

Kira in the Wonderland

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For those who have read "Alice in Wonderland" the word 'wonder' probably has double meanings. That refers to 'surprising and novel' and simultaneously indicates a structure in which we cannot help but lose our ways. Kira Kim has, for last three decades, lost his own ways. That is why his work, as claimed by itself, alludes to a marginalized life in the territory of an empire and to the structure of a hierarchy imprinted on his inner self. His work also presents a certain viewpoint the artist always relies on in observing and evaluating incomplete life aspects. As usually did all other dramas, Kim's work also has the starting point he bases his art in defying a relatively superior world and an overriding, controlling structure.

Kim's family history is of great significance in figuring out his narratives. In Korea which is traditionally a Confucius nation, the children born of a concubine were socially discriminated. The problem of illegitimate children was often addressed as the main subject in the 8th and 9th representative Korean literature. Moving beyond the sphere of a family system, the issue of illegitimate children extended to the society's entire hierarchal system. As an artist, Kim has been the subject of discrimination under Korea's educational system. While living in the world in which any outer oppression corresponds to internally structuralized suppression, Kim takes a relatively optimistic attitude. For instance, Kim strips his parents naked and has them boxing, or more accurately warming up and consistently chronicles the lives of minorities, including disabled persons and animals.

The "29th Floor" done in 2002 remains most memorable, marking a turning point in his work. The background of this work is a high-rise apartment building, one of typical residence types in Korea. In this performance, the artist ascends the stairs up to the 29th floor with a camcorder, which he throws out from the floor. In other words, someone who goes up the stairs and kills himself by throwing away his body from the 29th floor is recorded and reproduced by the camcorder. The camcorder shows what the man saw while falling down about 70 or 80 meters and even his last moment as it is. Kim derives many of his discourses from his personal experiences and applies them to an enlarged social structure. His 2004 serial artwork "Government-Customer-Personnel" is an extension of such attempts. This video work is to pay homage to the video artist Paik Namjun who passed away in 2006. In this serial work recalling Paik's

"The Violin Tugged on the Floor" the artist drags an operating camcorder on the floor. The internal meaning of this performance is transformed into a bodily experience and delivered to the viewer as it is.

Kim's recent work shows a synthesis of the icons and symbols of power discovered in Korea's social, political phenomena. These symbols ranging from outdoor speakers, cheap potted plants, and ceramics to female telephone operator's comment of "I love you." is a mechanical gimmick altering our life into something two-dimensional. What's sensed here is the fact that the artist's cynical attitude and self-inflicted wounds might shatter any optimistic basis. The background music of the pieces "I Love You" and "Wonderpia" is Korea's popular songs which were in vogue in the 1960s and 70s. They sound like the roars of a tiger in the circulation of capitalist values. The value system is, on the one hand, considerably captivating, but on the other hand appears to be infinitely menacing. In "Coca Killer" the artist refers directly to the tastes most commonly consumed in a marginalized culture. The three-dimensional logo flickering in showy colors presents a fatal name and points out who is the subject of aggression.

Kim Kira's work associates the David's naked body facing and struggling against an immense value system. One of the ways the weak may take is to transform his vulnerable point into a weapon. Kim strips his parents as well as himself naked for his work. As suggested in the 2004 work "Coordinate: it's your around" in which he threw his body towards the viewer, Kim's final weapon is his own body. What he shouts in his pieces is to maintain an optimistic attitude to the end. That is the content of his shouting although it couldn't be heard well, as if the title of his work featuring junk fast foods is "Still Life".