

NOORI LEE

What interests me is, among other things, your dialogue with architecture. Sometimes I think I recognize the realities behind the images. In what way are these modernist dreams your very own fictions?

Most of my motifs, such as houses and rooms, I have only indirectly encountered – through the two-dimensional medium of photographic illustration. The houses are in part modern and chic, but also mediocre. They are like models in fashion shows: very, very pretty, but they are still only several of many thousands more with the same beautiful effect. They belong to the chosen. Yet most of them are only run-of-the-mill, except for a few whose face, at least, we recognize. To architects the architecture photographs from glossy magazines are uninteresting, since they don't provide any significant information. Neither the construction nor the arrangement of the house is made clear. The house was shot for one purpose only: for the photo. And it is there only to look at. The photo wants many eyes to glance at it. Well, people have decided on this. Not the house itself.

This new series of pictures deals mainly with parts of a building and rooms. People are absent. How come?

I used to think that explaining this fact (the absence of people in my pictures) was too complicated.

In the meantime I think it is like “switching off the TV during a conversation.” Sometimes it's the resulting stillness that is unpleasant and upsetting.

The new wave of figurative painting these past years has often had a kind of neo-expressionist tendency. Which is not really the case with you. It seems to me that everything is much cooler?

I think I can answer here quite frankly. This tendency began in a generation somewhat older than mine. As I see it, my generation has had nothing to do anymore with “the death of painting”. With us there were no romantic or nostalgic temperaments. We only thought: “Why not...?” It was often ironic, or even cynical. As a rule all were subversive, whereas my painting was rather cooler, that is, “more controlled”.

What have your main influences been? I take it, these have been photographers as well as painters.

For my era, “image” is certainly an important concept, all of which started with video games and MTV. I think the “consumption” of films, books and music are equally important. The idea with rooms, for example, I got from Kubrick movies and the short stories of Guy de Maupassant. I am interested, for example, in what exactly all these pictures we see (from newspapers, TV, Internet, magazines, billboards...) trigger in us.

Recently advertising doesn't even seem to care whether the "image" even makes sense or not. It's only about attracting attention, nothing more. Some pictures from the media seem to me to be a riddle without an answer. Do they think that we as humans could get used to this and can simply ignore them without having to "digest" them?

Do you try to manipulate the effect of the media's picture deluge? Would you claim that you are able to create a critical distance, or do you let the pictures simply work on you?

In any case I get my urge to paint from the present situation of a "picture deluge". I don't need and don't want to invent a picture. I am all the more interested in pictures (from the media) that have a certain superficiality. Pictures that don't give away their ambivalence. The war pictures from newspapers, for instance, are also extremely categorized. Whereas the fashion photos starting at the end of the 1990s were much more exciting, the ones that veiled their subversiveness under a mantle of aesthetic glitz. These made a great impression on me. Which is the reason my perception of things has become skeptical, distrustful. Which gradually developed into a paranoid conspiracy theory. I read short stories by Guy de Maupassant or Thomas Pynchon. It was a perfect match... I collected motifs from different magazines and tried to find a tie-in. Each existence has a certain ambivalence. I like a picture in which black and white merge, but is nonetheless not gray. I have my problem with Hollywood's categorization of good and evil. In order to show this, the best possibility is probably to let myself be categorized as clichéd, so as then to break with it and prove the opposite.

From the German by Jeanne Haunschild