

# SUNG HWAN KIM

Kathy Noble introduces  
Sung Hwan Kim's new  
film *Temper Clay*, part of  
the first major commission  
for the Tanks

'To temper clay' is a line from William Shakespeare's *King Lear*. It is also an expression used to describe modifying something, or creating the desired consistency of multiple forms. In this sense, Sung Hwan Kim's new film *Temper Clay* addresses what 'form' might mean within moving image. Not only in terms of the imagery taking place on a flat screen in front of us, but also how this is moulded and choreographed by framing and cutting, and how it can then be sculpted through layered sound.

Shot in Seoul, South Korea, where Kim was born and grew up, the film juxtaposes his parents' flat in the Hyundai apartment complex with the family's countryside home, which was built with the intention that they would retire to it, but they never did. The complex was created by the Hyundai Group (*hyundai* means modern in Korean), in collaboration with the government, on landfill at a reclaimed site that was previously water, transforming it into one of the most valuable areas in the country. The development became a standard model for housing design as buildings mirroring it appeared throughout Korea.

In *Temper Clay* each space Kim has constructed acts as a stage set for a series of choreographed actions that he has conceived. These address female relationships – exploring love, patriarchy, domesticity and success – where parallel experiences from different cultures, places and times collide and interweave. Inspired by Agnès Varda's treatment of Jean-Luc Godard in his cameo role in her film *Cleo from 5 to 7* 1962, and Shakespeare's examination of the daughters' rule versus their father's in *King Lear*, the artist also interviewed his mother, aunt and other family members while researching the work.

Kim worked collaboratively with the American composer and musician David Michael DiGregorio (also known as dogr), alongside non-actors, creating a series of situations in which ideas were played out as short sequences of movement, interlaced by sharp editing, forming a kind of filmic poem. Shot in high definition black-and-white video, the sharpness of the image negates the possible nostalgia perceived through this stylistic choice. Sound and music were layered over this footage during the edit, forming a direct conversation between the visual and aural experience. *Temper Clay* is a highly affecting and emotional film, where strange human gestures – such as burning a paper sculpture on a girl's face – are coupled with everyday acts that become repetitive 'dance' movements, such as wiping up a spillage or constructing human architectures. While the artist worked with his family and incorporated autobiographical details, the piece does not become a documentary. Instead, the two houses form a dichotomy of landscape and architecture that also allude to social and economic oppositions. Kim retains an intimate view



Still from Sung Hwan Kim's *Temper Clay* 2012, Fireplace

Sung Hwan Kim (South Korea, b 1975) lives and works in New York. He studied architecture at Seoul National University, followed by a BA in Mathematics and Art at Williams College, Williamstown, in 2000, a Master of Science in Visual Studies at MIT Cambridge in 2003 and a residency at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam from 2004 to 2005. Recent solo exhibitions include those at Witte de With, Rotterdam (2009), Haus der Kunst, Munich (2010), Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland (2011) and Queens Museum, New York (2011)

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of the spatial patterns of the buildings and the psychological traces of the relationships that have occurred within them.

In works such as *In The Room* 2006–9 and *Dog Video* 2006 – which is incorporated in his new installation for the Tanks – he returns to the concept of the 'room', be it the literal intimacy of a bedroom or viewing the entire city conceptually as a communal room. For Kim, each work forms part of a longer-term project, where one leads to the next, and ideas, movements, people and places form a 'language' that could be described as an abstract form of story-telling. As such, each installation he creates usually incorporates both new and old work, coming together as a spatial 'drawing', using plywood structures, mirrors, chalk, video and carpet to form a total 'image' within the space. Here, *Temper Clay* is the focal point in an installation that experiments with 'doubles', both architecturally and by creating optical illusions with mirrors and light. Kim includes the videos *From the Commanding Heights...* 2007, a work interspersing the story of his Hyundai apartment with that of the rumoured affair of a Korean actress with a South Korean dictator, *Dog Video*, which plays with what it might mean to live as dog and master or father, and *Washing Brain and Corn* 2010, inspired by the poem *Leichen-Wäsche (Corpse-Washing)* by Rainer Maria Rilke, for which Kim worked with his niece.

Although clearly choreographed and staged, Kim's art is filled with raw emotion conveyed through music, sound and image. *Temper Clay* begins with a highly romantic scene of clouds fading in and out of each other in the sky, as if a storm is about to strike, which reaches a climax of thunder before cutting sharply to daylight. Through multiple yet simple means and materials, his works form a magical, dreamlike whole.