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The Innocent Game

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The Innocent Game

by

Kibaek Sung

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School of American Crafts

College of Art and Design

Rochester Institute of Technology

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Abstract

Everyone has an innocent childhood. People often reminisce the old days, pursuing happiness today rather than tomorrow's worries and anxieties. Innocence is an expression of the good value inherent in man, which breaks down the walls and loosens tensions between people. However, childhood innocence is weakened and faded after continual exposure to the world. The world we live in is not simple or tolerant enough to let people live as an innocent child. Just like games, the situations of today and tomorrow can be completely different depending on how we play on the gameboard of life. The current society is filled with deceptions, tricks, and conflicts which make the world nervous every day. In this game we play, the rule is simple. The winner takes all. Therefore human beings are pushing themselves to the cage of excessive competition and don't hesitate to fight fierce battles to win what they want by any means and methods. We don't even seem to feel guilty about breaking the rules of the game to ensure victory. There is also a disguise to convince others to participate in the game as if it guarantees human comfort and enjoyment. To live with innocence in modern society is like jumping into the middle of a forest filled with hungry wolves. The game we used to play when we were young was simple but fun and intuitive. However, the game we are playing now is extremely serious, complicated and dangerous. If you don't play the game with full alertness, you'll be destroyed by your enemy who is smarter and stronger than you. It seems absurd to wish human innocence to keep its pure state in this world. The innocence in modern society is now just another word for foolishness and weakness, but it is those who endlessly pursue with the desire to win that remain as the survivors of the world.

Introduction

When describing the innocence of a person, we use a child as an example. Young children are clumsy and immature, but they have no hiding in thoughts and feelings - no different words and actions. So we regard children as angels and cupids, playing a role in releasing tensions and reducing conflicts. Children prefer to have fun, rather than to worry about the serious life. On the contrary, adults consider the child's contentment of today's happiness rather than tomorrow's worries an unimaginable dream to attain in this modern society. It's no wonder that some modern tribes such as Kidult¹ and Yolo² often come to the surface of society. In this world, where material prosperity and growth have priority over any value and the quality of life, innocence is considered to be inappropriate. Life would not be such a painful burden if we could live freely and enjoy the world as we were young. The world is getting smarter and no longer generous enough to protect human innocence. Like the Sphinx quiz, where life and death are crossing, the questions the world asks are seriously difficult and confusing. In the world's games, humans are divided into winners and losers, which is directly related to human life. It is not simply a game you can enjoy like a child. This game's history is as long as the history of humans, so the experiences and strategies accumulated over time makes it hard to predict the outcome. To survive in this world, you need stronger power, a clever head, and a grim obsession to victory. I would like to express my feelings as a person living in this world where innocence no longer protects me. The world I knew and the world around me are now totally different. I wish I could see all of this as a simple play or game,

¹ A kidult is an adult with childish interests, Wikipedia

² The acronym of the phrase "you only live once". it is a call to live life to its fullest extent, even embracing behavior which carries inherent risk, Wikipedia

but it is only possible if I did not belong to this society. As a participant of the game, at will or not, at least I should think about what I'm involved with and what is going on now.

Context

Personal background

When I was young, I was a very introverted child who liked to be alone. Rather than playing outside with friends, I would play with toys or paint at home. Hanging out with someone was unreasonable because of possible conflict. Rather, I thought being alone was the way for both me and others.



Due to my personality, my childhood lacked conflicts, and I grew up knowing that I was a good and innocent person. However, as time passed, I started to make friends and had no choice but to establish a relationship with others. As interests and values collided, I formed relationships with a small group of like-minded friends, but it turned out it was not easy and did not go well. So I gradually adjusted myself to the rules of society. After becoming an adult, my innocence was blurred and I found myself living life in a very technical way. Being aware of the eyes and expectations of others, I nearly forgot what I truly wanted. It did not take me a long time to realize that I was simply a consumable item that was one of the many pawns standing in the middle of the chessboard.

Philosophical, sociological, political background

Some people believe that there is an absolute good in the world. The Christian worldview explains that goodness is God. When God created human beings, he expected them to be good, but human free will made a mistake in sin, which made life painful. Still, goodness remains in the human mind. The dilemma is in the human's instinct of conflict. Whether or not to save a stranger who is in desperate need is of its own a problem. Even if you decide not to save the person, you can't escape the guilt you feel. Helping others while putting yourself at risk is a unique feature of humans that can't be found in other creatures. This moral code, according to C.S Lewis, is a kind of manual that God has planted in humans and gives direction on how humans should live together³. If humans could live according to these manuals, nothing would have been removed from the Garden of Eden. The greedy man, however, created a clumsy manual to conquer the whole world. Morality is consistent and intuitive, while the man-made manual is incomplete and unclear. As a result, it has been constantly modified and reproduced for a long time, and now its guideline is complicated and difficult to understand. There are always tensions, conflicts, and disturbances for countless reasons in this world. We see someone winning and losing every day before our own eyes. Why must we fight over a victory which could never be fully satisfied instead of helping each other? Like the misaligned cogwheels which lost their orientation in the beginning, the world is now sneaking around making a loud noise made of screaming people who do not wish to lose the game. To fix the machine like this, we should look into the original blueprint of human beings.

³ C. S. Lewis. (1952). *Mere Christianity*. Geoffrey Bles

Artistic background

Does human innocence always produce morally correct results? Even sometimes children fight their friends and take away what they want. Are they then not innocent? Is there zero chance that innocence can harm someone? The answer might vary depending on specific situations. For man cannot be perfectly blameless. How about the instincts like greed and violence? Just like how dropping a drop of black ink into clear water will make the whole water black, it is almost impossible for human innocence to remain intact. For example, the purpose of a weapon is to protect yourself and your society by harming the other



Jannick Deslauriers, Reliques: Grenade, 2017

person. Protecting someone from threats is morally right, but it involves violence. Violence as self-defense is socially acceptable, but most violence is unacceptable. If there is another way, one has to search for it. Otherwise, violence will become merciless and brutal. The history of several painful wars that humans have experienced has proven to be a devastating result of this uncontrolled human violent instinct.

In addition, to defend themselves more effectively, they need not only physical strength but also psychological strategy: deception. The ghost army, which existed during World War II, mostly consisted of art workers, whose task was to deceive the enemy's eyes by making fake troops out

of cloth, wood, and rubber⁴. Deception can be considered a better choice than regular violence because it can effectively attack the enemy with minimal damage to allies. Many people prefer to get what they want with the psychological strategy, rather than the use of violence. The fall of man by the serpent deception in the Garden of Eden was the first event in which humanity lost its innocence. That is why deception is a lethal and efficient weapon.



A rubber tank used as a decoy during World War II

When violence and deception are mixed with innocence, it is hard to tell whether it is good or not. One would find it difficult to judge what's real and what's fake once we've added to different social standards and values that exist in this world. Humans are now devoting themselves to creating strategies for winning games in their camps, with different purposes and intentions, rather than looking at the same place as a community. They are living only for their interests by wearing the mask of innocence to disguise. Distorted innocence of man invited us all to the playground of

⁴ D-Day: Decoys and Dummies, <https://www.elinorflorence.com/blog/d-day-decoys/>

the world. We are now forced to take on the game of risk, whether we like it or not. Otherwise, the world might brand us as losers.



Jane Alexander, Bom Boys, 1998

Evolution



"Black Snake", 2017

Steel, Enamel, Marble dust

8.8 x 1.3 x 3ft

Based on my background, I have longed for the innocence of childhood; the days of playing with a toy snake in my little world are now buried in dark memories. At that time, I saw not the way of the world, but the way I see it. I could live the way I wanted and not by the rules that the world set. For someone like me, who hates conflict and violence, the world has been too burdensome and therefore I tried to run away and hide from it. Everything in my world was perfect and happy. There was no means of threatening others. Encouragement and cooperation were more important than criticism and competition. Worry and anxiety did not exist in my world. It was a utopia full of happiness and joy and hope. It may seem quite boring and too ideal, but it was more reasonable

for me anyway. I did not know anything about politics or sociology, but at that time my innocence seemed to be indicating at one point like the needle of a compass. What did the innocence mean to me? What makes people lose their innocence? Can't innocence coexist in the world in the first place or is the world today just rejecting it? Obviously, there is no place for innocence in this world full of lies, conflicts, and violence. For people, innocence means just a happy memory, and the world cannot afford to have it. Does the pink rocket I made look like a spaceship or a destructive weapon? Even if my intentions and purposes were innocent, it is no longer me but the world to judge them.



"Pink Rocket", 2016

Steel, Fabric

3.6 x 3.6 x 7.5ft

The body of work

Humans learn various important things to survive through play during the growth process. Play is very helpful in developing children's intellectual abilities such as creativity and application. As time goes by, the characters and patterns of the play evolve little by little. As a result, the play starts to have a variety of rules and a solid penalty system, called a game. There are a lot of kinds of games that range from simple to complex, some can be played alone, and others in teams. Even today, online games allow many users from all over the world to play at the same time. Many people, young and old, love games and invest a lot of time and money to achieve what they want in games. The nature of playing games is that you can test your skills and luck within fair rules. Almost all games have a winner or loser. Once you've tasted the sweetness of victory, it's hard to get out of there. The rewards of games are to stimulate something deep within humans. I find the innocence of childhood in humans playing these games. The nature of the game is not much different from the play, and it is associated with the pure instinct of man. When playing games, people enjoy the game purely like children. The innocence I want to deal with in my work is a little different. I would like to express the distorted innocence of human beings that have changed in real games in the world. There are always winners and losers in the game, but in reality, winners and losers mean life and death. You might have a choice to play the game, but in the world, everyone is just a participant.

1. The universe in plastic

There are certain rules in the game. Everyone participating in the game must follow the rules. The rules should not be advantageous or disadvantageous in any way, and all the rules must be set in advance to play smoothly. Once the game has started, this rule can never be changed or modified. The presence of rule is the biggest difference between game and play. The rules define the method of the game and the



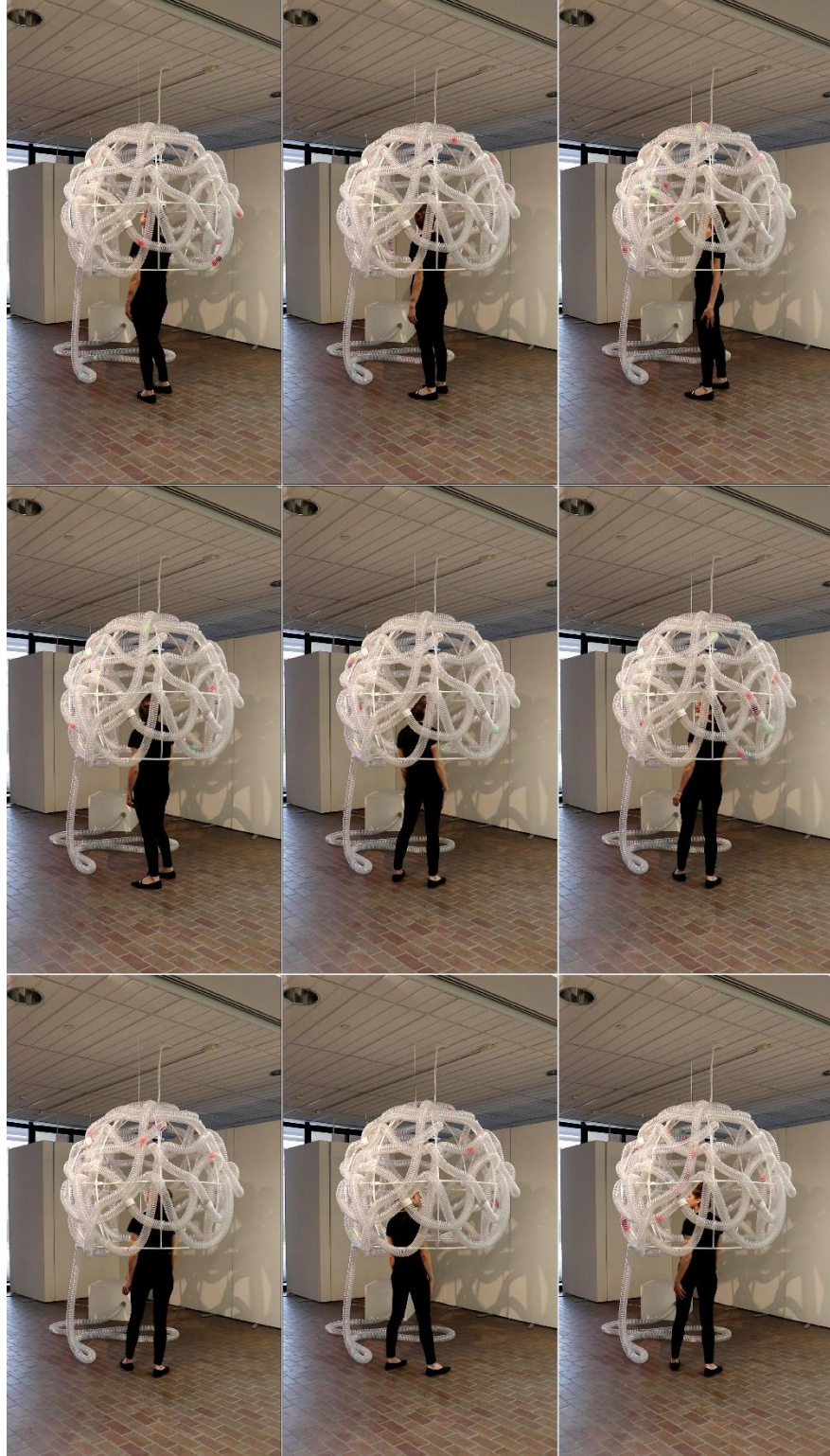
strategy. The ultimate goal of the game is to get more benefits than others while following the rules. Since the rules are already fixed, you can't change them while playing the game, but the ways to play the game are relatively free to the extent that the rules allow. In many sports, the rules are limited, but the strategy is very diverse. The simpler and fairer the rules, the more strategies you can come up with and it makes the outcome of game difficult to predict. If the rules are biased to one side or can be easily ignored in some cases, the winner of the game will be obvious and the game itself will become meaningless. The worst matches ever are the ones with unfair rules and fouls. The best games are represented by playing well with fair and reasonable rules. Human innocence is the simplest and fairest rule. It does not require any special strategy and is designed to be fully enjoyed if you follow it well, but as time goes by, humans don't just want to enjoy it; they want more. The usual effort to win the game does not guarantee a 100 percent win. Human greed, which is empty, attempts to transform the rules of the world for their own advantage. As far as the world is ruled by this anomalous rule, no matter how diverse and many opportunities seem to be given fairly, there will be someone who always wins the game.



"The universe in plastic", 2018

Pvc, Fluffy balls

5 x 5 x 4ft



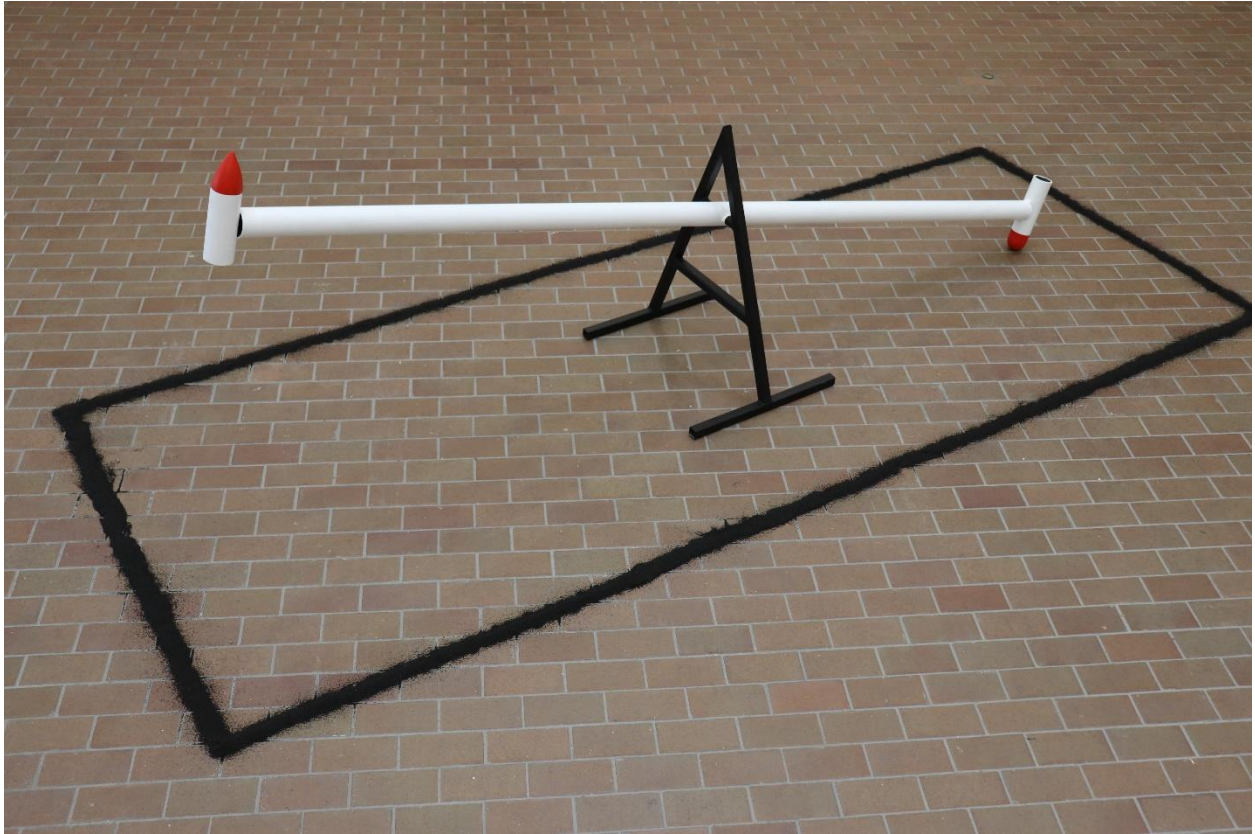
Movement of "The universe in plastic"

2. A matter of whose is heavier

There is a saying, “competition in good faith.” Innocence sometimes leads to competition, which, if used well, can lead one another in a developmental direction. The competition based on innocence is not for overcoming the opponent, but for your personal growth and development. It encourages humans not to remain in one place and take one step further. If you try to get better results by being stimulated by your opponent's growth, you'll end up ahead of your partner and will be stimulated too. Through this virtuous cycle of development from the competition, human beings have been able to achieve much growth and prosperity altogether.

Competition is the most important factor in terms of game motivation. Participants compete for the achievement and rewards gained by taking advantage of their opponents in the game. Without competition, there is no such reward and even the motivation to play the game can disappear. So choosing the right competitor is also important for the full enjoyment of the game. If there is a huge gap between the contestants' skills, playing the game itself becomes meaningless and boring. However, is the game more fun due to its intensity of competition? It is hard to judge the superiority in competition between groups with similar skills. The game requires winning or losing, so the results must be shown in some particular way. Therefore, the competition will inevitably be overheated and fighting will become fierce. In such an atmosphere, excessive competition loses its good intentions and purpose, and in the worst case, all that remains is anger and victory in ashes.

Modern society is all about competition. We live in a system that can only be taken away from others unless we try to have more than others. Even if it hurts someone, the most important thing is their own prosperity and victory. There is no value other than to win. Flying higher and becoming stronger than others is the only way to win the game.



"A matter of whose is heavier", 2018

Steel

10.5 x 2 x 3ft

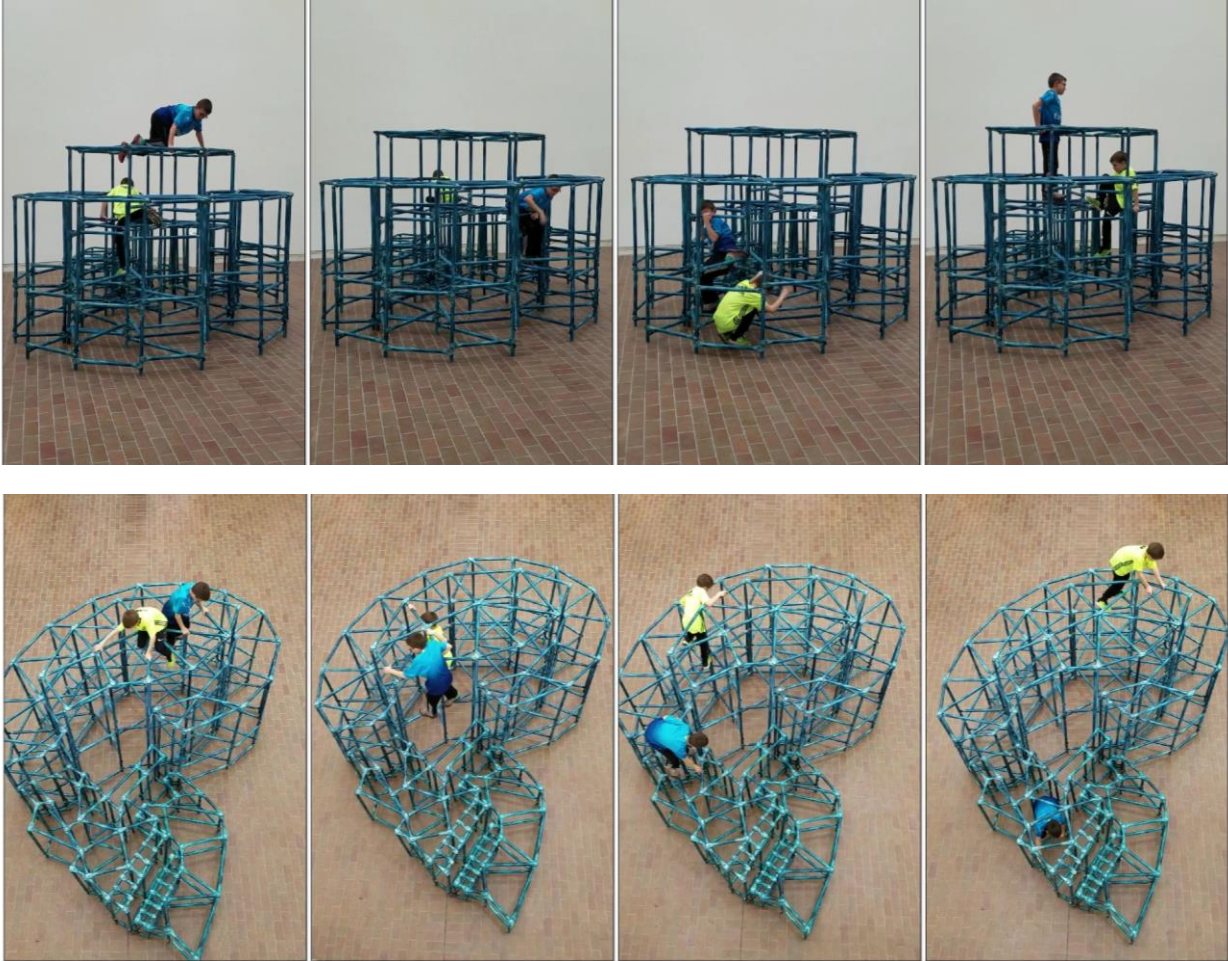
3. Never look down from the hill

To play a game, you need a specific space for the game. The concept of the game space is not only physical but also can be intangible and invisible as long as the rules of the game apply. The space within a game is governed by its own rules and is completely separate from other spaces. If space is not properly secured, the game will be difficult to play smoothly. All the elements within the realm of the game must exist for the purpose of the game. Space helps to ensure that the game plays smoothly by interfering with non-game interventions and also clarifies the boundaries between those who play the game and those who don't. For this reason, the participants of the game must always be aware of and trust the extent of the game's space in order to play the game without difficulty. Once the game space is set up with the participants' consent, free play is possible inside.

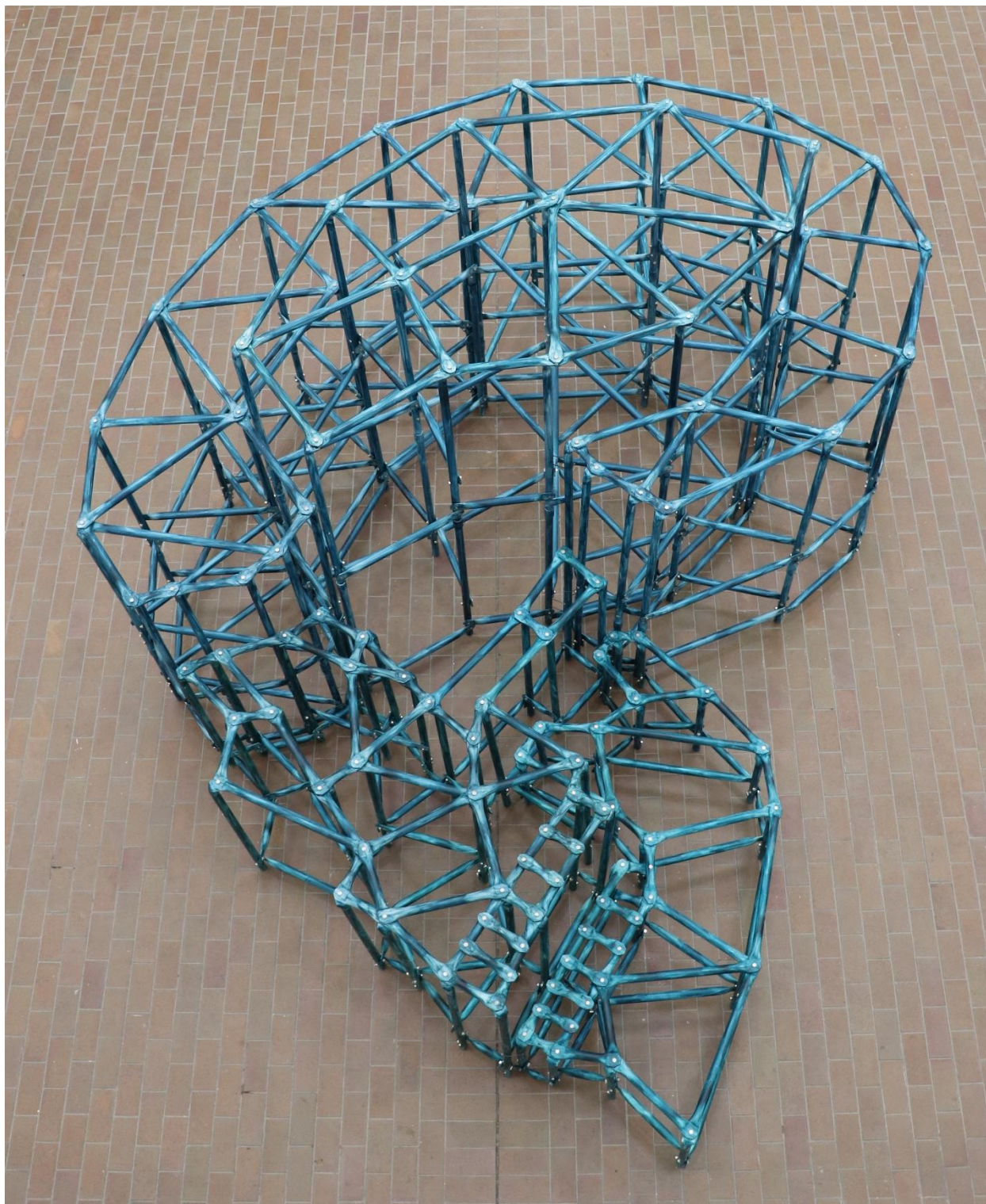
Reminiscent of the jungle gym on the playground, the tightly woven plastic structure provides children with a fun place to play. In this space, children step up, grab and hang, naturally creating the movements the space demands from them. In a complex and huge structure, it is free to swim according to the situation given before their eyes. However, because they belong to this space, it is difficult to judge the overall appearance from the outside. This is because, in space, the view is limited and the priority is given to the immediate situation taking place nearby. The game we play in reality requires a more macro perspective. If we are immersed in a game without knowing how well designed it is and what the purpose it has to offer, we might end up being trapped within the game.

Modern society is conveniently equipped with everything that people need to live. Advances in technology and society have made many people enrich their lives and make them feel more enjoyable. The days of worrying about war and famine have passed, and well-being and pleasure,

life and hope are paradigms of modern society rather than pain and illness, death and despair. Most people seem to believe that they are safe and reliable enough to enjoy the world, but sometimes we need to look at the world from different angles.



Kids playing on "Never look down from the hill"



"Never look down from the hill", 2017

Pvc, Stainless steel

12 x 12 x 6.5ft

Conclusion

Through my works, I have interpreted the game-like reality in modern society from a critical point of view. If the people living in the world could be a little bit more innocent, this game could have been more enjoyable. The human mind cannot afford to enjoy the game regardless of its result. We have created a rule that throws ourselves into the field of pain and competition and must defeat others to survive. In this harsh and pathetic world, humans have to live their hectic life playing games that they cannot fully enjoy for a whole lifetime. Is it a destiny we should accept in our time when human innocence is no longer welcomed?

I installed three works at this thesis show. All three works focused on play. Through this, I tried to elicit innocent emotions inside human beings and at the same time shed new light on the contradictory aspects of human society using images such as missiles and skull which represent violence or death. However, I succeeded in drawing people's attention and creating a pleasant atmosphere through playful works, but it was not enough to convey my dystopian message. Because the images like a skull used in the works, the audience could not easily experience pain or despair there. If it had been overcome through stronger visual contrast, other sensory effects such as music, and the atmosphere adjustment of the exhibition hall, it would have been a more conveyable exhibition.

I have been working on art with a constant interest in human innocence. The sadness and trauma after the world I dreamt of in my childhood collapsed and has brought longing and compassion for the old days. If we can remember the innocence of that time and try to re-live with it all the time, I think the world will not be as wild and hopeless as it is now. In the future, I would like to work on moving these small hopes into my work carefully. If modern society is ill, there will certainly be a cure for it, and it may be discovered in our innocent mind, not somewhere else.

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