

YAERIM RYU

SAFETY DISTANCE



Preventing her work from being read as autobiographical and preferring to be a bit distanced from her own paintings, Yaerim Ryu presents her new exhibition at the Berlin gallery Peres Projects, *You and Your Sweating Palms*. Being obsessed with depicting the weather and air within the painting, as she explains, the relationship that she creates with her characters by placing them in certain situations is very special. Able to awaken every visitor's emotions, her latest exhibition is on view until January 6, 2024.

"I wanted to segregate myself from the work that I was producing so to speak. It sounds quite contradictory because artists cannot make something which isn't about themselves since they are spending an enormous amount of time with their works," Ryu responds when we ask her about the barrier she creates between herself and her work, between the characters who star in her paintings and the general audience in *You and Your Sweating Palms*. This exhibition marks her return to Germany, where she intends to stay a bit longer discovering more and getting inspired.

Yaerim, you're now presenting your first solo exhibition with Peres Projects, as well as your first solo presentation in Berlin. How do you feel, and what does this mean to you?

I feel very excited to have my first solo show with Peres Projects and to present my works for the first time in Berlin. Since I went back to Seoul after my one-year stay as an exchange student in Southern Germany in

PERES PROJECTS

2017, I've always sort of wanted to come back, but eventually got busy with my life back in Seoul and almost forgot about how much I liked it here. However, I got this great opportunity to work and have an exhibition in Germany and I think I was quite lucky, to be honest. I'm more than happy to share my works with a wider range of audiences.

In *You and Your Sweating Palms*, you paint an unknown community, a neighbourhood of people you've never met who built and inhabited homes you have never visited, isn't it? Could you tell us more about it?

I do have a huge interest in homes. Not only in the sense of a residential building but also in the area it's located and the narratives regarding the place. So yeah, I paint a lot of houses in some random neighbourhood but mostly those of others, not mine. I'm not painting some 'home sweet home' stuff but rather those which I don't necessarily know who's living in. This is partly because I don't want my works to be read as autobiographical since I prefer to be a bit distanced from my own works. And I also wanted to depict a certain degree of tension as well by depicting an unknown community. The subtle, weird tension one feels when walking in a new neighbourhood.



Fog is a leading connecting element in your new project. How does it inspire you and why is it so present in the paintings?

Amidst the solidness and density of my works, I wanted to paint something fluid and changeable at the same time. Like the direction of the wind, the temperature of the day, and the passage of time and stuff. So basically, this led me to use a lot of muted hues and create a certain atmosphere, eventually conjuring scenes which look like they are pinned behind glass. This aesthetic forms a sort of barrier between the viewer and what's going on inside the painting. And not only for the viewers but also for myself as well. I wanted to segregate myself from the work that I was producing so to speak. It sounds quite contradictory because artists cannot make something which isn't about themselves since they are spending an enormous amount of time with their works. But still, I wanted some distance from it and I didn't necessarily want the viewers to be completely immersed in the content of this painting. I rather wanted the paintings to be perceived more structurally.

I've read that you use Google and Getty Images stock images as references for your figures, their houses and streets. Please, tell us more about your creative process. How do you start your artistic projects?

Sometimes it's just a single word or a short sentence that I randomly bump into on the street, in a catalogue, book, in music, or in a conversation with a friend. Language really inspires me to create images. Well, it also

PERES PROJECTS

works the other way around from time to time. The image comes first, and then the language follows, which often ends up becoming the title. And once I decide what I want to paint, I start looking up images I can refer to. While doing so, I figured that the more generic the images are, the more people can relate and distance themselves from the image at the same time which sounds quite contradictory. But it eventually brings up this weird, eerie feeling, which is often described as uncanniness.



And what do you enjoy most about the whole process?

I really enjoy thinking about the titles. I like to build a witty, poetic relationship between language and image. I am interested in the sounds of language and how they hit your ears when they are actually pronounced. I think this is why I'm so conscious about the way my titles sound when they are spoken out loud. I usually thought of a Korean title first and then translated it into English. But this time I came up with an English title first. I tried to translate them into Korean afterwards, but somehow I couldn't. They didn't sound right. I wish I could come up with a nice translation at some point.

What do you feel when giving life to the main characters of your paintings?

I really like seeing them come to life as the painting is getting close to the finishing point. But from time to time, I feel kind of sorry for them because I'm constantly making them do something regardless of their will. Placing them into a certain climate and making them wear a lot of heavy clothes, and I often make them work hard. Sometimes I have the feeling that I almost consider them to be alive. They even used to have names before, but I try not to do that anymore.

From going for a walk to a doctor's visit, the scenes you recreate in *You and Your Sweating Palms* are taken from day-to-day realities. How is it different from your previous exhibitions and what similarities does it have?

I started out being attracted to more dramatic, theatrical images. This was because my paintings tended to be based on a specific narrative formed of a couple of sentences, or sometimes several paragraphs. The narratives hardly resembled the reality. Rather, they were more dreamy and fictional. Although my fascination towards the relation between fictional narrative and image is still pretty much present, my fascination moved on to those that are based on the real world. Not that they are autobiographical or something, but the unsettling feeling you get when you notice something slightly different from your usual circumstances. Like, you come home from work and suddenly realise the subtle difference in your place but you can never point out what has actually changed.

PERES PROJECTS

It kind of spooks you out and I thought it might be fun trying to evoke this kind of unsettling feeling through a painting.

Apart from that, in my earlier works the influence of old religious paintings was also quite recognisable with the symmetric composition and muted hues, which were a result of mimicking faded pigments of old paintings. Some of these features are still remaining, although the symmetry of the composition has been quite diluted.

What would you like the public to feel when they visit your new exhibition?

They can feel whatever they want. To be honest, I haven't been so great at answering this question for all this time.



I can't help but ask you about its title. Why did you call it *You and Your Sweating Palms*?

The answer to this question is sort of related to the question above, how I feel when I'm giving life to the human figures in my painting. Since I've been quite obsessed with depicting the weather and air within the painting, I was thinking about the reactions of these people in my painting towards the climate and circumstances in which I forcefully 'place' them, so to speak. I always make them cope with certain conditions which I created. And at some point, I was thinking about them sweating. I wouldn't necessarily paint the actual sweat but I thought about them sweating from the hard work they're doing, or due to the weather, heavy clothing and stuff. I sometimes think that I might be considering these figures as if they are actually alive, breathing.

If you had to define this exhibition in just one sentence, what would it be?

ARE YOU SWEATING RIGHT NOW?

And what can you tell us about your future projects?

I'm planning to stay in Berlin a bit longer. Even after six months, I am still relatively new to everything although I'm not as frightened (it's embarrassing but I was!) as when I first arrived. I haven't had much time to look around or travel since I was mostly in my studio preparing for the show. So I'm really looking forward to spending some time in the city. Work-wise, I always wanted to paint something about supermarkets. The horizontality and repetitiveness of endless shelves, goods and aisles have always been a fascination for me and I think it would be a great subject for painting.

– David Alarcón