

Naeun Kang

Defrag

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Press Release

In computing, file system fragmentation, sometimes called file system ageing, is the tendency of a file system to lay out the contents of files non-continuously to allow in-place modification of their contents. It is a special case of data fragmentation. File system fragmentation negatively impacts seek time in spinning storage media, which is known to hinder throughput. Fragmentation can be remedied by re-organising files and free space back into contiguous areas, a process called defragmentation.
Wikipedia(1)

Vividly coloured and presented as almost abstract shapes and forms, tracing lines or colour fields into spaces that most of time mislead more than help their interpretation, the paintings by Naeun Kang are all figurative and all very thoroughly depicting traces and images in which close to nothing is random or

unthought of. In one of these paintings, for example, a room is presented to us, not in the classic pictorial idea of a room, but as a planimetry. We need to specify that it is not a random room that is presented to us, as this is *the* living room of the artist's parents at their home in South Korea. The floor plan represents almost exactly Kang's memory of this place: the furniture, a table arranged with plates, a kitchen, and even the movements of the people in this represented landscape, depicted by round circles moving through the space. This room exists and none of these movements were invented, the city in South Korea where they and the artist lived exists, as much as the complex relations linking together the people that are depicted sitting at this table. Also the four coloured figures depicted in another painting are not invented. The father and mother and brother of a child-aged Naeun Kang (here painting herself as not taller than the thigh of her father, a vivid memory of her childhood) are all depicted as if they were a Venn diagram. The artist, while reflecting about her interactions and relation with her family, in the different times of their lives and different sizes of their bodies, started to imagine of seeing them all as intersecting regions of a diagram, in their closeness and distances, love and incomprehensions. All these relations are as real as the large living room depicted again as a floor plan in another of the paintings in this show, this time exactly trying to visualise a usual Sunday in the large living room of the artist's family when they moved to North America. Like fragments, bits and pieces, copied from memories and emotions, these works are a constellation of instants and thoughts, of feelings and images that in the artist's memory compose

together a picture not far from the coloured and abstract screen that everybody that owned a computer in the 90s and early 00s have been presented with, the lines of untidy squares and colour bits with which our operative systems showed us how much our laptop needed defragmentation, in lingo *Defrag*. A process of turning a spread-out reality into a more organised form, a more efficient way of seeing and retrieving information from a complex system of data. In the same way, Naeun Kang presents us with an extremely coherent exhibition in which memory, reflections about her relationship with her ageing parents and the ideas of family, distance, and closeness take the shape of these very concise yet powerfully evocative paintings. These images invite the viewer to follow them in Kang's own process of defragmentation, to decompress all these very exact images and fragments, to follow her in her own way of approaching reality and metabolising her own lived experiences, some of her most important relations, and her way to feel and see them now and in her memory, both as a neurodivergent person, and as an expat.(2)

These images then, this art which is so foreign to us at first glance, become more and more clear when we understand how it attempts to present us memories, feelings and ideas with an almost forensic precision.(3)

We look then at another painting where behind an almost abstract interplay of lines and shapes, we discover it tries to depict at the same time, as overlapping figures, moving as a lenticular image, three cats the artists has subsequently fostered at her place in Oslo during the past years. That fuzzy overlapping of shapes is how she memorised and remembers them, and the almost abstract painting depicting this is as exact she

could be into representing it, or better: them, and it is here that one might be able to understand how nothing in these paintings is improvised, nothing is fantasy or an invention. Figurative painting itself, as an art form, is although partially reinvented for us in the process. Naeun Kang brings it back anew to represent, to make us see, and feel the eerie and fantastic world she sees, and that we couldn't have otherwise seen, felt or imagined without the help of her savvy brushstrokes.

Mattia Lullini

(1) Definition of File system fragmentation on https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File_system_fragmentation#Causes (Accessed on October 3rd, 2025)

(2) “[...] my past is what formed me/and part of me, and the accumulation of my experiences together with these other people are precisely what built up my relationship with them. [...] I don't think I've ever even tried to find meaning through painting, because it's too black and white and it shuts down conversation, I want to think that it's okay for my art to be the results or byproducts of my metabolising or processing of things (events, thoughts, feelings, experiences) and just be that, stay in that ambivalences (also opens up more conversation this way).” Naeun Kang, from a Whatsapp conversation with the author.

(3) The specificity and intentionality behind almost all of Naeun Kang's paintings is a way of working and creating images which I believe it originally taps into the roots of painting itself, not for the sake of art or in the lines of a tradition, but for the sake of exactly depicting and extracting ideas and feelings which the artist would have no other way to describe. Coming from decades of *post-*movements one would be tempted to apply this concept to the figurative paintings Kang does, but I really believe this is not something *post-*, and neither something *anti-*, nor in any other way hierarchically or antagonistically related to other kinds of figurative art, Naeun Kang's art goes *beyond* figuration. With the intention to find a way to visualise something clear to her but impossible to represent otherwise, her figurative paintings go through the idea at the core of this artistic expression to find a new place on the other side, which I would attempt to define *preterfigurative art*, or *preterfiguration*. When an art practice challenges our ideas, isn't it worth creating new words to describe it?

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Naeun Kang (b.1994, Changwon) holds an MFA from the National Academy of the Arts in Oslo (2023) and a BFA from the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague (2018). She has recently been exhibited at NEVVEN (Gothenburg, 2025 and Bologna, 2024), Christian Torp (Oslo, 2025), CHART Art Fair (Copenhagen, 2025), She Will Artspace (Oslo, 2025), Norsk Billedhoggerforening (Oslo, 2025), Centralbanken (Oslo, 2024 and 2023), Galleri LNM (Oslo, 2024), Kunstnernes Hus (Oslo, 2023), Northing Space and Entrée (Bergen, 2023), Akademirommet (Oslo, 2022), Het Wilde Weten (Rotterdam, 2021), and Intercultural Museum (Oslo, 2021) among others. Kang lives and works in Oslo, Norway.

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