

Art Radar

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"Red States": Singaporean artist Jane Lee's first solo exhibition in Hong Kong

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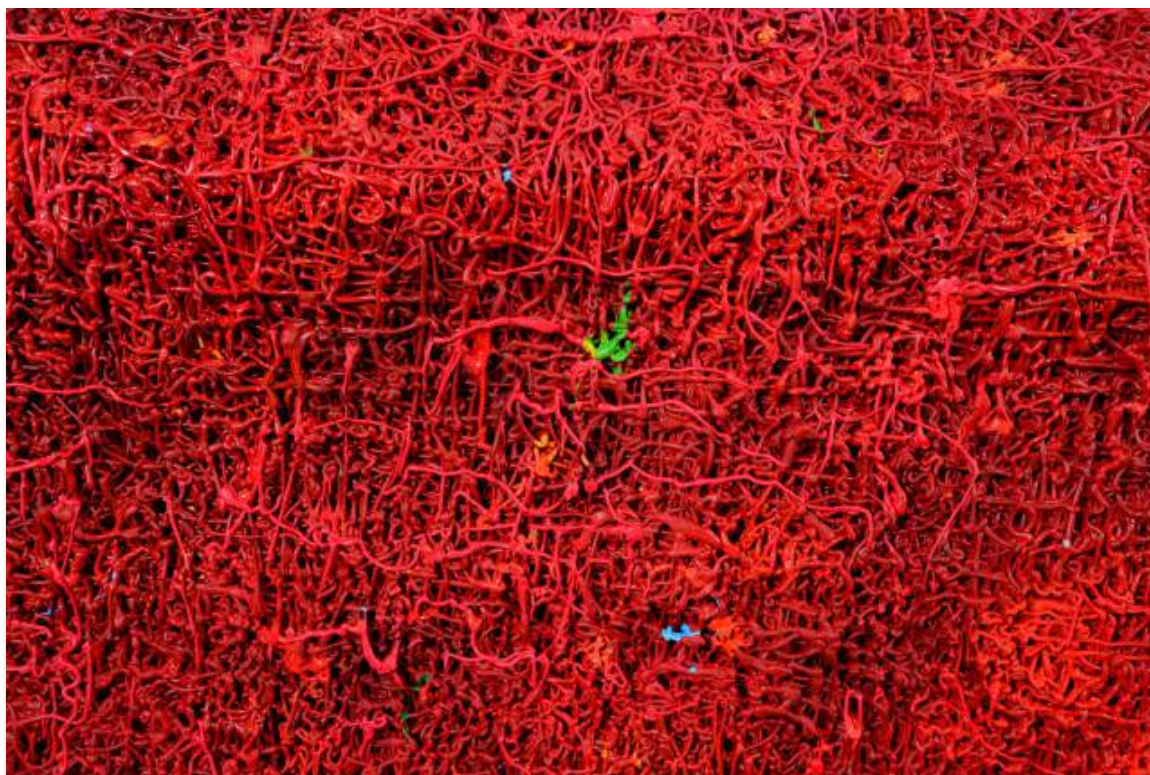


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Art Radar visits the first solo-exhibition of artist Jane Lee in Hong Kong and highlights three of the artworks on show at Pao Galleries, Hong Kong Arts Centre.

The exhibition "Red States: Jane Lee" presents a collection of artworks with a domination of the colour red, exploring the ambitious and unbounded category of artworks in both paintings and sculptures.



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

Starting in fashion and later finding her passion in transforming paint and canvases using hands and innovative techniques, Singaporean contemporary artist Jane Lee recently opened her first solo exhibition in Hong Kong, **"Red States"**, with the collaboration of Sundaram Tagore Gallery, **Hong Kong Arts Centre** and Tagore Foundation International.

At first glance, it would be puzzling for any viewer to define Lee's works in a singular genre. Made of paint and canvases, but not paintings on a canvas in a customary fashion, Lee's works traverse the medium and the materials, stretch the possibilities of forms, and come across as both three-dimensional sculptural objects and two-dimensional paintings stacked horizontally together to extend upwards. Viewers are as likely to find the boundary of Lee's works surrounding the outer edge of a canvas as to see them becoming external to the canvas, extending into the walls nearby, the floor below, or the space suspended between the viewer and the piece itself. The multidisciplinary form echoes with the universality of contemporary art, breaking down pre-existing forms, barriers and interpretations in genre.



Artist Jane Lee. Image courtesy Lee Ee Guan.

Jane Lee's multi-dimensional art is the result of her innovative and unique painting techniques and treatments stemming from her artistic vision. According to **Sundaram Tagore Gallery**, in some of her works Lee dispenses with canvas and extrudes mixed acrylic paint directly onto wooden stretchers, resulting in a three-dimensional object with a hole, and paint at the bottom that seems to be weighted down by gravity. From these techniques, her works give off an illusion of movement captured in a blink of an eye: the paint falls, swirls, rolls, unrolls, hangs or slides, and the audience may imagine associations with everyday objects like a hose, a window or a carpet.



Jane Lee, 'Red States', 2017, acrylic paint, heavy gel on fibreglass, floor piece: 9.4 x 124 x 61.4 in/24 x 315 x 156 cm, wall piece: 87.4 x 120.4 x 11 in/222 x 306 x 28 cm. Image courtesy the artist.

Jane Lee (b. 1963) was raised in Singapore, where she currently lives and works. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts and a Diploma in Fashion from LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore. In the ten years of her practice as an artist, she has participated in exhibitions at various locations, including a collateral event of the **56th Venice Biennale** titled "**Frontiers Reimagined**" and "**Medium at Large**" (PDF download), a 2014 year-long exhibition at the Singapore Art Museum. Her artworks have also won a number of accolades, including a **Celeste Prize** for painting in 2011, the first Singapore Art Exhibition International Residency Prize in 2007, and a finalist for the 2007 **Sovereign Asian Art Prize**. In between, her 2009 large-scale installation *Status* was acquired for the **Singapore Art Museum's** permanent collection. Although her artworks have been shown before in Hong Kong at the exhibition "Popping Up", Hong Kong Art Centre's flagship exhibition "Red States: Jane Lee" is the artist's first solo and site-specific show in Hong Kong.



"Red States: Jane Lee", 11 May – 10 June 2018, installation view at Pao Galleries, Hong Kong Arts Center.
Image courtesy Hong Kong Arts Centre.

Red States

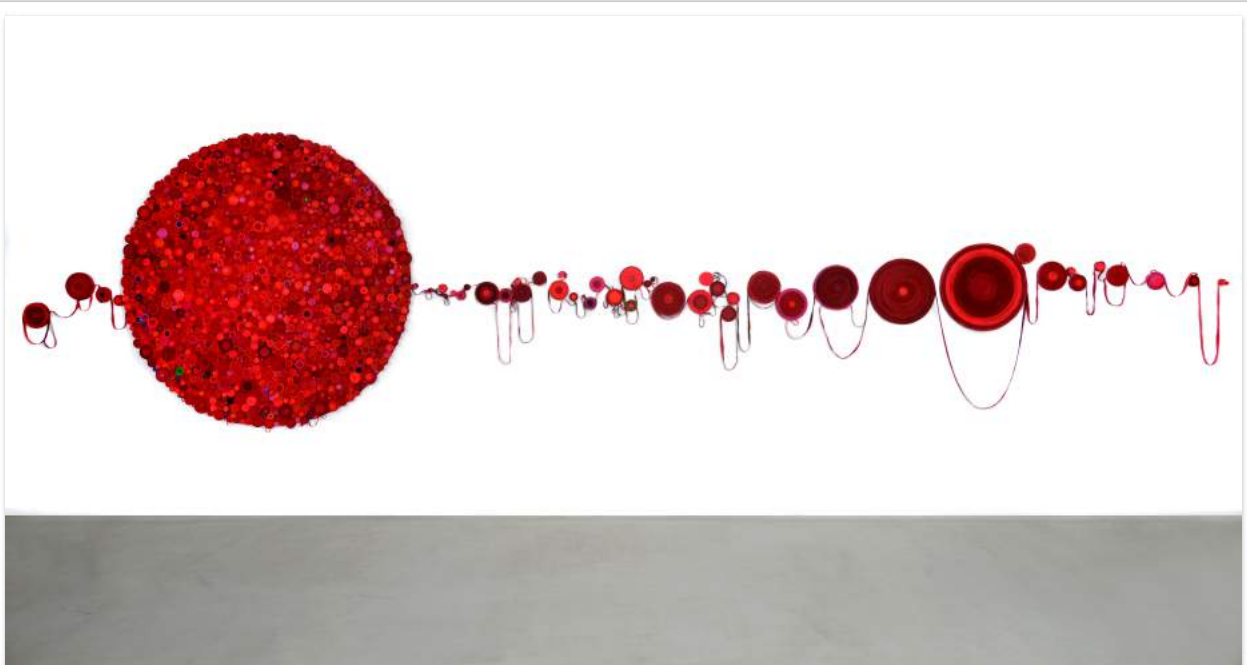
As the title of the exhibition "Red States" suggests, Lee's artworks presented are united by the colour red or rather, the spectrum of red in varying brightness and shade. The exhibition introduces a diverse yet cohesive mix of sculptural paintings and site-specific installations to the public. The artworks on display are situated across three floors of a unique and connecting space at Pao Galleries, Hong Kong Arts Centre. *Art Radar* asked Lee about the selection of the colour red as the titular theme of this exhibition. She commented:

What happened was this piece The Story of Canvas #1, was really the mother of all works in this exhibition. I created this piece first without intentionally deciding red is the color of this exhibition. Later, as I gave more thought to it, I want to provide a sense of unity with a certain elements and therefore, the color red becomes the theme across these works... There is not a singular message that has to be conveyed. In fact, I would like the audience just come in, take a walk near the works, have fun with them, look at them, and play with them.



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

The gallery is spacious enough to provide viewers with the right distance needed to explore Lee's works from different perspectives and angles, while also being intimate enough to lend a focused exploration to each of the works. As viewers enter the top floor of the exhibition, they immediately engage with Lee's works as soon as they step out of the lifts. *Art Radar* takes a closer look at several pieces displayed in the exhibition.



Jane Lee, 'The Story of Canvas #1', 2017, acrylic paint, canvas on board, 80.3 in/204 cm diameter; and 'The Story of Canvas #1a', 2017 acrylic paint, canvas on board, variable, 196.9 in/500 cm length as pictured.

Image courtesy the artist.

Stretching across the whole wall on the top floor of the exhibition, *The Story of Canvas #1* seemingly leaves a trail across the wall as it makes its way through its current position. The trail creates what is now *The Story of Canvas #1a*. *The Story of Canvas #1* is a large circle with a 204 centimetres diameter that is made up of smaller coils of canvas material. The rolls or coils of canvas are intentionally painted in various shades of red: some take an impression of a bright and lively novelty, while some are stained and dark. Using her hands and a palette knife, symbolic of Lee's original passion in art, Lee spreads pure acrylic paint over the raw canvas as she spreads and rubs it over an entire roll on both sides. The canvas naturally but subtly absorbs the paint, which manifests into various shades of red. After that, Lee cuts the canvas into strips and rolls them up, accentuating its warp and weft. Through this creative process, *The Story of Canvas #1* along with *The Story of Canvas #1a* redefine the materials they embody and again stand at the intersection of painting and sculpture while prompting the question, according to Michelle Ho, curator of the exhibition:

But where, really, is the beginning and the end? Does the medium take lead or does its materials define the former? (from 'Beyond and Beneath Paint: The Stories of Canvas in the Works of Jane Lee', Michelle Ho, 2018).



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

Like in *The Story of Canvas #1*, Lee transcends the usual two-dimensional function of canvases into a three-dimensional work in her work *Stack Up #2*. By stacking thousands of miniature square-shaped canvases together on a metal base that curves at the top to one side, Lee makes only the increments of lean slithers of canvas visible to the audience, who tries to distinguish the colour, shade and shadow of each piece through the cross section. Lee again prompts the audience to redefine what a canvas is capable of and envision the sculptural potential in materials commonly used for two-dimensional purposes.

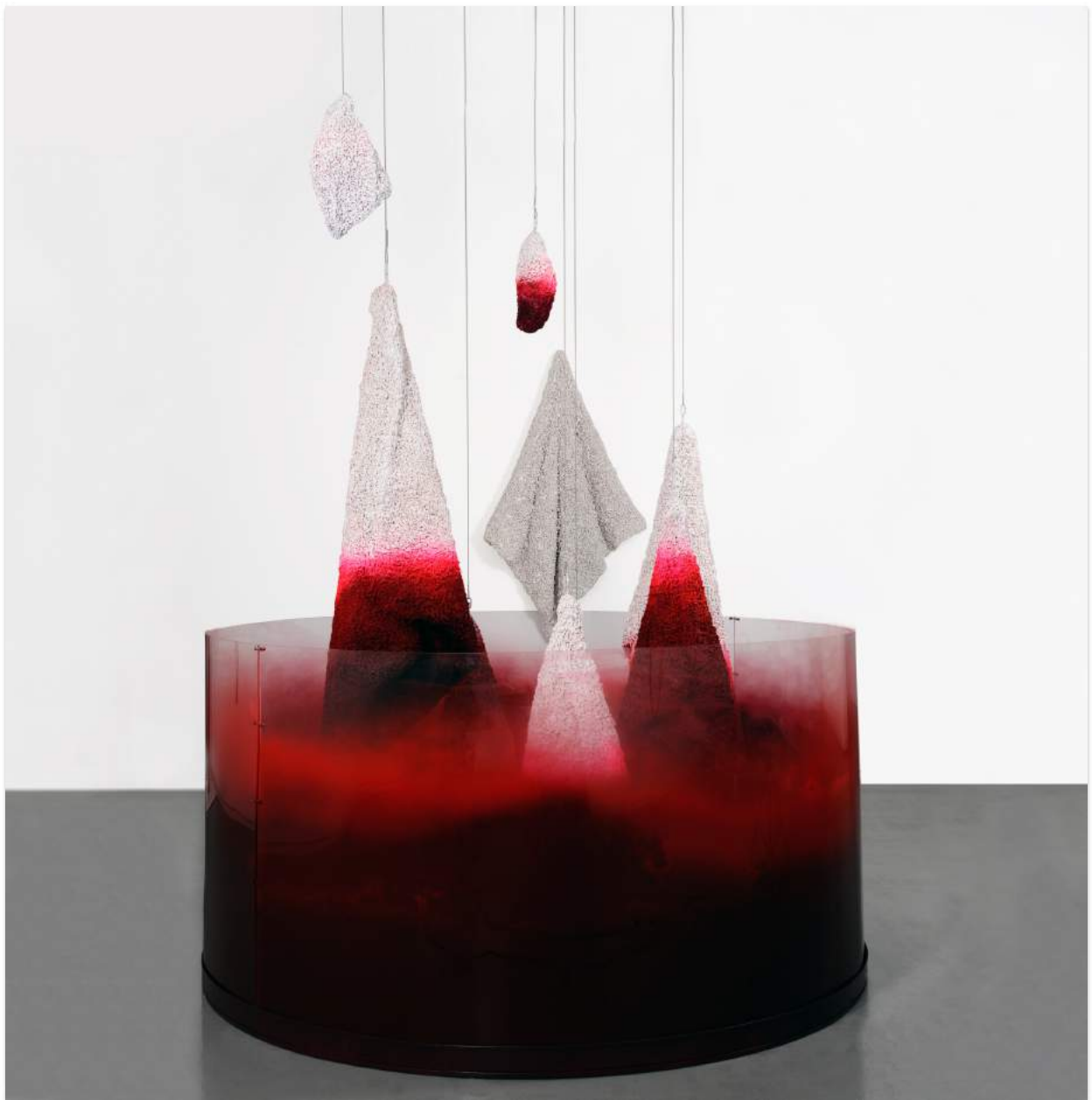
As the other end of *Stack Up #2* reaches close to the floor, loose strings are held together as the canvas suspends in the air, while canvas of various colours spreads beneath it, yielding a complete view of the components of the sculptural piece. The organised though seemingly precarious stacked canvas and the scattered canvas on the floor contrast with each other in form and weight, infusing the work with Lee's emphasis on playfulness and experimentation.



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

Walking into a separate room, visitors find themselves at an intimate distance with the nine sculptures *Cream Series 1-9*. Curator Michelle Ho describes the intense visual and emotional experience the audiences are likely to react thus:

Procedurally, these works can be seen as an application of paint on plinths. For detractors, these sumptuous blocks of lavish streaks, spills and scratches of acrylic that amass into extravagant assemblages, stand as a pure and unapologetic celebration of paint, nothing more and nothing less.



Jane Lee, 'Pond Series', 2017, acrylic paint, heavy gel on fibreglass, Pond 76.3 in/194 cm diameter, the largest piece 55 in/ 140 cm height. Image courtesy the artist.

Walking amongst the nine works from the "Cream Series", the audience may discover stacked canvases blending into a single entity and acrylic paint on top of heavy gel on fibreglass with one side or a hole in the middle that accentuate the works' three-dimensional aspect. The paint here is a mix of colours, like orange and blue; yet, the texture and spread of red and pink dominate, producing an interaction and sense of movement within each sculpture. Lee playfully addresses the tendency to categorise works into genres neatly.

As *Art Radar* delves into understanding the process and challenge of creating the works showcased, Lee comments:

As an artist, there are challenging moments for sure. For examples, you may envision something and you are experimenting with ways to create that, and then there is fear involved too. When you look inward, you may find fear that you have to confront.



"Red States: Jane Lee", 11 May – 10 June 2018, installation view at Pao Galleries, Hong Kong Arts Center.
Image courtesy Hong Kong Arts Centre.

What may surprise exhibition viewers is that additional studies and reference materials describing Lee's creative processes are revealed at the lowest level of Pao Galleries. Neatly labelled materials corresponding to the various creative techniques spread across two glass tables. Some include piles of small circular acrylic paints from a hole puncher and canvases stacked over each other while still semi-wet. These retrospective materials not only trace the chronology of Lee's practice, but also prompt a kind of surprise and satisfaction towards understanding the makings of Lee's emotional, playful and thought-provocative works. The exhibition "Red States: Jane Lee" lends itself to a variety of interpretations and walks the audience through an emotional exploration with Lee's artworks.

Gabrielle Cheng

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"Red States: Jane Lee" is on view from 11 May to 10 June 2018 at the Hong Kong Arts Centre's Pao Galleries, 2 Harbour Road, Wan Chai, Hong Kong.

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