

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born and raised in Daegu, Korea, Jiha Moon lives and works in Atlanta, Georgia. She received her Master of Fine Arts from the University of Iowa in Iowa City, Iowa and her Bachelor of Fine Arts from Korea University in Seoul, Korea. Her work is in the permanent collections of the Asia Society, New York City, New York; the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia; and the Hunter Museum of Art in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Her work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions at notable museums nationwide including at the Mint Museum of Art in Charlotte, North Carolina; the Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art in Nashville, Tennessee; and the Weatherspoon Museum of Art, Greensboro, North Carolina. She has been the recipient of several residencies including Omi International Arts Center, Ghent, New York; the Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito, California; the Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and the MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, New Hampshire. In 2011, Moon was the recipient of a prestigious Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Grant. She is represented by Curator's Office in Washington, D.C., Saltworks Gallery in Atlanta, Georgia, and Ryan Lee Gallery in New York, New York.

TOUR SCHEDULE:

Taubman Museum of Art
Roanoke, VA
May 2 – September 20, 2015

Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art
Charleston, SC
October 24 – December 5, 2015

Kalamazoo Institute of Contemporary Art
Kalamazoo, MI
December 19, 2015 – March 6, 2016

Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art
Auburn University, Auburn, AL
January 21 – April 30, 2017

Peeler Art Center, DePauw University
Greencastle, IN
August 25 – October 11, 2017

Jiha Moon: Double Welcome, Most Everyone's Mad Here is co-organized by the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art, College of Charleston School of the Arts and the Taubman Museum of Art. The exhibition is curated by Amy G. Moorefield, Deputy Director of Exhibitions and Collections at the Taubman Museum of Art and Mark Sloan, Director and Chief Curator of the Halsey Institute with special assistance from Andrea Pollan, Curator's Office, Washington, D.C.; Saltworks Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia; and Ryan Lee Gallery, New York, New York.



LOCATION: The Marion and Wayland H. Cato Jr. Center for the Arts
161 Calhoun Street, 1st Floor (on the corner of St. Philip & Calhoun Streets)
College of Charleston, School of the Arts, Charleston, SC 29401
HALSEY.COFC.EDU

PARKING: Available in the St. Philip and George Street Garages

GALLERY HOURS: Mon - Sat, 11am - 4pm, or by appointment
OPEN UNTIL 7PM ON THURSDAYS! Free and open to the public.

CONTACT: (843) 953-4422 or halsey@cofc.edu

BLOG: Join the conversation! halsey.cofc.edu/EDU/blog

BOOK A GUIDED TOUR: Free tours are led by knowledgeable and experienced guides and can be adapted to different time lengths, group sizes, and ages. Contact our Education & Outreach Coordinator, Maya McGauley at mogauleym@g.cofc.edu or (843) 953-5957.

OUR MISSION: The Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art at the College of Charleston School of the Arts provides a multidisciplinary laboratory for the production, presentation, interpretation, and dissemination of ideas by innovative visual artists from around the world. As a non-collecting museum, we create meaningful interactions between adventurous artists and diverse communities within a context that emphasizes the historical, social, and cultural importance of the art of our time.

The Halsey Institute's exhibition and education program is supported in part by the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, the Henry and Sylvia Yaschik Foundation and our Members.

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JIHA MOON:

Double Welcome, Most Everyone's Mad Here





Moonstruck in Wonderland

by Lilly Wei

Jiha Moon is not a theorist, not an ideologue, not a placard-waving agitator for social justice. She is not particularly invested in notions of “orientalism” as so brilliantly discussed by the late Palestinian-American cultural critic and theorist Edward Said in two of his most influential books, *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Since then, our thinking has evolved (or so we would like to believe), becoming more informed, more nuanced, more sensitized, in large part due to his insights. Difference is now swirled with the familiar as the world becomes smaller, as common concerns bind us and our common humanity seeps through, beyond stereotypes and the superficialities and inanities of commercialized tourism and global capitalism. There is an international culture that is instantaneously accessible to countless millions of people via the Internet and social media, technology bringing all of us closer together, blurring boundaries, for better and worse. As for the ever increasing numbers of travelers who circle the globe regularly (and they are not only the one percent), to be elsewhere on some levels is very much like being here (even beyond the world-wide ubiquity of certain American and European brands, American pop culture, and English as the world’s unofficial official language) where what used to be far-flung is seldom less than 24 hours away.

That said, our sense of the “other” has also become more fraught—who here was not deeply jolted by the attack on the World Trade Center, when the unthinkable occurred and the United States mainland itself was violated? As the world seems to be erupting uncontrollably into pervasive zones of irreconcilable conflict, we have exchanged our former, often blissfully naïve, Disneyfied notions of other cultures for one that is much darker, albeit no less stereotyped and reductive. The other, no longer exotic, erotic, and feminized, there for our pleasurable consumption, is now the enemy, the terrorist, to be distrusted, feared, hated. Over there is no longer so far away; over there is here.

Moon’s work is more about the social than politics, but inevitably, it backs into the latter. Navigating cultures and chronologies, trawling for

images from which she creates “portmanteau” objects (a term coined by Lewis Carroll in *Through the Looking Glass* to describe the merging of two or more existing words to form a new word) she asks her viewers to consider the complexity of cultural heritage and identity, and how malleable they can be. Born and raised in Daegu, Korea, Moon studied art at Korea University in Seoul, earned her MFA from the University of Iowa in Iowa City and now lives in Atlanta, her work reflecting her own responses as a bemused stranger, at least at first. And her observations of another culture (Iowa and the South might seem foreign to a New Yorker, let alone a young woman from Korea) are all the more perceptive because of it. However—and understandably—she insists that her artwork should not be categorized as merely an East-West comparison, itself a cliché by now. What Moon offers us is more current, more absurdist and absorptive, more humorous and tongue-in-cheek, as she investigates aspects of influence, authorship, originality, appropriation, and identity. “While it might look Asian,” she said, “it is all about America.”

Double Welcome, Most Everyone’s Mad Here is the title of Moon’s lively and endearing exhibition of mischievously plundered, reconfigured images made in an array of media and materials. The title is taken from Lewis Carroll’s beloved *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, filtered through the globally distributed 1951 animated Disney film, indeed, a double greeting from an erudite Oxford don’s satire masquerading as a children’s tale and a Hollywood mogul’s pop entertainment. In the film, Alice, searching for the White Rabbit, encounters the Cheshire Cat. Asking for directions, he directs her to the Mad Hatter and when Alice objects, he introduces her to the March Hare, who, he says, is also mad. He nonchalantly adds, “most everyone’s mad here,” concluding, as he begins to disappear, “I’m not all there myself.”

In a tribute to both Carroll and Disney, Moon makes her own Wonderland, her own Looking Glass world, where meanings are doubled, tripled, inverted, subverted and in flux, her clever, extravagant exhibition spurred by her own affinity for sense and nonsense. Cannily and exhaustively collecting images as they capture her fancy, she tosses them together as if into a cross-pollinated cultural bouillabaisse, calibrating their interaction, watching them simmer and transform. What she does so well is to take the accustomed and extract something fresh from it, something unexpected, often strange. Upending formal hierarchies, she allows multiple genres—ink drawing, collage, painting, etching, woodblock printing, cyanotype, ceramics, embroidery, graphic design, fashion, screen prints, and more, using both figuration and abstraction—to co-exist, jostling each other. She jumbles together fine arts, pop art, design, fashion, advertisements, text, and Internet icons for the viewer to happily puzzle over and revel in. Moon often uses Korean hanji, an elegant mulberry paper (paper has long been the preferred support

of traditional Asian painting and calligraphy and increasingly used by American and European artists). She then very consciously applies modern acrylic paint to hanji, explaining that she likes to mix old and new together, her brushwork boldly gestural and exquisitely precise, a dexterity learned from calligraphic studies. Fabric, such as tie-dye, or resist-dye cotton or silk (like hanji, they are materials associated with the East) often appears in her projects. The brightly colored textiles banding some of her paintings and wall pieces suggest a classic Western frame as well as an elaborately bordered Korean bedspread, a traditional wedding gift. They might also suggest other bedclothes such as quilts, the handiwork of accomplished, too often anonymous women, such as the fine quilt makers of the American South. Shoelaces, doilies, glitter, beads, rhinestones, gold leaf—all craft materials—turn up regularly in her creations.

She reinterprets traditional Korean accessories such as norigae, a good luck charm typically worn suspended from a woman’s robes. Attached by a ring or loop, its central ornament might be a jewel, a heavy silk tassel swinging from it. Moon replaces the norigae’s gem, for instance, with a ceramic component that conjures up a mask or a peach or both, claiming kinship with the painted, embellished kachinas of Native Americans from the Southwest as well as other ritual objects and folk toys from a spectrum of cultures. Adding different types of hair to replace the tassels, she reminds us about our crowning glory’s vexed social and racial status. A complicated subject, hair is a distinctive physical trait that can be synonymous with difference, evoking shame as well as defiance and fierce pride.

The motifs that Moon incorporate are deceptive, ambiguous. She doesn’t want them to be easily identified—or identified at all—the slippage between object and meaning a space that offers the imagination room to ramble about. She wants to “shake things up,” she said, and “misunderstandings” are crucial toward understanding, including her own. Her sources are equally

unclear; some motifs that look Asian might not be and the reverse. Possibly the clouds drifting across the surface of some of the paintings are from Buddhist paintings but they might also be Baroque. Tang dynasty landscapes might also be European surrealists fantasies or from Mexican folk art. Chinese fortune cookies, unknown in China, originated in California. Moon’s very appealing replicas are produced in glossy, painted ceramic, at times decorated with Picasso-like faces, animals—she has a menagerie of invented creatures at her disposal—and little red, green and black squares and dots.

Her marvelously variegated ceramics—she likes to join the ungainly with the graceful, the grotesque with the comely—might have been inspired by ancient Native American and Asian vessels or the popular face jars of Southern folk art and Angry Birds, from the popular children’s game. Some depict misshapen faces that suggest ogres in meltdown, masks from traditional Asian theatre or transmogrified portraits of actors from Ukiyo-e prints, seen also in her paintings, and some are more Western, with big, long-lashed eyes, and slightly menacing, Chiclet-toothed smiles like that of the Cheshire Cat, mass-produced kitschy souvenirs turned into the one-off.

Other metamorphoses include blending distinctive Pennsylvania Dutch imagery such as stylized birds with Korean phoenixes and Tweety Birds. Blue and white porcelain is another repeated reference, long associated with the Ming Dynasty which had a huge export trade in porcelain with Europe in the 17th and 18th century. The porcelains, including the patterns, were then adapted by the Europeans, and re-adapted by the Chinese, the willow pattern among the most desired.

The voluptuous peach with its rosy bloom, believed to be native to China, can be likened in form to breasts, buttocks and a heart—and, surprisingly, the shape of Angry Birds. A symbol of immortality and fertility in many Eastern mythologies, the



peach also wards off evil. Moon uses the shape often, a nod to her home state of Georgia, known as the peach state.

Other motifs such as dragons, tigers, lanterns, and pagodas appear in Moon’s lexicon in the guise of mass-produced kitsch and facile stereotypes but also as the residue of a revered tradition long abandoned by most contemporary Asian artists. They are as keenly aware of international trends and as engaged by current issues at home and abroad as their peers around the world, part of a millennial generation with little inclination for nostalgia.

More provocative is her Angry Bird “gook” vase, a derogatory term once freely applied to Asians (originally used by U.S. troops in Korea and Vietnam) without distinguishing its vastly different countries and cultures that cannot be meaningfully lumped together. Scrawled in black across a prettily glazed rosy pot, its demureness makes the word both more shocking and less so—the effect a muddling of intention, the barb muffled—or not. There is also a trend of late by those mocked to re-possess what was considered derisive as badges of honor.

The letter F that appears on a ceramic plaque brings to mind the start of an Anglo-Saxon expletive that has become rather innocuous due to overuse, but still not printable or utterable in certain media and situations. Moon slyly places the letter U, in case we missed the point, a bit away from it. However, she gives an extra twist to the linkage since her U is also a horseshoe, a symbol of good luck. Adding another layer of meaning to it, if the letters are combined, they are a transliteration of the Chinese character “fu,” which also means luck, a character that appears in Korean and Japanese, both languages using a native script as well as one based on Chinese ideograms. Moon’s “sweet, sour and spicy” show is full of these fortuitous connections that viewers can interpret according to their own unpredictable associations, a whimsical interaction that is another of her work’s great attractions.

Constructing an installation that sums up her themes, Moon assembles an ironic mélange of an East Asian interior with low, carved wooden tables placed on tatami mats and a few silk cushions scattered about. On the tables are vases with plants and miscellaneous, tchotchke-like pottery, as if set for her own version of a mad tea party. Floated on the sense and nonsense of cultural conventions and hierarchies, slippery, shape-shifting identities and the miracle of human variability and similarities, Moon’s eclectic, idiosyncratic venture is both serious and fun, her embrace of the disparate exhilarating. A journey of sorts, like Alice’s, she brings us a dazzling array of information, ideas, and images that in the ungrammatical words of her fictional counterpart, becomes wondrously “curiouser and curiouser.”



Lilly Wei is a New York-based independent curator and critic whose focus is contemporary art. She has written regularly for Art in America since 1984 and is a contributing editor at ARTnews and formerly at Art Asia Pacific among other national and international publications. Wei has also written for Art & Australia, Asian Art News, Sanat Dünyamız, Art Papers, Sculpture Magazine, Tema Celeste, Flash Art, Art Press, and Art and Auction, among other publications, and has frequently reported on international biennials such as those of Venice, Sydney, Cairo, Athens, Reykjavik, Shenzhen and Hong Kong and international exhibitions such as Documenta and Sonsbeek, the sculpture international in the Netherlands.

She has written on countless artists, including Magdalena Abakanowicz, Xu Bing, Chakaia Booker, Paul Chan, Francesco Clemente, Chuck Close, Diana Cooper, Tara Donovan, Theaster Gates and Ragnar Kjartansson to name a few. Wei was born in Chengdu, China and has an MA in art history from Columbia University, New York.