

LAMPO LEONG'S INKSCAPE

Lampo Leong's latest series, *Inkscape*, captures the dynamism of painting as action and as moments of artistic creation. As the title suggests, an "inkscape" is more than the sum of its parts—the medium of ink and the genre of landscape—and aims to be a sublimation of both. *Inkscape*, unlike an ink landscape, is a creation governed by the internal logic of the ink medium and its attendant forms, rather than reliance on reference to the physical world.

A navigator of polarities—East and West, China and the US, ink and oil, figuration and abstraction—Leong leaves behind the cultural schisms that he has successfully reconciled and now works comfortably within an expanded ink tradition that has been widening since the seventeenth century with "Individualists" like Shitao, whose innate abstraction has been admired and further cultivated by later inheritors of the ink practice like Leong. Even though Leong is known for his mixed-media acrylic and oil paintings that weave gestural, calligraphic marks into modernist color fields, Leong's deft return to ink is logical given his background: a native of Guangzhou, Leong studied ink painting and calligraphy at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, where he gained an equal foundation in drawing and oil painting through the school's synthetic curriculum. Armed with a versatile skill set, Leong came to the United States—residing first in San Francisco, where he earned a MFA in Painting at the California College of the Arts, and later, in Columbia, where he is now a Professor of Art at the University of Missouri-Columbia. In the 1990s and early 2000s, Leong worked mostly in the aforementioned mixed media technique that mediated oil and acrylic painting through digital processes. Ink, however, reemerged in his practice around 2013

after he had earned a Ph.D. in Comparative Studies of Painting and Calligraphy at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing.

Inkscape is the mature summation of Leong's recent scholarship and creative exploration, in which the mixed media impulses of his earlier work now finds articulation as video animations and video projections in collaboration with performance artists. Regardless of medium and format, the primordial energy often found in Leong's work is expressed as elemental components in the current work. Organized around geometric shapes, Leong's compositions are centered and balanced, often taking a circular shape in which we perceive the tension between a black hole's resolute flatness and infinite dimension. Even in his earlier oil and acrylic works, volume leaps from the two-dimensional surface as amorphous, overlapping forms. Leong's paintings are believable and beguiling worlds that are unfamiliar but logical. The new series, stripped of the physicality of paint and color, appears to return us to the glimmering, protozoic beginnings of the universe, or perhaps its rebirth.

Centripetal forces seem to pull the marks like magnets. Varied, animated, and powerful en masse, Leong's moving (perhaps dancing) dots are the progenitors of lines, which continue to appear in Leong's latest work, as they did in earlier work. Even absent of illusionary depth, which existed in the earlier work, the "inkscapes" suggest a layered world built upon memories, not unlike a child's Etch A Sketch board on which the particles that form earlier marks are embedded in the analog matrix of the drawing surface, even though they're invisible to the naked eye. We see a tabula rasa but we know traces of the past can never be completely erased.

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Lampo Leong: Inner Vision • Ink on paper, 144 cm x 255 cm (56" x 100"), 2014 • 梁藍波：心象 • 水墨紙本 · 144 x 255 cm · 2014

