

Digital Warrior Zin Ki-jong

Kang Sung-eun(curator, Insa Art Space)

Behind the CNN logo, clouds of thick smoke are rising into the sky and a bomber plane is passing by. At a glance, one would think the screen is a news clip of a bombarded area, but the subtitles at the bottom of the screen portrays a different picture. The words describe well aligned trees, flowers, and clouds floating peacefully above the mountain ridge. Suddenly, the smoke turns into clouds and the bomber plane looks like a commercial aeroplane.

Images and photographs which provide visual information are bound to be restricted or defined by words which offer linguistic information. If an image does not convey a clear message, one tends to recall a similar recent image one saw or an image one is familiar with. The situation in Lebanon is aired on the news daily, and so, a person seeing the image for the first time might immediately associate it with the Lebanon bombing. The person would be more convinced that his or her assumption is right because of the CNN logo. If the MBC or KBS logo replaced the CNN logo, viewers would look at the screen and perhaps see vapor clouds rising from the raging currents inundating Injae, an area in Gang-won Province. This example shows how formidable the power of the media is and makes one realize that the media such as television does not simply deliver information but considerably influences people's thoughts and beliefs.

However, this image is not of a bombarded area or even of mountain clouds. The artist, Zin Ki-jong simply used his camera to photograph a scene he artificially set up using a toy plane powered by a motor, trees and urethane foam, and transmitted the scene real-time to a monitor screen. The set scene which is placed right in front of the monitor is laid out for all to see, and the monitor is also positioned to capture images of visitors who are at the exhibition hall. The monitor can simultaneously show images similar to those of CNN news clips and images of visitors walking about the room. Through his work the artist questions the one-sided communication method of the television and the media. At the same time,

the artist aims to confuse the viewers even further by displaying images of visitors and images of the set scene side by side, and thus, blurring the line between reality and the virtual world. Paradoxically, this distinctly reminds people of the increasingly weakening boundary which separates reality and the virtual world.

As digital technologies advance, the distinction between reality and the virtual world is crumbling. Neo, the main character of the movie Matrix, demonstrates superhuman powers in the virtual world. In the last of the Matrix trilogy, the Matrix Revolutions, Neo exhibits supernatural powers even in the simulated reality created by sentient machines. The source which created Neo who wields supernatural powers transcending time and space is the Bit(binary digit), the smallest unit of computer data. All data is stored in the form of 0 and 1. There are no errors in data storage and data can be replicated and transmitted limitlessly. In the movie, Neo can easily move from one space to another by reassembling and transmitting Bit data and can acquire knowledge or athletic skills just by using connecting cables to a machine. If Bit is the basic unit comprising the virtual world, atom is the basic unit of the real world. The artist, in <On-air>, reproduces information made up of arrays of Bit data into atoms and then converts them into Bit data again and transmits them. Here, the virtual world is not imitating reality, but mimicking reality which is reflecting the virtual world.

In 1995, Nicolas Negro-Ponte predicted that the 21st century would be dominated by Bit rather than atoms, and it seems that his prediction turned out to be true. Information or knowledge based on Bit data have created tremendous added-value much more than that created by products made up of matter. Now with the emergence of new media such as PDA and DNB and the development of mobile content transmission, people spend much longer hours in the virtual space than the real world. People pay money to decorate their avatars in the virtual world and even commit crimes in order to gain online game items. Today's world is not only a hyper-real world where reality emulates the virtual space, but also a world where the virtual world is becoming the real world.

In his previous drawings, which were produced before <On-air>, images reflecting both reality and the virtual space can be found. For example, there were images in which a wing of an aeroplane was placed inside a mobile phone, or a school of fish on a monitor screen swimming towards an actual fishing rod outside the virtual space. These examples show that the artist was ready to incorporate the virtual world into his work even before he created <On-air>.

Zin Ki-jong takes photographs with a digital camera, searches information online, listens to music on a MP3 player, uses Macintosh, and makes use of unique items in his artworks. The artist is a typical digital generation. Zin's ability to embrace and use digital technologies and grasp current trends will enable him to become an even more talented artist in today's digital era.