



From top, clockwise, "Gyoki" (2001) "Structure of Thought No. 11" (2001), "Attracted to Light No. 1" (1988-2001)



## Darkness and light: Two brothers' search for wisdom, mediated by altered images

By Inès Cho  
Staff Writer

Medieval images of Jesus Christ or Christian saints on semi-transparent films are cut and reassembled with glue or staples on a canvas. Or they are mounted, curved on their metal clamps and hinges, which are lighted from within to breathe life into the opulent colors. Such contemporary works, featuring recurring images of light and darkness through liberal use of photographs as an artistic medium, question not only the existence of God in us today but also the creative mechanism of the artist's brain.

Since "The Christ Series" was shown at San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art in 1987, the twin brothers Doug and Mike Sarn, now in their late 30s, have continued to seize the attention of art critics and the modern art industry around the world. Their exhibitions have shown at, among others, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, the Guggenheim Museum in New York and Korea's National Museum of Contemporary Art.

Trained as photographers at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Sarn brothers began to mix photography and other media — painting, installation and lighting — in their art. They deconstruct and reconstruct — photographs are cut, treated or discolored, then reassembled, pasted or stapled. The photographic images become a collage on a blank canvas or an installation with metal clamps, electricity or mechanical parts. Their installational work "Amaterasu," from the early 1990s, features a lighted globe that spins in mid-air.

As part of an international joint tour with Galerie Hans Mayer in Dusseldorf, Germany, and the Torch Gallery in Amsterdam, the Sarns are showing works completed after 2000 at Galerie Bahk in southern Seoul.

"Doug & Mike Sarn — Absorption of Light" has four themes, "Structure of Thought," "Black Pulse," "Attracted to Light" and "Gyoki." All of them seek a center in the source of

light or the sun as the ultimate gravitational force that attracts planets in the cosmic world.

The "Structure of Thought" series beautifully captures the relativity of light and darkness through images of trees photosynthesizing. The photographic image of a black carbon mass printed on layers of Thai mulberry, Japanese Gampi and tissue paper represents a body of light. Jung Hoon, curator of Galerie Bahk, compares the relationship of light and darkness in their work to the brothers' search for enlightenment through human knowledge.

The "Attracted to Light" series features the bleak image of a moth attracted to light. The moth's desperate flight is again compared with a human mind's yearning for wisdom.

The sharp images of fallen, dry leaves in the "Black Pulse" series, which were created through developing an innovative technique for brittle cuticle prints, represent the veins of the human respiratory system.

While seeking enlightenment, the two artists became fascinated by the East and stumbled upon Gyoki, a revered and respected figure in Japanese Buddhism during the Nara Period (645-794). Gyoki was a high-ranking monk who combined Buddhism and local superstition to investigate truth and interrelationships within the universe. As the brothers identified themselves with Gyoki, they reconstructed a picture of an image of the monk and added the element of time by making the print look worn like an old painting.

Through somewhat familiar images crafted with innovative artistic techniques, the Sarn brothers are instinctively telling their story — the story of a search for wisdom and life force in the universe.

inescho@joongang.co.kr

The exhibition runs until April 30. Galerie Bahk is located at 79-13 Cheongdam-dong and is open daily from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. (until 6 p.m. on weekends). For more information, call (02) 544-8481.