

Jane Lee's (Red) States of Painting

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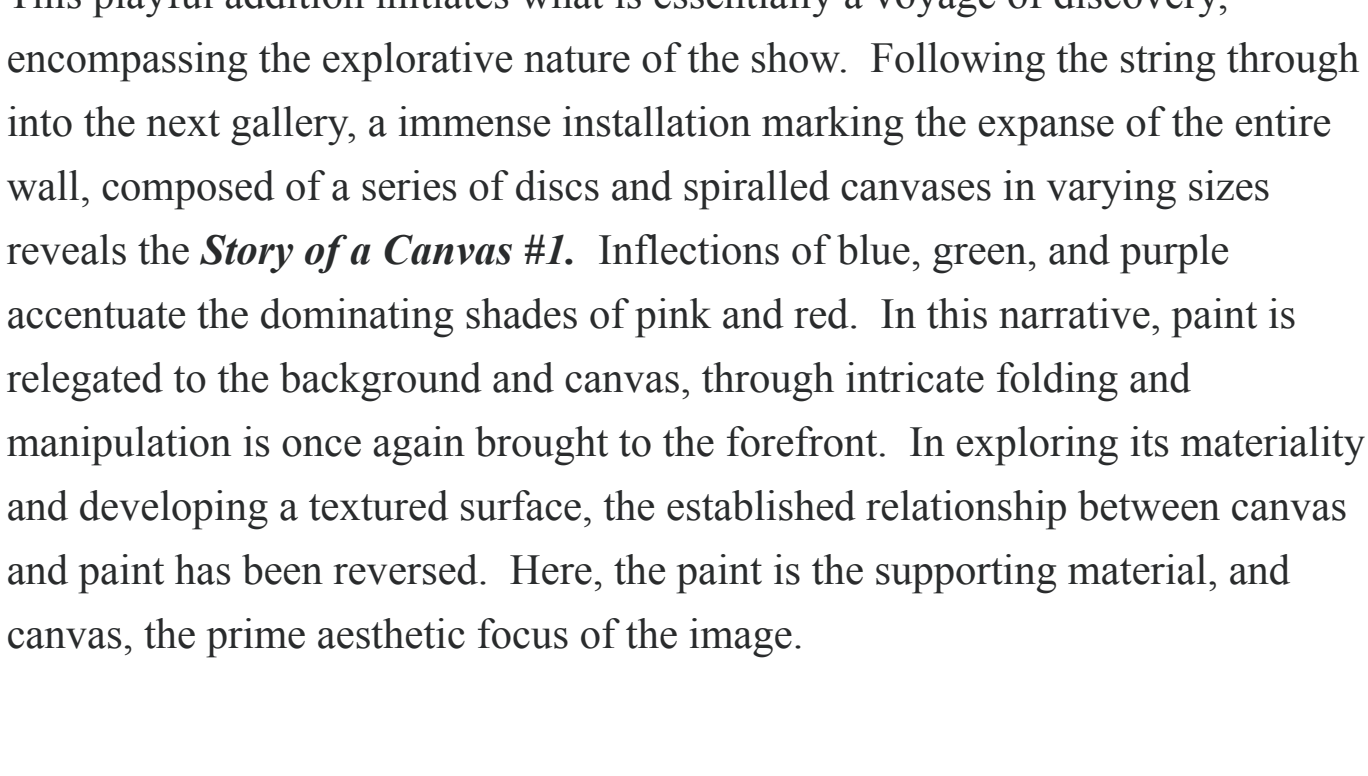
May 16, 2018Aaina Bhargava



Jane Lee, *Stack Up 2 (detail)*, 2017, acrylic paint on canvas stacked on metal base, 70.5 x 86.6 inches/179 x 220 cm © Image courtesy of the artist

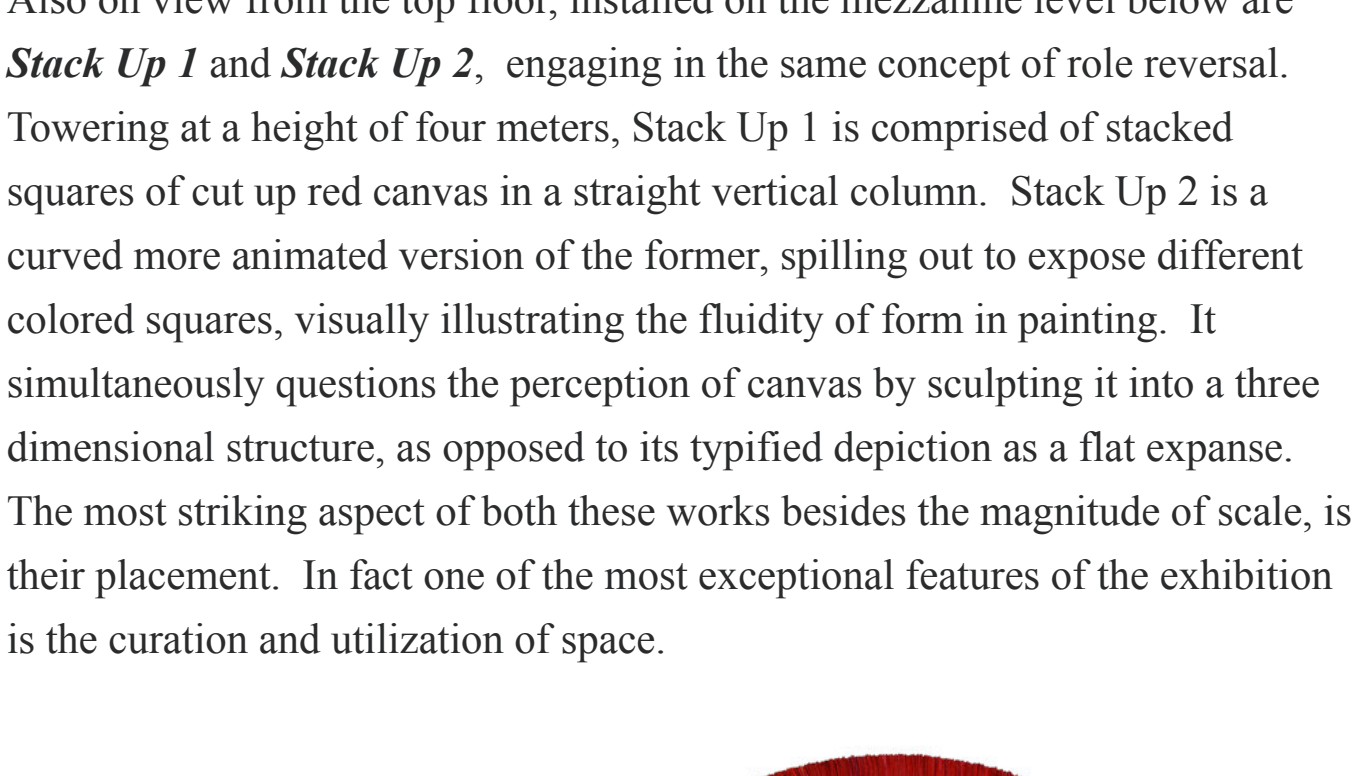
Documenting the evolution of Lee’s career and investigative forays into the nature of painting, **Red States** is organized by **Sundaram Tagore** and the **Tagore Foundation, Hong Kong Arts Centre**, and **National Arts Council of Singapore** and curated by **Michelle Ho**. Vivid hues, tactile surfaces and an intrinsic effervescence characterize Lee’s sculptural creations, which deconstruct the concept of painting by visually recontextualizing the function of its elements. Canvas, stretchers, frames and paint are employed and presented in a novel manner, compelling viewers to reach their own conclusions on what constitutes a painting.

A convoluted series of intertwined crimson canvas threads greets visitors at the entrance. Red, has always featured heavily in her work, alluding to celebration, passion, energy, here it also culturally references Singapore and Hong Kong. Canvas is the main hero of *Story of a Canvas #2*, a stark change from it’s usual supporting role. Assuming a rectangular shape, a sole string of canvas flows from the bottom, into a hole cut out in the wall beneath, inviting us into the exhibition.



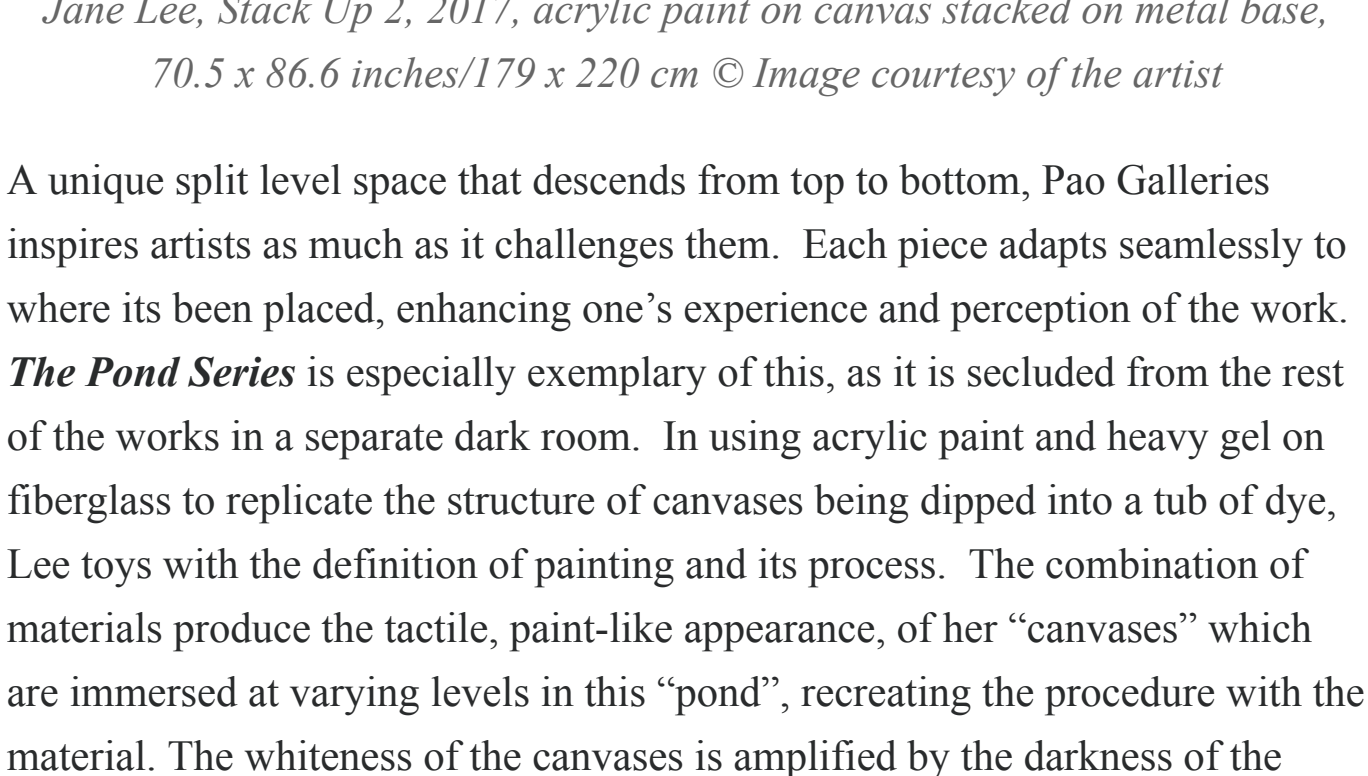
Jane Lee, *The Story of Canvas #1a*, 2017 acrylic paint, canvas on board, variable, 196.9 inches/500 cm length as pictured © Image courtesy of the artist

This playful addition initiates what is essentially a voyage of discovery, encompassing the explorative nature of the show. Following the string through into the next gallery, a immense installation marking the expanse of the entire wall, composed of a series of discs and spiralled canvases in varying sizes reveals the *Story of a Canvas #1*. Inflections of blue, green, and purple accentuate the dominating shades of pink and red. In this narrative, paint is relegated to the background and canvas, through intricate folding and manipulation is once again brought to the forefront. In exploring its materiality and developing a textured surface, the established relationship between canvas and paint has been reversed. Here, the paint is the supporting material, and canvas, the prime aesthetic focus of the image.



Jane Lee, *The Story of Canvas #1 (detail)*, 2017 acrylic paint, canvas on board, 80.3 inches/204 cm diameter © Image courtesy of the artist

Also on view from the top floor, installed on the mezzanine level below are *Stack Up 1* and *Stack Up 2*, engaging in the same concept of role reversal. Towering at a height of four meters, Stack Up 1 is comprised of stacked squares of cut up red canvas in a straight vertical column. Stack Up 2 is a curved more animated version of the former, spilling out to expose different colored squares, visually illustrating the fluidity of form in painting. It simultaneously questions the perception of canvas by sculpting it into a three dimensional structure, as opposed to its typified depiction as a flat expanse. The most striking aspect of both these works besides the magnitude of scale, is their placement. In fact one of the most exceptional features of the exhibition is the curation and utilization of space.



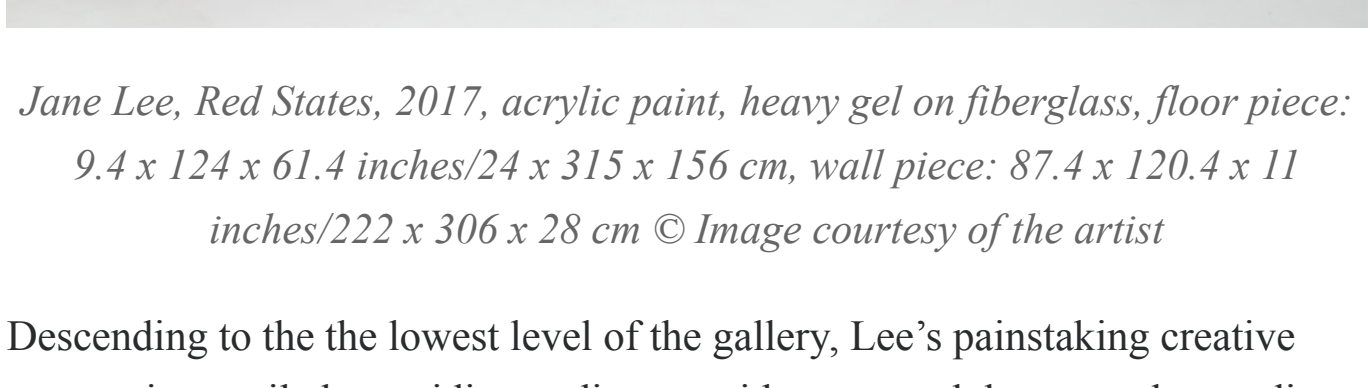
Jane Lee, *Stack Up 2*, 2017, acrylic paint on canvas stacked on metal base, 70.5 x 86.6 inches/179 x 220 cm © Image courtesy of the artist

A unique split level space that descends from top to bottom, Pao Galleries inspires artists as much as it challenges them. Each piece adapts seamlessly to where its been placed, enhancing one’s experience and perception of the work. **The Pond Series** is especially exemplary of this, as it is secluded from the rest of the works in a separate dark room. In using acrylic paint and heavy gel on fiberglass to replicate the structure of canvases being dipped into a tub of dye, Lee toys with the definition of painting and its process. The combination of materials produce the tactile, paint-like appearance, of her “canvases” which are immersed at varying levels in this “pond”, recreating the procedure with the material. The whiteness of the canvases is amplified by the darkness of the room which almost resembles a lab, or dark room for photography, where experimentation is encouraged and boundaries are pushed.



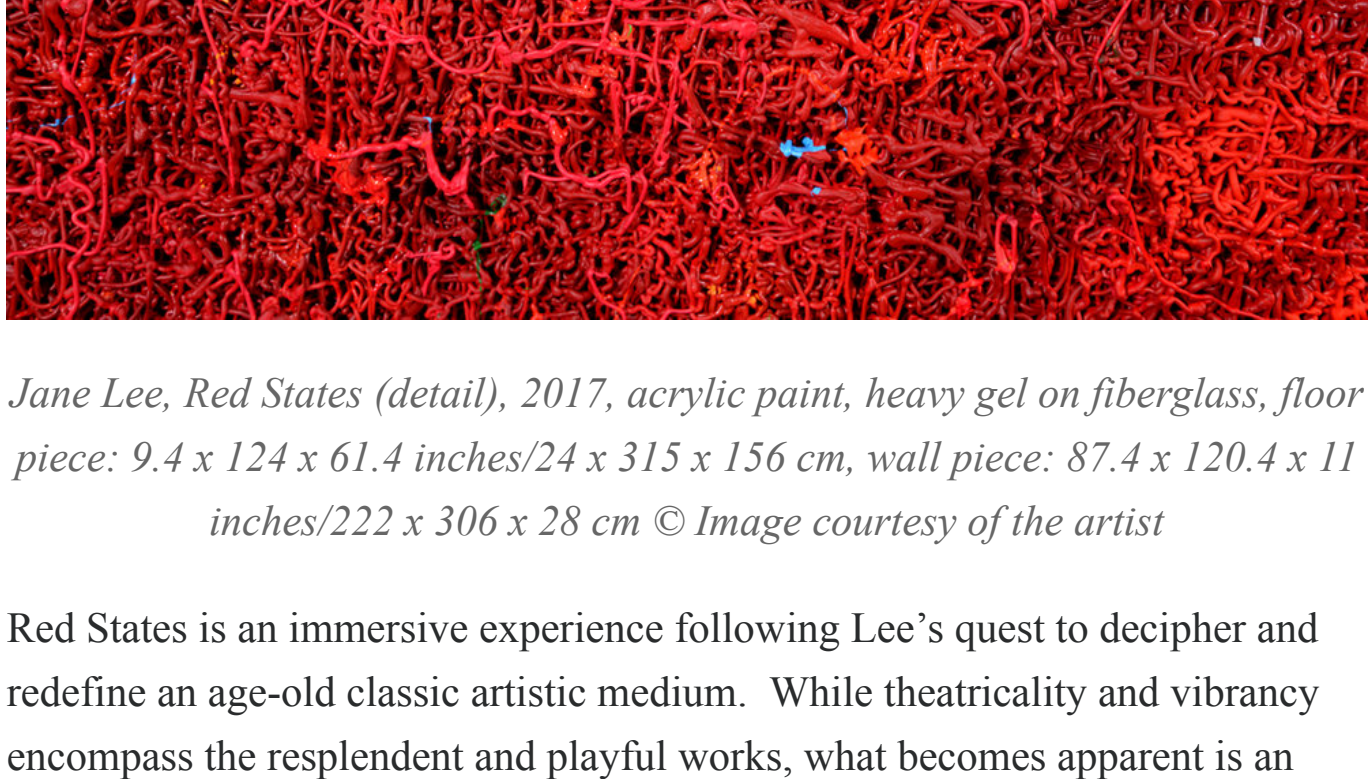
Jane Lee, *Pond Series*, 2017, acrylic paint, heavy gel on fiberglass, Pond 76.3 inches/194 cm diameter, the largest piece 55/ inches 140 cm height © Image courtesy of the artist

Two half levels below, separated halves of a canvas replica comprise **Red States**, also made with acrylic paint, heavy gel and fiberglass. Imitating the layout of split levels and reinforcing its visual impact, as one half is propped up against the wall, while the other half lies adjacent to it flat on the floor, demonstrating an inventive arrangement of space. The deconstructive method reflected in this piece also alludes to reimagining traditional modes of canvas.



Jane Lee, *Red States*, 2017, acrylic paint, heavy gel on fiberglass, floor piece: 9.4 x 124 x 61.4 inches/24 x 315 x 156 cm, wall piece: 87.4 x 120.4 x 11 inches/222 x 306 x 28 cm © Image courtesy of the artist

Descending to the the lowest level of the gallery, Lee’s painstaking creative process is unveiled, providing audiences with a rare and deeper understanding of her practice and how it has grown. Additionally some her earliest works are on display, incorporating fabrics such as linen, reflecting a progressing fascination with texture, potentially stemming from her original background in fashion. Applying this to art, specifically painting, has enabled her to create a signature aesthetic. For instance, rosettes of dried acrylic paint, which Lee crafted to construct her iconic **Fetish Series** (another highlight on view), have been collected and shown alongside miniature coiled discs of canvas. Samples of “paint” made with tools such as syringes and icing guns and a range of other products resulting from her experimentations are revealed, indicating the limitless breadth of her practice.



Jane Lee, *Red States (detail)*, 2017, acrylic paint, heavy gel on fiberglass, floor piece: 9.4 x 124 x 61.4 inches/24 x 315 x 156 cm, wall piece: 87.4 x 120.4 x 11 inches/222 x 306 x 28 cm © Image courtesy of the artist

Red States is an immersive experience following Lee’s quest to decipher and redefine an age-old classic artistic medium. While theatricality and vibrancy encompass the resplendent and playful works, what becomes apparent is an unwavering and genuine devotion to painting. An artist’s artist through and through, the scope of Lee’s consistently evolving remarkable career has been stunningly captured and presented.

For more information please visit the [Hong Kong Art Center](#) official website.

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