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ART

Take it as red, says Singapore artist making HK solo debut

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You can't help but see red at Jane Lee's first solo exhibition in Hong Kong.

The floor outside the Pao Galleries at the Hong Kong Arts Centre in Wan Chai is covered in ribbons of red canvases, and nearly everything inside is red.

It is a colour redolent of so many things that one may assume the Singaporean artist has chosen it for a reason, perhaps not least her show's politically resonant title, "Red States".

Yet Lee, born in 1963, says red is just a colour to her. "This is my first show in Hong Kong. I wanted to bring some of my past series here as well as new ones, but I worried that it would look messy. The colour seemed a good way of linking them all together," she says. And she's right.

The red theme turns the split-level gallery into a self-contained universe where an enchanting selection shows how Lee

questions the meaning of painting through relentless experimentation with materials and form.

The Story of Canvas #1 (2017) is a spectacular trail of red discs, all different sizes, laboriously made from coiled strips of canvas 5cm wide. The dynamic, 13-metre composition almost spans the entire length of the upper gallery.

"You can call it an installation, or a sculpture. But to me, it is painting. All elements of a painting are there: paint, canvas, structure," Lee says.

A darkened side room is the theatrical setting for the *Pond* (2017) series. White pieces of cloth seem to dangle from the ceiling and dip into a cauldron of steaming red liquid below. But there is no cloth and no liquid. It is all made of acrylic paint, gel and fibreglass.

Lee's delight in experimentation doesn't seem to have diminished in the 15-odd years since she abandoned traditional art forms.

"I originally trained with a classical painter and for years, I did

charcoal drawings, photorealistic paintings. But one day, I realised it wasn't something I was proud of. Why repeat other people's work? I had to stop and figure out what I wanted to do," she says.

A section of the exhibition shows her more muted, early experiments. Gradually, her work has become more ebullient and dramatic as materials are used with sheer abandon, as in the *Cream* (2017) series: thick slabs of acrylic that look like gooey desserts, as shown in another side room.

"When I was doing my training before, you had to follow so many rules. Now that I am challenging traditional paintings, I want to break those rules," she says.

The exhibition is presented by Sundaram Tagore Gallery in partnership with Tagore Foundation International and the Hong Kong Arts Centre.

"Jane Lee: Red States", Pao Galleries, Hong Kong Arts Centre, 2 Harbour Rd, Wan Chai, Sun to Mon, 10am-8pm. Until June 10



Part of Jane Lee's artwork *The Story of Canvas #1*. Photo: Courtesy of Jane Lee