

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tone Check: The Skins of Contemporary Korean Painting

398 West Street, New York, NY 10014

November 16, 2024 - January 16, 2025

Opening Reception with the artists: Saturday, Nov 16, 2024 | 6-8 PM

Curated by Phil Zheng Cai

Artists:

Claire Chey

Judy Chung

Ahyun Jeon

Jenny Jisun Kim

Jean Oh

Kai Oh

Yissho Oh

Youngmin Park

Jazoo Yang

New York, NY, November 16, 2024 - Eli Klein Gallery is thrilled to present “Tone Check: The Skins of Contemporary Korean Painting,” a group exhibition of 9 Korean artists probing through the psychological, emotional, and social uncertainties that are often unseen on just the surface. As skin works as a protective, discerning barrier for what is within, the artists have worked to open up that barrier to communicate and be vulnerable with the audience. This exhibition showcases 17 flat works, revealing the true colors of and under the skins corresponding to each painting, literally and metaphorically.

Since the Dansaekhwa movement, Korean paintings have had a strong historical connection with the concept of "skins." This notion has further developed in recent years, as what was initially perceived as a resemblance has now progressed into a more complex relationship. More artists are starting to resolve various conflicts—technical, psychological, social, and emotional—through flat, skin-esque surfaces. A canvas could now become a playground where complicated emotions and mixed feelings coexist and cohabit, much like the ever-changing definition of "Chaemyeon" (체면, directly translated as “face,” is how someone is perceived in society). The interchanging faces in this exhibition are made up of very distinct and personal mediums ranging from soil collected from traditional Korean houses to tattoo ink embedded in



Jazoo Yang, *Skin of Everything No. 20240801*, 2024.
Mixed media on canvas. 35 7/8 x 28 3/4 inches (91 x 73 cm)

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silicone to timeless painting mediums like acrylic & oil. This medley of earthly hues, intentional textures, and purposeful strokes opens up an inquisitive space where the audience is asked to assess the manner of what the skins of contemporary Korean paintings carry.



Claire Chey, *Guijeop #2*, 2024.
Oil on canvas. 66 1/8 x 48 1/8 inches (168 x 122 cm)

With her photographic digital lens exploring the physical body, Kai Oh's collage-like abstract paintings delve into personal interpretations of the eyes, often finding symbolism and parallels between the concept of vitality and its biological functions. Similarly focusing on the shell of our existence, Yissho Oh, whose work is often blurred between being a painter and a tattoo artist, operates on silicone through intricate techniques to deepen his interests not only in the mental and emotional expressions through the physical body but also the material structure of the body itself.

Claire Chey, who has till now persistently focused on themes of women being consumed by societal standards through explicit yonic representation, dives into another sector for this exhibition where she explores a mystic playground where sex-driven ghosts thrive in the realm of sleep—playing with ideas of shame, trauma, and ecstaticism. On a similar note of exploring an intangible realm to dive deeper into the human psyche, Judy Chung is a creator of digitally and physically merged worlds that are abundant with pop culture references and imaginative characters. She transports herself into a world of multiplicities where conjoined twins exist, comparing them to the idea of truth and falsehood. Following the narrative of twins and doubles, Youngmin Park, who is used to questioning the reliability of personal narratives, also emphasizes a phenomenon that happens in spiritual faith, where repetition is necessary for doubt to wash away.



Yissho Oh, *The Island Lives in the Whale*, 2024.
Acrylic, tattoo ink, silicone, resin on panel. 31 5/8 x 31 5/8 inches (80 x 80 cm)

While embodying the painting process through a daily bodily exercise consisting of meditative strokes and actively listening to the sounds of the materials when painting, Jazoo Yang tells us stories of forgotten communities through remnants left by neglected houses in Korea as well as other forgotten parts of Korea while questioning society for the decision for destruction. Jenny Jisun Kim, who outside of being an artist works as Korean-English translator, also takes on the role of becoming a folk storyteller of an ancient design found on a mural tomb from the late Guguryeo period of Korea as well as a visual translator for Yi Sang, a revolutionary poet who lived through the Japanese occupation of Korea. Her practice calls for the inability of both translation and painting to fully penetrate meanings.

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Internally driven and inspired, Ahyun Jeon gets up close and personal with the human body often to the point of abstraction and hones in on evidence left by unconscious defense mechanisms and moments of



Judy Chung, *Symbiosis (A More Imperfect Union)*, 2024.
Acrylic on canvas. 50 x 70 inches (127 x 177.8 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Eli Klein Gallery, and RAINRAIN © Judy Chung

vulnerability. Jean Oh has a similar approach in drawing herself closer to the physical body, at times embedding herself deeper into the canvas by sewing into it, and blending in concepts of fragmented memories, emotions, and interpersonal relationships; ultimately showing the fragility of identity.

Curated by Phil Zheng Cai at Eli Klein Gallery, this exhibition is made to create a fair outlet for the nine artist's physical manifestations of the different "skins" that are screaming at the forefront of their

rumination. As the gallery's atmosphere is filled with flavors of cultural interrogations, societal prejudices, emotional mindfulness, and spiritual uncertainties; we are asked to take off our own husks(if comfortable) and meet the artists flesh to flesh.

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