

Hidden Landscape

By Lee Chu-young, Curator of the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea

Invisible City

In an easy-going downtown park, a flock of pigeons are the star of this performance. The ACE biscuit purchased at the park store is used as bait to lure them and as a reward for their performance.

After setting a camera in a fixed location and by scattering pieces of the biscuit, one writes "INVISIBLE CITY" on the ground. While writing each letter, some pigeons flock to eat the biscuit pieces. When one steps back, these pigeons occupy the ground, eager to eat, so each letter eventually becomes invisible. As each bird leaves, the letters slowly appear to visualize the overall, textual meaning. "INVISIBLE CITY"

In the closely woven matrix of a modern city, humans pouring out predictable, instinctive desires often resemble pigeons that flock together to eat biscuit pieces on the ground.

Automobile Landscape

Small models of pastel tone buildings spread out over a flat hexagonal table to form an imaginary metropolis. Each model is movable with wheels on its base. Unlike other such maquettes, with elaborate detail, these architectural structures, part of *Flexible Landscape*¹, have simple forms, whose specific parts appear emphasized and modified. However, viewers who regard them as realistic can simultaneously recall, unconsciously, images of buildings from their own imagination.

1 The concept of a highly evolved Flexible Capitalism can underline the new form of labor in America's new economy, or the New Capitalism caused by the development of cutting-edge information and telecommunications, or the constant increase in labor productivity. This system places importance on pliable transformation and renovation that improves productivity. It is a system in which workers must adapt to constantly changing systems. New Capitalism can be seen as a new controlling system, emphasizing the free flow of capital, away from a nation's governance, rather than the abolition of regulations, for the efficient exploitation of man power.

Richard Sennett, *The Personal Consequences of Work in the Capitalism*, Translated by Jo Yong, Moonyeh Publishing, 2001, pp.7-12

All these buildings, such as those used by broadcasting and communications companies like KT, KBS, and Chosun Ilbo, retail outlets and theaters like Lotte and Mega Box, plus apartments like Hyundai, churches², and banks, like Bank of Korea, symbolically represent functional scenes of 21st Korean cities. Each represents large corporations, broadcasters, media and entertainment companies, construction companies, banks, and religious facilities, which have emerged on a broad scale from the New Liberalism of the 1990s and worldwide economic crisis, and each can be seen dominating Korea's major urban centers. All instigate and reflect the public's desire within contemporary society, and symbolize a 'Flexible Capitalism,' in which the consumption and distribution of commodities is the highest value, constantly open to extreme flexibility and expansion. Irrespective of context, history, or life-patterns, they appear suddenly, to subjugate all, exerting rampant influence transcending space and time.

Intoxicated by their magnetism, the public nowadays consider them a prerequisite of modern life, part of the freedom of infinite communication, that mobile telecommunication brings, and so they passively consume sport and movies, and solace from religion.

Within the system of New Liberalism, individuals use all their energy for potential profit. And so any contemporary landscape is formed by individuals as consumers. In the market place, standardized services are provided for 24-hour consumption, everywhere it seems. Tamed by convenience, consumers come to identify a lack of service with an absence of existence, and so feel a sense of deprivation within contemporary life.

The single channel video *Euphoric Drive*, showing a brilliant road running through paradise, is presented continuously as part of *Flexible Landscape*. The viewer's eyes can slowly move into it, following a tidy, new road, covered with a brilliant, warmhearted lemon yellow. There are no obstacles on the road, as enormous outdoor billboards, common to downtown, go passed.

"Those billboards show advertising by a mobile telecommunication firm, promising a world we have never seen or experienced, an automobile in which I can be pompous to my friends, and an apartment that makes me resist my sweetheart. I am an urbanite, and here is the finest place available to me, for my consumption. Urban civilization, which I deserve, is spread out before my eyes. What a fantastic drive!" We are intoxicated by this world. The 21st century civilization of technology and capitalism conducts a range of experiments on our bodies, which, along with our soul, radiates with insatiable desire, within hallucinogenic spaces, indulging us into this world.

2 It can be said some churches benefited from the economy of New Liberalism. Due to the economic crisis,

small churches disappeared, but enormous churches, based on huge capital, took hold, gaining income from contributions by well-to-do, devout individuals.

A Better Tomorrow?

A man falls on a vast pink-colored ground. His breathing halts. He looks like a typical company worker in white shirt and black suit trousers. He has bare feet, which suggest he is about to jump out. It looks like he is being chased. The city from which he has just escaped is exploding on the far horizon, radiating a brilliant flash and plumes of dark smoke. A while ago perhaps, the city and the man shared the same destiny. What caused this tragic incident, leading them toward their end?

The small wooden stick this man firmly holds, to the bitter end, is inscribed with his own optimistic life principle. Although he endured the harshness of reality everyday, and expected a better tomorrow, why didn't he predict his end, coming in just a few minutes? Why is his end so tragic, vain, and miserable? We do not know how he escaped from the city - perhaps he was blown by the gales caused by the explosion? We must presume another unidentifiable man has unhappily thrown away his life.

Installed in the exhibit venue, like ghosts, three-dimensional, organic, black, and sticky forms soar. Each appears like oil, mucus, or compressions of many dead bodies, that existed hundreds of thousands of years ago. Each form is deep black, like a black hole, drawing in light while radiating spiritual energy, like the compression of a vanished creatures' energy. The deep black is linked to the 'condensed form of objects,' suffocated by an end to breathing, a 'deep black smoke' rising from the dying city, a black silhouette of the city in peril.

We are optimistic about an unknown future. People believe it is alright, if they die together, when the Earth perishes. They can forget their regrets, while anticipating a better life. 'Blind belief' is a gift within the harshness of contemporary life. Those who die have no tomorrow. Those who win are those who survive.

Flexible Landscape

With *The Steel Sun* (2000), and *Sleepwalking* (2001), Ryu Biho draws our attention with intense imagery that recalls sci-fi animation. Ryu's work visualizes diverse conditions, plus physical and psychological reactions that derive from an individual's surroundings, their relations within social, political, economic, even natural environments. It has two directions: one is the exploration of his own psychology; the other is to enable his active involvement with other people through collaboration. His collaborative work is intended to create active communication between mass culture and art in a flexible, diverse manner. His work involves experimentation in internet communication; popular movies and TV drama; and work that attempts communication with the

public, exemplified in his Yoido Park and Anynag, Public Art projects.

Flexible Landscape reflects his consideration and view of social phenomena and invisible structures he experienced. Ryu unveils an unknown uneasy aspect lurked in everyday life in a modern city whose appearance looks perfect. The flexible landscape of a modern city he presents looks like a paradise filled with delights, enjoyment, and happiness and simultaneously appears in a perilous state and perishable due to an unidentifiable disaster. A city in reality is like a mirage that shows what we desire and wish. Those who know its true nature feel vanity, while those who know nothing about it dream of a fantasy. Any judgment of values is up to each.

Artists imagine and reflect the structures of reality in various ways. Although art provides us with the experience of spectacle, fantasy, and desire, we return instinctively to reality when the music stops, when we close the book, step out of the museum, or open our eyes in the morning. Fear of reality makes us disregard the existence of art, so art is far away, but reality is so close.