

The New York Times

What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now



Jan. 20, 2022, 3:14 p.m. ET

LOWER EAST SIDE

Jiha Moon

Through Feb. 5. Derek Eller Gallery, 300 Broome Street, Manhattan. 212-206-6411;
derekeller.com.



Installation view of Jiha Moon's new show, "Stranger Yellow." At the center is "Peach Mask Face Jug," from 2021.
Jiha Moon and Derek Eller; Cary Whittier

There are so many references in Jiha Moon's artworks, it can be hard to know where to begin. In "Stranger Yellow," her show of ceramic sculptures and ink-and-acrylic paintings at Derek Eller Gallery, I spotted bananas, fortune cookies, peaches and Ukiyo-e-inspired creatures; I saw echoes of Roy Lichtenstein's "Yellow Brushstrokes," traditional Chinese landscape painting and face jugs from the American South. This cross-pollination is partly a product of biography: Moon grew up in South Korea before moving to the United States in her late 20s. She studied art in both places and eventually settled in Atlanta.

But it's not just hybridity that makes Moon's art so thrilling; it's the way these sources of inspiration and pieces of iconography coexist and pile up within individual works. Often the results are delightfully absurd and cartoonish, like the sculpture "Peach Mask Face Jug" (2021), which comes alive with thick, grinning red lips and white teeth, while being adorned all over with faces, foods, hearts and more. Sometimes they're transportingly meditative, as in the 10-foot-long painting "Yellowwave (Stranger Yellow)" (2021), whose undulating brushstrokes could represent a seascape, a storm or something more abstract, like tendrils of memory.

Moon's visual blitz may not be self-important, but it is studied. The key to navigating it here is yellow, a potent color that's also a slur for Asian Americans. Moon reclaims yellow and weaves it like a thread through her web of signifiers, suggesting that even as our identities become more layered, there's still a core element that remains. JILLIAN STEINHAUER