

Incorporeal materiality

David Courtnage

It is not difficult to see why the figurative sculptures of Won Lee have captured the imagination of so many in the art world.

Thoughtful, daring, and by his own admission, 'primordial', his works project an intensity and mystery that leaves viewers in little doubt that this ambitious sculptor has real pedigree.

His works have been shown and commissioned in North America, Europe and Asia and are increasingly sought after by collectors and art enthusiasts alike.

Korean by birth, though now based in Toronto, Lee was educated at Pepperdine University and the Otis Art Institute. He also lectures on post modern Art theories and practices at the Luxun Academy of Fine Arts in China and he brings much of this academic rigor to his sculptures.

His realist pieces, such as the 'Girl at the Outhouse', are provocative, even dangerous, and designed to challenge the viewer. But there is also a distinct honesty about these works that encapsulates something more than what must have originally inspired their design. They are at the same time both a catalogue of the innate qualities of the initial impulse and an interpretation of meaning and possibility.

Nevertheless, it is the abstract works of Lee where his potential as one of the great sculptors to come really takes flight. Each piece is unique in its conception but is defined by a quality that runs through all of his abstract pieces. Twisted, deranged and tormented human forms project an image of despair and hopelessness, of bodies ravaged by disease. Yet they also emit a beauty and possess a prophetic quality about the fragility of human existence. Indeed, Lee himself suffered from polio as a child and one senses there may have been unconscious reflection of his experience in these works.

In particular, his sculpture 'A Family of Faces' represents represents this

contradictory.

The piece speaks as one; there is a unity of purpose in its conjecture, a hidden narrative that the family is an essential whole by and virtue an association that interdependence is necessary for these inseparable souls.

But there is a clear demarcation between the family and the individual, whether cognitive or not. Each face is different. Some are well defined with very specific characteristics, while others appear as either deformed or opaque beings, unable to extend any influence over the more dominating figures.

There is a natural hierarchy and chain of command represented that maintains Order and self-sufficiency. And, moreover, Lee has achieved what few other Sculptors have the ability to capture; elegance and distortion in the same piece. Or as he would describe it, 'incorporeal materiality'.

Won Lee has already made his mark as a serious and challenging artist who is not only capable of producing beautiful and aesthetically provocative sculptures, but who is also able to ignite an alluring introspection in the viewer that only truly great artists can evoke.

A prolific and energetic sculptor, Lee's best works are surely yet to come and for that we should all be grateful.

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