



View of “Jane Lee,” 2022. From left: untitled, 2022; *Where Is Painting #9*, 2022. Photo: Toni Cuhadi.

Jane Lee

SUNDARAM TAGORE GALLERY | SINGAPORE

Curated by Singapore Art Museum veteran Tan Siuli, “Where Is Painting?” was Singaporean artist Jane Lee’s first solo show at home in eight years, and marked a return to painting following a period of experimentation with other forms, including prints, paper sculpture, and video. As her eighteen new pieces attested, paint remains the artist’s most natural medium. Lee has eschewed the brush in favor of baking tools and, more often, her bare hands to create paintings on fiberglass, all in a rich blue and white, and, in the case of two untitled site-specific installations, on the gallery walls themselves (all works 2022).

For *Where Is Painting #9*, she used a flat, serrated cake scraper to create striations in layers of thick azure paint. The resulting texture looks a lot like buttercream frosting. One vigorous scoop through this tempting impasto has left a white gash—like the crest of an ocean wave from a bird’s-eye view—that sweeps across the nearly six-by-five-foot work, from the top right to the bottom left. It ends in a splash of white flecks on deep blue, where Lee has plunged into the paint with her hands. *Where Is Painting #9* speaks of good, simple things: a sticky seaside summer.

On the opposite side of the gallery, *Where Is Painting #1* and *Where Is Painting #2* were of similar scale and composition. Arranged as a kind of deconstructed diptych, with *#1* flat

on a table in front of a mounted #2, both works feature a background of thickly layered white paint, molded with frosting tools and, as with #9, a scooped-out passage leaving a large blue gash reminiscent of surf. To #9's calm, this pair introduces fury, with random flecks of red and green popping out against the blue and white. With whispers of Hokusai's *The Great Wave*, ca. 1830–32, something in the bursting of blue through white, of water roaring through sea-foam, braces and inspires.

The two installations were the most striking of the works on view. One of them consisted of a hole in the wall that Lee punched in a single blow—with a smile on her face, as we saw in a three-channel video offering glimpses of the artist at work. The tunnel of crumbled plaster that resulted from this cathartic blow, to which Lee added streaks of blue paint, recalled nothing so much as smashed-in birthday cake. It connected the two spaces of the gallery at eye level, allowing people to observe each other through the aperture. The other installation maintained this feeling of visceral release: The artist gouged fistfuls of paint from the wall to create a pattern of the same swooping gashes that appeared throughout the show. The debris lay arrayed on the floor beneath.

At the heart of this show's allure, along with the paintings' fresh palette, was its emphasis on process, on the flow of Lee's artmaking. For the beholder, the experience was disarmingly uncluttered. The art was in the labor and material itself—the energetic strokes, the lush consistency of the paint. Even more than it addressed “where” painting might be, this quality represented the triumph of the optimistic “how” over the brooding “why.”

The creative tenor of the 2020s has tended understandably toward the grim and overwrought. The uplift offered by “Where Is Painting?” therefore came as a welcome relief. That a show of this caliber should be on view at Sundaram Tagore's space at Gillman Barracks—the former British Army base that was transformed ten years ago into an arts hub, mere months after the Singapore Land Authority slated the embattled precinct to be renovated as a tepid-sounding “lifestyle enclave”—speaks of struggles to come. For now, we might follow Lee's example and punch through, smiling.

— Samantha Kuok Leese