

## Meredith Rosen Gallery

Meredith Rosen Gallery is pleased to present *Peach Fuzz*, Gowoon Lee's international debut solo exhibition. The show opens on April 30 and remains on view through May 28, 2022.

In a new series of paintings, Lee calls into question the supposedly non-threatening aesthetics of popular cartoons, which begin to look suspicious and concealing as we see violence and sexual dominance softened. The work repurposes Korean uses of euphemism to get at the taboo through the subversive use of cuteness.

Lee's paintings explore the fetishization of innocence developed by the culture industry in cartoons such as *Casper the Friendly Ghost*, *Tom & Jerry* and *Mickey Mouse*. Stills from television shows Lee watched as a young child are cropped at the moment of recognition. Yet, the familiar and specific curvature of Minnie Mouse's bow triggers a chain reaction of memory as the viewer comes to realize the impression such popular images hold. Lee defamiliarizes the characters through uncanny compositions which highlight the commodified aesthetic of cuteness that familiar television shows have passively ingrained in the collective memory.

Sianne Ngai suggests in "The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde," that the cute object's passivity and vulnerability is "often intended to excite a consumer's sadistic desires for mastery and control as much as his or her desire to cuddle." Lee plays into this duality of the cute object by cropping her chosen images so that an exaggerated single feature becomes a stand-in for the character itself. An eyelash or a plump fist decouples the subject further from agency.

Building on and simultaneously questioning the legacy of postwar European figurative painters such as Luc Tuymans and Marlene Dumas, Lee hones in on the seemingly most innocuous form: children's television. Lee's choice of subject matter reverses the young TV viewer's passivity and responds to the artist's own restricted autonomy in a consumerist society. The extreme objectification of the cartoon characters is dependent on the pliability and softness of their form. But the submissive status of child-friendly characters becomes active through the artist's reframing. The cartoon subject becomes subversive as it reveals the image's underpinnings of violence and gender-performance. Paintings such as *Fist* (2022) supersize what appears to be a paw that is both striking back at the viewer and melting into a bulbous abstract form, questioning our guttural responses to an inanimate imaginary character.

Lee's painterly application of saturated colors and complex compositional devices to pop-cultural subject matter is unsettling. As we are pulled in close to the familiar characters of Gowoon's work, their adorable façade recedes. We begin to see the seeds of ideology here, tied up in a pink bow, soft and supple.

Gowoon Lee (b. Daegu, South Korea, 1991) lives and works in Düsseldorf, Germany. Lee studied at the University of Auckland, New Zealand (2014) and Kunstakademie, Düsseldorf, Germany (2022). This is Lee's first exhibition with Meredith Rosen Gallery.