

Seoul eye: say cheese? Evergreen Tower by Jung Yeon-doo

Multimedia artist Jung Yeon-doo asks real Seoul families to smile for the camera

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"Evergreen Tower(2001)" courtesy of the artist

There's an artificial quality to Jung Yeon-doo's work that you can't quite figure out. Despite the ever-so-slightly awkward smiles and staged poses, the people in these photos aren't hired models. These are real families that live in the same apartment complex.



Jung Yeon-doo is best known for his green-screen works that playfully merge dreams and reality into a single photograph. But "Evergreen Tower," a 2001 photo series that was recently re-illuminated at the Daegu Museum earlier this year, shows 32 families and tenants of an apartment in Seoul's Gwangjin-gu as they are in real life.



Sure, their spines could be measured straight with rulers and smiles are a bit forced, but these photos give a sense of what the family is actually like—the artist took their portraits in the comfort of their own spaces, and the best part of the work is that it is visually self-explanatory.



With each room's faded peach walls, wooden floors, and pebble-like lights, you can immediately recognize that all the apartments share identical layouts. What's interesting is how each family has personalized the space to represent their lives—and now, with the distance of time, we are also offered a snapshot of everyday Korean life from 14 years ago.



Jung believes that the main objective in art is communicating with the public and his philosophy is revealed through the work with discernible clues—namely the obvious staging of these scenes for presentation. However, it doesn't always take background knowledge to be intrigued by something.

Little known fact? Jung's father threw an ashtray at Jung's head (and missed) when he announced he would go to art school. It's interesting to know, but doesn't necessarily add to the work. How ironic is our text here then?

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