

Eileen Leung

b.1981

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Coming across a work like *Three In One* in a gallery space feels like stumbling upon a small bright jewel you perhaps hadn't expected to encounter. In an Eileen Leung exhibition, you might find works resting in a small cluster on the floor as if engaged in conversation, while others sit on a plinth with a wise air, and still others hang on the wall-like traditional paintings.

Often her work defies easy categorisation: are these works paintings or sculpture? Looking at *Three In One*, you can see some of the surfaces are painted in an abstract manner reminiscent of the work of Russian Wassily Kandinsky, and with a lyricism and calligraphic line associated with traditional Chinese painting. In other works, however, figurative forms such as clouds and a girl's face are clearly evident. Leung incorporates both abstract and figurative styles, but she works on a wide range of materials (including perspex, plywood and clay), often in a single work and in complex combinations, so that her painted surfaces appear to push into the three-dimensional space of sculpture.

Although Leung habitually makes small, intimate works that invite close-up contemplation, there is, nonetheless, a parallel with the work of prominent American sculptor, Jessica Stockholder, who makes outrageously colourful multimedia works out of such disparate objects as furniture, plastic, toys and fruit, which have been described as "paintings in space". Stockholder's installations sometimes bump into the ceiling, spill out the windows or sprawl across the gallery floor. They wilfully draw our attention to space: the areas that enclose us and what lies beyond. By taking aspects of painting that normally belong on a flat canvas, and mixing them up with such diverse materials, Leung similarly makes us consider how forms interact with their environment and with space itself.

She calls the many shapes and fragments of perspex, plywood, paint and clay that make up her works, "magic beings". Each small entity is a "shape world", a hybrid of material properties that interact in surprising ways. For instance, the transparency of perspex might be blocked by plywood, or a hole cut in wood to open up space, or the earthiness of clay affixed to shiny synthetic perspex. Leung not only mixes media and styles in non-traditional ways, she also confounds the viewer by mixing the dream-like with the recognisably real. Yet, her works are grounded in an awareness of the natural environment, with many of her painted forms and shapes mimicking landscape or weather, and her titles often underline these references. In a work like Leung's *Breeze In The Sun*, for instance, we might perceive a benevolent environment where human beings and nature interact in complete harmony.

Robyn Pickens

Galleries and museums:

www.christchurchartgallery.org.nz

www.64zero3.com

Web search:

Chinese painting

Wassily Kandinsky

Jessica Stockholder

