

**A Supine Fork and the Body of Christ**  
**[Jenny Cho: Illuminating Shade for Big Window]**  
**Part 1. Sick Prophet and Old Magician**  
**Gallery Kiche, April 29–June 12, 2021**  
**Part 2. Patron Goddesses for Idle Fellows**  
**Kimsechoong Museum, May 25 – June 12, 21021**

**Soyeon Ahn, art critic**

**1. Death's Impossibility and Painting after Death**

When I first saw the supine human form, two shapes came to mind. One was an ancient human image, and other was (that) fork placed in an ordinary, logical manner at the center of a table.

While the work *Untitled (after Hunter Gracchus)* (2018–2020) may be “untitled,” the reference to the Hunter Gracchus hints at a hidden narrative. Lying deeply in a shallow space, the person in the image clearly seems to be Gracchus, a figure who has died yet is unable to proceed into his death, proving the impossibility of his death as he climbs aboard a ferry. The boat drifts in the water, carrying someone who should have arrived at his death by now; it shows that the Hunter Gracchus has not died, and it also evokes the presence of the body (like the cross at Golgotha). The image of the Gracchus's body lying in the boat in *Untitled*, covered with a thin cloth, immediately called to mind the body of Christ as painted by Andrea Mantegna. Jenny Cho's painting (on the surface) is actually a re-appropriation of the appropriation of Mantegna's (centuries-old) image of the human body by Robert Morris in his depiction of the body of Dutch Schultz. It refers to a complex set of events to show the presence of the “dead body.” The ferry is a metaphor for the coffin of the deceased, and Cho also seems to be recalling the open casket of Dana Schutz – placing a flat bed beneath a body confronted with the impossibility of death, while leaving room to reflect on the repetition of deferred moments in reality, with its allusion to a deep sense of abstract space.

In the paintings of Mantegna, Morris, and Schutz, the connotations of the “killed body?” concern the stigma associated with the flesh, the sacrifice assigned to the flesh, and salvation (of the stigmatized) through that redemption. Those images of death are now re-appropriated by Jenny Cho, re-contextualized as a death (and constraint) narrative as it pertains to painting. Just as Mantegna laid a bridge between the classical human form in painting (and the associated narrative) and the new use of perspective, Morris appropriated from Mantegna to juxtapose the mythical narrative of painting with a contemporary incident. Rewinding time from the literary narrative of Gracchus, Jenny Cho seems to be tracing a history of appropriations of the “dead body” in painting, which operate as a signifier for the impossibility of death. In other words, Cho's juxtapositions in anachronistic series present us with a prophetic conclusion about death's impossibility as alluded to by individual events: Mantegna and Morris, Schultz and Schutz, and Kafka and his character Gracchus, which run strangely in between them.

In terms of the fork, we should turn our attention briefly to another work by Cho from 2008, which if anything may feel somehow more distant than the histories that have been appropriated. As its title indicates, *Still Life Photo-Relief* (2008) uses the photo-relief form, falling in the category of what Cho herself has classified as her early work. Even among her early works from 2008 to 2015, which are examined chiefly in concept of the “in-between,” *Still Life Photo-Relief* is representative of her earliest work. As soon as I saw *Untitled (the Hunter Gracchus)*, the memories that came to my mind were of the human form in Mantegna’s painting and the deeply set fork lying at the center of Cho’s flat canvas. Interesting, it is Cho’s earliest work that I immediately thought of when I saw her re-appropriating a reference taken directly from the work of Morris, who had appropriated from Mantegna’s painting to juxtapose it with the death of mobster Dutch Schultz. It may have been that with its sense of deep perspectival space shortened within the canvas, I remembered Cho’s fork (and its pose) as a seemingly real hovering low over the table – much like the presence of a “dead body” demonstrating the impossibility of death. If we also consider the “in-between” concept that Cho has discussed at length, it may be seen as reflecting a scenario in the history of painting, where a contemporary work that has already become part of the past (or will soon do so) references the painterly perspective appropriated by the photo-relief form. In that sense, *Still Life Photo-Relief* effectively prophesies the delusion that will follow its own demise.

## 2. Anachronistic “In-Between”

Jenny Cho’s solo exhibition *Illuminating Shade for Big Window* consists of two parts. The first, titled *Sick Prophet and Old Magician*, is taking place at Gallery Kiche, while the second, titled *Patron Goddesses for Idle Fellows*, began slightly later at Kimsechoong Museum. *Sick Prophet* includes 11 works by the artist, including *Untitled (the Hunter Gracchus)*; *Patron Goddesses* centers chiefly on *Hinge Frame Set*, a work that the artist has been designing since 2016, announcing a break from (or expansion of) her early work. *Illuminating Shade for Big Window* reuses the title from Cho’s 2017 solo exhibition at Sindoh Art Space, and the titles of the exhibition parts are either borrowed directly or adapted from Cho’s previous work, including her painting appropriating the work of Jean-Baptiste Oudry. Making no attempt to conceal the appropriations and references, her process confounds classification of identity, revealing the intentions of someone seeking to embrace and implode the virtues of a linear lineage in order to manifest the (im)possibility of writing a non-linear history, much like the body of a hunter confronted with the impossibility of death. From what I saw, the orientation here is toward painting in anthropomorphized physical form.

With her methods of appropriation, Cho roams freely around the periphery of painting history as an anachronistic mediator/“in-between” presence. It may appear pointless to talk of “freedom” in such a case, but it seems like an appropriate word for refer to liberation from the history recalled by the body of the (dead) Hunter Gracchus, who roams endlessly over the surface of reality’s waters carrying his own casket. Seeing the enigmatic title *The Future is Painting* (2017–2020), we sense the clash between the innocent painting and the questions it raises: “What is the painting here, and what might the future look like?” What matters here is that the title connotes some very weighty questions. Seemingly forming a humorous contrast with the powerful rays of the sun in *Sunrise (after Turner)* (2020), the painting’s space – which is immediately specified in terms of locality – includes clearly defined shadows, generating meaning in terms of defining the relationships and narratives among the painting works in the exhibition as it effects a magical shift through the temporality of painting.

In *Sunrise (after Turner)*, the concrete date of “2020” at the bottom evokes an as-yet unripened contemporary moment. But alongside the mutable time of that number, the space is filled completely by the light of the sun – most of it referred to as the “atmosphere” – and the time here, viewed as a phenomenon, engenders a dramatic relocation in Cho’s work between the sunlight of the 19th century and the sunlight at the heart of 21st century Seoul. In an experiential narrative where the bright and warm rays coming in through a large east-facing window penetrate each day until it seems like they might melt the indoor space, Jenny Cho references the historic painting achievements in the landscape art of J. M. W. Turner, and arrives at a sense of accord. In terms of the less explicable forms of visual perception in reality, she employs the painting format (albeit in the opposite way from what Turner envisioned, in a way that actually appropriates it) to approach a reflexivity with regard to the medium. To this end, she adheres to the role of the anachronistic “in-between.”

A faint overlap can also be observed between *The Future is Painting* and Cho’s other work *The Balcony (after Magritte)* (2017–2020). As in *Still Life Photo-Relief, Future* shows us a neat arrangement of items on a concisely rendered antique Western dresser: Catholic items of various sizes, exotic-seeming decorations, a digital clock, and a Christmas card. Cho has carefully established a perspectival space that extends outward from the new evidence of a religious conversion, placed atop a marker of her grandmother’s sophisticated, antique tastes – radiating from the tip of the Virgin Mary’s (shadowed) head to the two corners of the case’s top. In an explanation of the current exhibition, Cho referred to a “painterly exploration of (new) Baroque forms.” I find myself seeing an overlap between the forms of the body (bodies) representing the impossibility of death with the odd “(new) Baroque” transformation, where all of the dramatic contrasts in light and exaggeration have been exhausted.

In *Balcony*, transports a “balcony” onto the canvas, like (drooping) symbols of the religious items and decorations on the antique Western dresser placed in front of the bland wallpaper in a Seoul apartment. Both referencing and appropriating the work of René Magritte, the painting sees Cho applying an additional (also anachronistic) layer with the issue of “identity.” Magritte appropriated the balcony of Édouard Manet, who appropriated his in turn from Francisco Goya. Following in this history/lineage of appropriation, Cho once again appropriates from Magritte, filling her canvas with the balcony’s pattern. The objects represented by these historic painters within the balcony and the pictorial space beyond are condensed into a (classical) human form; by the time of Magritte, it had transformed into a cubic shape evoking the presence of human shape – a casket, which may be seen as representing the dead body’s manifestation. Existing at some distance from this lineage yet saved by a certain death, Jenny Cho appears to have made the decision to appropriate the heavy coffin – an inherently narrative human shape – but to depict it with flowers at its corners, decorated with a balcony pattern. Can her sense of humor here be viewed as an error or malfunctioning of appropriation? It may not matter.

In *The Bedroom Painting* (2017–2020), the body has disappeared. It appropriates nothing, and its placement in between *Untitled (the Hunter Gracchus)* and *The Balcony (after Magritte)* does not appear to be coincidental. Here, Cho has replicated a (cliché) painting space originally imagined in the work of writer Ottessa Moshfegh as an empty space for the body of her protagonist. Calling to mind a sense of human reflection on Cho’s painting – and her attempt to illustrate the anachronistic nature of the contemporary through the forms of appropriation in her 2014 work *Running in Circle Backwards (After Malevich)* – it has her continuing to change her delusions. The empty bed may be the painter’s space, where she must accept *Sunrise (after Turner)* fully and without rejection. It may be the space of a painting containing a prophecy in which the dead form manifests the impossibility of death. And it may be the painting’s dialectical space (toward

death), much like the character in Moshfegh's novel who suffers from depression and overdoses on drugs. The painting forms its own narrative.

### 3. Floating Clouds and Rising Spheres

Were my delusions getting the better of me when I looked at *Spheres, Mirrors and Folded Papers (after Turner's Perspective Chart)* (2017–2020) and found myself thinking once again of *Still Life Photo-Relief*? If at some point in the past someone noticed the logical relationship between the mirror ball and truncated tablecloth that surround the supine form in a three-dimensional relationship and the distant shadow that falls beyond the canvas, then I hope people won't think too much less of me for imagining that *Spheres, Mirrors and Folded Papers (after Turner's Perspective Chart)* might have been discovered alongside the artist's notes in a desk drawer of her studio where old artwork had been tucked away.

In *Spheres, Mirrors and Folded Papers (after Turner's Perspective Chart)*, Jenny Cho appropriates a drawing made by Turner for a lecture on perspective. With its proof of the logic of visual perception, Turner's perspective chart is fascinating in the way it (perfectly) renders both what is visible to the eye and what is not. In her appropriation of it, Jenny Cho appears to have painted eight images, all filled with contradictions and impossibilities, after applying her imagination based on her beliefs about the orderly visual pyramids of perspective that came spilling out of (one point in) the retina on a piece of paper that had folded (because it was being carried around). In this series of square paintings, she finds a teacher in the deteriorated images of a sphere, mirror, and folded papers – illusions akin to the “dead flesh.” Bearing references on par with any contemporary painting, it raises serious questions that (attempt to) circle back to the history of painting. In her early work, Cho focused on experiments in which she explored and recreated the visual logic of perspective in Western painting history. Over the past few years, she has been appropriating concrete incidents from painting history that bear it out, pushing her own imperative in terms of painterly achievement (and the impossibility thereof) in an even more ambiguous direction.

Consider *Hinge Frame Set\_White and Black* (2015), which stands like a monument in the gallery. The hollow aluminum frame structure is the result of Cho's efforts since 2015 to design a painting frame that would be easy to transport and store, like a folded piece of paper that had been spread out. Effecting an experiment with the conditions of painting, *Hinge Frame Set* is like a series of magical stages proclaiming the efficacy of the result. Cho breaks through the limits of visual perception that have presented retinas with (masterly) painting images faded from their use as sun screens; she shows them with nothing concealed. For this exhibition, the gallery center is occupied by *Hinge Frame Set*, a mere support for those degraded painting images, and the artist appears to have intended to render a new perspective on the empty windows. Instead of a rising sphere, Jenny Cho has released a cloud into the void.

Everything points to that cloud. Using augmented reality (AR), Cho presents a cloud toward the large window. She had made it so that everything chases after this comical, even mundane-looking cloud. We no longer need to draw straight-line pyramids on flat surfaces. It suffices for us to believe that we are looking at a cloud within the (anticipated) pathway as it moves along, leaving behind irregular traces. In *Patron Goddesses of Idle Fellows are the Clouds* (2021), Cho references the ancient Greek comedy *The Clouds* by Aristophanes. Drawing on his humor and satire, she raises a question about the historical conditions of the painting medium: “Why does no one question this?” Contemplating the new stature of contemporary painting (as had been prophesied), she adds an element of “cute” delusion, playfully leading us to chase after a

cloud that is like the dead body of the Hunter Gracchus, floating over the waves on his ferry. And into *Hinge Frame Set*, a deep abstract space that calls to mind a ferry or an open casket, Cho has placed her own perspective-based landscapes as a painter with a nomadic identity. She has Photoshopped and UV-printed non-hierarchical found images consist of paintings (by non-Western masters) seen in Seoul, landscapes of Seoul, New York and Houston, and drawings of *Hinge Frame Set* containing her own perspectival view of paintings. She has taken that shadow, glinting toward the large window, and placed it before our eyes.

Translation: Colin Mouat