

zac lee

when come  
spring (?)

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## Zac Lee: *WHEN COME SPRING (?)*

For Zac Lee, to live in Malaysia is to live in a kind of surrealism; a wonderful soap bubble which distorts perceptions of truth and reality. Those on the outside see the gleaming surfaces of beautiful beaches, delicious cuisine, shining faces and sunshine. Yet his work reveals that were one to peer closely through the soapy film, perceived realities are different. In his new exhibition, *When Come Spring (?)*, Lee's paintbrush reveals pointy tales about modern Malaysia and her state of affairs, and the body of work continues to provide an elegant social commentary, fusing photographic accuracy with the confident and refined painting style for which he is so well regarded.

*When Come Spring (?)* shows a strong development from Lee's highly successful 2012 exhibition *Conversations in Yellow and Blue*. Conceptually, the collection invites deeper consideration of recent local political events through reflection on Chinese iconography. He enjoys creating works which have a back story, and thus certain pieces make good use of Chinese four character idioms, themselves rooted firmly in folklore.

The works *Horsedeer* and *Deerhorse* play on the Chinese saying 'to call a stag a horse: to deliberately mislead'; shorthand for the tale of a Qin dynasty official who used this trick to usurp the throne (Emperor's new clothes story carries the same message.) Similarly, Lee's signature painted tigers, alive in past paintings, now appear as synthetic figurines, rigid snarls gleaming, referencing the idiom 'the cunning fox borrowing the tiger's power: to use one's powerful connections to bully others'. The significance of these allusions is manifest in the artist's basic concern with political posturing. The deliberately aged 'Polaroid' style borders have meaning as well. Lee explains that an important aspect of *When Come Spring (?)* is the *immediacy* of the art; as if a man wielding a Polaroid camera (rather than painting on a canvas), he 'points and snaps' to create these striking images of Malaysiana. The discolored borders elegantly tell of the passing of time and hint that the messages extend before and beyond today.

Lee's mastery at playing on perception and reality is complimented through symbolic and deliberate use of colours and fonts to enhance subtlety. Pieces such as *Yellow Ducks* and *Toy Story* exude a wry humour covertly shared between artist and viewer, whereas *One Fine Day*, with its colossal crab claw and hammer, and *Listen*, depicting a magpie and hibiscus flower, present the double edged precision of quiet demonstration. It cannot be doubted that such works have both an aesthetic and critical reach, yet Lee does **not** feel any need to 'change a system, to be an activist'. Others do that much better. But he is invested in the country, and he is relieved to 'just able to express his thoughts and emotions as he sees them', through what he loves to do – consider and create. However, he remains hopeful that in five years time the situation in his homeland may have changed enough to enable him to abandon the complex subtleties of this kind of work, and move to a different genre.

His previous collection referenced Martin Luther King's maxim 'all we see is a shadow cast by that which we do not see'. In *When Come Spring* Lee develops this thought, presenting a powerful exhibition in his inimitable surrealist style and leaving us with the compelling message that seeing should not always be believing.



Zac Lee  
*When Come Spring*, 2013  
Oil on jute  
137cm x 175cm



Zac Lee  
*Deerhorse*, 2013  
Oil on jute  
137cm x 175cm



Zac Lee  
*Horse*, 2013  
Oil on jute  
137cm x 175cm



Zac Lee  
*Ideal and Reality*, 2013  
Oil on jute  
138cm x 175cm



Zac Lee  
*Listen*, 2013  
Oil on jute  
138cm x 175cm



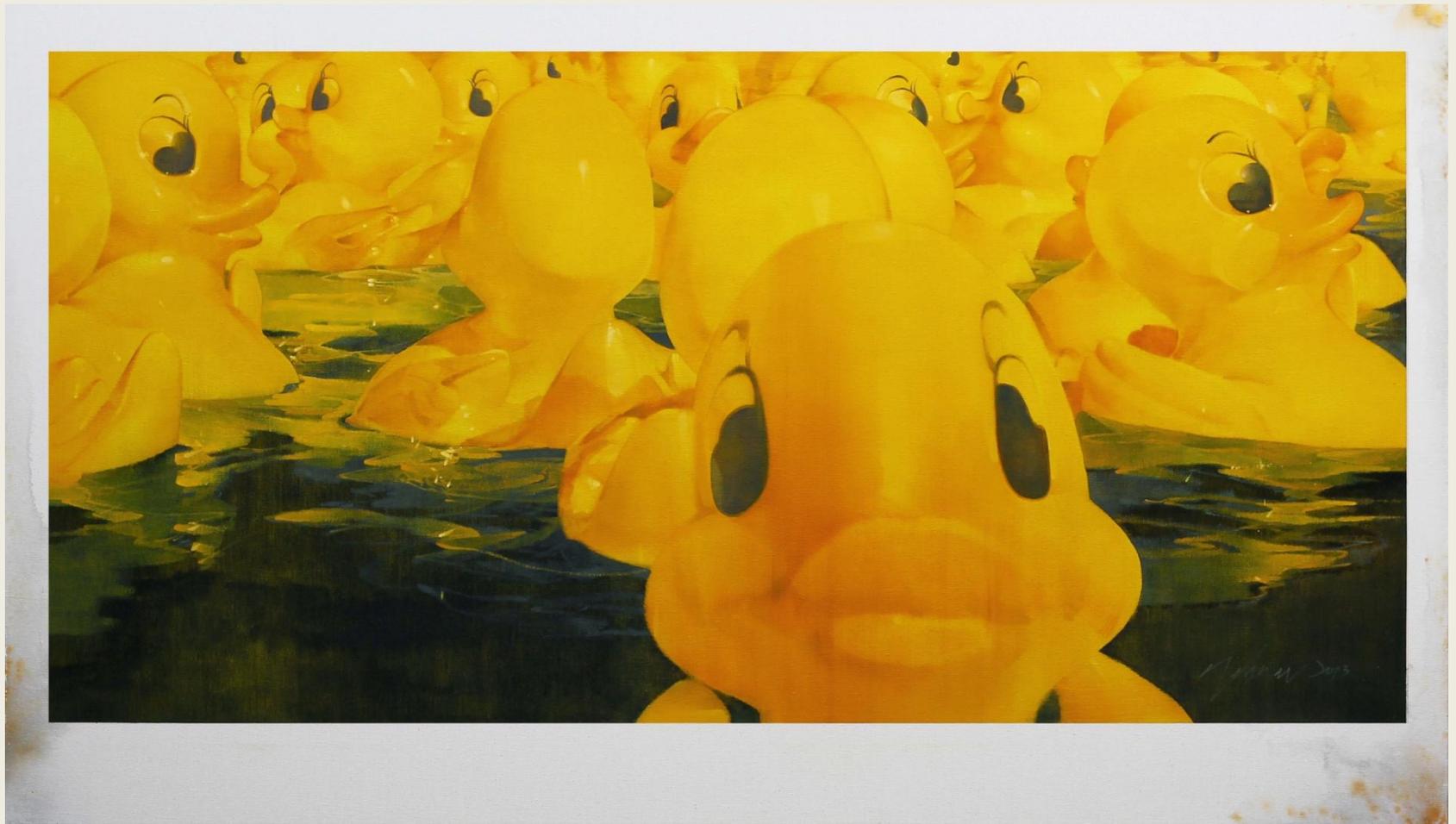
Zac Lee  
*Toy Story 1*, 2013  
Oil on jute  
138cm x 175cm



Zac Lee  
*One Fine Day*, 2013  
Oil on jute  
138cm x 175cm



Zac Lee  
Crabwise, 2013  
Oil on jute  
105cm x 198cm



Zac Lee  
*Duck in the Dark*, 2013  
Oil on jute  
105cm x 198cm



Zac Lee  
*Stripes of Arrogance*, 2013  
Oil on jute  
105cm x 198cm



Zac Lee  
*Threat of Threat*, 2013  
Oil on jute  
105cm x 198cm

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