



GaHee Park, *Domaine de Fatigue*, 2022. Oil on canvas. 63.5 x 76.2 cm | 25 x 30 inch. Photograph: Marion Paquette. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

## GAHEE PARK *EVENINGNESS*

January 18 — February 25, 2023  
Tuesday - Saturday 12pm - 6pm

For her first presentation of work in Japan, Perrotin Tokyo is pleased to present a new suite of paintings and drawings by GaHee Park. Born in South Korea and based in Montreal, Canada, Park's art draws inspiration from her upbringing in Seoul, as well as her initial observations of life in the United States. Both personal and fantastical, Park's paintings explore domestic intimacy and desire in her provocative vignettes of everyday objects and gestures. *Eveningness* represents the artist's fourth solo exhibition with the gallery.

Figures, either entwined or captured in moments of solitude, dominate Park's compositions. However, her work remains anchored in the genre of still life painting. Park draws the viewer into her world and experiences through sensual depictions of the body or quixotic portraits, yet the surrounding details provide the narrative and context for each work. For example, in the painting *Picture with Fruit, Flower and Flies*, an image hangs on the wall and depicts a chiseled torso with a white towel loosely gathered around the figure's shoulders. Flies hover around a table decorated with an elbow lamp and blooming rose. Framing the body, the erect reach of the lamp and flower's curvature subtly references feelings of arousal. Cantaloupe slices and an open magazine indicate the immediacy of the scene, as if the viewer has pulled up a chair to indulge in both the sweet melon flesh and image of the nude body. The magazine spread features a face with three eyes and alludes to watching, observing, and voyeurism, themes ever-present in Park's work.

The painting *Domaine de Fatigue* highlights the balance of psychological tension and whimsy inherent to Park's painting practice. A cocktail, tray of sardines, and wine bottle rest on a tabletop sheathed with a mint green table runner. A lone person wearily rests their head on a table, their gaze transfixed on the viewer observed through the martini glass. At quick glance it seems as if the person places their head on their own arm, but closer inspection suggests the arm could belong to someone beyond the picture frame. This scene nods to familiar intimacy between two people, with the person's nose comfortably nestled against the wrist of another. A hand with stiletto nails, a recurring motif in Park's work, serves as a metaphor for sensuality, as well as dominance.

Many works on view in *Eveningness* explore the passage of time. Park uses seasons and changes in light to note specific moments, both past and present. Notably, wintery rain clouds decorate the wine label depicted in *Domaine de Fatigue*—perhaps revealing the past nature of the relationship portrayed in the eponymous painting. The apricot sunrise in *Still Life with Slugs* evokes the beginning of something—entangled slugs at dawn conjure the start of a new love. Similarly, the various times of day depicted in Park's shrimp drawings imply a filmic sequence of events. Again, the viewer observes the breadth of Park's imagination as light and color transform the horizon while the sun climbs and descends into the sea.

— Joanna Robotham, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa, FL, USA.

# GAHEE PARK & JOANNA ROBOTHAM

## Q&A



GaHee Park, *Still Life with Slugs*, 2022. Oil on canvas. 96.5 x 81.3 cm | 38 x 32 inch. Photograph: Marion Paquette. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

**Joanna Robotham (JR):** Your work offers a quiet, even voyeuristic view, into domestic spaces and our private lives and your newest body of work reveals an even closer look into your subjects' world. This suite of paintings and drawings presents vignettes where the viewer feels like they are not merely passive observers but rather part of the painting, as if one is standing in front of a sumptuous arrangement of flowers, fruits, and vegetables, or seated at the table with your figures. How does this vantage point alter the meaning or context of your art?

**GaHee Park (GP):** In earlier works the figures used to be close to characters but gradually I've come to think of them more like components of a still life, on the same level as other elements — insects, furniture, food. The perspective is perhaps less human centric, which has the effect of making the inanimate objects appear to come alive.

**JR:** Curtains and textiles appear in previous paintings but in this current series of paintings the presence and texture of fabric is ever present. You create interesting layers, narratives, and dimensionality with the ripple of a table runner, the folds of a curtain, even the smoothness of a leather glove. What is the significance of textiles in these works?

**GP:** For me, garments cover space, and then create extra space. I was initially inspired by my cat. When we play, I hide mouse toys inside of fabric or plastic, and he likes to dig and find them. Sometimes, he hides behind curtains for privacy and it made me realize that the space in between the window and curtain, or the little gaps in the floors, or the shadow under a table, can be home for something, a little world. Formally, the ways the textiles crease, fold, hang and interact with bodies, they mimic body parts and movements. Plants do something similar too.

**JR:** Much has been discussed about your color palette and the body



GaHee Park, *Picture with Fruit, Flower and Flies*, 2022. Oil on canvas. 96.5 x 81.3 cm | 38 x 32 inch. Photograph: Marion Paquette. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

**in your paintings, but your work is also about the passage of time. How do you express time in your art and how does it further emphasize the context of each work?**

**GP:** I do study color in a theoretical/technical way (pigments etc.) but I am also trying to use color in an emotional and instinctual way. It's a big part of my expression. The palette, the interactions of the colors, these are a way to create and express emotional complexity. It's fun for me to think about how certain pigments are made and how they represent another element in a painting: some pigments are coming from stone but become a sky, or flies.

Expressing time is also related to the use of color. I like to make scenes specific but abstract. I think of the way seasons and different times of day are defined by certain colors or combinations of colors, how this conveys a certain mood or narrative. I like to play with these factors, blending them in unreal manners, so that there might be aspects of more than one season in the same work, or the time of day might be ambiguous.

This relates to the spatial aspect of the compositions as well, frames within frames, the viewer can't tell if something is a window or a painting, whether it's something real in the space or whether it reflects a different psychic or temporal realm, a dream or memory.

A motif I have been using recently — figures with multiple eyes, mouths, facial expressions, hands — is also related to time, it suggests different moments, and different kinds of moments as well (real moments, fantasies, memories, etc.), being shown at the same time.

**JR:** Your interest in drawing the body started at a young age. What elements of the body intrigued you during your formative years as an artist? Has your representation of the figure or certain body parts, such as fingers and eyes, changed over time?



GaHee Park, *Shrimp with Lemon and Celery*, 2022. Color pencil on paper. 15.2 x 10.2 cm | 6 x 4 inch. Photograph: Guillaume Ziccarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.



GaHee Park, *Shrimp at Night*, 2022. Color pencil on paper. 15.2 x 10.2 cm | 6 x 4 inch. Photograph: Guillaume Ziccarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

**GP:** As soon as I started drawing as a kid, I was sketching bodies, often naked. I think it was a natural curiosity for the human body and sexuality from an innocent age. But as I grew older, the innocence disappeared and got combined with experiences. Now, more than a curiosity for the actual body, I am drawn to looking for something more abstract, something more like an essence of sexuality, physicality, in a psychological or emotional sense. I am also interested in the way fragmenting certain body parts can suggest gestures and create tensions or narrative possibilities. Even a minimal suggestion of a body part can be very evocative.

**JR:** *When you first arrived in the United States, you spent a brief stint of time in Miami, Florida. How did that early experience inform your art? (note: I'm thinking of our conversation about Miami's unique color and architecture).*

**GP:** The first place I visited in the US was Miami, to attend a language school to learn English in my early 20s. Back then Korean people would usually go to New York or LA to learn English, but I looked at pictures of Miami and I wanted to visit. I was lured in by the ocean and the endlessly interesting buildings on this long island, it was unlike anything I had seen before in person. Furthermore, I wanted to visit somewhere that was far from Korean culture, different lifestyles, different weather, different rhythm. It was an extremely formative experience, though more on a personal and social level. But the architecture, the beaches, the vegetation... I absorbed it all in a deep way and these visual and cultural cues have made their way into my work.

**JR:** *The drawings featured in this exhibition depict a lone shrimp dangling or nestled in a cocktail glass and set against the horizon of a seascape. What does the shrimp symbolize in this suite of drawings?*

**GP:** There are a few different aspects that drew me to the shrimp. When I visit South Korea, sometimes my family takes me to a restaurant near where they grew up, it's in a seafood market. One time, my dad requested a special dish for me which was dozens of live shrimps, and we had to eat them while they were moving in our mouths. The experience stuck with me. I found it quite disturbing and would never have chosen to eat them

that way, but it was something my parents were doing to try to express their love to me, so I went along with it. It made me think about how cats will bring their owners living small animals... some kind of deep instinctual gesture that is offered in one way but has a totally different unintended effect that the offerer might not even be aware of, how this creates two different realities. I like to use animals, fish and insects and plants in my work to suggest these different realms and different living worlds co-existing and interacting in complicated ways. The shrimp appealed to me because its appearance is kind of in between an animal, insect, and fish, there's something alien and familiar about them. I also like the curved shape of the shrimp and the way it is served in a cocktail glass or bowl hanging off the side, as if they are crawling or diving in. It suggests some action, some movement. I fantasized about a shrimp that might be trying to get back home to the water and might think it is diving into the ocean instead of into a shrimp cocktail to be served and eaten.

**JR:** *You've described your feelings of invisibility, as well as feeling ignored, as an Asian woman. Have recent events of aggression, violence, and discrimination in major cities, particularly against Asian and Asian American women, impacted your practice and/or your approach to art making?*

**GP:** I decided to leave New York and moved to Canada during the pandemic. At the beginning of the pandemic, I did get some street harassment, especially during the early days when anti-Asian racism became more prevalent, and that did contribute to my desire to leave the city and America. But these recent events also made me more resolved to express myself and make room for myself in the art world. I took art history and theory classes in art school for 10 years (undergrad in South Korea and Philadelphia, then grad school in New York) and hardly learned about any Asian women artists, maybe two or three. I don't think my approach to making work has changed but it's made me more motivated to continue.

**More information about the show >>>**

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Studio image, GaHee Park, Montreal, Canada, 2022. Photograph: Mike Vass.

**GaHee Park**'s paintings may be realized in the "naive" style that recalls painters like Henri Rousseau, but her subject matter is far from it. Often depicting romantic scenes where the idyll has turned sour, the sexual acts that seem to be transpiring in her paintings are at odds with their quaint settings, where art history's favorite still life subjects—rotund fruit, cheeses, and bottles, appear on the verge of rolling off the surface of the table: so pitched is the surface, so hyper-stylized is her take on forced perspective. And yet, space doesn't seem to recede in Park's paintings. It's cancelled out by the kind of flatness only a laboring love of texture and pattern can produce. Space comes to a halt as Park revels in woodgrain and brocade. Any indication of space comes courtesy of some framed element that seems to replicate the scene, albeit with some slight modification like a game of "Spot the Difference." A window? A mirror? Another painting? Park revels in these ambiguities as well.

**More information about the artist >>>**

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