

Light, Space, and Zen – Robert C. Morgan

Space and light are the primary concerns in the paintings of Wan Kim. Taken from the physical world, his architectonic forms allude to ways in which conditions of the universe interact with one another. While the speed of light is constant, the manner in which light functions in relation to space is variable. For example, cinematic light projected on a screen functions differently than light emanating from an incandescent bulb. Alternatively, the still invocation of light on the surface of a painting is different from the way light defines objects in three-dimensional space.

Rather than objects seen from all sides, Kim's paintings intend to be perceived from a frontal piece of view. Given this condition of viewing, his paintings create a feeling of light within the illusion of space. His grasp of this phenomenon is a relative one that directs our focus to the Zen moment, the interactive moment, where suspense and stillness are distilled through focusing on the present.

Kim works with compressed corrugated surfaces on which acrylic paint is applied. Within these constraints, he articulates a geometry of interlocking forms that suggest views of urban architecture. In his recent *Lightscapes* (2012), the appearance of light is dependent on the illusion of space, just as space is intrinsically bound to the manner in which the geometry of form is perceived. Two paintings from this series glimpses of the sky and sea, as if the viewer were standing within a constructed building looking out or through to somewhere else.

Other paintings from this series include square and vertical formats with intersecting facets of architecture coming from various angles. One reveal a diagonal streak of light descends over a rhythmical dark façade, which two others show complex passageways with hints of light or a view of the exterior. Generally, these paintings move from dark to intermediate gray tones. There are two others in the recent *Lightscape* series that register effects of primary color. Both constructed and painted in vertical formats, both works suggest a place higher up on the exterior of a building or composite section of more than a single building that appears physically inaccessible unless one were peering through a window.

A more cunning and furtive painting included in the *Lightscape* series is a painting showing a dark floor and wall where a small opening appears at the bottom. The opening appears to hold no particular function other than as a passageway for a small pet, an animal of some sort. In addition, this aperture brings light from the adjacent room into the partially perceivable room in front.

In general, the *Lightscapes* relate directly to an earlier series of work from 2006 – 08. This includes a painting with a strong diagonal composition, titled *Gate* (2007), that articulates an extended exterior corner of a building, along with another more intimate painting of an interior corner with a cubicle form of light, titled *Space 1*

(2006). In each case, these paintings serve as harbingers for later works that carry a more refined aspect. There are two vertical paintings from 2007, titled *Waterfall*, in which a seam of light descends through each painting. In one case, the seam is broken and picked up on another level, suggesting a view of Yosemite Falls that I fondly recall from my teen years as a camper in Yosemite Valley. In addition, there are two undated square paintings, one called *You and I (Black and White)*, where the light alternates with darkness; and another, *You and I (Love)*, in which the two halves are more or less overlaid upon one another, painted in an intense monochrome red.

One of the most deductive and complex paintings in the exhibition, *Touch the Memory* (2010), is a densely painted red surface over the familiar corrugated strips of compressed cardboard. This painting implies a tactile resonance that penetrates deeply into the square surface. Here the Zen idea that Wan Kim describes in his statement of intent comes into the foreground of perception. This work congeals and expresses a rarified moment in which stillness and ecstatic solitude seem to prevail.