

From Current Issue

[EDITOR'S LETTER](#) Shape-shifting

[REVIEW](#) Ben Sakoguchi

[REVIEW](#) 13th Shanghai Biennale: "Bodies of Water"

[ONE ON ONE](#) Trevor Shimizu on Dan Graham

[THE POINT](#) Mobility, Racialized

[PROFILE](#) Aki Inomata

[FEATURE](#) Evelyn Taocheng Wang

[Table of Contents](#)

[Web Exclusives](#)

[Archive](#)

[Subscribe](#)



Installation view of **HILARIE HON's** "Yesterday Brightness," at Gallery Exit, Hong Kong, 2020. All images courtesy the artist and Gallery Exit.

P
R
E
V

N
E
X
T



THE SORROWS OF EMOTIONAL DETACHMENT: HILARIE HON'S "YESTERDAY BRIGHTNESS"

WEB REVIEW BY RUBY FUNG
GALLERY EXIT

HONG KONG



While Hilarie Hon's solo show "Yesterday Brightness" (2020) continued the apocalypse theme seen in her 2018 exhibition "The Daily Disappearance of the Sun," also mounted at Hong Kong's Gallery Exit, the recent display presented a more meditative perspective on doomsday. The 20 featured works from 2019–20 not only imagine a Kafkaesque world: Hon dissects emotional detachment as a coping mechanism for the existential threats that we face and extends that disconnect to the spectatorial space as an invitation for audiences to rethink how we view and interact with our surroundings.



HILARIE HON, *Sparkly Waters, Blurry Eyes 06*, 2019–20, acrylic and oil on canvas, 240 × 400 cm.

Upon entering the gallery, I was immediately drawn to the four-meter-wide composite painting *Sparkly Waters, Blurry Eyes* (2019–20). The arrangement of the 11 canvases illustrate an emotional disconnect with nature. The middle column comprises a central panel depicting a saturated orange sunset and two renderings of bird-filled blue skies. Contrasting this beauty are scenes of destruction. On the left and right of the centerpiece are paintings of a man sitting in a canoe. Above him, in separate compositions, disasters are unfolding: a house and grassland are aflame. Yet he remains nonchalant; his back is slumped and his blank face is turned toward viewers, away from the catastrophe. A different reaction to environmental pollution is found in the two corner panels, which each feature a bird on a flight path toward the heart of a firework explosion. Apathetic and suicidal, the men and birds respond to the destruction of their habitats in a manner subverting our expectations. Through this situational irony facilitated by the arrangement of the paintings, *Sparkly Waters, Blurry Eyes* conveys a searing message: the devastation of nature itself is not the ultimate nightmare; it is our indifference that seals our doom.



HILARIE HON, *Blurry Eyes*, 2020, acrylic and oil on canvas, 20 × 25 cm.

Hon does not stop at a meditation on the dynamics between humans and nature; she utilizes pictorial and non-pictorial conceits to call for viewers to reflect on our relationships with what we see. Adjacent to *Sparkly Waters, Blurry Eyes* was *Blurry Eyes* (2020), which features a pair of binoculars pointed outward at visitors. With the painting reflecting audience's gazes, we are reminded of our passive positions as viewers. Works that provoked self-awareness in viewers were placed throughout the gallery. *Detached Scenery* (2020) features a figure who stares out at audiences from behind a window. The prominent window frame demarcates the pictorial and spectatorial space, with the man's gaze augmenting the tension of this spatial separation. In this way, Hon alludes to the gap that we wedge between ourselves and reality. A foil to this mode of seeing, *Sparkly Waters, Blurry Eyes II* (2019–20) was situated in a corner deeper in the gallery. A green couch invites viewers to sit down and slowly appreciate a tablet-size painting of a sunset, held in an open, standing wood box. The sustainment of the beauty of this work requires the viewer's active participation. By placing the painting behind foldable panels, Hon also materializes the window frames in her other exhibited works, and thus blurs the boundaries between the pictorial realm and reality.



Installation view of **HILARIE HON's** (left) *Grass Stain*, 2019–20, acrylic and oil on canvas, 70 × 70 cm; and (right) *Sparkly Waters, Blurry Eyes II*, 2019–20, acrylic and oil on canvas, plywood box, 97 × 46 × 20 cm, at "Yesterday Brightness," Gallery Exit, Hong Kong, 2020.

In an era where passive viewing is propagated by the prevalent use of social media, Hon's show urges us to reexamine how we interact with our surroundings. The exhibition title "Yesterday Brightness," which suggests the inevitable fading of hope, expresses the artist's anxieties about the dire effects of severing our emotional ties with the world, however abysmal it might appear. In hopes of reversing this modern way of viewing, Hon augments our perception of our connections with our environments through her vivid, apocalyptic works, jostling us into enduring engagements with what is in front of our eyes.

Ruby Fung is an editorial intern of ArtAsiaPacific.

Hilarie Hon's "Yesterday Brightness" was on view at Gallery Exit, Hong Kong, from October 17 to November 28, 2020.

To read more of ArtAsiaPacific's articles, visit our [Digital Library](#).

ARTS AN | FINE
藝 倡 畫 廊 | ARTS

▼ Tools



Contact Us
Subscribe
Advertise

Twitter
Facebook
RSS

Search

© 2021 ArtAsiaPacific
Credits
Log In

ArtAsiaPacific
GPO Box 10084
Hong Kong

info@aapmag.com