

## YOO GEUN-TAEK, XI'AN KIM, KYUNGMI SHIN, LILY WONG

### *Phantom Rooms*

October 18 — November 28, 2024

In *Phantom Rooms*, the elusive nature of material and immaterial possessions is laid bare, offering a profound examination of the ways in which objects and spaces imprint themselves upon us. The exhibition brings together the works of **Yoo Geun-Taek, Xi'an Kim, Kyungmi Shin, and Lily Wong**, whose artistic practices engage with notions of lineage, colonization, and the intimate connections between cultural memory and material culture. Drawing from the tradition of *Chaekgeori*—Korean still-life paintings of books and objects—the artists reinterpret these age-old contemplations, exploring both the scholarly and the mundane. The works become vessels for memories, desires, and histories, sparking dialogue between possession and identity.

Many of the works in *Phantom Rooms* explore the global exchanges—of people, cultures, and objects—while delving into the historical traces found in both Dutch and Korean still-life traditions. Kyungmi Shin's works draws on the movement of goods through trade, reflecting on the circulation of porcelain, antiquities, and imagery, and tracing how these objects come to embody the cultural desires and shifting values of different eras. In her 2024 diptych *A Promised Afterlife*, Shin uses photo transfer and acrylic on wood panels to create a richly layered composition that juxtaposes historical and contemporary elements. The work evokes the opulence of a Louis XIV Beauvais chinoiserie tapestry, specifically *La Collation from the Histoire de l'Empereur de Chine* series, depicting an imagined Chinese emperor and empress in a pagoda, though European influences are evident in the figures, décor, and textures. Attendants serve tea and fruit among elaborate porcelain and gilt dishes, while musicians and dancers reflect themes of cultural fantasy, wealth, and cross-cultural exchange. A silver line drawing of a chaekgeori, a Korean still-life tradition, overlays the scene, featuring imported objects. Beneath this, a portrait of a young Korean adoptee and vessels used in Korean royal rituals add layers of personal and historical memory, creating a rich juxtaposition where imagination and reality collide.

The composition in Shin's *A Promised Afterlife* echoes the lively, chaotic depictions of domestic life and social interaction seen in 17th-century Dutch genre paintings, such as those by Jan Steen, where crowded scenes filled with material culture convey narratives about family and society. Shin's work, however, goes beyond a single cultural or temporal reference by incorporating photographic representations of diaspora and migration, connecting the objects in the painting to the human experiences they signify.

Expanding on a rich tapestry of references that spans Chinese medicine, Japanese woodblock prints, and Mughal miniatures, Lily Wong's works delve deeply into the symbolism of depicted objects, navigating the tension between historical memory and present identity. Her compositions, layered with figures and dreamlike spaces, conjure scenes that oscillate between fantasy and reality, as well as performance and authenticity. In *Translation* (2024), a central figure in vibrant yellow tones sits with its face partially obscured by a segmented window, holding a rectangular image of a face in a gesture of contemplation or confrontation. In the foreground, a knife is wedged between the window panes, while a peach rests on the table, both objects carrying symbolic weight. The knife may signify the act of "cutting through" layers of personal or cultural history, serving as a tool for navigating identity and memory. It evokes notions of division—boundaries between self and other, past and present, or inner and outer worlds—suggesting a means of accessing or dissecting one's own image, as seen in the figure's engagement with

the portrait. This act of cutting metaphorically points to peeling away layers of representation to reveal deeper truths.

Through her theatrical compositions, Wong stages the self as both actor and artifact, inviting viewers to witness the fracturing and reassembly of identity. Her works resonate with the tradition of *chaekgeori* in their arrangement and composition, yet the objects in question are not books or antiquities, but rather fragments of personal history that must be excavated and understood.

Xi'an Kim's still lifes destabilize familiar objects, transforming them into abstracted, plastic-like forms that evoke both childlike wonder and surreal detachment. In *Object 345* (2024), Kim arranges a collection of everyday items—vessels with animalistic features, melting and textured—positioned in the foreground, rendered in soft yellow hues with delicate blue details. The background is a blurry, abstracted rectangle of what seems to be a screen, vaguely adorned with impressions of birds and foliage. This soft, atmospheric backdrop contrasts with the sharper, more defined objects in the foreground, creating a sense of displacement. Some shapes resemble thick clay, others mimic the smoothness of ceramic, and a few take on a bubble-gum-like pliability.

Kim strips these objects of warmth, presenting them as cool, distant fragments of reality. The vessel, inscribed with "1992," the artist's birth year, hovers between temporal markers, while the melting forms suggest the fragility and impermanence of materiality itself. The playful, almost naive quality in her work frees her vision, allowing her to develop a vernacular language that feels both personal and universal. Kim's practice engages with a utopian vision, where the complexities of ideology and reality dissolve, leaving behind an idealized stillness. Her objects embody a paradox, balancing permanence and fragility, hinting that even the most enduring materials are vulnerable to the passage of time.

In Yoo Geun-Taek's practice, the ordinary object assumes an otherworldly strength, prompting us to reconsider the mundane as charged with alien significance. His works function as markers in time, each painting a reflection on both the individual and collective experience, rendered through an experimental fusion of East Asian traditional painting techniques. In *Some Dinner* (2019), a banquet scene—composed using oyster shell powder and gouache on hanji paper—takes on a ghostly, ethereal quality. The dinner table, set with floating, half-defined objects, seems suspended in time, surrounded by a dense yet abstracted landscape. The hanji and tactile oyster shell powder evoke memory and absence, transforming a domestic scene into a haunting reflection on life's transience. Geun-Taek's blend of traditional materials with experimental textures transcends East-West and personal-communal divides, creating a record of fleeting impressions that linger between the tangible and the elusive.

The exhibition's title, *Phantom Rooms*, gestures toward the liminality of these spaces—physical and psychological, real and imagined. Echoing the still-life tradition, deeply rooted in Belgium's art history, especially in Antwerp, the works in this exhibition push beyond conventional boundaries. The familiar conventions of perspective, arrangement, and *trompe l'oeil*, prized in both Flemish and Korean traditions, are reinterpreted here. The objects and spaces represented exist in a state of flux, neither fully present nor entirely absent, embodying a realm where memory, possession, and identity continuously intermingle and shift.

In this way, *Phantom Rooms* evokes spatial and temporal ambiguity, where the boundaries between interior and exterior, object and subject, and personal and collective blur. The still-life genre becomes a framework for navigating what is seen and unseen, the known and the unknowable. The viewer is drawn into these phantom rooms, where the physicality of objects gives way to reflections on the voids left behind—spaces where the passage of time, cultural memory, and identity converge and crystallize.

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**Phantom Rooms is on view from October 18 to November 28, 2024. Opening hours are Wednesday through Saturday from 13:00 to 18:00 hrs.**