

Seun Kim/유신애 S  
고등어 Mackerel Safranski/김세은 Se  
gkoo Jeon/정이지 Yiji Jeo  
Next Painting: As We Are/2025.6.5.-7.20  
이은새 Eunsae Lee/전병구 Byung  
Sinae Yoo/

Kukje Gallery is pleased to present *Next Painting: As We Are*, a group exhibition of young painters at the gallery's K1 and K3 spaces from June 5 to July 20, 2025. *Next Painting: As We Are* aims to assess “painting after painting”—the “next painting” to come—through the work of six young artists from the millennial generation (born in the mid-1980s through the mid-1990s): Mackerel Safranski, Seun Kim, Sinae Yoo, Eunsae Lee, Byungkoo Jeon, and Yiji Jeong. As digital natives who naturally embody today’s media environment and have been shaped by digital technologies throughout their lives, the millennials keenly perceive and capture images that promote the speed and immersive intensity of contemporary life, while also engaging in unique ways with the materiality and historicity of painting, one of the oldest artistic mediums.

Focusing on how the artists intersect the qualities of images with the materiality of painting, the exhibition highlights the critical potential of painting in an age of visual excess. By offering points where the visual experience of artists who have grown up in the post-internet era collide and converge with painting as object and material, it underscores the enduring role of the medium in evoking visual and sensory experience of images today. Ultimately, the exhibition proposes that the “next painting” to come will counter the acceleration of digital images, persistently championing the value of material reality and the sensory experience of slowness.

As per Hal Foster’s remark that “[t]oday, many images neither document the world nor derealize it,”<sup>1</sup> today’s images are more geared towards effects that solicit optical attraction than remaining faithful to the real. This flood of viral, often manipulated images reconstructs reality through algorithms and user feedback. In other words, reality is edited and transformed via a secondary protocol of aesthetic and consumer economies. Likewise, the phenomenon in which images predominate, becoming a platform that preemptively constructs reality, inevitably collides with the innate temporality and materiality of painting.

The exhibition illuminates how the tension that arises between these two poles is reflected in the works of contemporary young artists. The six participating artists share a common interest in materiality and temporality

embodied in painting. While digital images often serve as the starting point of their work as well as an object of reflection, the relatively slow pace of painting’s linear temporality captures its material accumulation—something that cannot be replaced by any other medium.

For these artists, the focus is on the opposition between the virtuality and materiality of an image. The excess of images produced by technology has fundamentally disrupted the methods of production, distribution, and consumption of art. Having grown up with the experience of traversing the real and the unreal, digital natives have a contested relationship with virtuality and materiality, where they are exposed constantly to an influx of online and offline images whose terms continuously shift. Here virtuality and materiality both contradict and reference each other. The meaning of the virtuality of the image is not limited to its liberation from material constraints; it can also refer to its disguise, as though it were itself material. In this framework, virtuality is a property of materiality.<sup>2</sup> The overlap between the virtual and the material is key to understanding the paintings of the millennial generation. While the millennials’ paintings are strongly influenced by digital images, the final result presented to us continue to be physical objects and forms. While contemporary images can take any source as a reference point—thereby flexibly moving from one image to another—painting remains a unique practice due to its material constraints.

It is under these complex conditions surrounding the image that painting seeks to recover the depth of reality as experienced through the body—by bringing virtual images from the network back into the dimension of time and materiality. While the digital platforms that preemptively design reality are dominant, thus becoming a challenge for contemporary painting, they can be resisted by the slowness of painting. What kind of material basis and temporal meaning will an image acquire? The “next painting” should actively frame this question.

<sup>1</sup> Hal Foster, *What Comes After Farce?: Art and Criticism at a Time of Debacle* (London: Verso, 2020), 148.

<sup>2</sup> Damin Yee, “Do Games Dream of Immateriality?,” in *Game Society*, eds. Jang Raejoo and Hong Leeji (Seoul: National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, 2023), 180-189.