

TWO COATS OF PAINT

SOLO SHOWS

Jennifer J. Lee's ghostly familiarity

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Jennifer J. Lee's reactivation of shelved digital images through painting established her as a pioneer in a post-Post-Internet epoch super-saturated with online photographs. "Square Dance," Lee's third solo exhibition at Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, cements her standing. As many of her predecessors doubled down on digital ephemera by creating work largely within the redundancy of the digital interface, she, as part of a new generation of painters, bulwarks digital impermanence by building a sense of physicality back into the image. She faces a technological crossroads: recent advancements in digital imaging have situated the image at arguably its most vulnerable point in history, where representation itself feels unsound. It is refreshing and reassuring to have guardians of observation and trusted eyes shepherd the image back to reality. Composed of eight resonant paintings, "Square Dance" resuscitates images to be cherished.

Lee has a fondness for low resolution. The endless cycling and exchange of the image online often results in a deterioration of its original quality. These pictorial gems translate best for Lee as the interpolated blocks of pixels suspended on coarse burlap surfaces, which distinguish her oeuvre. Delicate as this painting process may be, the impact is anything but. *Untitled (Train)*, just four by four inches, is an irreducible rendering of an arriving locomotive, nodding to the Lumière Brothers' seminal *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* – a film that helped build the foundations of cinematic experience. All the paintings in this show capture a seemingly mundane phenomenon, set to expire yet steeped in universality, whether an immaculate reflection as in *Untitled (Bowl)*, or a rising sun as in *Untitled (Canyon)*. Appropriately enough, every piece in the exhibition is designated "Untitled," followed by a parenthetical descriptor identifying it as a specimen of an internet image. Susan Stewart once stated that a col-

lected object represents "distance appropriated" – both extrinsic and innate to the possessor. Under Lee's eye, the viewer must reconcile the uncanny with the familiar, as the banality of the original image dissolves and it transforms in real time.

This activation is built on a delicate scaffold. Lee consistently uses jute – a very porous surface by painting standards – as a sort of osmotic membrane that functions as a threshold for both presence and absence. Cells of this membrane often clog in goops of oil paint, creating moments of stillness that pause the ventilated flow. In these moments of stillness, we start to question how much of the object is actually there to begin with. It is as if Lee were painting not the image itself but rather the mortar between the pixels. This clever airiness is especially pronounced in *Untitled (Pants)*, as the jute-gridded surface corresponds nearly one-to-one to the corduroy twill of the fabric. This alignment



Jennifer J. Lee, *Untitled (Train)*, 2023, oil on jute, 4 x 4 inches

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creates a dizzying moray pattern busily ricocheting the viewer's eye in a trap of texture. Or take *Untitled (Zoa)*, in which petals from a bouquet of Caribbean zoanthids often stumble and re-route into the gridded threads of burlap, like stubborn digital artifacts created with low-res aliasing. Only in distancing ourselves from the paintings do we regain a sense of orientation that reminds us of their ghostly digital origins.

- Kyle Hittmeier



Jennifer J. Lee, *Untitled (Pants)*, 2023, oil on jute, 12 x 9 inches