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Cindy Ji Hye Kim
In Despite of Light
March 10 – April 30, 2022

Casey Kaplan is pleased to present *In Despite of Light*, Cindy Ji Hye Kim's first solo exhibition at the gallery. Composed of paintings, works on paper, and sculptures, the artist explores memory and the fabrication of personal narrative through image-making.

A series of four sculptures, each resembling an easel, occupy the main hall of the gallery. Made with baltic birch plywood, the easel parts have been carved into recurring images from Kim's body of work: a tree, a wheel, a spine and pelvis, and two characters – one with beehive hair and the other with a top hat – which the artist refers to as Mother and Father. Appearing as décor or in camouflage, Kim's expanding visual vocabulary has been embodied across the four easels. This traditional apparatus, sometimes called a painter's donkey, is revealed by the artist as an instrument of visual discipline.

The easels' towering presence is amplified by the small drawings on their display sills. The drawings are rendered on hand-made paper composed of pulp, pressed flowers, and the artist's own hair. Kim describes the gesture of embedding her hair and preserved flowers as an attempt to breathe life into the drawings, while the images themselves express the artist's feeling of being uprooted and living without history, yet simultaneously being burdened by the past in her waking life.

Across from the easels is an installation of paintings hung from the ceiling. The grisaille works and exposed stretcher bars form a chamber-like interior which viewers can move through. Inspired by H.D.'s poems and her image of Freud as the Roman god Janus, the "guardian of the doorway between the conscious and unconscious minds,"¹ Kim has figured her paintings into double-sided arches and screens, furthering her on-going interest in the anatomy of images. As if conjuring a recurring dream, the three silk paintings each depict a bedroom scene. Kim sees the bedroom as a "womblike place of cowardice or revolution," a theatrical setting for the artist to suspend her own personal narrative into the realm of fiction, where dreams, memory, truth, and lies overlap.

A selection from the artist's on-going series of phénakistoscope paintings is presented in succession. An animation device from the Victorian era, a phénakistoscope creates an illusion of movement when spun in front of a mirror. In contrast, Kim's round paintings stay still like a broken clock, presenting a sequence of repeated figures arrested in motion.

The works in *In Despite of Light* exemplify a tension inherent in Kim's image-making practice analogous to the experience of recounting a dream. There is a desire to describe what really happened, to be truthful to the dream, to the past, and to the world, all while being faced with memory's deceitful edge. For Kim, to keep the past in living memory requires confabulating: casting light on what is essentially obscure, imposing coherence on what does not cohere. In despite of light, shadows remain.

¹Barnstone, A. 1988. Introduction. In: H.D. *Trilogy*. New York: New Directions Books, x.