

Seung Woo Back

Artist Statement and Biography

Artist Statement

Utopia #032 takes North Korea as its subject matter, but Back's intention here is different. In *Utopia* it is obscured and consequently seems to depict an "imaginary utopia" which does not exist in reality. The clues that indicate North Korea can be detected here and there, yet the distortion of shapes and colors makes the overall image utterly unrealistic. The oppressive and domineering dystopia of North Korea is paradoxically presented as an ideal "Utopian" world.

The images in *Utopia* is a reference to found objects such as propaganda postcards or posters made in North Korea. The artist's use of the element of transformation is accentuated by the utilization of computer technology to distort the forms of some of the original images and to remove and reapply colors. These manipulations in turn generate unrealistic images. *Utopia* embodies the artist's determination to make an inquiry on the subject matter of North Korea and the notion of diversified authorship in a more intensive way. Back found the materials of photographs of *Utopia* at a politically neutral collectibles shop in Japan where Bae Yong Joon and Kim Il Sung, figures that represent South Korea and North Korea respectively and are typical images for both countries, are regarded on equal footing. The way Back uses these images as the materials for *Utopia* would seem to indicate that North Korea is not a political subject to Back, but a neutral one that corresponds to his personal interest and artistic intention. *Utopia* boasts the strongest intensity in terms of transformation and distortion among the entire works of Back when it comes to experimenting with the diverse modes of authorial intervention that can be applied to photography. Also, Back does not try to prevent the viewer from discerning this fact. He makes an indirect reference to Russian Constructivism, characterized by the vertical composition, the repetition of the same element and increasing the height of certain parts of a building exaggeratedly, and the reiteration of identical sections so as to create a new building. The extreme contrast in color, which is obtained through the overall use of monochrome colors and the partial use of primary colors, is symbolic of the unrealistic reality of the dystopia of North Korea and simultaneously quotes the propagandistic color schemes used in posters whose purpose is to conceal such reality. What is clear here is Back's paradoxical intention to convert a dystopia into a utopia.

Back divided one of the images included in *Utopia* into thirteen parts, sent them to thirteen countries, had them printed, then had each print sent back to South Korea and reassembled into a large-scale photograph. In other words, *Utopia* underwent a series of processes of transmission and mailing. This results in a complete separation from the original action of pressing the shutter since the different processes applied to whatever might be considered the original image are almost impossible to uncover.

Artist Biography

Seung Woo Back **South Korea**

b. 1973, Daejeon, Korea

Education

2006 M.A. in Fine Art and Theory, Middlesex University, London, U.K.

2002 M.F.A. in Photography, ChungAng University, Seoul, Korea

2000 B.F.A. in Photography, ChungAng University, Seoul, Korea

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2012 Gaps, Unrealistic Generals, Gana Art Center, Seoul, Korea
Memento, Doosan Gallery New York, New York, U.S.A

2011 Deferred Judgement, Art Sonje Center, Seoul, Korea
Blow Up, Misashin Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

2010 Ilwoo Phtography Award Exhibition, Ilwoo Space, Seoul, Korea

2009 Revised Ideal, Gana Art New York, New York, U.S.A.

2007 Real World, Insa Art Space, Seoul, Korea
Real World, Foil Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

2006 Blow up, Gana Beaubourg Gallery, Paris, France

Selected Group Exhibitions

2014 Photography and Media - 4:00 AM, Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea
Five Views of the Korean Peninsula, noorderlicht gallery, Groningen, Netherlands
Art Plat Form, Art Stage Singapore, Singapore, Singapore

2013 Photography and Society- reflecting on the society, Daejeon Museum of Art, Daejeon, Korea
Relativity in City, Total Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea
Birth of a Museum: The MMCA Construction Archive Project, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea
AIR 3331 x MIK: Made in Kanda, Art Chiyoda 3331, Tokyo, Japan
Real DMZ Project-From the North, Art Sonje Center, Seoul, Korea
In Search of Lost Time, OCI Museum, Seoul, Korea

- WAR+MEMORY, Jeonju Photo Festival, Jeonju, Korea
 Cities of Ancient Futures, Changwon Asian Art Festival-Sungsan Art Hall,
 Changwon, Korea
 Succeeding, TOPOHAUS ART CENTER, Seoul, Korea
- 2012 Being Political Popular: Art at the Intersection of Popular Culture and Democracy
 Movements in South Korea, 1980-2010, UCI Museum, Irvine, CA, U.S.A
 Garden of learning, Busan Biennale, Busan, Korea
 The Magic of Photography, Daegu Photo Biennale, Daegu, Korea
 Re-Opening DOOSAN Gallery Seoul, DOOSAN Gallery, Seoul, Korea
 Camera- Human beings, IGONG GALLERY, Daejeon, Korea
 More Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness, SITE Santa Fe, Santa Fe, U.S.A
 More Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness, Minneapolis Institute of Art Museum,
 Minneapolis, U.S.A
 Real & Illusion, Seoul Auction, Seoul, Korea
 The Power of Photography analog & digital, Trunk Gallery, Seoul, Korea
- 2011 2011 Seoul Photo Festival, Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea
 The 8th Juan Media Festival 2011, Juan station Square, Incheon, Korea
- 2010 PHOS+GRAPHOS, Gana Art Center, Seoul, Korea
 Dreamland, Pompidou Center, Paris, France
 Chaotic Harmony, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, U.S.A.
 archiTECHtonica, CU Art Museum, Colorado, U.S.A.
 The View of Korean Contemporary Photography,
 National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taiwan.
 On the line, Daelim Contemporary Art Museum, Seoul, Korea.
 On the line, Korean Cultural Centre, London, UK
 On the line, Korean Cultural Center, LA, U.S.A
 PRESENT FROM THE PAST, Korean Cultural Centre, London, UK
 Man Ray & His Heritage, Seoul Museum of art, Seoul, Korea
 Man Ray & His Heritage, Jeju Museum of art, Jeju, Korea
- 2009 Chaotic Harmony, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, U.S.A.
 Bad Boys, Here now, Gyunggi Museum of Art, Gyunggi-do, Korea
 Mexico Biennial of Photography, The Centro de la Imagen, Mexico City, Mexico
 Magic Moment (Korean Contemporary Art Exhibition), Hanover, Germany
 What is Real? Gana Art Center, Seoul, Korea
 Double Fantasy, Marugame Genichiro Inokuma of Contemporary Art, Marugame
 City, Japan
 Art for Your Valentine, 915 Industry Gallery, Seoul, Korea
 Platform 2009, KIMUSA, Seoul, Korea
 Photography Now: China, Japan and Korea, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art,
 San Francisco, U.S.A.

- 2008
- 39(2), Art sonje Center, Seoul, Korea
 - The Bridge, Gana Art Center, Seoul, Korea
 - The Roots & Being now, Soheon Contemporary, Daegu, Korea
 - Landscape and imagination, Aram Museum, Goyang, Korea
 - See it, Bukchon Museum, Seoul, Korea
 - Image in Contrast, Trunk Gallery, Seoul, Korea
 - Photo on Photography, Kumho Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea
 - Young Korean Artists, Gana Art New York, New York, U.S.A.
 - Untitled, Bauhaus, Berlin, German
 - Memory of the Future, Daegu Photo biennale, Daegu, Korea
 - A Sweet Illusion, HanGil Gallelry, Heiri, Gyeonggi-do, Korea
 - Landscapes, Gallery Wa, Gyeonggi-do, Korea
 - LA art, New York, U.S.A.
 - Korean Contemporary Art, Cite Internationale Arts, Paris, France
 - Discovery Show, Fotofest, Houston, U.S.A.
 - Let a Thousand Flowers Blossom, Insa Art Center, Seoul, Korea
 - The Battle of Taste, Gallery SangSangmadang, Seoul, Korea
- 2007
- Paris Photo, Rose Gallery, Paris, France
 - Dream Walk, Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea
 - Up and Comers, Kumho Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea
 - Aipad, New York, U.S.A.
 - Round Trip, Forum Space, Seoul, Korea
 - Photo London, London, U.K.
 - Abandoned Protocol, Ritter/Zamet Gallery, London, U.K.
 - Faked Reality, Pos Gallery, Seoul, Korea
 - Complete Control, Contemporary Art Project, London, U.K.
 - Landscape of Korean Contemporary Photography, Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea
 - A Solid Scene, Artbit Gallery, Seoul, Korea
 - 2nd Dream of Winter, Gallery Artside, Seoul, Korea

2006 -2000 Over 30 exhibitions

Award & Project

- 2009
- Prix Pictec 2009, Award nominated, England & Switzerland
 - The first Ilwoo Photography Award, Seoul, Korea
- 2008
- Discovery Show, Fotofest, Houston, U.S.A.
 - KLM Paul Huf Award nominated, Foam Fotografiemuseum, Amsterdam, Netherlands
 - Leopold Godowsky, Jr. Color Photography Awards honorable Mention, Photographic Resource Center at Boston University, Boston, U.S.A.
 - This Photo is Great, 2008 Asahi Press, Japan

- 2006 Six Shooting Stars: BJP, London, U.K.
- 2005 One of Best Portfolio; Bratislava Photo Festival, Bratislava, Slovak Republic
- 2004 A Drawing Project: Wimbledon School of Art, London, U.K.
- 2001 The Third Grand Prize: Sajin Bipyong, Time Space, Seoul, Korea