



**IS IT ANIMATION, illustration or fine art?**  
If it's good work, who cares?

Seonna Hong's first New York solo exhibition *Animus* so touched collectors with its emotional insight that the show at 5BE Gallery sold out before it even opened.

Hong, an Emmy-winning animator, has allowed her commercial training to influence her fine art. Unlike 60s pop artists who used the comic-book esthetic to create abstracts or critique consumerism, Hong embraces its storytelling abilities. In a series of 16 small paintings, she narrates a young girl's battle with fear.

That sounds sentimental, yet Hong's use of symbolic color, stark graphics and body language are psychologically compelling. Fear is embodied in a large vicious dog, which lunges, growls and intimidates the girl, even in her dreams. Each picture works independently. Some show the child trying to befriend the animal, while others have her avoiding the problem altogether. In the end, the girl and dog, each painted on their own canvas, stand calmly face-to-face.

"It is not a morality tale," Hong explains. She describes the piece as "a response to aggression...a journey toward emotional resilience." Living in Pasadena, Hong's pictures are a good example of the West Coast's intuitive approach to new art, which tends to choose humanism over conceptualism.

As you move around the gallery, painted an earthy brown and decorated with paint and paper trees, you piece together the non-linear tale. Hong uses collage elements to give her paintings the look of a 3-D pop-up book. And a book featuring her series is planned; the mock-up is on display. When it's finally published, I'm guessing it too will sell out.

5BE Gallery, 504 W. 22nd St., 2nd fl. (betw. 10th & 11th Aves.), 212-255-0979; 11-6, free.

JULIA MORTON

## SEONNA HONG: ANIMUS

THROUGH SAT., DEC. 4