

A detailed look at what moves us

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Fine detail or dash and drip? In contemporary art anything goes. Yet a precise style can disarm passion and a raw, spontaneous style can rob us of context.

The precise, highly detailed and highly finished painting of Joon-Hee Park at Oedipus Rex creates landscapes within which the artist depicts herself acting out her dreams. In her surreal world, images have the precision of dream, an interior dream irrationally fantastical and rising from the subconscious.

The first painting in the show is Daydream, where the artist with her dark hair and wide eyes is bowed down by a great pile of toys on the top of her head. The toys are soft toys – bears and monkeys – and yet they bear heavily on the young girl. There are dark lines under those wide eyes that suggest stress and in the landscape is a blasted, leafless tree.

The artist is caught between her Korean childhood and inheritance and her present place in New Zealand. There is just enough generalisation to make it a symbol of the way everyone carries some burden from their childhood but it is still highly personal.

The rest of the paintings, all flooded with a clear bright light, but no cast shadows, are much more idyllic and joyful. They join the whole genre of recent art centring on wide-eyed naive young women. In most of the paintings, the artist's alter ego is attended by a big floppy-eared dog, part of a long tradition of the dog as a symbol of faithfulness.

A typical work is the large painting Picnic which could be the illustration for a children's book. The girl sits on a rug surrounded by teddy bears, dolls, red elves and precisely arranged food. It is a work of great charm but, in the idyllic landscape, that twisted tree appears again and the icing on a cake that has had one wedge cut out from it runs red like blood. Alongside, a monkey swings from its tail as an interruption or a messenger. This detail is whimsical and

there is a romping, rather naive delight throughout the work. The painting called Whim is a little symphony of pink and sweetness and there are other titles like Pink Candy and Lavender Pond which are intensely sweet.

Yet there are sinister hints. The cratered landscape in What Happens on the Moon is bleak though playful and the unsettling Annual Event of Bouncy Play achieves an intensity not apparent elsewhere.

This is an impressive first exhibition where the artist has established a style of her own and shows skill in draughtsmanship that reinforces her considerable potential.



Picnic by Joon Hee Park at the Orexart Gallery.
Photo / Supplied

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