

Monumental Delusion

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In his last solo exhibition *Green Mountain* displayed in the Brain Factory, Gyung-Su An showed artworks using toy soldiers as a subject. These are part of a series of works using toy soldiers, consumables in playing war. In *Mal-form Scenery*, which has continued until recently since Brain Factory, the artist completes the works by assembling and arranging the toys off the point and differently from the original manuals, and then painting them. Here, the scenes of the toy soldiers, attached or cut off in eccentric forms, curiously evoke ambivalent emotions, that is to say, monumental and at the same time devastated, as if they are the protagonists in Greek tragedies and the remains of hero statues. The theatrical narrative seems to be vaguely latent in these works but a seemingly paused situation without any motion or flow of time creates an apocalyptic atmosphere. The toy soldiers are the protagonists in this scene but they are not an essential subject that dominates this plot. Since this is a stage of discarded objects which have no life after the toys are consumed as an object in playing war, an intervention of time in the scenes is prevented and a causal relationship of the actions is eliminated. Because all the situations have already ended, the remains of the soldiers are seen as the last relics of collapsed civilization, evoking distance and vanity. As consumables of playing war, a substitute of a battle, their being is a metaphor of violence in society.

This exhibition, titled *Artificial Island*, shows a series of works with a subject of an artificial mountain. The outfit of these works look completely different from the toy soldiers series, but they are still related to each other in the sense that both are created by using artificial substitutes as subjects. An artificial mountain is a staple decoration of fake paradises such as Everland, an amusement park where we enjoy ourselves at the entrance fee. Beside amusement parks, ranging from artificial waterfalls in the zoos and in the gardens of barbecue restaurants to artificial caves in the subway stations, the artificial nature constituting eccentric landscapes scatters all over the places in the neighborhoods. This fixed form of nature is an abstract form of nature where the inherent ageing and extinction process are subtracted. With its no-odors and no-bugs characters and its unthreatening appearances, this abstract form of nature, urban developers' utopia, caters to the urbanites' common tastes toward the nature and erodes the "real" nature with the cheap eternity. The artist depicts the look of this artificial nature, and at the same time, furtively emphasizes awkward, if not strange, parts of it. The work seems to be a realistical landscape due to its elaborately represented surface effects, but soon you will notice that artificial devices such as drainage holes and buttresses are dotted all over. These devices turn the realistically represented volume and existence of the artificial mountain into a delusion.

The black light box work, newly attempted in this exhibition, plays up a kitschy attribute of the artificial nature by installing a fluorescent light above the artificial nature within the box. It is a direct narration in response to the shoddiness of the artificial nature as a substitute. More interesting is the indirect narration by way of painting works. What is distinguished here is the shift in using materials and techniques where most of the drawings are transcribed on the carbon paper, which creates visual effects like a rubbing. Because of its black and white tones, at a glance this looks like Chinese ink lines in the Oriental paintings but a deliberate look will give you the impression that it does not have any shaking or spreads and the effects are closer to copied print works rather than Chinese ink lines. These effects put more emphasis on the shape rather than the atmosphere and more on the surface of the scenes than the depth. The artist's physical and psychological traces which are bound to reveal through vacillating lines, spreads or stains in the works are excluded, which eventually produces nondescript and insipid pictures. The artist exposes the outfit of the artificial mountain as if it is copied, hiding himself behind the picture with any of his direct opinions cached. With his emotional intervention prevented, the artificiality of the scenery gets more noticeable. The works that are completed in this manner display strong realism by the precise representation of the surface texture but they are out of balance with the backdrop, which reduces the reality. This acquires a monumental sense of being but at the same time evokes a feeling of vanity. How effectively this paradox is embodied is expected to be the critical point in the development of this new series of works. For this paradox effectively reminds us of the awkward status of the artificial natural objects that occupy the urban landscapes but cannot join the Life, remaining like an island left out of place.