

GaHee PARK

GaHee Park's Surreal Scenes for Surreal Times

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By Katy Donoghue

When New Yorkers were asked to stay at home in March, GaHee Park knew she wouldn't be able to get to her studio every day anymore, so she moved what she could home. Making use of her spare room, she's since been drawing and painting—on a smaller scale—in preparation for an upcoming show at Perrotin in New York this fall.

Park's paintings have a graphic, naïve style, depicting surreal scenes like a romantic dinner in a fishbowl or a still life vase of flowers paired with a perplexing single finger, caterpillar, and shell. *Whitewall*

checked in with the artist to see how she's making the most of this perhaps equally unusual time.

WHITEWALL: How are you doing?

GAHEE PARK: I am doing well so far. I am preparing for a solo show at Perrotin Gallery in New York in September. I just moved out of my studio and am working on the show from home. Luckily, I have a spare room I can use for a studio, so it's a pretty good set up. I can't work on really big paintings, so I am changing my plans for the show a little bit and doing more small paintings.

Recently my cat has been sick, so my husband and I were going back and forth to the animal hospital for a couple weeks. This was at the same time as I was moving out of the studio. So, we were outside a lot more than we had been, which was stressful. But the cat is recovering now, and I am looking forward to staying in and having more studio time.

WW: Are you able to find the time to create?

GP: It was hard at the beginning of March when I couldn't get to my studio but wasn't fully set up at home. I was drawing a lot then but now that I'm set up at home, it's good to be back to painting. It's good to have a deadline with the show coming up so that I have to keep working every day, even with the strangeness of this pandemic all around.

WW: What are you listening to, reading, watching?

GP: Recently, I watched a few old films with my husband. The most recent ones were *Marnie* and *Rear Window* by Hitchcock, *Belle de Jour* and *Death in the Garden* by Buñuel, and *Fear of Fear* by Fassbinder. We also watched a newer Brazilian film called *Bacurau* which I liked a lot.

When I am working at the studio, I like to listen to something Korean, so I often listen to Korean audiobooks and news. I also turn on some Korean dramas while I'm painting sometimes. I find them comforting, and also the over-the-top melodrama kind of feeds my work somehow.

WW: What are you cooking?

GP: I cook every day, it's a big way that I unwind. I have been enjoying exploring the local online grocery/delivery options. I recently ordered some stuff from the Fulton Fish Market and made a few different seafood things. Also, my parents sent me a box of Korean ingredients that are harder to get here, especially now (dried vegetable, instant food, snacks, condiments, etc). So, I've been making a lot of Korean dishes lately. I also made a couple of jars of kimchi so I could make Korean pancakes.

WW: How are you staying connected?

GP: Recently I saw a friend who lives two blocks from me and we had a social distancing walk, which was nice. Otherwise, just mostly texting or emailing with friends and family, a few video calls, etc. As someone who was mostly going from home to the studio and working alone before the pandemic started, it's not such a huge lifestyle adjustment. Not to say I'm not looking forward to having the option of going out with friends again soon!

But I've also realized that some activities I didn't really think of as social, actually were a pretty important part of my social life—like going to yoga class or just bumping into people at my studio building.

WW: How are you staying inspired/hopeful?

GP: I had a painful two weeks with moving out of my studio and the cat being sick, but the worst seems to be over now, and I'm feeling more hopeful and productive. But every day has moments of hope and also moments of anxiety. I try to remember to breathe. I think the best thing for me is just trying to keep a frame of mind that lets me keep working. As long as I can do that, I feel OK.

Also, I am seeing more galleries and museums re-opening recently in Asia, and life is returning somewhat to normal in Korea. So that helps me imagine this current situation improving at some point. On the other hand, America isn't really doing most of the things other countries

have done to be able to safely start re-opening everything... so I can't say I'm optimistic about the short-term situation here.