

Minyoung Choi : A Metaphorical Realm of Interwoven Light, Darkness, and Fantasy

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I. Embarking on a Journey through Meta-Mapping Painting

Minyoung Choi stands as an exceptional contemporary international artist. Having pursued her master's degree in painting in both Seoul and London — two multicultural international cities — her artistic creation flourishes at the crossroads of East and West. Through the medium of painting, she unveils a profound odyssey of exploration, unearthing unconscious memories and emotions.

In her most recent exhibition, she delves into a fresh interpretation of creativity through the prism of Meta-Mapping Painting. This technique seamlessly integrates the artist's emotions, thoughts, and pre-creation dreams into a non-linear narrative structure of images, thereby extending a diverse psychological scope and connecting multiple viewpoints. From this vantage point, Choi's art defies the conventional stance of postmodernism, wherein meaning can be lost amidst reinterpretation. The essence of "Meta-Mapping Painting" lies in the interplay of various backgrounds and atmospheres, mediated by a specific medium. The choreography of a distinct temperament gives birth to a nuanced space where the boundary between reality and dream blurs, evoking a sense of softly spoken marvel.

Minyoung Choi employs a painting composition with unconventional contours, allowing gravity to coexist with time, harmonizing the dance of light and asymmetrical concatenation. Her expression transcends intricate psychological, mythological, and subconscious interpretations, capturing the very irregularities of space itself. In Choi's work, we bear witness to an almost ritualistic transformation of space. Here, vibrant atmospheres imbue enigmatic creatures, yielding a rich visual tension; alternating seasons play with the fleeting interplay of light and darkness, eliciting unforeseen scenes.

II. The Non-Linear Space

The exhibition commences with the artwork titled "*Bedroom*." The soft light of three o'clock in the afternoon gently filters into every corner of the room. It caresses the bed, glides along the staircase's edge, and eventually bestows a gentle radiance upon the floor, adorned with scattered leaves. These leaves boldly defy gravity as they hang suspended in their downward dance. Adjacent to the fish tank, a dream-like creature resembling a starfish reclines — a presence that will reappear in Minyoung Choi's dreams. In this space where time appears nearly suspended, the sole vigilant figure is a solitary black cat, its gaze unwaveringly fixed upon the table. Every element within the bedroom is intimately connected to the artist's intentions, serving as essential tools in her creative endeavor.

Indeed, Minyoung Choi employs these elements as a medium to intertwine different realities. Under the artist's skilled brushwork, everyday objects, often overlooked, undergo a metamorphosis into symbolic narratives, laden with tension and drama, and unfurling fresh narratives. These objects serve as keys to thoughts, unlocking gateways to diverse realms and guiding us into multiple chambers of imagination. Emerging from Choi's subconscious, they spring to life upon the canvas, weaving a tapestry of the artist's multi-faceted memories from Korea, Japan, the United States, and Europe — each locale having imprinted its creative mark through her journeys.

The artist's spaces shatter the inherent ties of objects, pushing rational logic to its limits. Perspective prisms, light interplay, object arrangement, and the defiance of gravity intersect to craft a non-linear

encounter for the observer. Here, the door to the bedroom opens, inviting us to embark into the uncharted realm of Choi Min Young's artistry.

III. Luminescence Amidst the Wilderness

In "*Landscape (fish tank)*", Minyoung Choi utilizes metaphors to dissolve the demarcation between the realm of the subconscious and the microcosm residing within the fish tank, ultimately extending its boundaries outward. Moonlight filters through the clouds and infiltrates the fish tank, which is enveloped in an enigmatic radiance, offering the viewer a sanctified presence. This splendid nocturnal tableau evokes the imagery of Mount Sinai, a sight Moses encountered in the Old Testament's Exodus, standing tall against the night sky. In Babylonian mythology, Mount Sinai is recognized as the "Mountain of the Moon God," while in Hebrew, it signifies a thorn-laden forest.

Choi's moonlit wilderness, replete with its majestic landscape strewn with boulders, appears to symbolize the inherent desolation of humanity, particularly within the realm of urban life often fraught with strife. The sparsely scattered thorn trees, dry and withered akin to anxiety and other emotions, grow silently in the recesses of the soul. Concurrently, the artist adroitly imparts an internal source of illumination to this environment. A sudden illumination emanates from the fish tank itself, akin to a potential artwork that transcends inner desolation, capturing the viewer's gaze, shimmering across the expansive expanse under the gentle touch of moonlight.

Consider this work from the perspective of the sublime, as delineated by British critic John Ruskin. The sublime often emerges from the realm of supernatural grandeur. Minyoung Choi's magnificent backdrop, tranquil and harmonious, bathes the observer's heart in a sublime aura. When we come into contact with the pinnacle of creativity, we finally apprehend the futility of confining ourselves to a somber reality. The vast panorama of natural light projects onto the inner canvas, illuminating the intrinsic soul and value of each object. The darkness rouses a yearning for a transcendental existence, where every being craves illumination. As this thirst is rekindled, we discern the potential of the space before us to mend the soul.

IV. Within and Beyond

Choi's artistic space stands in stark contrast to surrealism. Take, for instance, the piece "*Bedroom*," where a mysterious creature is set against an empty backdrop. This bears resemblance to Max Ernst's "*The Master's Bedroom*" (1920), yet devoid of the bordering angst, suppressed traumatic fantasies, or mental unraveling. Minyoung Choi appears to encapsulate internal vibrancy, crafting a fluid and multifaceted realm through the interplay of inner and outer environments. Her spatial narrative unfolds like an unpredictable dance in rhythm—eschewing the pursuit of definitive answers, instead leaving intriguing traces that amplify their distinctiveness in color and light.

"*Living Room*" and "*Living Room (Piano)*" initially appear as vignettes hanging within the corners of the "*Bedroom*". They seemingly portray the interior of a human abode, yet they truly depict the depths of the sea. A line of light resonates alongside the echo of waves, while objects marking the passage of time float suspended in water, as if memories were ensnared in its currents and frozen in the very fabric of time. Choi's fusion of inhabited tranquility, the aftermath of music, and the ballet of aerial gravity gives rise to a world existing within boundaries. Diverging from themes of forced subjugation or restlessness, her work often centers on the subtle rhythms forgotten by self-awareness in the everyday.

It is as if a newborn turtle happens upon a cozy haven by chance or a breathless sea cucumber, exuding unfamiliar secretions, finds solace amidst the sandy soil, enigmatic to human eyes. The light underwater appears arrested while diffusing across room surfaces and through object crevices, leaving behind a profound mood. This unconventional composition nurtures emotional inclusiveness, guiding the viewer to immerse themselves in the entirety of the space, tracing the gentle undulations of the water.

"*Landscape (Early Spring)*" and "*Ritual*" stem from Minyoung Choi's emotional state during their creation. While they capture the outdoors, the artist's intent lies in presenting self-orchestrated gravity and seasonal rhythms. Originating from external settings, Minyoung Choi conjures a sanctuary of inner tranquility, amplifying the narrative landscape intrinsic to these objects and anchoring her art in their very elements.

In the artwork "*Landscape (Early Spring)*," a Scottish-like valley unfurls during the early spring season, where fish leap alongside dragonflies, boldly defying the laws of nature without any restraint. This work offers a shy kiss to the viewer, as if cradled by morning dew. The space delves into the realm of the imperceptible, brimming with a delicate sense of freshness. Conversely, "*Ritual*" portrays the crystalline light of a winter's night. Minyoung Choi weaves Korean rituals into forests and snowy plains, crafting a space subservient to her aesthetic sensibilities. Trees, cloaked in snow, radiate a splendor blurring the boundary between day and night. The open composition extends an invitation to the viewer, beckoning them to a feast amidst the breeze of emotions.

Intentionally, Minyoung Choi obfuscates the lines between inner and outer space, seamlessly melding the two to forge a realm of evolving strata. The demarcation between within and without is shattered and deliberately convoluted, while their spiritual interplay remains absolute. As the artist spatializes the emotional imagery of creation, both internal and external space undergo abstraction and psychological rendering. The re-integrated emotional space critically responds to the challenges posed by Surrealism and emerges from the subsequent Postmodernism. Beyond deconstructing the relative semblance of reality, the absolute sense of spirit reawakens; amidst the dissolution of meaning, the fusion of inner and outer space births a novel unity. I dare say that this closely aligns with the intrinsic value that Minyoung Choi's "*Meta-Mapping Painting*" imparts upon us.

V. Charting the Depths

The artworks titled "*Offering for Giant Eels*," "*Pond*," and "*Lynx*," as their names suggest, deftly employ animalistic elements to delve into the artist's endeavor of mapping, while intricately portraying ritualistic scenes.

"*Offering for Giant Eels*" encapsulates the creature's regal sacrifice at the juncture of sea and shore, where waves rise and fall akin to ceremonial salutations to the link between existence and transition. Conversely, "*Pond*" draws inspiration from the tale of Fox and Rain from Akira Kurosawa's magical realist film "*Dreams*." The amalgamation of pallas's cat and koi carp, nestled within the depths of a dim bamboo forest, exudes an elusiveness that kindles imaginative contemplation akin to that evoked by the enigmatic Venetian artist Giorgione. In "*Lynx*," Choi's vision of a fantastical creature entwines with the extraordinary movements of the lead animal. The lynx at the heart of the composition is an enigmatic spirit, emanating an eerie sense of otherworldliness — its gaze seems to almost delve into the observer's thoughts.

Minyoung Choi is well-acquainted with the novel "*Cursed Bunny*" by Korean writer Bora Chung. This

narrative mirrors the artist's concept, encapsulating the innate human yearning for a divine dimension that unveils the core source of our inner universe. Minyoung Choi unites diverse human narratives, each with their conscious presence, into a distinct and magnificent tableau. A Hebrew parable timely threads through the narrative, as the gaze moves beyond the animal form to our illusory nature.

Balaam, an ancient prophet, embarks on a misguided ceremonial journey—enticed by material gain, he vows to visit a nation cursed to be blessed by God. However, amidst the journey, Balaam's loyal steed, a donkey, challenges its master and halts the journey with a shrewd foresight of impending disaster. Yet Balaam dismisses his companion's warning, lashing the animal instead and pressuring it through word and deed. The donkey's defiance becomes a tangible revelation of Balaam's spiritual vision — his oracle-reading ability approaches its culmination. Through divine intervention, the donkey gains the power of speech, rebuking its master for greed and ignorance. Balaam's downfall serves as a cautionary tale about the blindness that can ensue from humanity's quest for self-realization, marking a crisis of spiritual awareness.

Minyoung Choi's works can also be seen as contemplation on the precarious state of humanity. Within a non-linear reality, the artist unveils an inner realm of desire and maps this yearning onto enigmatic creatures bearing untamed attributes. Her paintings are constructed like a language, borrowing from these creatures to express the human heart; a canvas that merges reality and imagination, compelling the viewer to confront the manifold layers of conflict within the human subconscious and latent fears.

At the heart of each animal depicted by Choi lies the essence of a theme echoed in German writer Hermann Hesse's book "*Demian*": "I became conscious of a strange impression as I sat before the completed picture. It resembled a kind of god image or sacred mask, half-male, half-female, ageless, purposeful yet dreamy, frozen yet mysteriously alive. This picture haunted my thoughts for a long time and divided up my life....It was precisely at that time that I began having a great many dreams again as I had done during my childhood.... Now a new kind of picture appeared before me; time after time the painted portrait arose, living, eloquent, friendly or hostile, sometimes distorted, sometimes beautiful, harmonious and noble." These almost childlike creatures converge, stirring echoes of the past and present. In them, we find a reflection of ourselves.

VI. The Enigma of Minyoung Choi

Ultimately, the outcome of "Meta-Mapping Painting" converges with post-magical realism. Minyoung Choi's art brims with imaginative vigor. Choi's oeuvre navigates intricate emotional mazes, birthing fantastical universes that resonate with each viewer.

Minyoung Choi artfully interlaces the surrealism of fables, folklore, and myths, fostering a paradoxical harmony with the seemingly tranquil depictions of reality. She ingeniously introduces thought-provoking elements into her images, beckoning contemplation on the complex rapport between imagination and tangible truth. From the Korean-infused masks, a najeon lacquer jewelry box, to the subtle gestures of the large Megapode and its offspring in "*Nest*," and the turtle's contemplative gaze in "*Seasons*," the artist encapsulates the allure of confrontation. Moreover, in "*Search*," humanity teeters on the precipice of revealing Pandora's Box. This image, privy only to the viewer, encapsulates a moment of heightened tension, where the pale eel appears as an unforeseen threat, and the luminous pools of water seem like an abyss.

In "*Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare*," British fantasy writer C.S. Lewis delves into the interplay between imagination and truth: 'It must not be supposed that I am in any

sense putting forward the imagination as the organ of truth. We are not talking of truth, but of meaning: meaning which is the antecedent condition both of truth and falsehood, whose antithesis is not error but nonsense ... For me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning, Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition. It is, I confess, undeniable that such a view indirectly implies a kind of truth or rightness in the imagination itself ... the truth we [win] by metaphor [can] not be greater than the truth of the metaphor itself.'

Minyoung Choi's art harmoniously melds natural entities with her distinct style, enhancing the interpreted meaning through the amalgamation of emotions. Her "Meta-Mapping Painting" technique synthesizes a plethora of elements and spaces to unearth the essence of the objects and events she portrays. Her creations extend beyond the geometric characteristics of objects to unveil their underlying tensions, enshrouding them in an enigmatic aura of uncertainty. She cultivates an ambiance reminiscent of post-magical realism aesthetics, encapsulated within her own enigmas, which consistently give birth to novel metaphors.

Within Minyoung Choi's enigmatic compositions reside the interplay of darkness and light, the equilibrium between inner and outer realms, the resonances of each life form that comes to life. These facets collectively construct the artist's creative worldview. As we step into her realm of fantasy, we begin to grasp why tension pervades serenity and experience a newfound tranquility in the midst of the spectacle. Amidst an era where the lines between good and evil blur, where darkness masquerades as light and light as darkness, Minyoung Choi embarks on a discourse concerning creativity and metaphor. It might encompass a level of meaning akin to a nightmare, or perhaps, it represents a space permeated by truth, unveiling fallacies.