

A Record of another Reality

Yunkyoung Kim (Director, Mongin Art Center)

“In photography, we look at ourselves through objects. We see us, our worldly desire with Eunpyeong New Town.”—From the Artist Note

Hong-goo Kang's works with digital composite photos using a scanner in the 1990s were fairly explicit in exposing his stance in any context. He said, “I wanted to make extremely meaningless fake photos, because I was so sick and tired of institutions, words and theories surrounding artworks. So, I intended my photo works to be meaningless, empty and preposterous.”* Like he said, his <Home Sweet Home> series (1997) and <Warphobia> series (1997–1998) as well as <Who Am I> series (1996–1997) were very much so, and <Fugitive> series (1996) undoubtedly unraveled such an intent of his. However, his picture plane started to show a landscape taken with digital camera, which, maybe because it has taken a step closer to the reality, brings in the attention to the voice coming from the landscape of the reality itself in an accurate sense, instead of his own voice which used to be exposed through composition and plot. At the same time, he took a step back in observing the reality, which seems rather unfamiliar to the observers familiar with his earlier works. In other words, a series of landscape works including <Greenbelt> series (1999–2001) and <Scene of Ohsoi-ri> series (2004) seem to unfold a story in a somewhat different angle by exposing the changes in his work style and objects, artist attitudes, the artist-object relations, or spacing himself from objects.

His photos of Eunpyeong New Town share the similar context. His series of photo works were casually shot while looking around the neighborhood he moved to in 2001. They developed as records of happenstances, regardless of his own will, and ended up as an exhibition titled <Vanish Away: A Record of Eunpyeong New Town>. Then, as the government announced its master plan titled “Eunpyeong New Town Project” in 2002, his works confronted a new context. However, he refused to contextualize his stance on paradoxical reality, staying away from a documentary-type record on inevitable process of urbanization or development frenzy. Rather, upon viewing the violent landscape that happened to intervene in his own daily life, he chose to trace back on the memories and nostalgia on what is passing by, or what is gone now. And such memories and nostalgia capture the redevelopment process of Eunpyeong New Town with digital camera. They unravel themselves in two works: a series of the landscape photos by re-configuring the scenes of the redevelopment process attached on a long horizontal

level; and <Chronology on Eunpyeong New Town> that looks back on the development process in a 400-page slide show. The memories and nostalgia also expose themselves in <Guide of Eunpyeong New Town> that traces back on the spots he passed while photo-taking according to his personal memories.

Given the artist's comment, this work has captured the circumstances surrounding the new town and its redevelopment process, but stays away from an ordinary documentary-style context. That is, instead of forming an objective documentary based on the context surrounding Eunpyeong New Town, the focus is on trivial and specific circumstances. Flowers on a flower bed, trees and abandoned dogs—the ones that go up in smoke or vanish away before everything else—catch the artist's attention in comparison with light poles and roads that remain till the end of the demolition and first come into the redevelopment scene. All these objects regarded trivial and so eradicated trigger the nostalgia for what is gone now. On the landscape that resonates their having existed there once, the artist's sentiments with some elusive reluctance are seen. Such attitudes are, once more, clearer in the pace of his views towards the landscape. As for <Scene of Ohsoi-ri> similarly targeting a redevelopment district, the artist's view towards the object brings about rather tight breaths. This is because the attributes of demolition and redevelopment that instantly and violently intervene in daily life become the reality on the picture plane as they intensify in a rapid flow. However, the landscape of Eunpyeong New Town is in stark contrast from this: in these landscape photos with somewhat long breaths that have been captured at a walking pace in his neighborhood, his psychological status that cannot be shown objective are implicitly exposed. The artist cannot either come close to or disregard a stark reality amid the landscape of wasteland, so decides to view the overwhelming reality as a mere "landscape." As a result, he seems to look at the object from a step back, or from the corner of his eyes. So, he calls the work of his, a reality in the middle of the past, his personal memories on something that is of the past and the present alike, and also "seemingly unintentional record."

Underneath the memories and nostalgia he brought onto the photo surface remain inevitable concerns and worries that can be felt only by those who witnessed each object, and sensed by those who perceived them. The reality is made even more stark and acute because of the artist's subtle mindset—seemingly depressed and despaired—and sense of futility before the reality that contextualizes a given circumstance to a greater extent than any other plots. At the end of the day, his works did not unequivocally deal with contentious issues on redevelopment. However, they still leave

some fundamental questions to mull over: what goes up in smoke; what makes them to vanish like that; and who comes to see them at the end. As such, we inevitably think of a still challenging reality even before Hong-goo Kang's attitudes and works that seem to have changed.

*Hong-goo Kang, "Drama Set/Fragment/Disguise," *Drama Set* [catalogue], Alternative Space Pool, 2003.