

SOLUNA

FINE ART

Kim Woo Young: Urban Odyssey

Date: September 20, 2019 - October 19, 2019

Opening Reception: September 19, 2019, 6-8pm

Soluna Fine Art proudly presents *Urban Odyssey*, South Korean photographer **Kim Woo Young's** debut exhibition in Hong Kong and with the gallery. Within the exhibition Soluna Fine Art will present twelve photographs, on one hand, highlighting Kim's signature of seamlessly connecting the colours between wall surfaces and lines as well as the streets in his photographs; and on another, explores the artist's unique interpretation of an urban landscape or nature scene by providing a direct and unique visual experience. The exhibition will be on view from September 20 to October 19, 2019, with an opening reception in the presence of the artist on Thursday, September 19, from 6-8pm. *Urban Odyssey* marks the gallery's fifth solo exhibition, showing its determination to pave the path of introducing South Korean artists to diversify Hong Kong art scene.

Kim Woo Young was born in the port city of Busan, South Korea. He received his B.A (1984) and M.F.A (1989) in urban design and industrial design respectively from Hong-Ik University. Continuing his studies, he soon enrolled at the School of Visual Arts in New York City and received his B.F.A (1992) and M.F.A (1994) in photography. After graduating from SVA, Kim worked on his works as a photography artist in New York; but soon after, he was headhunted by several companies in Seoul to do commercial photography. Commercial photography in Korea was regarded as traditional and outdated back then, thus opened up a possibility and provided the perfect timing for Kim to revolutionise its aesthetics and style. Kim then stayed in Seoul for ten years as a commercial photographer collaborating with lifestyle, fashion, beauty, architecture and photography editorials, such as Magazine of Premiere, Noblian, Yuhaeng Tongshin, and Neighbor, just to mention a few.

However, after all those years in commercial photography, Kim wanted to get back to his roots and craved to create his art just as when he was in New York City. After spending over a decade as a commercial photographer in Seoul, Kim, feeling unfulfilled and creatively limited, wanted to leave South Korea and recuperated from the commercial world and intensive work culture. Kim, therefore, packed up, left his home country and travelled for 3 years to withdraw himself from the outside world. His solitude voyage met a crucial turning point when Kim found himself re-visiting Death Valley, the place which reignited his passion for creating his art photography works. In the artist's words:

"Once I arrived, it was as if I had landed on another planet via a mars rover. I never in my life felt the great power of mother nature as I did at that time – a mysterious, wild and time-worn world. I immediately fell in love with the energy there. Soon after my maiden trip, I returned to that same area and spent a few months at a time (on and off) living there until 2010. It is like I was born again when I first visited and it changed my perception of who I am and my life."

In this exhibition, twelve photographs taken in the U.S. and South Korea are curated specifically to accentuate both the simplistic sceneries captured in the works and the rustic beauty of the gallery space. On the ground floor, seven photographs of empty streets and deserted buildings in California draw attention from the audience with their vibrant and fashionable colours. At first sight, most people do not recognize these works as photographs but as paintings, due to their minimalistic nature and the little-to-none indications of the third



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dimension, as if they are merely lifeless walls of colours. Kim intentionally flattens his images to prevent the audience from presumptuously viewing the works one would conventionally do with documentary photography. To achieve that, Kim goes the extra mile to re-visit the designated site on multiple occasions, each at a different time, in search of the right composition and moment. A slight change in time, weather and surroundings could greatly affect the colours and the overall tones of the images, consequently, it could take Kim weeks to shoot his subjects. Kim explains his motivations:

“Sometimes people look at my (previous) works and the first thing they ask me would be where I took the image. When you look at a photograph, you want to read into what is being captured, rather than simply observing what is being presented. So I sometimes wait until dawn when there is no shadow or people on the streets to take the image. By doing so, I make my work very plain and 2D, and people will have to pay attention to the colours, textures and details that they would otherwise fail to notice.”

Compare to the hardedge, industrial-looking, geometrical colour photographs on the ground floor, displayed on the first floor are five monochromic photographs with soft organic lines and shades of grey appeared to be fading in and blending, capturing the nostalgic beauty of Han-Ok (traditional Korean houses) in the countryside of South Korea. Built with natural materials like soil, timber, rock and wood, the origin of these houses can be traced back to the fourteenth century, during the Joseon Dynasty, making them one of the longest-followed and most important traditions in Korean culture alongside Seoye (Calligraphy). Coincidentally the Han-Ok photographs bear striking resemblance to that of a calligraphy painting: wooden beams as strokes of black ink and the soil walls as mulberry paper. Despite these images appear to be black-and-white, they are in colours, rather than the outcome of Kim’s retouching. Such uncanny feature has to do with Kim’s ideal shooting time: the early morning and rainy days, and preferably winter time. In a way, Kim’s Han-ok works are colour photographs that reflect the actual colours of the traditional Korean houses under the early morning sky of South Korea in winter. Although Kim’s photographs on the two floors reveal vivid colour contrast, both conceptually illustrate the disruption of spatiality by capturing three-dimensional architectures and dwellings as two-dimensional, impeccably flat, and painting-like images.

By using the camera as the recording tool, **Kim Woo Young** captures the meaning of dilapidated and abandoned settings, especially those that are marginalized by the modern era, society and people. Kim’s melancholic and sentimental photographs encapsulate the historical traces of temporality and spatiality, and provoke the mundane, humdrum existence of modern society. Within each work, marks of disturbance caused by urbanization and modernization lay under the tranquillity of bare, desolate sceneries. Showcasing works that blur the boundary between photography and painting, Kim’s solo exhibition allows the audience to experience a transcendent visual voyage — an *Urban Odyssey*.



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About Kim Woo Young

Kim Woo Young was born in Busan, South Korea, and received his B.A and M.F.A in Urban Design and Industrial Design from Hongik University. Continuing his studies he soon enrolled at the School of Visual Arts in New York City and received his B.F.A(1992) and M.F.A (1994) in photography. Not only is he a mature photographer, but also a trained architect, city planner, and pioneer in revolutionising the style of photography in Korea. His years in New York gave him the opportunity to experiment with different techniques and mediums in photography. His images of nature taken in the rain resulting in an illusion of deeper dimension, using other methods such as formation in collage or painting with the composition of charcoal and lacquer on photographic paper; and one major modification was presenting images of nature in an abstract form onto an acrylic panel through silk screen printing.

The artist is based out of Los Angeles and Seoul. But recently he is spending more time working out of Seoul.

About Soluna Fine Art

Soluna Fine Art is the pioneering purveyor of Asian fine art and objects in Hong Kong with deep roots in South Korea. The mission is to revitalize the concept of Eastern aesthetics by promoting works that brings traditional value with contemporary interpretations, and to provide platforms for art that goes beyond boundaries of cross-cultural encounters. It emphasizes the idea of essential meaning and tradition of Asian fine art that incorporated a wide variety of cultural influences throughout history. The gallery showcases established and emerging artists, such as **Lee Kang-hyo**, **Park Yoon-Kyung**, and **Huh Sangwook**, through art exhibitions, fairs, educational programs, multi-disciplinary collaborations on an international level.

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Gallery opening hours: Monday - Saturday, 10am - 6pm

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