

**NICOLA
VASSELL**

Opening Jan 16, 6–8 pm
Jan 16 — Feb 22, 2025



NA KIM:

M E M O R Y
P A L A C E

Gallery Hours

Tuesday–Saturday, 10 am–6 pm

138 10th Ave. New York, NY 10011

For Press Inquiries

For press inquiries, please reach out to the team at [ALMA](#).

NICOLA VASSELL

Nicola Vassell is pleased to present *Na Kim: Memory Palace*, an exhibition of new paintings by Na Kim that will be the artist's first solo presentation with the gallery. The exhibition features a group of portraits that show Kim situating the genre within the structure of seriality to produce a sustained reflection on the intersection of appearance with representation and physical fact with metaphoric meaning.

These new paintings signal the continued development of Kim's project of serial portraiture that began in 2023. Grounded in a daily practice of painting that Kim considers meditative, she began to portray "imagined subjects" derived from a platonic ideal in her mind, one she pursued and discovered anew with each successive canvas. A commitment to repetition allowed Kim to begin seeing the differences between portraits in a heightened way, such that previously minor or incidental details then appeared to become evidence of new emotional and psychological landscapes.

A fundamental aspect of these works is their embrace of ambiguity and indeterminacy. Though they invite the possibility of self-portraiture, they are ultimately elusive and open-ended, refusing representational certainty. In place of a fixed subject whom we might locate in the world around us, viewers are instead confronted with a composite subject, one made up of separate moments, feelings and expressions, all connected without ever seeming to fully tie together. The implication that each portrait is related yet in some way different is reflective of our own fluid sense of self, one that is fragmented and provisional as much as it is consistent and unified. More than simply expressing a moment in time, Kim's paintings remind us of the conceptual underpinnings of portraiture as a way of questioning what constitutes a self in the first place.

Just as the philosophical scope of Kim's portraiture has become more complex, so too has her painting become more lush and lyrical. Whereas earlier portraits were placed against solid backgrounds of nearly monochromatic color, Kim's new paintings are more open and spacious, with loose, sweeping brush strokes left visible for viewers to see both as atmospheric and representational detail. Kim has likened her painting process to that of carving, in that she builds her figures up slowly in an intuitive way that sees each new mark responding to the one that preceded it. This way of working allows her to achieve a subtlety of effect, as facial expressions seem to hinge upon slight inflections of shadow, line and color, so that the interior world of a given subject might be legible, but only just so, ultimately leaving us to draw upon our own emotional or psychological experience.

Kim's attention to setting and atmosphere in these paintings can at times verge into complete abstraction, only further complicating our ability to trust what we first see in these portraits. Facial or bodily details that would otherwise seem familiar and easily recognizable, such as a nose, eyebrow or mouth, are instead transfigured by paint and mark-making so that we see them as form before illusion. Whether seen individually or considered collectively, these portraits ask us to examine our assumptions about appearance and presentation both in a physical and spiritual sense, to wonder if what we see represents what is really there.

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About Na Kim

Na Kim (b.1986 Seoul, South Korea) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Known for her mimetic portraits set against polychromatic backgrounds, Na Kim's paintings depict figures but are conceptually abstract. Her imagined subjects, derivative yet unique, evoke both confrontational and intimate encounters. Kim's practice centers neither accuracy nor narrative, but rather reflects a deeply meditative character study.

Solo exhibitions include Kim's debut solo presentation at White Columns, New York (2023) and forthcoming show at Nicola Vassell Gallery, New York (2025). Group exhibitions include *The Selves*, Nicola Vassell Gallery, New York (2024) and the White Columns Benefit Auction, New York (2023, 2024). Kim has shown work at a number of art fairs, including Art Basel Miami Beach, Miami (2024) and Independent Art Fair, New York (2024). In addition to her fine art practice, Kim currently works as the art director of *The Paris Review* and creative director of the publishing house Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Her designs have been named among *The New York Times*' best book covers of the year for the past nine consecutive years.

About Nicola Vassell Gallery

Nicola Vassell is a contemporary art gallery committed to discourse that widens the lens of the history and future of art. Its focus is on developing an intergenerational, cross-disciplinary program of international artists and thinkers.

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