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Roots, Realms and Reveries | 22 May - 5 July 2025

Woo Jin Joo & Molly Burrows

PRESS RELEASE

PROLOGUE

Taking the format of stage annotations, these notes take the viewer through the journey of the exhibition narrative set across two floors. It is set in three acts, akin to a play.

ACT ONE

Scene: Ground floor gallery

The soundscape of a sewing machine whirring fills the gallery room.

A vertical diptych interrupts the passageway in the gallery space and a wood-carved room divider sits centre stage. The linking of these two works as one unfolding narrative signals the journey to come. A mirror and brush sit atop the side table at the feet of the room divider. Three ceramic tiles depicting *The Story of Comfortable Characters* hang on the brick wall, nearest the window and loading doors.

The whirring sounds melds into gentle staccato notes played on traditional and classical East Asian percussion instruments.

Oneiric Vessel, 2025

The room divider is both sculpture and portal, inviting viewers into an altered state of seeing whilst remaining a holding space for the story that unfolds. Confronted initially with its inner face, soft tones of magnolia and butterscotch reveal the silhouette of a butterfly, a quiet nod to the Taoist parable of Chuang Tzu's Butterfly Dream. Is it the man dreaming he is a butterfly—or the butterfly dreaming he is a man? Reality shifts, dream and wakefulness blur, and transformation hovers in the air. Walk around to view its outer face. Rendered in deep navy and shadowy blacks, evokes the outline of a tree—or is it a figure? *Pu* (朴): uncut wood, raw and unshaped, symbolising the latent potential and innate nature of being. Together, these two sides are in constant conversation, transforming into one another as the viewer moves—figures become trees, trees become butterflies. Reality and unreality, the physical and the imagined, merge into one. The divider itself is a found object, discovered in a junk market during a daily studio commute. Its unknown history becomes part of its charm—an

object that holds memory but resists a single narrative. The hand-carved wood offers familiar cues yet eludes specific meaning, prompting us to create our own.

From The Depth of Riverbed, 2025

Embroidered in magnolia, electric blue, and navy, the work hints at movement. Its flowing patterns of the diptych evoke water or a current flowing, gently guiding downward. Hung one above the other and sized in direct proportion to the room divider, this embroidered diptych cloaks the adjoining passageway.

In Taoism, water always finds its way. It yields, it flows, it descends to the low places, and thus reveals the path. Water represents humility, strength and constant change. As Ursula K. Le Guin translates from *Tao Te Ching*:

True goodness is like water.

Water's good for everything.

It doesn't compete.

It goes right to the low loathsome places, and so finds the way.

INTERVAL

Proceed out of the gallery room and walk down the corridor. Open the door ahead of you.

Sweetness of a Thousand Eyes, 2025

An embroidered portrait of a wrathful face greets the eyes of the viewer before descending the wooden stairs. Echoing Guanyin with a thousand eyes and a thousand hands—the bodhisattva of mercy in her watchful, feminine form. Each eye a witness. Each hand a gesture of salvation. She stands as protector and guide, warding off evil, offering joy, and reminding us that someone is always watching—benevolent, patient, and ready. This is a space of initiation. A journey of becoming. Are you ready to enter? Are you ready to awaken?

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ACT TWO

Scene: Lower ground gallery (landing area)

The rhythmic whirring continues then fades. Mesmeric and inharmonic percussion notes follow.

'deep-cellar reveries'

'The creatures moving about in the cellar are slower, less scampering, more mysterious.'

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

The distinction between reality and unreality becomes ever more fluid. The lower ground gallery translates as the underground or deep cellar, where dreams have no limits. Its corners are darker and our imagination runs wild.

Ancestress, 2025

Suspended by a pair of ceramic vines, this textile embroidery hangs within a shrine-like space—evoking the reverence and intimacy of ancestral worship. The work draws deeply from themes of roots and lineage, embodying what we carry with us across generations: memory, protection, and transformation. The recurring motif of Chuang Tzu's Butterfly Dream appears in the composition blurring the boundary between illusion and reality, self and ancestor, dream and waking life. In this space, the butterfly is not just a symbol of ephemerality, but of metamorphosis and continuity.

The shrine's presence is powerful and ambiguous—protective yet wrathful, generous yet fearsome—like the ancestors themselves.

The Story of Comfortable Characters, 2025

Situated as encounters, token size ceramic tiles are dispersed on the walls of the lower ground floor. Referencing inukshuks—stone markers that resemble people, built to guide others across vast landscapes. They tell a story of those who've passed through. These tiles are imagined in a similar way: objects to be carried, installed, or discovered. Once fired and made permanent, they feel like artefacts—quiet and enduring, passing on meaning through touch, placement, and time.

The characters depicted in this body of work often return to the urge to lie in the sun, especially on a hill. Slouched and settled, their limbs slip into valleys, their bodies stretch into mountains, and their heads dissolve into sunlight. Often the characters care for one another in

motherly, loving, even godlike ways. Arms encircle. Eyes watch from above. Bodies remain gently entangled in gestures of ease and intimacy.

ACT THREE

Scene: Lower ground gallery (emptied-out swimming pool)

A pause. The unmistakable sound of a sonorous waterphone begins playing followed by a low audible voice singing. The familiar whirring continues.

Walk towards the pool and descend the set of stairs. You are continuing the journey in this reverie. A wood-carved side table stands tall on a phantom-like embroidered limb, looming over the visitors. Continue towards the tower depicting creature-like faces before arriving at an arch-like sculpture with a painting diptych behind, suspended in the far end of the pool.

Murmur, 2025

It begins with a carved wooden table—silent, posing. It invokes a sound just out of reach, a subtle stirring, as if the feet were growing. Could it be a Doekkabi's trick? Or did the table grow a leg in the night, shifting form while we looked away? Objects twitch, hesitate, then breathe. Furniture becomes creature. A quiet movement, heard not in sound, but sensed in its absence.

Drawing from Korean mythology, the Doekkabi (도깨비), material transformation, and the uncanny, the spiritual possession of inanimate objects has been the key starting point of artist Woo Jin Joo's practice of myth-making and in particular, re-imagining its myth and tradition.

Ardent, 2025

From within the tower, faces emerge—wrinkled, twisted, laughing— not frightening, but familiar. These are the Doekkabi, trickster guardians of the quiet spaces. They shift, mimic, and smile, revealing themselves with a flicker of emotion just enough to make you wonder if you imagined it. Then, a child's song rises —high, sweet, and fiercely joyful. It pours through the corridors like sunlight, and the creatures come to life. Not one, but many, crawling from doorframes, hearths, corners, drawn by the music.

It is a festive procession, not of gods above but of spirits beside: wild protectors of the dreamer's home. They clap, dance, mimic, play — not to mock, but to invite. To remember. That the house is a place of wonder, a keeper of childhood's sacred chaos. And the Doekkabi? They are its smile.

For Those Who Wade, 2025

At last, the souls, seekers, or wanderers arrive at the gateway after a long journey. The act of crossing symbolises an inner awakening. The embroidered archway stands at the threshold between Earth and Heaven, representing transformation, waiting, and transcendence. The work draws on Buddhist, Taoist, and mythological motifs, creating a spiritual and symbolic gateway.

In a surreal twist, the archway itself wears black suede knee-high boots—a striking, almost absurd detail. This anthropomorphic gesture blurs the line between object and being. The portal is perhaps not static but alive, or even a guide or guardian on the path to enlightenment.

Watching Over The Slumped Mountain Man, 2025

Having crossed into another realm, you have arrived at a monumental diptych. Slumped Mountain Man is curled on his side, facing the viewer—perhaps the only slightly sad character artist Molly Burrows ever drew.

This motif began to reappear in other works —on ceramic tiles, in paper collages, and eventually becoming the centre of the largest painting to date which hangs in the gallery space here. In this work, a four by two metre diptych, he is no longer alone. Another figure leans gently into the landscape, watching over him.

EPILOGUE

Scene: Lower ground gallery (side rooms)

The whirring has stopped... The ringing of chimes, a vibrating crash of the gong and tremulous voice in the distance ensues.

Exit the pool via the same set of stairs and notice another two sets of ceramic tiles depicting *The Story of Comfortable Characters* hung on the walls under the pool skylight. Continue down the space and walk towards the entrance to the enclosed rooms on your left.

Tireless, 2024

A pair of embroidered legs - an object or being which cannot rest. Forever chasing or stirring. The work emerges from beneath the shower area. Symbolizing the restless pursuit of movement—not merely physical, but psychological, emotional, even spiritual. The leg becomes an emblem of perpetual becoming, the body's innate refusal to be still, to cease becoming.

Trickster, Shapeshifter, Protector, 2025

Enter the Doekkabi. Extending from the wall, pincer-like fingers appear in the room beckoning for itself to be delicately dipped into the wash basin.

Neither wholly good nor evil, these mythological beings take on familiar forms, mimicking human habits and gestures. They inhabit the built world—walls, corners, thresholds—guarding and revealing. In their playfulness, they disarm fear, coaxing the imagination awake.

In traditional Korean belief, house gods guard the domestic realm—kitchen gods, toilet spirits, hearth deities, each occupying a specific function and doorway. Worship in these spaces was existential, not ornamental. The home became more than shelter; it was a mythological landscape, a guardian realm where the imagination of the child could safely roam.

Thus, the domestic is not mundane—it is mythic. A space where real objects turn into imaginary beings. In this way, mythology is not an escape from reality, but a deepening of it. An act of protective storytelling that allows us to live meaningfully among our fears, our play, our inner chaos.

Well-Rested, 2024

You have arrived at a respite area. Have a seat. Feel well rested.

A paper collage on card - a nod towards abstraction of the human figure and landscape. Referencing Benode Behari Mukherjee, a visually impaired artist who used collage as a foundational tool, Molly Burrow's practice utilises this medium as it is inherently inclusive and democratic. By reducing the human form to simple shapes and colours, the focus shifts to the act of making itself—the intention is to have that process shared, experienced, and understood by all audiences.