



Miru Kim, *Glenwood pipe stretch*, 2007. Digital C-print, 30 x 45 inches, edition of 6, 20 x 30 inches, edition of 10. Courtesy of the artist.



Miru Kim, *Nursing home perched*, 2007. Digital C-print, 30 x 45 inches, edition of 6, 20 x 30 inches, edition of 10. Courtesy of the artist.

NAKED CITY SPLEEN

Miru Kim is an artist living and working in New York City.

I've lived in urban environments all of my life, spanning three different continents. Over the last nine years, New York City has grown to be my favorite city. The island of Manhattan alone has such a dense, mysterious network of man-made structures soaring fifteen hundred feet aboveground and digging 800 feet below. The five boroughs of New York are connected by more than 35 bridges and tunnels that make the city a miraculous feat of engineering, architecture, and design, incomparable to any other. The anatomy of the city is complex, like that of a human being, both physically and psychologically.

Experiencing the feelings of alienation and anxiety in the city, I started to understand how many artists and authors indulged in the decadence of urban life and suffered from severe bouts of depression, inertia, and isolation, which the term *spleen* embodies. For me, one of the ways to escape the negative side of my surroundings was to visit desolate, hid-



Miru Kim, *Sugar factory crouching*, 2007. Digital C-print, 30 x 45 inches, edition of 6, 20 x 30 inches, edition of 10. Courtesy of the artist.

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den places in the city. Every time I stepped out of the ordinary aboveground spaces that were filled with anonymous crowds, I felt regenerated and unrestrained.

As I learned more about the abandoned parts of New York, not only the physical but also the psychological dimensions of the city became more exposed. These spaces—abandoned subway stations, tunnels, sewers, catacombs, factories, hospitals, and shipyards—started to

represent the subconscious of the city as if it were a sentient organism. I decided then to express through art my desire to feel not only the skin of the city, but also the inner layers of its intestines and veins, swarmed with miniscule life forms and filled with collective memories.

What has always fascinated me the most is discovering what dwells in these places, because I would see that there are living beings reclaiming these urban ruins.

I've come across more than just rats, also wild dogs, cats, and birds, and bees nesting in sugar barrels in abandoned sugar factories. I started envisioning imaginary beings that could inhabit these spaces, so I decided to include a live figure in the photographs I took. For my first attempt, I set my camera on a tripod, started the self-timer, and modeled myself. Clothing felt superfluous to the shots because it would make the figure too culturally specific, time-specific, and even too personal. Eventually it developed into a series with one character, because the performance aspect became meaningful.

As I momentarily occupy these forgotten spaces of the city, they are transformed from strange to familiar, from dangerous to playful, and from harsh to calm. □