

CONTEMPLATION • FORCES

By Lampo Leong

One of the most pervasive and enduring motives for artistic creativity must surely be the desire to express a sense of awe and majesty evoked by the overwhelming power of nature. Philosophers like Kant and Burke have given to this experience the name 'Sublime', and many powerful works of art throughout the ages and across cultures bear witness to this eternal force. Peter Voukos' ceramic work exhibits the same heroic power as ancient Greek sculptures. Anselm Kiefer's paintings capture the same grandeur that the painters of the Song Dynasty responded to in their monumental landscapes. What but a feeling for the Sublime accounts for otherwise inexplicable similarities in our responses to certain works of, say, Picasso and Michelangelo. The Sublime seems to impart to works imbued with its spirit something transcendental and timeless, something that otherwise belongs only to primordial nature. My work also responds to this same spirit. Through my painting, I hope to allow the viewer to share my reverence and wonder before nature's awesome majesty.

Trained both in China and the United States, I believe that today's artists arrive at a moment of extraordinary challenge and opportunity. Faced with the challenge of mastering, synthesizing, and transforming the elements of traditionally opposed aesthetic values, we have the opportunity to realize radical new possibilities in artistic creativity. For instance, in traditional Chinese ink painting and calligraphy, the expression of the brush strokes is a fundamental value. In the traces of the hand one can read not merely the marks of the calligraphic character, but also appreciate the instantaneous revelation of the artist's total experience focused in the moment of setting brush to rice-paper. By contrast, European painting since the Renaissance has explored the rich secrets of color in its love affair with light through accumulated layers. Utilizing unique techniques made possible by digital imaging technology, I have been able to fuse these two elemental values in multimedia and postmodern works that transcend the old paradigm of East-meets-West, reaching a new level of integration.

In my current series of painting, *Contemplation • Forces*, I have developed a post-modern visual language that incorporates the rhythm of wild cursive Chinese calligraphy with images from the outer space or the microcosmic world in color schemes reminiscent of the symphonic effects achieved by Abstract Expressionism. While I continue to pay homage to the spontaneity and beauty of the calligraphic stroke, in these paintings I literally shatter the written word, layering, overlapping, fading the mutable fragments in and out of dynamically shifting planes of meditative or molten hues. The strokes themselves, set free from signifying function, seem to dance in color fields pregnant with light. Energies shift and explode to create tension and serenity in an electric manner.

The images produced via my approach to the challenge of integrating a dual artistic heritage are as startling as they are paradoxically familiar, even intimate. These images might at times remind the viewer of elemental forces—seething magma, the formation of fossils, glaciation or solar flares. At other times, they might seem metaphoric of invisible dramas—cosmic or spiritual crises, powerful emotions recollected in moments of serenity. As for me, the inky blacks of figural marks playing against fields of colored densities and radiant lights speak of my own fascination with the processes of creation. Reflecting a reverence for both the spirits of *Dao* and the Sublime, as well as an ever-renewed wonder at the universe revealed to us by modern science, my paintings celebrate the dynamic energies that give birth to new stars, new planets, and new life. These paintings provide glimpses into the crucible of genesis.