



Installation shot of
Haeri Yoo
Drift
2006
Colored pencil, crayon, tempera,
and acrylic on wall
19 1/2 x 12 feet
Bronx River Art Center, Bronx, NY
Courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery, New York

NEW ARTIST

HAERI YOO: PAIN PATCH

BY SIMON WATSON

Haeri Yoo paints highly expressive, gloriously colorful psychological landscapes depicting pain, suffering, sadness, isolation, and evisceration. They practically scream through rivers of thick red paint that allude to bloodied and ravaged human bodies. And yet, in the midst of this chaos, a strange sort of unity remains intact.

Dismembered body parts, scattered about the canvases, still find places to attach themselves. Arms extending from one figure may or may not belong to that of another. One figure's head is actually divided into two faces. One face is turned angrily toward another, who stares off indifferently. Given the swollen eye and streaks of red that appears below the nose of the "indifferent" face, one cannot help thinking that the angry face has inflicted a certain degree of damage. In another work, the head of a woman whose eyes are closed is juxtaposed with another head, which lies sideways, red in color, with a mouth represented by thick red paint in a jagged line. Clearly, many of the characters represented are at odds with one another, bearing the unmistakable stamp of tensions between the gen-



ders. And for the viewer who stands as witness, there is the charged task of assembling the visual carnage and detecting the roots of this mayhem that arises from Yoo's passionate view of human sexuality and bodily tension.

On the subject of her influences, the Korean-born artist says, "Although my paintings look very Western, I was influenced by Korean calligraphy that needs to carry *chi* and express an energy with each stroke, and by Korean traditional (folk) painting, which depicts life and sadness of folks including happiness, anger, love, and pleasure, with humor. For most of Korean traditional drawings and painting (not all, but especially master's work), are supposed to be done without a sketch but directly drawn with brush to finish whole picture. I haven't learned calligraphy or traditional art, but the influence is still in me. I like to play with something in between and something is quite opposite one another like figuration/abstract, humor/sadness, happiness/anger, beauty/violence."

Yoo wholeheartedly embraces a stream-

of-consciousness painting practice. She claims that her work is not premeditated, that in the tradition of Korean calligraphy, the pen (in her case, the brush) guides the hand. This is not to suggest that there is no calculation to her work. In *Pain Patch*, she pays homage to a recent case in which a mother accidentally caused the death of her baby by placing a "pain patch" on the child. The patch contained a high dose of painkiller, lethal to an infant. It was this concept of "healing that gives more pain" that inspired the painting. What makes Yoo's work so remarkable is that the "perfect storm" of psychological chaos is challenged within the confines of the canvas. The placement of heads and body parts, damaged and strewn about, hold the promise of reconfiguration.

Haeri Yoo will have her first solo show in November at Thomas Erben Gallery in New York. Her work has been shown at the Queens Museum of Art, the Bronx River Arts Center, Rush Arts Gallery, Mehr Gallery, and Campani's "Defining a Moment" exhibition. She was awarded the 2007 Visual Arts Award from the AHL Foundation, a residency at the Henry Street Settlement, and a Korea Cultural Council Grant and was a participant in the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Swing Space program. Yoo's work will be included in the forthcoming "Unreal: New Image Painting" at the Saatchi Gallery in London. Her work is being collected widely (including The Saatchi Collection, London; Bose Krishnamachari, Mumbai; Craig Robins, Florida; Aurel Scheibler, Berlin; and Nicola Cernetic, Turin). An MFA graduate of Pratt Institute, Yoo lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Below:
Haeri Yoo
Desert
2008
Acrylic on canvas
48 x 60 inches
Courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery, New York