VISUAL ARTS & ARCHITECTURE: A colorful utopia melding cultures

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REVIEW

Jiha Moon’s ‘Dear Social Climber’

Jiha Moon: "No Peach Heaven: MuRungDowan"
Through Feb. 16. 11 a.m.- 6 p.m. Saturdays and by appointment.
Prices: $1,600-$20,000. Saltworks Gallery, 635 Angier Ave., Atlanta.
404-876-8000; www.saltworksgallery.com.

Bottom line: This latest chapter in a growing body of work affirms Moon's gift for clever and beautiful abstractions.

In 11 new paintings on view at Saltworks Gallery, Jiha Moon demonstrates her particular penchant for joyful and quirky compositions merging traditional Asian motifs with American pop culture.

Moon's recent works in "No Peach Heaven" build on the artist's growing repertoire of elegant images with a very personal flavor. Taking inspiration from a Shangri-La legend, the South Korea-born painter reinterprets the story of MuRungDowan, a fisherman who follows a path of peach blossoms that leads him through a cave, into paradise —- a paradise that, once departed, cannot be found again.

On handmade rice papers, delicate ink combines with expressionistic acrylic brushwork to re-create the imaginary landscapes of MuRungDowan's elusive utopia.

In "Peach Cliff Zigzag," a collision of vibrant fuchsia, violet and teal hues tumbles through a large vertical plane in an exquisite and floral fantasy. In smaller format, "Dear Social Climber" shows off a pheasant couched in a sophisticated painting of lacy lashings and floating formations of rock and cloud, executed in brilliant jewel tones. "Rhetoric Channel" illustrates Moon's delight in referencing cultural twists and turns: The Atlanta-based artist wryly populates a particularly animistic work with lush, ripe peaches as well as fluttering Microsoft logo butterflies and saturated fragments of rainbow.

Moon anchors selected images within a gently elongated fan shape, teasing our perception of foreground and background. She allows patterns to spill over the edges of these suggested boundaries; we make of them varied metaphors —- a sort of looking glass through which to journey, a variation on the fabled cave, or perhaps the impossibility of cultural isolation.

Contained within the fans' borders, Moon's signature elements are everywhere —- unabashed color, rhythmic tendrils, cartoonlike creatures embedded inside the intricate patterning —- all rendered with a confident hand and ethereal sensibility.

Moon's latest are playful, delicious and nuanced allusions to the global nature of contemporary culture and, very much, a little slice of "Peach Heaven."