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Kyungmi Shin, "Origin Stories"

by Jody Zellen

Craft Contemporary, Los Angeles, California, Continuing through September 8, 2024



Kyungmi Shin, "Mirrors of Hard Distorting Glass," 2022, acrylic on archival pigment print, UV laminate, 61 x 90 7/8 in

In Kyungmi Shin's exhibition, "Origin Stories," the Korean-born, Los Angeles-based artist explores past and present through a thoughtful intermingling of ceramics, sculpture and painted photographs. Her complex works investigate both female and Asian identity and ancestry through art historical representations while also referencing contemporary culture. She mines personal photographic archives, enlarging photographic snapshots and then tracing aspects of them with gold and silver painted lines. She also explores traditional Asian patterning, often presenting her original ceramic objects in combination with authentic traditional pieces. The confusion between the two kinds of objects questions the notions of contemporary and traditional. .

The exhibition brings together multiple aspects of Shin's practice so as to weave a trajectory through her expansive range of pursuits. "Shaman tiger takes a walk outside" (2024) is placed in the center of the gallery to receive prime attention. In it Shin dramatically exercises her ability to combine multiple forms and materials. The image is that of a tiger, but seen differently from all sides. While first and foremost a 3-dimensional object, it also doubles as functional furniture. Its shelves, for this installation, house numerous pieces of chinoiserie.

Dichotomies and instances of simultaneity prevail throughout. In her painted photographs, Shin often begins with family photographs or images from art history, as in "and the sweet upside-down cake (Lunch on the grass)" and "Three Magi" (both 2022). In "and the sweet upside-down cake (Lunch on the grass)," she superimposes an image of adolescents picnicking with Asian-style foods atop Manet's painting "Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe," drawing visual comparisons as well as contrasts. Similarly, "Three Magi" is overlaid with a photograph of a woman and her child (another image from the artist's family archives) that echoes



Kyungmi Shin, "Shaman tiger takes a walk outside" (composite views from three angles), 2024.

the depiction of the Virgin Mary and baby Jesus in the original painting by Andrea Mantegna. "Riding on that Carriage" (2020) pays homage to Shin's father, who is depicted as an old man seated on a couch surrounded by decorative imagery culled from myriad sources.

What is unique about Shin's work is the way it weaves together multiple narratives across cultures and generations. Within the installation, these large-scale painted photographs as well as the ceramic objects are presented on walls that range from dark brown, to deep red, and a light blue-gray — colors that come from, as well as enhance the imagery.

Shin's hand-crafted ceramics are often presented in conjunction with the photographs. Here, Shin includes arrangements of both found and created ceramic objects. They are placed on shelves and laid out on antique wooden stands. The standout "Tentative Baroque" (2020) is an intricate porcelain sculpture of a lower leg and foot inscribed with painted blue vines. These vines also extend as ceramic tendrils from the top of the leg. The object rests on an antique wooden end table and is located in front of a wall painted a dark reddish-brown.

Filling a wall in the side gallery is a black and white photographic mural that replicates "The Audience of the Emperor" from the series "The Story of the Emperor of China" (1700-1710), a tapestry by Jean-Baptiste Monnoyer and Guy-Louis Vernansal that hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Atop this mural and on an opposite wall painted a deep red, Shin presents hard-paste porcelain ovals from her "Journey to the East" and "Blue and white Christian Narrative" series (both 2019). In these pieces, she fuses traditional Asian patterns with more illustrative renditions of historical symbols drawn from religious iconography.

Jody Zellen is a LA based writer and artist who creates interactive installations, mobile apps, net art, animations, drawings, paintings, photographs, public art, and artist's books. Zellen received a BA from Wesleyan University (1983), a MFA from CalArts (1989) and a MPS from NYU's Interactive Telecommunications Program (2009). She has exhibited nationally and internationally since 1989. For more information please visit www.jodyzellen.com