

Mirroring me, Mirroring you

At first they have the slick finish of industrially fabricated, readymade objects. The tables, pedestals, frames, cases, and the objects collected on their pristine surfaces have the look of things that could be found in a design workshop or science laboratory—metal cylinders that resemble precise weights or parts for a machine, metallic surfaces bearing the precipitate of an experiment. Upon closer inspection, however, the objects that are so lovingly laid out and precisely displayed on showroom-worthy surfaces elude recognition. These objects are without any precise function. These are the leftover bits, homeless objects rescued from their homelessness.

Contrary to the expectation created through the work's readymade appearance, Myeongsoo Kim handcrafts his sculptures from salvaged materials, from the unused (and unusable) bits left over from various suppliers of industrial production. He spends time in his studio cutting, re-fabricating, joining, and carefully polishing scraps of wood, metal, and plastic, refashioning them into objects of display and for display. Why?—one might wonder what compels such intensive devotion to such seemingly useless, valueless objects. Amassing a variety of objects usually small enough to be held in the hand, Kim explores the link between collecting and human sentiment, between market value and personal value. Like the forgotten souvenir, Kim's sculptures tie commodity consumption to personal desire and intimacy. His installations comprise both the object and its mode of display, the fetish object and the conditions of its fetishization—inspiring the compulsion to touch, to have, to own, to possess without exactly knowing why it is we desire them.

Using materials closely within the lineage of minimalism and post-minimalism—such as plexiglas, mirror, metals, and naturally occurring minerals—Kim contaminates these traditionally sterile surfaces by inserting a sense of the personal and ephemeral into the scale of geologic time. Frailty is often a physical property of the very materials Kim chooses for his sculptures. Surfaces are altered, corroded through chemical reactions. Cakes of Himalayan salt in a delicate gradient from dark rose to a frail, crystalline pink verging on white, placidly rest on metal plates all the while destructively eating away at their host by their very inertia. While this could be read as a metaphor for the sedimentation of a private archive, one's personal image repertoire made over time, now unfolding through space, these groupings effect transformations that occur on a molecular level, fundamentally changing the structural properties of the material—that is, its very being. The materials become embodied with a sense of the human, not unlike the way we hold on to ashes, the literal dust of love held in containers, preserving them now as even more sacred than its life before.

This material instability extends into Kim's use of objects easily broken as part of his sculptural assemblages. In an earlier work entitled *Dear Susan*, Kim painstakingly reassembled a shattered teacup back to its original form, still bearing the traces of the sugary coffee it contained before it lost its structural integrity. The teacup, a gift from his ex-lover, rests on top of a translucent glass cylinder that Kim produced for a lens-making course. Kim describes how he laboriously hand-polished the glass with a solution of micro-fine liquid sand over the course of several weeks, grinding down the surface so that it would eventually be able to refract light. In an instant, however, an accident left a miniscule chip at the lens's edge, reversing countless hours of labor and, along with it, any potential of the

glass becoming a lens, or an object providing clarification. Instead of throwing out the lens, though, Kim transformed it along with the teacup into a small-scale monument to brokenness—to broken love, broken objects, broken vision.

This impossibility of salvaging the material's original purpose as a lens is critical to understanding Kim's sense of things that fracture—glass, salt, light, love. The lens is central in Kim's practice not only as it relates to a history of optics, but also in its relation to looking, to scopophilia, and desire effected through vision. Lenses exist as the human attempts to calibrate by precise degrees the measure of our look, to quantify our desire, to see it more clearly, to bring something closer when it feels too far, to push something farther when feels too close.

In this way, the diverse range of materials Kim employs begins to emerge as kinds of faulty lenses with varying degrees of transparency, reflection, opacity, and translucence: the matte, blurry, dull reflection of aluminum; the all-too-crisp mirror; the mutable reflection of two-way mirror; the glare of plexi; translucent pinks, opaque whites, all offering different kinds of filters for looking, but which ultimately frustrate any attempt at seeing clearly. Even in the works that employ an actual lens through photography—the medium thought to be the most transparent of all—Kim still frustrates our desire to see. The photographs, taken from Kim's trip to Latin America, are chosen as the images that literally picture the loved one's absence. These photographs of hollow spaces—a wide landscape, an empty bed—are rolled up, or framed and stacked up against each other, or arranged in overlapping layers. They never show their entire content, but only how our own desire is always occluded from ourselves.

Kim's working process of layering, erasing, defacing, or covering surfaces all relate to this desire to see—to see something that is hidden, to see someone who is absent. In his work, it is vision, or the look, that mediates this desire to see into a space that is impossible to physically enter, impossible because of temporal and spatial removes, or because it is virtual in that it exists only in vision. Kim's work, then, does something curious—it turns sculpture into the picturing of desire, the image that we can never see. The scopic regime (long dominated by other mediums, such as painting and photography, that have been more traditionally categorized as image-making technologies) is here realized through the sculptural. At the same time that we become aware of our private, internal desire acutely externalized and displaced onto these objects, the sculptures present themselves as an imaging, or perhaps the better term would be an *imagining* of that internal bodily experience through vision. Kim takes minimalism's insistence on bodily experience based on external relations of form and space and turns it inward—that is, he takes the invisible insides and turns them outward, showing the alchemical transformations that happen when you encounter another body. In so doing, he introduces a new mode of relationality that posits human vulnerability as the very source of its possibility. The spatial reverberations created throughout the surfaces of his works create a boomerang effect in which sculpture's closed form is transformed into an infinitely deep abyss—an abyss that threatens the risk of falling and breaking, and perhaps even the best kind of falling, that of falling in love.

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