

Sally J. Han – *Nine Lives*

27.10 – 18.11.2023

Opening 26.10.2023 at 17-19 PM

B. 1993 in Shenyang, China

Lives and works in New York City

Here's the *tea*; this is a gallery that *really* likes cats. A hope to at some point fill the gallery with cats is one I've been privy to before. So, while I haven't been involved in this exhibition, but rather in the first group exhibition that first saw Sally J. Han's work on the walls of Ulrikagatan, I'm going to let on that this is a pretty dreamy exhibition considering just that. As I ask Sally what shapes her interest in cats, I'm told that she participated in an exhibition that looked to examine the perennial motif of cats within art, a couple of years back at her NYC gallery Fortnight Institute. Something just stuck with her since that time. I like that, that things don't always have to be so tangled and complicated. The truth about cats – and dogs, for that matter, is that they are kind of just cats and dogs and always have been. However, if in the past we used to have an ownership relationship to cats, we today have elevated that rapport to *parenthood*. It's called being a cat parent and is hardly a novelty anymore, but rather a mundane notion. That's as much as I know, I don't own cats myself and neither does the artist actually! She has two birds, I've met them, they're wonderful, but they're also the reason she couldn't possibly have cats now.

It makes me think of the idiom "The cat that ate the canary" which has nothing to do with the cartoon image of Sylvester the cat chasing Tweety bird, but nevertheless both things come to mind at once. Similarly, several other idioms, whether hanging on to their explicit wording or symbolic meaning starts popping to mind in connection to Sally's exhibition. "It's raining cats and dogs" stems from how house pets used to hide under heavy storms and rain. There's something about the mood and melancholia that the idiom informs that resonates so well with her work. At the core, her paintings have often struck me as being about windows into an ordinary life being lived and time running its cyclical but mundane course. Not much always happens but the details and attributes found in the scenes amount to the abundance, or richness of a quiet day, that makes for the axis of a singular life. In this regard, I'm struck with humour looking at what for me appears a key painting in the exhibition. As the cat parent is away, presumably busy with daily work, the cat sneaks up on a chair and stills its boredom by properly surveying its parent. With a paw on dollar bills left there, the cat becomes the witness of the hustle that is the everyday.

I'd be attentive to art historical references if I were you, you might find a bit of Caravaggio or Joan Miro in the exhibition. Or something rather Edward Hopper-esque, reeking of film noir, when the mood amplifies a few notches. But don't think Sally J. Han to be so precious with art history. Even in such *Nighthawk-ing* scene, there'll be plenty of silent humour to go around.

Ashik Zaman, Stockholm

Belenius

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There is a sly politics to Sally J. Han's paintings. As "A Painter of Modern Life", she seduces the eye and the mind with her pictorial narratives... careful to embed details that hint at her identity as a Korean and Chinese American. Twentieth century American art has not always told stories that reflect Asian American realities. Han's work beguiles us with quiet yet powerful scenes of her lived experience. A game of Mahjong while savoring a cigarette. A studious girl pouring over her homework. A piano lesson. Smartphones are the only clue that these scenes are unfolding in the present tense. Her techniques hark back to the century's old alchemy of painterly expression, while creating scenes of everyday life that are simultaneously very contemporary and yet utterly timeless.

Alison M. Gingeras, New York

Jingmei "Sally" Han, born in China and raised in South Korea, moved to New York where she received a BFA from the School of Visual Arts (2016) with a Silas H. Rhodes Scholarship. In 2019 she received an MFA with an emphasis on drawing at the New York Academy of Art. Her first solo exhibition in New York was at Fortnight Institute in January 2020. She has participated in selected group exhibitions at the Flag Art Foundation, Jeffrey Deitch Gallery, NY, and LA, *Pictus Porrectus: Reconsidering the Full-Length Portrait*, curateby Alison M. Gingeras and Dodie Kazanjian, Art & Newport Foundation, Newport, Rhode Island, and *Dark Light: Realism in the Age of Post-Truths*, curated by Massimiliano Gioni, Aishti Foundation, Lebanon. Sally J. Han's work is in the collections of the Aishti Foundation in Lebanon and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Miami.

Fortnight Institute, New York