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INTERVIEW WITH JANE LEE

Internationally-renowned artist Jane Lee was recently at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute for the first part of her artist residency at the STPI workshop. The Singaporean artist is most well-known for her three-dimensional use of paint. The Artling had the opportunity to chat with her and see the works-in-progress, to see how Lee has been incorporating her unconventional use of materials into the print and paper-making process.



Jane Lee at the STPI artist studio. Image courtesy of the artist & STPI

This is your first residency at STPI, how have you found it so far?

I'm very excited. This is my last day, I extended two more days when it was actually only supposed to be two weeks.

What have you found to be one of the challenges of working with paper or print, since you usually work with paint?

Paper is a lot more dry. I've been working with paint, exploring paint as a medium. Paint is wet, and naturally turns solid. For me to start with this, it's actually less of a hassle. It's another, new experience. It's interesting to see how I can push and how much I can do with dry media.

I'm trying to get away from painting. I've been practicing and exploring the possibilities of painting for a decade, but for me, this is like a new start. It's a new start for me, a good excuse to get away from painting.



Image courtesy of the artist & STPI

Do you think you'll continue moving away from painting after this residency?

Not really, I'll still work with painting, but perhaps for another area I'll look into working with other media. Like for these works, we are also going to incorporate some video and sound into the work, it's more narrative this time.

What is this body of work?

Basically it's like I'm playing with the birds. It's about being trapped and finding freedom. Here, I'm pulling down the color from the bird. But the colors will not be shown through painting, it will be through paper. It will become a long landscape, but a landscape created through the color of the bird.

What drew you to working with the imagery of birds for this series?

As I mentioned, the subject matter for this show is mainly playing with being trapped, confinement and freedom. Paper is related to nature, and the environment includes birds.



Image courtesy of the artist & STPI

Your works often have a very tactile quality, like your paintings and even the works you are creating here...

I think I don't do it consciously. People tend to want to touch it, but that's not something I think about before.

You actually have quite a range of ideas within these works created at STPI, but they all essentially relate to nature...

Yes, we actually came up with 10 ideas when I first started.

Did you end up creating all ten?

No, that would be too much to show!

What were some of the other ideas that came up?

Well, we'll keep it for another project...



Image courtesy of the artist & STPI

In some of these works that I've seen you use very rich, deep hues of blue and purple. You use similarly vibrant colors in your other works, is there a reason for this?

For painting I use a lot of very intense colors. For this series of works, I'm trying to move away from that. For example, I'm using some clear materials and we're keeping the transparency for some. Although I guess I can't totally get away from colors, even if I try.

What brought you to the themes of being trapped and freedom for this body of work?

Look around in our society, everyone is working day and night. No one has time for each other anymore, because you have to work, you have to earn a living. So everybody is a bit trapped in what they're doing.

How do you get to this freedom that you are depicting?

Freedom? Well, to me, freedom is very important. I meditate, I pray, I believe in God. So that spiritual part, when you get in touch with God, that is freedom. I want to present that idea. I don't know if it will happen or not, but I want to try.



Image courtesy of the artist & STPI

What drew you to painting as a medium initially?

I started as a painter. The first thing that attracted me to paint was the quality of the paint as a medium. When I started, I just stuck to the medium and tried to push it. It has been so many years, but there's still so much more room for me to push the boundaries. But after ten over years, perhaps it's time to for me to start thinking of trying something else. Hopefully this is a good start for me to get away from painting. It's always hard for me to find a reason to get away from it.

Do you have any ideas on what you want to try next?

For now, my paintings are moving more into site-specific installations. I'm trying to incorporate architecture, everything, into the painting. Everything gels into one. I'm trying to break the boundaries, no longer just 2D, no longer 3D, beyond that. Any possibility that I can push.



Image courtesy of the artist & STPI

With these works – coiled strips of paper –and even with your paintings with the strips of canvas, they all seem like the works are caught in mid-movement, it feels like they are still unraveling. What do you hope to convey with that mid-movement tension?

I'll keep that free for interpretation!

You're one of the most in-demand artists in Asia right now, do you have any advice for young artists?

Work really hard. Don't think about other stuff so much. I guess the most important thing is that you need to have passion for what you're doing, that's all. The rest is beyond our control, whether people accept you, whether people like your work or don't like your work, you can't be concerned with that.

Interviewed by Kim Tay

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