Abandoned Protocol

Seung Woo Back
Eloise Fornieles & Kate Hawkins
Ben Judd
Hyung-Geun Park

An exhibition by I-MYU Projects and Charles Danby

Ritter/Zamet, 2 Bear Gardens, London, SE1 9ED
Introduction

Social Codes

Abandoned Protocol brings together artists from Korea and the UK through a preparatory discourse of photography. Considering still image, moving image, and moving image as still image, the exhibition includes video, and touches upon performance.

Protocol offers a standard of behaviour, setting rules that govern syntax, and conventions that inform communication. The artists in Abandoned Protocol consider such codes of social exchange, each turning to the periphery of cultural convention to question the social, political and economic implication of these systems.

While protocol affords tested and orthodox codes of communication, abandoned protocol presents a generative discourse of diverse social schemes, codes of etiquette and assorted belief systems, acknowledging that difference is exacted, not through the negation of convention, but through the structural re-rendering of the codes that form it.

The works move through social ‘psychological’ spaces, revealing in the poetical-uncanny of the landscape social codes that lead to a consideration of environment and territory, to terrains that exist on the margins of inhabited spaces.

Abandoned Protocol reaches between Seoul and London and seeks to inform a narrative between the two cities.
Seung Woo Back

Rules of Disturbing Beauty

Real World is the resolute title given by artist Seung Woo Back to a series of photographs of miniature buildings taken at the Ains World theme park in Bucheon, Korea. The gameplay that marks out these works begins with the artist’s choice of title. In naming the works ‘real world’ Back immediately introduces us to the idea that these are somehow something other. From the outset we are aware that something is amiss, and on inspection it is clear that there is awkwardness to the images, for while their composition is structured, their content is unsettled. Signifiers grate and collide and the contradiction between composition and content lead us back and forth between worlds that fail to align. What we come to understand is that this disruption is not only between models of objects and actual objects, but moreover between worlds in which different rules apply.

While Seung Woo Back stretches convention within his photographs, he resolutely adheres to technical procedure in his making of them. His proficient handling of large-format cameras, and his use of long exposure times, leads to large-scale detailed works with full tonal ranges, and extensive depth-of-field. These photographs propose permanence through their pictorial presentation of what appears stable and absolute, but this exacting balance is a veneer to a layer of disruption, for while pictorial stability fools, if only for a moment, the underlying uncertainty that Back masterminds is one in which fantasy and reality become ever harder to decide between.

In considering Seung Woo Back’s Real World series, it becomes clear that the miniature buildings that occupy the foreground are scaled reconstructions of landmark Western buildings, while the distant and periphery views reveal generic newly built Korean apartment blocks. The linear perspective drawn between the two categories of buildings highlight a very real cultural ‘distance’ between Korea and the West. After rapid economic development diverse cultural images are shown everywhere throughout Korea. Desire for Westernisation has largely led to visual symbols that are crude and kitsch. The models of world-famous architectures in Seung Woo Back’s photographs can be seen as structures that mimic the West. Mimicry derives from a complex of inferiority, in this sense defined as the psychology of the Other, as conceived by Lacan, the Other that wants to be like the subject it craves. Here mimicry is a partial achievement, a gesture that takes after, in appearance, but that also concedes through the inner conflict it generates. A metaphorical cultural void occupies the space between the nearby models and the far away densely populated apartment buildings. Seung-Woo Back’s choice to locate the buildings in the foreground and background of the frame is made with exacting calculation, offering to the viewer the ‘gameplay’ of finding their own position between these points of opposition.

The ultimate destination in Seung Woo Back’s game is the location of identity through structures that are both real and unreal. Back’s methodology is arguably cynical. The fake models, the subjects of the photographs, are presented at the forefront of the works, suggesting that from the outset Back’s strategy is not to be straight, and moreover to be purposefully awry. This method appropriates literary strategies through which academics ‘vote-back’ or ‘talk-back’ in a bid to challenge accepted canons of thought. Back avoids subjective sentiment, and in doing so his practice reflects the position of a researcher, his works are methodical and calculated, and as an artist he becomes a cultural critic, ‘talking back’ not only to a dislocated Korea but also to imported western ideology, with exacting self-examination towards society and culture.

Keum-Hyun Han
Etiquette and Ritual

It begins with an action as slight as a glance across a crowded gallery: one woman noticing another, sizing her up, the hair, the shoes, the dress... The same dress! A scowl, a deadly look is thrown, eyes are locked. Through the throng of the private view, the two women move, circling each other, the distance between them closing, the rhythm of the doppelgängers’ feet falling into a violent tattoo on the gallery floorboards. Wine is sipped; then it’s spat, a jungle red fluid staining the precious dresses, these accoutrements of status, which disintegrate under the bloody projectile.

In the performances of Eloise Fornieles and Kate Hawkins, rules of etiquette are ritualistically played out, through aggressive repetition that reveals a repressed sexuality and underlying violence. As with the piece described above, Mal Gusto (2007), the most ephemeral gesture, a greeting or an acknowledgement, is unpacked into a tense expose of the cultural ironies surrounding human urges otherwise buried in social nicety.

The artists met whilst studying at the Slade School of Fine Art, London, and began collaborating upon graduation in 2006, drawn together by complimentary individual practices. Hawkins’s work taps social ritual, as in her video piece Eternal Peas (2006) where the artist painstakingly eats, one at a time, what appears to be a never-ending dish of peas, while her recent painting series Harpies and Queens (2007) – which rendered images of high society women culled from magazines as an expressionistic horrorshow – examines the construction of female beauty, and its use as both camouflage, and display of aggression and power. Similarly addressing notions of dysfunctional beauty and taboo, Fornieles performance and video work, like Sibling Rivalry (2006) with her brother Edward Fornieles, confronts the viewer with unorthodox sexuality, in this case incestuous.

For their first collaboration Pleased To Meet You (2006), performed at Scope, New York, a social conceit peculiar to the environment – the artworld airkiss – is intensified into an unexpected eroticism. Like the many others browsing the art fair, the artists greet each other with the standard ‘mwah, mwah’. Instead of moving on however, their mime of kissing continues, becoming increasingly intimate, though their mouths never meet. Within the enclosure of this almost-embrace, the two women lay claim to their own space. Upon reaching an extreme point of sexual tension, their actions reverse, and they part as if nothing had happened.

Through such works Baudelaire’s famous musings on the artist of modern life can be heard to chime: a man who is in the crowd but not of it, attentive to contemporary fashion, and all the ticks that make up his age. Fornieles and Hawkins are creating work that is situated quite literally within the throng, that of the artworld itself, in its contemporary manifestation as an intensely social and socially specific group. Yet while the heightened gestures of the performances are conceived as conduits of revelation, it is the crowd, the audience, whose unpredictable rejoinder completes the artwork. In London Mal Gusto triggered clapping and foot stomping from the gallery gathering, goading the artists in their vicious dance. Pleased To Meet You, on the other hand, provoked a range of extreme responses from macho leering and reactionary incredulity, to expressions of female solidarity. More social dialogue than social commentary, it is this relationship between the performers and the crowd that provides the ultimate frisson.

Skye Sherwin

1 Mal Gusto was first performed in Tel Aviv 2006, and then Paradise Row, London 2007 and realised as a video for Abandoned Protocol, 2007.
Ben Judd

Yo Te Curare / I Will Heal You

Ben Judd’s recent residency in Cali, Colombia resulted in the construction of an organisation called I Will Heal You. Positioning himself precariously close to practitioners of witchcraft, scientology, and parapsychology, as well as working with graphic and fashion designers, architects, jewelers and furniture makers – who Judd commissioned to invent an identity for his organisation through objects and designs installed within its shrine-like headquarters – the artist’s project systematically sought to create a believable cut or spiritual movement from the relationships he had forged in South America.

As well as researching the visual identity of guerrilla groups and insurgent factions that are currently active in Colombia, one of Judd’s main protagonists in Cali was Verónica Mardel, an artist who had previously created her own one-person quasi-religious organisation called ‘The Ministry of Universal Culture’. Mostly based on nonsense in opposition to the tension of the country’s civil war, Mardel’s position is largely naive and idealistic, yet her aim is to unite the local population, who almost exclusively ignore her and treat her as harmless eccentric and outsider.

Judd’s interest in Mardel led him directly to construct his own belief system, which contained a similar variety of ambiguous spiritual and religious connotations. In his film, which works in the matter-of-fact yet informal documentary style of a number of other contemporary artists such as Aleksandra Mr and Erik van Lieshout, we see him immersed in a number of rites and ceremonies. In one scene, Judd is caught in a local witch’s cleansing ritual, seated in a circle of unlikely props such as lemons, eggs and sugar, which are set on fire, Judd is left quivering with his eyes shut. In other clips we see local musicians perform lyrics written for the project, which form prophetic statements when combined with the events in the video, and the piest and eclectic objects that inhabit the world of Judd’s developing cult. Judd has mentioned that the physical presence of his subsequent installation in Cali aimed at a total transformation of the space it occupied, through simple lighting and the addition of curtains, to lend his movement a sense of history and simultaneously provide the feeling that something important was about to take place.

Perhaps if we start to look for motives behind Judd’s movement, we can begin to notice his desire to test the boundaries of his personal world by forcing himself to become directly immersed in the unfamiliar rites of small subcultures. The artist’s focus on keeping one foot in the real world is an important one, and through this, his documentation exists as a halfway house between existing reality and the possibility of another that’s full of unrealized potential.

In the past, Judd’s films have evoked a very British concern for amateur enthusiast activities, such as trampolining and Morris dancing. Unlike anywhere else in the world, the UK harbours a distinct pride in its own pristline attitudes, and although these works unavoidably connect with low forms of culture and the politics of aesthetics and representation in a familiar way, they also succeed in skewing everyday activities in an unpredictable manner that takes the work beyond ruminations on taste and class. Judd’s films are also anthropological in nature way (it’s interesting to note that trampoliners and Morris dancers have been demonised and ridiculed for quite some time), but the artist still operates as a genuine participant by adopting a believable persona in each context.

Much like his previous work with marginal groups who have their own communities and belief systems, Judd continues to throw himself into alien situations while keeping a distinct distance. He has started to develop a concern for a much more mysterious subject matter, and is currently making a new film in the UK with another witch, a spirit medium and a second shaman. In his recent visit to the latter character, Judd attempted to go on a journey to enter another dimension as both a participant and an observer. Just as Judd puts his faith in the Colombian female witch’s eclectic process and her amalgamation of belief in I Will Heal You, he continues to use various sources to push his own schizoid and sundry problem solving practice further.

Despite the success of this film, another convincing multi-layered healing power lies in Judd’s recent stereoscopic photographs. Taken with a Russian Sputnik camera and seen through an antique Victorian viewer, these images show various figures that appear to float above the surface of each picture. Photographs such as The Visitant (2006), which shows a female figure on a beach, accompanied by a strange light source and a number of stones and cut logs that hover in the foreground, are initially seen in their raw state, with the bare bones of the mechanical apparatus in view. It’s only when one looks through the viewer that the illusion renders itself clear. It is interesting to note that Judd has previously involved himself with a group of amateur photographers, and perhaps this time his own fascination for the photographic medium has produced a clunky duality of its own; one can see joints and the articulation of this work, but still enjoy being fooled by the misapprehension that it projects. Analogous to the position in I Will Heal You, where the artist takes the role of the believer and the non-believer simultaneously (even while Judd is immersed in his cult), a tension exists as the artist self-consciously keeps the camera rolling, his photographs show the fragility of human perception, together with the extent to which we enjoy allowing ourselves to be drawn in to such situations.

Through this, perhaps we can see that Judd’s work deals not only with the inevitable delusional dilemma of being in the world, but also with a constant pushing of the boundaries of perception. Most important of all, the artist realises that if we are to research new, more radical forms of existence, any shifts in reality will have to take place gradually, rather than through a sheer break brought about by an impossible form of romanticism. Perhaps any slippage from one world to another will happen in forms we are yet to comprehend.

Andrew Hunt
This movement exists. It also doesn’t exist. Our chairs, jewellery, clothes and buildings are designed for real people. They are also just for show. I believe every word that I am saying. I also know that this movement is just a construction. I am here to convince you to join I Will Heal You. I am also here to say it is a sham and to warn you to stay away. This movement exists. It also doesn’t exist.

I Will Heal You believes in the principle of Dualism – the concept of two opposing notions co-existing as one.

I Will Heal You believes in uniting everyone. It also believes that everyone is separate and that this is an impossible, idealistic notion. I Will Heal You wants to unite everyone under a common belief. It also wants to divide everyone.

We want to create a paradise on Earth. A place where everything is perfect. Where love knows no bounds. Where there is a perfect union between people and also between people and nature. Where people work in perfect symbiosis. Where people instinctively understand each other – where ideas, patterns and symbols are echoed throughout every aspect of the people’s lives, including their buildings, furniture, clothes and jewellery. This is our definition of true love.

Yet this paradise is also a sham. It is a construction, where the love between people is merely imagined. Where people suffer from delusions, where they start seeing connections between things that don’t exist. So-called patterns emerge that are simply the result of a hopeless longing for a non-existent unity.

Our manifesto is both deeply profound and ultimately meaningless. It speaks of a fundamental unity between people and nature, of a place where there is integrity and beauty. Yet it is also a construction – our movement is an amalgamation that borrows its ideas shamelessly.

This movement exists. It also doesn’t exist. I am here to convince you to join I Will Heal You. I am also here to say it is a sham and to warn you to stay away.
Poetics and Epiphanies

Think of a theory of photographed landscape. You might claim that most landscapes look to the future, for typically they show houses and roads and other structures which help us to deal with tomorrow's eventualities. In a house we can shelter from bad weather, should it arise, and a road will take us to our destination. The spires and towers of religious buildings point to the long term future which we can only imagine. You can apply this theory quite easily to the great landscape of nineteenth century with their wealth of canals, tracks and farmlands. But the scheme doesn't apply everywhere, for a tree, for instance, lives within its own seasonal time and the sea goes about its business in its own way.

We need a theory if we are to approach these landscapes by Hyung-geun Park. What are we to make of, for example, a pool of red liquid overhung by foxgloves and pine branches? It is not just a scene from early summer, and the redness too seems to refer to earth. It must be a foxhole. But such prosaic explanations aren't very satisfying. He has enhanced the original scene, making earth into something like a lava flow. Park's procedure is to invite us into a domain where practical explanations suggest themselves – but no more than that. In Swamp (2004) a misshapen plastic ball lies on the surface of a pond green with weed. In the normal course of events one would imagine that the ball was reclaimable, but you also know that if you were to make the effort you would soon sink out of sight in the bottomless morass disguised by the algae. You pass quickly, that is to say, from a technical difficulty into a reflection on mortality and the life ever after. Park puts us in touch with the incommensurable, for his incidents open doors into infinity.

Another of Park's photographs, The Grave Yard (2003) is of a graveyard in springtime, to judge from the daffodils and tulips on display. Spring flowers, which are comparatively short-lived, signify the turning of the seasons. In a Christian context, which this is, they also signify Easter and the Death and Resurrection of Christ. Altered to the possibility of meaning you will notice a horizontal cross, and in the background a tilted stone with a fully vertical cross beyond. Right in the background there is an upright tower, completing the transitions. Bill Brandt, Britain's most poetic photographer, proposed something very similar in a series of pictures taken in the 1940s in a graveyard on the Isle of Skye in which tilted memorial stones point to the precariousness of the human condition and its hopes for better times to come. What Park does in such a picture is to recognise the potential or inherent meaning in a scene which most of us might simply take for granted as part of the daily round of commonplace events.

The gravestones with their accompanying flowers are, of course, memorials. The flowers, though, will soon fade, and the script on the stones will become illegible with time – as we well know. Memorials invoke lives past and they propose that those lives will be remembered, and they involve a lot of wishful thinking. The details of life are hard to gather, and there can be no assurance that memory will live on. That is to say, Park singles out an instance in which past, present and future come together in a way which we hope will be conclusive, but which we know will not. He is attracted to such moments, and he disrupts them.

It is hard to characterise contemporary photography which is, in fact, quite varied. There is, for example, a light style which one associates with Japan: white balloons on snow, say. Then there are those deliberate arrangements favoured by the North Americans – salon photography rather in the manner of the nineteenth century. Hyung-geun Park, by contrast, favours what might be described as the depth model, which associates him with the Surrealist tendencies of the 1920s and 1930s. Two Trees (2005) features a curtained window almost concealed by dense cypress trees. Cast your mind back and you will remember that Bill Brandt was interested in the significance of distant windows because they stood for elsewhere and for the mysterious other. Park's poetics are like those of Brandt, not least because they both seem to possess a cosmic awareness. In one of Brandt's early pictures milk bottles stand on a doorstep on an early morning in London and a newspaper announces a solo flight to New Zealand on the other side of the world. Park, in his turn, remarks on the globe come to rest in autumnal bushes amongst snowberries half taken over by shadow. It's his way of describing the turning of the earth and the division of light and darkness. Park is a world of epiphanies and of emanations rather than of phenomena and of immediate objects of perception. He is, quite simply, a major artist in photography.

Ian Jeffrey

(Revised from text first printed in Hyung Geun Park, New Art Gallery Walsall, 2006. Reprinted with permission)
Hyung-Geun Park, A Paper Horse, 2004, 100 x 75cm, light jet C-print

Hyung-Geun Park, Swamp, 2004, 125 x 100cm, light jet C-print

Hyung-Geun Park, The Graveyard, 2003, 125 x 100cm, light jet C-print
SELING WOO BACK
1973 | Korea | Lives and works in London and Seoul

Education
2005-2006 Slade School of Fine Art, University College London, MFA Fine Art
2001-2004 Kingston University, BA Fine Art

Solo Exhibitions

Selected Group Exhibitions

Awards

KATE HAWKINS
1980 | London

Education
1998-1994 University of Edinburgh, MA (Hons) Fine Art

Solo Exhibitions

Selected Group Exhibitions

ELIOSE FORNIELES
1980 | London

Education
2004-2006 Slade School of Fine Art, University College London, MFA Fine Art
2001-2004 Kingston University, BA Fine Art

Solo Exhibitions

Selected Group Exhibitions

Awards

BEN JUDD
1970 | London

Education
1995-1997 Goldsmiths College, University of London, MA Fine Art

Solo Exhibitions
1991-1994 University of Huddersfield, BA Fine Art

Selected Group Exhibitions

Selected Group Exhibitions


Catalogues
2007 - Jff Morgan, Codo / Current, Mongolian National

HYUNG-GEUN PARK
1973 | Korea

Education
2003-2005 Goldsmiths College, University of London, Postgraduate Diploma in Fine Art / MA Image & Communication
2002- Gwang Ju University, South Korea, BA / MA Fine Art

Solo Exhibitions

Selected Group Exhibitions


Collections

Curator’s Biographies


CHARLES DANBY studied at Norwich and Kingston before completing an MA in Fine Art at the Slade in 2002. He contributes to publications including United and Wonderland and is assistant editor of Mish & Now. Curated exhibitions include 2(007) Pranvere at the National Gallery of Arts, Tirana (2007), Air Guitar and Two Teaspoons at Elscoft/Weiss, London (2007) (co-curated with Brooke Lynn McGowan), and The Invention of Solitude at The Nunnery, London (2006) (touring to Leicester City Gallery, 2008). He is a part time lecturer at Loughborough University and project curator of The Fifth Column, a platform for contemporary art in external spaces.
Abandoned Protocol

An exhibition conceived by I-MYU Projects and Charles Danby

7 September – 29 September 2007
Ritter/Zamet, 2 Bear Gardens, London, SE1 9ED
www.ritterzamet.com

Designed by Katherine Aguilera
(hex.proof@gmail.com)

Contributing Writers:
Andrew Hunt, Keum-Hyun Han, Ian Jeffrey, Skye Sherwin

Text: Poetics and Epiphanies (originally titled Park’s Poetics) © Hyung-Geun Park
All other texts © authors and reproduced by kind permission

Images © artists pp6-7 (Seung Woo Back), pp10-11/23 (Eloise Fornies & Kate Hawkins), pp14-15 (Ben Judd), pp2/18-19 (Hyung-Geun Park)

Edited by Charles Danby
Printed by Hong Jin, Korea

I-MYU Projects
23 Charlotte Road
London,
EC2A 3PB
www.i-myu.com

I-MYU Projects (Jeongae Im and Eunbok Yu) operates between London and Seoul and has an extended network through America, Europe and Asia.

With thanks to: Nick Hackworth and Paradise Row, Gasworks International Residency Programme, Marcus Ritter and Kate Zamet

RIFF/AAZMET

With support from Arts Council Korea

The copyright holders assert all rights as defined by the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1958 —as amended. No part of this publication may be reproduced, electronically stored, copied or quoted without the written permission of the copyright holders.