

THE REALMS OF EXISTENCE

JIWON CHOI

FROM PORCELAIN FIGURES AND FADED RELICS TO ROOMS SUSPENDED BETWEEN MEMORY AND DREAM, JIWON CHOI'S PAINTINGS TURN NOSTALGIA INTO SOMETHING STRANGER, DARKER, AND QUIETLY SEDUCTIVE. HER WORLD IS ONE OF POLISHED SURFACES AND LINGERING SHADOWS, WHERE INNOCENCE MEETS UNEASE AND BEAUTY SEEMS TO CONCEAL ANOTHER STORY. DRAWING ON THE UNCANNY PRESENCE OF DOLLS AND THE CHARGED SILENCE OF OBJECTS FROM ANOTHER TIME, CHOI CREATES SCENES IN WHICH THE PAST REFUSES TO REMAIN STILL. NOTHING ANNOUNCES ITSELF; EVERYTHING LINGERS. THIS IS THE ENIGMATIC WORLD OF JIWON CHOI.

Your paintings suggest that memory is not a passive recollection but an active force that continues to shape our present. Although moments inevitably pass, they remain alive through the emotions, objects, and stories we carry with us. Your porcelain figures seem to inhabit this space where the past and the present coexist. Do you see memory as a form of continuity rather than nostalgia alone? Can painting preserve emotional truths that history itself cannot?

J.C.: For me, the persistence of memory is less about preserving the past than about a dynamic flow in which the past continually intersects with the present and the future, generating new energy. Interestingly, my work never begins with a fixed conclusion. Instead, it starts with curiosity about a subject or object that draws me in for reasons I cannot fully explain.

As I complete each work, my fascination deepens, extending beyond the image itself to the culture and history surrounding its subject. Working with these fragments of the past seems to actively propel me forward in the present. In that sense, the process is also one of discovery, revealing the sensibilities and tastes that will define who I become.



above: artist **Jiwon Choi.**



Your porcelain dolls exist in a space between the animate and the inanimate, between presence and absence. Rather than portraying death as a conclusion, your work seems to propose a dialogue between different realms of existence. How do you understand this threshold between life and death? Is it a metaphor for memory, transformation, or something more deeply rooted in your personal philosophy?





JC: Because life is finite, I tend to focus on the value of the present rather than believing in eternity or an afterlife. This has led me to reflect on the fundamental human desire to hold on to what inevitably disappears and to suspend the passage of time. I believe an artist's longing to preserve something beautiful within a painting forever arises from much the same impulse.

The porcelain dolls and orchids that frequently appear in my work embody these ideas. I often keep orchids nearby and observe them over long periods while I paint, and at times they begin to feel almost artificial, as though they exist somewhere between the living and the inanimate. I am drawn to the quiet tension created by subjects that inhabit the threshold between presence and absence, life and lifelessness. To me, this ambiguity is where beauty becomes most compelling. Through painting, and through the materiality of oil paint, I seek to breathe new life into things whose vitality has already faded, bringing something long suspended in time into the present. The windows and doors that occasionally appear in my compositions also serve as visual passages, allowing memories of the past and present to intersect.

“I AM DRAWN TO THE QUIET TENSION BETWEEN PRESENCE AND ABSENCE, LIFE AND LIFELESSNESS.”

opposite page: ***Undrinkable***, 2022, oil on canvas.
above: ***The Butterfly in the Frame***, 2023, oil on canvas and ***Diving into the Night***, 2022, oil on canvas.



The antique clocks, porcelain, family photographs, and decorative objects in your paintings are more than carefully observed still-life elements—they carry cultural histories and personal narratives. At a time when globalization often blurs cultural specificity, how important is it for you to preserve these visual traditions? Do you see your paintings as a way of safeguarding cultural memory through the language of objects?

"MAKING ART IS A PROCESS OF DISCOVERING NEW POSSIBILITIES THROUGH FRAGMENTS OF THE PAST."



"PORCELAIN EMBODIES CENTURIES OF EXCHANGE BETWEEN EAST AND WEST."



opposite page: ***Following the Curves of Orchids,*** 2025, Oil on Canvas.
above: ***Path to the Past,*** 2024, Oil on canvas.

JC: I am deeply interested in how a single object can embody the complex intersections of different cultures and histories. For me, making art is a process of discovering new possibilities through fragments of the past. In this context, the objects that appear in my paintings are not static remnants of a single memory. Instead, they become protagonists that carry their own narratives within unfamiliar spaces where different moments in time converge.

I was first drawn to porcelain dolls because of their smooth surface and visual allure. As I learned more about the history of porcelain in China and Europe, I came to realize that they embody centuries of exchange between East and West. Since then, I have found myself continually drawn to objects shaped by these cultural intersections, observing the silent traces they carry and allowing them to guide my work. By reinterpreting the tension inherent in smooth, seductive materials that appeal to our most instinctive desires, I hope to move beyond fixed notions of tradition and uncover new possibilities for painting.





In contemporary society, we consume images at extraordinary speed, often leaving little room for reflection or remembrance. Your work encourages a slower encounter, asking viewers to contemplate the emotional lives of objects and the memories they contain. Do you believe there is an ethical responsibility in remembering—both personally and collectively? Can art become a form of resistance against cultural amnesia?

JC: As contemporary society becomes increasingly driven by speed and efficiency, I find myself drawn instead to the art of the past, where layers of time have quietly accumulated. Recently, I had an experience that reminded me of the value of what I call a "slower encounter."
Last year, I saw a painting by Johannes Vermeer in person for the first time while visiting a museum in Germany. Although I have visited countless museums and galleries, nothing had prepared me for the experience of standing before one of his works. I found myself completely absorbed, unable to move for quite some time. It left such a profound impression on me that I came away with a personal wish to see every surviving Vermeer in my lifetime.

I place great value on craftsmanship, a way of working that stands apart from the pursuit of efficiency. In painting, craftsmanship is not simply about creating a flawless surface. It is the ability to distill years of discipline, observation, and refined sensitivity into a single brushstroke. In an age when images are endlessly produced, consumed, and forgotten, I devote so much time to each painting because I hope it can offer viewers a rare moment to slow down.

Your paintings evoke a profound sense of tenderness, suggesting that returning to memory is not an act of escaping the present but of understanding it more deeply. Many people discover that revisiting the past offers reassurance, resilience, and even hope for the future. Do you hope your work encourages viewers to embrace their own memories—not as something that belongs to what has been lost, but as a living source of identity, healing, and emotional strength? If so, what do you hope remains with them after they leave your paintings?

JC: Today, many people seem so focused on moving forward that they overlook the stories hidden within the objects around them, as well as their own inner perceptions. Through my work, I hope viewers will pause, even briefly, and reconnect with memories and reflections they may have long set aside. I believe that quietly awakening these dormant sensibilities can become a gentle form of resistance to the pace of the contemporary world.

"IN AN AGE WHEN IMAGES ARE ENDLESSLY PRODUCED, CONSUMED, AND FORGOTTEN, I HOPE MY PAINTINGS CAN OFFER A RARE MOMENT TO SLOW DOWN."

previous page: ***Where are we heading to***, 2020, oil and acrylic on canvas
above: ***After the Death of Wasps***, 2025, oil on canvas.
opposite page: ***Room in Red***, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas.
All images of artwork courtesy of the artist and ThisWeekendRoom.


MONACO
RODOMONTADE
THE CURE
FOR THE AGE OF MORE
CULTURAL GRAVITY
ART BASEL PARIS
JIWON CHOI
REALMS OF EXISTENCE
ASHA SWILLENS
AESTHETICS OF AN IMAGE
FALL/WINTER26