

One of the key works (page 80) in the oeuvre of Dong-Yeon Kim is a small unassuming board placed on end like a scientific exhibit. Three small wooden blocks are mounted on the board, which - like children's building bricks - represent little, stylized farm houses. The models are linked by sketchy pencil drawing apparently represented the course of a river. The river meanders through the village, forming collecting basins and with side arms leading to the houses. The drawing permits various associations: the network of waterways and paths gives an organic impression, evoking a w-ray view of supply systems in the human body, of life and energy lines. The river begins at a large excavated well. The other eight, round holes spread across the board are, so-to-speak, exploratory boreholes, indicating vain past searches for water. The principal well of the settlement penetrates deep down, forming the conically tapering pipe, the chimney or tunnel-like well shaft, which is both the support and handle of the board.

For the artist Joun-Ju, the little houses, the search for water, and the watercourse symbolize the small village in southern South Korea where Dong-Yeon Kim grew up. The object thus doubles as a sort of artistic visiting card: it reveals autobiographical traces, presents a condensed programme of life and art. It represents the cornerstones of Kim's artistic work, situated between drawing and sculpture. The small work focuses on architecture, which for Kim is a mirror of his creative work and his state of being, and, finally, it thematizes the cavity, the hollow space, a repeated motive in Kim's oeuvre. For Kim, the hole, tunnel, or vessel symbolize a permanent search, a constant penetration of material and a tribute to the "void." Finally, the board demonstrates the metamorphic ability of art to combine different elements: water becomes blood circulation; a well shaft becomes a lung and simultaneously a peephole, chimney, or mysterious tunnel.

Kim's work does not unfold in successive stages but in cycles. Everything that he later varied and elaborated appears to have been planned from the very outset. This is all the more astonishing because the artist Dong-Yeon Kim draws on two completely different cultural areas. He completed his studies in painting and drawing at the Kyung-Hee University in South Korea. The focus was on traditional techniques, calligraphy, and copying famous masters.

Kim's first independent drawing show a filigree line structure recalling the branching of a plant or root, arterial systems, water courses, or hand lines. His preoccupation with organic growth, with the construction of route systems and the depiction of energy lines is already apparent - elements that are to be typical of the later oeuvre.

Kim has been lastingly influenced by the Korean "Sehando" tradition, a combination of poetry, drawing, and painting by the Korean symbolist Chusa Kim Jeong-Hee(1786-1856) with his impressive emblematic drawings, which, for instance, express his sentiments in the form of a simple farmhouse with snow-covered pines, Even during his studies in Korea, Kim was fascinated by Bauhaus concepts The 1920s programme for unifying art, handiwork, and technology under

the wing of architecture included the notion of exploring the creative potential of all sorts of materials. Dong-Yeon Kim pursues this idea when he later repeatedly experiments with new materials, glass, clay, wood, aluminium, steel. His enthusiasm for the Bauhaus finally brought the artist to Germany.

When Kim moved to Düsseldorf in 1988, he logically chose to study art and architecture was indissolubly associated with his artistic work. In the visual arts he was a master student of A.R.Penck. Penck's sign system with stylised matchstick figures, which allude to the "ego" in the "system" was fully compatible with Kim's understanding of the expressive resources of calligraphy. Moreover, Penck gave his students great artistic leeway, and after a three-year orientation phase, Kim devoted himself above all to object art. His first spatial works were created in 1990: sack-like, limp envelopes of wire mesh and textile, combined with cylindrical forms of paper and filler. Amorphous, soft figures contrasted with geometrical, arrow-like structures. The artist explored a similar dualism in his drawings, where horizontal linear hatching meets vertical, rounded outlines.

His Bauhaus-trained interest in the complete interpenetration of organic and geometrical forms, perhaps also the idea of homage to traditional Asiatic motives, inspired Kim to produce a series of works on the subject of plant fragments. Between 1990 and 1992 he created a series of cones, bags, pipes, and rings whose scaly segmentation give the impression of schematized seed capsules and stems while simultaneously bringing to mind the stacked gearwheels of a machine. Basic mathematical elements, scientific models of organic life, and technical set pieces blend into a whole. Kim was ultimately interested not in the transient blossom but in the functional mechanisms of nature, science, architecture, technology, and of art.

Somewhat later, the artist extended the cycle to include objects of coarse linen. He cut the cloth into long, narrow strips and sewed them into a pipe with broad outward-turned edges, giving the effect of a dried-out, fibrous stalk. Kim filled the pipe with white pigments and finally cut it into segments. This produced thicker and thinner slices with an edge of straggly, concave forms. The basic artistic vocabulary was identical in both sections of the work; the view of nature as interaction between opposites was given still greater salience. The play of light and shadow inherent in pipes and funnels was brought out by the colours - grey linen and white pigment. The dualism of rough, rugged shell and tender, pure-white core is also more striking than in earlier works, as is the combination of perfect geometry and natural deviation.

In Kim's oeuvre, conically tapering pipes and funnels later developed into a particularly compelling motif. They unfold in a multifaceted and highly associative spectrum, reoccurring, for example, in the form of tunnels of chimneys. At the same time they function as lighting tubes directing the eye towards specific sections. Kim thus created an emblematic "super sign" that self-referentially reflects the artistic idea of selective, questing visual perception and which also materializes visual perception itself as a three-dimensional object. The continuously variable cone accordingly points in self-reflection to vision, to functional technical and architectural elements and to organic, living origins. Art, architecture, and nature merge, implementing the original Bauhaus idea in an individual and contemporary fashion.

All of Kim's early work is concerned substantively with the question of the "ego" and formally with hollow forms. In 1992 he created a series of casts of his head in clay and glass. In this series, three glass heads are connected by cable to a carboy; other works show clay heads that gaze at their distorted image in a sort of wall mirror. Through the attached, illuminated light bulbs, the heads literally thematize enlightening, energy-giving vision as self-knowledge. Cracks and joints become visible. Self-interrogation becomes an acid test of one's own force.

Subsequently, in 1993-94, Kim produced head-sized vessels of bronze with a wide opening, which are presented scattered across the floor like fallen plant capsules. The main theme of this work is the hollow space, which, from an art history point of view, Kim reinterprets: while the 1947 and 1948 manifestos on "concetto spaziale" led Lucio Fontana to create a series of slit canvases before producing big, spherical bronze objects that were merely scored, notched, or dented in the early 1960s, Kim is not concerned with injuring the surface but with the hollow body as an independent form. This basic idea brings Henry Moore to mind, but also points to the matter-of-course concern with the void in Asiatic aesthetics. At the same time Kim created arm-long, tapering tunnel elements that distantly recall snails or mollusc shells. The holes piercing ceramic, wooden, stone, and bronze blocks arouse no organic associations; they function as open spaces or windpipes and as geometrical schemas of pathways leading into the dark, into uncertainty.

After completing his studies as a master student, Dong-Yeon Kim returned to Kyung-Hee University in Seoul to lecture. A scholarship from Samsung Publishers enabled him to return to Düsseldorf in 1995, where he now lives with his wife Bae Ji-Yyun and their two children. In the mid-1990s the first sculptures were produced of stylized architectural elements - e.g., pantiles aligned in the style of traditional Korean architecture. Their combination of concave and convex forms brings at least a Western observer to think of Asiatic harmony theory. Other roof-like objects by Kim appear to hover weightless above the ground. In addition to the broad-surfaced element, the incorporeal field of tension relating to the ground is an immediate component of the work. Very much in keeping with Far Eastern aesthetics, the invisible is an integral element of the sculpture. In 2004, Kim constructed a pagoda-like form of three stacked, tapering, widely jutting roof levels. Lying on its side, the basic form - rounded on both sides and hollow - has the outline of a boat. In the exhibition "Body and Space" in Kaarst, Kim let observers discover the object and its glowing yellow interior through a long telescope, allowing them to see segments of a segment.

After preoccupation with single element of the day-to-day environment, like plants, vessels, and roofs, Dong-Yeon Kim turned to entire building ensembles. He constructed small buildings from poplar wood, fabric, paint, and cast resin. Overlapping scraps of cloth and gashes in roofs, walls, and floors give these models a "tattered," half-ruined look. The impression of continuous mutability of the elements, so that solid and rigid forms appear soft and amorphous, is reinforced by foundations of seemingly liquid cast resin. The circular openings vaguely recall the radical "anarchitecture" of Gordon Matta-Clark. Whereas Gordon Matta-Clark dissected breathtaking formats and entire factory buildings in the 1970s, Dong-Yeon Kim is interested not in destructive

intervention but in gaining new insights and opening up new, unexpected perspectives.

In other works, Kim piles up nested buildings like accumulations of cells that have lost all relation to gravity. Another series shows buildings huddled into streets or round villages and interconnected by straggling loops of white-painted poplar wood. These loops symbolize the habitual routes taken by the inhabitants, Individual paths; too, ultimately reveal a recognizable pattern reflecting the basic principles of nature, for, from a distance, the village resembles an inflorescence with wide-spreading, loop-like petals. Hovering freely in space, the overall formation gives the impression of a cloud and the settlement becomes a "castle in the air."

Fascination with guided perception induces Kim to take up the tunnel motif again. Under the tilted "The Holy City" he has created polygonal aluminum sculptures with the outline of a stereotypically simplified building, extending into oblong, intersection rows of structures, and developing into veritable labyrinths. As the eye of the observer follows the contours, walls, corners, and edges constantly interrupt progress and impose a change in direction. Even if the basic pattern is a straight line, it continuously meets new, unexpected situations with tilted or staggered walls, offering no clue as to where the path will lead. On the occasion of the Korea Busan Biennale in 2005, Kim realized this basic idea in the form of a walk-in tunnel building.

Works dating from 2004 show scaffolding of rough, unpainted poplar wood, which recall urban tower buildings, terrace housing, and parking buildings. The clear structure is optically interrupted by torn-off shreds of untreated canvas. Seen from a distance, the buildings appear fragile and run-down. But the first impression is notoriously superficial. From close up the construction is stable and clear. The first impression of a hapless, "injured" architecture, demanding a sentimental attitude on the part of the observer, is in gross contrast to the sober, mass-produced construction.

Kim continues his medley of urban architecture with a series of sculptures representing industrial smokestacks and electricity pylons. The larger-than-life, approximately 2.5 metre-high metal constructions majestically dominate the exhibition halls. They consist of innumerable L-profile steel girders bolted together, a technique familiar from construction sets for the young. Kim's power pylon is a homage to engineering architecture like the Eiffel Tower and to Constructivists such as El Lissitzky. They also symbolize the mighty streams of power that ensure the basis for societal life and constitute a "double sign" uniting the art of engineering and a pagoda-like form. Once again, Kim succeeds in demonstrating an intersection between the Bauhaus and Asian culture with everyday objects.

Kim's smokestacks, extending the motif sequence of formal equivalents stalk, tunnel, and telescope, are constructed of brick fragments and cement. A compact, white cloud of smoke surmounts the mouth. Kim had long portrayed smoking chimneys in drawings and smaller oil paintings in his exploration of amorphous forms. The first "smoke signals" clearly relate to calligraphy. They consist of long, thin, sinuous, vertical lines. They broaden out, and, as in the first drawings from the late 1980s, acquire figurative expression, turning into rounded, female forms evocative of Venus figures. In keeping with her classical attribute of the "foam-born," the goddess

materializes out of amorphous material. Her form is in contrast to the slim smokestack of rough, grey material. The play with opposites now acquires clear sexual connotations, echoing psychological, e.g., Jungian, treatises, and surrealist painting, for instance Max Ernst and Salvador Dali. In another series of smokestacks, the smoke assumes the form of angels' faces and wing fragments in the sky, bringing to mind classical Christian iconography. Other, smaller objects take up the dualism of circle and rectangle through the integrated combination of smokestack cone and factory cube. In comparison with the object art of Kim from the early 1990s, with its allusions to Asian roof construction, the play with opposing forms no longer recalls Asian aesthetics, rather the programmatic Bauhaus use of basic geometrical forms. Over and above this historical flashback, Kim's smokestacks allude to aspects of social history: being relatively small, they embody the fast disappearing craft industries, which Bauhaus architects, in particular, fostered and appreciated.

In today's Western conceptual world, technology, architecture, nature, and humanity are kept apart. With his artistic return to the Bauhaus and purposive reference to the traditional Asian world of ideas, Dong-Yeon Kim draws new, inspiring force, generating the often invoked unity of opposites in his work.