

Jurors' Statements

Danielle O'Steen

In So Yoon Lym's paintings, the body is an instrument of design. Her large-scale portraits, which show the human form from an aerial perspective, transform braided heads into carriers of elaborate swirls, curves, and diagonals. Though fantastical, the subjects are very real, based on students Lym encountered while working as an art teacher at John F. Kennedy High School in Paterson, New Jersey. But that's just a starting point for Lym, who avoids traditional modes of documentation by obscuring the faces and only referring to the students by name in the titles.

In this series, Lym turns a seemingly banal subject—high school students' hairstyles—into a thoughtful study, capturing the intricate networks that have been pulled and stitched together to reveal the fine hairs and vulnerable scalp below in her careful rendering. She exposes her fascination with the "living craft form" that guides the students' families and friends to create such diverse patterning. All at once Lym's paintings offer an anthropological study of America's youth and a history of African American hairstyles, with none of the scientific concerns that would lead into stereotypes or a physiognomic assessment of these individuals. Instead she leads her subjects into the lineage of ancient and modern portraiture, where such depictions address ideas of identity while showing fashion and tradition in practice.

Born in Korea but raised in New Jersey, via Uganda and Kenya, Lym has had time to consider how visual appearance can both include and exclude those from the culture that surrounds them. Her pictures allow the viewer to meditate on these issues and the mandalas she has created with the delicate treatment and meticulous detailing of each head. These students are not statistics but unique entities, presented though not defined by the styles etched into their hair. Their city or place of origin does not determine their identity, but they are shown belonging to a greater narrative, unified under tradition, expression, and craft. Most of all, Lym's totemic circle of heads reveal anew a form of beauty now eternally free from the distractions of the everyday.

Danielle O'Steen is a critic and curator working in Washington, DC. She has contributed to publications such as Washington Post Express, Art + Auction, Capitol File, DCist, and Flash Art. She received her Masters in Art History at George Washington University, where she organized exhibitions for Classroom 102. This fall, her group show "Site Aperture," will open at Flashpoint Gallery in DC.

Tim Tate

When I see So Yoon Lym's imagery, I am immediately struck with the similarities with the symbols of language. Perhaps that is her intent, to create a new language of contemporary society. She does so beautifully. Referencing ancient glyphs or almost recognizable sanskrit, she gives insight to those able to read it. Each symbol another dialog discussing urban life of today.

Tim Tate is a DC native, and has been working with glass as a sculptural me-

dium for the past 25 years. Co-founder of the Washington Glass School, Tim's work is in the permanent collections of a number of museums, including the Smithsonian's American Art Museum, Renwick Gallery, and the Mint Museum. While Tim's work has always been glass based, his newest works feature video and electronic interactive elements. In 2010 he received an award from the Museum of American Glass in New Jersey as a "Rising Star of the 21st Century". He was featured in 2 museum shows in 2010; "The New Materiality" at the Fuller Museum, and "Dead or Alive" at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York.

Jacqueline Ionita

So Yoon Lym creates photorealistic black and white paintings of the braided crowns of African American heads floating in white space. Lym, of Korean descent, presents to us beautiful compositions, sensitively crossing the cultural reverences for the hair as extensions of our bodies and our lives, spiritually, socially and physically.

So Yoon Lym's meticulous renderings of strands of hair, weaving in and out of a systematic landscape on the head, are always viewed from the back or top. Presenting the viewer with the back of the head should seemingly carry tones of disregard, apathy, or rejection, or should seemingly put the viewer in a position to scrutinize or subjugate, however, my read of these works are not determined by any potential power structures. So Yoon Lym's black and white works read as information, devoid of emotion or bias. She is acquainting us with her vicariousness and acute observations of the hairstyles of African American youth, a group Lym works with on a daily basis. So Yoon Lym successfully and exquisitely applies philosophical principles from her own culture to the culture of another, and imparts images to us that compel us to look closer, to engage, without hammering a political point. With these paintings, Lym has avoided pushing any agenda, and has relayed to us her genuine wonder and delight, and we're prompted and interested to explore further.

Jacqueline Ionita, a painter and graduate from the Corcoran College of Art + Design, is the Director of Hamiltonian Gallery, a new gallery in the heart of the U Street Corridor in DC, which focuses on innovative works by emerging and mid-career artists. Ms. Ionita is also the Program Manager for Hamiltonian Artists, a non-profit organization dedicated to the professional development of emerging artists.