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## 5 Questions with Kim Beom

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*Text by Molly Taylor*

**“Though my works have a sense of humour, usually pessimism and absurdity underlie it.” *Random Life* at STPI is South Korean multimedia artist Kim Beom’s first ever solo exhibition in Singapore, made up of works in a host of mediums from paper-pulp sculptures to abstract lithographs made in collaboration with the gallery’s print team.**

The work, though often comical in its observations of the strange customs of humanity, reveals a deep suspicion of the ordering principles of society, perhaps felt most keenly in the artist’s ‘Blueprints and Perspectives’ series that reveals technically perfect architectural plans for nonsensical structures, such as a watchtower whose soul purpose is to provide a platform for security guards to look over one another. *Random life* runs as part of STPI’S 15th anniversary programme.

**Your current exhibition at STPI is called ‘Random Life’. What does title refer to?**

The title reflects many aspects of the exhibition, which shows a few different kinds of work that I made at STPI. ‘Random Life’ is also the title of a single work in the exhibition. This work is about the existential condition of our lives that we neither chose nor fully understand. Many works are about what we see and how we see: the matter of our perception. And some works are a little bit about social or political matters. I always feel that the situation of an individual in a society is something that is randomly given, too. So I thought the existential aspect of ‘Random Life’ could be a good point of view for this exhibition.

**The series of abstract, monochromatic lithographs, included in the exhibition, are given meaning by their absurdly detailed titles (for example, ‘Untitled, Tongue of a Camel Tasting Rock Salt at a Construction Spot in Egypt’), which offer a comic perspective on something otherwise without context. How would you describe the way that you use humour in your work?**

The works in the series, ‘Untitled Lithographs’, contain subtitles in parenthesis that are mostly long and look absurd. The images in the works look abstract, and the descriptive and detailed subtitles suggest what the artist meant the images to be, and how to see the abstract images in more specific ways. Basically the subtitles are something that could be associated with the images just like when we describe Rorschach images. They could be liberal and imaginary.

In fact, the way I use humour in my work is something that recently I am trying to understand. Because whilst some of my works have some sense of humour, usually some pessimism and absurdity underlie it. Anyway, if an artwork can communicate with a viewer, I hope that communication can be enjoyable.

**You worked alongside the STPI printmakers and printers to produce the works in the exhibition. How did you find this when compared with your usual process, which is mostly solitary?**

I usually want making works to be personal, and the behaviour of making to be by an individual. So yes, working in STPI with the production system is very different from my usual way. But technical aspects in art such as paper-making, and especially printing as image-making have been always fascinating to me. And I always admire professional technicians who can do things perfectly that I

cannot. The staff are all artists and professional technicians, and I enjoyed working with them a lot, watching their processes, and learning from them. It was a great experience.

**The Paper Wrapped sculptures see everyday domestic objects such as noodle cups and stain removers covered in grey paper pulp. How does this reposition the meaning of such objects?**

As the objects are wrapped, they showed their basic shapes without colours and other details. So some of the wrapped shapes were still recognizable, some of them were not, and some of them became abstract. Some objects were wrapped with simple compositions or combinations, or in more expressive ways. In any case, the identities of the objects remain since the actual objects are still in the pulp. This subject of the identities of objects and what we see in the shapes are the ideas on which this series was based. I liked the mixed identities of the works as objects and sculptures, and the change of impression and perception of 'what we see'. Simple differences in the working process led to variations of sculptural expressions. This is why I made many small works as a series.

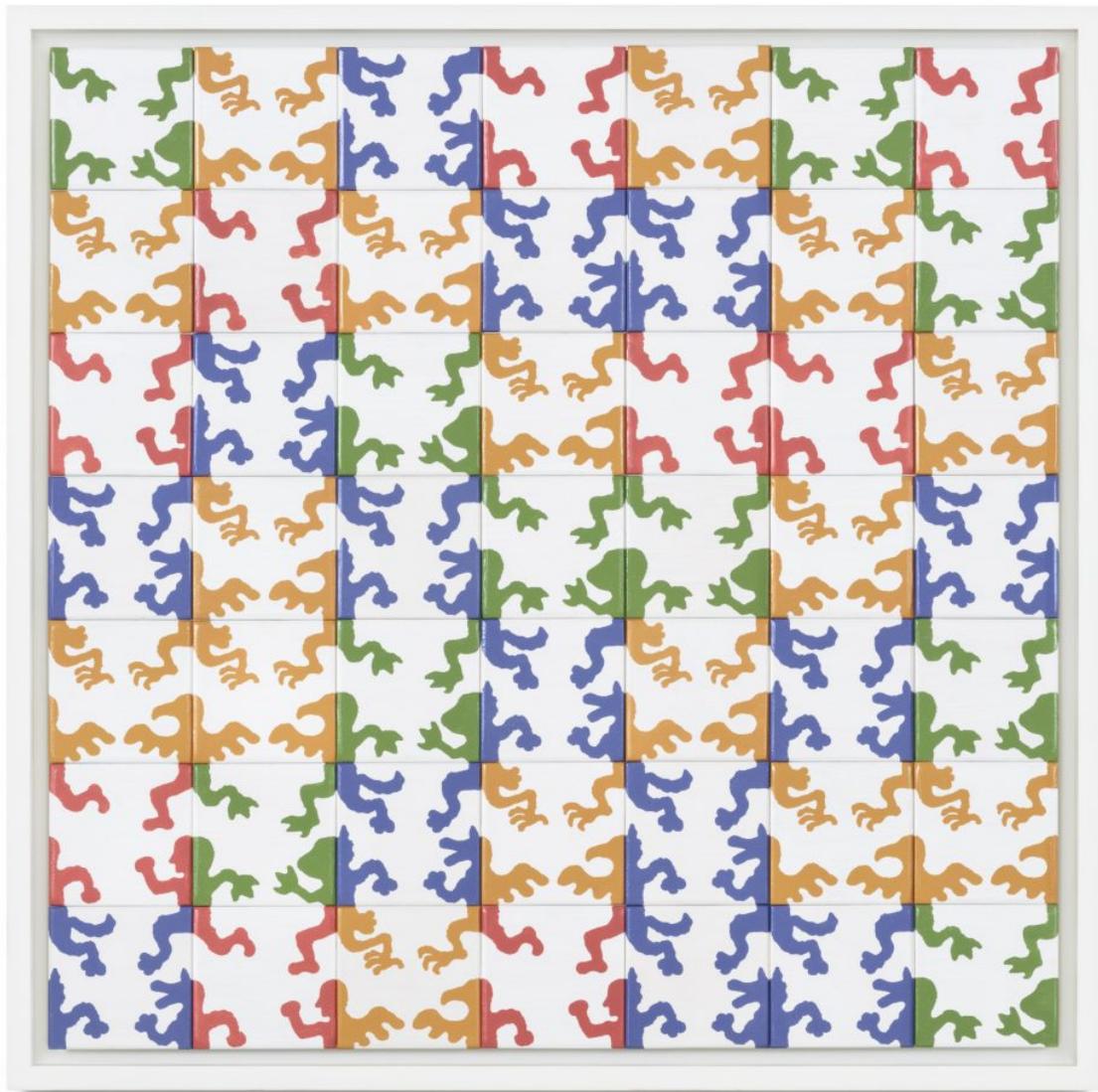
**Your architectural blueprint of an imaginary residential watchtower, whose soul purpose is for security guards to watch over one another, seems like an absurd version of Foucault's Panopticon. Can you talk about this work a little?**

I have worked on the series, 'Blueprints and Perspectives' since 2002. They are metaphorical descriptions of a society, specifically based on an absurdity and inhumanity that I have seen and felt since I was young. None of them are real, but I think they are not that much more absurd and irrational than many things that we find in the real world. I don't think that everything in human society is intelligent and reasonable. Being absurd might not be a favourable human nature, but it may be a part of destiny. Drawing each blueprint plan and perspective is to express how societies were planned and built part by part. And it describes the notional and absurd reasons or intentions without really caring about the humanity of individuals. Thus, the works are kind of violent. I feel like they are landscapes of a primitive dictatorial world.

*'Random Life' runs until 17 June at STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery, Singapore. All images courtesy the artist and STPI.*



Untitled (One with a Coin), 2016, Kim Beom, Objects wrapped with pigmented paper pulp, abaca and cotton pulp on wooden base, H17 x W36 x D11 cm



Random Life (in Color), 2016, Kim Beom, Stencil on wooden tiles, 71 x 71 x 4 cm