


Discover

Inspiring

Artistry

Sojeong Lee

DIA



Sojeong Lee

Night Dreamer

2024. 11. 14 - 12. 21

Based in Düsseldorf, Sojeong Lee focuses on the human figure as her primary theme, drawing on autobiographical experiences to explore the unconscious and the act of dreaming. Her works showcase intricate expressions and emotions unique to her, woven into a narrative structure on the canvas.

Inspired by cartoons she watched as a child, the artist incorporates elements such as large eyes and flushed cheeks into her work. These features amplify a sense of tension, compelling viewers to confront genuine emotions that evoke an ambiguous feeling beyond mere “nightmares,” capturing the subtle sensations that arise between polarities. Through this process, she visually manifests her fears and acknowledges her reality, tracing a journey of self-recognition within the conscious and subconscious.

The title of this exhibition, <<Night Dreamer>>, metaphorically reflects the artist's creative journey. Beginning from her intimate dreams, the exhibition captures the anxieties and uncertainty that modern individuals experience, translating this journey into a canvas-bound exploration. Lee creates images that bridge dreamlike scenes, lingering memories, and the imagination that connects them. Like a dreamer, she reconstructs dreams and reality within her works, inviting viewers to experience her nocturnal flights of fantasy. Through Sojeong Lee's art, audiences embark on a visual journey, delving into their inner world and savoring a unique exploration beyond reality.

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Sojeong Lee
Three-Way Conversation
2020
Oil on canvas
100x160cm



The frog represents a second self, or another version of me within the unconscious, deeply hidden. It's always dissatisfied with reality, wanting to speak out, yet bound to simply observe from the sidelines...

-Artist Statement

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Sojeong Lee
The First
2021
Oil on canvas
160x110cm



Sojeong Lee
Hey, I'm here
2022
Oil on canvas
160x100cm



Sojeong Lee
Through the Storm
2024
Oil on canvas
180x120cm



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Sojeong Lee
Raum der Gedanken
2024
Oil on canvas
180x140cm



Sojeong Lee
Der Schrei (The Scream)
2020
Oil on canvas
125x80cm



Sojeong Lee
The voice who lives in
2024
Oil on canvas
160x120cm



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Sojeong Lee
Head in the Clouds
2024
Oil on canvas
140x120cm



The figures in the paintings wear expressions of terror, as if they've just awoken from a nightmare. They are merely shells, borrowing someone else's appearance; in reality, each one is a self-portrait of me.

-Artist Statement

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Sojeong Lee
Wanderer
2024
Oil on canvas
100x160cm



Sojeong Lee
Walk
2018
Oil on canvas
120x60cm



Sojeong Lee
Waiting
2023
Oil on canvas
120x80cm





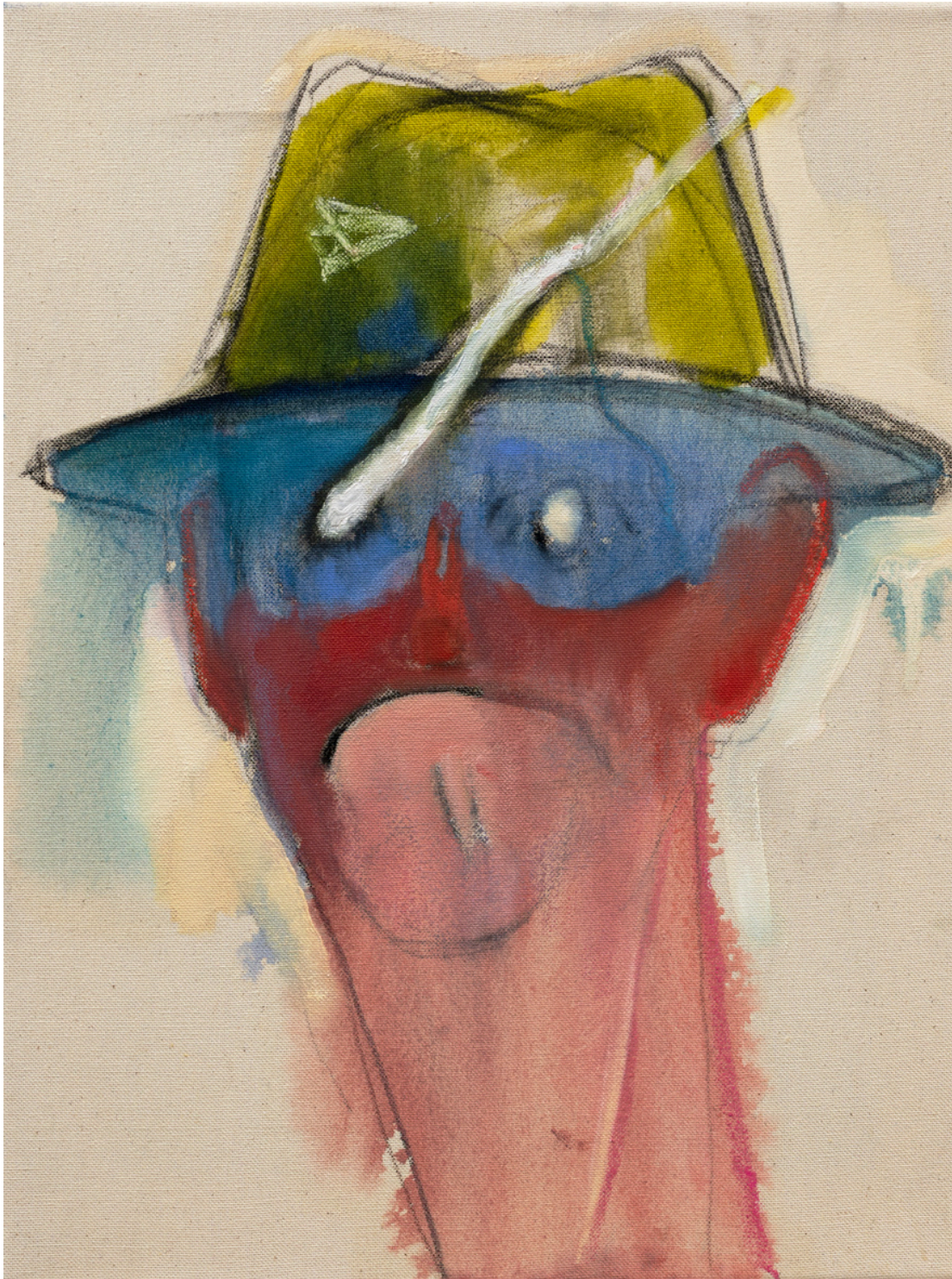
Sojeong Lee
Don't see me
2024
Oil on canvas
40x60cm



Sojeong Lee
Far Away
2024
Oil on canvas
40x60cm



Sojeong Lee
Wake
2024
Oil on canvas
60x40cm



Sojeong Lee
Der Hut
2022
Oil on canvas
45x35cm



Sojeong Lee
Vertikal
2022
Oil on canvas
45x35cm

Here Comes the Night Time

Exhibition Preface

Sunghui Lee

Lee's affection for comics since childhood has influenced her approach to depicting emotion and situations with a sensitivity and visual style reminiscent of the genre. The large, hollow eyes and flushed cheeks of her figures create an uncanny quality that infuses her paintings with a mystical, surreal tone. Certain symbolic elements recur frequently in her works—smoke, hats, butterfly nets, paper airplanes, headphones, and solitary figures swimming or walking alone. These objects and scenes represent elements of her unconscious, signaling her ongoing exploration of her inner world through painting. Ultimately, Lee's work appears to be an exploration of the journey to bring the unconscious into the conscious realm.

Beginning from nightmares

Sojeong Lee describes arriving at thoughts on dreams and the unconscious as part of her search for why she feels compelled to paint.[1] She often experiences nightmares, and while early on, her work occasionally referenced art historical themes, her paintings have been dedicated from the start to recording and tracing these nightmares. The figures in her paintings appear in states of anxiety or bewilderment, their faces embodying emotions like loneliness, fear, and unease. Lee is deeply focused on bringing the hallucinatory images she encounters in dreams into the conscious

realm, often transforming them into symbolic or cryptic elements. For example, paper airplanes, which frequently appear in her works, were inspired by her childhood experience of folding paper planes as a school assignment. Lee overlays wandering forms onto these planes, projecting complex fantasies and a sense of precariousness, as if they might land unpredictably. Although paper boats may quickly sink when touching water, Lee frequently depicts figures wearing paper boats on their heads, symbolizing preparation for a journey across the vast sea of the unconscious. Hats and raincoats serve as protective gear against the unknown outer world, while figures holding insect nets are seen waving them in the air toward invisible targets. According to the artist, depictions of smoke emerging from a figure's mouth or eyes stem from the idea that the soul might escape during sleep. Water also appears frequently in her paintings, symbolizing feelings of helplessness or melancholy as deep, unfathomable expanses. Particularly, figures swimming alone in the middle of these waters evoke a sense of danger, as if escape were far from certain.[2] Many of Lee's characters, often with flushed cheeks, appear dressed in multiple layers or at times entirely bare-skinned. The artist frequently employs vivid primary hues, yet the omnipresent blue tones in her work evoke tension rather than tranquility, prompting thoughts of obsession, fear, and uncertainty. Shades of blue unerringly permeate scenes set in night, darkness, and shadow.

[1] Sojeong Lee's artist Statement

[2] Above artist Statement, 2024.

Seen in Dreams

Sojeong Lee describes the figures in her paintings as various portrayals of herself, ultimately calling them all self-portraits. Her work thus avoids generalizing human experiences of inner anxiety, conflict, or the boundary between reality and dreams. Instead, it delves into Lee's own unconscious mind and personal psychology. Compared to the work of an artist she admires, such as Ruprecht Von Kaufmann, the distinction becomes clear: while Kaufmann's figures address broader themes—universal human experiences like anxiety, alienation, and questions of identity—Lee's characters are rooted in her autobiographical experiences and individual emotions. For instance, in Kaufmann's depiction of a sleeping figure, sleep can be interpreted as a form of psychological escape, a means to avoid difficulties in the real world. However, in Sojeong Lee's paintings, the sleeping figure is closer to someone entering and wandering within the realm of dreams. These characters are on a journey through the unconscious, depicted in more fantastical scenarios. Additionally, because the clues Lee provides about the situation or emotions of the figures are partial, the narratives within each of her works remain ambiguous and fragmented. Had Lee employed imagination to add narrative layers to her unconscious images, her paintings might have been more descriptive and complex. However, because her paintings arise not from deliberate or conscious imaginings but from the lifting of unconscious images, they

capture only an isolated moment of the dream—similar to a still frame in a video—without contextualizing what comes before or after. The backgrounds surrounding her figures are often simplified or rendered as flat planes of color. The recurring spatial depictions in her work also function as symbolic devices; she mentions that her painted spaces can appear like borrowed scenes from a film, disconnected from any context. For example, emotions unprocessed from everyday life may accumulate into large stones, deep pools, or bizarre architectural structures.[3]

Symbolism of the Eyes

Since childhood, Sojeong Lee has been drawn to manga, especially horror genres such as Junji Ito's *Uzumaki*. In horror manga, dreams and the unconscious are often depicted in strange, grotesque ways. For instance, in *Uzumaki*, characters are engulfed by a surreal spiral phenomenon, undergoing mental and physical transformations. Inner desires, fears, obsessions, and madness—forces beyond human control—are frequently conveyed through expressions, particularly the eyes. The appearance of spirals within people's eyes begins to overtake their bodies and alter their psyches, symbolizing how unconscious fear or obsession visually manifests through the eyes. Ito's characters have exaggerated, expressive eyes; a face in terror shows enormous, wide eyes to depict shock, while dilated pupils suggest deep distress and intense fear.

[3] Above artist Statement, 2024.

Thus, in horror manga, eyes often signify psychological confusion, unease, and subconscious fragmentation. Similarly, in Lee's paintings, eyes reveal emotions like anxiety and confusion. She often portrays her figures with rounded, vacant eyes or expressions of horror, as if captured waking from a nightmare or within a scene from one.[4] Interestingly, nearly all her characters have blue pupils; in her recent works, the eyes are still painted in blue tones but appear less defined, resembling hollow caves akin to skull outlines. This hollow-eyed portrayal makes her figures appear as if they have lost their sense of sight or are wandering without orientation. In <The Voice Who Lives In>(2024), the character has large, round eyes reminiscent of manga, with faint, translucent images reflected within. Here, the eyes do not solely express emotion or psychology but function as a portal to the unconscious, linked to the hat's window, serving as both a conduit and an expansion of the pictorial space toward the subconscious. Thus, in this work, the eyes are not merely a window to emotion but a vehicle connecting the painting to the unconscious world, expanding the depth and dimensionality of her art.

Here Comes the Night Time

In examining Sojeong Lee's paintings, it is essential to recognize *night* as both a point of departure and a space for emerging possibilities.

While spatial settings like forests, fields, and water are prominent in her works, the notion of night as a distinct temporal space has. While spatial settings like forests, fields, and water are prominent in her works, the notion of night as a distinct temporal space has yet to receive the same emphasis as themes of sleep or dreams. However, as Lee's paintings navigate through nightmares—interweaving night's imagery into day and vice versa—the process traverses the boundaries of unconscious and conscious realms. Thus, night, representing the unconscious, and day, symbolizing the conscious, are intrinsically linked in her work. For her paintings to exist, dreams and the unconscious must be pulled into conscious awareness. Here, night, despite being a time of anxiety and chaos dominated by nightmares, also serves as a latent force, drawing images up to the surface of consciousness. Moreover, night evokes stronger emotional experiences, often bringing repressed feelings and wounds to the surface, which can transform into melancholic reflections or stimulate profound creative inspiration. In this way, night in Lee's work functions as a dual entity: while it is governed by nightmares, it simultaneously holds the potential for liberation and new possibilities arising from those very nightmares.[5]

[4] Above artist Statement, 2024.

[5] The title of this artist's note is borrowed from the song <Here Comes the Night Time>(2013) by the rock band Arcade Fire. In this song, night represents a dual existence, embodying both chaos and disorder as well as liberation and the potential for new possibilities. The lyrics question the inequalities and suffering present in the real world and also express a degree of skepticism toward religious beliefs.



Sojeong Lee
Passed by
2024
Oil on paper
100x65cm



Sojeong Lee
In the Midst of Calm
2024
Oil on paper
100x65cm



Sojeong Lee
The Howl
2021
Oil on paper
65x100cm



The paper folding I used to bring as homework in my childhood...

The shapes that drift unconsciously, full of complicated, random fantasies and an inherent sense of uncertainty about where they might land, resemble paper airplanes.

-Artist Statement

DIA



Sojeong Lee
In the Dark
2020
Oil on paper
48x36cm



Sojeong Lee
Pool of Sorrow
2018
Oil on paper
42x29.5cm



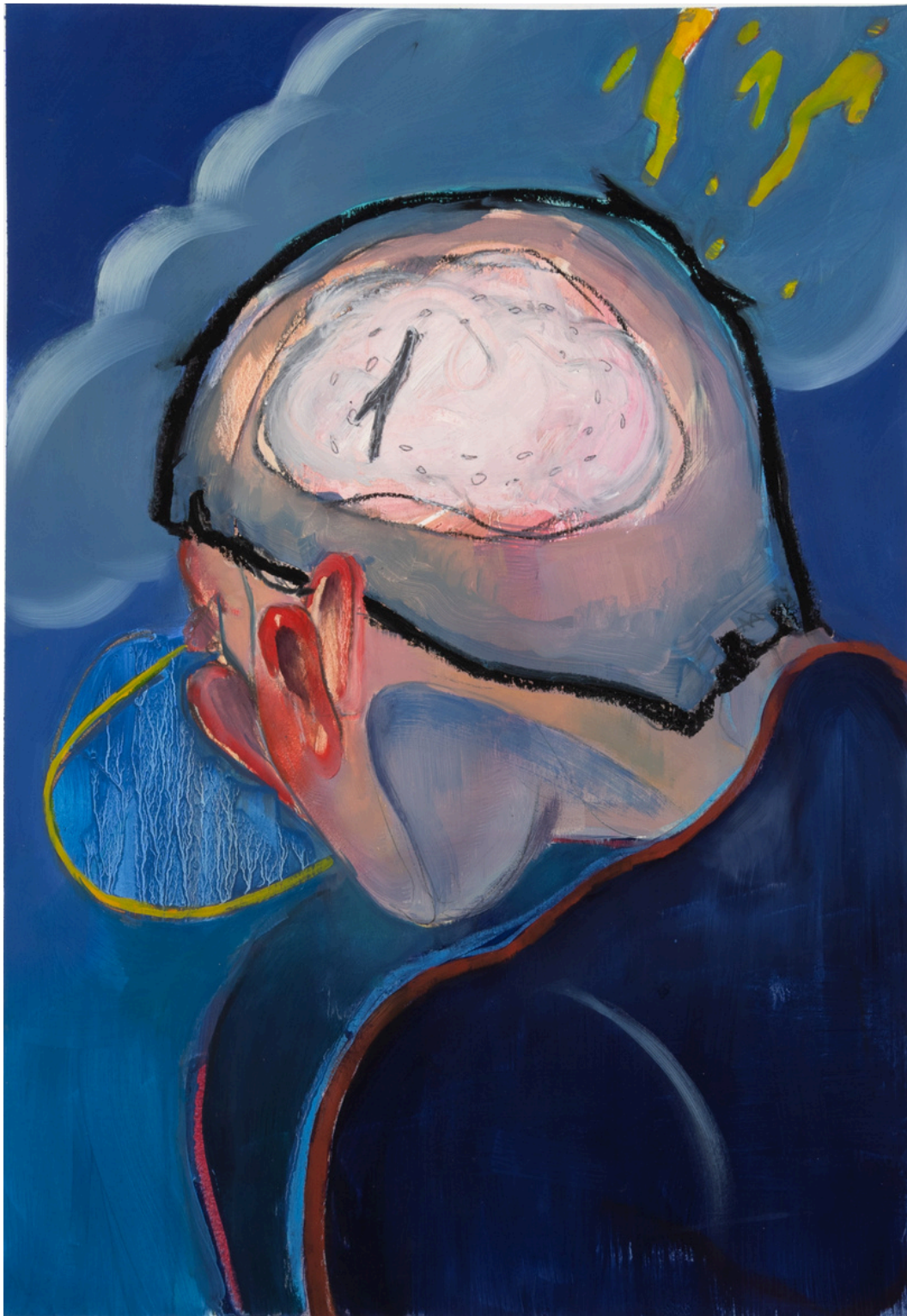
Sojeong Lee
Look Back
2021
Oil on paper
48x36cm



Sojeong Lee
Swing
2018
Oil on paper
42x29.5cm



Sojeong Lee
Contact
2021
Gouache on paper
35.5x28cm



Sojeong Lee
Lost in the Chaos
2018
Oil on paper
42x29.5cm



Sojeong Lee
Confuse
2018
Oil on paper
42x29.5cm



Sojeong Lee (b.1993)

Sojeong Lee builds a composition centered around figures, placing everyday observed surroundings and objects within the canvas to create a narrative structure that explores relationships between images. Through the process of continuing the story, she examines a scene where icons and landscapes communicate together. Through these processes, the artist transforms objects imbued with personal imagination and emotions into elements of everyday life. She enables this richly layered emotional resonance to unfold as a universal narrative.

From 2016 to 2024, Sojeong Lee studied at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, Germany, where she earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees. In 2023, while pursuing her master's degree, she held a solo exhibition at Galerie Droste in Germany, marking a successful debut in the German art scene. She has also participated in numerous group exhibitions, including at Annarumma Gallery in Naples (2024), Obey Art Space in Berlin (2023), Café M in Berlin (2023), Museum Haus Opherdicke in Holzwickede (2022), Galerie Biesenbach in Cologne (2022), BBK in Düsseldorf (2021), and Bruch & Dallas in Cologne (2019).

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2F, 37 Yulgok-ro 1-gil, Jongno-gu, Seoul, Korea 03062

www.diacontemporary.com

info@diacontemporary.com

[@dia.contemporary](#)



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