



EVERYBODY KNOWS
THIS IS NOWHERE
SOL NAMGUNG
OCT 09 - NOV 28
2026

INTERVIEW

Dear Sol, your second solo show at FWR Galerie is titled *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere*. This is also the title of a painting in the exhibition, a medium-format work defined by triangular forms in dark shades of blue arranged in a circle. They could be the silhouettes of trees or mountains. At its centre, a kind of clearing glows in a magical transition from yellow to orange to rosé. The title references Neil Young's best-known album (1969). To what extent is music an inspiration for this painting and for your work in the studio?

SOL NAMGUNG: I mostly listen to music without lyrics, such as ambient, cinematic music and classical music, to create an atmosphere for a painting and in the studio.



Then I begin a painting with a colour that matches the mood, without any reference image. For days, for weeks, I look at the

painting and fill it step by step. Sometimes I paint quickly, sometimes slowly and loosely. The painting that gives the exhibition its title stood in a corner of the studio for a long time. One evening I listened to Neil Young's album *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere* on my partner's record player. As I listened to the song of the same name, the "lost" painting came to mind, and suddenly I had a title for it. In the same way, my paintings are not depictions of a specific place, but a space where landscapes I have seen create a new one. A place that exists, yet isn't really there. The song title, so to speak, "knocked on my door". And so, sometimes a word, a sentence or, indeed, a song title turns into a painting.

Standing in front of your paintings, one begins to dream. What at first glance presents itself as a landscape – a lake here, trees and bushes there, further on sky, sun and moon – appears unreal on a second look. Sky and sea mirror each other in the same blue, or sun and crescent moon appear at the same time against a carmine-red ground, while a pearl-like band slides in front of the horizon. Where do you draw your landscape impressions from? And how do the surreal moments in your pictorial world come about?

I often take the landscapes I like to look at as motifs. In my hometown of Chuncheon in Korea, I can see the mountains from the window. Wherever I walk, the mountains are all around me, while the city is full of buildings, cars, streets and people. Here, nature acts like an empty space. And so, away from the bustle of the city, my gaze can rest on the mountains, the trees, the sea and the sky. On my travels, too, I seek the stillness of the landscape, far from the noise. I often take photos of sections of the sky, of panoramas. Again and again I find new, unusual perspectives, and through them I learn the dynamics of lines, new colours and forms. Images from the day, images at night – I collect all kinds, and from these afterimages a new kind of landscape emerges. Perhaps that is where the surreal, otherworldly impression comes from.

Your application of paint is distinctive. You apply the oil paint directly onto the bare canvas, in a single touch. It is as if your painting “breathes”. Might your craft and the resulting aesthetic have connections to Korean painting – or to film or fashion?

In the past, I knew nothing about Korean painting. Only after visiting art museums in the USA and Germany and experiencing Western art did I discover my own taste. After that, I often visited exhibitions of old and modern Korean painting in Korea in order to look at the art of my origins from new perspectives. The materials of traditional Korean painting are water, muk (ink) and Korean paper. Each brushstroke is decided in a single movement. The areas that are not painted remain empty and dry. The emptiness is an essential part of the composition, because it lets the painting breathe. It is a decisive kind of painting that is emptied and thereby filled. By looking at such works, I came to understand filling and emptying, and the charm of a painting's dry surface. Since then I have been in love with the modern painting of Lee Ufan, Yun Hyong-keun and Yoo Young-kuk. It is quiet, dramatic, simple and full of pathos. I, too, want to paint pictures that let the essential speak.

Your compositions oscillate between figuration and abstraction. The reason for this ambiguity is your strikingly minimalist formal language. Visual blurring dissolves the boundaries between foreground and background, and between colour and motif. Everything in the picture seems detached from space and time. Do you follow a predetermined concept when composing a painting – are there preliminary studies? Or do you let yourself be guided by an intuitive process?

My most recent travel destination often becomes the motif for a new series of works. It can be mountains, the sea, a garden, a recent sunrise, or just a hedge or a single bird in the sky that has recently left an impression on me. I paint without sketches or

drawings as a reference. For me, painting is not a task in which I follow fixed rules; rather, I allow myself time for free expression. While painting, I process the landscape I have experienced internally. Sometimes a painting takes two days, sometimes half a year. Each painting has its own pace. In the course of the process, the actual motif can disappear into the colour, the boundary between foreground and background can become blurred, and in this way a new space-time continuum emerges on the canvas. Through this slow and steady process, I finally see how my painting shapes the image.

Your painting feels truthful and deeply moving. Your recurring motif of the “wave” reminded me of a passage by the Korean writer Han Kang: “(...) From a distance, the sea seems to move rather evenly, and the crests of the waves recall the scales of countless fish. Myriad glittering particles, constantly rolled back and forth – yet nothing is infinite.” In these words, quiet poetry is paired with melancholy, telling of the resilience of human existence. Which personal feelings flow into your painting? And what observations do you make about the condition of people today?

I am happy and yet worried. Unhappy and cheerful at the same time. Suffering and hope exist side by side. I think there is no absolute state. Only the in-between. Joy and sorrow both pass. In this blurriness, I nevertheless try not to be pessimistic. I create small wishes and first successes for myself. I turn my gaze here and there and keep getting to know the world. For me, painting is a reflection of thoughts that cannot be put into words. It is my way of finding meaning in the sunrise and in the endless waves, and of following what moves me. Nowadays there is a tendency to pursue something ultimate and absolute. In this either-or phenomenon, I see above all what divides us. I, on the other hand, try not to forget that in everything there is always another side, or something in between, hidden and waiting to be discovered.