

COLOSSAL

"GaHee Park Unsettles Still Life Traditions with Surreal, Soured Temptations"

By Grace Ebert

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"Drowned Thought" (2023), oil on linen, 90 x 67 inches. Photo by Paul Litherland. All images courtesy of GaHee Park and Perrotin, shared with permission

In a brief email exchange about her work, GaHee Park references freedom several times. The Seoul-born, Montréal-based artist wants to liberate herself from realism and infuse her paintings with the expressive, simplified qualities of abstraction, creating decadent scenes with recurring motifs like eyes and fish. "I like to think about every subject of my work, including animals and human figures, as part of a still life. That gives me more freedom to make images," she shares.

Working in flat planes of oil on linen, Park envisions surreal tablescapes and moments of intimacy gone awry, and she begins each piece with a preliminary sketch. "Sometimes I keep these drawings for a few years in a drawer until my confidence in the image grows, and I am ready to make it a painting," she says. "I often use some images or motifs from previous paintings so I can play with familiar forms more freely, exploring variations to go deeper into those subjects."

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

Park often returns to flesh, whether it be on the human body, fruit, or fish. Appearing seductive yet spoiled by hordes of ants or incongruous feelings, the more carnal aspects of her works reflect on the pains and pleasures of being alive in the world. In pieces like "Drowned Thought" and "Waiting with the Fishes," eyes float in glasses filled with colorful liquids, "reflecting different emotions and states of consciousness," she says. The motif "could be to freeze a particular moment or show multiple moments or states of mind at the same time."

Fish have a more personal role for the artist. "My grandmother sold fresh fish in a market in Korea, and I have always spent time with (dead) fish and seafood. Observing them from a young age probably makes me want to paint them," she says. "There's something familiar about them for me, but they also still seem very alien."

Park will open her next solo show, *Fun and Games*, on February 24 at Perrotin in New York and currently has a piece on view in *50 Paintings* at the Milwaukee Art Museum. Follow her work on Instagram.



"Three Faces and a Shadow" (2021), oil on canvas, 52 x 48 inches. Photo by Tanguy Beurdeley

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508



"Cat with a View" (2022), oil on canvas, 60 x 80 inches. Photo by Marion Paquette



"Waiting with the Fishes" (2023), oil on linen, 25 x 24 inches. Photo by Paul Litherland

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

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jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508



"Touch I" (2022), oil on canvas, 40 x 48 inches. Photo by Paul Litherland



"Seafood Dream" (2020), oil on canvas, 24 x 25 inches. Photo by Guillaume Ziccarelli

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508



"Touch II" (2022), oil on canvas, 40 x 48 inches. Photo by Paul Litherland



"Still Life with Slugs" (2022), oil on canvas, 38 x 32 inches. Photo by Marion Paquette

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508