

Ich brauch' Tapetenwechsel: I need a change of wallpaper.

In beloved German singer Hildegard Knef's 1970 song, a birch tree longs for a change of scene: *I need a change of wallpaper, I need a breath of fresh air around my crown, I don't want to stand in line anymore!*

Wallpaper is the backdrop to our lives; it sets the scene. It might only be a thin surface, but the feeling of a space depends on it. Sometimes it's garish and disorienting; sometimes it's a pretty pattern hiding an unfortunate stain. It can be familiar, nostalgic, homely – or perhaps it's just a little tired and you want to peel it all off: eager for a change of scene.

Our new gallery in Seoul is a change of wallpaper for Efremidis. For this inaugural exhibition we present the work of 5 artists who, though wildly varied in approach and sentiment, each draw attention to the role of surface in processes of change. These practices explore themes as broad as domesticity and familiarity, repetitive patterns of life and labour, intimacy and personal transformation. For some, surfaces are found to mask and deceive, and social critique is parcelled in humour and uncanny familiarity. For others, surfaces amplify material processes and modes of production, combining craft, handmade and industrial techniques to explore different relationships to labour.

Each of these artists have a longstanding relationship with Efremidis' Berlin gallery, and we're delighted to introduce them to a new scene in Seoul.

Hannah Sophie Dunkelberg

Hannah Sophie Dunkelberg's practice pushes against sculpture's stability, dismantling the integrity of modernism's fetishistic status by re-mixing styles from industrial and digital processes with handmade craftsmanship. In her reflective wall reliefs, plant-like forms and playful abstractions are moulded with an industrial vacuum-forming process. Commercially, this vacuum-forming process is often used to produce the little plastic trays that mass-produced tech accessories are packaged in, or the custom-formed dimples embedding fancy chocolates in their box. Under intense pressure handmade gestures are translated into slick digital-seeming imagery. By incorporating this technique, Dunkelberg merges signifiers from familiar consumer experiences with the seductive status of the art object. Light on these lacquered surfaces is slippery and evasive; distinctions between positive and negative forms are thrown into question.

Michelle Grabner

Michelle Grabner uses careful, hand-painted gestures to reproduce the intricate details and recurring patterns of fabrics such as lace, knit and gingham. Her preoccupation with grid-like compositions in textiles arises from feminist inflected inquiries into the history of weaving and pattern-making, and is tied to her belief that various power structures are reflected in the patterns and abstract arrangements that surround us in the materials of everyday life. Grabner states, 'because I believe that all forms are political, I have committed myself and 30 years of painting to re-articulating vernacular patterns in order to shift the unobserved into critical sight.' These overlooked quotidian textiles, often associated with perfunctory feminine labour, are elevated to the monumental status of minimalist painting. Her process becomes a subtle subversion of dominant order, where meditative insistence on similarity works to amplify the power of miniscule variation.

Tom Holmes

Despite their figurative elements, Tom Holmes' paintings are entirely abstract. Imagery is drawn from the vernacular of everyday American consumerism, with glimpses of garish holiday decorations, cartoon characters, remnants of plastic merchandise. However, Holmes distorts these references: they appear fragmented and contorted, strangely lit and jarred in pictorial space. Built in layers and flurries of oil paint and acrylic ink, the paintings are related to the photographic and often seem to clutch at a movement in time. Their execution is, however, resolutely painterly and strongly linked to a history of mannerist and baroque painting. For the artist, who has been primarily known for their cross-media installations incorporating sculpture as well as painting, the surface of the paintings is used as a smokescreen, an invitation to engage the viewer in themes such as childhood, liberation, reconciliation, nostalgia – while never actually offering a firm foothold.

Tony Just

Over the past seven years, Tony Just has worked with shapes, drips and stains – a project inspired by Hans Fallada's novel "The Drinker" (1950), in which the protagonist undergoes an existential crisis, becomes an addict and ends his life by deliberately contracting tuberculosis. He does, however, find solace in his pain, describing his tears as "endless, bitter, and eventually comforting." In response to this description of weeping, Tony Just dripped wine over a notebook and painted the surrounding spaces. His practice later came to revolve around these contingent marks and residues, with large canvases transposing them in paint and pastels. In this way, he invites abstraction to transform into a possible image, a face, a suggested narrative. Deeply influenced by his own experiences of trauma and healing, Just's painterly surfaces are inscribed with a human tenderness. He often uses his palms to smear pigment directly onto the canvas, leaving impressions of skin and touch in the looming, shadowy forms.

Arthur Laidlaw

Arthur Laidlaw's images are densely layered, their surfaces thick with material, colour and entangled perspectives. His practice is concerned with the extant physicality of history, the residues that the past leaves on cities and their architecture, but his works are equally engaged with personal memory and its fallibility. Laidlaw's practice evolved profoundly after time spent drawing and photographing in the Middle East, months before the Arab Spring. Reflecting on this experience, he realised how personal identity had acted as a screen, a protective membrane which filtered his experiences through a mixture of naivety and hubris. He wondered how to reconcile his own shifting perspectives alongside contradicting representations in the media. Subsequently, doubt and distrust play a central role in these rich, kaleidoscopic compositions. Laidlaw often begins with sketches and photographs, later overlaying with paint, pencil, ink and gouache in order to obscure and undermine the 'truth' of his source images. Distinctions between surface and content are intentionally blurred, asking the viewer to determine what is real, what is imagined, what is lost, what remains.

Aura Rosenberg

Aura Rosenberg's Porn Rocks started as a practical joke. During a summer holiday in the late eighties, she pasted images torn from porn magazines onto rocks and placed them in a trout stream to prank a friend who went fishing there. This joke acted as the genesis for a decades-long analysis into erotic imagery and the body, in which Rosenberg installed the re-surfaced rocks in various locations, including art institutions and public places. Via their humorous origin story, the rocks satirise the scale and male bravado of Land Art, while also quite literally tearing up the male gaze which dominates pornography. In these carefully staged photographs, the rocks are further abstracted, appearing like slabs of roast beef, both ruddy and grey. But with close observation, the photographic details of mediated sex reveal themselves, and the whole array becomes an eerie memorial to bodies dismembered and desire displaced, finding uneasy delight in the grotesque.