

HYANGMOK BAIK HOME

PREVIEW: 6TH MARCH 6-8PM
EXHIBITION: 6TH MARCH - 5TH APRIL 2025

Exhibition text written by artist and writer, Andrew Salgado.

Because I attach to things both passionately and irrationally, I politely requested (read: asserted my intention) to write the text for Hyangmok Baik's sophomore exhibition at the gallery, Home. After all, in 2023, I wrote the text for his debut exhibition at the gallery. At that time the work drew allusions to childhood, dreams, and nostalgia, but also Greek Mythology, Günter Grass, C.S. Lewis, and Willy Wonka. These allusions are prevalent; reprisals and constants in Baik's work. But as my friendship with Baik has developed, so too has my interpretation of his work: the longing, the darkness, the perverse sense of humour that courses like a current through his saturated colours and disconnected masculine forms.

Very recently I came across a book by a lesser-known author of short stories by the name of Bruno Schulz. To read a Schulz story (any Schulz story) is to submit to a fantastical and macabre world. Characters become birds or insects; they disappear through walls and merge into their surroundings. Everything - flowers, cats, wallpaper, factories on the horizon, wayward fathers, overrun with nods to Shakespeare, Dante, Kafka - becomes reinvigorated with enough burden of meaning to make Freud blush. Grey depressive days turn, without notice, to technicolour inner-worlds. In "The Republic of Dreams," Schulz describes a city "as if on the edge of the world," and I wonder if Baik - working from Seoul - grows similarly despondent as those of us struggling through the endless grey wash of the London winter. So Baik becomes like Schulz, escaping to an inner world of comfort, where he cannot escape but in fact embraces some of the grotesque or macabre imagery that appears therein. Like Schulz, Baik is intent on establishing a new language to comprehend a world that is otherwise incomprehensible. Where inner and outer realities merge. "Here, nothing happens in vain, nothing occurs without profound meaning... Here, events are not an ephemeral phantom on the surface, here they have roots... That is why there is such gravity, a deep accent of sorrow in what takes place."



Home (2024), mixed media on canvas, 162 x 130 cm

To me, being an artist is about using the tools immediately available to each of us to decipher the world around us. We are equipped with all that we allow ourselves, and so reading into Baik-by-way-of-Schulz is neither meant as empirical nor pretentious. It is simply the matching of two things, two or more potentially disparate things of interest to me (in this case: Baik, Schulz), and drawing a new connection, finding a new meaning. We could drill the artist, and demand his explanation to decode the ciphers presented, but where's the magic in that? What we can see: references to Ophelia, di Chirico, Neo-Classicism, and Pop Art, Op Art, Street Art. A sensibility to me that appears as a lamentation of youth - but perhaps that's just me.

A sleeping figure in a poppy field might be a nod to *The Wizard of Oz*, it could suggest the lotus fields in *The Odyssey*, or it might reflect an anti-war stance, poppies being a symbol of peace - especially given the current feeling amongst millennials (Baik is 32) where the political climate seems to be reaching boiling point, a fever-pitch frenzy. To me, it recalls the Washington Irving short classic *Rip Van Winkle*, in which the unwitting titular hero falls asleep, only to awake twenty years later, sporting a long beard otherwise unaffected by a world drastically changed. It's a perfect metaphor for the nostalgic reverie - and odd sense of inexplicable, almost exquisite horror - that I find in Baik's work. Like Van Winkle, moments before that fatal sleep, lost to some form of surreality, perhaps dreaming about home.



H YANGMOK BAIK (b. 1990, Seoul, South Korea) currently lives and works in Seoul. He graduated in 2019 with a MA in Fine Art from Hongik University.

Solo exhibitions include: *You Know How Much I Love You*, Anzai Gallery, Tokyo (2024); *While You Were Sleeping*, BEERS London, London (2023); *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, OTI Hong Kong (2022); *The Garden of Eden*, OTI LA, Los Angeles (2021); *Forgotten by Us*, BEERS London, London (2021); *Imagine Utopia*, Gallery Stan, Seoul, South Korea (2020); *Wanderlust*, Gallery Marron, Seoul, South Korea (2019); solo show at Gallery Meme, Seoul, South Korea (2018) and a solo show at Gana Art Space, Seoul, South Korea (2016).

Group exhibitions include: *How It's Going*, 193 Gallery, Paris (2024); *Coexist*, Gana Art, LA (2024); *Family & Friends*, BEERS London (2023); *Human*, Choi & Choi Gallery, Seoul, South Korea (2023); *Bitter Nostalgia* (with BEERS artist Adébayo Bolaji), Saatchi Gallery, London (2022); *Yohood*, Shanghai, China (2019); Gallery Ili, Seoul, South Korea (2019); *Mercielbiss*, Busan, Korea (2019); Stan Art Center, Seoul, South Korea (2019); Chiyoda, Tokyo, Japan (2019).

Fairs include: Art Fair Tokyo, with Anzai Gallery, Tokyo, Japan (2024); Kiaf Art Fair, with OTI and Gallery Stan, Seoul, Korea (2022); Art Busan, Gallery Stan, Busan, South Korea (2022); Yeonhee Art Fair, Seoul, South Korea (2019); KIAF, South Korea (2019) and; Art Busan, Busan, Korea (2019).