

Sally J. Han
Lost and Found

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FORTNIGHT INSTITUTE

21 East 3rd St. NYC 10003

A lipstick-stained napkin, a copy of Kōbō Abe's 1964 novel *The Face of Another*, a grocery list, tootsie rolls, and a delicately salt-rimmed margarita—these seemingly disparate objects all find a home in Sally J. Han's painted scenes. One work, depicting the interior of the Chinese restaurant Wo Hop in bold shades of green and red, features a small bird with a strip of paper clasped in its beak. Bearing the words "If you chase two rabbits both will escape," the fortune was one Han actually received after dining at the iconic Manhattan Chinatown establishment. Forgotten and eventually remembered for this painting, Han's memory of the fortune can be described by the name of her latest exhibition at Fortnight Institute, *Lost and Found*.

In the aforementioned work, remnants of a fortune cookie and a plate of orange slices sit beside an open bottle of Tsingtao as glistening condensation droplets glide down the glass surface. Han's painting—aptly titled after the German-brewed, Chinese beer in its foreground—speaks to the places frequented by the New York-based artist. Also on view in the exhibition is *At Lupe's*, named after the Mexican restaurant Lupe's East L.A. Kitchen. Like Tsingtao and Wo Hop, Lupe's carries with it a history of migration by serving Mexican food with a Los Angeles-spin in Soho.

The theme of migration can be found not only in Han's paintings, but also in her life. The artist was born in Shenyang, China, but spent the first 10 years of her life in South Korea, followed by seven years in Beijing. At the age of 17, she moved to New York on her own. Snowy winters unite all of the places she's ever called home, and are a focal point of *First Snow in East Village*. "It's a very special painting for me, because I was applying for a green card at the time and realizing that I've come a long way," Han explained. In the painting, perched on the artist's hand are two birds, not just symbols of flight but also Han's pets.

Five years ago, Han was wandering Petco when an employee informed her that if she brought a bird home, she'd receive a complimentary birdcage. "I remember thinking, 'Wow, that's unusual,'" recalled Han, who seized the opportunity. Four years later, she got her second parrot. The orange tabby cat that appears in works such as *Late Summer* is the pet Han had before she gradually developed an allergy. "I think of my work as a visual diary. I'm recording my daily life with a little bit of imagination," Han said. "It's my journey and journal."

Not only reflective of her life, Han's paintings are also in visual conversation with the artists that have come before her. In the background of *At Lupe's* hangs Frida Kahlo's 1954 painting *Viva la Vida, Watermelons*, completed just days before the legendary artist's death later that year. In Han's reimagining of Lupe's, the last work Kahlo ever made looms over a scene of quiet leisure, as if to say the pressure to carve out an artistic legacy is never too far from Han's mind. And in *Lost and Found*, her second solo show at Fortnight Institute, Han grants viewers deeper insight into the life and mind of the artist.

- Text by Harley Wong

Jingmei "Sally" Han was born in China and raised in South Korea, she then moved to New York where she received a BFA from the School of Visual Arts (2016) with a Silas H. Rhodes Scholarship. In 2019 she received an MFA with an emphasis on drawing at the New York Academy of Art. Her first solo exhibition in New York was at Fortnight Institute in January 2020. She has participated in selected group exhibitions at the FLAG Art Foundation, 303 Gallery, Jeffrey Deitch Gallery, NY/LA, and Art & Newport Foundation, Newport, Rhode Island, and currently the Aishti Foundation, Lebanon.