

ARCHIVE 00



INTERVIEW WITH SUN WOO

A00

"Sun Woo, tell us a bit about your background."

S.W

"I was born and raised in Seoul, South Korea until I moved to Canada around the age of ten. After spending four years in Toronto, I returned to Seoul, then left for New York to attend college there. Upon graduating, I came back to Seoul, where I'm currently based."

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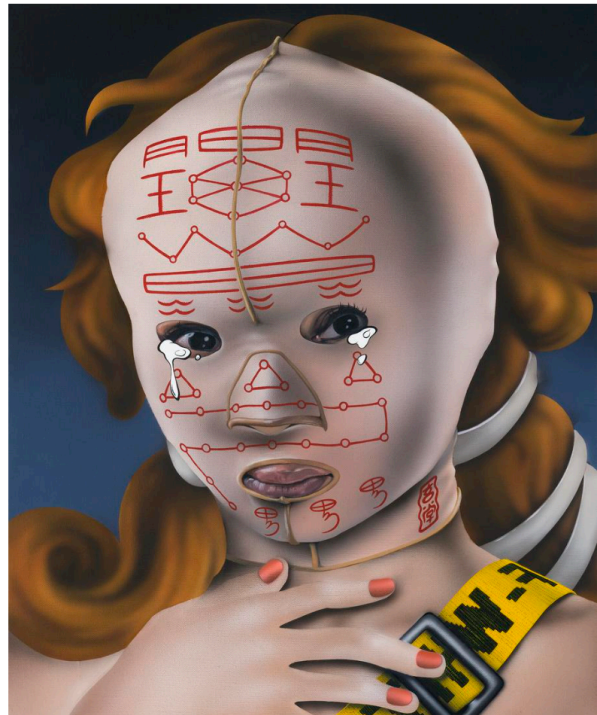
"When did you start painting? Were you passionate about art from a young age?"

S.W

"I started at a very young age. One of my earliest memories is of myself making watercolor paintings of animals, which my parents used to tape on the home wall like a small museum. They also enjoyed taking me to art exhibitions and reading me comic books at bedtime. I think all of these made me proud, happy, and inspired as a kid, and encouraged me to continue pursuing art."

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"Your painting has a lot of fashion references, especially streetwear like vans and off white. What's the story behind those references?"



S.W

"In my recent works, I was interested in exploring today's fetish items, the ways in which they get circulated and consumed both physically and on the Internet, and what that reveals about our contemporary desires and anxieties. I always start off by gathering images and creating a collage of them on Photoshop (I call them my "sketches"), so in the selection process, I focused on images of items that I found emblematic of the latest fad like Off White sneakers. Other than fashion, there are also references to gaming, Karaoke, and K-pop."

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"The consumption of style, goods, and aesthetics seems to be a big part of the youth culture now. When you say "contemporary desires and anxiety" what do mean?"

S.W

"Considering the degree of fixation with those cultural products for some of us, like waiting in line for days for a pair of designer sneakers or the latest AirPods, it almost feels like these lifeless objects and technologies have come to bear meaning and value beyond mere practicality. For some, it could be the sense of belonging to a particular community that they provide, and for others, possessing these fetish items may fill in certain holes in life, giving them something they can deliberately own and change. Such sense of community and agency they provide may be real, but they might just as well be all in our heads. So I tried to explore the psychological drive behind such phenomenon, asking questions like: What do these silent goods speak about the desires, anxieties, and perhaps deficiencies of today's society? What part of ourselves are we trying to fill by actively consuming them? To what extent can they alleviate such drives, and how are we to deal with the rest?"

A00

"Looking at the modern streetwear phenomena, like Supreme, can tell us how relevant this "drive" you mentioned. Why did this topic interest you? A few years back, your work had this more anime-like aesthetic which kind of faded away after the Puma collaboration."

S.W

"I've always been interested in how popular culture and technology feed into the psychologies of the masses and vice versa. In terms of the specific images that I choose, I tend to take inspiration from personal experiences or things that I observe from my surroundings. My previous series also touched on this concept, as it explored the ways in which young female bodies are presented and circulated in K-pop and what that reveals about the desires of Korean society. Because I found that the strategies used by Korean and Japanese culture share certain similarities, those works borrowed a lot from K-pop aesthetics in terms of the color palette and the poses and costumes of the girls depicted, etc., as well as certain elements of Japanese pop culture, hence the more anime-like aesthetic. I was also interested at the time in mixing print and paint in a way that from far away, the whole thing looks like either a printed image or a painted one, but up close, you can distinguish between printed areas and painted ones."

In my recent works, I tried to construct a similar kind of tension between digital and analog but only with paint, in order to experiment with how such difference in methodology would impact visual experience and reception."

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"The modern aesthetics, based on the notion of globalization, suggests that the eastern world is becoming more and more westernized, especially in the context of beauty standards and fashion. What's your view on this?"

S.W

"I'm aware of the concerns raised about how globalization may simply be another term for global westernization, but I don't necessarily find the integration as moving in one direction. The popularity of BTS among American teenagers, for instance, is challenging the traditional western notion of masculinity in terms of fashion, beauty, and the ways in which men present themselves."

The global fascination with Tik Tok among youths is also changing the ways in which people communicate and engage with social media within a territory that hasn't been explored before by American platforms like Instagram, Twitter, or Snapchat. Such trends and movements seem to suggest that we're standing in the middle of something closer to a cultural exchange on a global scale rather than simple one-way diffusion of non-Western cultures into those of the Western powers. It's going in all different directions."



A00

"Considering your Western and Eastern background: Korean family, growing up in Canada, going through higher education in New York, etc. Would you say that the diverse culture you experienced had a large influence on your work?"

S.W

"For sure. The cities that I've lived in are all very different in terms of culture, which gave me a hard time adjusting to each. As with most immigrants, being alien and alone was something I had to constantly deal with. Looking back, I think this is what drew me closer to pop culture, as I spent most of those times watching TV, listening to music, and messaging friends back at home through social media, which naturally led me to take interest in the subject and fed into my practice."



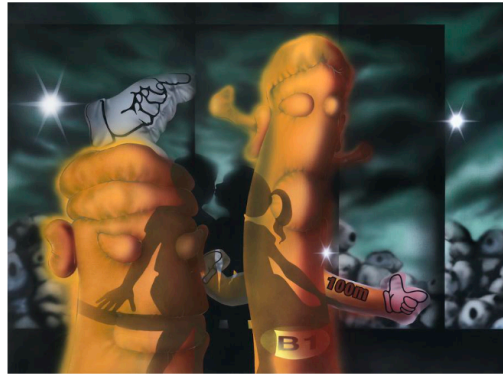
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"What sort of pop culture were you drawn to?"

S.W

"I liked burning my own CDs at the time, so I would download and listen to Avril Lavigne, Hilary Duff, and Green Day on my walkman. My aunt ran something like a small Blockbuster in the neighborhood, so I would go there every weekend and rent out popular teen movies like Mean Girls. My dad lived in Korea, so he often sent me boxes filled with CDs of the latest K-pop boybands (I was a big fan of TVXQ), DVDs of K-drama, and Korean teen magazines like Bromide and Wawagirl.

Bromide used to give away one big poster of an idol group for each issue like a lucky draw, so I would always open them praying that I would get my favorite band. By the time I graduated from middle school, my entire room was filled with Bromide posters. Cyworld and Buddy Buddy, which were the Korean equivalent of Facebook and MSN, also kept me connected to friends back home. They offered features like avatars and virtual rooms you could dress and decorate, which were also some things I spent a lot of time on."



A00

"Love it. The good old days...I'm from Tokyo, so we have a similar culture here. Earlier on you mentioned that you've been playing around with the boundaries of digital and analog. Some people would say that painting is a dead practice. What's your view?"

Considering your interests in pop culture and fashion, installation-based contemporary art seems to be on the rise...like works by Virgil Abloh for example. Or Samuel Ross, from A-Cold-Wall*"

S.W

"The question of a painting's life or death has literally persisted since the invention of the daguerreotype, but I don't think there was a moment where painting ever died. It was redefined over and over, and the same goes for the digital age that we're in today.

And yes, I'm interested in fashion but perhaps in a manner that's different from how you described it. Rather than the boundary between fashion and art, I'm more interested in deciphering the symbols and the indexical paradigms that these fleeting commodities allude to. I would say that I'm utilizing fashion references as more of symbolic cues that point to certain social phenomena rather than trying to blend fashion with art and vice versa."

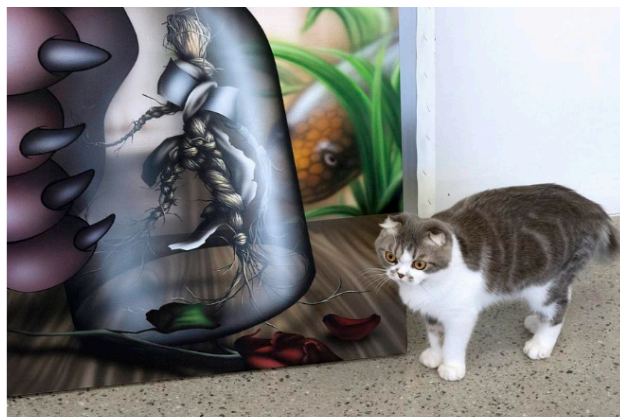


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"The exploration of the digital and the analog can take many different vehicles. Have you ever considered trying out things like sculpting? Or other mediums?"

S.W

"Yes, I think the boundary of the two can be materialized in many different forms. I've worked with print in my previous series as mentioned earlier, and at the moment, I'm experimenting with a relief-like surface that creates a type of dimensionality that oscillates between flat canvas and sculpture. I'm also continuing to play around with making images in the digital."



A00

"That's a lot of exciting stuff for us to look forward to then. Your recent solo exhibition in Korea, "Wishing Well", what's the message? and what sort of story is it telling?"

S.W

"It was a show that presented my most recent body of works, which I talked about earlier. With the title, I was initially thinking of the sacred water well that grants wishes in folklores, as my works tried to capture the moments in which objects and images begin to become something more than their physical bodies as they're consumed by individuals and communities and passed on continuously from one to another. I liked the fact that it can also be read as a message of Godspeed, of wishing someone or yourself well, also touching on the wish-fulfilling aspect of today's fetish culture. I actually got a lot of questions asking if it was related to the pandemic. I guess you can also interpret it in that way. It's really open to interpretations, and I'd rather have people take away different things from it."



A00

"That's an interesting, and unexpected back story in regards to the title. Tell us about your ideals, or vision...what do you see in the future? Do you ever fantasize about what's coming?"

S.W

"What do you mean by ideals or vision?"

A00

"Perhaps what you want to become or do in the future, or what the world might become. Do you feel that you and the world are moving towards any specific direction?"

S.W

"These days, I'm thinking a lot about the impact of the pandemic and how it'll change our futures. I'm already witnessing redefining of age-old values such as the meaning of connectedness and home, as our lives are being increasingly mediated by the digital. It seems to be giving us a new sense of belonging that's grounded on virtual communities, and the explosion of online activities like virtual exhibitions seems to be giving us a new sense of connection to the outside world. This shift in the way of life is increasingly driving me to think about what new roles our physical bodies should take on and how these new ways of living will continue to evolve."

It's also making me wonder about my own body of works, also situated between the digital and analog, and the new direction that the art industry is heading, as many museums, galleries, and artists are increasingly trying to figure out ways to present their artworks in digitized form. It definitely feels like a time of various changes and shifts, and it's raising many questions for me to think about concerning what lies ahead and what our future holds."

A00

"Hopefully, things are changing for the better and not the worse. I would like to throw you our last and random questions. We couldn't ignore the fluffy companion you have at your studio. What's her/his name?"

S.W

"It's Theo! He's an eight-month-old baby boy. Keeps me company 24/7."