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Qoede Lee

Chilgok, South Korea 1913—1965

Self-Portrait in a Long Blue Coat, 1948–49

Oil on canvas

72 x 60 cm (unframed)

Known as major figure painter in Korea and for paintings responding to its colonisation by Japan, Qoede Lee was mostly active between 1930–50s. His trajectory parallels Korea's occupation by Japan (1910–45), the country's Liberation, its partition (1945), and the Korean War (1950–53). Trained in the 1930s in Daegu and in Japan at the Imperial School of Art, Lee first championed Western aesthetics, later combining them with East Asian techniques, using sharp lines and contours to seek two-dimensionality. In the late 1940s, under the umbrella of the Joseon Art and Culture Association which he co-founded, Lee realised paintings addressing Korea's freedom from Japan. Towards the end of the Korean war, he was arrested and detained in prisoner-of-war camps, choosing to side with North Korea where he would defect in 1954. This led to his blacklisting, his work being rediscovered and re-exhibited in South Korea since 1988 only.

Lee's *Self-Portrait in a Long Blue Coat* (1948–49) shows the artist wearing a blue *durumagi*, a men's overcoat and component of the traditional Korean dress. One of the four self-portraits that still exist of the many Lee realised, *Self-Portrait in a Long Blue Coat* is considered his masterpiece and exemplary of his hybridisation of Western and Oriental painting. This is visible in the inclusion of diverse visual signifiers. Lee's Korean attire is complemented by a fedora – a Western hat worn by the upper classes, referencing his status. Lee also depicts himself holding a palette with European oil paints, and an East-Asian ink brush called *mopil*. He proudly stands with an affirmative gaze, in front of a rural landscape with women wearing the tradition *hanbok* in the background. Bright-coloured and forward-looking, Lee's portrait endows the artist with the role and power to imagine the future of Korea and Korean arts.

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Evelyn Taocheng Wang
Chengdu, China 1981

Do Not Agree with Agnes Martin All the Time, 2022–23

Mixed media, including: calligraphy ink, mineral colour, acrylic colour, graphite, colour gesso, colour pencil and pencil, and artist seals on linen canvas
185 x 185

A native of Chengdu, currently residing in Rotterdam, Evelyn Taocheng Wang works across artistic mediums and different pictorial traditions. Initially trained in the East Asian literati tradition, she graduated from Nanjing Normal University's Fine Art Department in 2006. While still in China, Wang was also exposed to Social Realism and Western Modernism. In 2007, Wang was the recipient of a residency in Germany, which led her to study at the Städelschule in Frankfurt (2010–12), later becoming a resident at De Ateliers in Amsterdam (2012–14). Wang's transnational, nomadic trajectory informs her practice in which issues of cultural traditions, multilingualism, art history, identity, authenticity, gender, and the interplay of images become templates to be appropriated, reworked, or fictionalised. A recurrent characteristic of Wang's work is her referencing of modernist female figures (Ingeborg Bachmann, Octavia Butler, Eileen Chang, Agnes Martin) which act as mirrors or props for the artist's queering of the histories she appropriates.

Wang's series of paintings *Imitation of Agnes Martin* stem from her long-time fascination for the Canadian-born American painter – a 'hermit-master' according to Wang – which started through an encounter with catalogues, rather than Martin's actual paintings. An *émigré*, both a central figure and an outsider of the minimal art milieu, and drawing on East Asian thought (Taoism and Zen Buddhism), Martin's life and work constellate tropes with she identifies, and upon which her own language is refracted. For this series, Wang literally followed the captions of selected Martin paintings. Although she indistinctly speaks of 'imitation' and 'appropriation', her reading of the captions uncovers a repressed element, namely the amount of water used with the paint. If lightness and fluidity become connectors with the paintings of the Chinese literati tradition, they also distance it from its Confucianist-patriarchal basis, while the insertion of figurative elements within the modernist grid tease minimalism's universalist pretences.

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