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The Paradox of Beauty

Jeong Myoung-Jo (b. 1970)

Date: 16 September - 19 November 2022

Opening: 16 September 2022 (Friday)

Venue: Soluna Fine Art, GF, 52 Sai Street, Sheung Wan, Hong Kong



Jeong Myoung-Jo, Play-Ground #20-06, 2020, Oil on canvas, 112 x 162 cm

Soluna Fine Art is pleased to present 'The Paradox of Beauty', the first solo exhibition of the contemporary Korean hyperrealist painter Jeong Myoung-Jo with the gallery. To commemorate the month of September, which signals the seasonal transition from summer to fall, Jeong's exhibition showcases a total of 11 works from the artist's signature oeuvre depicting the women in traditional Korean finery, the *hanbok*, across different seasons of life and class. 'The Paradox of Beauty' will be on view from 16 September - 19 November 2022.

There are deeper implications behind Jeong Myoung-Jo's painting series, apart from the exterior beauty of the embellishments that the audience may be drawn to at first glance. In addition to the hidden faces of the women, the iconographic interpretations of the background, dresses, hairstyles, jewelry, and motifs give clues to the paradoxical meanings in beauty and status that span from the dawn of history to the modern age in Korea. For example, the backgrounds in the paintings could be distinguished into vibrant color and dark themes, illuminating the subjects' societal positions and underlying attitudes.



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The painting titled 'Play-Ground #20-06' portrays a *gisaeng* (members of the lower class who were trained to become professional artists and performers in the Joseon Dynasty) at the center of the highly stylized landscape known as the *ir-wor-o-bong-do* (일월오봉도; 日月五峰圖), or 'Sun and Moon and Five Peaks'. The picture was a common folding screen placed at the back of the king's royal throne, with the sun and moon symbolizing the king and queen and the five peaks representing the dignity of kings and eternal national prosperity. Jeong's reinterpretation of the cultural emblem may allude to how the *gisaengs* had also constituted a notable social group in the Joseon dynasty, inconspicuously organizing some of the most significant historical situations apart from the obligations to maintain beautiful appearances and gentle demeanors. Moreover they were often referred to as *hye-uh-hwa* (해어화; 解語花), or 'conversable flower' for having exceptional skills and intelligence to offer refined conversations. In contrast, 'The Paradox of Beauty #22-02' spotlights the Korean queen, casting the full weight of darkness around her without external distractions. Similar to the dramatization of light and shadows in Baroque paintings to evoke subjects' emotions, Jeong also implements the chiaroscuro technique to accentuate the queen's longing and introspection. Despite being in full regalia, which signifies power and class, she is seen to be in a forlorn state.

Although Jeong's paintings lament the historical oppression of Korean women from various positions, they also visually re-code and empower the subjects of the portraits to reclaim themselves from the traditional gender and class stereotypes through offering fresh insights. In a way, the historical female icons are closer to modern women, who, like *gisaengs*, simultaneously receive formal training and education, while behaving autonomously with genuine subjectivity within the elaborate social systems. Moreover, there are also modern women who, like the queen, appear impeccable but struggle under the clasp of strict social rubrics, and systematic oppression. This can be further illustrated by the fact that the painted figures are Jeong's acquaintances, dressed in *hanbok*, who are aware of the issues that are still prevalent in the country today.

Therefore, by deliberately choosing to hide the portraits' faces, Jeong invites the audience to re-examine the historical female beauty from modern viewpoints. The act of analyzing the paintings is also mirrored by the subjects in the paintings, who have their backs turned as if occupied by something. Moreover, the hyperrealistic portraits represent illusions, encouraging the act of inquiry into the individual perceptions and paradoxes of beauty instead of blatantly accepting them at face value.

About Jeong Myoung-Jo

Jeong Myoung-Jo (b. 1970) was born in Korea and was inspired to pursue art by the beauty of Korean traditional clothes. However, Jeong's work does not merely present colors and patterns. Looking at a woman in a beautiful traditional dress who has her back to the audience, one would find the age-long remorseful lament of traditional Korean women or discover the destiny of the Korean people of having to carry the past wherever they go. Viewers are bound to interpret the painting in the context of society and history, and from



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the perspective of self-identity. Her works have been exhibited at ARTSIDE Gallery in Korea, Gana Art Center in Korea and Art Central in Hong Kong. Her works are also housed by Hansol Cultural Foundation in Korea, Amorepacific Museum of Art and Standard Chartered in the United Kingdom.

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About Soluna Fine Art

Soluna Fine Art is a gallery specializing in Asian fine art and objects with deep roots in South Korea. Our mission is to revitalize interest in Eastern aesthetics and philosophy by showcasing established and emerging artists and works of traditional value with contemporary interpretation. Works by artists represented by Soluna Fine Art can be found in private collections and institutions around the world. As well as exhibitions, our annual programme includes fairs, educational initiatives and multi-disciplinary collaborations on an international level.



Soluna Fine Art

GF, 52 Sai Street, Sheung Wan, Hong Kong

Opening hours: Tuesday - Saturday, 10am – 6pm

For press inquiries, please contact:

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The Paradox of Beauty

鄭明祚 (生於1970年)

日期: 2022年9月16日至11月19日

開幕: 2022年9月16日 (星期五)

地點: Soluna Fine Art, 上環西街52號



鄭明祚, Play-Ground #20-06, 2020, 布面油畫, 112 x 162 厘米

Soluna Fine Art 誠意呈現與韓國超級寫實主義畫家鄭明祚首個於畫廊舉辦的個人展覽「The Paradox of Beauty」。九月代表夏天即將過去，秋天即將來臨，是季節交替的時刻，而本月份具有象徵意義。是次展覽將展出鄭明祚11幅的作品，描繪穿著韓國傳統服飾「韓服」的女性和她們如何跨越生命中不同季節和社會階級。「The Paradox of Beauty」的展覽為2022年9月16日至11月19日，開幕定於2022年9月16日(星期五)。

觀看鄭氏的作品時，觀眾一開始可能會被華麗的點綴吸引，但在這輝煌的表面後有更深含義。畫中女性隱藏的面孔、背景、禮服、髮型和首飾正提示觀眾，在韓國歷史和現今的社會中，美其實帶有自相矛盾的意思。例如，畫中的背景可以被分為鮮豔和黑暗的主題，分別反映作畫對象的社會地位和大眾對他們隱含的態度。

畫作「Play-Ground #20-06」描繪了一位妓生(指受過很高的藝術造化的社會階層，其社會地位在鮮王朝時期屬賤民)置身於日月五峰圖(일월오봉도)的中央。日、月、五峰是朝鮮王朝御座後常見的屏風圖案，是朝鮮王權的象徵之一。圖中的日、月代表着陰陽，國王和王后，而五座山峰代表國王的威嚴和國家繁榮。鄭氏重新詮釋韓國傳統文化標誌，可能是為了暗示妓生作為一個顯著的社會階



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層，如何低調地參與一些重要的歷史事件，但仍然能保持美麗的容貌和溫柔的舉止。妓生同時間俱備各種技藝和個人修養，能夠跟客人交談，因此她們又有「解語花」的美稱。相比之下，「The Paradox of Beauty #22-02」利用燈光去突出朝鮮皇后的背影，讓她不受外界干擾之下被黑暗包圍。這跟巴羅克繪畫有相似的地方，兩者都透過光影變化去強調激情和戲劇性。鄭氏還採用了明暗對照法，使朝鮮皇后的渴望與反省顯得更加鮮明。雖然她身著盛裝，代表著高貴王權，但卻看起來很悲涼。

一方面，鄭氏的畫作為不論社會階級，一直以來受到壓迫的韓國女性而哀嘆。另一方面，她用嶄新的角度賦權於畫中的人象，讓她們在社會和大眾傳統對性別和階級的刻板印象之中重新拿回自身的價值。在某種意義上，畫中描繪的女性跟現代女性很相似。她們就如妓生一樣，在複雜的社會制度內，需要接受訓練和正規教育，但仍希望能保留一定的自主性。還有，現代女性跟朝鮮皇后亦有共通點。她們可能表面上看起來無可挑剔，但其實在嚴格的社會規則和系統性壓迫下掙扎。而事實上，畫中穿著韓服的人象是鄭氏的熟人，她們透過親身經歷，比任何人更加清楚現今韓國社會還遺留下的性別和社會階級的問題。

所以，鄭氏刻意地隱藏肖像畫中的面孔，邀請觀眾考慮古今的社會背景，去重新審視自己對女性美的看法。這分析的過程猶如反映畫中轉過身去的人象，都在專注於其他事情上。再者，鄭氏的超寫實肖像使現實和幻覺的界線模糊，從而鼓勵觀眾自我審視和反思「美」當中自相矛盾的意思。

關於鄭明祚

鄭明祚於 1970 年在韓國出生，於韓國首爾弘益大學獲頒藝術文學士及藝術文學碩士學位。作品受韓國傳統服裝韓服的美學啟發。鄭氏的作品並不單展現受韓服啟發的顏色和圖案，更透過穿著韓服的女人背影表現傳統韓國女性的懊悔之情或韓國人背負歷史的命運。鄭氏的作品大多和當時的社會歷史環境和身份認同有關。她的作品曾在韓國 ARTSIDE 畫廊、韓國 Gana Art Center 和香港 Art Central 藝術展展出。她的作品被韓松製紙基金會、韓國Amorepacific Museum of Art和英國渣打銀行等團體收藏。

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關於 Soluna Fine Art

Soluna Fine Art 是一家來自韓國並精於當代亞洲藝術的畫廊，致力於展示成熟和新興藝術家的兼備現代詮釋意義和傳統價值的作品，激發人們對東方美學和哲學的興趣。Soluna Fine Art所代理的藝術家的作品均被納入世界各地的私人收藏和機構。除畫廊內部的展覽之外，我們歷年也作為被邀請方參與國際的博覽會、教育計劃和多元的合作項目。



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營業時間：星期二至星期六，早上十時至晚上六時

地址：上環西街52號

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