

Jiha Moon

Jessica Gorman

Korean-born artist Jiha Moon talks with urban-code magazine in advance of her upcoming solo exhibition at the Curator's Office micro gallery. The space is located in the District at 1515 14th Street NW, suite 201. Moon's work will be on view from September 15 – October 20, 2007.

JG: Process is often equally, if not more, fascinating than the interpretative aspects of contemporary art. What is your emotional involvement with each piece? Is there a rhythm to the preparation and creativity invested in each of your works?

JM: I often try to put together many different styles of mark making on the same page. I strive to create readable, coherent moments, which at the same time appear busy and chaotic. Emotional involvement is important for my work. Even years after completing a work, I often remember what specific thought process or emotion I went through while creating it. I engage emotionally with images, colors, concepts, forms, and especially in the difficulty of translating my thoughts into two dimensional, pictorial space. Much of the strength in my work, I later find, is in the accidental capture of moments, which reveal themselves only through later, careful development. (For the last part of your question) I usually work on three or four different projects at the same time. Whenever I find myself getting frustrated, I move on to something else. Often, the simple motions of basic material preparation, organization, or even the cleaning of my studio helps me to refresh my creativity.

JG: Would you describe the environment of your studio? Do you have any charming,

kitschy rituals that you perform before beginning a new piece?

JM: My husband and I live in two-bedroom condo. I use our second bedroom as my studio, so my art is much blended into my life. I have lots of things in my studio. I have bunch of books, toys, postcards, and junk that I draw inspiration from. This is important but... I need more space to paint! I don't really have any prescribed rituals when I begin a new piece, but I do drink lots of coffee.

JG: Surreal imagery and intense color palettes can be intimidating, but your work seems to avoid the pretense often associated with abstracted ideas or ambiguous narratives. Is the inclusion of whimsical, cartoonish elements a conscious choice meant to enable a dialogue between the work and the viewers? Or is it simply what happens when you put pigment on the paper?

JM: Much of my work focuses the cultural references evoked by specific combinations of color. I like how different styles of mark making bring different meanings based on diverse cultures. I try to work with my color choices that way. I often choose colors to work with certain associations, or based on different cultural references. For example, if I use dark green and red, Christmas-like colors, it is challenging to use them in such a way as to not evoke that mood. This thought process leads my work, melding the familiar within unfamiliar frameworks, hopefully creating a new experience for the viewers. My color choices have become much more specific now than they were a few years ago.

Well, I get a lot of cartoon-related comments



from people, but I actually can't really draw cartoons. I look at spontaneous mark making and imagine creatures or shapes quickly, solidifying a kind of Rorschach response to incidental forms in my work.

Another element navigating and changing the meaning is line. I think of the line as a leading actor in my work. It changes its character from one gesture to another. I have been deeply influenced by Korean folk art and temple painting, Renaissance sepia drawings, pop cultures and contemporary design.

JG: Do you view your work as a reflection of your life at the moment, or a fantasy apart from it?

JM: Absolutely. It is all reflective to my ideas and visions of nonsense or comical utopia, I would say, rather than fantasy.

JG: Opposites, contrary forces, extremes; they feature prominently in your work. Tension between textures, colors, surfaces, shapes and lines manifest themselves repeatedly. You've already described how you make this spectrum of complex relationships work for you, but what value does a piece gain from your practice of the philosophy 'more is more?'

JM: Well, I guess my response to this question is best illustrated by my work itself. What I try to do is sort of nonsensical... like trying to put old and new imagery at the same time or being in between Heaven and Hell, or being very serious but still very funny, being very personal at the same time global. I like to think that these combinations are possible.

JG: You've experienced many well-deserved triumphs in recent years. As a result, your work has grown beyond the venue of the contemporary gallery, and pieces are now included the collections of several high-profile museums, among them the Hirshhorn Museum of Art & Sculpture Garden and the Virginia Museum of Fine Art. Does success on this level feel any different than selling your first piece?

JM: I feel very fortunate that my works are being welcomed into such prestigious collections. It feels very surreal, positive, while at the same time adds a kind of pressure to take what I do further. In that way it is very similar to selling my first work. It took a while for me to realize my work can be exchanged with money.

JG: On your website, there are images of school children touring Pleasant Purgatory at the Brain Factory gallery in Seoul, Korea. Have you found

that a specific demographic is more receptive to your work?

JM: More here than in Korea I guess. Mixed and diverse cultures are more valued here, and my work needs to be read in context.

JG: Has the way you conceive of works changed now that your pieces are exposed to a much broader audience with varying levels of art education and interest?

JM: Yes, it is because I produce my work in the States, where so many different cultures coexist. I used to live in Annandale, Virginia, where large Korean and Hispanic populations in the area all



Above: Persica Route 2007, Opposite: Jade Cycle, ink and acrylic on Hanji paper, 36" x 24", 2007 courtesy the artist and Curator's Office

mingled in American suburban culture. What can be better than that influence in my work? I think my work benefits most by being seen by as many diverse and varying people as possible, that they all somehow make sense of my work in their own languages.

JG: There has been much commentary on your work by critics and enthusiasts alike; do you care to set the record straight on any particular aspect of your art?

JM: Oh, I have gotten a couple of bad reviews along with the good. I do not expect to get only positive response to what I do. It is nerve breaking though, to put up your work and hear what people actually think about it. But I always think that a negative review is way better than no review at all, because it means that at least your work is important enough for people to talk and write about. **..UC**