

## The Manifestation of Delayed Utopia

Hyeongtack Jung (Exhibition and Publishing Producer, Art Studies)

*The consumer price has risen 43 times since 1963. The land price has risen 1,176 times in Seoul, and 923 times in other big cities. In the 1980s, the total value of Korea's land was 1,463 billion dollars, 5.7 times that of Canada (256 billion dollar) whose territory is 100 times larger than Korea. It was 9 times that of France (172.1 billion dollar), whose territory is 5 times larger than Korea. And it was more than half of that of the United States (2,950 billion dollar). The worth is presently enough to buy all the territories of the United States. As of August 2005, the top 10 households had 5,508 houses, and the average number of houses these households possessed was 550 houses. But, 8.41 million households, 50.3% of total households in Korea, were houseless. Although the penetration rate was over 100% since 2002, and a surplus of house was 1 million houses, four out of ten Korean people lived in rented houses. (Hankyoreh Sinmun August 18, 2008)*

This news article, relating to Lim Seung-chun work, may sound absurd, like an artist's imaginary ship, voyage, or imaginary land. However, this article reflects the distorted situation of Korea's land possession. Through his *Dreamship* series, Lim visually addresses Korea's apartment culture and construction sites. This series begins with demolition and construction scenes near his studio in Mokri, Dongtan-myeon, Suwon, Korea. It begins with questions such as, "Why demolish maintainable buildings?" "Why build so many apartments, despite over 100% of the penetration rate of houses?" Anyone can reply to these questions by searching the Internet or a book for a while. This is a frame-up Go game between the Korean government, construction firms, Land Ministry, and Land Corporation.

This phenomenon is represented by artists in three major ways: depicting an alienated individual psychology deriving from this apartment construction system; depicting shopping complexes and amusement spaces, considered byproducts of apartment construction; and representing the superfluous and sleek appearance of urban spaces made up of apartments. Despite the serious intention of these works, most depictions fail, unveiling the inner flesh of such aspects. I think this is why these artists could not add their imagination to their work. Lim's work shows the free aesthetics of imagination. In a way of returning to reality, by representing reality, through his imagination, his imagination is extraordinarily outstanding.

Works on display in the show are a completed version of *Dreamship*. An imaginary scenario, blending with institutions such as IMB(International Maritime Bureau), UNHCR, and Raoul Island,

plus imaginary figures like Captain Bae, and Nakta. For the Dream ship to leave for an uninhabited island on the South Pacific, this project is open to those who lost their dwelling places due to large-scale apartment construction, urban development projects, and dam construction. The Dream ship is strong and the island is beautiful. But, could this ship safely arrive at the illusory island? This immovable, imaginary ship with three prows looks more unstable than his previous works.

This ship maximizes aimless drifting in a visual way. While his previous pieces appeared as an image of settlement with their solid appearance, this work unveils a precarious psychology through the expression of a drifting moment. The Tower of Babel, representing insatiable human desire, also symbolizes the uppermost stratum of Korea's hierarchical real-estate society, composed, for example, of Chongwadae, Land Ministry, and Land Corporation. In the imaginary scenario, refugees residing on the ship's prow suggest homeless people, including residents in poverty-stricken hillside villages and demolished areas. This hierarchical structure appears stronger than his previous works. This structure overlaps with the actual hierarchical real-estate system, of many houses for one household; one house for one household; and a houseless household. In addition, an unidentified entity of a fanatical development culture appears in his work, symbolizing the expansion of the body through a hermit crab's claws, digging into the land like a bulldozer.

Two-dimensional pieces displayed for the first time in the show are as monochromatic as his three-dimensional work. The interior scenes of a cave, without a clear entrance, and what pops out from it, and The Tower of Babel covering the sky, are not real scenes but psychological landscapes unveiling the anxieties of life. Like his three-dimensional work, the feeling of a gray monotone is alive in his two-dimensional paintings, which are akin to oil paintings as ink works. This is due to their formal similarities with his cubic pieces. A visual quality deriving from monotone, a psychological oppression caused by the scenes, and a sticky feeling of irritation between scenes and viewers, are conspicuous in these paintings.

Although self-denial is the expression of one's will, if his dystopia is derived from his self-denial, this exhibition would be dull. A statue of a boy with three eyes named Nakta, in an imaginary voyage scenario, is a key motif of this show. As the number 3 appeared in the exhibition title as a metaphor for completeness, the boy has diverse symbolic meanings. In the imaginary scenario, Nakta signifies hope and survival on the Dream ship, and represents the will to live. The boy's

psychology overlaps with Pandora's hopeful imagery. As a manifestation of shabby reality, the angel appears wretched, not snow-white and brilliant. His crooked back suggests a paradoxical situation between reality and being.

A gap gives rise to such a paradox. We often say it's dreamlike when reality is too far away from reality. We say it's real when an imaginary world is vivid. Lim's paradox is not artificial but realistic. Thomas More's *Utopia*, and Tao Qian's *Tao Hua Yuan* (Peach Blossom Spring) are imaginary yet vivid worlds. The figure 2-3-4-6-18-22-24 is concrete figures representing the hours of rest and labor, male and female marriage ages, and autonomous administrative bodies in Utopia. So what do the figures 1083-819-577-521-476-412-405-403-341 mean? These are not imaginary numbers, but the numbers of houses possessed by Korea's top 10 house owners. Recognition often undergoes confusion between reality and imagination. An unstable hierarchy between reality and imagination is represented in Lim's aesthetics of paradox.

A contemporary aesthetician argues art is impossible to represent, but some existentialist states that "Only art is able to change nausea caused by the fear and irrationality of present existence to a fruitful manifestation." It is natural the impossibility of representation is addressed in the field of aesthetics. In terms of practice, this possibility in Korean art today is infinite.

Lim represents vivid reality rather than an imaginary utopia. For him there are many motifs inspiring artists in Korea. In this sense, Lim is outstanding among more conformist artists who focus on producing things for the art market, expanded fantastically over the last two years.