

*In recognition of change, of Yellow, through the practice of Jungwon Jay Hur*  
words by Lu Rose Cunningham

Noting a texture of 'now' and sheer drapes, a presence. Almost tangible. Locating memories of a figure through a window in hazy afternoon light. Or atop highland heath dressed in gorse. Perhaps, a figure in celandine meadowland, fingers brushing wildflower tops that sway to a breeze. Feeling this through the lens of a canvas. Brushstroke petals across a plane - these are in my retina. Or maybe in her dream. Or maybe through his film roll. Locating Derek Jarman's 1971 *Journey To Avebury*, a landscape film saturated in gold that maps the Neolithic stone circle at Avebury. Eye to mind to camera. Riverside encounters to pagan sacredness, the soul/the water/the breath between us sojourning between good and evil. Like *Journey To Avebury*, Jungwon Jay Hur's work (from here I call her Jay, as we do so in friendship) wryly cuts a journeying down into segments, to the point where the perception of the journey recalls a type of dream where fragments are perceivable but the overall picture is not. Allusive; I like this, the appeal in not fully understanding the entirety.

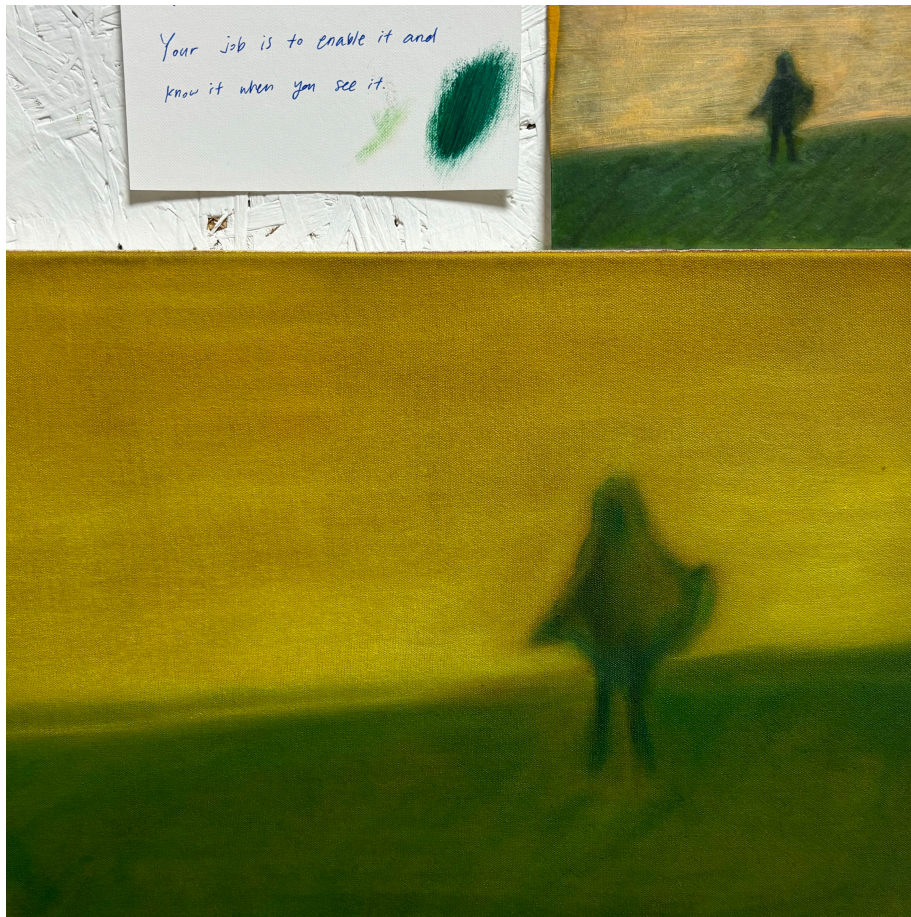


Above: looking at stills of Derek Jarman's 1971 *Journey To Avebury*, from a studio visit with Jungwon Jay Hur, London, 2024

In the night, she pictures the air gauzy like melted butter. The colour of August, of hair kissed by daytime, gradating tonally. A shadow of yellow arising when mixed with violet - street lamp pouring inside during early hours - something surreal at play. Your lover looks

longingly in your night-flooded bedroom, filtering in such lead tin yellow. Their hair and eyes and teeth are cut-outs of energy in your gaze/hands/pulse, writing feeling with light. You want to capture and develop this scene. To capture, she dreams and opts to develop this radiance in paint. Understanding the aches and sorrow, the dawns and dusk, the joys and elevation through such shade, its quiet ambiguity. Sickly to salubrious, yellow as a labile vessel. A Piero vignette in a gold gilded frame, the allure of it through the gallery drawing you closer. Maybe too much. An uneasy relationship with gold frames for their finery, questioning how this material reached these British shores. Nauseating, lethargic. Like Jay, I have always felt a quiet aversion as to where I sit with such bleaching or selfishly sumptuous shades.

In her studio, a canvas of green flooring with burnished yellow above, *Untitled; study of dream sequence*. I move towards it like a moth to light-flooded stain glass, paint's resinous allure. I'm reminded of Emma's yellow trainers in Glasgow, a statement in constant motion, a flash of intrigue; reminded of the gold door near Denmark Hill Station, meandering to a Pantone strip in Eva's kitchen, a spectrum of rays. A deep yellow shard - ceramic or egg - and a single yolk splash across the wall. A primary colour, understated but intense, unforgettable.



Above: Jungwon Jay Hur, *Untitled; study of dream sequence*, 2024

She wanted to hold her language, to own and sculpt it, so she chose yellow.

She talks about yellow, but this time with less unease, an almost affection to the colour, her visual voice evolving to ochre, to brown to green, a texturally peppered landscape falling away beneath my gaze. There is so much richness and joyous moments in these folded tones, over and over, light to shadow. Revealing and concealing through one strip of paint.

A line of feathers across the studio wall. Autocorrect shifts *line* to *lune*, fittingly - Jay's work conjuring a lull or lullaby as though we are addressing the works by moonlight, a gentle wavering between waking and sleep state. A navigating across realms and continuums. Above the feathers, an image of the late Agnes Varda looks out into the room, icon-like with her own light exuding, her profile set against a cerulean blue backdrop. There is something saintly about her and I wonder whether Jay's practice, infused with what feels like ritualism or spiritually guided acts of making, takes inspiration from Varda, her close attention to slowing down and being attentive to the details of the world. To listening, speaking and responding to the array of characters, languages, histories and local lores of the places passed through and lived. Daily encounters brought to the fore and interrogated, explored and celebrated, into the fabric of things. Threads are spun between Jay and Agnes, their compulsion towards birds, of capturing the essence of a place, a moment in time. Gleaning if you will, the shades and subtle geographic and almost mythic shifts across zones traversed. I search for more passerine imagery - a small bird drawn on paper is lightly taped to the wall, as though paused, to lift off once more. Light and yellowed pigment of the sun on a birds wing - I note the repeated motif of birds across Jay's work - another commonality between us, a draw to winged creatures, to a propulsion to forward into feelings and patterns.

Looking closer at the hand-drawn depiction, this tender exploration of painting fractures somewhat, altering now to migration. I'm thinking of starlings and their generational memory, carrying memories in their flight patterns of what they have seen/heard/learnt and felt, reassembling mid-air in response to places of nesting and populated sites of trauma. Of safety and insecurity, of hopeful collectivism and change - emotional, physical, and psychogeographic -, notions that Jay's works broach with sensitivity and quiet assurance. Such feelings are conveyed through a mature demand of the paintbrush and constant navigating of the canvas as a plane to paint on and cover with new landscapes as well as an open expanse to find one's place within. This maturity continues, through her devising of expansive compositions sat between portraiture and landscape, in which the viewer at once observes other figures situated in dynamic vistas, whilst also gazing out as though they are their own protagonist in Jay's dreamscapes. I note this in particular in the work *Oi Toli (oh far)* - centred around a figure on a grassy sea cliff - named after the folk band Merope's song of the same name, Jay capturing the atmosphere of the song, imagery coming forth spiritedly into a newly imagined landscape. Like the song, the painting grows gossamer-fine, but swirls with emotional heft, delicate as it is deep. Across her practice also is a deeply intentional palette of tones, that build-up or strip back textures and forms, alluding to a pulsing rhythm like that of living - a tangible depth as though standing bare-foot on a grassy mound, to a more shadowy, lessening grip, as though falling away into sleep murmurings.

The mind lurches back to yellow. Yellow as sourness, as demarcation, as bitter feeling. Jaundice, car sickness, a drift of psychosis à la Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*. The *to-let* sign, one among many in this wildfire of housing turmoil. As the *danger, cables overhead* warning. The lines you can't park over without risk of fine. Amber lights flashing. Crossings - traffic, picket, waters. To persist or (be) let go. Yellow is a combination of red and green light, stopping to forwarding. The yellow against pitch of



windows in Dungeness, recreated in my East London garden - our shed as an ode to Prospect. The choice of yellow on black not so warmly received at first - brash, gaudy, glaring. An alarm in the dark. Housemates now address it fondly, warmth exuding from charcoal depths. It's striking how light and a wash of a colour can change an image, an object, a perception. How it traces feeling - individual or collective - pointing out how we might share in objection and approval.



Above: Jungwon Jay Hur's paints in the studio, London, 2024

I have been thinking a lot about colour lately. The word colour increasingly in my mind's jargon, the neighbourhood jargon, the world's. The language of the news and the people inside it. I burn white in the sun. Whiteness as a potential open flame. My mother tans olive. Jay has hands that remind me of a warm heart and morning hellos. They beckon me to hold them, to reach out. Not everyone sees colour the same - recognising this again and again.

She dreams of gamboge firmament. Looking back down from Jay's sky, tonight I am carried in a sea of canary at Walthamstow's counter protest. The colour of amnesty. Light as souls rising up in times of crisis. In a time of such uncertainty, the process of conjuring new worlds to dwell in, to find comfort in and rest with, feels both a personal ritual of self-reflection and soothing, and a prayer for those lost and seeking shelter, physically and emotionally. A landscape of solace and refuge, an attempt to locate oneself in today's ongoing tumults. Wheat fields in late summer. Flax to saffron, a feeling shared in Philip Guston's 1951 *Ochre Painting 1* - the amber promise of nourishment - before literally



yellowing to citrine before paling green-blue as cold sets in, or when rain doesn't come, too much cadmium sun against it. Such hues unfold as the outcome of labourers working the land, of our impact on rain-cycles/world-cycles/life-cycles, of time and health impacting upon us. Working a land akin to working a canvas, or creating a plate for print-making; the motions of stretching, grooving, demarcating, applying, reapplying, critiquing, in every inhale to exhale. Repetition, the art of creating or of prayer.

Upright sheafs in a field that present themselves from the car window as horizontal. Sky to ground, a wash of golden linseed. A girl/an angel/a gentle reminder stood greeting the air as the river runs, a plane scanning right to left. Speaking to her piece *The Wanderer* (2024), Jay expresses how,

*it's just like encountering or attempting to summon an old memory from your mind. And this, this ghostly figure whose body is so transparent may be the one who's looking for that lost memory or the memory itself that got long-lost, standing alone above all the mist.*

A cluster of trees in one of her latest smaller paintings, christened *Growing Lives; awkward trees*. Saplings in Burgess Park transmuting as ghostly white flames, vertical to an expanse of burgundy. Another of the hand-sized canvases, *Light Holding Webs*, presents a yellow to burnt umber backdrop with sun-rays alighting on a spanning spiderweb, holding the sun as though solidifying heat in its silken net, as though fingers fearful of letting such celestial warmth slip. Jay's practice speaks to John Berger's idea of 'home' - that it exists in the crossing point of two lines, one vertical and one horizontal. An attempt to find a centre, a place to reside, to come to terms with, face truths. Questioning through layers of light how to visualise a weight, *the weight* - of things, our words, the soul. Reconciliation, celebration, grieving, catharsis. Seeking these moments of heart to heart engagement, the accumulation or deduction of daubs to imply object or apparition, presence or traces of what once was. To be seen, heard, understood in some capacity, to recount or propel new narratives; one's own honesty - an unveiling of interiority - in such painted stories, echoing and enveloping the lives of others as well, to tend to the need of connection.

Thinking around connectivity, Jay tells how the whole process of making for her is a meeting point of intensive labour, time, and different materials that then become an 'alchemy.' She shares how Karin Mamma Andersson said, *know your history*. We consider memory in painting and in the process of painting where one re-constructs a memory. Jay notes,

*I've always found it difficult to draw something out of memories or to construct the world out of them because of the fear of tapping into the realm of past and the vulnerability coming from it. Though I must admit that we create things and paint things from memories. From what we know, right? From what we remember, from what we felt - to recollect and and visualise how the seat of a chair upholstered in Burnt Umber velvet changes its colour into light Terre Verde when brushed, how the tactility cobalt blue velvet floor at a Buddhist temple made me feel so nauseous and disgusted... Why do I reject or blind my eyes towards the things that are already within me, whether they are memories of darkness or brightness?*

As Amy Sillman frames it, *to hold colour*.<sup>1</sup> Becoming part of the materials, the shapes, the yellow - to ponder and unfold the experience of diaspora as a female Asian artist in the

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<sup>1</sup> Amy Sillman, *On Colour*, essay from *Painting beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-Medium Condition*, eds. Isabelle Gran and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth (Sternberg Press, 2016)

UK, and re-explore her native Korean culture she had overlooked in the past, building a new cultural and personal connection through painting. In another note Jay shares,

*I've always found it difficult to come to peace with yellow ochre paint - it felt too close to me, too close to my own skin and images and words and enigma and dogma associated to the colour yellow. Every time I use it as part of my palette I felt physically uneasy - especially for the 'Zorn palette', which has partly helped me repel this unsettling sensation and understand its shade. This strange gut reaction was the sense of fear, rejection and distance. I had socially learnt to be shameful and disguise the very colour I wear and was hiding from it until I saw the series of ochre painting by Guston in a book. It wasn't even close to its life size but I felt as though this painting grabbed me by my head and force me to look at the colour as it is, the purity of colour and its beauty and harmony and light it holds.*

Yellow - harshly, a colour of slurs for Asian communities, a colour of condemning, of difficulty - becomes a part of her, not avoided but acknowledged and held, with a newfound sense of urgency. She forwards as a multidisciplinary artist from Seoul wishing to dwell, to operate, to politicise and be. Jay's paintings, and by extension herself, lead towards the unknown, beyond the border of their canvas frame.

*In the midst of global wars, I think of every Palestinians' road towards home, humanity's road towards the unknown, new world. A painting knows its faith and is always ahead of my own consciousness.*

Derek wrote how, *Naples yellow, lead antimonate, varies in colour from pale to golden yellow. The yellow of Babylon. It is called giallorino. It lasts forever, and is manufactured from a mineral found in volcanoes.*<sup>2</sup> It arrives with pulsing heat, with persistence, with willingness to keep going, with kinship. *The nimbus of the saints, haloes and auras. Of hope.*

She wanted to hold her language, to own and sculpt it, so she chose to welcome yellow.

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<sup>2</sup> Derek Jarman, *The Perils of Yellow* from *Chroma: A Book of Colour* (Vintage Publishing, 1995)