

Rest If You Must

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By now, it is apparent that Yeo Kaa has fully switched gears in her artistic practice and currently produces a body of works that represents a new moment in an artist's trajectory. Deviating from distressful themes, social taboos, and macabre imagery often spiced with dark humor and irony, she now dwells on a more empowering tenor in her pieces with bold declarations of positivity and upliftment – from cultivating one's inner strength, to recognizing affirmation from others, to celebrating the small things that help us keep going in life. This significant shift is not just a whim or sudden swing in temperament but rooted in deeper changes that occurred in the artist's perspectives and experiences recently, perhaps catalyzed by the challenges that confronted society in the past few years such as physical isolation and prolonged detachment from the outside world. It is the development of her own character that reveals itself in art.

This exhibition continues to express the artist's newfound outlook – not with the stance of moving forward but its opposite. Centered on the idea of taking a break or rest, the collection of works stresses the necessity of a pause or downtime, a temporary stop from pursuing a course to ultimately accomplish the desired goal. This interval takes numerous forms in human life as well as in the natural world: taking a leave from work, a gap year from study, a sojourn on a trip, a quick rest between exercise routines.

Though passive or leisurely, these moments allow us to rethink and reflect, to recuperate and regain vigor. To flesh out this rumination, the artist draws from a popular choice for recreational activity in her country. Coming from a nation of islands in the tropics, rest and recreation often meant traveling to a seaside destination and dipping into its refreshing waters. Like many others back home, her holidays are filled with fond memories of having fun and relaxing on a beach or pool. She revisits such experiences by gathering images that recreate her familiar environment for leisure: gentle and graceful waves, people swimming, a raft, and inflatables. Some figures cast on suspended cloth capture the flexing movements of a swimmer's body, and at the same time reminiscent of banners that sway amid a breezy atmosphere. These images as well as their material can be expanded to other symbolic meanings that still resonate with the overarching themes on which the entire exhibition is hinged. While the pillows and blankets suggest bedtime, the raft and the act of swimming may recall navigating a perilous journey and the effort to stay afloat and overcome challenges. The paintings are also noticeably executed in a lighter tone than the artist's usual saturated palette, allowing the compositions to be visually soothing to complement the exploration of relaxation.

It is human nature to take a rest, and it is a testament to the limits of our physical capacity. A time off is a vital need that even the most efficient machines require. In this exhibition, Yeo Kaa proceeds to celebrate the strong individual – by acknowledging its weakness and vulnerability.