

# Joeun Kim Aatchim at Make Room Los Angeles

May 26, 2022  
Text by Alec Recinos



Joeun Kim Aatchim, *The Untouched and the Delivered — A Tale of a Moon Light Prayer in the Lions' Den* (2022). Mineral and earth pigment suspended in glue, whitegold leaf, refined pine soot ink, charcoal, graphite, chalk on silk, 22 x 34 x 1.5 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Make Room Los Angeles. Photo: Josh Schaedel.

In *사자굴 [Sajagul]* — *Then, out of the Den* at Make Room Los Angeles, Joeun Kim Aatchim uses her family's home as the ground from which to explore memories from her childhood in South Korea. For her first solo exhibition on the West Coast, Aatchim employs a traditional silk painting technique to depict haunting scenes in domestic spaces that vacillate between believable imagery and fantasy. Still, these fabricated scenes remain rooted in the real, as they capture the emotional register of memory, and stage its always-attendant slippage between reality and invention.

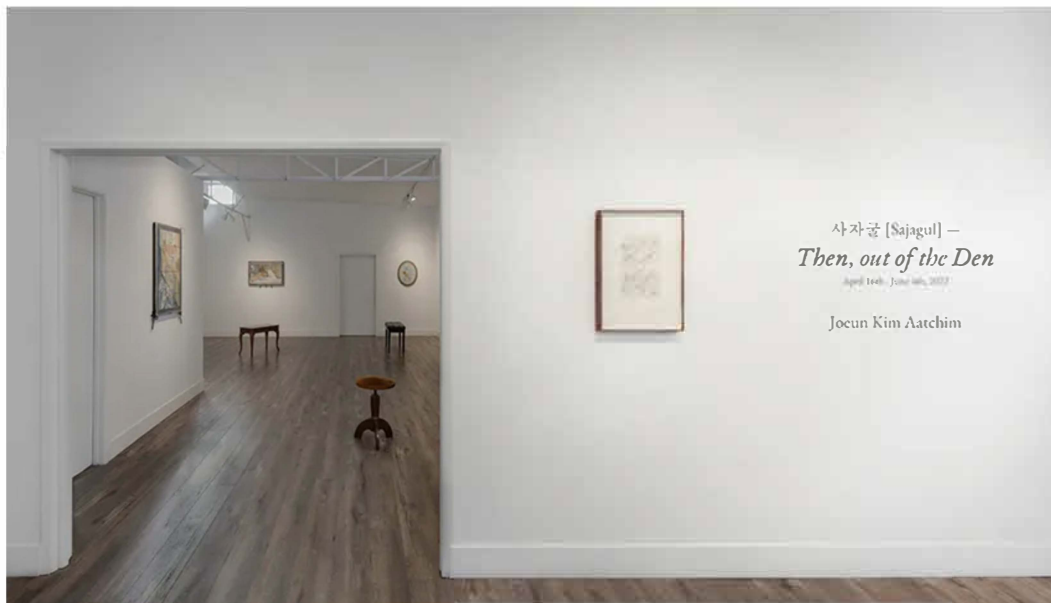
Across the paintings, the interior spaces that Aatchim depicts ground her scenes while everything else evokes an otherworldly space that seems untethered from the rules of our reality. In *The Untouched and the Delivered — A Tale of a Moon Light Prayer in the Lions' Den* (all works 2022), for example, the grid of the tile floor establishes perspective in the space of a cabinet-lined hallway that opens into other rooms. This naturalism, however, remains solely in the background, as eerie figures fill the painting: a

woman weeps in an adjoining room, while a lion scratches menacingly at her door. There is always an enigmatic element like this in Aatchim's paintings, determined by feeling rather than empirical fact: the lion emerges from the artist's obsessive viewings of the movie *Jumanji*—a film that offered her an escape during a trying time in childhood—and enters her painted memory like an interloper.

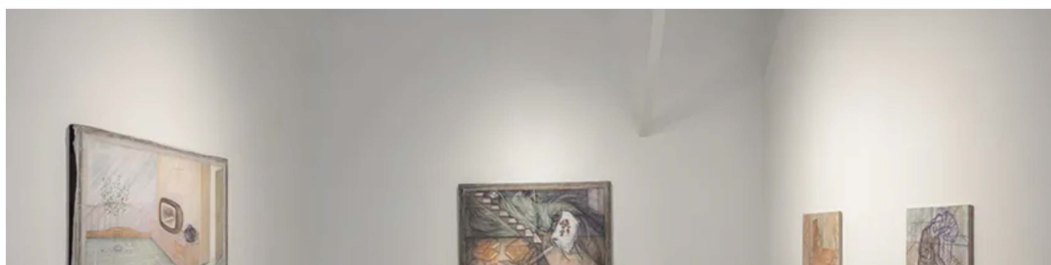
Aatchim underscores the affective nature of memory not only through the otherworldly content in her works but in the form in which they are presented. Once the architectural ground has been established, the subjects within are painted and repainted, producing a series of overlapping images, each one the result of an attempt to more accurately remember a specific moment. As a result, what should be static scenes stuck in the past instead become animated, allowing the viewer to experience Aatchim's memories as active and alive. In *Doubt The Hands (The Debt Collector Seeks the Father Through a Milk Delivery Hole)*, a mother and child cower in a corner while a debt collector reaches threateningly into the house through a hole meant for milk delivery. Though the debt collector is kept safely at bay outside the door, the superimposition of multiple forms accentuates the tension of the tableau by destabilizing his solid figure, as if in his writhing he could slip through the barrier. Simultaneously, the anxiety of the mother and daughter becomes palpable, as they seem to vibrate in fear. Through these delicately layered lines, Aatchim both endows each painting with a sense of movement and establishes the emotional register and stakes accompanying these remembrances.

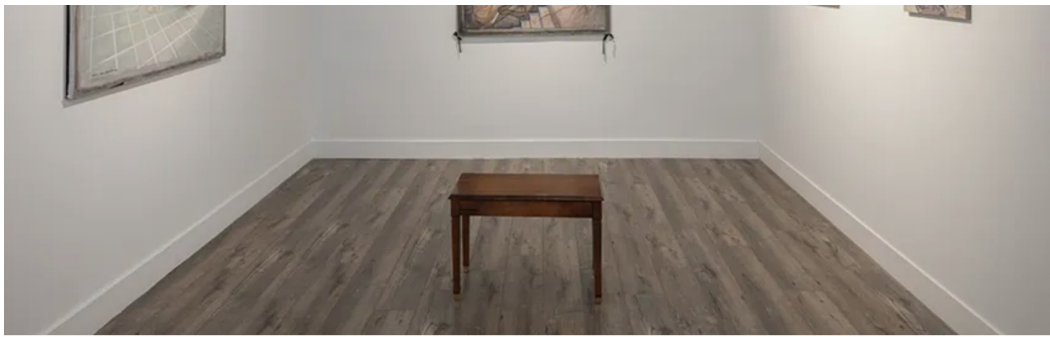
Memory, as these paintings attest, is not concrete; it is contingent. Aatchim's paintings hold these scenes open, preventing them from resolving into perfect, stylistic clarity to highlight their emotional resonance and urgency. By sustaining the always-ongoing interpretation of the artist's childhood, the works in *사자굴 [Sajagul] — Then, out of the Den* project these moments into the present day and pull the viewer into the process of recollection. There can be no neat conclusions here, only the potential for the past to be considered anew.

Joeun Kim Aatchim: *사자굴 [Sajagul] — Then, out of the Den* runs from April 16–June 4, 2022 at Make Room Los Angeles (5119 Melrose Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90038).



Joeun Kim Aatchim, *사자굴 [Sajagul] — Then, out of the Den* (installation view) (2022). Image courtesy of the artist and Make Room Los Angeles. Photo: Josh Schaedel.



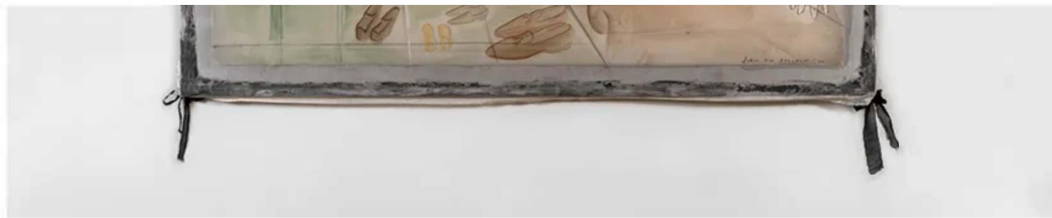


Joeun Kim Aatchim, 사자굴  
*[Sajagul] — Then, out of the Den*  
 (installation view) (2022). Image  
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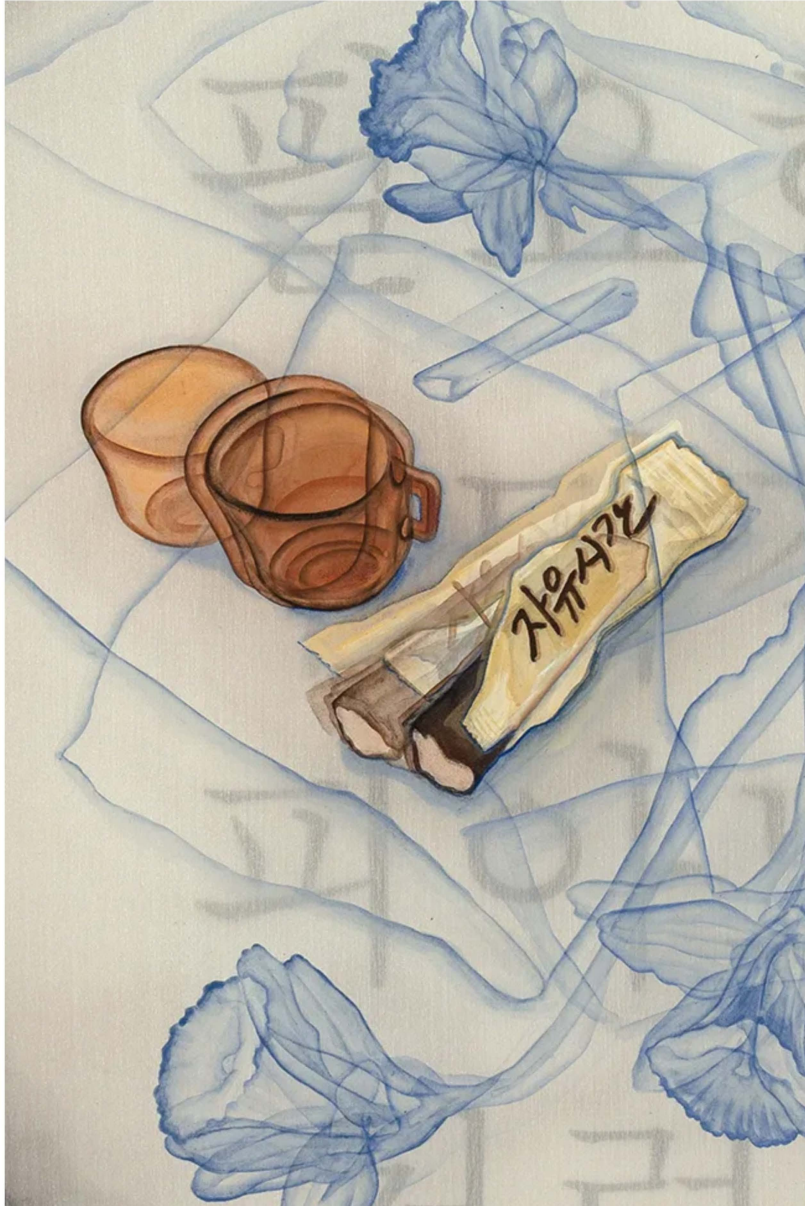
Joeun Kim Aatchim, *Doubt The Hands (The Debt Collector Seeks the Father Through a Milk Delivery Hole)* (2022). Mineral and earth pigment suspended in glue, refined pine soot ink, charcoal, graphite, chalk on silk, 35 x 50 x 1.25 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Make Room Los Angeles. Photo: Kunning Huang.



Joeun Kim Aatchim, *Still life with An Alone time, A Candy Bar, an Ember Cup, and Poet's Daffodil, Over Mother's Poem (Item Found in Her Pocket by a Child Detective)* (2022). Mineral and earth pigment suspended in glue on silk, ink on cotton, 24 x 20 x 1 inches. Image courtesy of the



artist and Make Room Los Angeles. Photo: Kunning Huang.



Joeun Kim Aatchim, *Still life with An Alone time, A Candy Bar, an Ember Cup, and Poet's Daffodil, Over Mother's Poem (Item Found in Her Pocket by a Child Detective)* (detail) (2022). Image courtesy of the artist and Make Room Los Angeles. Photo: Kunning Huang.



Alec Recinos is a writer and researcher based in California and New York. His work focuses on the political and performative nature of aesthetics.

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