

Judy Chung
Cafeteria

RAINRAIN is pleased to present *Cafeteria*, the first solo exhibition by Brooklyn-based artist Judy Chung. The show features a series of new paintings that highlight Chung's excavations into an underbelly of nostalgia through a meticulously layered maze of unpredictable symbolisms.

Cafeteria includes an eponymous and central painting, *Symbiosis (Cafeteria)*, where viewers meet the show's protagonist in the midst of dramatic action. In Chung's quintessential palette of bright neon colors, we find our main character spewing (or perhaps inhaling) heaps of spaghetti noodles in a school lunchroom strewn with the bright yellow strands. The velocity of the lead figure's action seemingly creates a glitch—her limbs and head are multiplied and spread wide in an attempt to find balance as onlookers are caught mid-reaction.

In her book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sarah Ahmed questions what emotions do—specifically investigating the relationship between human emotions, actions, and the various sociopolitical hierarchies and agendas that impact them. By offering an understanding of the associations humans place on emotions vs thought or reason, Ahmed speaks to what is deemed “appropriate” in our society. Similarly, Chung's practice finds fodder in deeply seated memories, like the hyperspecific childhood understanding of which foods were deemed “appropriate” or “cool” (chicken nuggets) and which were not (spaghetti). By joining the several onlooking students seated around the edges of the painting, viewers are pushed to experience multiple vantage points—oscillating between the central figure, the students, and their own gaze. In her text Ahmed notes, “The very physicality of shame—how it works on and through bodies—means that shame also involves the de-forming and re-forming of bodily and social spaces, as bodies turn away from the others who witness the shame”¹ We, as viewers to Chung's painting, may shift in our shoes with pity while also reading the reactions of the peers, which further influences our response and understanding of the space shared in the work.

This level of heightened perception is a key aspect to experiencing Chung's exhibition. The pieces in *Cafeteria* showcase Chung at her most potent, beckoning viewers close with the disarmingly cute aesthetic of her canvas and palette before unfurling a myriad of psychosocial questions. Chung and the characters in her paintings are protected by shields and camouflage, but with a porosity that allows intimacy, similar to the armor donned by the Heroine character in *Spaghetti Lariat*—protected all over, but with a gaping hole in the torso—her heart remains vulnerable.

By Claire Kim

¹ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. (Routledge, 2013), 103