



Since my diagnosis I have explored my experience of pain and illness, both its physical and psychological dimensions, in a number of art works. *My Tree Lives Here* (2008) is a small-scale self-portrait oil painting that primarily shows the psychological experience.

The initial process of making this work, as most of my other paintings, involved methodical preparation. I started by making a three-dimensional shadowbox, or open display case, not too different from Joseph Cornell's miniature boxes. In the small box I carefully placed a few hand-made objects and miniature items arranged to create a diorama. Photographs of myself in various poses along with a separate photo of the diorama were then superimposed on a computer. Once the right combination of the figure and the background was chosen, the process of painting the image began. The final painted image is an intricate rendition of the scene. The small box set-up, miniature hand-made items, nostalgic dollhouse furniture, and the choice of outfit and pose, all point towards one's intimate private domain. My works are similar to Cornell's miniature dioramas in that they symbolically represent unexplained poetic narratives, nostalgic dreams and abstract ideas through juxtaposition of common objects; yet my paintings differ in the specificity of their psychological narratives which are created within the realm of inhabited domestic settings. My paintings communicate my own personal psychodrama within the enclosed domestic space.

In *My Tree Lives Here* the figure near the centre is wearing a traditional Korean petticoat. A woman in her petticoat in public is considered absolutely taboo in Korea as the utmost private moment is exposed. The hunched and kneeling pose chosen for this painting, together with the holding of the red ribbon close to my face, gives an impression of mourning or being tormented by an inner affliction. The tree next to me stands as though it has lost its vitality. The branches of the tree look like the stump ends of amputated limbs, with the red ribbon wrapped around the tree like a loose bandage. The room itself is suggestive of one's internal body or organs. Whilst the painting in most ways follows a realistic style, the wallpaper destabilises the viewers'

comfortable expectations. A realistic painting in general gives *unchallenging* proportions, depicting all objects on the two dimensional surface in a way that contributes towards the illusion of a believable three dimensional subject. The wallpaper here is a metaphor for a living organism - it rebels against the rule of the realistic painting by travelling across the walls and selectively overwriting the objects inside the room, indifferent to the visual flow of the rest of the painting. It symbolises the rogue actions of a living organism or disease, upsetting the flow of the visceral process, and reflects the behavioural pattern of my own chronic illness. As it travels, slowly yet surely engulfing the walls and objects in the room, it extends its web over everything near it; so too my misbehaving cells spread, establishing adhesions that result in painful obstructions to the functions of my organs.

- Written by Eugenie Lee