First major survey for one of Australia’s foremost contemporary artists: Lindy Lee

In the first major survey of her work, a new exhibition at The University of Queensland Art Museum will examine and celebrate Lindy Lee’s extraordinary contribution to Australia’s cultural life over the past three decades. Lee’s work came to prominence in the mid-1980s and has evolved in tandem with key developments in Australian art, including the turn towards Asia.

*Lindy Lee: The Dark of Absolute Freedom* (20 September – 22 February 2015) explores Lee’s acclaimed early photocopy work, and the work that evolved following her embrace of Buddhism and her Chinese heritage. Also included are recent works in which she employs pyrographic techniques to evoke the infinity of the cosmos, and compositions comprising flung bronze. A total of 48 works have been assembled for the exhibition, including works sourced from public and private collections.

To step into a room filled with Lindy Lee’s recent artworks – those works of metal or paper whose surfaces have been ruptured so many times by fire – is to step into a world of night in which every surface glints light from fresh rain, and stars radiate in their thousands overhead. Today Lee’s quest is for a cosmos that continually unfolds and a darkness that is, at once, light; but perhaps her search for qualities of transcendence began even before she approached Zen Buddhism in the early 1990s. While it may be too simplistic a reading, one could say that Lee began with blackness and now finds herself in a search for light; in her flung-bronze works and firestones, shiny formless forms stand in for an energy of existence, just as the faces that stared out from her earlier repeated photocopies stood for lives once lived. It is as if all her work has been to honour those who have passed, to render the unseen qualities of existence, and to be reminded of, as she terms it, ‘the ocean of birth and death’.

— Michele Helmrich, Curator

ABOUT LINDY LEE:

*Lindy Lee* is a major Australian contemporary artist with a career spanning three decades. Born in Brisbane in 1954, Lee lives and works in Sydney. She studied at Kelvin Grove College of Advanced Education, Brisbane, 1973–75, before departing for London in 1978 to study at Chelsea School of Art, 1979–80. She studied at Sydney College of the Arts, 1981–84, completing a BA (Visual Arts) and Post Graduate Diploma (Painting). She received a PhD (Art Theory) from College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales in 2001. Lee is presently a Senior Lecturer in the Painting Studio at Sydney College of the Arts, The University of Sydney. She has exhibited in Canada, China, Germany, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, UK, USA and New Zealand and her work is held in major collections including the National Gallery of Australia, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Art Gallery of South Australia, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, National Gallery of Victoria and Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art. In 2001, Benjamin Genocchio and Melissa Chiu authored the monograph *Lindy Lee*, published by Art & Australia with Craftsman House, and in 2008 ABC-TV produced *Artscape: Artists at Work, Lindy Lee* (30 min.). She is presently undertaking a major public art commission for the New Century Garden within Sydney’s Chinatown.

Selected quotes from Lindy Lee, Artist:

An excerpt from *Between the oceans of birth and death: An interview with Lindy Lee*, undertaken by Suhanya Raffel.

“There is a saying that you should not enter a zen-dō – the meditation hall – unless you are prepared to be exactly who you are. This is not about ego ideas but an unconditional and compassionate self-acceptance. This acceptance is the coming home. There is a lot of ritual in Zen, but you realise after a while that this is liberating. The ritual helps to free the mind from being entangled in the endless small decisions that make up our lives so you can face deeper parts of self. It can be tough; you need to confront a lot of self-delusion. In part, this is what my fire work is about – my own ritual of burning away my personal delusions.”
How do you arrive at your choice of materials and colours? Were materials first?

“It’s simple really – colours, materials, methods ‘call’ me. For me, materials are always first. Initially, it was colour, then the carbon of the photocopier, followed by wax, and now the material is fire. Image and content need to be embedded into materiality. The material and immaterial are hinged together; you could call it matter and spirit. Myriad endlessly shifting relationships bring form into the world – embodied reality. The immaterial has no agency in the world except through matter, and the material has no substance or vitality except through the evanescence of the immaterial. My current work is particularly concerned with this mutual dependence.

The materials, especially the colours, are a kind of autobiography. Black is the constant. I started my artistic career using only black. At that time, it was the colour of loss and mourning and now it is the colour of cosmos and mystery. The progression of colours has been black, red, intense ultramarine blue, purple, orange, and green.

The most personal and poignant colour for me is the green, because of its affinity to jade. It evokes tradition on one hand, but I knew instantly when I started to use it that it was the colour of ‘the ocean of birth and death’ … All of the colours I use are lined with similar important personal experiences.”

ABOUT THE CURATOR:
Michele Helmrich is Associate Director (Curatorial) at UQ Art Museum, The University of Queensland and Curator of Lindy Lee: The Dark of Absolute Freedom. Helmrich has worked at the UQ Art Museum since 2004 as Curator of Public Programs; Curator; Senior Curator; Acting Director; before taking up her current position. Curatorial projects have included exhibitions on artists Rosemary Laing, Judy Watson and Fiona Foley, the latter co-curated and presented in partnership with the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. In 2012 she curated Return to Sender and Animal/Human. With Peter Spearritt she co-curated Defending the North: Queensland in the Pacific war (2005), and with Nick Mitzevich Margaret Olley: Life’s journey (2009). She has contributed to various exhibition catalogues, monographs and art magazines.

Selected quotes from Michele Helmrich, Curator:
“Lee’s photocopy work and encaustic paintings of the 1980s received early acclaim and she has continued to garner national recognition. Her work developed almost in tandem with shifts in Australia’s psyche: the postmodern cultural debates of the 1980s, the turn to Asia and multiculturalism in the 1990s, and an increasing openness to ideas such as those offered by Buddhism.

“Despite the transformative moments that punctuate Lee’s works, currents of continuity can also be observed: repetition and the grid; obsessive approaches to image making; darkness and light; form and the formless (in Buddhist terms, Emptiness); and images that unfold endlessly.

“Born in Brisbane in 1954, Lee remembers the pain of racism, of hating being Chinese when she was young, and of being encouraged to assimilate. Referring to her works with photocopied images, she recalls, ‘I loved the flawed copy, because it was a representation of what I was; I felt split and divided, and it was supremely painful.’ Such pain is also her family’s story across five generations who have lived in Australia for periods of time.”

“As Lee comments, throughout her work has been a ‘need to honour and redeem that which is lost and that which is exiled from us’. The darkness and pathos of the early works has perhaps evolved into a sense of light and transcendence. Nevertheless, a deep current underpins the work.”

Exhibition publication
A fully illustrated publication accompanies the exhibition and includes essays by Associate Professor Rex Butler, Damian Smith and curator Michele Helmrich, as well as an interview with Lindy Lee conducted by Suhanya Raffel.
Exhibition film
A short film by filmmaker Louise Turley accompanies the exhibition.

KEY INFORMATION FOR LISTINGS & DIARIES

Exhibition title: Lindy Lee: The Dark of Absolute Freedom

Running dates: 20 September 2014 – 22 February 2015

Opening event: 19 September 2014 (6.15 pm for 6.30 pm)

Curator: Ms Michele Helmrich, Associate Director (Curatorial)
UQ Art Museum


Art Museum address: The University of Queensland Art Museum
James and Mary Emelia Mayne Centre (Building 11)
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http://www.artmuseum.uq.edu.au

Opening times: Open daily, 10.00 am – 4.00 pm (Closed public holidays)
Free entry

Media images: Download images for new and review here

Image caption (Cover): Lindy Lee
Terrace of the immortals 2012
Black mild steel and fire
Collection of The University of Queensland, purchased 2013.
Reproduced courtesy of the artist, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney,
Sutton Gallery, Melbourne and 10 Chancery Lane Gallery, Hong Kong.

Image caption (Back): Photo: Lee Nutter

For further information or to arrange an interview or tour:

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