

Jennifer J. Lee

Yards

7 March — 10 April 2026

The title of Lee's second solo exhibition at **THE SUNDAY PAINTER**, *Yards*, operates as both measurement and metaphor. A yard is the American increment that structures a football field into legible territory, the unit by which fabric is sold and blankets are made. Lee's subjects — vintage afghans cropped from online marketplaces, astroturf fields photographed from unusual aerial perspectives — share this common denominator. They are measured, commodified, gridded. Yet they are also vessels for something more elusive: cultural memory compressed into pattern, ritual distilled into color and line.

To arrive at this compression of meaning, Lee employs a particular kind of slowing that occurs when something weightless is made heavy. The image — that flickering, frictionless thing we scroll past countless times before we've even had breakfast — suddenly gains mass. It demands our time. It forces us to really *look*. Sourcing photographs from the algorithmic sprawl of eBay listings and stock photography databases, Lee performs a peculiar alchemy, transforming the ephemeral into the obstinately material. She works on thick jute burlap, a surface that announces its own coarseness and refusal of photographic smoothness, yet the effect is a hyperrealism so exacting it borders on the uncanny. The process is painstaking: pulling a digital image apart, pixel by pixel, then rebuilding it with an attention that feels almost devotional. What emerges is not merely a painting of a photograph, but an interrogation of how images circulate, what they signify, and what happens when they're forced to be still.

Blankets, Lee suggests, are like flags. The chevron afghan pattern carries the handmade rebellion of the 1970s; the Hudson Bay blanket, with its bold stripes, is entangled in the violent histories of colonial trade; the mass-produced baby blanket, square and soft, speaks to the standardisation of comfort itself. Each pattern is a lineage, a set of forms passed down through generations, now circulating in the perpetual marketplace of resale platforms. Football fields, too, announce allegiances — cultural, regional, almost tribal. They are domestications of war, engineered landscapes where conflict is ritualised into yardage gained and lost. Both blankets and fields flatten complex histories into geometric planes. Both are viewed through the

eye of a camera, which skews perspective and turns the tangible into the purely visual.

Lee's choice of burlap complicates this compression. Her choice of material is rough, visibly woven, resistant to the slick illusion of photographic reproduction. It degrades the image even as it simulates it with uncanny precision. This tension between the hand and the mechanical, the slow and the instantaneous, the weight of paint and the weightlessness of the digital, anchors her practice. There is something almost transgressive about the slowness of her process, the hours spent rebuilding what a camera captures in a fraction of a second. But Lee is not merely translating photographs into paint. She is a semiotician in a visual sense, arranging her subjects into sequences that hint at syntax, at a language just beyond articulation.

The paintings speak to one another across the gallery, the crocheted blanket and the football field trading their oppositions — feminine and masculine, intimate and public, domestic and spectacular — united, finally, by the same unit of measure. Both performing a kind of cultural shorthand. Both reduced, through the lens of a camera and the hand of a painter, into meditative planes of color and pattern. What is perhaps most striking about Lee's work is its refusal of easy consumption. These are images we would likely scroll past without a second thought, but held in paint, rendered on burlap, they resist the endless circulation of the digital. They ask us to linger, to consider not just what we are looking at but how we are looking, and what it means to bring something weightless back into a gravitational situation.

Lee's paintings are startlingly photorealistic, yet they are not about photographic accuracy. They are about the gap between the image and the thing, the distance between what we see and what we know, the slippage that occurs when a symbolic object is reproduced, circulated, commodified, and finally, painstakingly remade by hand. The paintings do not explain themselves. They do not offer closure. Instead, they open small apertures into the accumulated meanings embedded in everyday objects, the histories compressed into patterns, the ways in which culture is both preserved and flattened in the archive of the internet.

— Text by Lisa Modiano