

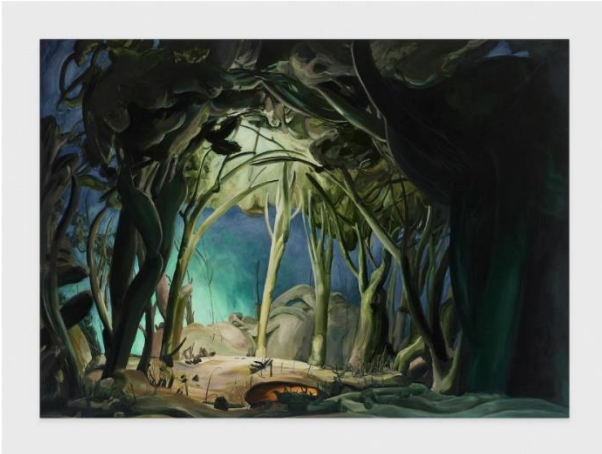
Emma WEBSTER

Whitewall,

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August 2022

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Emma Webster, *Still in the Coda*, 2022, oil on linen. 60 x 84 in. | 152.4 x 213.4 cm., courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

ART

Emma Webster Inaugurates Perrotin Dosan Park with Illuminating Realities

By Eliza Jordan
August 29, 2022



Two days ago, **Perrotin** opened its second exhibition space in Seoul, located in Dosan Park in the Gangnam district. Timed perfectly to the opening of **Frieze Seoul** (September 2–5) —Frieze's first-ever iteration in Asia, led by Director **Patrick Lee** —the gallery is presenting for its inaugural exhibition a show by the British-American artist **Emma Webster** entitled "**Illuminarium**." On view through October 1, the presentation marks her debut with Perrotin and her first presentation in Asia.



Emma Webster, *Blue Moon*, 2022, oil on linen. 60 x 84 in. | 152.4 x 213.4 cm., courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

Created in her studio in Paramount, California, Webster's paintings begin in a hybrid of sketching and sculpting within the digital world. Scenes—such as otherworldly landscape paintings and imagined fantasies—are constructed in virtual reality and infused with theatrical illumination, taking viewers on a mystical, distorted journey. Hinging on artifice and drama, these scenes are then painted by hand by Webster onto large-scale canvases, playing with our notion of media for a look at real and unreal worlds.

"I'm interested in how we replicate space, in the virtual and in paint," Webster told *Whitewall*. "My practice looks at the nature of spatial illusions through the lens of landscape and art history."

In celebration of "Illuminarium" and Perrotin's latest gallery opening, [Webster](#) elaborated on her practice and paintings on view, and shared why digital creation continues to excite her, her storylines, and the possibilities of her art.



Portrait of Emma Webster, 2022, courtesy of MACKSFILMS.

WHITEWALL: Your approach to a sketching-sculpting process within screen space is quite unique. How did this begin?

EMMA WEBSTER: Moving into screen space was a practical evolution. In graduate school, I started to work from still lifes to create a convincing painting. Then in 2020, my friend Wyatt Roy lent me his Oculus headset so I could try sculpting some of my dioramas in VR. I quickly realized so much more was possible when I didn't have to deal with clay, figurines, lighting, and gels. Just like sculptors working from sketchbooks, I can pull my drawings, watercolors, and photographs into VR programs as reference. Since there are fewer physical limitations in the computer, the renders are more akin to the drawings: wild and strange.

WW: What specific types of scenes did you want to create in "Illuminarium"?

WW: The paintings in "Illuminarium" play with peripersonal space. They contend with our scale, like a cross between a panorama, natural history display, and video game. They imply that the spectator is also a player in the scene. Like the suffix "arium" they are places, but "for what" remains suspect. The paintings have a sense of ominous anticipation, light becomes the means of traversing into and around the wings of the sets.



Emma Webster, *Whisp*, 2022, oil on linen. 84 x 60 in. | 213.4 x 152.4 cm., courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

WW: What do these scenes communicate about virtual, artificial, fantasy, or real life?

EW: When I make the landscapes in the virtual, I too am implicated. The thing I'm making is all around me, it's no longer a separate object, it's a whole ecology that I am also a part of. It unravels this notion of creative objectivity. The same is true for our current climate, there can be no 'outside.'

Illusionary space, which used to be a fundamental concern in early painting, is becoming more and more sophisticated in technology. These paintings aren't realistic, but they are convincing. I'd like these scenes to extend all-about the viewer, to require the spectator to consider the politics of background, for we are a part of it as well.

WW: Does having this layered approach to your work enable you to envision multiple storylines in the work?

EW: Absolutely! On a practical level, I have fun experimenting in any type of media. Everything can go into the digital diorama—photography, drawing, sculpture, 3D scans, etc.—and return to my love of painting. The same applies for the readings of these landscapes. Because they are hybrids of interests in art history, botany, landscape, and scenography, they ask to be populated. Each painting in "Illuminarium" has many scripts.



Emma Webster, Griffith, 2022, oil on linen, 60 x 108 in. | 152.4 x 274.3 cm., courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

WW: How were these pieces made in your Los Angeles studio?

EW: One of the paintings in the show is titled *Paramount*, after my studio's neighborhood in L.A. I love the title because it also connotes Paramount Motion Pictures, movie sets, and scenography at large. It's both a geographical and hypothetical place. My warehouse there is built out so I can move fluidly between sketching, sculpting in the computer, and working on large canvases.

WW: What landscapes are you typically most drawn to exploring and re-creating?

EW: I'm drawn to landscapes that have a sense of action. Landscape is always in movement, but we tend to forget until there's a sudden flash in the sky, swelling tide, momentous gust, an *event*. I'm particularly drawn to the allegorical landscapes that depict the weight of fates, like those by Albrecht Altdorfer and John Martin. I love apocalyptic and divine scenes where they tried to imagine something never seen before.



Emma Webster, *Nightingale Theatre*, 2022, oil on linen. 60 x 108 in. | 152.4 x 274.3 cm., courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

WW: How has the rise in digital art, and 3-D creation, impacted your practice?

EW: The digital isn't staying in its lane. It's bleeding into all arenas. For that reason I see it as an extension or subset of other media; more akin to a sculptor moving between wood and plastic. I only came to use it because the software has been newly adapted for luddites like me. I can't wait to see how these tools evolve as more people adopt them.

WW: Are there any shows you're presenting this fall?

EW: I'll have a painting in Perrotin's booth at **Paris+** this October, and we're discussing a show in Tokyo for next spring!