

I ♥ PHOTOGRAPH

MONDAY, JANUARY 10, 2011

Soo Kim



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(reverse of above image showing holes cut)

By hand-cutting into your photographs you remove them from the realm of reproducible photos to unique, sculptural objects. Whether the cuts are very subtle, as in *Camouflage*, or invasive, as in the *Elysian* series, the images become unique. I'm wondering if you could talk about the unique nature of your photos and how you approach reproduction in your work.

I came to photography a little sideways, studying not in a photography program, but in an art program. I always loved the vocabulary of photography but I questioned why there was such a tendency towards serialization in photographic bodies of work, why everything had to be so uniform, and I was often frustrated by the absolute orderly nature of photographic practice. One way for me to approach a photographic practice was to make different images within a body of work as well as inserting a form of mark making that would make each piece unique while letting me bring in a drawing component to the work. Since photography is by nature a largely subtractive medium, able to record one small portion of the world through a frame onto paper, my excising of parts of the photograph removes more information from the photograph while inserting something else that even the photograph can't hold or picture. What is interesting to me in light of this is that I am now making photographic work in that sort of serialized nature that I had initially resisted, but the unique nature of each of the pieces speaks to the idea of photographic serialization, taxonomy and reproducibility in a slightly different way.

The works are also framed in a particular way, mounted onto plexi with space between the photograph and frame edge, so that the photograph "floats" and the cut-out spaces of the photograph cast shadows onto the wall it's installed on. As a result, the color of the wall plays a part in the overall piece because it acts as the ground, in a sense, to the piece – installed on a brown wall the piece reads very differently than seen installed on a white wall, making the piece not site-specific of course, but space-sensitive perhaps, another way of thinking about the irreproducible or unique quality of the work. Funnily enough, my work photographs badly so when people see jpgs of the work, they think I make drawings or that I'm adding tape or stickers rather than taking imagery away.

Your work also foregrounds the material nature of photographic paper; can you talk a bit about your work as sculpture?

I think that quality may be most apparent with the newer work, *Elysian*. The photographs in this body of work were taken from a hilltop location in Los Angeles, overlooking a city that is not included in the frame of the photograph. The trees that fill the photograph are cut away and hang off the print, leaving the birds and sky to make up the flat space of the photograph. The trees in the photograph are cut out of the sky and hang forward revealing their painted reverse side; the fallen trees reassemble in clusters into thickets, into different dense forests of their own. The metallic colors of the trees' reverse side offer a contrast to the trees that once made up the photograph and whose traces are now marked by their absence, shaped by the skies that surrounded them. This doubling, or shadowing of the trees in the photographs, points to an idea of landscape that considers the experience of looking at the landscape not specifically for its indexicality or ability to record or locate, but to present an idea of looking at landscape that incorporates both stillness and movement, that is barren and full, quiet and noisy, fast and slow.

I'm interested in photographic materiality and in my work, I think one way of discussing that was through a kind of shy dimensionality evoked by the shadows cast on the wall by the works. With *Elysian*, I used metallic colors because it reflected light, they are colors that are difficult to record photographically, and it was a way for me to talk about photographic materiality, about photography and sculpture, in a humorous way – painting metallic colors onto photographs that act sculpturally was, in a way, my making photographic bronze sculptures.

In *Camouflage* especially, the cuts have to do with the nature of the photograph itself: the white space of the photo, where there's an absence of information, is cut away to reveal the neutral space behind the photograph. I'm wondering how you go about your decision-making when you decide to cut and how self-reflexive your work is in relation to photography.

I always start by thinking about the photographs, making images that would live together in the end. Then I sort out what to do with the process of excising/removing parts of the photograph. In some works, the cuts act more like drawings, bringing in more fantastical elements to the picture, and in others, I follow what's in the photograph and remove parts of the image guided by what's already there. Some of the earlier work looked at popular photography, such as snowflake photography and chronophotography, for inspiration.

With my *Midnight Reykjavik* series, I follow the form of the built environment of the city, cutting away the buildings' skins so that they lose volume and end looking like line drawings of a city drawn onto the natural landscape. Each piece is made up of two cut photographs, two opposite views of the city combined to make a dizzying panorama of a city. And the emptying of the buildings in the landscape talks as much about the dynamic ways some architects in the 1960s envisioned the future city as it does the recent global economic collapse, the housing market, and Reykjavik as an early prime example and marker of those events.

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In the *Camouflage* series, the photographs are taken from cemeteries though there are no obvious indications of the site, appearing instead to be sun-dappled, forest-like landscapes. As you get closer to the work, you notice that the photograph is marked by hundreds of tiny excisions all over the print. All of the areas of the photograph where the sun has reflected off of the landscape, where there was too much light for the film to record, documenting that build up of light as nothing, no photographic information, have been excised. So the work changes when seen from afar, and upon closer inspection, in the way camouflage acts in nature and in warfare. For me it's about how I think about looking, landscape, combat, invisibility, hiding, and photography.

You can find more of Soo's work [here](#).

POSTED BY NICHOLAS GRIDER AT 9:50 AM

LABELS: [INTERVIEW](#), [SOO KIM](#), [USA](#)

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