



The Charitableness of the Subconscious

Oum Kultuv

Curator: Tamar Lev-On

Oum Kultuv's solo exhibition offers an overwhelming plethora of shapes, colors, experiences and physicality, but above all, it is an abundant manifestation of dedication and total commitment. "The survivalist ability to move, breathe, and live with an information overload," she shares, "developed into vivid colors and intricate details to create a world so inundated with content it becomes abstract."

Oum Kultuv (b. 1976) is a self-taught multidisciplinary artist, a unique presence in the local art scene. She was a prolific street artist, competed in design contests, participated in illustration and comics festivals, as well as design fairs, studied carpentry, and worked with at-risk youth, among other things. Over the decades, she has been working and experimenting with a wide range of mediums, including painting, digital drawing, papercutting, miniatures, poetry, performance, photography, and textiles. This exhibition features drawings and illustration works, which are a mere fraction of her extensive body of work.

Her work processes are meticulous. She usually draws every single element and fragment of her infinite compositions separately, scans it, digitally colors it, and then superimposes layers upon layers of the individual visible and hidden drawings. Through this Sisyphean practice, she compiles thousands of deconstructed components into immense, grotesque, and surreal worlds that are simultaneously delicate and refined. Oum Kultuv prints the digital image using various technologies on paper and stickers, which she continues to work by hand to create the final, one-of-a-kind artwork.

Standing in front of her works, one cannot help but think of Hieronymus Bosch's fantastical creatures, the aesthetics of street art, and Japanese manga. All these come together to create the sweeping feeling of an all-encompassing collage that draws viewers to linger and dwell on the details while also marveling at the whole. Every angle or viewpoint of the piece, from up close or further away, reveals a different scale within it – from the individual elements, through their juxtaposition one over the other and next to each other, and ending with the full image.

The wealth of details echoes the artist's Sisyphean work process, as she leads viewers through a range of emotional and physical experiences. "My intent in this exhibition is to immerse the viewer within the world and visual language I have created and to allow them to lose themselves inside it." The vibrant color palette often stands in contrast to the imagery; it creates an impression of childishness or cuteness, while the imagery itself is often distorted and disturbing. The profusion of detail also undermines the viewer's sense of orientation, as the work has no beginning and no end, and it is unclear whether it is the final product or a moment within the process. Only the fact that it is on display indicates that we are looking at the finished work.

The artist is synonymous with her work: She covered the clothes and ephemera in the exhibition in the prints' formal language, which has become her trademark. Anything that comes across her path has the potential to be marked and become Oum Kultuv's "merch," and when she walks down the street, she imagines passersby as "marked" and embellished with her shapes. The act of covering becomes an act of marking artistic territory.

Alongside her uncompromising totality, Oum Kultuv explores memory, or rather, the fear of losing one's memory. The scores of figures and shapes she creates and places in large plastic containers serve her like a catalogue of reality signifiers: figures, shapes, and colors. She remembers and catalogues them in her mind, she says, as if they have the power to hold reality and the environment for her, and at the same time, shield her from the pitfalls of the world.

The video featured in the exhibition was created recently, during the war with Iran, and it also enlists the forms and aesthetics to elicit the viewer's emotional empathy. The deliberate flickering and constant repetitions trigger a sense of urgency and fear, as well as a palpable frenzy: "The work is my internal dialogue as an artist who deals with PTSD and with a bottomless internal and external overload, like a river that wants to flow through concrete. I use the language of illustration to convey a message that contradicts the stylized line. You need to push through the stylistic smokescreens to get to the uneasiness and discomfort that I am aiming for."