

# Wonderland.

## Yaerim Ryu Unveils Her First Solo Exhibition In Berlin

We connect with the Seoul-born artist to discuss her new exhibition, “You and Your Sweating Palms”, her first solo project to be presented in Berlin.



South Korean artist Yaerim Ryu is inaugurating an important new chapter in her career, as she takes centre stage whilst unveiling her new exhibition, “You and Your Sweating Palms”. It’s the first time that the Seoul-born talent embarks on a solo experience in Berlin, one of Europe’s most important cultural poles. It’s also her first time signing off a solo exhibition with Peres Projects gallery. In “You and Your Sweating Palms,” artist Ryu delves into the unfamiliar, capturing a community she has never encountered in a neighbourhood she has never explored.

Set against the backdrop of a foggy Northern European climate, the works subtly reveal Ryu’s recent relocation to Berlin through hidden clues like a red traffic sign and pigeon excrement on urban paving stones. The exhibition explores Ryu’s experience of being an outsider in a new city, unable to jog through its overcast streets without getting lost. Through her paintings, she observes the residents of this unfamiliar suburb—voluminous, masculine figures who remain indifferent to the weather as they engage in everyday activities like barbecuing and home improvements.

Here, we connect with Ryu to discuss her artistic upbringing, how she’s seen her artistry evolving throughout the years and what can the audience expect from the new project.

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## **When did you first start painting?**

I think I started to make things that can be referred to as 'work' after graduating from art school. After graduation, I briefly stopped painting. I never really considered myself as an artist, I felt that I wasn't good enough so I thought about doing something else instead. But there was this moment which really changed everything, when I went to a vacation with my parents to Frankfurt. I know that it's a weird place to spend your vacation but my family lived there for a few years before I was born so they wanted to go there, for old times sake. Me, nothing to do with the city, bored, spent a day by myself and went to an art museum. It was some sort of museum night that day, so the place was open till late. There weren't much people around. It was almost like only me and the paintings in that huge space. Felt very strange and great, just being there alone with all the works. I think at that point, I thought to myself that this is what I actually want to do with my life and started painting again.

## **How has your artistry evolved over the years?**

I was interested in more dramatic, theatrical images. The influence of old religious paintings used to be more visible by the symmetric composition and muted color which was the result of mimicking faded pigments of old paintings and murals. Back then, my paintings were based on narratives consisted of sentences, sometimes paragraphs. The narratives were dreamy and fictional most of the time, hardly reflecting the reality.

Although my fascination for the relation between fictional narrative and image is still pretty much present, my interest moved a bit towards 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 realize the subtle difference in your place but you can never point out what has actually changed. It kind of spooks you out and I thought it might be fun trying to evoke this kind of unsettling feeling through a painting. This is why I'm more into depicting day-to-day realities these days, such as homes, visiting the doctor, supermarkets and stuffs.

## **Do you have a typical process when working on a piece?**

Often it starts with a single word or a short sentence I randomly run into on the street, in a catalogue, book, music, or a conversation with a friend. Language really inspires me to create images. Well, it also 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 for images I can refer to. And while doing so, I figured that the more generic the images are, the more people can relate and distance oneself 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.

## **Congratulations on "You and Your Sweating Palms"! How was the opening?**

Thanks! The opening was great. There were a lot of people than I expected. Since this is my first solo presentation outside of Seoul, I was really excited to share my works with a wider range of audiences.

## **Can you tell us a bit about what the exhibition explores in terms of its themes and concepts?**

I was really into depicting the weather and air within the painting during I was preparing for this show. While wanting to construct a firm, solid painting like a rock or the wall of an old building, I also wanted to paint something fluid and invisible. Such as the direction of the wind, temperature of the day, passage of time.. etc. This led to some particular elements like hair blowing in the wind, people wearing knitted sweater and padded jumper, tree branches with or without leaves and stuffs. And I also came to think of the reactions of the people in my paintings towards the climate and circumstances which I place them under. I always make them cope with certain conditions I create, and at some point, I was thinking about them sweating. I wouldn't necessarily

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paint the actual sweat but I thought about them sweating from the hard work they're doing, or due to the weather, heavy clothing. I sometimes think that I might be considering this medium so called painting in a quite 'romantic' way, regarding my figures as if they are actually alive.

## When did you start working on the collection?

I started working on this collection from February this year. So the works in this show were partly made in Seoul, though I finished them here in Berlin.



## How did you select the colour palette for this collection of work?

I used to work on wooden panels before. I liked the texture, and how colors turn out on wood. I switched to canvas for some practical reasons, and was a bit frustrated at first because the colors seemed too flashy and blinding on a clean, white surface. I think I began to use a lot of muted hues to neutralize everything at this point, and later realized that this color palette helps me create a subtle barrier between the viewers and the world inside the painting.

## Is there a piece you're most proud of?

I like my dog shit painting. Well, it is easier to get the larger works finished in the way I want them to be, because I put so much time into it. And they also have much more space to fiddle around with. If I mess up one small corner, I can move on to the other side of the canvas and make up for it. So I am somehow more satisfied when I manage to make a good small painting. It's like that I placed everything in the right place, at the right time, which feels really nice.

## What is it like to see people interact with your work?

It is amazing to see how people start building up their own narratives looking at my works. I pretty much enjoy working on titles, hoping those titles to function as a clue and an obstacle to the works at the same time. So it is quite interesting when people try to make connections between the image and the titles, which leads to creating a whole new point of view towards my works.

## What are you working on next?

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.