

**Over and Out with Kim Keever**  
**Catalogue Essay by Dominique Nahas**

That's it. Kim Keever has gone over the edge. Just look at the bottom of the image *Rain Shadow* and you'll see what I mean. Here in all of its glory you can detect the edge of the earth, the thin layers of the earth's plate open for inspection and speculation. A look at the surface of this endless deserted mountainscape reveals its paper and cardboard underpinnings, which mine-strip the aura of Authenticity. In its place, Keever substitutes the elegiac Real Artifice. Keever enjoys producing tantalizing nature images of near-transcendental remove. He likes the challenge of creating miniature controlled environments. He has used enormous water-filled aquariums to create his scenarios of lost time. Now he has veered off into other territories as well. He makes his own sound recordings, piano riffs that move us through his videos. He uses a moving panorama and a wall-box (*Cave Piece*) to explore space and place. The resultant images are as vexing as they are beautifully contrived. To begin with, it is hard to pinpoint exactly what jars us in his images. They are suggestive of another time and place, a mixture of the real and the imaginary. Yet they appear to be more eerily real than not. It is difficult (even if you are taken in by Keever's deception) to come up with a plausible geographic location from where the fictitious images were presumably taken. There are very few normative cues given other than the suggestion of a particular terrain; all of Keever's images are unpopulated. Keever, the Duke of Deception, is immensely pleased. He revels in these conundrums.

We are a million miles away in Keever's universes but his loosely crafted paper and plaster sequences are inches away from his camera's lens. We are also dwelling and indwelling within Keever's artificial paradises. His miniature environments allow us on one level to dream and to be submerged in reverie where we suspend disbelief. When we come down to reality it is partly due to our own senses but it is also due to Keever's sensibility and gentle play which invite us to question our most convincing proofs for the existence of some primordial beauty. We cherish perfection all the more while we see its collapse. In his *Alchemy of Imagination* essay, Gaston Bachelard refers to the "law of ambivalence" which sets into play the movement of the imagination. He writes,

"There are profound and durable ambivalences inherent in the fundamental matters which material imagination draws upon. This psychological property is so constant that we can formulate its converse as a basic law of imagination: a matter to which the imagination cannot give twofold life, cannot play the psychological role of a fundamental substance. A matter which does not elicit a psychological ambivalence cannot find its poetic double which allows endless transpositions. It is necessary to have a double participation - a participation of desire and fear, participation of good and evil, peaceful participation of black and white for the material element to involve the entire soul. In the realm of imagination there is no value without polyvalence. The ideal image must seduce us through all of our senses and draw us beyond the sense which is most clearly committed."

Keever's models exist to make illusions and images. He wants us to enter in a state of suspension, Bachelard's ambivalent state which counts for nothing and counts for everything. The poetic double here is Keever's sense of time: his landscapes stage both a desire for immediacy and a sense that the moment is always behind or ahead of us. If there is rapture in Keever's work it is rapture in the sense that there is a type of divine madness at play in Keever's vision. There is a delicate interweaving, a gentle and insistent teasing of possibilities through visual incongruities that extends outward, reaches back and pulls you into its grasp, like a gently persuasive and irremediably insistent voice.

There is a sensation of being swept in and then away by the artworks' multi-faceted qualities. "Values become engulfed in miniature, and miniature causes men to dream," writes Bachelard. The polyvalent dreams Kever presents for our inspection are photographs and videos and little magic boxes set into walls where universes unfurl before our eyes. Those places consist of sweeping panoramas and far away scenes that are usually void of any real life. The subjects are the terrains themselves, the roseate skies, a nimbus of the faraway and the primordial. Alternately Kever keeps our minds off the idea of earthly time itself, whether primordial or futuristic, by suggesting planetary life on some other planet. I suppose the imaginary is always at play in one way or another in Kever's worlds. His fascination with geology and natural processes and evolutionary functions is an entry point for him and for us. His speculations on biologic adaptability and on first causes always hover just under the surface of his work. Those speculations about our ecosystem and our abuse of it and the minute spec of time that we inhabit on the earth since its formation seem to pervade his work. His deliberate ambiguity in his choice of terrain (extra-terrestrial or not) compels us to think of his work as the framing of the big question: is there something bigger than just us out there? For Kever to raise speculations on the existence of other living planets, coterminous with our own (or having preceded our own earth's existence or possibly forming viable living conditions after our own planet's demise) invites further speculations on the potential of art to promote social change. If there is a more direct political aspect to the artist's work it is a double-barreled one: to get us thinking about our role and place in Nature and to dwell a bit on its fragility, and on ours. What is moving and poetic with Kever's work is that through the obvious intensity of his fixation on creating miniature universes which he carefully controls and manipulates he recalls for us all our first inklings of what it meant to play and to create and to control our creations through play. We were once, as children, always lost - lost in the space of our own inner spaces, through play's reverie. It is this reverie that Kim Kever revisits through the making of his own work. It is this reverie that he wants us to share in and to participate in, if only for a while.

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