

# Wetterling Gallery

## “The Doubling of Reality”

### On the current works of the Korean artist SEO

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(Translation Michael S. Cullen)

In 2014, the Korean artist SEO, based in Berlin, took a significant turning point in her artistic work with a series of “Kalte Landschaften” (Cold landscapes) – eight laser-cut wall objects made of aluminum. Unexpectedly, SEO had changed the esthetic temperature – one no longer felt that she revered the works by Caspar David Friedrich and the German Expressionists.

But the artist had already taken a giant step – from the representational to abstraction, from the genre of traditional landscape painting to the landscape as a form of consciousness. She had replaced the scraps of rice paper with metal.

As in her prior work it was possible to recognize SEO’s draughtsmanship and her relationship with scenery. The creation of shadows by the wall objects had something picturesque about them. If you stepped back far enough there was actually the sense or feeling of spatial depth. It was easily possible to plunge into the waves against the noise of time, into a state of energy of perfectly balanced qualities.

The realities of the art have the advantages that one cannot expect to get definitive explanations from them. Given SEO’s different aesthetic orientations one must come to the realization that she is on both sides of any argument, that she has internalized them and that they have put a stamp on her painting – such as in a globally composed mixture of landscapes with mountains of Korea, with forests of China and rivers and streams from France. SEO has a big heart. Her impulses to try or do something new and experiencing contradiction are essential to her being.

In the concept of things being different are many components of things to come. SEO has reassembled them in images that bear witness to the coexistence of otherness. At a time that is characterized by unpredictability, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, the artist moves effortlessly between different times and places with methods of applied improvisation.

The works of 2015, from the series “Die Teilung der Unendlichkeit” (The division of Infinity), for example “Bergsee” (Mountain Lake),

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"Terrace n + 1", "Sprung ins Unendliche" (Jump to Infinity), "Getrennter Weg" (Separate Way), "Traumfeld" (Dream Box) in three versions), "Endloser Bogen" (Endless Bow) in two versions and a few smaller sizes are also a continued realignment of SEO's creations. SEO's core theme is the "alienation of the natural".<sup>1</sup> "By the increasing impact on the nature of technique, technology and information, man creates a growing constructivist reality in which the space for life and cultures and hitherto inexperienced relationships are accelerated", says SEO.<sup>2</sup>

That she mixes micro-differences within a work is known as a strategy. That SEO confronts such landscapes of agriculture, meadows and forests with modernistic architectural forms and lets representational passages collide firmly with geometric patterns - that marks a turnaround. "The content and visual aesthetic focus still remain for me here on an emotional and romantic level, even if I build (...) structurally very clear, almost severe compositions, perspectives and spaces," says Seo.<sup>3</sup>

The new images of 2016 have titles such as "Deine Sicht, mein Gefühl /Your vision, my emotion", "Die schwingenden Räume /The vibrating rooms", "Die wankende Säule / The faltering pillar" and "Distanz ist ein Gefühl/Distance is an emotion II".

Stronger than before, the computer aesthetic determines the visual division of space and the design of internal forms.

SEO summons things with a strong focus on the 'now'. Behind this is her certainty that emotion and inspiration in art are 'now' and mean presence. In a gesture of immediacy, SEO is the person who questions the established traditions by researching and questioning the unknown.

In an era of increasing digitization and hyperrealistic worlds in computer games and animation films, SEO positions herself at an intersection, at which expectations are stimulated to make everything new and at the same time to remain old. The audience may be surprised, but should not be alarmed. This is pretty much the opposite of what advanced composers, sixty years ago, would have wanted to reach in musical experiments with the aid of computers. But we no longer live in the era of avant-garde provocation and SEO rather offers us a pictorial space, defined by some mild artificiality, in which the present is processed scenically,

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<sup>1</sup> SEO. Die Teilung der Unendlichkeit (idea, sketch), November 30, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Dito.

<sup>3</sup> Dito.

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physically and as an eye irritant. Commercially tamed standard applications of image processing techniques and SEO's perception of time as a mostly static setting flow together in the picture.

On the whole, they turn into complex images, charged with the energy of wildly framed carpets, which communicate the phenomenon of current dispersal of identity, movement, direction and space. SEO does not see the virtual reality, which the computer can invent as a deceptively real template for a picture design, as threatening the core of visual events. The rationalist dressing of modern architecture serves her in the works which emerged in the early months of 2016, as a necessary 'cool' attention grabber to get the viewers within 'moved' subject relations into a conflict between critical rationality and rational criticism. Computer aided design can just as easily serve deconstruction. The desired aesthetic effect is instability, the existential threat of the past.

SEO's artistic career describes a piece of recent cultural history, in which the technological revolution has almost completely dissolved the boundaries between reality and fiction. The painter with the Korean background creates visuals fact from fantasy. In her current work, two times or attitudes collide with each other, one based in nature, and one bound in a mathematically economic fixed view of matters.

That this balancing act, accomplished at various levels, is complicated and sometimes feels schizophrenic, perhaps contributes to the actual strength SEO's recent works.

By not eliminating these pitfalls, but in presenting them with sobriety - in coloring engendering feelings of dizziness, and in the choice of materials - acrylics and paper collage - she puts the pictorial rhythm into a condition of euphonious disorientation.