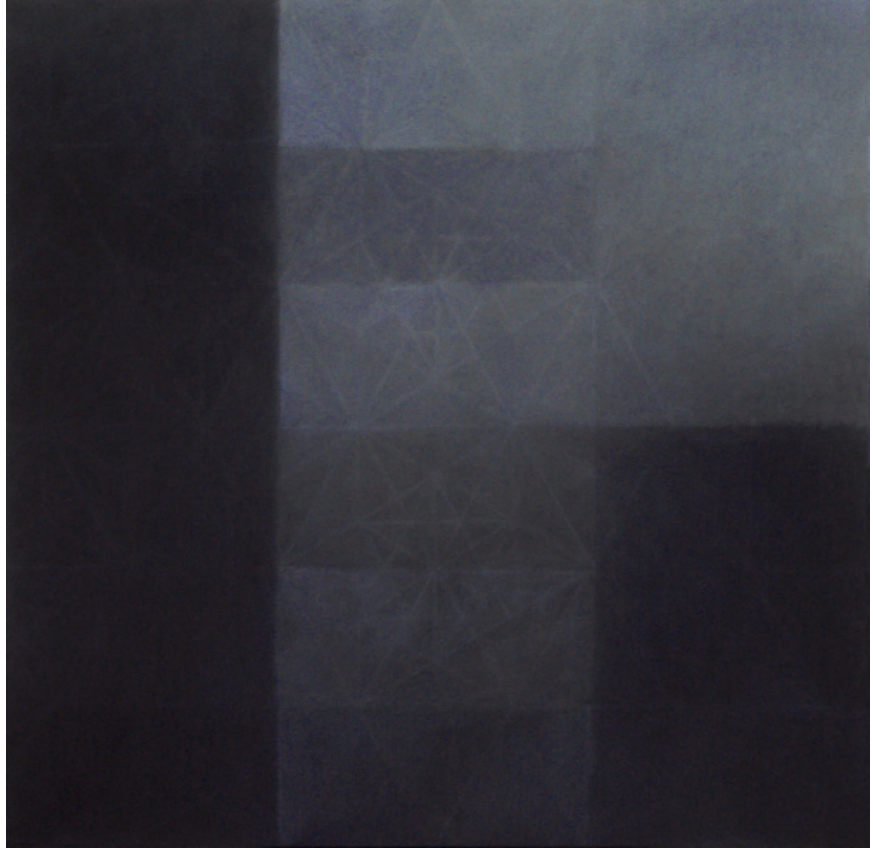


PAINTING/A CAKE THAT SATISFIES HUNGER

by Richard Stodart



Untitled/Flowers of Emptiness, Richard Stodart, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 48" x 48"

THE EMBODYING BODY-EMBODYING-THE-ROUND-MOON-SHAPE

Responding to Nagarjuna's utterance, "Body manifesting a round moon shape, Expressing thereby the body of the Buddhas," Dōgen writes in *S*, "Busshō"¹:

You should know without any doubt that at that very time [of his utterance] Nargajuna was just sitting there on the high seat. The form in which he manifested his body was no different from the form of any of us sitting here right now. Right now our bodies are manifesting a round moon shape.

Since self and ego are from the first excluded from this manifested body, the manifesting body is not Nagarjuna; it is the body of all Buddhas. Since it is *expressing thereby*, it breaks through all Buddha-bodies. Because of that it is completely free of Buddhahood. Although clearly and distinctly embodying the form of the full moon/Buddha-nature, it is not a round

moon shape set out on display. Much less is there any sight or sound in the preaching it expounds. The manifesting body is not a form or mind. It is not a *skandha*, base, or field. Although it is identical to a *skandha*, base, or field, it is *thereby expressing*, and it is the original body of all Buddhas. . . It has no established form, and when an unestablished form is formless samadhi as well, it is the *manifesting* body.

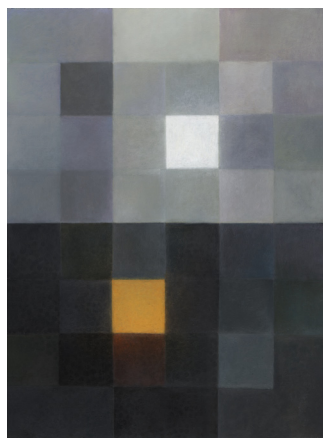
The manifesting body preaching the Buddha-nature is therefore clear and distinct — and it is absolute emptiness. . . . Once you speak of the Buddha-body, it is *skandhas*, bases, and fields, just as they are, manifesting the Buddha-nature. . . . The merit of Buddhahood is the all-pervading, all-encompassing activity of this manifesting. The comings and goings of all these infinite boundless merits are a single moment of this manifesting body. . .

You must know that in painting the form of the body manifesting a round moon shape, the form of the manifesting body must be there on the Dharma seat. Eyebrows must be directly and authentically raised, eyes directly and authentically blinked. . . . If this picture is not a moon-shape, the shape of suchness is not there; it does not preach the Dharma; it makes no sight, no sound, no sermon. If you would seek the manifesting body, you must trace the shape of the round moon. When you trace the shape of the round moon, you can trace only the shape of the round moon, because the manifesting body is the round-moon shape. When you want to paint the round-moon shape, you must trace the shape of the round moon, you must manifest the full-moon shape.

Given the view above in *S*, “Busshō”, I posed the question to Hee-Jin Kim: Is pure abstract expression an adequate means to embody the full round moon shape? He answered:

In my own reading of the Busshō passage, Dōgen seems to envision a totality of “the body-embodying-the-round-moon-shape,” namely, the relational dynamic reality of the artist, the artwork and Buddha-nature *in toto*. That is, the artist, his or her whole body-mind, and artistic symbols/images and mediums — together regarded as “the body” — endeavors to “embody” “the round moon shape” (or “the full moon shape” — Buddha-nature — different from “a single circle shape”). In this respect, the artist is “the embodying body”; creative process is “embodying.” Needless to say, the body and the full round moon shape are two foci of this creative process. I hyphenate these foci and “embracing” altogether in order to underline a totality of such truth/reality which is said to be boundlessly open, empty, and luminous. Sublimation and transformation in the process constitute “embodying,” never disembodied. Your work of art is in fact charged with your values, insights, emotions, and so on. If you can present your artistic vision or story, viewers would be pleased.²

“What is thinking
of not-thinking?
Nonthinking.”



The Steelyard, 2007,
acrylic on paper,
22.5" x 30"

NONTHINKING IN THE PAINTING EXPERIENCE

Wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline are the three essential categories in the eightfold path of liberation of Buddhist practice that satisfies hungers. Wisdom includes the factors of (1) right understanding and (2) right thought. Ethical conduct includes the factors of (3) right speech, (4) right action, and (5) right livelihood. Mental discipline includes the factors of (6) right effort, (7) right mindfulness, and (8) right concentration. Of these eight factors, Dōgen singles out right thinking from the wisdom category and identifies it with nonthinking/emptiness, making it the kernel of zazen and the essential method of his Zen: “What is thinking of not-thinking? Nonthinking.”³ As a focus that connotes the absence of any self-existing essence (*jishō*) in Buddha-nature, right thinking/nonthinking is to be practiced concurrently with the ethical factors (3, 4, 5) and mindful (6, 7, 8) factors of the eightfold path. Right thinking/nonthinking may thus rightfully be said to be the “custodian” of emptiness that skillfully mediates the interface between thinking and meditation for equilibrium and fairness.

Dōgen writes:

Study the steelyard in equilibrium. When we study it, our power to discern minute differences in weight manifests itself without fail, and thus puts forth the expounding of dream within a dream. Unless we consider weight differences, and thereby attain equilibrium [of the steelyard], no fairness [in the ascertainment of weight] is accomplished. Only when equilibrium is attained do we see fairness. . . . [By virtue of this principle of fairness] we weigh emptiness and things; whether it be emptiness of form, [we weight it] to meet fairness.⁴

Like the steelyard in Dōgen’s analogy, right thinking/nonthinking facilitates the ongoing dynamic dialogue between thinking and meditation that is responsive to, and responsible for, daily affairs. Although immersed in their discontinuous continuity, the wisdom of right thinking/nonthinking is free of and unattached to thinking and meditation.

ARROW AND CIRCLE THAT COMES NONTHINKING

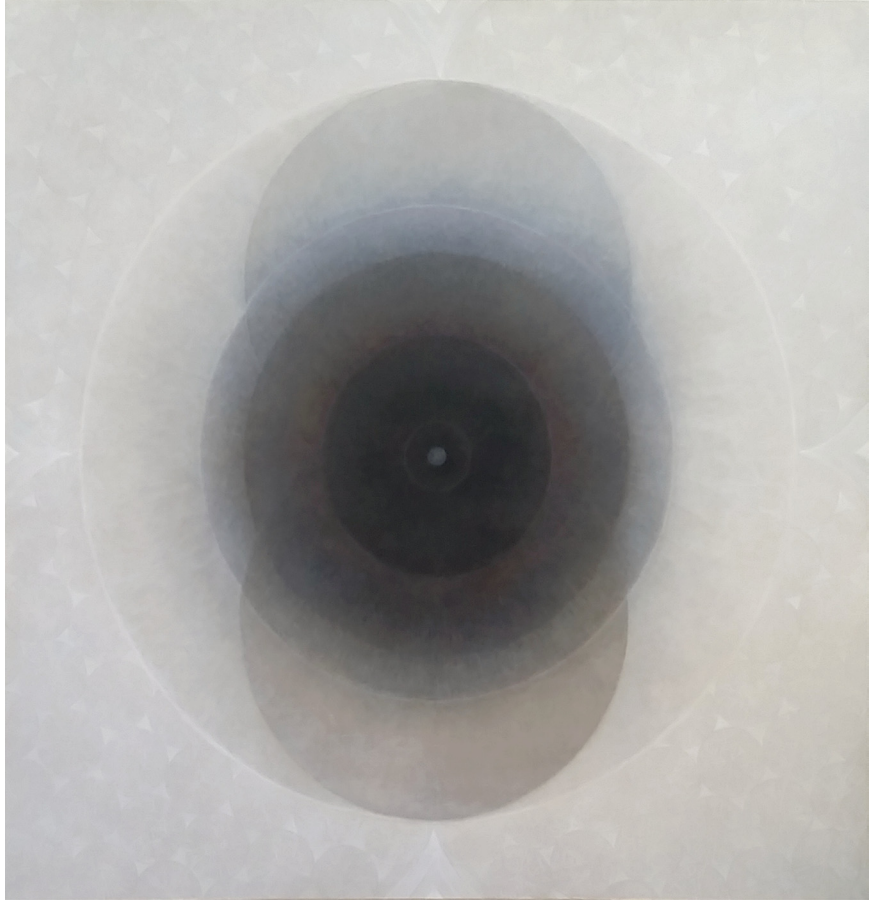
In the painting experience, I designate Arrow as the full round moon shape of active expression (enlightenment) and Circle as the embodying body of expressive activity (delusion) in the free ethical and mental workings of the body-mind (*shinjin gakudo*).⁵ Mediated by nonthinking/emptiness, which nullifies them of self-essence, Circle and Arrow entwine as vines (*kattō*) of the singular liberating momentum of entire time, and hang in emptiness as orientational and perspectival foci of duality (the body) and nonduality (the full round moon shape): *ku ze ku* (the emptiness of emptiness).



Entwined Vines, Richard Stodart, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 58" x 58"

Circle discontinuously affirms the expressive activity of thinking (the body) by negating Arrow as the active expression of enlightenment (the full round moon shape). Even so, Circle is continuous with Arrow, since its boundary with Arrow is permeable: it thinks of Arrow. Circle is thus neither the effect of Arrow nor is it reducible to Arrow. The ego-willing, liberating function of thinking in Circle holds the Arrow with the resolute creative clarity of ego-purity. When Circle is illumined, Arrow is darkened.

Conversely, Arrow discontinuously affirms the active expression of not-thinking (round moon shape) by negating Circle as the expressive activity of delusion. Even so, it is continuous with Circle: it *moves* with and illuminates Circle. As the cultic and moral continuity of all things, Arrow negates Circle without privileging itself over Circle's philosophical and cultural expressive activity. When Arrow is illumined, Circle is darkened. Intimate, reflexive, and dynamic, the nondual Circle and Arrow of the embodying body/the full round moon shape is "ever-already" within the ineffable/unnameable workings of realization in the eightfold path.



Someone Nonthinking, 2015, acrylic on canvas, 66" x 66"

In my painting practice, I grope my way along in a push and pull with Circle as the embodying body of differentiation (expressive activity) and Arrow as the full round moon shape of equality (active expression), in and through right thinking/ nonthinking as the “someone” custodian of emptiness. Through the principle of fairness in emptiness and the limiting and liberating functions of discriminative thinking⁶ in the creative process of embodying, I weigh ideas/feelings and symbols/images of the embodying body/ the full round moon shape until they equilibrate in a fully expressible image of opening/illuminating, speaking/listening, encountering/making, expressed/ inexpressible. In essence, the embodying body and the full round moon shape hang without self-essence as the emptiness of emptiness in emptiness — *ku ze ku*. In this *sāmadhi* of self-fulfilling activity, picture is reality, the symbol is the symbolized.

Dōgen writes in *S*, “Busshō”:

There is no medicine beyond the rice cake to satisfy our hungers. . . The present activity of the rice cake is making a picture. . . . Because the whole universe and all thoughts within it are the act of painting a picture/a painted picture, every human thought and thing emerges from a picture, and Buddhas and Ancestors come forth from pictures as well. Thus, beyond the image of a rice cake there is no medicine to satisfy our hungers, beyond the image of hunger there is no mutual encountering among humans, and beyond the image of fulfillment there is no capability.

In sum, to be satisfied with being hungry, to be satisfied with not being hungry, not to satisfy one’s hunger, and not to satisfy one’s not being hungry — all these would be impossible and inexpressible were it not for an image of hunger. You need to explore through your training that the concrete here and now at this very moment is a picture of a rice cake. . . . When you make this meritorious function fully manifest, you will realize just what a picture is.⁷

Hee-Jin Kim comments on the foregoing passage as follows:

A picture is not a representation of reality in the philosophical sense; to understand this, the dualism of representation and realism must collapse. Even so, the process of painting a picture is not arbitrary, capricious, or undisciplined but informed and nurtured by cultural sensibilities and personal/historical memories, among a number of conditions.⁸

Dōgen writes in *S*, “Busshō”:

Because it is like this, the self and surrounding environment of sentient beings is not in the least involved in the waxing influences of karma, is not bred by illusory causation, does not come into being naturally, and is not practiced or realized through miraculous powers. Entire being is not original (timeless) being, because it fills the past right on up to the present. It is not emergent being, because it does not receive even a particle of dust. It is not separate, individual being, because it is an inclusive whole. It is not beginningless being, because “What” is “This” that comes “Thus”. It is not being that appears at a certain time, because “my everyday mind is the Way.” You must know with certainty that within *entire being* it is impossible, even with the greatest swiftness, to encounter sentient being. Understood in this way, entire being is in itself completely and emancipated suchness.

Right here and now there is no second person. . . . One is prior to knowing (and actually is living) the fact that the root source of illusion is originally severed; the busily working karmic consciousness (*goshikki bōbō*) is as such the manifestation of the Buddha-nature . . . the true mode of sentient being—entire being. Such a standpoint does not allow any “second person.” “Entire being is the Buddha-nature I call the whole integral entity of entire being

sentient beings. . . . You must understand that the “being” that the Buddha-nature makes the *entire being* is not the being of being and nonbeing. *Entire being* is a Buddha’s words, a Buddha’s tongue, the pupils of a Buddha-patriarch’s eyes, the noseholes of a Zen monk.

Nor does the term entire being mean emergent being, or original being, or mysterious being, or anything of the like, much less conditioned being or illusory being. It has nothing to do with such things as mind and objects, substance and form.



Notes

1. Translations of S, “Busshō” throughout the text are by Norman Waddell and Masao Abe in *The Heart of the Shōbōgenzō*.
2. Email correspondence with Hee-Jin Kim.
3. Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō* fascicle “Zazengi” (1243).
4. Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō* fascicle “Muchū setsumu”.
5. “Activity (*gyō*) fathoms the way to be in unison with expression (*setsu*), and expression has the path to be attuned with activity.” —Hee-Jin Kim, *Mystical Realist*, p. 76.
6. “Discriminative thinking, delusory though it may be, possesses an intrinsic capacity within itself to overcome and transform its own limitations, for it is “ever-already” within the process of realization itself, not “ever without.” That is why discriminative thinking neither arrives nor leaves”. — Hee-Jin Kim, *Meditation And Thinking*, p.84.
7. S, “Gabyō” translation by Hee-Jin Kim.
8. Hee-Jin Kim, *Meditation And Thinking*, p.118.