

LUBOV

Eunnam Hong

Souvenirs

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Souvenirs travel with you, stored in the body as the joy or menace of memory, talismans like a keychain, napkin, rock, or lock of hair. You're leaving with it for better or worse. Eunnam Hong's paintings take note of the tangible and psychological souvenirs that weigh upon the present; the haunt of a place, a marker in time, of transition, sentimentality, loss, or longing.

Hong's identity as a South Korean New York-based artist is present but not without disguise. Tactfully deceptive, the series is anchored by a tall, slender, stern, and stylish femme character cloned throughout, posers that appear to be hiding from something in plain sight. The scenes are cinematic with an awkward editorial tint, demure and disciplined, well-rendered with sharp edges and softened hues, set in a naturally lit pre-war apartment furnished mid-century modern. Looking at this series is akin to cruising the pages of a nineties Yves Saint Laurent campaign helmed by Hedi Slimane. Breezed women clad in Phoebe Philo's Celine drift through rooms. Denim, canvas, leather, silk, satin, all lean on walls, get dressed in groups, on the verge of departure or just having arrived, ..the trappings of figurative painting.

Bouncy beach blonde wigs unify the work, spare the lone brunette in *Myth*, (2023). Wigs offer easy transformation, making Hong's character an enigmatic mystery, similar to "Woman in a Blonde Wig," an elusive character played by Taiwanese actress Brigitte Lin in Wong Kar-wai's film "Chungking Express," known for its non-linear storytelling and portrayal of modern Hong Kong. One could assume the recurrent incognitos to be her proxy. But it's more bizarre self-exaggeration than portrait, embodiments of memory and souvenir that also riff on the feeling of imagining oneself as the lead in a fictional version of life. In *Battles* (2022), two clad in army green and patent leather sit hunched around a low table, smoking Marlboro reds and playing dice. In *Enemy* (2023), another two pass each other in the hallway-turned runway while one sits postured and alone in a dark room, an inscrutable scenario where all wear red.

Each painting is a phantom and conjures a phantom itch to know who, what, when, where, and why. It persists, just like the question of whether blondes have more fun.

—Claire Sammut, April 2023.

Eunnam Hong is a Brooklyn-based artist born in Gangwon-do, South Korea. Hong graduated from the Seoul Institute of the Arts. *Souvenirs* is Hong's first solo exhibition in New York City.

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