

Ingo Baumgarten: just painting

Julie Kang, Gallery JJ, Director

"Cities are a collection of memories, desires, and signs." -Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities-

Gallery JJ is pleased to present *just painting*, an exhibition of recent works by Ingo Baumgarten speculating everyday aesthetics and culture through various architectural elements. He paints such scenes from the cities with specific geometric composition and sensible touch, carefully revealing their humble beauty overlooked in the routine involuntarily and socio-cultural memories buried in our hectic life.

He has established a distinct artistic position through many exhibitions by leading institutions worldwide, including China, Germany, Japan, and the United States. Since 2009, he has been living and working in Seoul, observing architecture imbued with the socio-cultural context of Korea and presenting its visual phenomena through his unique formal language. It conveys formal attributes from the spatiality and temporality of such respective built environments. His paintings are beautiful and calming at first glance, but they also reflect many stories of the cities he experienced and the people within. The whole or partial image of a house or other structure on his canvas is thus a metaphor for society.

On view includes drawings along with his recent paintings of the buildings in Korea, and German townscape and transit system. While focusing on the design, structural function, and social implications of the structures that shape the everyday cityscape, his perspective now strives more on aesthetic and emotional than before. Architecture is a social construct that stipulates the lives that dwell in it, and thus his work ultimately is about the projection of life and its pictorial metaphor. This exhibition presents a new perspective on our everyday urban life and questions our cultural recollections.

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The images of stairs, balconies, and corners on the canvas are familiar elements in our everyday life. He observes and collects these entities daily. Peripheral things that have been neglected as a backdrop are brought forward as the subject matter in his work. We can perceive the sensibility and nuance inherent to the structure and color used in such cultural clash in eclectic architecture - their heterogeneity and incongruity, tradition and novelty, and variation and permanence. It is a familiar yet unfamiliar scene. He explores something behind, between the visible and the invisible, to reconstruct it for communicating with the viewers.

His has been interested in the details in architecture and object for years. For instance, cultural exploration through interior objects in Portugal in 1994, photographic documents of Tokyo streetscape in 1998, German townscape in the early 2000s, and urban scenes in Korea until now. His paintings of architecture and culture hitherto are not just personal thoughts but also an authentic record.

Through ordinary buildings or their elements, he seeks the identity of the respective society and the narrative inherent in its built environment. He looks at architecture from 'urban anthropology' perspective, a study on the reciprocity between urban space and people. The form and color of architecture are essential factors in establishing an urban environment. They are the collective sentiment and cultural integration which he is fascinated to portray. He has experienced different cultures and customs in France, England, Japan, China, and now Korea which induces defamiliarization.

Architectural style changes over time by different ideologies. In his early days in Seoul, he was fascinated by the unusual detached single-family homes, so-called *yangok* – an eclectic architecture combining the language of Western modernism with Korean conventions – that represented the rapidly changing conditions of the modern lifestyle in Korea. These houses that have guaranteed prosperity amid Korea's rapid development since the 1960s now decline in value and vanish into history. His work thus evokes such memory and experience from the viewers in whichever context they come from.

Whether it is the refurbished buildings in Hongdae area and Insa-dong, or the old blocks of Seogyo-dong stained by twilight, there is a world in which we live in such a structural frame. It contains our emotions and narratives. Throughout history, architecture proposed a better future and utopian ideas such as Mies van der Rohe's polished modern house, for instance. Yona Friedman famously said it is with the people, by the people, for the people. The forms of columns, roofs, or even detailed ornaments all reflect many contexts of each epoch - society's ambition, convention, trend, economy, and technology. We can read these latent or ignored contexts by paying attention to the details in our built environment. Baumgarten's findings and paintings have become a record and memory of the vanishing architectural style of an era and the essence of living.

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His painting employs rigorous use of dividing lines like geometric abstraction and a wealth of colors. In the horizontal and vertical compositions, diagonals layer secondary rhythm. His work begins by looking at parts rather than the whole structure. These magnified parts that align with pertinent proportion and angle on the picture plane derive abstract attributes from such concrete subjects. Though they appear planar, they embody a certain depth different from the emulation of

reality and take a form of synecdoche in which a part infers the whole. His meticulous framing turns the familiar into the abstract and unacquainted. The symmetrical and balanced townscape of Friedrichshafen and Berlin subway station scenes emerge as unrealistic images of indwelling silence accentuating its emptiness and human absence. His painting evokes magical reality like Wes Anderson's film, for instance, through a wall with a delicate bloom, tinged by sunset.

The harmony of tender colors plays a crucial role in his work in which they constitute a sense of time. The expression of color is ultimately about a variation of light and shades apprising both form and texture. When we look at architecture, we tend to focus on its form primarily, but the color on its surface - manifested by light and shades - underscores its formal properties. Ancient Greek temples, the origin of Western architecture, originally had rich and vivid colors. They now appear as pure and idealistic white structures because most surfaces have worn off the pigment. Besides painting, the use of color in architecture has always been essential and not collateral. It is also a catalyst to narrate forms. Many works on view have subtitles regarding color such as *untitled (pink-yellow structures, Busan)* and *untitled (green-blue house, Busan)*. Although the linearly divided color planes may seem cold and crisp, they surprisingly unroll a warm sensibility. It comes from his painterly interpretation rather than replicating the actual colors, in which the scene is infused by the changing atmospheric light. Its trace is durational. Light is temporal, and the color is spatial, according to Deleuze. The form is emphasized not only by the relation among colors but also by light, shade, and time. Baumgarten's paintings instill texture and tactility of light in an ambiance of the sunset; for instance, the colors manifested by its obliquely falling glow on a building and the reflected light among adjacent surfaces. These moments are ephemeral but also eternal.

Untitled (roof windows) and *Untitled (shadow on blinds)* exhibit the structure and rhythm of the object much boldly in light and shadow. His intuition and artistic sensibility project here to determine color and tactility. Through the reconstruction of composition, proportion, and color, he revisits aesthetic experience and value we are unaware of in daily life. As a result, though his work often crops on details, they are emotional and *malerisch* rather than realistic and descriptive. It embodies a pictorial world, distancing itself from the custom of seeing objectively. His paintings remind us that elusive small things and the in-betweens sustain our life, and the familiar world we live in is also ambiguous and unusual.