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LIQUID SOUL:
Recent Paintings By JONGWANG LEE

October 4-November 10, 2011

OPENING RECEPTION: Tuesday, October 4, 6-8 pm

We are delighted to announce the opening of LIQUID SOUL: Recent Paintings By JONGWANG LEE, on view through November 10. This exhibition is SEFA's second solo show of Lee's work, following a successful one-person exhibition at New York's Prince George Gallery that Eley curated in 2007. LIQUID SOUL presents some paintings completed in the past two years, which include an extensive portrait series of Abraham Lincoln, several Buddhas and a rich array of abstract work, all rendered in Lee's signature mix of resin, oil paint and pigment. Lee's paintings are comprised of up to a dozen layers of this unique combination of materials. Like living creatures preserved in amber, the artist's vibrant colors pop from beneath a gem-like, glossy layer of resin. This stunning finish supports the philosophy he wishes to convey.

Lee's approach to image-making negotiates a balance between the spiritual and physical worlds. Drawing inspiration from Buddhist concepts and other cultural and spiritual traditions of his native Korea, Lee believes that the best life is in equilibrium. If one can achieve balance, one can achieve peace. Lee's paintings are physical representations of his ideal way of life.

The impetus behind his current work is a concept called *Spacewomb*. Lee's recent work proposes a womb-like mindset: protected, peaceful and free from strife and confrontation. The all-over quality of Lee's *Spacewomb* paintings represent a return to liquid beginnings; like the earth, the human body is 73% water. The dynamic surfaces of Lee's paintings imitate the flux of life and create a tension between movement and stasis, life and half-life, peace and alienation.

Lee works in both abstract and representational styles. Informed by Cubism, Lee's portraits are not always as we expect. An eye floats or a foot protrudes—a breaking down of the physical to understand the metaphysical, a fluid quest for balance. The subjects of much of his recent work are iconic, historical figures who have become his personal heroes—Abraham Lincoln, Jesus, Buddha. Though his devotion is largely secular, Lee admires these religious and historical figures for their sacrifices and their commitment to peace and balance. His figural works often blend binaries: male becomes female, east and west converge

Much of Lee's artwork is influenced by his experience as a Korean immigrant to the United States. The spacewomb circumvents questions of race, language and membership. It is universalizing; we were all new once. "My art is a-political," Lee explains, "I wish to show the alternative [to politics], to present the spacewomb, a place where there is peace."

ARTIST BIO

Jongwang Lee was born in Seoul, Korea in 1960. He attended Sunhwa Art High School and received a BFA in Sumi-e painting and drawing from Hongik University, Seoul, and an MFA from the National University of Tokyo Arts and Sciences, Japan.

Lee has been featured in group and solo shows throughout museums and galleries in Japan and Korea, including the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum and the Kawasaki City Museum. Since moving to New York in 1999, he has exhibited at the Sonoma Museum of Visual Arts, CA, the Hammond Museum, NY, the Korean Embassy, Washington, DC, the Japan American Art Association at the Tenri Gallery, NY, the International Art Festival Lantern of the East, Los Angeles, CA, and more.

ARTIST STATEMENT

色即是空 空即是色 (Form is emptiness, emptiness is form)

My work explores the idea of a spacewomb. This concept is my suggestion for an ideal human lifestyle. I envision fluids, symbolizing human beings, wandering around a neutral space with protection. In this womb, fluids reincarnate after each life cycle and transform through different spiritual stages. Life in the spacewomb disregards the racial and individual differences of human beings and strives to connect each individual to another telepathically.

Today, we live in a highly materialistic and technological society in which we seem to gradually feel alienated from our environment and soul. Through my work, I seek a balance between the spiritual and material worlds. While trying to visualize the tragic tension between the two worlds, I encourage viewers to look within themselves and sense the ultimate, ineffable mysteries of life. In my paintings, I also aim to present an organic element, a life that moves below the surface of things. To achieve this goal, I have experimented with various materials and techniques. In my most recent paintings, I build a series of layers that dry at different rates using liquid resins mixed with oil paint and rice paper, resulting in a three dimensional, sculptural effect.

Living in America has given me a new sense of freedom with which to experiment and has also brought me into contact with new ideas, as if I have been reborn in the spacewomb. I believe that combining my eastern traditions with the stimulation of America's western traditions has enriched and deepened my work. This has furthered my spiritual quest, a quest I seek to share with those who see my work and draw themselves into it.

I find inspiration from many Buddhist philosophies relating to space. Nothing is permanent. Everything in the universe is constantly transforming from one state to another. With these teachings in mind, I use my imagination to express my ideas about nature.
