

PASADENA, CA

Soo Kim

PASADENA MUSEUM OF CALIFORNIA ART

Soo Kim's *They Stop Looking at the Sky*, 2006, which was shown recently in the Pasadena Museum of California Art's project space, is a set of collages made by using a computer to juxtapose found and original photographs and new drawings, printing the results on single sheets of transparent film, then mounting each composition on one of three four-by-five-foot Plexiglas panels. The recurring image is a partial overhead view of a city. The architecture suggests a range of cultures, periods, and technologies; the overall mix makes it difficult to think of it as specific to a single place. Though you wouldn't know it from looking, the two primary photos Kim worked from are shots of Istanbul, a city that's already a hodgepodge. Ragged apertures in many of the buildings allow for interior views, though it's unclear whether this is a trick of the artist's or the result of a disaster or attack.

All three collages share the same angles and planes, the same few people, and many of the same small details. But if these elements provide the basic structure of the compositions, the ways in which Kim fills in the gaps make up the works' substance. In the left-hand panel, walls are often replaced by Moorish-looking black-and-white geometric patterns. In the right-hand panel, things are even more radically displaced: The city appears about to disintegrate. The central panel, punctuated by luminous white spaces—blanks that leave it an unfinished puzzle—looks relatively stable at first. But even here the spatial logic is inconsistent: Witness the figure standing with one foot on a horizontal surface and the other on a vertical.

Ultimately, it's impossible to arrive at an unequivocal conclusion about these images or their relation to one another. Interior and exterior space constantly flip-flop; in a recurring image, two men apparently stand on the roof of a building and lean on the parapet, but also seem to rest on a counter that circles a room. One might think of decline and revival, or devastation and recovery, but assigning a specific mood or theme to a specific image or part thereof would likely prove fruitless. In the end, we're left unsure as to whether we should even be thinking in terms of culture, time, events, progressions, connections, or comparisons.

Kim's cobbled scenes turn out to be puzzles in more ways than one, leaving viewers in the position of baffled gods. One sees varied points of view—literally different perspectives—caught in the process of congealing; possibility and problem are commingled, and that which was, that which is, and that which could be are untidily interwoven. The work draws us in but leaves us uncertain about where to begin. In a world that feels as fragmented as ours, that metaphor at least is clear.

—Christopher Miles



Soo Kim, *Untitled Study (detail)*, 2005, layered, hand-cut color photographs, 11 x 14".