

the Art of Seeing and the Presence of Existence:
Sangbin IM <ANTARCTICA>

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<My Existence in Remote Areas>

Sangbin IM has revealed unfamiliarity inside intimacy by manipulating various kinds of images of everyday life with aid of contemporary cultural technology. In the making of his work, IM incorporates painting and drawing with digital collage by combining numerous images to express a sense of irony through the scenery, that is ordinary but special and conventional but deviant. IM's sensational image making makes improbable heterogeneous environment so lively to the degree that viewers feel uncertain about the distance between the scenery and where they stand. This visual illusion leads them to expand their experience.

IM takes pictures from different angles and creates a scene of simulation through elaborate editing on computer. This creating process is well represented in IM's work, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which has received very favorable reviews. The original paintings that are initially categorized in different time, movement, and region are connected under IM's direction which ultimately creates a unique stage that is unconventional and non-institutional. Subsequently, IM continues to provide a variety of hybridized combinations by changing and distorting size, shape, or the relationship of the hustle and bustle of a big city, people, and skyscrapers.

Nonetheless, in this solo exhibition, IM moves his place into Antarctica, a land that is virtually uninhabitable. IM's Antarctica project includes penguins on pack ice in a freezing environment and iceberg showing marble or abstract artwork like patterns. This project is not so much ironical as his other projects but focuses on existentialism in regard to who he is as an artist. To do so, he introduces some props such as his glasses or a telescope which are directed at the frozen sea of ice, toes, and a scarf blowing in the wind. These props operate as an optical tool and provide a frame holding a mysterious Antarctic image. For instance, a small boat and ski are quite heterogeneous enough to highlight the presence of a person.

IM's Antarctica project is based on pictures taken from actual site, however this project feels like a scene from a fictional illustration or cartoons because his glasses, a blowing scarf, a hand holding a telescope or a camera stands out too vividly in the front instead of emphasizing the sole magnificence of Antarctica. In comparison to his previous works, these props make the combined image look less unified, more exaggerated, or less elaborated. The very moment, when the union between true and false loses its balance, reveals the strategy of an illusion and a simulation then highlights the fictionality of an image. In front of IM's work, instead of real-like virtual, I realized

that the real force leading the scene is now the subject and the perspective on others.

The props symbolizing IM's presence are presented as a scapegoat hiding the true nature of Antarctica while strongly grabbing our attention. IM continues to utilize this visual strategy in the Iguazu falls series and the Sinduri coastal sand dune of Taean series by introducing his iconic glasses and goggles without other traces of mankind. The props highlighting the ways of seeing directs our attention not only to the art of seeing but also to the existence of the subject, the presence of "I", and its relationship with others and the world.

Since B.C. mankind has continued to experiment on visual functions and the act of seeing. Eyes naturally understand and accept things, then tend to form illusions such as three-dimensionality in a picture plane, an exaggerated deep sense of space by a simple mechanical device, or an optical illusion through a shifted focus. With use of these gimmicks, the West had developed various mechanical devices that created simple effects in movies and camera obscura that captured upside down yet more accurate images. These devices later led to the development of camera and projector. Human eyes are quite sophisticated, yet are easy to be fooled and tend to self-create a virtual scene.

How to see the world has conformed with the development of science and technology. Accordingly, the ever-changing ways of seeing have affected the relationship between the subject and the object being watched or between the environment and recognition. Especially, the 20th Century psychologist, Lacan claims that a person configures the identity while connecting the presented images and inner images. An act of "viewing" the "image" leads to making a "story" to construct the subject, then to developing imagination and narcissism simultaneously. The subject that is so versatile and open-ended, gets configured through the endless interaction between "I" and what is out there. Therefore, our visual practice goes beyond a simple observation to finally connect "I" with the world while playing an inevitable role in the formation of "I".

Of course, the idea that "I" am the master of eyes plays a crucial role in the identity formation. I am the subject, the main character of my life, however, I am also an object witnessed or observed by things that I see. In fact, what I believe I see as a subject cannot help but imply the suspicion of my existence as an object to be stared at, which continues without my intention. To a great extent, IM's Antarctica project brings up this complex relationship between the subject and the idea of seeing.

For someone, Antarctica is the beginning of the land while,

to others, it is the end of the land. This relative perspective questions what the perspective really means and also questions the relationship between nature and human beings. The peculiar characteristics of vast and desolate Antarctica is reminiscence of overwhelming sublimity expressed by Friedrich, a German romantic painter. However, what makes a giant truly gigantic is a human being, the existence of such a tiny creature in this universe. Without human beings, Antarctica is nothing but a chunk of thick ice. Therefore, the existence of a person facing the nature grants a meaning to the site.

Antarctica, the land after the end of other lands is full of fluid and ice limiting human activity. However, even in this place, a subject becomes an object to be seen by unspecifiable things. In Antarctica, nature and human exist as 'the others' to each other, but this very special relationship in the desolate wild reinforces their existence. This mutuality leads us to finally find and face "I".

<The Weight of the Nature Stimulating the Identity Imperfections>

"I" cannot be the complete visual master of everything because I exist not only to see but to be observed by someone as an object. Of course, I hope I am the subject of seeing, but this hope is incomplete and only highlights the relativity, variability, and imperfection of my existence. Through a contrast of nature and human experience, IM's Antarctica project effectively highlights the irony of every moment when one experiences immediate tension between the significance of identity and partial and imperfect subjectivity.

By introducing the long history of seeing into his works, IM visualizes the condition of image making which has been inseparable from the technology of seeing in history. IM's Antarctica project leads us to ponder on tiny and partial subjectivity of a human being under pressure of nature's dominant power, "the other". Moreover, a lonely tour of life in Antarctica leads us to feel the ambiguity of existence between "I", the subject of seeing all spectacles and "I", the object being watched. In conclusion, through the highlighted glasses, IM visualizes the history of seeing and questions whether he is the true master of his life. In addition, while recognizing the tension between the subject of seeing and the object being watched, IM provides insight into the existential status of everyone trying to live a full life, which appears to be whole but is inevitably partial. Through appreciation of IM's exhibition and his works, we will experience separation and unity of the moment of our lives.