

*Her Keen Feet* (2015)

by Hyo Gyoung Jeon

This is not about works of art, but the story of an artist.

She said she paints a lot of feet. When I look at her paintings again after learning this, she seems to be more conscious than others of the fact that her feet are stepping on something, and standing on somewhere; she must have been a person who thought about herself, and what was not herself, even before she became a person who painted. In her several modes of work, there are two kinds of painting that relate to her feet: paintings of places her feet have touched and found familiar and intimate, and places where her feet have stumbled upon the unfamiliar and unexplored. It feels that she must have cogitated upon moments and fleeting incidents for a long time.

She has thought of times her bare feet have touched another's. I assume this is a moment when her feet feel intimacy, not like stepping on someone's foot by mistake— attaching and detaching for a very brief moment— but of laying one's feet atop and amongst another's to touch and warm one another. She must have preferred it to putting on socks when the air was chilly or the floor was cold. It is a statistically more rare moment than touching someone's hand. To rehearse the tender encounter that her feet remember, she repeatedly paints the feet of two people. Their feet are four in number, but as layers of memory pile up, the canvas becomes crowded with several feet, multiplying with memories. The paintings with many feet feel warm in temperature.

Conversely, she has also painted an encounter between feet and an unfamiliar spot. This time what she confronts is not a state, but a situation. Her speedy brushstrokes and the seemingly unplanned, spontaneous paths of the brush combine with improvisatory colour choices to show a hasty pursuit of an elusive memory— one that's slipping away even as its afterthought is

tethered to the canvas. However, when you look at the tight and complete painting, you see that it's not trying to drift away from or deny the unfamiliarity of the moment, but rather to settle it down at some point, to solidify it with firm presses. While unfamiliarity is a feeling that's difficult to pinpoint, the purpose of painting the situation might not be describing and explaining the facts but rather somehow reconciling the crude sensation itself, rendering that upon which her feet have touched. The blurry and foggy sensation of uncertainty is elucidated in the painting: unfamiliarity is explicitly at stake.

These paintings of situations are warm in temperature as well. It feels like she is still thinking about the feet even when they aren't present, when the painting elicits the depths of where she had trodden. When I look at the feet lying on the bed it's as if they are having a nightmare that they're falling into an abyss, or as I contemplate the feet strolling along the rippling beach, I realise that for her the sensation of the feet plays a crucial role in revisiting situations in the past. The position of the feet anchors her observation. For her, the matter stepped on by the feet is more important than that which is witnessed by the eye.

Using the localised tactility of the feet as the primary mode of observation leaves many of the other sensory organs aside. It is an extremely private and subjective experience and thus often results in records which are not obviously tethered to the real world or apparent facts. Of course such subjectivity is not a problem: every artist observes the world from their own viewpoint, resulting in works shaped by their own methodology and visual sensibility. However, to feel emboldened to trust to one's subjective observation confers a legitimacy on it: I imagine it must have taken daily commitment and dedication to neatly pile up the pitch-dark unfamiliarity felt in the feet to accrue that sense of legitimacy. The effort to do so must have taken more energy than the act of painting itself. To her, a day would have seemed short with the work of willing subjectivity into legitimacy.