

Dwelling

Jun 16 — Jul 29, 2023 | Canal Projects, New York, USA

Dwelling is an exhibition of works by Marcus Jahmal, Cheyenne Julien, Ho Jae Kim, Kenrick McFarlane, Kyung-Me, and Woody De Othello that addresses our complicated relationship to ideas of home. Considering the central place that figurative painting has gained in contemporary art practices the show explores ever-evolving approaches to self-representation. The artists gathered here engage with abstraction, naturalism, and photorealistic precision in order to accentuate the psychological and socio-spatial tension of their built environment, especially domestic interiors. While at times perspectives of home can sustain and nurture our bodies, they can also suggest the entrapment of people's subjectivities. Following this threat, the artists in this exhibition explore psychologically taut environments that imply both a sense of physical embrangement, and a glimpse at complex emotional states through thick washes of color, symmetry, and dramatic shifts in perspective. Gestural abstraction, expressionist color, and a sense of comic formalism are used to portray emotional, physical, and psychological impact. They share a sense of indirect unease as the figures depicted do not seem able to address the viewer directly.

San Francisco-based artist Woody De Othello is known for his reimagining of domestic spaces where perspective seems to melt away and twist into surreal new forms. In vivid, saccharine color the artist abstracts oversized figures and objects through ceramic sculptures and paint. For Dwelling, De Othello has created a free-standing tableau of these anthropomorphized objects and imagery which act as a center stage for the exhibition's metaphors of interiority.

Kenrick McFarlane's portraits of ghostly figures rendered in thick washes of color evoke tensions of the public and private self, and bring into question concepts of vulgarity and beauty. Formally posed figures are partially erased and blurred appearing as though they almost seep into the canvas. Based in Los Angeles, McFarlane's practice negotiates the gaps and contradictions between interior and exterior selves through lucid, expressive, and dream-like canvases that draw on a range of histories from German Expressionism to trap.

Also working with expressionist color is the Brooklyn-based artist Marcus Jahmal. A self-taught artist, his domestic scenes rich with metaphors are often drawn from his life growing up in Brooklyn's Prospect Heights neighborhood surrounded by a West Indies community. Jahmal's scenes skew a sense of linear perspective, depicting interior scenes of individuals at home. Spaces lose their depth, slowly caving inwards as the floors rise and walls lean in, creating an air thick with psychological tension.

Other works express this sense of entrapment in a more naturalistic style, such as the works of Brooklyn-based artist Ho Jae Kim. Kim's works on view depict often solo figures that seem frozen. In *Day 3: The Janitor* (2020) a uniformed man is seen sweeping from behind. The figure's seemingly mundane task is elevated to theatrical heights as he is perfectly centered under an ornate arch and bathed in lurid stage-like lighting which juxtaposes the janitor's anonymity and nearly invisible labor.

Kyung-Me's three works on view from the series *Papillon de Nuit* (2019) share this mood of suspension and psychologically tautness. The Brooklyn-based artist operates within a rigid sense of order, creating meticulously detailed interior settings that have a near perfect symmetry of mirrors, columns, curtains, and spotlights. At first, each scene appears empty. Looking more closely, the viewer can find reference to the depicted space's occupant in each: a hand draped over the arm of a chair, or an abandoned shoe. The works give the sense of something darker lurking in the shadows, almost as if these ornate modern homes have overtaken their inhabitants.

In rich reds and purples, the work *Morning Cigarette* by Cheyenne Julien depicts a single woman seated at a table, Julien's grandmother whom she would visit in Spanish Harlem as a child. She is rendered in with exaggerated features, smoking while lost in thought. The work resonates with a profound hushed atmosphere, the woman's weary expression pushing against the comic depiction in thick primary color.