



# Insane Park

## “I have no idea, because I have no idea” and “Joy of Painting”

In times of uncertainty, the human brain has a tendency to seek reprieve by deliberately detaching from reality. While exercise and entertainment have historically served as palliatives, the most engrossing diversion from today's postmodern malaise is the internet. Pseudonymous media artist Insane Park's double solo exhibition at Arario Gallery in Seoul was a timely endorsement of escapism for those seeking sanctuary from the global pandemic.

In the gallery's main space, “I have no idea, because I have no idea” encompassed an immersive media environment that bombarded viewers with audiovisual elements. Videos appearing on an array of outdated TV and computer monitors, as well as projected onto the walls and ceiling, overlapped and competed with each other within the darkened gallery, which itself served as an IRL proxy for the vast and fragmented nature of the world wide web.

Park's videos are primarily straightforward and reductive renderings of single motifs: either in the form of textual epithets—such as “In order to shine we have to burn,” which scrolls across a Windows 98 desktop—or digitally mediated activities, including gameplay on an early-generation version of Tetris. And yet, this lack of

pretense in expressing one-dimensional evocations of millennial ennui imbues these videos with a collective potency that transcends discrete logics of interpretation: their scattershot presentation demands passive, browsing-based engagement, devoid of intention or hierarchical preconceptions.

Of these works, the more compelling retain an experimental quality. In the three-channel video *20th Century Boy* (all works 2020), the artist appears to traverse three adjacent monitors, from a flickering black-and-white film format to a color-distorted analogue video to a pixelated digital clip. In *Barbie Girl*, the disembodied head of the humanoid AI robot Sophia sings a popular late-1990s Euro-dance hit premised upon role-playing as a children's doll. Such desires to breach alternate dimensions of time and space through the medium of video—and to transform oneself in the process—speak to Park's longstanding interest in dynamics of representation and perception within the framework of mass media.

These themes dovetailed with Park's second exhibition, “Joy of Painting,” which paid tribute to American landscape painter Bob Ross, whose TV show of the same name was a public television mainstay in the 1980s and '90s. Ross has since developed a cult following worldwide, largely due to the proliferation of online videos and memes that have introduced his new-age artistic attitude to younger generations. Presented in a separate gallery, some 13 canvases by Park depict Ross's signature saccharine landscapes, mounted in heavy gilded frames and cordoned off by velvet ropes. Such deliberately pretentious installation schematics asserted a confounding contrast to the populist aesthetic of

the paintings themselves: attempting to invest otherwise trivial compositions with the contextual trappings of “high art” appeared aspirational at best, evincing an attempt at value-by-association.

A video work accompanying the paintings on view appropriates footage from Ross's TV show, overdubbed with a Korean-language voiceover offering a sardonic step-by-step guide to becoming a successful Korean abstract artist. Rather than undertaking an idealized landscape in this fabricated episode, Ross appears to paint a canvas in the style of Lee Ufan, one of Korea's representative modern artists, whose characteristic minimal abstract paintings consist of vertical blue lines in single, uninterrupted brushstrokes.

Peppered with classic Bob Ross aphorisms (“You have to be happy when you paint, that's all that matters”) while explaining how to easily create artworks that sell for lots of money, the video's voiceover thematizes the polemics of creativity and commerce as coexisting pursuits. Here, Park sheds light on a dichotomy that so many contemporary artists struggle to reconcile, submitting a subversive critique of the art market and its subjective criteria for the socially determined value of art. Moreover, the narration amounts to an escapist soliloquy that activates desires for acceptance and validation from the contemporary art establishment through gratuitous imitation. Ultimately, Park's concurrent exhibitions revealed the futility of deriving succor in such strategies: whether through pixels or paint, role-playing and appropriation will always operate at an ontological remove from substantive discourse.

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INSANE PARK, *Barbie Girl*, 2020, still from single-channel video with sound: 3 min 54 sec. Courtesy the artist and Arario Gallery, Seoul/Cheonan/Shanghai.

