

## A World of Unfamiliar Gravity

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Jang Jaemin's paintings are like tranquility at the moment heavy rain subsides. Clearing away the damp atmosphere, I recall the movement of sight proceeding towards the object. The persistently gazing eyes, shifting directions every moment, an obstinacy to seize the vestige of the vanishing sense. Jang's works are paintings, more in the gestural sense, rather than the name of the object itself. His picture screen does not specify an ending and ardently embrace the vestiges of physical rhythmic movements. The landscape that has gone through a filter of the body is arranged in a new order. Perspectives get disarrayed and forms, distorted. The physical and mental distance from the object endlessly gets readjusted. Each time an identity is tracked, an unknown blankness appears. The picture screen filled with boisterous brushstrokes soon becomes desolate. Here is a world where the afterimage is remembered more clearly than the original.

1.

The artist's body, shifted to the studio, ruminates the shade of the scene. The landscapes that Jang paint are of the distance that cannot be reached, yet, at the same time, feels close enough so that one's foot may reach its shadows. Try and estimate the distance; envision the proportion of space between the object, picture screen, and the artist's body. Speculate the physical space and emotional distance. Brushstrokes become heavy and light at any time. *Tree Ghost #1, 2* (2020) depict a scene the artist saw nearby his residency in Cheonan, Korea. The tree and earth are entangled with one another and have become a single body. A close-by object and far away background, something alive and things that are not, are treated with equal weight. The shadow pushes away its host, and the world realigns. This is an act of building a world of new gravity by applying the weight of sight and the height of emotion.

Jang attempts an "equal contact"<sup>1</sup> with the objects, using painting as a tool. A gaze without a single focus point is, therefore, able to look at all elements within the field of sight equally. This gaze is possible not in reality, but in the world of painting. Jang's picture screen encompasses the peripheral vision. Although the vision and color sense are weaker than the central vision where the focal point is located, the peripheral vision effectively captures delicate light and movements. The picture screen does not assert fixed meanings of the sites and solely concentrates on the senses. Here, narrative and context are not necessarily important. The task lies in the exploration of the visual elements revealed from the fragmentary scenes and the artist's reaction from them. In *Temperature of the*

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<sup>1</sup> From a conversation with the artist, White Block Residency (Cheonan, Korea), August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

*Boulder* (2020), the figure and boulder penetrate and encroach one another. The border fades away. The figure permeates into the landscape, and the landscape becomes the figure once more. Any clues that might help speculate the quarry's purpose or description on the figure's identity is nowhere to be found. The anonymous scene paradoxically leaves more room for interpretation.

2.

The initial image of a landscape gets lost forever, "when one begins to distinguish where is what"<sup>2</sup> Instead of tracing the natural form, Jang reflects and newly recomposes. To reach past experiences, he consistently excavates previous memories. Another layer of space-time, the 'present state' of the painter, is added on the picture screen. Inevitably, even further varied versions of 'now' permeate on the extensive picture screen of *Upper Region of Reservoir* (2020). Reason, trying to remember, and emotion, trying to feel continuously collide with one another. As movement becomes more extensive and rapid, intuition applies stronger, and unanticipated events irrupt.

Jang's paintings are like outcomes of many efforts to make experiences his own. The gliding moments of now are held onto the tip of the brush. Jang holds a large brush. The larger the tool, the longer the painter's breath. A brush with a large volume holds an equally large amount of paint and corresponds to gravity with a massive presence. The painter must keep straightening up the constantly falling brush and press it in horizontal directions to make each brushstroke. The brush, even while pushing towards the horizontal plane, transmits its vestige towards the floor. Any plans made for the work beforehand has now become meaningless. Nothing can be reverted, nor predicted. The artist's busily moving hands carry out the painting of the present. The memory of the past and the time of the present push and pull one another and endlessly go towards the immediate future.

3.

Jang materializes the landscapes his body experienced. The synaesthetic experiences of a place are the motive. He usually paints underdeveloped areas surrounded by nature. These places require continuous adaptation to unknown environments. The artist visualizes and tactualizes the space-time he has endured. This characteristic prominently shows in *Owl's Forest* (2020), depicting a night scene in Bretagne, France. Six owls are secluded within dense brushstrokes. Perhaps the artist heard the eerie owl call so vivid, as he could see it, even with limited sight in the remote night. *Rowboat* (2020) stimulates the sense of touch before vision. Its particular brushstrokes, high in viscosity, emphasizes the materiality of the medium. Softly spread out mud, or a wet field alike.

Jang paints as if something still is alive, and something silent is howling. He dissolves a landscape from reality into his senses and transforms it into existence with a different property. He concentrates

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<sup>2</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *One Way Street / Thought Images*. Translated by Young-ok Kim, Mi-ae Yoon, and Sung-man Choi. (Seoul: Gil Publisher, 2007), p. 120.

all his five senses and strives to encompass all things his body has perceived onto the flesh of his paintings. It is enduring an experience together with the object once more. The picture screen remains silent regarding history, reality, and stories of life, and solely transit from one sense to another. The scenery obtains a new body placed in the real world, maintaining a minimal trace of itself, smeared from the original experience. Yearning for eloquence with obscure expression, this is the body of painting, believing in apparitions.

We are becoming increasingly accustomed to the omniscient point of view of the world every day.<sup>3</sup> Imagine what tomorrow would look like, shifting towards a virtual world. What kind of appeal should paintings have on a stage where immaterial images have already taken up a huge space? And yet, what Jang's picture screen reveals is the vision of the people who set foot on the earth. The vestige of gestures of people being pushed into the future, having both insecurity and hope. The landscape filters through the artist's body and becomes an entirely different identity from its true nature. With its own volume, each picture screen leans on the wall of reality and gazes back at us. As it always has, painting undoubtedly manifests its value as a being with materiality. It asserts its own identity that resembles none other. Here, the painting's body is alive - a substance that came through a world of unfamiliar gravity, embracing the heavy and distinct afterimage.

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<sup>3</sup> Steyerl, Hito. *The Wretched of the Screen*. (Berlin: Stenberg Press, 2012). *The Wretched of the Screen*. Translated by Sylbee Kim. (Seoul: Workroom Press, 2016/2018), p. 16.