

Forming Reality: The Making of the Real

Many elements go into the making of a Hyperrealist reality. In trying to analyze it one should be constantly aware that that reality is not made for the purpose of creating an imaginary reality. It is developed by the artist as means to an end of making comments on the reality the artist lives and operates in. That means that the visual work functions as a telling mirror allowing the artist to direct it at issues, ideas, emotions or any other elements of the artist's 'real' world. The better polished the mirror, the more telling it is. Debbie Han's mirrors are polished to perfection. One of the most intriguing elements in producing Han's "mirrors" is the distortion embedded in them, which makes one undergo an experience similar to that experienced in a distorted mirrors room – a fresh, distorted, yet fathomable and even amusing look at what one may call reality.

The gestures, the human interactions, the human scale and the poses of the female figures in the works all suggest reality and are registered as such, however, the "sculpturalization" of the figures clearly distances them from it. That distancing is enhanced by Han's treatment of time and place. Both dimensions stretch in all directions. In *Bowing Grace*, for example, Han photographed a Korean woman in a traditional bowing pose and "sculpturized" it in the form of a classical Greek marble sculpture. The time stretch is linear. The photo and the object are contemporary, the posture is a hundreds of years old tradition and the Western reference is many more hundreds of years earlier. The work manages to place Korean unique tradition, the female form, Western culture, history of art and aesthetics all in the same neutral space for the viewer to witness and participate in making the multitude of threads that connect and separate them.

Things get more complicated in a work like *Seated Three Graces*. Here both time and space seem to stretch and contract depending on which of their angles or elements are looked at. Here too, Han photographed Korean women in familiar poses, engaged in a common act and "sculpturized" them in the fashion of the classical Greek marble sculptures. However, the aesthetics are not classically Korean. The plump figures suggest Western contemporary and classical aesthetics of eras not coinciding with ancient Greece. The common conversational poses do not correlate well with the classical Greek sculptural poses either. More so, each individual pose takes from a different time and place. The figure on the left places her hand in a pose that may be the closest to traditional Greek sculptures, while the figure in the middle is seated in the pose of the Buddha or that of an Indian god, and the one on the right adopts the "thinking" pose of post-Romantic Europe.

Unlike Han's other works exhibited here, the three figures are seated in a "realistic space". Notice the shading of the ground, suggesting an actual three dimensional space, which is still devoid of any characteristics but it is not a black void as in the other works.

This is an exercise in control. By weaving the various elements the way she does in *Seated Three Graces*, Han manages, on the one hand, to force the suggested dimensions of time and place in her Hyperrealist environment to remain limited to the cultures and issues she wants to discuss, while, on the other hand, she succeeds in leaving vast conceptual fields elusive and open to richer and deeper readings and inputs of the viewer.

An excerpt from an essay "Hyperrealism and Conceptual Art - What you see is what you get?"

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