



NEW RELEASE 2024

Seunggu Kim *Better Days*

Texts by Simon Bainbridge, Seunggu Kim
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A Perspective on South Korea's Balance of Work and Leisure

Over the past forty years, South Korea's economy has developed rapidly, with various consequences. As well as long working hours, many Koreans only take half of their vacation, and due to lack of travel time they mostly spend them at home.

At the same time, the South Korean population is aging, the society is characterized by a hierarchy determined by age and social status. Seunggu Kim shows us the special South Korean vacation culture of urban leisure facilities in his balanced image compositions, but also focuses on how people deal with the challenges in a country full of contrasts.

His photographs visualize people's fast-paced lifestyle and community-based trust, and he shows South Koreans adapting to their situation and enjoying themselves. The series *Better Days* received the Ilwoo Photography Award 2023.

From the text *Better Days* by **Simon Bainbridge**—editor, writer, educator, and former Head of Content at Magnum Photos as well as former Editorial Director of the British Journal of Photography:

What is remarkable about Kim's panoramas is the consistency of his elevated point of view, rendering people and places as architectural models. In the complex networks of pathways and boundaries, we see how we are shaped by our environment. He draws our attention to the outer edges to show us the workings of things. And in many of the pictures, the spectacle itself is absent, or peripheral. At a cherry blossom festival in Gwangmyeong, we see crowds converging from all directions upon a small amphitheatre. Yet we are presented with a rear view of the stage facade and a cluster of service tents, the nearest of which opens to reveal bored security staff sat around a table, indifferent to the focus of everyone else's attention.

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From the *Artist's Statement* by **Seunggu Kim**:

The individual leisure activities in the photographs in Better Days are clustered around this foundation of 'pragmatism' and 'community'-orientated individualism.' The Korean' order of coexistence', the communal values that refer to and complement each other, are firmly entrenched in a long historical narrative. Ordinary leisure activities, chosen by individuals, are gathered in a single square frame, expanded and arranged into dozens or hundreds of moments, forming multi-layered relationships and coexisting.

Seunggu Kim, a graduate of Korea National University of Arts and Sangmyung University, has specialized in photography and visual arts. His work adeptly balances unnatural elements within the photographic frame, providing revealing insights into the complexities of our daily lives. His oeuvre focuses on unraveling the intricate fabric of Korean society by observing various elements such as urban and suburban life, leisure activities, and climate. Through his observations, he illuminates how the core and periphery, tradition and modernity, spiritual values, and material desires intersect, intertwine, and evolve within the fabric of Korean social structures.

Seunggu Kim has held over ten solo exhibitions, including at Filter Space in Chicago and The Korea Society in New York, and has participated in numerous group exhibitions worldwide, such as at the Center for Creative Photography in Arizona and Fotografiska in New York. Among his awards are the Ilwoo Photography Award for Photographer of the Year (2023) and the Young Photographer's Portfolio award at the Hanmi Museum (2022). His works are included in major collections, such as the Pushkin Museum in Moscow and the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea.

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