

RE: An Unsent Letter

Jang Pa (Artist)

“Were the surface and the depths to be apprehended equally, emotions such as love would be better understood.” — Michel Tournier

Excessive Love

The body of his work is filled with the structural relationship between love and desire, as well as with the stories which derive from both. Rather than accept the impossibility of the yearning to discover love within desire, the artist transports said yearning into the province of fantasy and beauty. Having followed it into such imaginations, he again searches for the possibility of love. The search is made possible by the fact that fantasy omits all scenarios in which desire is carried out. As in Lacanian psychoanalysis, which defines our fantasies in terms of a framework which either enables us to desire something or teaches us how to desire, the artist does not delve into the depths of desire in order to discover its roots. He instead speaks of the sphere of possibility created on the surface of desire by the phantasms of fantasy.

Intersections with the Imaginary

The spaces in Yongseok Oh's paintings are physically flat. His use of indistinct or indistinguishable vanishing points strips his work of a sense of realism and fills it with an augmented fantasticality. The mechanisms of meaning within the thin surface of these paintings become all the more lucid through the faces which he draws. Oh's work tends to include repetitive images such as severed heads. These images may be interpreted as a commentary on castrated desire, but, more importantly, they enable the viewer to observe the face as a surface cut off from humanity. The face as shell instead of the face as reflection of the interior functions as an image of the surface. The abstruse existences inhabiting the flat realm of the surface function as a gap leading into new domains. For the artist, the realm of the surface constitutes an intersection between reality and the unreal. One does not go about reading his paintings by hunting down the source of desire or pondering the message that his work seems to impart. The viewer would be better advised to encounter the surfaces of desire within the province of fantasy and pursue the process through which the desires of reality permutate into the unreal.

An Unsent Letter

Oh's novels are similarly characterized by an ambiguity of existence triggered by flat surfaces. The majority of his novels are epistolary novels narrated by a first person "I." Unlike the somewhat objective accounts of third person narration, first person perspective situates itself and the reader within the interior of the "I." It uses the soliloquy as its means of fluctuating between speaking in monologue and speaking aside. Such soliloquies are made possible by the epistolary form, largely due to the true recipient of these epistles having been designated as an individual best suited to comprehending their contents. As if waiting for a response to his letters, the artist ceaselessly anticipates the possibility of finding love in desire. The paintings and novels of Yongseok Oh present us with a spectrum of instinct, impulse, desire, and love filtered through the prism of fantasy. All we need do is observe the way in which the prism operates.