

Kara JOSLYN

W Korea,
Interview
March 2023



Q. Under what circumstances are you preparing the answers for this questionnaire now?

KARA: Ha! I love this question. I'll quote from the infamous journalist, Hunter S. Thompson:
"Written under duress by Kara L. Joslyn."

Q. Could you describe your studio in detail? Also, how is your most common day there?

KARA: My studio is on the second floor of a warehouse in Boyle Heights - one of the oldest neighborhoods in Los Angeles. I have west-facing windows that are really cool gridded style warehouse windows but they're covered with chain link fence on the outside for safety. So, through a bunch of gridded patterns, I see the epic sunsets and the morning moon set above stretches of industrial roofing, with palm trees here and there. It's a classic LA post industrial landscape. Inside, I have a fake fireplace that's plugged in with fake fire and a lot of plants so it's more cozy. My ceiling has cool wood beams. I just got a new couch that's like a Knoll Barcelona loveseat knock off. I'm sitting on the couch right now, typing this (under duress and with a joint), but it would be a lot cooler if I were making out with my crush, artist babe, Conrad Ruiz, on this couch - hahahaha. I have one side of the studio that is just for airbrushing - lots of canvases against walls and a hectic rolling cart with paints and spray guns and a big air compressor. I put down rubber flooring that is black with little blue specks - like a gym floor. I call this area the play pen. Which is funny because I recently realized there's a gentleman's club called "the play pen" down the road on the other side of the bridge, by Night Gallery. My play pen, however, is not for performing, it's for the opposite — it's a place where I can disappear into painting, away from human adult life, and not be perceived by anyone. I think most artists will find a way to get to a "disappear here" type place where we can lose track of what time it is.

Q. Your first solo show in Korea, *Please Throw Me Back In The Ocean* will be held in Perrotin Seoul. Where did you draw inspiration for the title of this show?

KARA: The title of the show is stolen from an old friend's album title. 'Eric Von Raven,' was the front man for some punk/garage bands I was friends with when I lived in Oakland/San Francisco. I would always go to shows. It was a more carefree time when we were all young, badly behaved, high, and well-dressed. He was an especially batshit crazy and beautiful weirdo (perfect front man) and wrote the best lyrics. Total Pisces Punk.

Q. Personally, I was listening to the song, *Bubbles*, that Danielle Shang references in your press release, while appreciating your work, '*Love, Peace, Harmony? oh very nice, very nice. But maybe in the next world. (The Decollation of Alan Watts / Grooving on the Eternal Now as Sacrament)*' (2022) that is reminiscent of vanitas, and it was quite interesting to notice the contrast between them (laughs). Ryan Caraveo used the word 'hook' as a metaphor for love in the song, *Bubbles*. In your work, what does the imagery of the hook mean to you?

KARA: It's perfect to feel that contrast! The ocean is symbolic of the subconscious mind. A place where there is a whole dream reality. In my work I continually reference mythological places like the underworld, or underwater, that represent where we go to talk to our own souls, meaning the parts of ourselves that are hidden or occulted. Carl Jung called this our shadow. We are all in light and so we all cast a shadow — everyone is both good and evil.

PERROTIN

If we do not face these darker parts of ourselves, our unconscious desires can take over and we can become out of control. This can be a creative, wild, and inspiring energy or it can become harmful and self destructive. I was thinking of the hook as a component or symbolic tool in this triangulation of desiring our own destruction, and fishing out powerful creative impulses as a source of renewal. Perhaps all desire comes from wanting to recover a missing piece of ourselves. It's interesting because the hook of a pop song that gets stuck in your head is really kind of addictive, but it is also what keeps you engaged long after the song has stopped playing. There's a memory, an inscribing, or imprinting that happens. And it sinks down, is forgotten, but as soon as you hear that song again, there it is.

Q. I understand that your works are mainly drawn from 1950s instructional craft books. In the photographs found in books, what makes you keep standing in front of the canvas?

KARA: Painting is magic. As artists and people who are moved by art, we are all really dedicated to The Mysteries. Bringing something formless like an idea or image into the world of form, is totally trippy. I think it's a lot like taking a piece of blank white paper and manipulating it with hands and tools until it is a face, or a flower, or the moon. Because my subject is really more like 'The Shadow of Americana,' underneath it all, we are all sharing a kind of post-modern hangover from the often-tyrannical changes in the world during the 20th century. It's part of why I find it interesting to work from reference material from the 1950's and 60's, which is a highly idealized classical period of American Modernism / Capitalism where it seems like the culture was trying to prove to itself, that all the years of destruction had been worth it, because we had arrived at some great utopia...until it revealed itself as dystopia.

Q. This show includes 11 of your recent paintings that examine the concept of 'Americana' from various angles. How do you imagine these works will resonate with Seoul, where the exhibition is held?

KARA: Southern California and Seoul are similar because they both straddle the light and dark, the natural and the tech-postmodern. They share a fantasy-frontier aspect, be it Hollywood & Disney or K Pop. Entertainment is a trojan horse that creates global interest and exerts influence and power through artists and cultural imaginaries. Beaches give way to post industrial tech realness. And it seems there's a mash up of modernity, wellness, spirituality and consumerism that is truly parallel. Plus Looking forever young. Haha. I am so SO excited to travel to Seoul. This aspect of straddling the light and dark alludes to "The Shadow." The shadow of myself or the shadow of a people. When driven by unconscious desires, humans usher in their own destruction. We even destroy the very planet that gives us life (because separation between us and the earth is really just an illusion). Jung's solution was to integrate the shadow so as to become — not perfect — but whole. The shadow contains the impulse for destruction, but also the impulse for creation, and powerful capabilities to manifest reality. "The psychological rule says that when an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside as fate. " - CG JUNG

Q. You said, "If photography is the false index — the truth that tells a lie, I like to think of painting as the trick— the lie that tells the truth." What does it mean?

KARA: When we see a photo we accept it as the truth. But as Susan Sontag famously wrote about in the 80's - the camera lies. What is outside the frame? Everything about a photo persuades us to think it is reality, but it is merely a story, a manipulation, a lie. However, when we see a painting, we have no presupposition that it is depicting truth, or indexing reality. We are highly aware at all times, it is an illusion, that it is a lie. Like fiction, painting has a greater ability to reveal truth to the viewer because it's a conditional space created as a repository for a dream reality that viewers can interface with to activate their own ability to conjure meaning.

PERROTIN

Q. How did you find out the powdered optical automotive pigment as the medium? When the pigment which has a holographic effect is applied thinly with an airbrush on the canvas, it creates a strange psychedelic mood in your work. And this leads the audiences to discover a three-dimensional effect on a two-dimensional surface. How are these material and technical attempts related to the theme of 'illusion' that you have been exploring?

My grandfather was a part of one of the first tech companies in Northern California founded in 1960, called Optical Coating Laboratories Inc (OCLI). They invented thin film optical coatings. They're commonplace now, we see them as a colored coating on our eye-glasses, and iPhone camera lenses. At that time, the tech was new, and enabled inventions like holograms, the original Polaroid camera, and the mirrored glass on the helmets of the NASA astronauts who landed on the Moon. OCLI later invented these holographic or "color-shift" pigments I use. The pigment was first made to be an anti-counterfeit ink for printing the new \$100 bills in the 1990's. It has since become standard in currencies world-wide. When I first began working with these materials, I felt it was a way to tease out how my personal, familial story intersected with painting and these facets of American culture where things can be very beautiful, but also quite sinister. These optical materials being invented for the defense industry, and to make money itself, do conjure up what many would say is the root of all evil in the world. It is especially ironic in a place like California which, from the right angle, looks like paradise lost. Lost to development, the military, silicon valley and other tech defense such as NASA, JPL and SPAWAR. Painting is probably the first optical technology. Optics, the eye, is essentially the nucleus for all illusion. We rely so much on the eye, we don't believe in what we cannot see. In this way it's almost a favor to a person to fool their eye. To make them conscious of illusion itself, instead of merely seduced by it.

Q. You might have received this question from countless people. Is it true that your Instagram account '@karavaggio' was inspired by Caravaggio? Could you please explain the story of Caravaggio being called on your Instagram?

KARA: Ha! When people ask for my ig I always say:
it's @karavaggio - like the Baroque painter, but with a "K," like the Kardashians.

Q. What is the latest news that surprised you (positively or negatively)?

KARA: That pharmaceutical industry scientists admitted they actually know nothing about brain chemistry in relation to mental health and that serotonin isn't linked to depression and that there's no such thing as a chemical imbalance in the brain. Oops.

Q. As an artist, what are you skeptical about?

KARA: That's a nice question, thank you. I'm quite a romantic. I like Romanticism. In art, in writing, in philosophy, in general. I remember in undergrad, when I found out the philosopher Nietzsche was in the genre of German Romanticism and that he was very opposed to the philosophy of one of America's philosopher heroes, Rene Descartes (barf), something clicked in my brain— that Romanticism is not about an aesthetic of something lacy or non-modern, it's about the sublime and uncanny, but also Nihilism. I came to think of subcultures and counter cultures (or maybe even those that advocate for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament) as Romantic in nature because the sublime, sensuality and idealism are always relative to the status quo. I'm also very sympathetic to libertines, rebels, weirdos, dickish faeries, misfits, queers, melancholics, and anyone who has the courage to be themselves, so I'm skeptical about artists becoming all too eager to conform into an image and trajectory that is too easily packaged and prescriptive. I think the world is often hard to live in and we play the hand we are dealt, we make compromises, yes. But I'm skeptical about artists taking pleasure in conformity because I think it proposes a destructive idea of what is "good" and "bad" in art and in culture, and also means artists are not questioning authority. I always imagined artists were meant to be rebels and poets and anti-war punks who did drugs and had orgies and talked to spirits in rituals and meditated and on the "why" and "how".

Q. What is the most frequent question you ask yourself currently?

KARA: "Should I ask Siri to snooze the alarm for ten more minutes?"

(W Korea) 미국 LA에 위치한 당신의 스튜디오를 자세히 묘사해줄 수 있나?
 카라 조슬린 내 스튜디오는 LA에서도 가장 오래된 동네 중 하나인 보일 하이츠의 어느 창고 2층에 있다. 서향으로 아주 멋진 격자무늬 창문이 있지만, 안전을 위해 바깥으로 철조망을 쳤다. 그래서 거리 곳곳에 있는 야자수, 서정적인 일몰, 산업용 지붕 위로 아침 해가 떠오르는 풍경을 이 격자 패턴 너머로 본다. 전형적인 LA의 포스트 산업사회 풍경이다. 스튜디오엔 가짜 벽난로와 화초가 있어 아늑한 느낌도 든다. 최근 놀(Knoll)의 바르셀로나

나를
다시
바다에
던져주오

미국 출신의 젊은 화가 카라 조슬린(Kara Josslyn)의 국내 첫 개인전이 페로탕 도산파크에서 개최된다. 사이키델릭한 분위기가 넘실거리는 모노톤 회화 너머로 작가는 바다를 경유해 의식과 무의식에 대해 말한다. 서울에서의 전시를 앞둔 어느 날, 그와 메일 인터뷰를 나눴다.

홀로그램 효과가 나는 분말형 차광용 페인트, 과거 컴퓨터가 발명되기 이전 그래픽 디자인에서 사용되던 에어브러시를 작업에 활용하여 디지털 이미지 같은 분위기를 연출한다. 특유의 사이키델릭한 무드를 연출해주는 안료는 어떻게 발견했나?
 할아버지가 1960년 캘리포니아 북부에서 설립한 최초의 테크 기업 'Optical Coating Laboratories Inc(OCLI)'에서 근무했다. OCLI는 오늘날 안경, 카메라, 디스플레이 등의 제조 분야, 방위 산업 분야에서 널리 쓰이는 박막 광학 코팅 기술(Thin-film Coatings)을 발명한 기업이다. 그리고 지금 내가 작업에서 사용하는 색 변환 잉크, 홀로그램 기술도 발명했다. 오늘날 홀로그램 기술과 색 변환 잉크는 지폐나 신분증의 위조 방지를 위해 널리 사용된다. 어쩌면 미국 사회에서 가장 흔히 접하게 되는 기술인 셈이다. 이러한 재료들을 사용해 처음 작업을 펼치기 시작했을 때 어렴풋이 느낀 것 같다. 이는 곧 나의 개인적이고 가족적인 이야기를 회화에 교차시키는 방법이자, 나아가 미국 사회의 여러 측면을 작품에 담아내는 방법이라고.

STYLING: JESSICA MARTIN /
 SET: JESSICA MARTIN /
 MAKEUP: JESSICA MARTIN /
 HAIR: JESSICA MARTIN /
 DRESS: JESSICA MARTIN /
 SHIRT: JESSICA MARTIN /
 BOOTS: JESSICA MARTIN /
 R. MARTIN CLUB