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Dick Lee: Imperfect Memories



Galerie Belvedere 24 Oct-16 Nov

Having made a glittering name for himself as a songwriter, composer, playwright, pop singer, fashion guru and restaurateur, Dick Lee has plenty of laurels to rest on – but the 57-year-old isn't showing any signs of stopping. This month, he reveals yet another talent to the world: visual art.

'I've always sketched, even in my childhood, when I was drawing comic books, and later when I studied fashion at the Harrow School of Art,' recalls Lee. 'I am [merely] revisiting this part of myself after so many years and this makes it even more exciting. Nobody else, apart from my family and Galerie Belvedere, knew that I

can sketch and paint.'

And it's just as well that Rasina Rubin, the director of Galerie Belvedere, happened to see Lee's private works at his house and suggested that he create more works and put together an art exhibition. It took him three years to get everything in order, but it's finally coming together this month.

The resulting show, *Imperfect Memories*, consists of 24 works divided into two series – titled 'Flower' and 'Flag' – and revisits his childhood in the 1950s and '60s. The former series is drawn from his recollections of fabric shops; his mother used to run a boutique and his 'earliest memories were of her shop and the countless bales of marvellously

coloured fabric at the shops we used to visit,' as he says fondly. The latter explores the more political concept of nationhood 'as Singapore morphed from a British colony to a Malaysian state to an independent country'.

And while this is the first time that we will get a glimpse into his paintings, it's certainly not the last. 'I have never pursued a career in [visual] art until now, [but] these are works I take seriously and I, of course, hope that the public will regard them as serious works [too]. It is my wish to continue painting,' Lee reassures us. 'In fact, *Imperfect Memory* is the first of a series of exhibitions that I will be staging with Galerie Belvedere.' Watch this space! **GP**

Qiu Jie



Art Plural

Until 26 Oct

Now aged 52 and based in Switzerland, Qiu Jie was born in Shanghai and grew up during China's Cultural Revolution, a period that had a huge impact on him as an artist. Children were only sent to school for a few hours each day at the time – mainly to learn about the greatness of the Communist Party – and so the young Qiu passed his time by learning how to draw.

'Chinese people have a tradition of studying a lot and as they had a lot of time at home, they used to practice music, dance or drawing more intensively than before the Cultural Revolution,' he explains. 'When I started to learn how to draw [at the age of ten], the only images I could copy were propaganda images. You could say I did not have the choice.'

Qiu went on to graduate from art schools in Shanghai and Geneva, and is now best known for creating works in pencil that merge images from the historic East and contemporary West. Around 30 of those pieces are on display at Art Plural this month, featuring sentimental portraits by a man caught between two worlds.

'Today, I am inspired by [Chinese propaganda] but also by images in Western adverts. Both represent my identity and my education in China and Switzerland,' Qiu says. 'It is not difficult to express this contradiction in my work because I am living it every day. However, this confrontation is hard to live with, and so I always feel the need to show that in my drawings.' **GP**



Art

* Explain your art Haegue Yang

Born in South Korea and based in Berlin, Haegue Yang, 42, is the first artist to participate in STPI Gallery's new initiative Platform Projects, which hopes to raise awareness of contemporary art in Singapore. In this exhibition, Yang tickles our various senses by incorporating local spices and other food items into her works. She tells Gwen Pew what it's like to play with food.

'I was fascinated by Singapore's diverse culture in general, and the variety of exotic foods and spices that are readily available at the market here is simply inspiring. I discovered these items as I went on small field trips to various places in Singapore, so incorporating these materials in my production at STPI just happened more or less spontaneously. I am always in search of new materials as a sculptor and I felt it was especially important to let myself be inspired by the place during my residency at STPI. It is astounding how much these everyday elements are able to convey – they reference a broader history, encompassing their origins from an



evolved civilisation to contemporary life. In this instance, they reflect Singapore's diverse population and colonial history as a commercial port city of South-East Asia. I was humbled by the materials and wanted to create something simple yet significant with them.

'The process varies in terms of its execution. In the group of works under 'Embossed Prints and Juice Dyes' (pictured), slices of various vegetables, untreated spices and herbs were pressed into fresh paper pulp to create small bumps

and unevenness on the surface. It was a relatively simple and direct process. It likens to what we know from our childhood days of creating prints using chopped vegetables.

'However, not every item we tried printed successfully due to their different consistencies, so we had to constantly test various vegetables to produce the desired work. Another challenge for us was realising that natural juice from pressed vegetables easily fades. I learnt that one had to simply accept this ephemeral nature. The natural product and the questions around it positively challenged me.

'It was very meaningful to work in Singapore, since my production has taken place mainly in Europe in the last two decades. I loved the hot and humid weather, and the evening breeze with night food. I can almost feel that when I look at these works. I hope viewers can feel that Singaporean air and smell, and sense the joy and melancholia that I, as a visitor and outsider, brought to my works.'

Haegue Yang: Honesty Printed on Modesty is at STPI Gallery from **24 Oct-24 Nov**.

See our full interview with Qiu Jie at www.timeoutsingapore.com.