

Yaerim Ryu

*You and Your Sweating Palms*

November 10, 2023 – January 6, 2024

Opening Friday, November 10, 6–9PM

“To bake a cake in the eye of a storm; to feed yourself sugar on the cusp of danger.”  
–Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous*

Peres Projects is pleased to present *You and Your Sweating Palms*, Yaerim Ryu’s (b. 1994 in Seoul, KR) first solo exhibition with the gallery, as well as her first solo presentation in Berlin.

Droplets rendered in such meticulous detail, the rain that Yaerim Ryu paints can almost be touched. A drenched, heavy figure stands before the rolling hues of gray that fill the skies of an imagined neighborhood. Hood down, they are impervious to the heavy rainfall. This is a climate they know well.

Ryu paints an unknown community, a neighborhood of people she has never met, who build and inhabit homes she has never visited. In *You and Your Sweating Palms*, this neighborhood is imbued with a foggy Northern European climate. Clues of Ryu’s recent move to Berlin lie hidden in the works: a red traffic sign; pigeon excrement splattered on the urban paving stones. Aside from these, however, the setting appears closer to a US suburb, with its detached houses scattered between vast roads, driveways and patches of green lawn. *You and Your Sweating Palms* is an exhibition that documents a rising fog as it seeps into the frames of this uncanny suburb, describing the unseen, and physically felt, experience of a place through its atmosphere.

Unable to jog in the overcast streets of a new city without getting lost, when Ryu moved to Berlin, she found herself watching others run, imagining their sweaty palms. The suburb she paints is populated by her voluminous, masculine figures, who are undeterred by the weather. Their damp hair flutters with the wind or clings to their reddened foreheads, they are calm: they barbecue, jog, and make home improvements, their heavy bodies rooting them to the ground. The work in part responds to the male gaze, not by inverting it—her figures’ eyes never meet the viewers and rather than staring out seductively with their nude bodies angled towards us as with the female nudes of renaissance paintings, her subjects look away with calm disinterest and wear layers of thick clothing. Instead, they retain their subjectivity, existing behind muted membranes that leave them unaffected by the viewer’s gaze.

*The Frown on That Face Just Like a Stale Bread* (2023), the earliest of the works, shows seven of Ryu’s weighted figures as they carry out work on a house. Two of them carry a cracked window behind which she mutes the tones of the painting, discovering a quality that will come to permeate the rest of the works in the exhibition. The muted surface of the paintings, achieved by thinly layering oil paint, aesthetically mirrors Berlin’s climate, the grayness and humidity. But the resulting flatness also imposes an intriguing distance between the viewer and the world within, with the scenes appearing as if pinned behind glass. Further, Ryu uses Google and Getty Images stock images as references for her figures, their houses and streets, images that, despite representing a small minority, have through their over circulation come to represent normality, conventional people and conventional lives. By using these references in conjunction with a technique that mutes and contains the work’s content, Ryu recreates in the viewer her own paradoxical experience of becoming familiar with a community she does not yet feel part of.

The viewer looks out with Ryu through curious eyes at the people who call this place home, how unmoved they are, not only by us, but also by the weather that Ryu herself finds so new and strange. In this way, it is through noticing and painting the atmosphere that she highlights her own newness to the space and distances herself from her subjects. In this muting, all parts become equal, flattening the work's content so that the narratives within are no longer centered and instead this distance itself comes to the forefront. The rising fog therefore contains a contradiction: it hides as much as it reveals, describing what cannot be known, separating the viewer from the internal narratives while also revealing the fact of this separation. Ryu never appears in her paintings directly but instead through her absence, watching on with the viewer while she herself refuses to be watched.

This is Yaerim Ryu's first solo exhibition with Peres Projects. Her recent solo exhibitions include Gallery Kiche, Seoul (2022), Show and Tell, Seoul (2021), and Shift, Seoul (2021). Her work has been presented in group exhibitions at Func Gallery, Shanghai (2022), Doosan Gallery, Seoul (2022), BGA maru, Seoul (2021), and Bergstaffel, Stuttgart (2017). In 2022, she was part of "Now & Next" by Frieze and Chanel Korea and the "Review Project" of the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Korea. Her work is currently part of the group exhibition *Memory Beneath the Ego, Fantasy above the Ego* at the Seoul National University Museum of Art.

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