

Youjin Yi

*Figments*

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Text by Christian Ganzenberg

What connects these fabulous human-animal creatures, these pillow-like sea cucumbers, with the landscapes of forests, meadows, waters, and clouds? Where is the common denominator in these dreamlike, seemingly carefully constructed images? The creatures sit under umbrellas, some wearing feather and wing dresses, others have octopus arms. For the most part, however, animals are in the foreground here: besides swallows, crows and dogs, you can also find shells, gas masks or paper-filling drop shapes. The ambiguous motifs seem like metaphors, countered by the sober clarity of the titles. They rev up our processes of perception and interpretation, only to plunge into the infinite depths of these interpretive trapdoors. Painterly worlds collide here as well, experimentalism on the one hand, culturally complex techniques on the other: handmade Hanji paper on classic canvas, papery emptiness on impasto color surfaces, delicate lines on dark contours; acrylic, oil, pastel, and graphite are found side by side without these paintings ever being overloaded.

These works are balancing acts held together by the artist's exceptional painting skills and personality. The artist's name is Youjin Yi, a skillful tightrope walker who knows how to naturally intertwine different poles. Thanks to her determined nature, she has acquired the ability to observe the permanent oscillations of her rope at every moment in order to place herself in the right relationship with the forces of her surroundings. From this position, she creates wonderfully polyphonic images that playfully combine the contradictory and divergent to create something new and unique.

Contrary to what the title of the exhibition wants to suggest, these works are not figments and fantasies. These pictures are (also) the expression of the artist's biographical imprint: Youjin Yi has recognized in the experience of the other what is originally her own, discovered her own identity through the experience of another. After the first 20 years of her life in South Korea, she came to Munich with only a few words of German in her luggage and has since not only made the language her own, but also studied a different understanding of painting. Her teachers here, especially Günther Förg and Leiko Ikemura, provide a fruitful counterpoint to her training in classical Korean painting with Park Dae-Sung.

Fortunately, this process of emancipation did not lead to a stunting of her self-image but resulted in a clarification of the heteronomy of her own identity. Here, identity is "how I determine what is important to me" (Charles Taylor). Youjin Yi has developed dreamlike self-evidence, both in her biographical change of worlds and in her art of painting, which interweaves disciplines: the ambiguity of her motifs also arises from the combination of graphic and painterly qualities. Her lines are not borders but rather openings, her figures are also surfaces, inside and outside can hardly be distinguished. Lying on the floor, these works are always created without sketches or drafts. This horizontal position allows Youjin Yi to draw solely from her memory, sensation, and imagination, and pushes her to take distance between the painting process, evaluation, and correction. Only for the final presentation the works are erected. Then they become invitations to meet the artist on their surface. The viewer's gaze from the outside meets the gaze of the artist, who acts in the background of the canvas. There is something probing about this moment, also because the works remain in an indefinite state of suspension, a nuanced consonance of emotional states. A neither-nor reigns here: neither one nor the other is to be understood as authoritative, all parts and alignments have something abnormal about them. It is precisely in this peculiarity that the common subject of these images is found. As a result, each element unfolds anew, is shaped and formed by its adjacencies, and can only be comprehended in connection with them. This understanding of an open coexistence, which corresponds to a pictorial declination of identity into "belonging" and "exclusion" - this is Youjin Yi's mastery, which comes to light in these works.

*"It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories."*

- Donna Haraway