

Philip Martin Gallery

## Sung Jik Yang

NADA New York | *Paseo*  
2 - 5 May 2024



Sung Jik Yang  
*Annie*, 2024  
Oil on canvas  
70 x 58 in  
177.8 x 147.3 cm

At 2024 NADA New York, Philip Martin Gallery is proud to present a solo exhibition of new paintings by Los Angeles-based painter Sung Jik Yang. Produced in the “alla prima” or wet-on-wet style of Edouard Manet and others, Sung Jik Yang’s portraits express the feeling of modern identity as experienced through the people he meets in LA’s San Gabriel Valley.

Like all great portraitists, Sung Jik Yang takes the viewer into a world of unique individuals, revealing their visages and inner emotions in thoughtful, careful compositions. Sung Jik Yang structures his paintings as direct encounters between viewer and subject. In Yang’s paintings of a traveling street-dance team from Thailand, we find young men visiting the United States, eager to express their art. In a portrait of an African-American family, we see a father and his two children enjoying a Sunday trip to the mall. In a picture of a couple on a couch, we witness how Americans live today. Yang comments, “I capture the appearance of people that I paint. I love their spontaneous image and I try my best to present my interpretation of the human subject.”

Sung Jik Yang sometimes paints the people in his life; at other times, he paints people who are unknown to him - the “chance meeting” with a stranger analyzed by German philosopher Walter Benjamin in his writing on the new urban networks of Modernity. Walter Benjamin’s writing at the beginning of the 20th-century built on the observations of French poet Charles Baudelaire, whose “flaneur” negotiated the new societal landscape of 19th-century Paris. Sung Jik Yang, working at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st-century - a new “gilded age” of globalization and capital - takes an entirely different, more democratic approach, engaging his viewer in one-on-one interactions with empowered fellow individuals in a diverse Southern California metropolis of over 17 million.

Sung Jik Yang’s show title is drawn from the Spanish word “paseo” - to promenade. The history of the promenade is the history of looking at others, also while presenting oneself, long a topic for painting, where messaging between artist, viewer, and subject - across the picture plane - is crucial. Sung Jik Yang’s show title also refers to the Pasadena shopping complex, “The Paseo,” where Yang meets many of his subjects. A large outdoor mall built in the style of New Urbanism, The Paseo draws visitors from Pasadena, the San Gabriel Valley, and the Inland Empire. Visitors to the mall walk and eat, try on clothes, visit boutiques and go to the movies. Yang asks if he can photograph them, if he can paint them, and then later, he invites them to his studio to see the painting he made.

Sung Jik Yang’s portraits draw on the fluidity of encounter and identity, reflecting his subject’s inner complexity via deft brushwork, in the manner of painters like Alice Neel or Barkley Hendricks. Like many immigrants to LA - David Hockney comes to mind - Sung Jik Yang works with the concise insight of the insider/outsider, finding in his new home a landscape of new sights and connections. Yang’s paintings humanize subject and viewer alike, the kind of humanizing that only Painting can do. Sung Jik Yang adapts the tools of the great medium as a compliment, not a competitor, to the new modes of address across the picture plane in the 21st-century - phones and screens - presenting an enlivened encounter for viewer and subject alike.

Sung Jik Yang (b. 1989, South Korea) received his BFA from the ArtCenter College of Design (Pasadena, CA). Sung Jik Yang will be featured in the upcoming exhibition, “Boys,” at X Museum (Beijing, China). His work recently appeared in, “Friends & Lovers,” at Flag Foundation (New York, NY). Recent solo and group exhibitions include “Pocket Universe” (Philip Martin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA), Friends Indeed Gallery (San Francisco, CA); Samuele Visentin (London, UK); 8-Bridges Gallery with Friends Indeed Gallery (San Francisco, CA); Eastern Projects (Los Angeles, CA); Space Gallery at Ayzenberg (Pasadena, CA). Yang’s work has been reviewed in such publications as Fuerteventura Times, Booooooom and New American Paintings. Yang lives and works in Los Angeles, CA.