

Dong-Yeon Kim's "The Holy City" consists of schematised model buildings. The miniaturised structures, partly made of aluminium, give the effect of elements from a modular building-block system. They neither possess an individual character nor do they appear to refer to any sort of spiritual meaning in the sense of the title.

The buildings are empty, only silhouettes. They are stretched out, giving the impression of a system of transitions, tunnels, shafts, never static, comforting shelter. The buildings are often combined into larger architectural complexes, for example forming a square around an open courtyard, thus actually evoking a 'holy' cloister.

Dong-Yeon Kim retracts such illusion of a 'true to the original' architecture through breaks and staggerings. In the "Monastery" for example, high-curving roof halves form 'connecting sections' extending into the void, structural elements are placed at 'oblique' angles, labyrinths are constructed with no viable passage, buildings are deprived of their protective function by perforating the roofs, and, finally, building models are rotated by ninety degrees. This rotation leaves the roofs jutting freely into the air. The building has in principle become inaccessible. It has become a free, sculptural element. In his layouts, Kim thus blends the illustrative nature of a model and the free play of geometrical elements.

As anti-Vitruvian visions, the little buildings parody every architectural purpose, just as the settlement as a whole evades every planning calculation. However rationally constructed the individual modules may appear to be, they defy constructive reason. The surpassing of all rational order is symbolised in a literal sense by the unattached connecting sections, which lend the city a fundamental air of endlessness. In brief: with a building plan that goes beyond reason and its symbolic infinity, the city becomes architecture devoted to higher circumstances and purposes. It is in this sense that it can be interpreted as a 'Holy City.' Kim hence combines extreme artistic reduction with expressive meaning. He demonstrates that art can derive 'higher' levels of meaning from standardised, everyday elements, too, and is perfectly capable of adequately responding to religious traditions.

This programme of transforming standardised architectural components into a symbolically charged art is more or less summed up in Kim's smokestack sculptures. Botticelli figures formed of plaster smoke arise from the chimneys, linking in relay everyday life and allegorical art. Some of the nebulous spectres recall Venus portrayals by the Renaissance artist, ironically thematizing the mythological quintessence of beauty.

Kim also transfers his models to 'reality'. For example, he often back-translates the scale of his objects, enlarging his toy buildings until they are large enough to accommodate people. An absurd scenery results in which the lowdetail schematisation expected of models gains immense presence. The objects placed under the microscope show unequivocally that they cannot be reduced to their mimetic properties, that, apart from themselves, there is no original on which they are based. The basic principle postulated by Dong-Yeon Kim's large and small-scale works is thus a domain of art combining 'higher' symbolic contexts, the rejection of decorative 'enhancement' and autarchy.