

Section: 1 Paintings

I was first introduced to the artist Woo Kuk Won, during a quick catch up with my dear one in Seoul, South Korea. She had told me that Woo Kuk Won's paintings have been selling in a frenzy during this pandemic. Upon first glance, Woo's works seem to play along the sadness and innocence of a specific era. An era, which everyone often looks back on- Childhood! Often there are dreamy sequences of children and animals- and playful poetry! Scribbled across the canvases. Most of the poetry is kept short and poignant. It often twists the whole image of the work. Sometimes they are used as a monologue of the characters in the painting and other times the poems resemble an after thought, the artist might have had upon finishing the piece. It overall has a sense of control, A punch and there's also something very natural about it. His works are



mostly painted in muted tones, which gives a colder aura.



The following two pages are an excerpt from an interview about the artist, Wook Kuk Won. I read it originally in Korean, and I decided to translate some into English.

A small building along the main street of Seocho-dong. Just ten steps down the stairs, a different world unfolds in an instant. It is an artist's space, with paint cans on one side of the wall like ornaments, carts mixed with various tools such as paint and brushes, colorful work clothes covered with rainbows, images and memos filled the walls, and light cigarette smells. As soon as you enter it, you listen to music that sinks like air on your skin, and you Woo Kuk-won in a sophisticated burgundy sweater, suddenly appears. 'You're not wearing your work clothes?' I ask. The answer is back in less than a second. 'I don't like to look like an artist. So I changed my clothes before you came to the shoot.' As soon as I burst into laughter at his honest answer, a strange and beautiful work stands out behind his shoulder. It's a picture of a flower. 'I traveled to Barcelona recently, this was made just before leaving.' The work, titled 'Queen of Night,' is a collection of flowers that bloom only at night. After passing the "morning" series and the "afternoon" series, which has the text "I hate morning" inserted, the flowers that bloom only at night. The work is full of text. The wall is filled with handwritten notes of various flower photographs and explanations of flowers that seem to have been referred to when painting. 'The text in the work is meaningful as 'text' itself, but it is also 'something' to balance the space inside the square canvas. Foreign audiences sometimes ask me if I wrote with my left hand. As part of the painting, I hope you can understand it as a curved line that has been drawn like a scribble.' The author presented a work titled 13 fairy tale books in a solo exhibition in 2012. He also painted a passage from Chronicles of Narnia, Henry David Thoreau's Walden, Carl Gustav Jung's book cover in his work, and recently read Peter Pan again.

Another characteristic of Woo Kuk-won's work is that there are many animals and child figures. "I think animals and children are really beautiful things by themselves. Among the many beings in the world, they are the prettiest and most impeccable to me." His work, which combines the color at a glance, the free and unflattering touch, and the lovely presence of animals and children, is a "pretty picture" at first sight. However, if you take time and look closely, there is a mysterious feeling between the sweetness and sadness. The chubby arms and legs, the flat, round child's face. But there's no expression. The figures have a blank expression. Is the child happy?

Are they depressed or jealous of someone? Did the endless naps and dreams tire them? Did the artist really want to draw children, bears, crocodiles? Or did he borrow the form of "the most beautiful and impeccable being in the world" to express something else?

Artist Woo Kuk-won's voice, saying "I don't know how I feel" several times in a drowsy and soft tone, and his playlist, which flows into my ears, were contained in one melody like a note drawn on the wrong track. "You have to be sensitive to external stimulants, but books, music, films, and travel are not the same. My threshold for beauty is getting stronger. Most things don't move me anymore." Wouldn't the creator of beauty eventually run into a marathon with pain and joy in his hands to face the beauty of his dreams? I look at the writer's face and work alternately. The search for a hidden meaning has begun.

Design House November 2016 Edition

Back to my research

Woo's works also reminded me of one of the pioneering painters in this style-

Yoshitomo Nara.

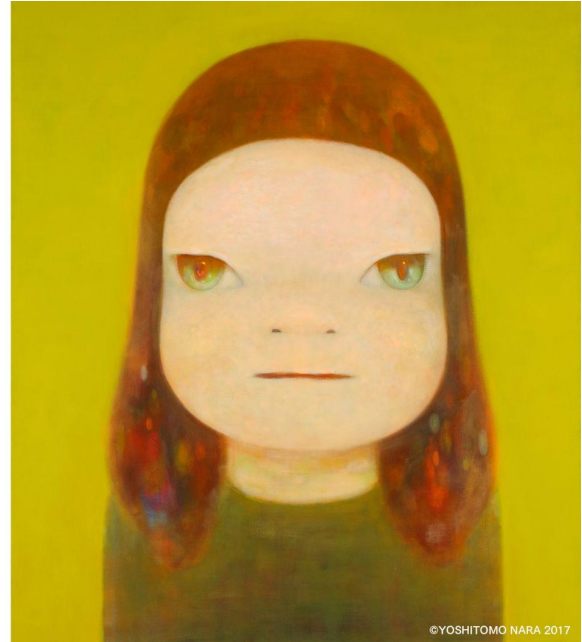


His early works often depicted young girls smoking and being rebellious- They often had a "A quoi bon" nature, and their eyes looked like axes. Always angry, and it was quite impactful. His works were unforgettable. There were people who had never seen Nara's work before, But there was no one who had only seen Nara's work once. His works were incredibly impactful- despite the simple structure. I remember a lot of t-shirts and other unlicensed merchandise being made And distributed in the early 2000s. Surely the image was a statement in itself.

With Nara, it's actually very intriguing to see his development through the years.



Drawing from 2012



Painting from 2017

There are 5 years between these two works,
The eyes have become more dreamy and also somehow full of life
Compared to the old works which were depicted unembellished and raw,
His more recent works started to depict girls with a warm happiness
Their facial expressions are more at ease, and look like loving eyes.
Nara often talks about his audience playing an active role in his
creative process.

He spoke about meeting a young boy at one of his exhibitions.

The boy had told him

" When I'm sad, I look at your paintings. "

This set Nara free, and made him want to make more happier
expressions in the works. For many years Nara felt that his work was
misunderstood. But the boy understood his work, as the way he originally
intended. This finally set him free.

And you can see this in his recent works because there are less
repetitions and more versatile works. And the girls in his paintings

finally look more at ease, as if the painter's own wounds healing has manifested in his own works. Nara's also started to venture out into sculptures that look like they jumped out of his cartoons and paintings. I love that Nara keeps on evolving like nature.



The Great Wave off Kanagawa- Hokusai 1830s.

This work was a part of one of Japan's biggest art movements in history.

Ukiyo-e. It was originally established in the Edo period.

Because of the methods of using woodcuts to mass produce prints, Ukiyo-e was an affordable art. In the 17th century these prints (ukiyo-e) cost about the same amount as buying a bowl of noodles.

Ukiyo-e captured more casual sceneries-And the main motif was to enjoy and embrace the moments of our short lives. It is made up of uncertainty, pleasure and society. It was not considered a higher form of art- but more casual and was adored by the mass public. The vibrant colours of ukiyo-e and the affordable price made it more popular.

I've been in love with this piece " The Great Wave Off Kanagawa" for a long time.

The longer I look at it, the more I notice the sailors on the boat. There are three boats wrapped by the waves, the sailors are prepared to get through these waves. It makes me think of bravery and perseverance.

You can see Mount Fuji's snow melting. So it could have been late winter- early spring. The sailor's could have been bringing some tuna fish back-

In the 1830's when Hokusai made these works, Japan was under isolation policy.

There was only one port open for foreign boats to arrive, and that was Nagasaki port.

Usually Dutch traders visited, and this was when Ukiyo-e became famous across Europe. One more reason why this piece is so striking is because of the colours used.

The pigment used was Prussian Blue, which was the first artificial pigment developed in the 1706 by the paint maker Diebasch in Berlin. I think the nature of Ukiyo-e is so beautiful because it makes mundane moments of lives special. It's also a look into the times we have never lived.

Section : 2 Film

ChungKing Express- Wong Kar Wai



Sharing the same loneliness and longing.

The characters are running, walking, sleeping in a frantic city.

Everything seems slow motion and incredibly fast at the same time.

Wong Kar Wai uses repetition throughout the movie.

This is shown with items such as canned foods, and also with the soundtrack.

California dreaming being used for 9 minutes of this film's air time.

Two stories are weaved into one, in this film.

In the middle of the movie, the main characters change.

The characters are lost, individuals who have no home, no family and no identity. They also constantly try to escape themselves with lovers that they can't have.. Hong Kong in the mid 90s was experiencing the state of its own disappearance. British Colonial was ending and Hong Kong was being given back to China in 1997, Hong Kong's identity was fragmented even before this. Territory of Qing Dynasty, then colonised by the British Empire in 1843, then in 1941, taken over briefly by Japan during World War 2. And then back to The British Empire again where it would transition to a manufacturing hub, Becoming exposed both culturally and economically to both East and the West. During the time ChungKing Express was produced, there was a very rapid sense of time passing in Hong Kong.

The handheld camera work and fast pace editing creates a disorientating Experience for the viewers. The fleeting time- a lifestyle of disposability- frantic life of being in the city- Escapism and restlessness.



The canned food with expiry dates presents this nature very well.

The canned food is used as a metaphor for the disposable nature of love, and of life. The uncertainty, the sadness, the detachment.

ChungKing Express ends on a hopeful note that is heartwarming.

This is a masterpiece that will withstand time.

SECTION 3 : Installations-

Laure Prouvost- Mother

Prouvost's newest installation work is about motherhood.

She uses octopus as a metaphor for motherhood.

Octopus takes care of the eggs and die as the eggs hatch.

"It's really about life, and bringing new life. One life ends and a new life will start. For humans, we pass on knowledge, pass on memories. So it's a mixing, this kind of hybrid world

The constant state of wait- waiting for the winter to pass-

Good piece of art.

Hopefully something that makes you see the world slightly differently-

Bringing sometimes lightness

System of what's right, what's wrong,

Interlude- Some thoughts, influences and free writing

When I think of one of the best directors that portray narratives in a realistic, piercing way, Agnes Varda is one of the first to come up in my mind

Varda originally studied philosophy and that heavily influenced her style of writing and directing. Agnes Varda was often portraying social decay, sorrows, grief and loneliness. She was also able to depict characters feeling tired and trapped, in a visual way that was both enchanting and haunting.

What I admire so much in Nara, Varda and also this newfound artist Woo is their

ability to walk alongside with their inner child-

For me truth is a big part of the magic in works, and someone being able to express without filtering to an excessive state where all else is stripped away and desolate

is beautiful and moving.

The range of different mediums. These artists lived through different times,

In different parts of the world, building different narratives, yet there is still a common ground they stand on...playful philosophy,

The frustrations and what is left of innocence is interesting because it feels familiar and real to most of us. It also reminded me of Noah Bambauch, when talking about films, He said most of his works are inspired by real things in life.

He said it's like rubbing two stones of reality together to make a fire. I know I am probably going on a tangent right now about all these brilliant artists, but I couldn't cut it to a short paragraph, and feel that eventually we will get there if I just keep writing and pushing myself to think more.

The more years spent studying in this field, and making works, There were infinite moments of doubt, about the path itself and also if I was fit for it.

I think the role that art plays is quite immense.

It brings pleasure, joy, comfort, also it makes us wonder,

One of the best things about literature is that we all get a chance to have second hand experiences through the stories we read, and grow a muscle for compassion.

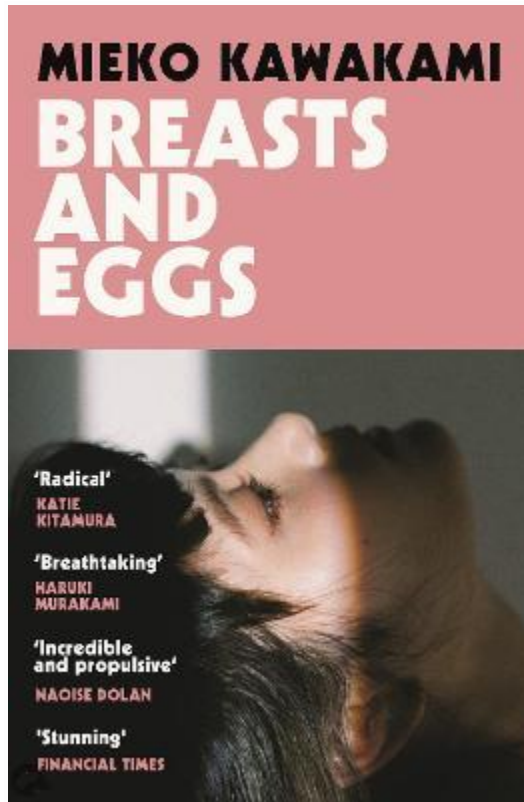
Even though we can't live in alternate universes, books open up a new world.

Talking about Books-

Section 4 : Literature

There is a book that I wanted to write about-

It's called *Breast and Eggs* written by Mieko Kawakami.



The work is semi autobiographical- it's based on two sisters from Osaka- The family is bordering on poverty, and the sisters are raised in difficult circumstances. This book portrays Osaka really really well.

Within Japan, Osaka has a slightly rougher image-

Kyoto is more old fashioned- and the image of the place is very elegant-

Whereas Osaka is considered more rough- and not so sophisticated.

(People sometimes mock the Kansai accent.)

In Osaka, they have a more direct way of speaking-

And even the sense of humour differs from other regions.

Personally, I adore Osaka- the neon signs, the humble streets, it's more exhilarating- But also quite rowdy and exhausting at times.

The book follows the main character's transitions from her childhood in Osaka to moving to Tokyo - to try her luck with her writing career.

Here's an excerpt from the book that moved me. It's between page 87 and page 88.

It hits like a boulder- and made me burst into tears while reading it.

It's one of those rare moments where you feel completely understood by a work of art.

" The question of whether the thing I was writing qualified as a novel was open to interpretation. That much was true. At the same time, I was sure I was writing a novel.

Absolutely sure. Maybe it looked like I was wasting my time. And maybe for everyone but me, that was all it would ever amount to. An enormous waste of time.

But I knew that it was wrong to dismiss my work like that.

It felt like I had said something that I could never take back.

Writing makes me happy. But it goes beyond that.

Writing is my life's work. I am absolutely positive that this is what I'm here to do.

Even if it turns out that I don't have the ability, and no one out there wants to read a single word of it, there's nothing I can do about this feeling. I can't make it go away.

I recognize that luck, effort, and ability are often indistinguishable.

And I know that, in the end, I'm just another human being, who's born only to die. I know that in reality, it makes no difference whether I write novels, and it makes no difference if anyone cares. With all the countless books already out there, the world won't notice if I fail to publish even one book with my name on it. That's no tragedy. I know that.

I get that. But that's when I always think of Makiko and Midoriko.

Our old apartment, strewn with dirty clothes. The countless wrinkles in our red faux leather book bags. The stinky, work out trainers in the darkness of the front door. I think of Komu, how she helped me learn my times tables.

When we were out of rice, the four of us made dumplings from flour and water and spun them in the pot- from the way we laughed, you'd think that we were doing this for fun. The way the ink of the newsprint blurred under our watermelon seeds. All the days that Komu had us help her clean the building. The fragrance of the trial bottles of shampoo that we packed in plastic baggies for extra money. The icy blue shadows. How I worried that my mum was never coming home, and how she came home in her factory uniform, all smiles.

I knew these things were related to my desire to write novels.

But how?

The book I had in mind wasn't supposed to be auto-biographical, but whenever I felt stuck, or told myself I couldn't even form a decent sentence, these thoughts and feelings started pouring in. Perhaps these memories were obstacles that I could never overcome.

Trapped in her reality, tired and frustrated.

This excerpt was written in the main character Natsuki's perspective.

However the story also goes in depth with her sister stories and also shows excerpts from her teenage niece. It carefully weaves together the three women's experiences. Although Natsuki's story uses Osaka and Tokyo as the background- I think the story is genuinely relatable to a lot of readers from all over the world.

So the work is not site specific at all.

One quote by Carl R. Rogers comes to mind-

"What is most personal is most universal."

I think sculptures are beautiful because it's someone's thought that can be touched, and stands on its own ground. I remember feeling tremendous loneliness as a child, but there was a moment when I realised, everything around us was made by someone and that was fascinating. I think also the role of art - is a piece of history that can be well preserved like a jar of jam- art can become timeless hand me downs from generation after generation. There are songs that were written 100 years ago- which we hear now, in a completely changed, different state of world, yet we can still feel the beauty and pain of it. As humans, we are flawed, and will be flawed forever but what is so interesting is that- Sometimes people find comfort in our shadows. There's a Korean saying called " If there are too many sailors on a boat, The boat goes to the mountain" As in listening too many opinions might be misleading- However the wonderful thing about art is that

there is a place for everyone and anyone. Even if that doesn't necessarily always happen in the mainstream media.

-When you write, you can write about anything-

Breast and Eggs was moving because of the casual dialogues between Nataski and her sister, and the chapters referring to cold beer and chips. Reading this book felt like watching a realistic coming of age movie. In a short film I made of my friend Margarita, there is a conversation between us

While she paints her childhood favourite teddy bears worn out nose.
(the bears original nose came blue, but somehow ended up a grey colour)

As she paints the bear's nose there is music playing and I say to her
" this feels like a coming of age movie "

It was just exactly that. That is all.