

“Welcome to the Image Land” or the artist’s hand

“My first encounter with 3D was like entering a brand new universe.” Kim Joon’s works, which once switched from modernist abstract paintings to objet paintings, have transformed once again to 3D image paintings. The body here in its disembodied state becomes the image itself. The body that wanders around not in places but in space has the logos of transnational companies like Starbucks, Chrysler, Ferragamo and Armani engraved on it, or sports leather from their products like skin grafts. The Drunken series has liquor brands such as Dom Perignon, Moet Chandon and Ballantine, while the Fragile series displays global brands in ceramic ware. The desire that fetishizes capitalist products now creates, in drunken stupor, a fragile identity for the body, which is encapsulated in the slogan “I consume, therefore I am.” Kim’s images are extraordinary exquisite and captivating, pleasing to the eye in their color and design. But as the artist’s touch grows deeper, the images grow more melancholy. Walter Benjamin said that in times when a general worldview or the tradition of storytelling as a means to transmit wisdom for meaningful life becomes impossible, that is, in melancholy times, allegories that create new meaning through montage would emerge. (The title of this exhibition, <<Blue Jean Blues>>, is worth noting in this regard.) Whether he is engraving various signs onto flesh he created or working with 3D images like now, Kim Joon is a master at variation. Perhaps his variations serve as ironic proof that desire can never be indexical nor completely fulfilled. Within his digital generated images, even Adam and Eve or Romeo and Juliet are no different from all the other anonymous people invited for a few moments to make merry with Dionysos for a fleeting taste of ecstasy. The physical properties of the body that was a specific place in which diverse forms of labor occurred have disappeared, and in their place, the body is exhibited as the signifier of desire itself, without any signifié. This kind of flight may be liberating, but the body that experiences this liberation is merely a simulacrum.

“It’s burdensome to dream. The return to reality is exhausting. Dreams ... or anything that is distanced from reality makes me uncomfortable. ... The desire to break away and obsession seem to coexist.” So says the artist. Finding it burdensome to dream, so remaining in the shrine of dreams endlessly sustained by capitalist commodities–fetishism: This contradiction brings into sharp focus the fate of humans who voluntarily surrender themselves to the system of new capitalism. Life mirrors commodity – fundamentally instant and transitory – with no guarantee for the continuity of time. In this life nobody imagines death anymore. As if we have never lived before, we have no stories to tell about life. Anywhere in the world, it is not difficult to meet ‘bodies’ without hi/(her)stories, and bodies living as commodities consuming other commodities. Joon Kim figures these bodies with an innovative and impressive power. The fragmented bodies served on the banquet table are the allegories of our life becoming fetish of commodities.

Kim Joon says that physicality and the sense of touch are the qualities he values most. I’m truly curious about what kind of painting-like objets he will come up with next as he applies his artistic hand to digital generation. How will he give shape to the contention between dreams and reality, between being engraved and engraving? How will he delve into the contemporary phenomenology of the body? Surely there must be an aesthetics unique to someone whose preoccupation for more than a decade has been “engraving.”

The images from this exhibit, <<Blue Jean Blues>>, tell the stories of other artists, music, and cultural influences that engraved special meaning in the artist’s life. The fact that we are beginning to see the stories and not the commodity is a sign that we’re at a turning point. With this sign in mind, let us ‘dream’ the unknown world to be revealed by the artist’s hands.

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