

CRITICS' PICKS



Joeun Kim Aatchim, *Doubt the Hands (The Debt Collector Seeks the Father Through a Milk Delivery Hole)*, 2022, mineral and earth pigment, glue, refined pine soot ink, charcoal, graphite, and chalk on silk, 35 x 50 x 1 1/4".

LOS ANGELES

Joeun Kim Aatchim

MAKE ROOM LOS ANGELES

5119 Melrose Avenue

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Joeun Kim Aatchim’s solo show here, titled “사자굴 [Sajagul] — Then, out of the Den,” is based on the artist’s mythicized memories of the apartment in which she grew up in Seoul during the 1990s. Her haunting paintings, made on semitransparent silk, fill a void left by the fact that she and her family have virtually no photographs from that time, which was grievous for them all, paralleling wider unrest in South Korea. Among their tribulations was her father’s bankruptcy, a scenario immortalized in *Doubt the Hands (The Debt Collector Seeks the Father Through a Milk Delivery Hole)*, 2022, in which the artist and her sister cower in fear as the titular functionary kneels at their door, reaching menacingly through an opening normally used to deliver milk.

Her technique references Korean traditions of painting on silk, placing her family’s experiences within a historic cultural continuum. The depicted interiors seem to waver with staggered outlines and overlapping transparencies, suggesting the elusive nature of memory and perception as well as the artist’s stereo blindness—a lifelong condition rendering her unable to perceive depth. Aatchim’s translucent surfaces glimmer with hand-mixed mineral pigments, enhancing the imagery’s ghostliness. A sense of preciousness is heightened by black bows dangling from several stretchers, suggesting the paintings as objects of mourning.

Aatchim describes her process as a memory game in which word associations trigger recollections alloyed with fantasy. Communicating remotely with relatives back in Korea, the New York–based artist structured her surreal scenes around key details of shared reminiscences. Recurring motifs of pianos, televisions, and lions relate to aspects of the family’s milieu: They lived above a piano store; her sister played the instrument; and the children watched the 1995 movie *Jumanji* over and over, presumably finding solace in the notion that their own troubles could also have unreal origins.

The protagonists of her beloved film play a magical game allowing them to go back in time and transmute the past. Similarly, Aatchim’s project reads as a quest to reclaim control over her negative experiences by concretizing and mythologizing them, affirming the transformative powers of memory and imagination.

— Annabel Osberg