

Hejum Bä

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“Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which they communicate than by the content of the communication.”
– Marshall McLuhan

In the infamous movie *A Clockwork Orange* by Stanley Kubrick, one of the most iconic scenes depicts Alex, the protagonist afflicted by an insatiable thirst for “ultra-violence”, undergoing the “Ludovico technique,” a form of aversion therapy in which his eyes are forcibly pried open as he is obligated to watch a series of graphically violent, and disturbing footage.

Hejum Bä’s first solo exhibition at MASSIMODECARLO Hong Kong bears a provocative title – a nod to the viral Korean internet meme – *I want to buy unseen eyes* – referencing the constant stream and influx of content we consume in the digital age, whether we intend it or not. These thoughts, feelings, and emotions are laid down on canvas as a response to the artist’s perceptiveness.

Hejum’s paintings are not mere random arrangements of lines and colour fields. Rather, they represent a meticulous dissection and abstraction of the peculiarities of our contemporary experiences. Living in Seoul, and working in Gangnam district, also known as the financial heart of the city, Hejum Bä looks and listens at what surrounds her. To the artist, the seeming schizophrenia of modern life is neither foreign nor bizarre, but rather a familiar muse.

In *A Bitcoiner’s Hope* (2024), complementary fields of colour are circumscribed by specific linework patterns that mimic chart visualisations used in banking apps. In this work, Bä explores the impact of Bitcoin in South Korea, where the trend saw countless people investing their savings in cryptocurrencies.

The use of line-work as a key aesthetic theme in Bä’s oeuvre derives from the observation of unlocking patterns in smartphones. In *Heavy Swipe to Unlock* (2024), two thick green lines mimic the path our fingers instinctively follow through habits ingrained by modern technology. The term “heavy”

not only suggests the physicality of the gesture, but also evokes a pivotal feeling that Bä impute to her paintings: as our digital lives prioritize fleetingness, we need weight and heaviness as a grounding counterpart.

The idea of rendering her work as a painterly anchor against the hustle of our life opens another key concept in Hejum Bä’s research, “sheer optimism.” Understanding optimism in contrast to positivity, the artist aims to use the former as a mental foundation to build, where the latter is often enforced as a needed attitude in modern capitalism.

In the painting *An Affirmation* (2024), Bä reflects on the recent psychological trend in using words of positive affirmation to motivate ourselves to remain productive and healthy despite the hardships we face daily. *Sheer Optimism* (2024) and *An Uplifting Painting* (2024) both embody this exploration of anchoring and presenting a strong and deep feeling of hopefulness. The reverse drops of the second artwork create an uplifting pattern, as the artist presents the painting upside-down.

At large, Hejum Bä’s exhibition at MASSIMODECARLO Hong Kong is a two-fold exploration of modern life: it offers an objective, non-judgemental commentary on our current condition. From her studio in Gangnam, Bä observes and investigates, often emphasizing what she sees; as in the end, “we are all trying to get by,” one overstimulation after the other.

It is in virtue of this understanding, that a second layer of reading on Bä’s work emerges: her paintings become a welcoming escapism, where abstraction serves as a tool for empathy, lines connect us to our present, and colour patterns move us beyond it. Only the titles, with their witty captions, reveal the inherent duality present in her work.

– Valentina Buzzi, writer and curator

Hejum Bä

Hejum Bä was born in Seoul in 1987. She lives and works in Seoul, KR.

Hejum practice aims to convert the vocabularies of abstract painting into the indices of crypticity of some aspects of today's communication, which are manifested in the frequent use of digital devices. Bä colour-field abstraction maps out our changing position towards various types of images, and their circulation as a form of information. Hejum considers painting the measuring scale of our relationships with the digital sphere, in an attempt to mobilize its elements as visually semantic values, by placing atypical shapes and primary colours in specific structural relations. By running the dynamics of shapes and colors she seeks to render a chain of cryptic meanings. As curator Eunjun Lee synthesizes: "Hejum Bä's paintings can be anything at all and remain an elusive mystery. Nevertheless, they open up the world within us and prompt us to wonder whence the forms in our first crayon drawings came. And the answer remains a riddle".

Graduated from Ewha Women's University's Painting/Printmaking program (Seoul) and received her diploma at the Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design she is now enrolled in the Practice-based Research Program at Bauhaus University (Weimar, Germany) while working in Seoul.

Recent solo exhibitions include MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique (2023), a presentation for the Focus Asia sector in Frieze Seoul (2022), Kumho Museum of Art (2021), SeMA Storage (2021), OCI Museum of Art (2018), and she has participated in multiple group shows including Young Korean Artists 2021 at MMCA, DOOSAN Gallery, HITE Collection, Whistle gallery, and Hakgojae Gallery.

Valentina Buzzi

Valentina Buzzi (b.1995) is an Italian writer and curator in contemporary art, living and working between South Korea, Italy, and France.

Recent notable exhibitions include La Maison de La Lune Brulee (2024), collateral event of the 60th Venice Biennale, and the Italian Pavilion at the Gwangju Biennale (2023). Valentina has written essays and catalogues for institutions, art galleries, fairs, and biennales. She regularly writes for Plus Magazine, Art Asia Pacific, Eazel Art, among others. Valentina is a Ph.D. researcher in cultural studies at HUFS in Seoul. As an academic she has conducted lectures at ELISAVA, HUFS, Italian Cultural Institute in Seoul, Malta Biennale with UNESCO, and Udeka.