

HONG KONG

Jieun Park
at AP Contemporary

Art that features unusual juxtapositions of flickering cityscapes and thick calligraphic lines within bold positive and negative spaces speaks of an artist who is unafraid of risk. The works that make up Korean painter Jieun Park's recent exhibition entitled *Inner Journey* show something of the risks that she has taken and with which she has had fun. Collectively her art is also a striking example of someone reaching to articulate a fresh artistic vision as well as making enterprising use of calligraphy as a pictorial support. It is such things that immediately draw one into her tales and encourages one to linger over them. Given her choice of subject matter, however, most of her paintings are surprisingly small.

Park's individual narratives are dark and moody. They are built around various international cities imagined at night: among these, for example, are Prague, Hong Kong, and Paris, each a part of her *A Little Talk* series, all in Chinese ink and acrylic. Such places are magical to the enquiring mind and the artist, through her lively techniques, moves the viewer to think of these cities as places that are full of secrets. Such well-known cities are also places of convoluted histories and political, social, and cultural intrigue and this adds to our enjoyment of them.

Her expressionist paintings dance with pinpricks of light and subtle coloring, suggesting the hustle and bustle of life. Such works as *A Little Talk – HK*, *A Little Talk – Paris*, and *A Little Talk – Praba* are significantly enhanced through Park's bold, irregular geometry. The sense of intrigue she hints at is also heightened by the darkness into which each city is placed. The sense of magic is built up by the reality that each city is vaguely outlined and in the embrace of a cosmic darkness. While other paintings in her series have a flowing, lyrical calligraphic line to them *A Little Talk – HK* has a hard-edged calligraphy that seems to imprison the city rather than set it free as a vital, organic place in the universe.

Park is clearly both a traveler in spirit and by moonlight as well as a seer for she imagines each of her cities in unique dimensions of time and place. This adds to the attractiveness of her paintings for the places she imagines seem to be mysterious and impenetrable to the viewer. We think of the familiarity of their names—Paris, Prague, Hong Kong, and so on—and the sense of romance each one conjures up in the mind's eye but here before us are strangers. These glittering night cities, held in the embrace of dark cosmic lines, floating away into space, are somehow suddenly foreign to our knowledge.

Among the best examples of her art's strength are *A Little Talk – Paris* and *A Little*

Talk – Praba, which is of the best examples of her painterly techniques. The works speak not just to her soft, impressionistic imaginings but also to something of the fragility of the world and our smallness with the depth of our universe. For Park each city is a unique floating planet within the freedom of the cosmos. By living within these cities we are part of that freedom.

While there is a great feeling of freedom in her art, there is also a sense of foreboding, a sense of alienation in the darkness of the image trapped or in the swing of a black calligraphic line. The small, packed cities of her imaginings with their overwhelming architecture are nests of loneliness and sameness against which we must fight.

Ian Findlay

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Yin Xin at Connoisseur
Art Gallery

Among the generation of artists who emerged from China's art colleges in the 1980s, Yin Xin is one of the most singular. He has always been an artist who has followed his own path, making strikingly textured artworks filled with fine perceptions on humanity, personal anecdote, and social observations. These were just a few of the things that attracted me to his art when I first encountered it more than two decades ago in Hong

Kong and Taiwan. The quality and subtlety of his historical and social observations and narratives remain strong as is clear in paintings in his most recent exhibition *Once upon a Time in China*, the majority of which were made over the past couple of years.

Although he has lived and worked in Paris since the mid-1990s, Yin Xin (b.1959) is a thoroughly contemporary Chinese artist, even as he merges his unique set of literary and pictorial influences, among them the French Baroque painter George de la Tour (1593–1652) and, one suggests, the novelist and essayist Lu Xun (1881–1936).

Through his paintings he has always sought fresh voice in his examination of China's changing views of itself generally and to highlight the effect of history, specifically on individual mores. The odd prism through which East-West social, political, and cultural identities and attitudes were viewed throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th century was startlingly mannered in their human relationships and full of historical misunderstandings as well as remarkable feelings of cultural superiority. The 19th and early 20th-century political and cultural upheavals have been fecund periods for Yin Xin.

John Thomson (1837–1921), the 19th-century Scottish photographer of the Far East, and perhaps most famously, China, would recognize in Yin Xin an equally astute social observer. Lu Xun, too, who wrote the powerful tale *The True Story of Ab Q* (1921) would also see in the artist a kindred critical spirit. For Thomson, Lu, and Yin Xin the portrait has been one of the most effective ways of not only capturing the human moment in turbulent times, but also giving a face to cultural and historical tensions. One is aware of these in such works as *Opium Story*, *Pipa Music*, *Night Light*, and *Preparing Opium*, each of these paintings speaks directly to opium use, one of the most debilitating scourges



Above left: Jieun Park, *A Little Talk – Paris*, 2014, Chinese ink and acrylic on Korean paper, 65.1 x 90.9 cm. **Above right:** Jieun Park, *A Little Talk – Hong Kong*, Chinese ink and acrylic on paper, 91 x 91 cm. Images: Courtesy of the Artist and AP Contemporary.