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Stephen Chang Kim MFA Thesis Statement

Stephen C. Kim
Claremont Graduate University

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Stephen Chang Kim

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Committee Members:

David Amico

Rachel Lachowicz

Ann Bray

Stephen Chang Kim

Statement

My work focuses on attempts to rationalize the removal of the figure as it becomes a collision of abstract and real within the painting. The idea of cancellation using the palette knife interfaces an image by taking away the object of desire from being there. Viewers are then forced to look into the relational element of what is there, as they become inclusive as a participant in visualizing with their memories of what is present in an absent state. Something similar takes place when we read books without visual aids - our minds visualize a fictitious reality where content includes all of our physical and emotional being. The empathy we feel closes the gap between objectivity and subjectivity. In my paintings, I allow viewers to interpret the unknown by identifying what is there and not there through investigative means of accessing their inner thoughts and perceptions to claim decipher the situation presented within the painting.

At first glance, the painting can be seen as something familiar but with the absence of something or someone interacting. There is a sense of mysteriousness and isolation as it may be evident that the figure is staged within the environment without a clear indication of what the figure is reacting to. The person they react to can be seen as an abstraction of something as it is replaced with paint marks in the background that may not be recognizable. The environment sets the stage as it collides with the realism of the figures face and body with abstract lines painted roughly with a palette knife. The figures in my paintings are deep into their own thoughts and actions.

I paint figures who are in their own private moments of an emotional state- feeling sad, happy, or maybe both. In my paintings, I look into the psychologically precarious situation of a person interacting with a sense of absence of a loved one. I paint an impossible situation by withholding visual information of one of two figures as abstract lines that creates the impossibility of presence from the original photo that I began with. Absence causes a sense of mystery. The figure that is withheld becomes a powerful life-force that questions the very existence of the one that is present, as it wants to connect in a world that does not want to connect. This struggle to belong in a place and connect to another can cause us to reflect on ourselves with our own sense of being. We exist in this world because of how we interact in our society and it's that very nature that makes us who we are and validates our presence. When one figure is withheld from the other, the first figure becomes stuck between somewhere and nowhere.

People commonly take things for granted when we have them, such as relationships to friends, family, relatives, and even animals or objects that we are emotionally attached to. Through disconnection there is connection as long as one remembers what is absent. The incompleteness of the painting engages the viewer to become participants in the paintings meaning. Finding something relative that connects the painting to the viewer is imperative in the creation of my art as memories are used as a tool to identify the unknown.

My paintings question the value of human sentimentality and of the moments in our experiences that question the very nature of our being. The need to identify the temperament of how we see ourselves in society and the need to emotionally connect has been a lingering question both in and out of my studio. I hope to connect with the viewer and convey the message that absence of the subject can be a powerful thing.