Nothing is yours, Everything is you

March 8 – April 13, 2024

Kitti Narod, Ming Ying

Curator: Yonni Park, Jeeeun Hong

From March 8 to April 13, 2024, Tang Contemporary Art Seoul will present “Nothing is yours, Everything is you”, a duet exhibition by Kitti Narod and Ming Ying. These two artists have received worldwide attention for their unique painting styles.

The multi-persona phenomenon, which has appeared frequently in art and literature since the mid-20th century, is rooted in an effort to embrace multiculturalism and understand multiple identities. As our lifestyles have diversified in modern society, this phenomenon has become more widely accepted. In particular, the so-called “social media generation” expresses their identities through various channels and shows a greater tendency to respect diversity than older generations. This has become a trend that cannot be ignored in modern society. With this social background, the search for identity has taken a more important place in contemporary society and thus has become an important topic in the art world.

“Life is a journey of finding oneself.” -Albert Camus

Simple yet revealing, and colorful yet concealing. Interpreted in two contrasting languages, the characters in the works of Kitti Narod and Ming Ying are at once ourselves and complete strangers. The two artists’ contrasting explorations of how to perceive images in their works are in line with their own journeys of searching and questioning their identities.

A hugging couple, two friends, and people sharing their daily lives are depicted in Kitti Narod’s simple yet powerful language. His simple yet delicate approach immerses the viewer in the work, drawing them into the piece in an instant. The unique balance of colors and distorted shapes, combined with his skillful control, create a sophisticated interpretation of people, their actions, relationships, and the objects around them.

The images on the canvas, represented by carefully selected elements, appear serene. However, they radiate energy through the movement of the figures and the relationship between them. The contrast between the two different elements evokes subtle emotions in the viewer. The artist hopes to give a sense of universality to the characters in his works while paradoxically accentuating their specificity in order to approach and coexist with different identities and ways of life.

Glittering jewelry, dresses, and exaggerated hairstyles. Scenes from salons, balls, and other events reminiscent of Western upper-class culture are portrayed in a swirling, frantic manner. The dramatic depiction of seemingly extravagant appearances is a special way of capturing real-life interactions. Ming Ying places the main character on the stage she creates on her canvas. Then, she chooses the costume and creates the atmosphere. The characters who represent Western culture or Western colonialism on her canvas stages are dressed extravagantly as if they are unsparingly revealing everything about themselves.

However, when looking at the figures in the work, the viewer soon realizes that the characters are hidden beneath the striking materiality of the paint and the thick strokes of the scraper brush. The colorful but repetitive costumes, the discreet postures with restrained personal expressions, and the atmosphere that seems controlled to maintain elegance create a subtle conflict, creating tension in the work and inviting the viewer into the narrative. It takes a while to realize that the main characters are, in fact, faceless, lost in the glamour. The prominent materiality of Ming Ying’s paintings immerses the viewer in her work, creating a gap in time before the identity and essence of the subjects, hidden by the glamour, is recognized. Observing the anonymous figures in glamorous Western social gatherings is the artist’s ongoing exploration of her identity as a foreigner and an Asian living in the West. It is also our own search for identity through social belonging.

The figures in Kitti Narod’s and Ming Ying’s works represent the characteristics, symbolism, and aesthetic elements of cultures and groups in different societies. The contrasting expressive styles and unique perspectives presented by their works amplify their messages. Through this exhibition, we hope you can join the artists on their journey to explore the meaning and value of human life through a deep reflection on identity, delicately reflecting the existentialist anguish of individuals.