

SOO KIM



photo: © Grant Mudford

SOO KIM

C.O.L.A. Works



Camouflage, 2009
Hand-cut chromogenic print
61 x 60 inches (approx)



(Clear as winter ice), 2011
Hand-cut chromogenic print
60 x 60 inches (approx)

SOO KIM

There is an undeniable aspiration toward the tangibility of images in Soo Kim's photographic works. While trafficking in the banality of everyday life, Kim's labor-intensive process seeks to upend the conventional uses of photography and excise from it a scrim through which a desirous longing can pass. Whether the focus is on the natural settings of such non-descript locations as Elysian Park in Los Angeles or the built environment of Reykjavík, Iceland, Kim activates her images by cutting away photographic material and revealing the surfaces beyond their immediate picture plane. For Kim, the process of excision provides an antidote that is both hostile and sympathetic toward the type of reverie the images -- left to themselves -- might belie.

At the heart of Kim's approach is the cultural assumption that photographic images possess an internal logic and structure that mimes the visual representations they appear to offer. The urban environment has provided a particularly fertile test ground for staging this inquiry. In 2009, for instance, Kim set out on a project in the context of Dubrovnik, Croatia, where she produced a panoramic picture of the historical coastal town by systematically documenting its topography from the perspective of the elevated walkway that runs throughout. The photographs that result from this pedestrian activity were then laboriously whittled away in great enough detail to leave the prints in a skeletal state. For each individual work, two images were then overlaid and synthesized into one in order to create a new image that is both densely interwoven and porous enough to reveal its material backing.

Kim's Dubrovnik project attempts to capture a total image of the city while questioning the validity of the photographic medium in performing this task. Photography's relationship to architecture and the natural landscape has been fraught since the technology was invented -- a condition inherited from painting and its struggle with the conventions of representation throughout centuries prior -- but Kim's process results in a photographic object that is neither objective nor allegorical. In this, like many of Kim's other projects, the absence of the picture's material becomes the focal point.

The conundrum that results in the translation of one spatial order into a two-dimensional plane is a problem that precedes Kim by a considerable margin, but the renewed interest her practice exemplifies appears to be part of a larger conversation around the materiality of images -- both photographic and otherwise -- and their structural relationship to the world of which they are a part. Unlike many of her contemporaries, however, who often deal in the ruination and degradation of photographic materials and processes, Kim asserts a quality that remains lyrically intact. Lyricism is maybe just one way of describing this tendency in Kim's work, but it is a revealing frame of reference in so far as the term exemplifies a cultural impulse that is often overlooked and left unspoken.

—Aram Moshayedi

Aram Moshayedi lives in Los Angeles where he is assistant curator of the Gallery at REDCAT and a doctoral candidate in the department of art history at the University of Southern California.