



Installable. 2007. Courtesy: Alison Jacques Gallery, London and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York.

BY BARBARA CASAVECCHIA

Landscapes. Sets. Fragments. Stories. Haikus. A single word, implying a whole universe, could perhaps sum up the installations by Ian Kiaer (born in '71 in London, where he still lives) at Tanya's GAM through January. But a word is not enough, because his projects are as layered and polysemic as hypertexts, mingling Bosch, Kenzo Tange, Watteau, Archigram, LeDoux, Korean manga and architectural utopias.



(A) Ian Kiaer, *Bruegel project: survival balloon*, 2007. Courtesy: the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York. Photo: Fabian Birgfeld, TECTONICS.

BARBARA CASAVECCHIA *First things first. How did you structure your exhibition at GAM in Turin?*

IAN KIAER Around three projects that I began at different stages, and also some side works. It's the first time I've been able to see them work together. They are *Bruegel Project / Casa Malaparte* (1999), first presented at Manifesta 3 in Ljubljana; *Hakp'o dang (Black)* (2001), based on the life of Yang Paengson, an exiled 16th-century Korean scholar of Confucian paintings, and the experience of living in contemporary Seoul – two seemingly irreconcilable conditions; and *Scheerbart project* (2005), based on the novelist, architectural critic and science fiction fantasist Paul Scheerbart, whose manifesto of glass architecture influenced many of Bruno Taut's visionary drawings for his volume of Alpine Architecture.

Why did you choose Bruegel as a starting point?

IAN KIAER Bruegel originally interested me because of his trip through the Alps to Italy, which took him to Rome via Naples. He painted a naval battle set in its



gulf (1560, Galleria Doria-Pamphili), near where Casa Malaparte was built in the '90s. At the time I was reading Malaparte's descriptions of the city and it seemed they both responded to a particular sense of panorama.

An intentional Italian reference? Are there any others?

IAN KIAER I've recently made a work involving a curtain and mirrors... I love Mollino, and I visited his house in Turin – a house that has not so much to do with dwelling, but rather is an artifice, a set.

Your installations seem to work as theatres of vision, combining fragments and cross-references. In Japanese, the word "ma" (space) is often used to define the em-



ptiness surrounding an object, the visual "interval" around it, like the silence before or after a sound. "Ma" is not created by making a composition of elements, but rather is the thing that takes place in the imagination of the person who experiences them. Does this Eastern concept inform your strategies in any way?

IAN KIAER Perhaps the Korean equivalent for "ma" is "pung-su" (wind and water), a kind of ancient Chinese geomancy. One can see it in paintings, in the way a roof of a house is placed in relation to a mountain. There's always a tension, both visual and metaphorical, that translates into a philosophical position.

Why Korea?

IAN KIAER I had a long residency in Seoul in 2001 and my wife is Korean, so I go back to it all the time.

In her essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" (1970), Rosalind Krauss

claimed that "sculpture itself has become a kind of ontological absence, the combination of exclusions", a category resulting from the addition of the non-landscape to the not-architecture. Why do you use architectural models?

IAN KIAER I remember reading that Nikolai Tarabukin dismissed Rodchenko's *Pure Red Colour*, calling it opaque and stupid and stuck in representation. It was an early attack by an avant-garde writer on the autonomy of painting and more generally the art object. He called for artists to enter the factories and begin a new form of collective production. That was as early as 1922. It seemed so much of what interested me about painting was to do with a kind of redundancy and the notion of the model helped me to play with this. The model involves aspiration and possibility, but also is about representation and return, and works in the space between more defined forms of practice.

Among the subjects of your research, one finds the stories of exiled intellectuals, working out of the mainstream. You often use very fragile and unstable materials. Are you trying to counterbalance the big ego, muscular rhetoric of architecture?

IAN KIAER I am interested in how things are undermined as a possible quality and critique. I just recently began a project based on Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, whose characters look down on a European landscape from above, not from the viewpoint of a Hegelian confidence, but while reclining, in a position of sickness and weakness. To me, this makes the aerial view redeemable. I'm interested in how most tragedies occur through an excess of confidence.

By making fairly small models, you often put viewers in the position of dominating the aerial view. How does scale come into play?

IAN KIAER That's not always so. In Turin, for instance, some works are bigger than the viewers. But I suppose scale is another issue that has to do with the model: you put it on a table, which immediately becomes something else. I think it's important to have a check between the imaginary and the matter-of-factness of the ready-made.

Do you always use the original materials, or do you re-create the installation with what's at hand?

IAN KIAER I tend to use the original materials, but whenever I bring a work into relation with another, it's difficult to see beforehand how it will evolve. For instance, this time I am adding a new work to the *Scheerbart project*. All these processes are open, and there's always a need for improvisation, readjusting, re-hanging things. Very few works of mine are presented as they have been in the past.

DI BARBARA CASAVECCHIA

Paesaggi. Set. Frammenti. Racconti. Haiku. Si potrebbero riassumere così, in una sola parola-mondo, le installazioni di Ian Kiaer (nato nel '71 a Londra, dove vive), fino alla fine di gennaio alla GAM di Torino. Ma una parola non basta, perché i suoi "progetti" sono stratificati e polisemici come ipertesti, dove s'incrociano Bosch, Kenzo Tange, Watteau, Archigram, LeDoux, i manga coreani e le utopie dell'architettura.



BARBARA CASAVECCHIA *Per prima cosa, come hai strutturato la tua mostra alla GAM di Torino?*

IAN KIAER La mostra è strutturata intorno a tre progetti, iniziati in momenti diversi, e ad alcune opere secondarie. È la prima volta che vedo che effetto fanno, insieme, questi tre lavori. Si tratta di *Bruegel project / Casa Malaparte* (1999), presentato per la prima volta a Manifesta 3, a Ljubljana; *Hakp'o dang (black)* (2001), basato sulla biografia di Yang Paengson (un esiliato coreano del Cinquecento, studioso di dipinti confuciani) e sulle esperienze di vita nella Seul contemporanea – due condizioni apparentemente inconciliabili; e *Scheerbart project* (2005), incentrato sulla figura del romanziere, critico d'architettura e maestro della fantascienza Paul Scheerbart, il cui manifesto sull'architettura di vetro influenzò molti dei disegni visionari di Bruno Taut per il suo volume sull'architettura alpina.

Perché hai scelto Bruegel come punto di partenza?

IAN KIAER In principio, Bruegel ha suscitato il mio interesse a causa del suo viaggio in Italia, che lo portò ad attraversare le Alpi per poi giungere fino a Roma e a Napoli. Egli dipinse una battaglia navale, ambientata nel Golfo di Napoli (1560, Galleria Doria-Pamphili, Roma), proprio vicino al luogo in cui, negli anni Trenta, fu costruita Casa Malaparte. All'epoca stavo leggendo le descrizioni della città fatte da Malaparte e mi è sembrato che sia lui sia Bruegel avessero una particolare percezione del panorama.

Il riferimento all'Italia è intenzionale? Ve ne sono altri?

IAN KIAER Recentemente ho realizzato un'opera in cui vi erano una tenda e degli speechi. Adoro Mollino e ho visitato la sua casa a Torino – una casa che non sembra tanto un'abitazione, quanto un artificio, una scenografia.

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