

MIRA SONG: *When the Yellow Breeze Blows at 4:45*

By Sarah Gee Miller

First, you have to stop rushing around, hard as that might be. Put the phone away and close your eyes. Breathe. Only now can you begin to feel what Mira Song painted in her new Green series, the exhibition titled "When the Yellow Breeze Blows at 4:45". Although the exact word is difficult to pin down, reverence, maybe, but it is without baggage. These paintings are joyous, which makes them, in a sense, both provocative and notable. These are lush, juicy images of growing plants, swirling textures, splotches and drops, and strings of lights. It's always a late afternoon here, on a warm day, and you are looking in on a carefully cultivated, almost ritualistically-ordered garden space. The viewer is always placed just outside, offering a glimpse through a portal or a little window. Yet, this exclusionary view is not alienating, nor is it voyeuristic, it's an invitation to linger, even assume ownership in what we see. The paintings thrive in the curious space between abstraction and figuration. In this space, objects are recognizable but not in the shifting and fragmented planes in which they reside. It is a dream world in many ways, but subtly anchored in the everyday.

There's an insular quality here. But rather than claustrophobic, it's airy and life-affirming, affirmation wrested from the most ordinary of objects. Yet, these aren't just philosophical exercises, there is a visceral tactility as well - in the vividly rendered cement and wood, sidewalk cracks, and winter branches. Even in the abstracted shapes, there is a sense of aliveness, oxygen-rich, and elemental. It's magic of the most humble kind; there's nothing didactic here, which is remarkable, given the sense of quiet revelation in the images. It's up to the viewer whether or not to take what is offered.

Song has long been fascinated with the spaces, both architectural and personal; how we construct them and choose to live in them; and how the best of building design invites us to improve our lives. As a child growing up in the crowded city of Seoul, she found refuge and inspiration in the imaginary goings-on inside a pot containing a bonsai tree in her parent's small garden. It was a place she could enter with her mind, a miniature world. Bonsai itself is a controlled process, a carefully considered version of reality. Song recognizes the parallels between the pruner and the artist, especially in the past few years as pandemic restrictions caused us to turn inward, our obsessions amplified as a hex against an increasingly upsetting world. The careful tending of living things, the close examination of what it means to be at peace. In the hands of a fine and confident painter as Mira Song, the ritual becomes the remedy.