

Derouillon,

KEUNMIN LEE

WHEN HALLUCINATION IS NO LONGER A SYMPTOM

EXHIBITION

20 February — 5 April 2025

"The artist's job is to deconstruct the defined state"
Keunmin Lee, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Elena Foster
Seoul

Keunmin Lee (KL): It's a statement, you can read it when you are comfortable and have the time.

Elena Foster (EF): So this is your manifesto, your statement about what art means to you?

Hans Ulrich Obrist (HUO): [Quoting] "This art is made to liberate myself from the oppressive nature of illness and diagnoses." Can you tell us about your views and thoughts on the violence inherent to the way society defines and categorizes individuals through data?

KL: Before the diagnosis of my mental illness, I came across the book *Orientalism* by Edward W. Saïd and it made me realize that there is a way of constructing narratives that portrays others as weak, sick or inferior, and thus justifies this representation. I began to take an interest in these social categorizations and definitions even before I started drawing my hallucinations.

HUO: Can we see some of the drawings?

KL: This is my sketchbook of daily drawings. Feel free to flip the pages.

EF: Do you draw the things you see or the things you have in your brain?

KL: The drawings are based on the memories of my hallucinations. And I draw them in a surrealistic automated way.

HUO: Is surrealism an inspiration to you?

KL: Not the movement specifically, but I do use that method of automatic drawing.

EF: We would expect something much more disorganized. This is a very meticulous and detailed drawing.

HUO: Who are the artists that inspire you besides surrealism?

KL: My biggest inspiration comes from outsider artists. Many images from them have had a huge impact on me.

HUO: Are the drawings the base for the paintings? Or are they completely independent? When you make a painting do you make drawings or studies before?

EF: You wrote here: "My art is a diary of repetitive pathological records." The records you remember in your mind? You didn't draw them when you were having hallucinations or delusions?

KL: The drawings are independent from the paintings. It's a separate body of work; they are not a sketch of some sort. As for the hallucinations, I experienced them briefly, during two months of hospitalization when I was twenty and it's on this memory that I rely; I relive them over and over again through my recollections. Now that I have distanced myself from that phase, I see myself as an outside observer of my own past. I try to capture its nuances and essence, rather than actively representing the hallucination.



HUO: Do the drawings have titles?

KL: I don't have titles for individual works but I am working under a series entitled "Refining Hallucinations".

HUO: I notice that here - next to the drawings - there is some text: "Panic", "Eye", "Drink", "Ears", "Tumor", "Knife", "Hole", "Hyperemia", "Congestion".

KL: The words I put here proceed from a sort of self-study; I wanted to put my condition into words. As you said, they could work as a title, but they are not an official title.

HUO: What about this work? Is it the biggest one?

KL: This is a painting in progress, so it doesn't have a title yet; I usually give a title after the work is done, just like these new ones entitled "Accidental Landscapes".



HUO: And do you also write? What connects you to literature?

KL: I only write artist statements or brief descriptions about my work. I am not very familiar with literature and I also have some difficulty with reading texts. Instead I turned towards experimental electronic music, like brain dance, before devoting myself fully to visual arts.

EF: What is your relation to the body, to blood?

KL: There are a lot of paintings about blood and physical scars and that's because when I was hallucinating and unable to tell the difference between my hallucination and reality I ended up hurting myself physically; blood became like a hint of reality. I use it as a metaphor in my paintings.

HUO: This makes me think about the flesh in Chaïm Soutine's work. What do you think about his work?

KL: I like the gesture and the color.

HUO: I am very interested in outsider art, "art brut"... but we know nothing about historical Korean figures. Are there any Korean artists from the past that you appreciate? What is your view about the South Korean art scene?

KL: What disappoints me a little is that in Korea, the emphasis is often not on the artist's practice, but on the artist overcoming his difficulties and finding healing through his art... I prefer to look at artist's works through a study lens.

HUO: This work is fascinating. It evokes not only the flesh, but also the entire vascular circulation. It's like an entire organic system. At first, I thought of Soutine's influence and the flesh, but in fact it's not that: it's a representation of the system itself - blood system, digestive system, organic system...

KL: I kind of connect the digestive system to the social system, between absorption and elimination and so on. Generally speaking, through my works I try to express resistance to oppression, to the way in which society conditions and "packages" us. My works are very much linked to my personal history, but I'd also like them to help people become aware of the way they are reified by society.

HUO: Do you have a definition of art or a sentence in Korean you could write so we can post it on Instagram as part of the series of artist's handwritten phrases we publish?

KL: It means: "The artist's job is to deconstruct the defined state".