

Back Seung Woo's work emerges from how the pervasiveness of digital image processing negates the need to produce original photographic images. Taking this as both a necessary condition and a point of departure, Back has developed work where he deploys archives of photographs, some taken by him and some by others, to expose the realm of images and offer it as a reconstructed world.

Back's use of archival images started with his *Blow Up, 2004-2005* series. *Blow Up* consists of a set of enlargements made from regular snapshots taken by the artist during a visit to North Korea in 2000. During this extremely rare opportunity, Back was only allowed to photograph what he had been granted permission to shoot. In addition, his films were all confiscated and returned as cut-up negatives and prints compatible with a positive image of North Korea. Unsatisfied, Back initially neglected these photographs. Only after reviewing them years later, did he decide to use them by blowing up particular details of these censored images. The results are pale, severely cropped, and blurry. Yet, by focusing on overlooked details from the vastness of information contained in the censored photos, Back subverts the control that they had been subjected to.

He continued to work with images from North Korea to create *Utopia 2008-2011*. In this series, Back altered North Korean propaganda photos of buildings from posters and postcards through distortion and the use of primary colours in the background. These altered images, whilst indirectly referencing Russian Constructivism, also heightened the awareness of how they were constructed. In *Utopia, 2011*, the artist divided some of these images into 13 equal parts that were sent to 13 countries along with the same printing specifications. When all 13 parts of the same photograph were returned, they presented different printing results. Since whatever was considered the original image was subjected to the same specifications, these results highlight how, at the moment of taking a photograph, it is impossible to foresee what effect different processes will have on the image produced.

Also addressing unforeseeable effects of the processes images undergo and the myriad reconfigurations of the information they contain, *Memento, 2011* was constructed from archives of found images collected by Back. For this piece, he asked eight people to make their own selection of images from over fifty thousand photographs, which once belonged to numerous individuals. The choices and arrangement of these photographs taken by others were made in accordance with each individual's projected narrative. These reconstructed narratives, like the methodologies Back used in *Blow Up* and the *Utopia* series, interfere with the intentions present not only at the time the images were taken but also the subsequent decisions made about them as they were collected.