

nonchalant ease, which is possible because he is an astute observer of the past and the present, keenly aware of humankind's big picture and its details. It is the details that catch our eye and invigorate our imaginations, allowing us to imagine for ourselves new narratives in the silence of our minds.

Ian Findlay

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Kim Joon at Sundaram Tagore Gallery

The immediate fascination with works by Korean digital artist Kim Joon is its ready familiarity, even as it is far from the quotidian, but edgily surreal and disturbing. His elaborately tattooed bodies and shattered porcelain forms speak to serendipitous archaeology. The textures of Kim's work suggest hyper-real painting of the finest quality, but it is deceptive as one comes to realize that it is computer-generated. His imagined cities and urban spaces and great whale-like figures are all also computer-generated entities. His subjects are transformed into magical "paintings" of rich colors and with a generous fluid line through his dexterous use of three-dimensional modeling software, the new brush. The selection in his eponymous exhibition gives but a glimpse of the artist's *oeuvre* but it does serve to whet the appetite for more.

That Kim's vision is achieved so finely through his modeling software has always been a marvel to me for this highlights not only his dynamic technical skills, but also the sheer vitality of his imagination and its elegant execution. Of all of the artists I have known working with computer modeling software Kim Joon (b.1966, Seoul) is one of the most outstanding for in his complex vision he brings together a unique blend of tradition and modernity that creates an easy sense of intimacy with his narrative. At the same time, he also highlights



Kim Joon, *Drunken-Gone With the Wind*, 2011, digital print, 119.9 x 210 cm. © Kim Joon.

the magic of engineering and architecture, his sensitivity to form and color, and within all figurative narratives a keen awareness of humankind's struggles with itself through destruction and reconstruction, through social and political rejection, and the clash of desires for psychological identities beyond self: the use of brand names, for example, is at the forefront of this clash.

Kim's use of brand names in some of his best art, for example, reminds one of the art of the Chinese painter Wang Guangyi (b.1957, Harbin), whose use of Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) propaganda imagery alongside the brand names

and logos of major Western companies in his *Great Criticism* series (1990–2007). For a while it caused controversy among those international companies that Wang featured. As we seem to be reaching ever-greater levels of greed in the second decade of our selfie-mad 21st century, Wang's sagacious criticism resonates ever more sharply.

Kim's use of brand names and his implied criticism of these corporations, however, strikes me as somewhat less aggressive than Wang's: it is as if the brand names are remnants of a crumbling empire or a lost civilization. There is something bizarrely "clean" in such images even. They are



Kim Joon, *Drunken-Absolut Vodka*, 2011, digital print, 210 x 119.4 cm. © Kim Joon.

embraced by crumbling chaos in which shattered "bodies" lie or the names of once famous individuals are tattooed into eternity on a disembodied arm or leg. Fame is ephemeral, Kim seems to be saying in one work called *Neverland* (2009), the names in dying flesh as a brand fade quickly.

Kim Joon is to computer-generated figuration as his countryman Lim Taek is to computer-generated landscape as seen in his sophisticated chromogenic prints that blend compelling classical landscape structures with modern motifs. Kim's tattooed figures and fragmented body parts, as well as his sensual male and female couples, also strike something of a classical pose. His damaged or shattered porcelain in such works as *Drunken – Gone With the Wind* (2011) and *Drunken – Absolut Vodka* (2011) exemplify something of Kim's stark, disconcerting vision of the world. Tragedy is made beautiful in the service of consumerism. For a moment we are in Benetton world.

Kim's art is presented in such a neat and organized fashion that we are at one and same time attracted and repelled by the narrative tragedies that he lays out for us. There are times when one feels as if Kim has reached into archaeological time and pulled out a mirror to the contemporary destruction by so many marauding religious fanatics for whom history means nothing, figures in clay or porcelain are equally idolatrous and need to be smashed or they will pollute our spirits: such nonsense and fear corrupt our freedoms.

Yet, although there is frequently a sense of social dislocation or alienation, of violence, of self-gratification, of indolence, and of Bacchanal pleasures in his shattered narrative, there is a faint sense of hope: with his fallen idols here Kim represent fragments of the broken human condition yet suggest how outstanding humankind has been and can be again.

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