

Dong-Yeon Kim

The apparently true story of the Snowsters

As he makes his way towards the interior of the museum, the visitor approaches a scenario that seems anything but real. He had already noticed the powerful magenta colouring of the walls from a distance, and it had attracted him and made him curious. Finally he is confronted by an unrendered wall measuring a good metre in height and obstructing any view into the exhibition room. Artificial light shines dimly through a small window glazed with matt panes of glass. It is also in the window that he can recognize some shadows, outlines of strange, motionless beings that seem to populate the world behind the wall. How many of them there really are, what they really look like or what they are doing there remains a mystery to the viewer as he slowly approaches the said scenario.

Dong-Yeon Kim uses a partitioned-off room of the museum for his installation. This room is the last of an enfilade of rooms and its two entrances serve at the same time as its exits. Kim chose this room for its particular spatial situation. The visitor can enter it only through either of its two entrances. Added to this is the fact that he must first walk quite a long distance in order to approach what is happening in the room. This basic spatial situation is of eminent significance for the installation.

As he approaches the room, the visitor's gaze is first drawn to the wall and the closed, dimly lit window. The visitor now finds himself in a state of expectation, not to say intense curiosity, this likewise being a prerequisite for a basic appreciation of the work. The shadows perceived by the visitor remind one of the shadow images in Plato's famous Allegory of the Cave. While these shadows do not move, they are nevertheless the only reality offered to the visitor. In order to satisfy his curiosity, the visitor must now take action himself or else fall for the fallacy behind the scenario.

Having come close enough to the room to survey the entire situation, the visitor now realizes that the wall does not completely partition off the room but leaves enough space on its left-hand side for him to peer into the installation and see what is happening there. He also realizes that the powerful, dominant magenta of the wall does not extend across the entire room but serves just as a surrounding background for the happenings behind the wall.

Thus the visitor feels more than challenged to discover what lies behind the wall. If he fails to do so, he will be like the prisoners in Plato's cave who forever thought that the shadows cast on the walls of the cave were actual reality.

With this installation, the South Korean artist Dong-Yeon Kim testifies to the ability of the artist to make the viewer reach beyond the shadows towards apparent reality. Looking behind the mirror, revealing reality behind the curtain, fathoming the things that hold the world together – such have always been the high aims of art. In this regard, Dong-Yeon Kim has created an impressively convincing work.

If we continue to play the artist's game, we shall now go ahead and look at the reality behind the wall. We naturally expect clarity and enlightenment, but instead we are confronted with ever new questions and doubts. The small fantasy figures, affectionately called Snowsters by the artist, turn out to be little white monsters. Formed from gypsum, they are all very much alike. They are faceless creatures, neither human nor animal. Their name alludes to their origin. This too is an in-between realm midway between that of the monster on the one side and that of the snowman on the other, a state of existence that clearly reveals their ambivalence between strength, power and the transience of life. These hybrid creatures have here created their own world, a kind of building from which they populate the world that opens itself up to them. But this world in which they live is likewise an in-between one, for standing behind the high wall, and lower in height, is a second wall on which the artist has built for these fantasy figures a fragile dwelling glued-together from thin wooden laths. They live here close together. Some of them have climbed up to the topmost, brightly lit platform behind the window, their shadows being the ones visible from the other side. They try to look through the matt panes of glass, but in vain.

An important feature of the window is that it has been designed as a sliding window and is fully functional, for it is perhaps only a matter of time, or evolution, before these tiny creatures fathom the mechanism of the window and are able to set eyes on our side of the world.

For the time being, however, they are living in the world that has been thought up for them. At the bottom of the low wall, Dong-Yeon Kim has loosened a cement block in order to enable the Snowsters to escape into the space behind, this being defined by the length of the wall and the powerful magenta background.

Here the Snowsters now tug away at children's dolls and toys, like Lilliputians trying to overpower the giant Gulliver. Some of them are connected together by thin threads, others drag "conquered" relics of toys into their

dwelling. If we look more closely, we can even make out teardrops running down the face of the torn doll. The artist placed them there himself, aware as he was of the fate that was to befall her.

We, the visitors, observe the scene from above, from an elevated and privileged position. After our initial surprise at all the hustle and bustle, we quickly realize how little we are able to say anything reliable about the scene. We are filled with enormous doubts coupled with ambivalent feelings towards these tiny beings. Are they destroying things or are they tidying them away? Do they mean well, or are they dangerous? Nothing at all is clear. Even our confrontation with the children's doll and its obvious dismemberment makes us feel uneasy.

With his installation "Working Time", which he built anew in Goch and donated to the museum in 2012, Dong-Yeon Kim thematizes the artist's search for truth and knowledge. With the lightness of form typical of his entire oeuvre, he makes us curious enough to seek the truth behind the wall and not to succumb to the fallacy of shadows. But what we then see makes us even more doubtful about reality and truth. And everything finally culminates in the question: what is the sense of this search for truth and knowledge?

The artist's installation may be compared to a theatrical play staged according to all the rules of dramatic tension: light and shadow, movement and stillness, except that it is the spectator himself who decides when and how the curtain is to fall.

Expressing the artist's search for truth and knowledge, which is one of the driving forces behind Dong-Yeon Kim's entire oeuvre, "Working Time" is a significant metaphor of this search. Indeed, it is an art work that questions and the very sense and motivation of art itself.