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Painter Suh landscapes her memories

By Jean Oh

In artist Suh Yoon-hee's latest work, a mother and daughter wade hand in hand, framed by shards of darkness, towards an uncertain future.

"I put myself in a painting for the first time in this upcoming solo exhibition," said Suh, 39. "My daughter and I come out holding hands."

The mother, in her black swimsuit and big white hat, is Suh. And the little girl in white is her daughter. The work, with its crackled surface and dark vapors, hints at something ominous in the distance.

Suh started on this piece two months ago, "when I knew (my daughter) was going to Canada," she explained in an interview with The Korea Herald.

Just looking at this tall, willowy woman, with her long black hair and twisted gold earrings, one cannot imagine the pain she has endured recently. Suh was separated from her children three years ago, as a result of marital strife. And two months ago, it was decided that her children, her 15-year-old son and 12-year-old daughter, would move to Canada attend school there.

To overcome the pain of this separation, Suh started painting again, after 10 years of life as a housewife. And now, as she opens her second solo exhibition this week, she faces a new life, without her children.

But her paintings, on the whole, are anything but sad. They impart a sense of unfolding beauty. Children and adults raft and ski in a vast and shimmering aurora borealis. Fireflies dot the crinkled and misty terrain. The effect is ethereal and nostalgic.

"I healed myself through my



Suh Yoon-hee
The Korea Herald

work, and found joy in it," she explained. "I use things from my memories, of traveling or being with my children, and I put pieces of these memories in my works."

The joy that Suh felt as she painted people from her happiest moments is quite clear.

"The people in my paintings express my memories more clearly," she elaborated.

Suh's people are tiny little dots on a vast landscape. From afar, he works look like modern interpretations of traditional Asian landscape paintings, devoid of human life. But, up close, people holding umbrellas, students strolling, SUVs and rafts come into view.

"When I express myself, my people come out small naturally ... When I first started out, my people were one to two centimeters big."

While her extensive background in art — she has both a master's and a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Ewha Womans University in painting — may contribute to a tendency to create Asian-inspired landscape art, Suh also believes that the use of small figures on a vast terrain is a sign of the anxiety

she felt when she started to create on canvas again.



Artist Suh Yoon-hee walks with her daughter in "Memory Gap 0180 (2007)."

"When I first started again, I was very anxious." But now that she feels more confident, she paints her people two inches tall.

While humans form an integral part of her art, her textured backdrops give her work its magical qualities.

According to Suh, she starts by dyeing the canvas repeatedly over a period of three to four days. All her dyes are natural. At times, she uses tea; sometimes she uses Chinese herbal medi-

cines. And she uses bark from pine trees, as well as shells and other natural material to create the unusual patterns and textures which make her work so unique. Through this dying process, an unplanned terrain emerges.

"I am leaving all the traces of my life on this huge screen," said Suh, referring to the stains left by the dye on her canvases.

There is something quite moving about the way that the white canvas and the dye work to create a dynamic pattern. It's

as if the uncertain backdrop that her memories skate on transcends time and space.

"The word 'gap' from my painting series 'Memory Gap' means 'in between time and space,'" she said.

Suh has been creating these timeless works, which she titles "Memory Gap," for two years. The series typically features vast spaces of dyed canvas with small figures, to capture her memories in this medium.

"Even though the canvas is empty, I want it to express the

fullness of my memories," said Suh. But in fact her canvases are filled to the brim with color, patterns and people. They are an eloquent expression of herself.

Suh's exhibition opens on Thursday at the Brain Factory in Jongno-gu. It runs through Nov. 25. To get there, take Subway Line No. 3 to Gyeongbok Palace Station. The gallery is located across from the west side of Gyeongbok Palace. For more information, call 02) 725-9520.

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Garner gets mixed reviews for Broadway debut



Jennifer Garner
Reuters

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Actress Jennifer Garner has become the latest Hollywood star to debut on Broadway, receiving mixed reviews on Friday for performance role alongside Kevin Kline in a revival of "Cyrano de Bergerac."

Garner, married to actor director Ben Affleck, stars as Roxane, the love interest of Cyrano, played by Kline.

Cyrano pines for Roxane but fears she will not be interested because he has a large nose so instead pens love letters to her for the dim-witted, yet handsome Christian de Neuville (played by Daniel Sunjata), whom Roxane loves.

"The latest in a series of boldface film and television actresses to test their stage legs (including Julia Roberts and Claire Danes),