

In this era of images, there is nothing beyond the production and consumption of images. Photography is, of course, at the core of these processes. However, the traditional method of producing images that consisted of wandering passionately in search of subjects and shooting photos of them, no longer guarantees the meaning of photographic images as it once did. The explosion of digital images challenges the basic assumptions of photography that have been its support for the last one hundred and fifty years. The myth of direct representation, whether of a dramatic moment or a beautiful scene, has started to collapse and is finally coming to an end. It is true that luckily some images can still stand out when rescued from the sea of images. This, however, is something that photographers today are unable to attain and discourse on "the death of photography" may be the most evident reflection of this sense of crisis. This current situation is ironic given it has been largely brought on by the practice of photography itself. Given that all myths need sacrifices, the current situation may be an anticipated outcome. The problem is how to clearly recognize the context of these circumstances when executing a ritual for this myth of photography. Though their context was slightly different, artists addressing similar issues started to emerge in the 1970s in the West. The practices of Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine, Richard Prince and Louise Lawler destabilized the foundation of modernist aesthetics such as authenticity, aura and existence. And their attack seems to have been partially successful within the established system of the art world. Their works seem to embrace issues that were not allowed in previous canonical modernist works. They tackled issues such as the West and non-West, gender, and crossovers. But the current situation, thirty to forty years after their emergence, is different from theirs. The crux is that current vital concerns, such as the death of photography, cannot be overcome by merely questioning the established system. Where should we search for the possibility of actively intervening in this photographic phenomenon that is happening out of control, outside the established system?

It is this point that Seung Woo Back's works bring to our attention. It seems that he has inevitably had to take alternative approaches in his works. It would seem that the only strategy to adopt would be to confront the age of proliferating images and to boldly give up the traditional subjects of photography. Instead, Back has been disturbing the intricate web of meanings attached to photographic subjects. His response to our customary dependence on the groundless myth of photography is that it is nothing more than a ruin that is a remnant of meaning. *Nobody Reads Pictures* traces Back's pursuit of new horizons of meaning in photography, while still dispelling its myth and disturbing its meaning. From Back's body of works, seven series are presented in *Nobody Reads Pictures*. Images from each of his seven series of works, *Real World I* (2004–2006), *Real World II* (2006–2008), *Blow Up* (2005–2007), *Utopia* (2008–2011), *Seven Days* (2010–2011), *Archive Project* (2011) and *Memento* (2011), are accompanied by introductory

articles written by Hyeyoung Shin to help understand the artist's works following the progress of his practice. To provide critical readings of Back's works as a whole, two additional articles and an interview are also included in the book. Young Min Moon's "Out of Pictures, Out of the Archives" employs a conceptual framework of "picture," "proxy," and "archive" in reading Seung Woo Back's works. Moon distinguishes the meaning of "photo" as a record of existing objects and "picture" as a rearrangement, at the same time focusing on the artist's search for the deconstruction of the typical meaning of archive in his *Blow Up* and *Utopia*, where he utilizes existing archives. Keum Hyun Han examines the body of works created by Seung Woo Back, presenting him as an artist who has sought to reverse conventional ideas on photography. She comments that Back's works move from the level of image production to image collection, where the artist as an authentic figure does not exist and diverse meanings come into play. Moreover, Back's works are now surpassing photography as a mere visual medium and stepping into the stage where viewers experience them. Sunjung Kim's interview with the artist was done before Back's solo show at the Artsonje Center in 2011. The interview provides the artist's own accounts of the background and process of creating his work. As all myths need sacrifices and death brings new lives, Back's strategy, which boldly deconstructs conventional ideas on photography and opens up new possibilities for the medium, is expected to provide an interesting point of departure for both reading photography as a medium and his work.