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FOREIGN LOVE TOO JIHA MOON

WEB EXCLUSIVE BY LILLY LAMPE
RYAN LEE GALLERY

KOREA, SOUTH | USA



JIHA MOON, *Sarah*, 2013, ceramic and mixed media, 86.4 × 25.4 × 2.5 cm. Courtesy Ryan Lee Gallery, New York.

Questions of cultural appropriation abound in Jiha Moon's "Foreign Love Too," her second solo exhibition at Ryan Lee Gallery (formerly Mary Ryan Gallery) in New York. In paintings, works on paper and ceramics, pop culture, art historical references and icons from the East and West collide, often fusing into hybrid symbols. These visual signifiers become inextricably linked, indicating that when cultures meet, rather than clashing, they meld, raising complicated issues of complicity.

Moon utilizes a variety of mediums, each of which showcases different aspects of cultural melding. In her paintings, Helen Frankenthaler-esque washes are layered with cartoon characters, Dutch iconography and Chinese ink-painting marks. *Peach Mask 4 (LOVE)* (2014) exemplifies this, bearing a confluence of marks and icons. A piece of Korean *hanji* paper cut into a peach shape—a reference to Moon's home-state of Georgia as well as a symbol of longevity in many Asian countries—forms the body of a red Chinese dragon, alongside logograms of tie-dye fabric. Though the logograms read as Chinese characters, they also resemble the letters L-O-V-E, bringing to mind the iconic Robert Indiana sculpture.

Layers of iconography compound in Moon's work. Light blue peaches morph into Angry Birds, while blonde hair like that of a Roy Lichtenstein heroine radiates from graphic paisley shapes. Moon's mutation of visuals reveals their malleable nature.

The eye motif is prominent in this body of work, referencing the wide-spread fetishization of eyes, especially in Asian societies. This iconography also serves to flip the gaze onto the viewer. Eyes, from reptilian to cartoonish, adorn a range of faces. Some of the paintings have holes cut in them, enabling them to serve as masks as well. In this way Moon's work implies that the viewer both perceives the works and is being perceived by them. Recognizing the assimilation of images, he or she is complicit in this mutable exchange.

This sense of watching and being watched is more playful in Moon's ceramics. Peach shapes and eyes lend a variety of vases and plates personification. Her *norigae* series—works which take the form of a traditional Korean amulet comprising a central object, tassels and beads—is particularly complex, incorporating synthetic hair, ceramic and a variety of colorful accessories. *Sarah* (2013) features a large ceramic plate painted with daisies, eyeballs and a demon face. Thick dreadlocks of synthetic hair are woven throughout; an intricate knot of black hair laced with cowries and red, yellow and green beads is perched at the top. *Sarah* explores the cultural significance of hair—from the sophisticated bead and shell braids of Caribbean cultures to the thick, knotted dreads of hippies. It also examines the Asian desire for more Western-style coifs. Moon's cultural appropriation, therefore, is all-inclusive, acknowledging that the manipulation of signs is in fact a pervasive global phenomenon.

Foreign Love Too is on view at Ryan Lee Gallery through March 8, 2014.

Lilly Lampe is a writer based in New York.

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BLOUINARTINFO

23 Questions for Painter and Knick-Knack Collector Jiha Moon

by Ashton Cooper

10/02/14 4:39 PM EST



Jiha Moon, "Mama Dance," 2013 (detail)
(Courtesy of RYAN LEE, New York)



Name: Jiha Moon

Age: 40

Occupation: Artist

City/Neighborhood: Atlanta, Georgia

The title of your show at Ryan Lee Gallery is "Jiha Moon: Foreign Love Too." Where did that title come from?

The body of work for my solo show with Ryan Lee Gallery is a continuation of my work from my solo show "Foreign Love," which is now at the Weatherspoon Art Museum in North Carolina. It originated at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia. As a foreigner living in the States myself, I often think about what authenticity really means and I think we often misunderstand it. The title is from this idea of how we often fall in love with what we think of as foreign or exotic to us.

For that show you also created ceramic objects for the first time. What was it like working in a new medium? What techniques did you use?

Clay is something that I have always been attracted to and wanted to try. Ceramic has a long history connecting East and West. As an Asian American artist, this is such a rich area to explore and to research. I actually enjoy the unexpected and uncontrollable process of kiln works. Not everything comes out perfectly, but I've learned what to expect from this process.

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I have been exploring the idea of Asian blue and white ceramic, celadon and crackle glazes that people easily associate with Asian ceramic works. For example, I put together some old pine trees and Angry Birds as part of a landscape drawing in the manner of blue and white style on ceramic.

Also, learning how to do things in a ceramic studio, I purposefully make pots and vases non-functional. I've learned that many ceramicists often distinguish between functional and decorative work. As a painter this notion was a bit harder to accept, and I started making ceramic works that look like they are broken. However, these works were built perfectly and sliced and put together before they went to the kiln. Nothing was broken but they are meant to look that way. My ceramic work has influenced my own painting work as I work back and forth between two studios.

Your show at the Weatherspoon Art Museum recently opened and you just had a solo exhibition at MOCA Georgia. How does it feel to be getting that kind of institutional recognition?

I was in an important museum group show called "One Way or Another: Asian American Art Now" at Asia Society in 2006, which Melissa Chiu curated; at the Drawing Center in New York in 2008; and had a solo show at the CUNY Graduate Center that was curated by Katherine Carl. I moved to Atlanta in 2006 from Washington, D.C. and have lived here ever since. Atlanta is the city that I have lived in the longest except for my hometown, Daegu, South Korea, where I grew up. It is such privilege to be recognized and have several museum shows in the South in America.

What project are you working on now?

I am working on new paintings and ceramics for shows at the McNay Museum in San Antonio and for the National Academy Museum in New York.

What's the last show that you saw?

Rashid Johnson's "Message to Our Folks" at the High Museum in Atlanta.

What's the last show that surprised you? Why?

I loved Rashid Johnson's show. The way he handles the subject and material are very specific and at the same time touching broader and bigger cultures and audiences.

Describe a typical day in your life as an artist.

I am an artist and I am also a mother and a wife who is multi-tasking many things at the same time. I get up, check my email, social networks, news from here and Korea online, and go to my studio by 11 a.m. I work in my studio until I pick up my son at his school around 5 p.m., and then come home and cook dinner for my family and spend time with them. After my son goes to bed, I do some correspondence or other business-related work on the computer. If I am not

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too tired I often go back to my studio by 9 or 10 p.m. and work until I go to bed.

Do you make a living off your art?

Yes, so far.

What's the most indispensable item in your studio?

Hanji — it's Korean Mulberry paper. I buy a year's supply when I visit Korea.

Where are you finding ideas for your work these days?

Everywhere! I read labels and take pictures of logos on products at farmer's markets and grocery stores. I am a sponge and observe everything and adopt things into my work. I image Google things all the time, and search words in different languages and read Wikipedia pages constantly. I read articles just as much as digging through art books or going to galleries or museums. Any of these can be inspiring and give me ideas for my work.

Do you collect anything?

I collect many things from all over the place. I have hundreds of souvenirs and knick-knacks in my studios. I also collect art often. I try to buy what I can afford but I also have been trading with other artists who I love. My husband and I have quite a nice collection of contemporary art.

What's the last artwork you purchased?

Last year my husband and I bought two pieces from Kansas City artist Jaimie Warren's self-portrait series. We love her work.

What's the first artwork you ever sold?

I sold a large oil on canvas of my grandma's funeral painting to one of my professors at the University of Iowa when I was graduate student there.

What's the weirdest thing you ever saw happen in a museum or gallery?

My 4-year-old son, Oliver, screamed at me, "I hate this work!" at the Dali show at High Museum and stomped his feet really loud last year. I got shocked and had to remove him from the situation immediately.

What's your art-world pet peeve?

People who can't focus on the conversation for a second and keep looking around at art openings. Artists who I don't know who ask me to introduce them to my galleries at the openings. People who give me stink eyes when I bring my little son to the openings.

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What's your favorite post-gallery watering hole or restaurant?

Any Korean restaurant on Buford Highway in Atlanta, and Koreatown in Manhattan has lots of great fusion Asian/Korean restaurants and fancy bakeries for coffee and snacks.

What's the last great book you read?

"Night Studio" by Musa Mayer. I am on and off and still reading.

What work of art do you wish you owned?

Any of Philip Guston's later paintings.

What would you do to get it?

Dream big!

What international art destination do you most want to visit?

I would love to go to the Venice Biennale next time.

What under-appreciated artist, gallery, or work do you think people should know about?

I think I am an under-appreciated artist... definitely Asian artists; any minority artist should have more opportunities to be seen and appreciated in the art world.

Who's your favorite living artist?

Sarah Sze, Nick Cave, Do Ho Suh.

What are your hobbies?

I like cooking. There is something similar between cooking and painting.

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JIHA MOON

By KEVIN GREENBERG

March 26, 2014

Jiha Moon, All Around, 2009.

"People have a soft spot for foreign things. I feel that it is because we add our own experience and imagination to the unfamiliar, which can lead us to misunderstanding it," says the artist Jiha Moon. "It's a lot like tourism. As a foreigner living in the United States, I often think about what authenticity really means, and I think we often misunderstand it."

In Moon's new show of mixed-media works on paper and ceramic sculpture at RYAN LEE gallery, the artist effortlessly melds tropes from disparate sources—including traditional Asian landscape paintings, flickering memes from the Internet, and various highs and lows of American popular culture—into lush compositions that straddle the line between abstraction and representation. The theoretical underpinnings of Moon's work might rely on slightly shopworn themes from the Asian-American diaspora, but when her compositions gel, the results are vivid and mesmerizing, and the intricacy of her technique can't help but draw the viewer in. "Ultimately, everyone except ourselves is foreign," Moon says. "Examining misunderstanding is part of the necessary process of understanding others. I want to share that experience."

"Jiha Moon: Folk Visiting Artists" runs through April 13 at the Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, North Carolina.

Image courtesy of the artist and RYAN LEE, New York.

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Critics Pics - February 24, 2010

Atlanta

Jiha Moon
SALTWORKS
664 11TH ST NW, ATLANTA GA 30318
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Jiha Moon's increased confidence is evident in this new series of paintings. The tension between figuration and abstraction still pervades her repeated layering of traditional Asian landscapes and gestural expressionism. But this new work seems to revel in the joy of painting, alternating thin washes of ink with delicately rendered objects and thick impasto brushstrokes, all on Moon's favored handmade hanji paper. Collage also figures in some of the works, as when she adds paper to extend her painted surface from the rectangular picture plane or incorporates fabric appliqués, possibly an influence from her ongoing residency at the Fabric Workshop.

The South Korean-born, Atlanta-based artist still wrestles with the notion of shifting identities, particularly in our image-laden society. Pac-Man-like figures with razor-sharp teeth, butterflies, and even Wonderland's Alice find their way into her peaceful landscapes with floating clouds and trees, which are interrupted by bursts of energetic color. The work speaks of a society that not only straddles two cultures but also occupies a third—in cyberspace. Moon's professed hero Philip Guston stated in 1960, "[P]ainting is impure. It is the adjustment of impurities which forces painting's continuity. We are image-makers and image-ridden." Moon seems to have taken this to heart in her current exhibition (titled "Blue Peony and Impure Thoughts," in Guston's honor), providing thought-provoking interpretations of the multilayered and image-rich world she inhabits.



Jiha Moon, *Painter's Argument*, 2009, ink and acrylic on hanji paper, 33 1/2 x 32".

— Rebecca Dimling Cochran

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Art In America, May 2008

ATLANTA

Jiha Moon at Saltworks

Jiha Moon studied both traditional Korean painting and Western painting at university in her native Korea. She furthered her knowledge of the latter in the United States, but it remains particularly telling that her early training was based in a system in which the two practices were distinctly separate. In her small- to medium-size works, she has developed a style of painting that is not so much a fusion as a harmonious layering of the two traditions' distinct mark-making and leitmotifs.

Painted on handmade hanji paper that she personally selects in Korea, her compositions have incredible depth. Moon may build up as many as seven layers using ink and acrylic paint. Each application reveals not only her technical virtuosity in both Eastern and Western painting styles, but also the broad cultural vocabulary that she draws from. In the approximately 3-by-2-foot *Rhetoric Channel* (2008), for example, Moon begins with veils of ink washes in cloudlike forms on top of which she delicately renders conventional ink drawings of peaches and

peach blossoms. Over this, she strategically places rainbowlike swaths of acrylic color with a thickly loaded brush in a single Abstract Expressionist-like gestural movement. Then, she goes back into the piece again with her fine ink brush to create butterflies and to add detail to both the delicate clouds and the bold brush strokes.

Titled "No Peach Heaven: MuRungDownan," this new series of 11 works (all 2007-08) pulls many of its references from an old Korean tale. In the story, a fisherman, MuRungDownan, follows a trail of floating peach blossoms along a stream and unknowingly enters a utopian world. When he eventually returns home, he tells everyone of his experience and they follow him as he eagerly tries to rediscover this magical place. Yet the fisherman is unable to retrace his steps and his followers ruefully realize there is "no peach heaven."

Now a resident of Georgia (the peach state), Moon is clearly searching for her own Shangri-la somewhere between her old and new home. Symbolic references to the various influences in her life fill her pages. She often cuts the paper into the shape of a modified fan before painting. Some of her works include beautifully depicted mouths, arms or ears, perhaps reflecting a sense of dislocation and a desire to be heard. Then there are symbols, such as Japanese anime figures or butterflies that resemble the Microsoft logo, that speak of commonalities in our global society. She weaves these elements into beautiful works that require some effort to decipher, but the results are exceptionally rewarding.

—Rebecca Dimling Cochran

Jiha Moon: *Rhetoric Channel*, 2008, ink and acrylic on hanji paper, 37 by 24½ inches; at Saltworks.



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Art Papers, March/April 2008, p53



JIHA MOON
ATLANTA

Jiha Moon's Shangri-La radiates elegance and ugliness, caprice and tradition in *No Peach Heaven: MuRung-Down* (Saltworks Gallery; January 12–February 16, 2008). Titled after a traditional story from her native Korea in which a fisherman follows a trail of peach blossoms into a cave where he finds earthly paradise, the exhibition features new works that weave contemporary pop cultural references from Moon's home in Atlanta with traditional Korean techniques and materials, historical Chinese painting styles and motifs, Japanese animé, Disney animation, abstract expressionist brushwork, and her own delicate, calligraphic line.

Dear Social Climber, 2007, and *Over the Rainbow*, 2007, feature fan-shaped cutouts mounted on squares of violet Korean Hanji paper. Within each fan, flowers and sylvan creatures emerge from eddies of paint and delicate lines against swirling purple, azure, and yellow washes that morph into billowing opaque, turquoise and mauve cloud forms. A naturalistic pheasant with a red monk's hat swims with three-dimensional crimson biomorphic globules and Disneyesque flowers in *Dear Social Climber*. In the center of *Over the Rainbow*, gnarled trees with pastel-colored leaves are tethered in gossamer ribbons by the birds that fly over Dorothy's rainbow—or rather, in this case, Snow White's bluebird friends. A pattern of lavender scallops is woven into the violet Hanji paper ground, over which ghost-like teal outlines of clouds, trees, and birds flow into meandering linear designs.

Rhetoric Channel, 2008, recalls the vertical format and intuitive space of Chinese literati landscape painting. Here, peaches, dogwood blossoms, and spurring rainbows cascade down a misty red mountain range amidst fluttering Microsoft butterflies. In *Peach Cliff Zigzag*, 2007, a grey Dr. Seuss-like road hovers its way upward, unhinged from its mountainous support. Diaphanous mists of purple, green, and aqua wash play hide-and-seek with fuschia ribbons and opaque teal stratus clouds, fine blood-red outlines of cloud or rock formations, and loaded gestural swaths of purple, laven-

der, and black. Throughout, clusters of peaches with bright pink nipple-like tips dangle on fine green vines. The universal continuum embodied in landscape gives way to the collision of tradition and contemporary corporate culture.

In a departure from the rest of the show, three tiny pink paintings are positioned in an alcove, linked by pink-washed tendrils and tails painted on the white walls. In *Beauty and the Beast*, 2008, fuschia-bordered teal ribbons and blue-white painterly strokes encircle a young Asian beauty, with misty red pigment clouds forming ominous glaring eyes and snarling snouts. White-fanged orange mouths emerge from the left, chomping at the diminutive maiden.

At over five by six and a half feet, *No Peach Heaven*, 2007, is the largest and most complex image in the exhibition. Here, encroaching patterns of regular, geometric stripes threaten Moon's fantastical universe of cloud washes, painterly swirls, and carefully delineated morphing creatures, cradled within the fan shape. Recalling 1960s post-painterly abstraction, these test patterns invade her uninhibited flowing world of painterly mark and linear metamorphosis.

The profusion of marvelous metamorphosing creatures and sumptuous settings in Moon's creations compels writers, including myself, to wax poetic, searching the thesaurus for terms that do justice to the richness of her imagery. At times, the referential richness of her work does seem nearly overwhelming. Yet, Moon's menagerie is not home to implausible cultural hybrids. If the exhibition's title suggests the impossibility of finding paradise in the New South, her fusion of East and West, tradition and kitsch, high art and pop culture celebrates a dizzying diversity of coexisting cultures in a buoyant vision of endless possibility.

—Diana McClintock

INSIDE FRONT COVER: Jiha Moon, *Peach Cliff Zigzag*, 2007, ink and acrylic on Hanji paper, 30 in x 55.5 inches
ABOVE: *Beauty and the Beast*, 2008, ink and acrylic on Hanji paper, mounted on canvas, 9 x 6 inches
(courtesy of the artist and Saltworks Gallery, Atlanta)

Burnway, January 21, 2010

Jiha Moon's new solo opens Saturday at Saltworks,
by Jeremy Abernathy



Jiha Moon, Painters Argument, 2009. Photo courtesy Saltworks Gallery.

The imagery in Jiha Moon's paintings can thunder with laughter, whisper of legends long forgotten and some yet to be lived, and shed mournful tears of dripping blue and pink paint. Her new exhibition, opening at Saltworks Gallery this Saturday, January 23, from 6-9PM, is titled *Blue Peony and Impure Thoughts*. As Atlanta-based curator Stephanie Greene observes in her essay on the exhibition, "Traditional pink or white peonies represent luxury and wealth—the opposite of lotuses, which signify spirituality—but blue peonies don't exist in nature." In our interview below, the artist elaborates on her title and her influences and challenges in creating her recent work.

I wanted to interview Moon because I missed her last solo at Saltworks in 2008. (Since then, she's shown in Washington, D.C., at the Moti Hasson Gallery in New York, and in venues as far as Seoul, South Korea.) The symbol of a peony implies an identity bound to a specific place, rooted in the soil. But choosing the unnatural color of blue shifts this identity out of its familiar context. It's a nice metaphor for life in the increasingly global 21st century.

Q. What distinguishes your newest show from previous work? Are these "impure thoughts" more than just a theme, or will we see something different in terms of form or content?

J.M. "Impure thoughts" is from one of my favorite quotes from Philip Guston's essay, "Impure Thoughts: On Guston's Abstractions." He says " ... But painting is impure and it is the adjustment of impurities which forces painting's continuity. We are image-makers and image-ridden." (Guston, 1960)

I have long admired Philip Guston for not only his work but also his philosophy and attitude towards the world. Also, I have always thought about this quote whenever I hit problems in my work. It helps me ... because most of my trouble begins when I think too much about the balance between abstraction and figuration ... and feel too conscious about resolving the problem rather than let the work be itself.

Anyway, so I made observations over what has been going on in my recent work which is "shifting identities and the battle between abstraction and figuration." ... [That's when] I came up with the title: *Blue Peony and Impure Thoughts*.

... So, yes, you will notice some differences in my work in terms of how I handle paint, color, form, and paper as material compared to my previous works. ... I hope these new works are more figurative [and] more abstract at the same time. I also started using the color black, which I was a bit afraid of before, as I did not want the viewer to think of Asian calligraphy too much. ... But now I am ready I let the color take its own role for each work, whether it wants to be Asian calligraphy or not.

Q. Can you name a few specific Asian influences on your work? That is, where do you look for line, color, symbolism, or relationships between figure and ground ...?

J.M. Well, I look at many things in general, in any form of art or life. I look at Korean folk art (Min-Wha), Chinese landscapes, Tao-Chi (he calls himself an individualist, as he did not want anybody to talk about his influences too much—I love his attitude!), Bada Shanren, Disney cartoons, The Simpsons, Hieronymus Bosch, national flags, commercials, pop culture, youth cultures, Japanese woodblock prints (especially Utagawa Hiroshige), Korean quilts and Bojagi, women's art-embroidery, Renaissance etching, and sepia drawings and many more



Jiha Moon, Impure Thoughts, 2008. This print is an homage to Philip Guston and is the first in an edition co-published by Wingate Studio and the Smith College Museum of Art.



Jiha Moon, Rhetoric Channel, 2008. Photo courtesy the artist and Saltworks Gallery.

Q. What should we look forward to in terms of site-specific details? What have you learned from previous installation work: for example, the collaborative work with Rachel Hayes at the Contemporary or your solo at Moti Hasson Gallery?

J.M. It is such a challenge for me to do an installation, because I am such a painter. My main focus and love is on the surface of two dimensions. But once in a while I have a project that sticks in my head wanting to be [released into] real life. For example, in the project I did in NYC, I made a 15-foot-long scroll painting, along with sculptural elements meant to be viewed from all directions ... or [another example was] a collaboration with installation artist Rachel Hayes. It makes me use my senses. [It makes me] more intense and awake.

... For this installation at Saltworks, I used all my collections and artifacts from my studio. I have [wanted] to do this so bad for a long time. It is a storehouse—an idea box like a thrift store. I have been collecting these things since I started living in US. They are my source materials as well as inspirations. I think just about everyone has one of these kinds of collections at their house, even if they are not artists. Of course, I bet all artists have this in their studios ... favorite postcards, correspondence, little paint boogers, and toys. I wanted to make [it] extreme and ... in my own context, matching with different types of stripes, which often appear in my work. [These stripes] can be [interpreted as a] Korean traditional rainbow but also be national flags. They are sort of in between familiar and non-familiar.

Q. Take a minute to read this quotation by Radcliffe Bailey. The quote is from my interview with him last fall. "Someone asked me the other day, 'Radcliffe, how do we get more African Americans to come our art spaces?' There's a way to invite everybody. ... Sometimes I drive out to Buford Highway, and I see whole different worlds out there. And when I see those worlds, I say, 'You know what's missing in the Atlanta art scene? The makeup of all these people.'" If you were in the room and you heard this, what would be your response?

J.M. Well, if I was invited to some punk house (with kids fighting, dancing) or a hip-hop place, I would feel the same way. This is a country of all kinds. There is so much to experience and learn. But for me, Korean restaurants and stores on Buford Highway are sort of the tip of an iceberg, which is a bit Americanized. Cultures are quickly blending and changing, which is interesting. My work has so much Asian influence to some viewers, it but appears very Americanized to some others.

The work reveals who artists are, but doesn't always show their ethnic [background] quickly. That's what I am interested in. The identities are more complex and layered than what people can think of. I tell people I am a Korean when they ask me where I am from, [but it] doesn't mean they understand me so much. "Where are you from?" can be a tricky question these days.

Jiha Moon's Blue Peony and Impure Thoughts will be on view at Saltworks Gallery from January 23 through March 6.



A detail of Jiha Moon's 2008 'Megaxiscape' installation at Moti Hasson Gallery in New York.