

Artist Profile

Lampo Leong: Creating A New Visual Language

By Pamela Marquis

Lampo Leong's artwork embodies his search for an identity between two cultures: Chinese and Western. His artistic language is the fusion of the rhythm of Chinese calligraphy and the dynamic quality of Western abstract art.

In his latest series, "Contemplation • Forces" Leong believes he achieved a great breakthrough in his art.

"I finally synthesized or fused all of my influences and experience into an art that represents myself," says Leong.

Leong describes his work in the "Contemplation • Forces" catalog with an understanding and appreciation for both cultures represented.

"Chinese brush painting and calligraphy value the unique moment when ink is put indelibly on rice-paper. Each stroke declares the totality of the artist's experiences," says Leong. "Western art composes symphonies of color and light, texture and depth. Today's unprecedented exchanges, a melding of traditions, make possible the attempt to genuinely understand the different elements in each culture.

"Artists have an extraordinary opportunity to master, synthesize and transform the specialties of each medium, creating an entirely new visual language and universal aesthetic."

Leong's inspiration comes from many sources – Greek culture, ancient Chinese philosophy, calligraphy and modern European and American art. He finds his creative themes in the many varied aspects of nature, from supernovas in outer space to cells under a microscope.

His artistic influences are also



Leong grew up in China and began studying calligraphy at age 10. He moved to the United States in 1983.

Photo by L.G. Patterson



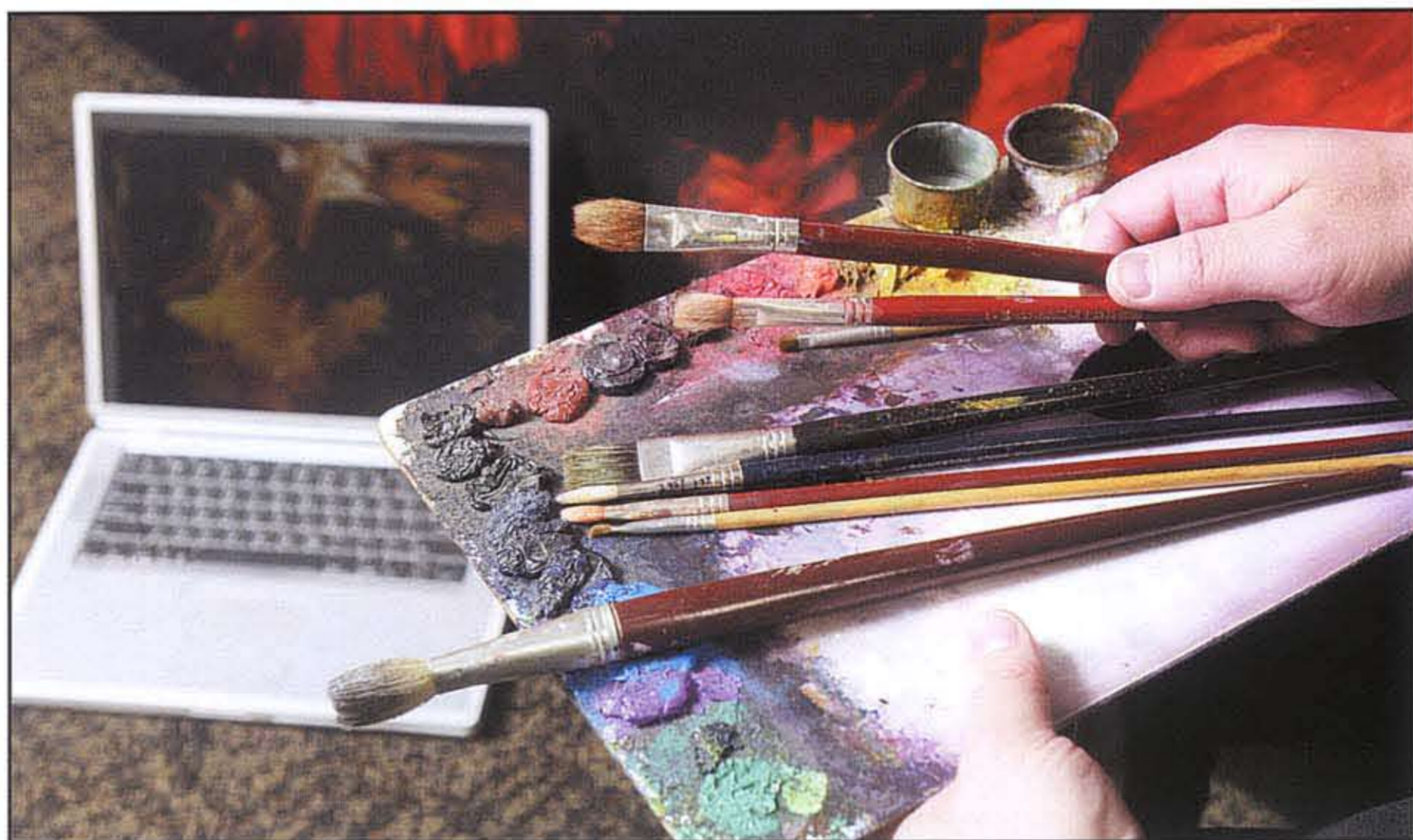
"Golden Synergy One" was created using Leong's dynamic technique that begins with traditional inscriptions that are reproduced electronically then covered with colored oil or acrylic.

diverse: they include artists from ancient Chinese calligraphers to Hans Holbein and Jan Vermeer, and from the 20th century artists Lucian Freud and Peter Voulkos.

His compositions begin as small-scale, traditional inscriptions, done with brush and ink on rice papers in a calligraphic style. Then he splits his preliminary inscription and painting into pieces and collages them onto a canvas. Leong then scans this work into a computer and finally blows it up by using a large-format ink-jet printer that reproduces the movement of the brush across paper onto another canvas. Then he applies acrylic or oil color over and around the calligraphic fragments.

Leong appreciates technology, especially what the computer can provide to his art, but he is quick to state that if used indiscriminately, the computer can have an adverse impact on one's art.

"There is danger that one must remember: the computer is just a tool,



Leong's style is influenced by a diverse group of Chinese calligraphers and a variety of 20th century artists.

the idea must not be led by the computer," he says.

As a child growing up in China, Leong began studying calligraphy at age 10. In high school, he would return after classes to paint late into the evening. After the Cultural Revolution,

the Guangzhou Fine Arts Institute began to once again accept students. Leong was ready. Out of a field of 10,000 applicants, he was one of 16 to be selected to the prestigious art school.

Leong graduated from the institution in 1983 with a bachelor's in Chi-



"Corona"



"Earthy Patina"



"Fiery Striad"

nese brush painting, ready to broaden his horizons. He headed for California where he received his MFA with high distinction from California College of Arts & Crafts in 1988.

Leong's work has been featured in more than 30 solo exhibitions and hundreds of group shows around the world. This year, he has solo exhibitions at Legacy Art and BookWorks in Columbia, Western Illinois University and Guangzhou Museum of Art in China. His work will also be included in



Photo by L.G. Patterson

Leong was one of 16 students accepted from over 10,000 applicants to attend China's Guangzhou Fine Arts Institute.

more than a dozen shows nationwide.

"I was particularly attracted to the power of his abstract work," Legacy president Jim Downey says. "It is very fresh and intense. It is wonderful stuff."

Leong is passionate about his art and happily shares that passion through his teaching. He is currently an assistant professor of art at the University of Missouri-Columbia. He believes teachers should be a role model for their students and be the ones who help bridge the gap between artis-

tic techniques and the making of spiritual and meaningful art.

Leong cannot imagine himself as anything other than an artist; it is the life he has chosen even though he believes being an artist is not easy, especially in a world where so much emphasis is placed on accumulation rather than spirituality.

Leong's work celebrates the energy of life and creates a sublime visual experience, one that he hopes offers insights into his spirituality and enlightenment. ❖