However, upon deeper reflection, we can see that this process of identifying cause and effect is an attempt to fit the event into the confines of our language system. Our language is limited, and it is not always possible to express complex ideas or experiences in words.

I'm happy when people who see my work ask questions or even express their displeasure because they don't know how to interpret it. Because it can be a positive sign that the work exists "outside language." This allows for deeper engagement and

understanding of the work beyond what can be expressed through words.



JUXQUILOGY I, A STICK ROLLER, WHITE PAINT, A MANNEQUIN WITH COVERALL SUIT, LATEX GLOVES, VANS SHOES AND WHITE BANDANA, 2023, 70 x 75 x 75 IN

In your artist statement, you mention the limitations of human language in describing the world, particularly in relation to artificial intelligence and quantum mechanics. How do you believe art can help us explore and understand aspects of the world that are difficult or impossible to express through language alone? Can you share any specific examples or experiences from your own work that demonstrate this?

That's an excellent question. To answer it, we need to consider the role of art. In my opinion, art is a means of sparking conversations. It acts as a catalyst that generates discussions among people. These conversations arise from differences in thought, and my artwork plays a vital role in creating a rift in our everyday language and thinking by causing unexpected events that cannot be described in the language we have. This creates differences that are often thought-provoking.

When people see my artwork, it raises questions like "Why does this artwork make me feel uncomfortable?" "What is this artwork trying to say?" and "How can I describe this in words?" These questions can lead to conversations about the limits of our language and about entities that exist outside of our language.

While I would like to provide specific examples of my artwork, I don't want to create a definitive answer that suppresses the various interpretations of the audience. Instead, I encourage the promotion of conversations that arise from diverse thoughts and differences.

In your work, "THE LOVERS," you explore the concept of a recursive link between two watering cans, symbolizing the relationship between 'you' and 'me.' Can you explain the inspiration behind this piece, and how it reflects the fluidity and interconnectedness of human relationships?

As I was inspired by the concept of quantum entanglement in science, I pondered and realized that there was no existing term in everyday language that referred to 'two distinctly different things, but two things that are connected as if they were one.' Therefore, I set out to create a visual symbol for this idea as part of the process of inventing a non-existent word. Lovers who profess 'I can't live without you,' mothers and babies who never want to be apart, toothbrushes & toothpaste, and threads & needles are examples of separate entities in our lives, yet they cannot exist without each other. This work was born out of my contemplation on these concepts.

01:00

FRACTAL 18. THE LOVERS, TWO WATERING CANS AND MDF PEDESTAL, 2023, 47 x 20 x 13 IN

In "JUXQUILOGY II," you use four mannequins lying on each other's knees to create a stable structure. How did you come up with this idea, and what message do you hope to convey through the interdependence and cooperation depicted in this artwork?

The piece is obviously standing in balance. But that balance is made possible by the individual mannequins relying on each other. If one mannequin collapses, the balance of the whole is broken in a chain and collapses.

I wanted to visualize the heavy responsibility that falls on the individual when the survival of the individual is directly linked to the survival of the group.

This responsibility can become a burden that chains us to a life we may want to break free from. Many people experience this, including myself with my mother and girlfriend whom I feel responsible for protecting. It's because of these precious people that we must endure the inevitable ups and downs between despair and hope. I hope that my work can help you understand the concept of "juxquilogy," which is a nonexistent word that I would like you to infer the definition of through my art.



JUXQUILOGY II, 4 MANNEQUINS WITH COVERALL SUIT, LATEX GLOVES, VANS SHOES AND WHITE BANDANA, 2023, 25 x 50 x 50 IN

Both "THE LOVERS" and "JUXQUILOGY II" challenge the boundaries that separate individuals from one another. What inspired you to question these distinctions in your art, and how do you think the viewer's perception of their relationships with others might be influenced by engaging with these pieces?

Although the distinction between myself and others is not the primary focus of my work, I've noticed that many of my pieces attempt to bridge that gap. As a child, I relished spending time with my favorite friends and playing together. But as an adult, I realized that maintaining that same level of openness and vulnerability with loved ones is difficult. The hedgehog dilemma accurately captures the situation; if you get too close, you get hurt, but if you stay too far away, you feel lonely. These emotions create a fundamental void in the heart that cannot be filled. It was a tough realization to come to, and in my early twenties, I struggled with borderline personality disorder as a result. Even now, at thirty, I don't have a definitive answer to this problem. Perhaps it's something that we all have to grapple with for the rest of our lives. I hope that those who experience the same emptiness as I do will find solace in my work and feel a sense of connection with me.

Can you discuss your choice to use the non-existent word 'JUXQUILOGY' as a title for your works? How does this decision contribute to the overall experience and interpretation of your art?

I often find that the experiences and emotions I encounter in daily life quickly fade away because there are no words that can fully capture them.

As an artist, my role is to name and record these intangible entities.

Since August 2021, I have created around 450 words that do not exist in the dictionary. (<https://shorturl.at/dEFIJ>)

Some of those words sometimes don't have enough explanation just by the linguistic definition I gave, or they have some implications for our society. At that time, I reveal them as a work of art, visualizing themselves to the viewer.

Juxquilogy is one such word. In addition to the Juxquilogy II presented, the ongoing Juxquilogy series commonly visualizes the idea that life can be more painful than death, that hope can be darker than despair, and that standing can be more tragic than falling. Through the concept of Juxquilogy, I aim to represent myself and my peers in a space where the boundary between being alive and dying is blurred.



JUXQUILGY III, A MANNEQUIN WITH COVERALL SUIT, LATEX GLOVES, VANS SHOES, ROPE, AND BALLOONS, 2023, 85 x 30 x 30 IN

In your exploration of the world beyond language, have you discovered any new insights or inspirations that have significantly impacted your understanding of the world or your artistic practice?

In the above question, I said, "Experiences that quickly fade away because there are no words that can fully capture them." However, this is a common phenomenon that many people experience. For instance, upon waking up, individuals may recall their dreams, but the memories quickly dissipate within seconds, like how a piece of sugar dissolves in water.

Allow me to provide a simple example to explain my perspective. It has been conventionally believed that the idea of a road predated the term "road," and that the word was coined to describe this pre-existing idea. However, I am gradually coming to the realization that the opposite may be true: that the word 'road' existed before the concept of a road, and that it was necessary for us to have the word in order to recognize the existence of the road. In other words, without the creation of the word 'road,' it may not be possible for roads to exist in the world as we know them.

As I invent new words that don't yet exist, I feel that the scope of my imagination widens. I express this feeling in the sentence: "When you create a language, it comes to life as if the object it refers to is real." This is what I experience as I continue to work on it. Or, on the contrary, the real world that we feel and perceive as real may be an illusion created by wordplay and puns.



JUXQUILOGY IV (PARKED), A MANNEQUIN WITH COVERALL SUIT, LATEX GLOVES, VANS SHOES, CABLE TIES AND 4 WOOD STILTS, 2023, 105 x 40 x 60 IN

Your work has been exhibited in numerous museums in Korea, including Seosomun Shrine Museum and CICA Museum. How have these exhibitions shaped your artistic practice, and what impact have they had on your career?

Fortunately, I recently had my first exhibition at the Seosomun Shrine Museum. As a student who had only made art in school before, I used to believe that art was solely a matter of the artist and the audience. However, as I started interacting with institutions at the museum level, I came to realize that engaging with curators and other professionals in the field is an essential part of being an artist.

This newfound realization proved to be a challenge because I felt a disconnection between the ego I experienced while creating the artwork and the ego that came into play when selling or exhibiting the artwork. It felt like I was losing a part of myself. These experiences made me understand the importance of remaining true to myself both inside and outside the studio, and I'm still learning how to do that. I believe this journey will enable me to be more authentic about my work.



JUXQUILOLOGY V (VOMIT), FOUR MANNEQUINS WITH COVERALL SUITS, LATEX GLOVES, BLONDE HAIR EXTENSIONS, AND FLAGPOLES, 2023, 96 x 20 x 16 IN

Lastly, how do you envision the future of your artistic practice, and are there any new themes or media you would like to explore in your upcoming works?

In the past, I was fixated on creating media art that required programming. However, I came to understand that what defines an artist is the message they convey. Thus, I now fearlessly use any medium that best communicates my message, even if it's unfamiliar. As a result, I've created works using various media, including media art, performance art, readymade, sculpture, and conceptual art. The medium is secondary to the topic I wish to express.

Along with Juxquilogy, I'm currently exploring another concept that I'm yet to define in words but can be described as 'viewing the world from God's point of view.' The famous image of the Pale Blue Dot captured by Voyager as it left the solar system illustrates how insignificant our world is in the vast expanse of the universe. The idea that politics, the economy, war, and love that we value more than anything else in the world are all happening out of this pale single dot makes us see many things differently in our lives. I believe that my next summer's work will focus on conveying this idea.