

## **The Transformation of Process and in the work of Jane Lee**

Process is an integral aspect of Jane Lee's paintings. This emphasis upon process reflects the growing importance of process in contemporary art, where it occupies a central position today. The notion of process in art first emerged in America and Europe during the 1960s, in the work of the post-Minimalists and Arte Povera artists. Artists such as Robert Morris, Robert Ryman and Jannis Kounellis, among others sought to highlight the importance of the processes they employed in their works. They saw these processes as being of equal, if not more significance than the final artworks that resulted. This importance placed upon the notion of process reflected, in some ways, the wider social, political and intellectual climate during the time. It was a climate informed by structuralist theory, in which notions of truth, legitimacy and authority increasingly came under question. There was a prevalent sensibility and belief that authority and truth were no longer immutable and unquestionable and that the underlying power structures of society should be highlighted in order to reveal the legitimacy of power and authority. However, although this interest in process first emerged in European and American art in the 1960s, it has also assumed renewed significance in art today. This can be seen in exhibitions, which have taken the character of 'laboratories', which emphasis process and transformation rather than immutability and finitude, as well as in artworks which downplay the importance of the finished state of the works in favour of their states of becoming. However, this is also where Lee's paintings depart from other process-oriented work being made at the moment, which seek primarily to emphasise their processes and incorporate these processes into their finished states through indexical strategies. Lee's paintings are not about process in and of itself. Instead, her paintings develop, in interesting and significant ways, the engagement with process in art.

Engaging with materiality in a way that reflects her previous background in fashion design, Lee's paintings employ the use of unconventional materials and innovative techniques. Although materials and techniques are employed in her paintings to highlight their processes, to draw attention to the way the paintings have been made or constructed, this reflexivity in Lee's work also serves to challenge and subvert the received representational paradigm of painting. By making the painting's processes and materials the very subject of the work, Lee's paintings question

painting's ability to offer a valid and relevant perspective about the world, to represent the real world. Instead, by 'representing' the processes of their construction, her paintings draw attention to the ambiguity of representation, and allude to a new model of representation, one that takes as its starting point, the tools, materials, techniques and processes implicated in the representational strategy. For, underlying this engagement with representation are the visually intriguing and compelling paintings that Lee's processes have resulted in. This can be seen, for example, in her series entitled *The Obscure Object*. Employing acrylic paint and sealant, the surfaces of these paintings are characterised by a rich tactility that verges on the sculptural. The highly tactile, organic and delicate forms belie the fact that these surfaces have been created using paint, giving the impression instead that they have been meticulously sculpted out of clay or plaster. In addition to exploring the objecthood of painting, questioning painting as a two-dimensional mode of expression, the tactility in her paintings also further complicates the relationship between the surface and support of the painting. Lee transforms the materiality of paint into an integral part of the painting's structure, making the surface and the support one and the same. This multifarious engagement with objecthood is further evident in her *Untitled* series. In these paintings, Lee goes further, to even eradicating the wooden stretchers from the final work, leaving only a 'painting' that is constituted entirely of its outer surface.

Therefore, even though the starting premise of Lee's paintings is the deconstruction of the essence of painting, what results are paintings that are visually seductive and compelling, embodying a reflexivity which does not allude to anything outside themselves. In so doing, her paintings engage with painting and art in significant ways. By questioning the objecthood of painting, her paintings mediate the complex relationship between process and their final manifestation, opening the possibility for a new representational paradigm for painting, and in a way which results in novel and engaging aesthetic experiences.

Eugene Tan