

Emergency Vehicles

Wendy Yoshimura is an octogenarian Japanese-American maker of watercolour still-life paintings. She was also, in the 1970s, a member of several by-any-means-necessary radical leftist organisations including, alongside kidnapped-heiress-turned-revolutionary Patty Hearst, the Symbionese Liberation Army. These days, Yoshimura apparently doesn't want to talk about that. Living quietly in Oakland, California, she's outwardly pledged herself to art, separating a time of extreme engagement from one of retreat into aesthetics, into 'just' painting. For many artists, though, and Alison Yip seems like one of them, things are more conflicted, day to day, hour to hour. The world, as the contemporary cliché runs, is on fire; polycrisis and precarity engulf us; today's news makes you nostalgic for yesterday's, et cetera. How do you go to your studio and make art in the face of that? How do you get through the day, even? Maybe you're not going to be able to close yourself off, and maybe you don't want to – you'd prefer to feel connected to something larger, to overcome the anomie that's a hallmark of this century. Maybe some of the daily dodging of psychic burnout is going to become something resembling subject matter. Probably you don't have to be an artist to relate.

Yip doesn't know Wendy Yoshimura personally, but she might claim connection with her, provisionally, on the axes of Asian-Americanness plus their shared profession. She also doesn't know all the other Alison Yips on social media, but they too constitute an accidental community she's part of. Many of them, she found, like to post pictures of the matchas and coffees they're having, and of the fancy marbling of the foam that baristas – ersatz painters of a sort, you might say – routinely apply. (Of course, this habit is not limited to Alison Yips: it's a symptom of flattened internet image culture, of visual conformity.) *This* Alison Yip, in making paintings in turn of those cream-and-brown swirls with other Alison Yips swirled into the compositions, enacts a reaching-out to, or a reaching-towards, these other aesthetic appreciators. But to widen out beyond them, again, a barista coffee epitomises treat culture; the small and relatively affordable things that we – the collective we – allow ourselves to get through the day. That we need, because the days are this nerve-jangling. So Alison can have a little cappuccino, as a treat. And so can Alison, and Alison, and all the rest of us non-Alisons.

If there is an element, in all this, of wresting something from catastrophe, it's perhaps epitomised by Yip's semiabstract paintings rooted in violent celestial phenomena, explosive lightning etc, which avowedly have their roots in Gilles Deleuze's thoughts about how painting might emerge from what he terms, a little gnomically, a 'catastrophe' in the early stage of making, but also track back to premodern eras in which such events in the sky were read almost as

premonitions and were politically instrumentalised by leaders, fake news of yesteryear. It might also be appropriate that they relate to atmospheric conditions, because Yip's entire show is a climate, an airspace crackling with ions, rather than a statement. Sense might appear to arise not within but between works, in a wobbly matrix, and in an activity of collective meaning-making. For instance, a photograph by Katja Ruge of German techno DJ/producer Helena Hauff, which Yip traded for an artwork, here points towards the building of temporary communities when read alongside, say, the works mentioned above, or chairs arranged, in the manner of nineteenth-century French salons, in a way that encourages conversation; waiting for occupancy.

In play here is the widescreen question of what is appropriate to artmaking and exhibition-making in the present climate. Yip's response involves a movement both away from familiarity and finished-ness, on the level of images, and also a movement *towards* something that is more open, less definitive: the creation of a context in which a desire for community meets a community of interpreters (us, the viewers) and a cloud of questions. Those questions might include what kind of painting one can feasibly make right now, and whether an artist who's frequently worked in that medium – and in figurative imagery, a format currently being dragged downward by the prevalence of AI slop and templated image making – can currently express herself fully within it. Or whether some thoughts are not appropriate to painting, and might require another, improvisatory community of forms or materials. If the energy this show runs on is sincere ambivalence, it also pivots into a satisfying paradox: ambivalent, yes, but not unsure about being so, and – gestures at the teetering world outside us, the roiling worlds inside us – also not unsure about why.

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