

## In-Sun Kim *Encased*

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## In-Sun Kim

CORINNA GHAZNAVI

### Encased

Art from recycled material or made from garbage is hardly a new concept in contemporary art practice. Often, the work is quirky, its original materials recognizable, and the viewer is left to marvel at the artist's innovation and the potential discovered in what is otherwise considered useless material. More often than not, recycling has a political aspect as well. And both are generally apparent in the final art object exhibited.

In-Sun Kim makes objects out of paper. Specifically, she makes functional furniture out of newspaper that she has layered, glued, and layered again to attain a solid and workable surface. She mixes graphite into the glue, and when she has a sufficiently thick block of hardened glued paper she cuts it, sands it down, and then proceeds to use it as building mate-

rial. The results include a table, a bench, and a finely crafted cupboard.

From across the gallery one initially perceives these objects to be made of stone — such densely layered paper and graphite resembles the surface of marble. The colour is a bluish stone hue giving way to a paler beige and grey, and the solidity of Kim's design further suggests materials that can weather the outdoors. Close up, one realizes it cannot be stone, for the surface has a fine grain, attained through sanding the layers, making it clear that it is wood we are looking at. Upon touching the pieces one finds that it is indeed a solid hard carpenter's surface.

There is a beautiful circularity in this when one understands the artist's process: used paper recycled back into functional wood that incorporates both the grain of its original material and traces of its purpose as paper: bits of the

original newsprint appear in certain areas, although generally unreadable for being so fully integrated into the block as a whole.

Although Kim makes her work from recycled paper and then transforms this into functional objects, the sculptures are art objects nonetheless, and not design. The beauty of this work is that it never loses its conceptual and aesthetic quality. Working specifically with newsprint means that Kim uses a mass-produced throwaway product that is both ubiquitous and essential in our culture. The valuable information offered by the papers immediately on publication becomes outdated almost the moment one has finished reading it. Beyond news one also accesses politics, theory, literature, and advertisements. Newspapers offer a density of information that, paradoxically, rarely penetrates the surface. They are seldom kept or re-read, and the cheapness of their production leaves our fingers ink-stained. Yet Kim somehow manages to compress all this information and its implications into the objects she creates, objects that are, as she points out, as ubiquitous as the paper itself. Furniture surrounds us: we sit, lie, and chop vegetables on it. We eat, work at, and place objects on furniture that can be crafted, bought, designed, or found in the streets on garbage day. Kim sees furniture as an apt metaphor for life as we live it: it surrounds and supports us and our things, and defines the spaces of our life and work.

Kim further combines the arduous aspect of women's labour and the traditionally male art of carpentry. Like many contemporary women artists, she makes something out of almost nothing. Equally, she is engaged in a task both mundane and meticulous

that requires endless hours of repeating the same gestures. This long process of layering and gluing the paper together becomes a repetitive and meditative task for the artist. She claims to thus incorporate her own musings and emotions into the very material that she creates from newsprint. Beginning with a fragile thing, she slowly creates something strong and durable, playing with the tensions between the ephemeral and the solid, the reflective and the physical. When the task of building up her material is complete, she saws, sands, and carpenters her work together. The undeniably solid piece that is the end product of her labours finally emerges as a culmination of thoughts, words, remnants, and mixed media to encompass life itself.

In-Sun Kim has created a soothing and contemplative space for the viewer in the gallery by placing these simple and straightforward objects around the room. They offer solid surfaces on which to sit or to walk around. The intricate patterns that have emerged or been erased in the process of sanding offer a surface that is serviceable as well as meditative. The viewer may reflect philosophically on the layers that she has built up in the process of creating these pieces: one goes through stages of discovery as one sees the newsprint, the discernible text fragments, the marbled colouring, the wood grain. The artist expresses her interest in finding metaphors for life, and compels the viewer to consider the full circle presented in the metamorphosis of tree to paper to wood, of words to material to object. Accompanying life, invariably, is fragility and therefore death: reusing and resurrecting newsprint in the way that she does, Kim both mirrors life and transcends it. ←



IN-SUN KIM,  
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Photo : Zack Pospieszynski

