

Invitation to an Unfamiliar World

The first thing one notices about figurative paintings by Min Song-sik is the unique color fields and the sharp contrast created by the juxtaposition of those colors. His generous use of straight lines, especially the diagonal lines, and unique composition and perspective on architecture and space set a surreal mood. The most characteristic of all is the absence of people in whose place are common objects. Of course, not all of his paintings are without human figures. There are pieces like *Even this is not Enough!* (2005) and *A Return of Astronaut* (2005) which feature people, but the focus is really on their distinct attire, the swimsuit and the spacesuit, rather than on the people. The human figures, in fact, appear to be there only as a means of featuring the suits. In other paintings people are blocked from view by other things. For example, in *Drunken* (2005), a young man and woman are there but not quite visible because they are behind a table. In *Going Fishing - At Home* (2005), only the arm or the leg can be seen.

In the space devoid of people Min places non-human objects, such as tents, fish, knives, fishing poles, lamps, boats and planes, quite often things that have to do with camping or traveling. These objects serve as a medium connecting the painting and the person appreciating it. Min thus avoids depicting people openly, preferring to provide only indirect and circumstantial evidence from which the viewer can guess what happened in that setting. This can naturally lead to a story, making the message more flexible and rich. The typical scene in his painting may look like a picture of a quiet and drowsy afternoon, but within that rather mundane setting is a strong tension, and that tension makes the painting dynamic. Because there is no leading character in his painting, it ironically creates a situation where anybody can put himself in it and assume the leading role. Min uses an unstable composition and subtle nuances of colors very effectively to magnify the intensity or the weakness of emotions in order to heighten the psychological state rendered.

What is the primary message Min is trying to deliver? It is an escape or vacation from the mundane life. Min points out that while our society has become richer in material, we have become poorer in time for reflection and relaxation. *City Life - APT* (2004) and *Going Fishing - At City* (2004) speak for the artist, who himself lives in a city and is frustrated by the constricting urban environment. His works

express his and his fellow city residents' wish to run from the stressful city life. The sea, the kayak, the fishing tools, the tent, and the sofa are symbols for Min's wish and intentions to leave the urban environment.

The human being faces a dilemma between one's own inner desires and the need to adapt to one's external reality. This clash of the reality and non-reality is represented in Min's paintings as a mix of unrealistic space with the realistic space. Take the *A Stairway* (2006), for instance. To the right there is a canvas but there is no wall to support it. What is more the people inside an ordinary household are making sushi right at home! In *Drunken* there is a building with the roof lifted off and clear transparent walls. This is an imaginary type of space that cannot exist in the real physical realm. It is at once familiar and strange to us. It is a space of yearning in which the impossible can become a reality, and it is a space right on the borderline where everything and anything can be mixed together. It may be both indoors and outdoors. It is a place where objects and their surroundings can hardly be distinguished. It is, moreover, a place where all common sense arguments are turned upside down. In *A Harbor II* (2006), there are ships anchored. Of course, one would expect to see some fishing boats at such a small dock, but that anticipation is thrown off by a huge oil tanker. Likewise in *A Harbor I* (2006), one sees containers, which would lead one to look for cargo ships, but only a submarine is there. Min's paintings can each stand on their own as independent pieces, but they can also be grouped together, creating a space quite different and unique. *You Got a Huge TV!* (2006), *Pizza and Refrigerator* (2006), *Too Far!* (2006) were actually exhibited together as if one work. *A Stairway* made up of two canvases can be displayed side by side as one piece, but it doesn't have to be. Outside the window on the left canvas is green grass, while on the corresponding spot on the right canvas there is blue water. The color of the carpets in the two paintings are also different.

Min Song-sik is an emerging artist whose works are now gaining public recognition. At the end of last year he was invited by Busan Museum of Modern Art to exhibit for 'Vision and Perspective in 2005.' Early this year, Daejeon Museum of Art chose Min Song-sik as one of the artists to feature in 'Channel 5 Five - 2006 Young Artists.'

Min's painting style has substantially changed during the past three years. *Sushi Bar*

completed in 2003 was a realistic painting based on personal experience and rendered with more vivid brush strokes. Works like *Going fishing - At Night* (2005) and *At Home - Orange Brick Wall* (2004) exhibited in his first individual exhibition in spring 2005 represent the transitional phase in his painting style. The objects depicted in the painting are more or less consistent with his latest works, but in terms of form one can see the use of the painterly planes and curves, which shows he is shifting. Works completed in late 2005 and early 2006 are defined by his bold division of space and omission. He also introduced the concept of the transparent glass wall in an attempt to create fictional space. The bricks have also shifted from the realistic and descriptive bricks to ones that are more design and pattern focused, on the whole accentuating the color field. From this it is evident that Min is shifting in his approach to space. It should be noted, in addition, that the works exhibited in Busan were mostly of scenes seen from a distance whereas those featured in Daejeon dealt with more private and intimate space as if it was there right next to you. In this solo exhibition in doART Gallery he presents works of sharper color contrast and stronger dramatic elements, with color fields covering a greater portion of the canvas. The result is a painting in which the abstract and the figurative delicately overlap. He also juxtaposes the scene seen from a distance and the objects seen from up close to achieve an ironic and dual space.

When working on a painting, the first thing Min Song-sik considers is the composition. He looks at space from different perspectives, reinterpreting it and adding elements that are familiar and others less familiar. The new space he creates is confined to the two-dimensional, but it is one that is deterritorialized and one which transcends the limitations of the two-dimensional. It is indeed a space that anyone today would desire to experience. Furthermore, it can be a space where artworks and the average person can communicate. Min Song-sik thus approaches us with the invitation to this unfamiliar realm he has created.

Ryu Han Seung
Assistant Curator

National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea