

**Lee Maxey, Yang Bo Between**

July 5 – August 12, 2023 12:00-19:00 Closed on Sun, Mon and National Holidays

Yutaka Kikutake Gallery is pleased to present “Between,” a two-person exhibition featuring the works of Brooklyn based artist Lee Maxey and Tokyo based artist Yang Bo. They share an interest in boundaries and distance, conveyed through the medium of painting. From icons of pop culture to everyday scenes observed within the frames of a window, their motifs are recognizable and point to familiar sentiments. In this exhibition, two artists with different roots present the latest fruits of their artistic practices, which have grown in depth as they continue to pursue their unique means of expression while sensitively responding to recent social changes and trends.

**Lee Maxey**, born in 1988 in Arkansas, USA, and based in Brooklyn, paints the phantasmic boundaries between the ordinary and the extraordinary. Interested in the way reality is understood through markedly personal perspectives, she produces works that encourage contemplation. She imbues mundane landscapes and objects with an air of mystery. Maxey’s paintings have a unique presence as if drifting between dreams and reality. In *Specter* (2023), overgrown shrubs evoke the erosion of life by death, and *Unmoved* (2023) presents a striking split between a field of healthy green and dormant grasses. Meanwhile, the fence that appears in *Purgatory* (2022) is depicted from an extreme angle below, suggesting entrapment. As the title implies, the work references Christian doctrine, a preoccupation of the artist’s; no longer religious but raised in a fundamentalist household, Maxey hints at the possibility of biblical interpretations. Egg tempera, which the artist primarily paints with, was also the primary medium for religious paintings of the Middle Ages. The artist’s fixation on familiar motifs and her depictions of the mystery hidden in everyday life, could be regarded as a response to a religious education intent on the afterlife.

**Yang Bo** was born in Hubei, China in 1991, and moved to Japan in 2001. He has consistently produced works on the theme of pop culture such as film and music, and the sense of distance related to its reception. Bo creates his unique world of work by interweaving scenes from his own life with portraits of people and events which despite being far distant and unreachable, affect us psychologically in an extremely intimate way. In recent years, the artist has been working on a series of paintings that envision the word “Mood,” the newest selection of which will be introduced in this exhibition. Bo’s belief that people are at times moved more by their mood rather

than by logic or objective facts, also seems to reflect his concerns for the pressure to conform that has long prevailed in Japan, and the aspects of a society in which even the most minor online news articles have the power to trigger a vast chain of emotions. Inspired by the “Like” icon on social networking sites, the new heart-shaped paintings feature various motifs selected by the artist, such as the moon and the Subaru car company emblem. As the artist states that he often finds himself attracted to objects that have been historicized, the “Like” icon that we come across every day is something that is now internalized in our daily lives or is already on the verge of renewal. At the same time, it is also possible to see it as a reflection of the social reality that responds to Bo's keen sensibility. In addition to presenting Yang Bo's new works, this exhibition will be the first ever showcasing of Lee Maxey's works in Japan. We hope visitors will enjoy the lush world of paintings created by these two artists of different backgrounds, who focus on the boundaries or the sense of distance between objects.

*My paintings fixate on the mundane, warping the familiar into queer emblems of a controlling and mystical world. In contrast to my childhood, which was focused on the future—the end of the world, the afterlife—I demonstrate that the routine present is full of mystery, beauty, and is more worthy of our attention. My work highlights the pervasive unease that can come with seeing signs of a larger “plan” in the everyday, while also demonstrating that the ordinary world is a plenty interesting place to exist without outsize meaning. I paint with egg tempera, aligning her images with the ancient medium's extensive history as a tool of persuasion and beauty. The paintings of this show continue my task of highlighting how highly personalized (and fraught) perception is. - Lee Maxey*

*I draw inspiration from observations regarding the relationship between people and products of culture in everyday life. I mainly focus on the mechanisms of how products of pop culture are received in urban life, as well as the manner and means of consumption related to these products, and simulate these in my paintings. Words and phrases referenced from pop music, symbols on social networking sites, images of iconic stars, and items from punk fashion are combined with everyday scenery, and the distance and contradictions residing between them generate a sense of incongruity. While such appear to give an impression of instability and fluctuation, I challenge myself to present them as a thrilling reality. -Yang Bo*