

Meredith Rosen Gallery

Meredith Rosen Gallery proudly presents “Sugar Rush,” a solo exhibition by Gowoon Lee. This exhibition of new paintings will span both gallery spaces on 11 East 78th Street and 11 East 80th Street. The show opens January 20th and will remain on view until February 25th.

Working at the threshold between mass media and painting, Gowoon Lee’s paintings reveal the underpinning of violence, intoxication and gendered stereotypes in children’s cartoons. This new body of work focuses on the hallucinatory and psychedelic visual effects employed by popular animated cartoons such as *Mickey Mouse* and *Looney Tunes* that the artist watched as a child in the 1990s. Recognizing these television shows as a fleeting collective memory, “Sugar Rush” questions the individualistic associations of abstraction through the appropriation of ultra-recognizable characters.

Building on her previous body of work, this new series expands on the language of doubling, blurring and collapsing figuration and the static abstraction in between television frames. In these moments, characters appear inebriated and the viewer becomes disoriented as the locus of action exists just outside the frame of view. The loss of control coupled with the cuteness of the characters reveals a sinister aspect of mastery at the root of these cartoons. In a post-television era, wherein viral, self-generated media eclipses preordained entertainment, Lee questions the vestiges that remain in our collective consciousness.

Each painting is completed in one sitting in a wet-on-wet technique, Lee’s process mimics the trance-like state induced by cartoons and psychedelic visuals. The larger than life scale of these new works create an immersive experience furthering the disembodied nature of the cartoon vernacular. Lee pushes recognizability to the edge, yet the associative grip these characters’ hold remains present. The paintings in “Sugar Rush” question the limits where the image fractures, severing memory and the immediacy of looking that painting requires.

Softened, pastel colors and the aesthetic of cuteness are a device that cloaks the underlying violence and mechanisms of control. Elements of digital image manipulation such as zooming, cropping and freeze-frame are co-opted in Lee’s painterly process as a way to examine the lasting aesthetic impact such images hold. Lee reverses the process of infantilization, revealing the adult themes indoctrinated in children’s media, slowly numbing us to violence, gendered scripts, and intoxication.

Gwoon Lee (b. Daegu, South Korea, 1991) lives and works in Düsseldorf, Germany. Lee studied at the University of Auckland, New Zealand (2014) and Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Germany (2023). This is Lee’s second exhibition with Meredith Rosen Gallery.