

## Kwon Sunkwan's Living Images

Soukyoun LEE, Chief Curator of the Sungkok Art Museum

Kwon's huge size photographs contain something that overwhelms viewers' gazes. The enlargement of the photo size retains several meanings. This act was initially attempted by the school of Dusseldorf for the purpose of differentiating their photographs from others, usually used for documentation or reporting. Thus, the enlargement of the format has become the first step to proclaim the attempt to use photographs in useless terms such for hanging them on a wall in gallery or museum space, departing from its conventional utility. A group of photographers in recent days, who claim to be artists, tend to enlarge their photos to a monumental size and Kwon's works also can be seen as a part of these examples. The founders of this group, Bernd & Hilla Becher, displayed the vanishing structures of industrial society in a neutral sense using the strict techniques of documentary skills. However, they denied their works to be recognized as merely documents or visual records, but wanted them to be recognized as individual images out of sociological contexts, not as simply traces of history. They eliminated such fluctuating and sensuous elements like subjective emotions, periodical changes, the depth of an event, etc. and aimed for a firm composition in a somewhat strict and a cold sense, rather than subjective expression of the capture of scenes involving only temporary meaning. An image in this context attains objectivity as a new entity, not as a trace of something else. Therefore, Bernd & Hilla Becher and the following group of Dusseldorf have presented a strict and minute sense of artificiality as simulacra instead of contingency and eventuality. In this sense, the enlargement of the format also has the effect of transforming a photograph into an individual entity rather than a merely mimesis.

The expansion of an image creates its individuality as well as an artistic effect. This is one of techniques which had been once used by Andreas Gursky, part of the Dusseldorf school, and Thomas Ruff. Ruff made his original image through the technique of maximizing low-pixel film. For instance, he eliminated the documentary aspects which deal with a particular social event from his photographs by enlarging the scene of the attacks of September 11th. The enlarged images alter the scene of the terror attack into a scene of a romantic battlefield as past artists have beautified their objects using their imagination like scenes one of Tourneur's landscapes. Therefore, Ruff used images from postcards, portrait shots, or the mass media to develop his

works and put more importance on these produced images than the real scenes from these social events or tourist spots. In this way, Ruff denies the point, 'here and now' where one chases for the originality of photography based on its objectivity. His represented scenes may disappear within their reappearance or are diluted by the numerous other similar happenings. Thus, the scenes become so-called 'places where something happened within an image'. It is also important for Kwon to make his images be original entities of another dimension of facts rather than merely copies of reality. However, the working method he has adopted is slightly different from his predecessors'. He intentionally composites his characters and objects within an image. Gursky supposed that people today are trained to see pictures not in the way of purely viewing themselves, but in the drilled and pre-determined way of Classicist or Modernist artists. Thus, he tried to recall such magnificent landscapes once described by Romantic artists from his own city landscape through delicate composition. He, for instance, attempted to restore the interior of a holy edifice in an orderly sense. Kwon's images seemingly follow Gursky's similar principles. Both the artist Gursky and Kwon intensely compose their objects and characters within images, while the other great masters from the Becher group induce intense strain by catching up the correct previous scenes of events or their marks to continue the passage of time. Although sometimes an unexpected crowd of people are included within Kwon's camera frame, his images are usually the result of a strict composition rule. And each scene recalls different scene from classic sacred pictures, genre paintings, Modernist abstract paintings, or parts of today's movies and sports games on television.

Kwon doesn't try to conceal the fact that he created his images based on strict principles. His characters' seemingly unnatural postures allude to the work's artificiality. At this point, one can misinterpret that Kwon is a performance artist rather than a photographer. To be honest, performance and photography retain a close relationship with one another and are in fact inseparable. Art has become dematerialized while touching on conceptual art or performance. In this way, art uses photography as a way of witnessing itself. That is, photography has proclaimed its utility as a trace of art that leaves nothing behind. Photography has become merely a by-product or remainder and thus has been given a cold reception because of its mechanical aspects and supposed intentions. However, it becomes a different story for artists who deal with photography as their creative material. Such outer elements like characters' postures and outlook and general composition are now selected and given new meaning in terms of being 'photographed', and are created and disused only for photography's artistic needs. From this point, photography is not merely a trace of something, but creates its own phase of reality.

Kwon's photographs stand on a sleek and clearly ordered surface. His images within amusements of powerful light and flowery colors that appeal to our all parts of sentiments provide us with conceptual and visual enjoyment. However, these amusements of colors and light seemingly fly away after the evaporation of the confidential externality of its strengthened surface. In particular, Kwon's huge external format lets small things become huge on a monumental level and thus eliminates hierarchy within the canvas. This also removes the horizon line and the vanishing point in order to let viewers catch the lively scenes at a glance and therefore the images are confined within a depthless surface. Such configured images shown in a single dimension, with repetition and an absence of a center, and indifference between the perimeter and the outskirts allow the audiences' gaze to wander around within the emptiness. There is nothing behind the single dimensional image, nor does a central point that holds the viewers' gaze exist. Each portion of the image seemingly has the same worth as the others, but only the relationship among the parts gains meaning. In this context, a certain emptiness rules over by and large. In addition, there is no hierarchy among the each spectacle as no hierarchy exists within a single image. All the scenes are equal within their ordinary dailiness or completely presented artificiality. As all coming events and spectacles are merely artificial, each moment that imitates such events are portrayed in complete configuration, while any stark contingency or irregularity is confidentially eliminated. An individual within the sleek, flawless, and tolerably transparent world is nothing more than a part of a huge machine and merely repeats hollow acts.

Kwon's photographs are given birth through the artist's intense labor as one can see in the large amount of equipment, the huge-sized camera, light settings, sets, and even in his careful choosing of characters. Thus, his photographs portray our hollow reality as a solid and configured entity of images.