

Zac Lee
Knotted Nests

3rd December, 2015 – February 15, 2016

Shalini Ganendra Fine Art

Zac Lee's Open Invitation

What do you hope the reaction is to your new work?

'I hope that the audience appreciates my concerns and that we will develop a common understanding.'

Zac Lee considers his thought process in painting as similar to that used in Chinese calligraphy: if one line, one stroke, is wrong, the meaning of the piece collapses. Once a mistake is made, it is irreparable. Though he works primarily with oils, Lee does not take advantage of the malleability of the medium: once a work has been started, its idea and focus are fixed in his mind. He locks himself in figuratively and literally.

This closed-system process is apt, considering his preoccupation with a seemingly unchangeable environment captured in his work. Lee describes Malaysia as a '*surrealism country*'; it is humorous, amazing, odd, intriguing, inspiring. But, it is also dark, irrational, disharmonious, nonsensical, and it is this darkness that his 2015 series *Knotted Nests* explores. The Chinese idiom that 'the snake and the rat share one nest' is the focal point of the series. It refers to the collaborative force of darkness where wrong doing is a common goal: wrong doing, in turn, attracts wrong doing. The creatures in the paintings, as depicted, are unappealing, and yet their co-existence with human authority brings life to the idiom.

Though a continuation of earlier works, in so far as commentary on flawed systems, in these new works, instead of animals being metaphors for humans, we see humans as metaphors of sorts for a wilder kingdom. Lee explores the socio-political jungle through experimentation with double exposure aesthetic and X-ray. In 'Under One Hat', an X-ray of an official hat reveals a curled snake hiding within, protected by a rat, as a partner – rather than prey. Here we have an altered animal kingdom.

The figure over which these animals crawl and slither, is gagged by a hibiscus that reappears on its own in 'Sea of Change' and 'See of Change' in huge and compelling format. The hibiscus contains a crimson wave, and this is once again Lee playing with language and vision, *'exploring the concepts behind red-ocean strategy, exploitation, competition, aggression'*. In 'See of Change' the colour scheme hints at the national flag, the blue invoking the *'blue-ocean business strategy, creation, uncontested space, and the pursuit of differentiation'*. The 'blue-ocean' is an alternative mode of business conceived in retaliation to the competitive 'red-ocean' model that currently dominates developed markets. In a blue-ocean market, companies succeed not through competition, but instead by creating 'blue oceans' of uncontested market space.

Zac Lee's mode of commentary challenges locally accepted systems in ways that are unexpected. *'The only thing I can do is paint'*, he says. *'I am not an activist. I am an artist who paints personal emotions, no-one else's'*. His view is not academic. It is lived.

This is proved by Lee's process: he works almost entirely from his head and imagination. Before he even considers sketching, or mapping out ideas, he thinks. Before he begins, the story and concept are clear. Though the visual itself might be altered at each step of the process, he works intensely, in obsessive bursts, each stroke certain. Lee shares - *'look at the painting, not the vision or the process. As an artist, I have one space, one moment, for that first impression of the impact of the vision. THAT is the only thing the audience sees.'* Now the discussion can begin.



AWARDS

- 2015 Nominee, Sovereign Art Prize, Asia
- 2014 Finalist, Sovereign Art Prize, Asia

MAJOR EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 Asia Week NY, SGFA at Bernarducci Meisel, New York
- 2014 My Country, SGFA w/Louis Meisel Gallery, New York
- 2013 *When Come Spring (?)*, SGFA @ Gallery Residence
- 2012 *Conversations in Yellow & Blue*, SGFA
- 2011 *Truth & Dare*, SGFA
- 2010 *New Species C - 4*, KL Pac Performing Arts Centre , Sentul, Kuala Lumpur and SGFA.
- 2009 *What Goes Up*, Shalini Ganendra Fine Art, Malaysia
- 2006 Red Mill Gallery, Vermont Studio Center, USA



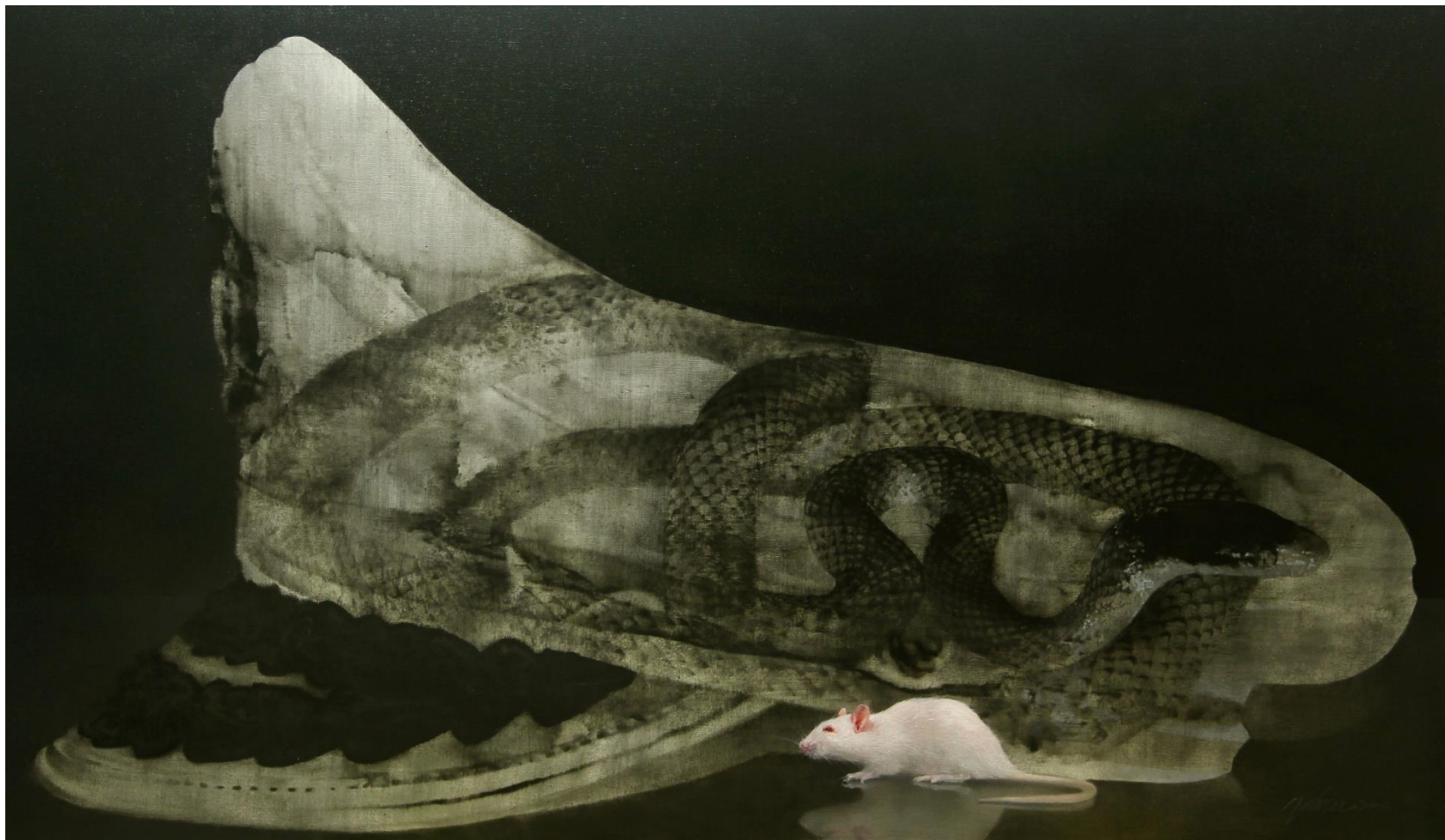
Constriction, Oil on jute, 138x175cm
2015



Collusion, Oil on jute, 138x175cm
2015



Drowning Hero, Oil on jute, 138x175cm
2015



Under One Hat , Oil on jute, 107x198cm
2015



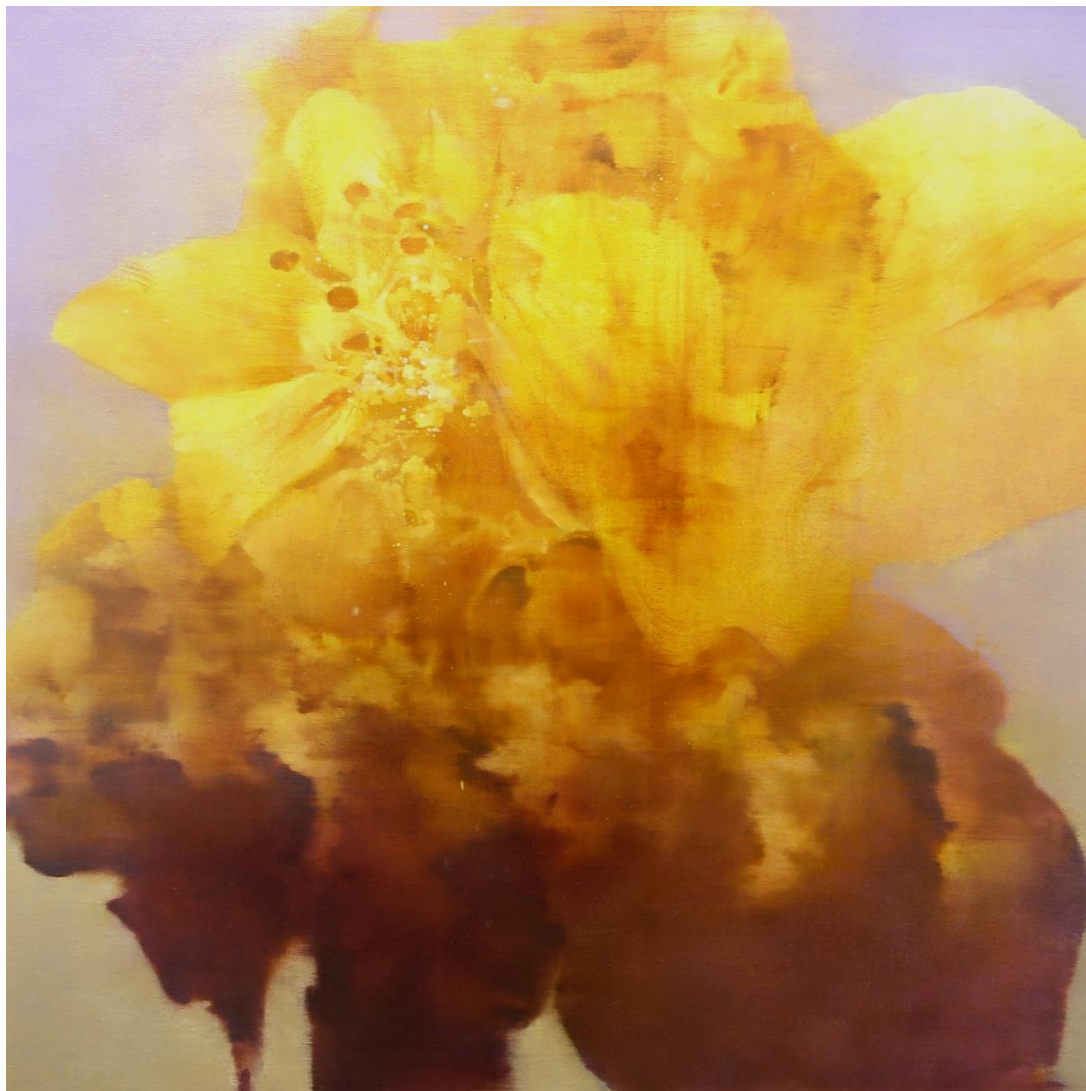
Sea of Change, Oil on jute, 183x183cm
2015



See of Change
Oil on jute, 183x183cm
2015



Country Blue, Oil on jute, 97x97cm
2015



Clean Again, Oil on jute, 97x97cm
2015

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