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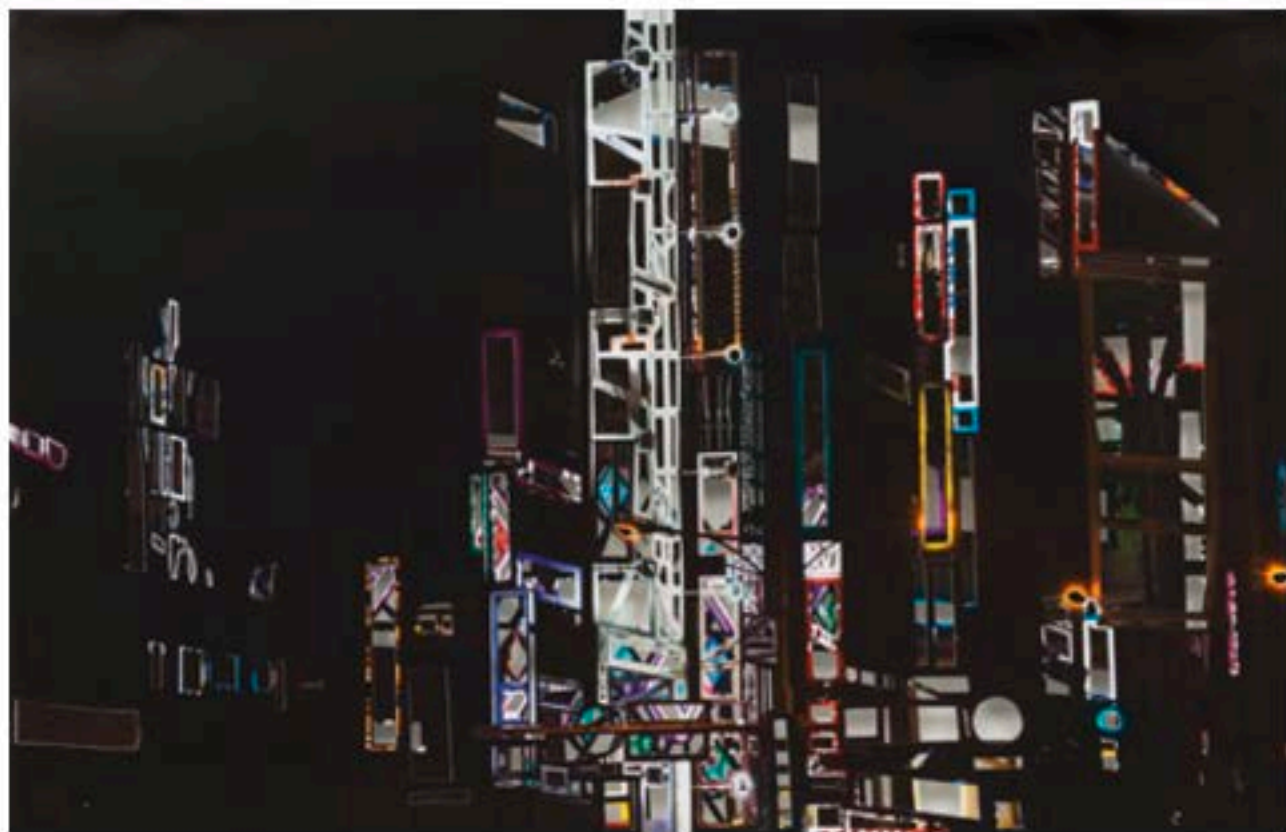
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## Hybrid Photographers

by george melrod/jody zeller/molly enholm

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*Photography has always been a uniquely curious medium, directed insistently out toward the real world: as much as a tool for mechanical documentation as a vehicle for artistic expression. With the advent of the photograph, the art object officially entered the age of mass reproduction, its uniqueness and authority put in question. With the new, ongoing explosion of digital and online imagery, photography is again undergoing profound transformation, as the very idea of film now seems quaint. Because of its collaborative instincts, photography has long been adapted by visual artists to be used with other mediums. In this issue, art ltd. looks at three emerging LA photographers who are pushing the medium in engaging new directions. Their work highlights the hybrid instincts of the medium, and how its own amorphous authority and language continue to evolve, both with technology, and in reaction to it.*



*(She recognizes him)*

2012

Two hand-cut inkjet prints

27 1/4" x 42"

Photo Credit: Brian Forrest

Courtesy of the artist and Angles Gallery, Los Angeles

## SOO KIM

Perhaps ironically for an LA photographer who in fact chairs the photography department at Otis, Soo Kim never studied photography herself. "I was in practically every school except photography," says the CalArts MFA (1995). "My photo education was spotty, so it wasn't habituated into my education early on. So that really helped me." Kim's practice is wide-ranging both geographically and conceptually, but it's also as focused as an X-Acto knife, which is just the sort of implement that she uses to cut into her images, rendering them unexpectedly weblike and tactile, spacial and singular and doggedly hand-wrought. Yet despite her interventions, Kim remains first and foremost a photographer. And if her work edges into terrain that sometimes seems antithetical to those conventions that the medium is expected to reinforce, she remains acutely aware of what those preconceptions are. In a sense, her ongoing body of work can be considered an experiment in how pliant and plastic the medium really is.

"I started cutting up the photographs as a way of making the work literally unique, but also cutting away some of the legibility of the photograph," she describes. Cutting away trees from their background, she saw herself as "inserting into the work a deliberate slowness," while also bringing "this slowness to looking at the work." While this meditateness may hark back to the early days of the medium, when capturing a shadowy glimpse from nature or humanity seemed wondrous, it flies in the face of today's digital photography revolution, wherein we casually sift through thousands of images every hour, absorbing and digesting them with voracious appetite. In fact, Kim describes her works as "revealing but also withholding," as embracing both "full disclosure and complete withdrawal." With her own labor-intensive subtractive process, excising volumes and elements from the spaces she presents, a viewer who might not give the image second thought is drawn in to its complexity and texture, to its nuance and mystery. While the image still seems to offer "the indexical quality" we expect from it, it also exists as something else more reticent and unknowable; to the degree that we assume photography to be objective and revelatory, Kim's practice spotlights the medium's ability to be subjective and elusive.

In 2009, Kim moved into depicting architecture in a set of works about Dubrovnik (in Croatia) and Reykjavik (in Iceland), cutting out the volumes of the buildings and layering the images atop each other in pairs. Transformed from panoramas of blockish volumes into open latticeworks, the images of these small but contrasting cities are unlike anything one expects of architectural photography. In fact, though one would not guess it, the Iceland images were photographed at midnight during the summer solstice. Kim's fascination with architecture was continued in an ambitious artist book she created in 2012, depicting Arcosanti, the visionary utopian construction in Arizona started by Paolo Soleri in the '70s. Laid out in pages of perforated scrims, the book is an astounding feat, spinning into three dimensions from the volumetric flatness of the page: at once narrative and non-linear, a fragmentary yet still intact Calvino-esque hall of mirrors.

In 2011, she returned to nature in a series of lush-seeming forest scenes, actually shot at a Buddhist cemetery outside Seoul, that examine density and emptiness as a form of camouflage, and Elysian, a series of detailed wooded scenes (inspired by the LA neighborhood). For these last pieces, she painted the backs of the images in metallic colors and let them fold forward in the frame so that they became overtly sculptural, and their backs became an active part of the works. In her dramatic 2012 series of scenes of Taipei at night, featured in her recent solo show at Angles Gallery, Kim removed the signage from beckoning nighttime urban vistas, leaving empty gaps amid the tantalizing effusions of color and geometry, in a sea of blackness. Although still expository, and recognizable as cities, the works veer toward giddy abstraction. And yet despite their emptiness and self-awareness, their allure is palpable. Hollowed out of specificity, they nonetheless draw the viewer into their layered spaces, in their evocation of "the consumption of desire, rather than objects of desire," becoming "empty vehicles of desire underlying urban life."

Kim's current work-in-progress promises to edge even further into three dimensions, into a sculptural realm. Involving photographs of landscape from Panama and Taipei, these works are still evolving off the walls, to an as-yet indeterminate form. "I'm folding those photographs, so they have more shape to them. I'm looking at origami, tessellations," she says. "They're too rotund to frame. The backs are painted and they're folded out, kind of unwieldy now." Pushing quietly but determinedly from photographic space into the viewer's realm, her works continue to challenge preconceptions: not just of what photography can represent, but how it is experienced.

—george melrod