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Eva Armisén: Paint Like a Child

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Eva Armisén, Insa Gana Art Center; May 14 to 26 — Jaeyeon Woo / The Wall Street Journal

For Koreans, reeling from the ferry disaster, an exhibition of paintings by Eva Armisén arrives at the right time. The Spanish artist's work, on exhibition at Gana Insa Art Center in Seoul, is comforting, filled with a sense of affection, care and support. It conveys the importance of family and of finding small, everyday things to celebrate in life. The 45-year-old painter, who has traveled around the globe—Barcelona to Los Angeles to Hong Kong—exhibiting her work, says Korea has a special meaning to her. An edited interview excerpt:



— Eva Armisén

Q. Could you tell us a little about your childhood?

I was a very shy girl and liked to draw. I explained a story better in drawing than in talking. When I was 12, I met a great teacher at school. It was an incredible experience. She taught me by painting I could have the power to transform things. Creativity changes everything around you. You get to have different ideas about people and things, which is really a great

power. I was so into it.

Q. Where do you get your inspiration?

It comes suddenly from everything and everywhere. It can come from talking in a bus, watching kids play or walking on a mountain. I like looking around.

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Q. All the faces in your paintings smile. Do you always create happy paintings?

— Eva Armisen

If you look closer, some of the paintings have different meanings. For example, the one with a bear is about me as a mother being stronger to protect my kids. It is not a bad feeling, but sometimes it makes you feel fragile. My animal series talks about the need to mask your feelings for others. When you love other people, you sometimes need to become a different person.

Q. How do you keep your imagination?

I don't really have a formula. I was really lucky that my parents were always supportive. When I told them I wanted to paint, their immediate response was, "Go for it." They never said things that could discourage me. They gave me a lot of freedom and self-confidence. As a mom myself, I hope I can do the same for my kids. Also, I always have had the children's way of thinking or solving problems. We try to make children think as we think, when they probably have better ideas or simpler solutions. But we don't listen.



The Walk, 100x81cm, oil on canvas — Eva Armisen

Q. Your works are particularly familiar with Koreans. One painting features a couple enjoying Korean barbecue. What does Korea mean to you?

Korea has given me a lot of things, especially opportunities to do things that I had never done. I closely worked with a Korean friend in L.A., and after almost three years I'd still never been to Korea. I don't know why. One day, seven or eight years ago, she suggested I go, join in an art fair and see how people react. And then things happened so quickly. I felt that people in Korea were moved by my works in a special way. Since then I've been coming here three or four times a year. And I have done really nice projects here.

Q. Tell us about your collaboration with Korean companies.

I started a collaboration, for the first time, with Kolon, the sportswear company. Then my work with O'2nd was kind of a dream come true. Because I always thought my paintings couldn't move from a canvas, making clothes with my paintings on them was really interesting. It felt so alive, and many people enjoyed it. Working with Skinfood was also a pleasure. It was the first time working with another artist and also with a cosmetics company. I was really involved in the project from the image to the color to the meaning we wanted to convey. But what I really liked about was that it offered me a chance to get in contact with young people. I always love interacting with them.

Q. What are you working on now?

Now I am working in an art museum (Gana Art Park) in Jangheung, a Seoul suburb. I paint on the walls and have art sessions with Korean kids. It's been great and I am having the best time. While I am working, I see kids playing around. It is really a luxury to have a museum for children that has a natural setting and great art pieces. I really feel that a lot of dreams came true in Korea.



Eva Armisen with Skinfood

Eva Armisen Exhibition

Insa Gana Art Center; May 14 to 26

Gana Art Park, Jangheung, Gyeonggi; June 10, 2014 to Jan. 31, 2015

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