

SANGBIN IM: RECENT WORKS

The computer's most profound aesthetic implication is that we are being forced to dismiss the classical view of art and reality which insists that man stand outside of reality in order to observe it...It may be that the computer will negate the need for such an illusion by fusing both observer and observed, "inside" and "outside."

-Jack Burnham, "The Aesthetics of Intelligent Systems"

In 1969, art historian Jack Burnham delivered these words in a symposium of artists, curators and historians organized by the Guggenheim Museum of New York that sought to anticipate how the development of computer technology would radicalize the realm of traditional art production.

Nearly forty years later, we explore the work of Sangbin IM, a trained painter that has felt the increasing obsolescence of its own traditions in the brush, the gesture and the canvas. Born into a post-industrial age dominated by the rubric of the computer, IM has traded in those arcane tools for the digital camera, the mouse chained to its keyboard, and the high-definition gloss of the cibachrome print in hopes of having painting communicate to us again. As prophesized by visionaries like Burnham, IM's computer-generated photographs continue to symptomize the vast transformations the computer has had on not only the tropes of painting but also on the knowledge of visual perception.

IM's works are often mistakenly categorized as a site of binary oppositions: part versus whole, analogue versus digital, reality versus virtuality. Upon closer consideration, however, one must concede that these images are not a testimony to the traumas of opposition, but a witness to how contemporary vision is synched and layered onto a simulacral plane—a plane that permits no pure access to a single object, where vision is always plural, intersecting and overlapping with other objects, vectors and desires. In consequence, this is where IM's pictorial illusions to collage, the artistic technique of layering, boldly multiply meaning. And out of such layered oppositions and multiplications of meaning, arises a profound fascination with infinity that the viewer discovers at the core of IM's digital practice.

Whether it is through use of the horizon line or merely insinuating endlessly reproducing objects, IM's iconic snapshots of cities like Seoul, New York and New Haven seek to unite the personal narrative with the universal unknown. Like tourist snapshots on steroids, IM's manipulated visions of public monuments, city skylines and museum and conference room interiors all uniquely reflect a search to visually describe the illusive concept of infinity. It was art historian Erwin Panofsky who initially suggested that infinity was mathematically and visually harnessed at once during the Renaissance with the advent of linear perspective. For many during the Renaissance, the conceptualization of infinity represented a witness to the existence of God and a justification for the higher aspirations of Art. Whether this particular aim holds true for IM, it is of little significance. For in the end, IM's attempts to unite visual expression and mathematical reason, painting and computer, "inside" and "outside"—are sufficient enough to instill in us a newfound faith that wondrous experiences still await us at the intersection of culture and technology.

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