

## Thin Ice and Inbetweenness – A Conversation with Kim Yong-Ik

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Kukje Gallery's (IC12) contribution to Kabinett is an intimate journey through close to five decades of creation by seminal South Korean artist Kim Yong-Ik, whose self-avowed despair at today's capitalist and neoliberal system did not seem to dampen his mood when we met him on the opening day of Art Basel Hong Kong 2018.



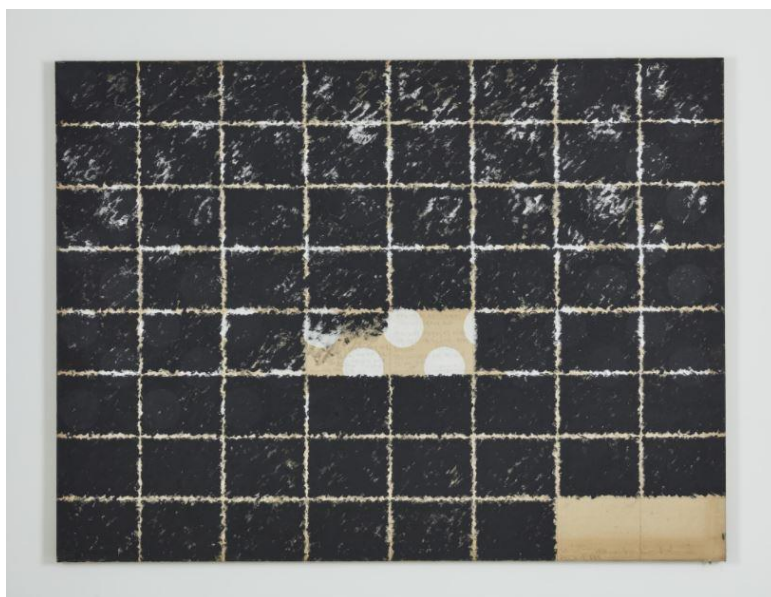
Artist portrait of Kim Yong-Ik  
Photography by Keith Park  
Image provided by Kukje Gallery

Kim's artworks employ a kind of visual trickery which may reflect his view of our world as a whole. In surrounding ourselves with the trappings of capitalism, are we being tricked, misdirected from what is truly important in life? Within such a framework, Kim's Kabinett may be visited as a visual remedy, a means of assuaging the poisonous ills of capitalism temporarily.

Few artists produce works which revel so much in their own incompleteness; indeed, Kim joyously revisits his earlier works to improve, or sometimes obliterate his original intentions or ideas. One work here, *Vowing Rebirth*, presents a 1995 painting cheerfully “buried” in a coffin in 2015, while another was begun in 1974 and was last added to in 2010 (to say “completed” may turn out to be inaccurate). His use of readymades (including a Spanish wine box) are fuel for his own gentle, optimistically hopeless battle with the prevailing norms of the capitalist world, and are unabashed homages to Marcel Duchamp.

When asked when he is at his most happy, he answered that it was when he was travelling between places, such as between his home in Seoul and Hong Kong. At first, we misunderstood his meaning, assuming it is the distraction of being busy that he enjoys. Kim rebutted this firmly, along with the idea that he likes flying (he hates it). Rather, the state of inbetweenness is what gratifies him – the precariousness of being neither here nor there. As an artist, Kim remarks that his role is to be on thin ice – belonging completely to one place or to one artistic or political movement would jeopardize this precariousness. It would come in between him and the joy of inbetweenness.

The rest of the conversation went as follows:



金容翼 Kim Yong-Ik (b. 1947) *Despair Completed #3* 1990-2002

Acrylic on canvas

194 x 259 cm

Courtesy the artist and Kukje Gallery Image provided by Kukje Gallery

**In 1980, you refused to unpack the boxes of your artworks at the Young Artists' Biennial in South Korea, which was seen both as protest against the South Korean government, and a witty response to Marcel Duchamp. What should we be protesting about in today's world, and which artists still inspire you?**

We should be resisting the globalizing force of capitalism known under the name of neoliberalism. This resistance should be more than just an act of protest; it should begin with the self—you have to break out of your thoughts and daily existence that are closely bound to capitalism.

Marcel Duchamp continues to inspire my practice and many aspects of my life in general. Once he stops giving me inspiration, I will erase him from my mind. And that will be my very last homage to the great artist.

**You would like us to resist this cataclysm (the end of the world) by fundamentally changing our lives by any means. What practical changes can individuals make to make the world a better place?**

An abstract answer to this question would be "to step away from the modernist ideology of progress, development, and accomplishment, and to escape to your inner self." The practical act an individual would take, however, must vary. As an artist, I strive to continuously doubt the art system, artistic practice, and even my life to create a dissonance within the world we live in.

**One of your definitions of a drawing is A work that is continuously in progress and does not remain static in a stage of completion. Why do you feel the need of continual change, and do you feel there is too much in the world which is static and unchanging?**

I don't think the world is static and unchanging. I'm rather critical of how we have set the idea of completion and a fixed state as a goal to continuously and compulsively pursue. When we are running after these, many aspects of our life and the world get flattened. Just as gentrification wipes out the history of old towns and streets. A drawing gently embraces and glides with the traces of existing history, as it doesn't strive for completeness or a fixed state.



Kukje Gallery K2 Kim Yong-Ik solo exhibition  
"Endless Drawing" installation view  
Image provided by Kukje Gallery

**You once remarked that the world has exhausted its ability to create new art. Why do you feel that way, and is this a recent phenomenon or one which was already the case when you began as an artist?**

I would say this idea has persisted since the very beginning of my practice. There was this seed of an idea and it constantly grew to this point. It's not so easy to tell why. As an artist, I must have intuitively felt that the epoch of Anthropocene is coming to an end. Around this time, I encountered and was mesmerized by Jungyeok, a book of philosophy from 19th century Joseon dynasty. According to the philosophy, the universe has passed the time of growth (spring and summer; referred to as former genesis) and entered the time of burial (fall and winter; referred to as latter genesis). My interpretation is that it was possible to create something visible out of the invisible during the former period whereas in the latter years, the only possible gesture of an artist is to edit and rearrange existing visible elements.



Kukje Gallery K2 Kim Yong-ik solo exhibition  
"Endless Drawing" installation view  
Image provided by Kukje Gallery

**You retired from teaching at Kyungwong University in 2012. Having seen different generations of students, how do you feel today's generation differ from you and your fellow artists in the 1970s?**

Today's generation have more talent and are strikingly astute. I respect their ability to daftly manipulate the current information technology, including computer. It's a shame that they have to live at a time when any kind of growth is no longer possible.

**What plans do you have for the future?**

My goal is to have a "well-ending" to my career and my life.

Kukje Gallery

Art Basel Hong Kong 2018

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