LINDY LEE: THE DARK OF ABSOLUTE FREEDOM

Lindy Lee, one of Australia’s leading contemporary artists, has had a career that has spanned over three decades. Such an extensive time frame has resulted in drastic and subtle changes that have taken place in her artistic style, and are revealed in her new exhibition Lindy Lee: The Dark Of Absolute Freedom, on at the UQ Art Museum.

This is Lee’s first major survey of work, and allows viewers get an insight into the artist’s life, technique, influences and passions. Lee’s Buddhist faith and Chinese heritage are woven throughout the exhibition which is spread over four room spaces on the lower level of UQAM, with her most recent works in the first space giving a backwards chronology of her art as you move through the gallery.

The works in the first room of the exhibit all contain ‘fire’ of some kind, with the most breathtaking, and most literal form, being the several plasma cut metal works that contain different burned patterns. Lee’s works have a very philosophical and self-reflective nature to them, with the question ‘what is this that exists?’ being in the essence of every work. For these plasma works the answer is that we as people are not outside the laws of nature, Lee can decide on a pattern to be burned into the metal, but she cannot control
it. This is a concept that is evident in the variety of burn patterns in the separate works, and the natural form that results. The empty space is as vital as the metal in these works, as the immaterial shadows that are created are as much apart of the works as the metal itself. This is also reflected in the molten bronze works whose metal work combines with the white wall space to complete the piece.

Room two transitions from not only this concept, but also in medium to a room of portraits. Lee is known for her photocopy work, and although the content of these works are not original, it is the colour and medium that makes them what they are. Portraits of ancient figures covered and scraped with wax reveal Lee’s determination to study the great works, and yet stray from them in her own style, to copy, but be completely original in her own right. This room also contains portraits of her mother and grandmother presented in minimal stark colours and grid formations.

Grids and repetition are motifs in Lee’s works. While the base image stays the same the colour and shading over the images changes, and is presented in a grid form. At first glance it is aesthetically captivating, but understanding Lee’s use of colour in context says so much more. Black= grief or mystery, red=blood and body, blue=spirit, purple= body and spirit, orange =Buddhism. When you have this knowledge the use of black, blue and red for her mother, and black and red for her grandmother reveals just how important family is to her art.
The third room of the exhibition has Lee’s earliest works. Photocopies printed on different materials, the use of paint and shading to leave her mark on existing figures and imagery all reveal the start of Lee’s processes and vision as an artist, as well as the beginning of her use of grid work and strategic limited colour palette.

It is the last room of the exhibition however, that fills viewers with the most emotion, a room filled with propped up cards of her family’s portraits. Each person has their portrait duplicated several times, with subtle shading changes in red and black. Red=blood, blood=family. It is a sense that is undeniable and hits you when you walk into the room.
Making this the last room was a wise curatorial choice by Michele Helmrich. As you move through the gallery you move backwards in time through Lee’s career, however it all comes back to family, and it literally stares you right in the face.

If you are a fan of contemporary art then this is an exhibition to see. You will be blown away by Lee’s diversity of medium, technique and subject matter, all aspects that make her a treasured Australian artist.

**The Details**

**What**: Lindy Lee: The Dark of Absolute Freedom

**Where**: University of Queensland Art Museum

**When**: 20 September 2014- 22 February 2015

**Website**: Visit the UQAM website for more details

*Images courtesy of University of Queensland Art Museum*