

"Genuine Void" and "Subtle Possession"

Jun T. Lai is an outstanding Taiwanese contemporary artist. Her Chinese name "Tsun-tsun" signifies purity, natural, beyond the ordinary, and other worldly. Like the meaning of her name, she is pure, elegant and graceful. Her English name, Jun, which is derived from the Japanese pronunciation of "Tsun", recalls summer and is representative of her personality — strong, vigorous, passionate, outgoing and open-minded.

With her abundant artistic gifts, Jun steps into life, poetry, literature, music, dance, painting and sculpture. She loves all these fields and she is talented in all of them. She has vigorous energy and desire to create, extensive knowledge and solid working experience. She works diligently, committedly, and actively. She also carries an extraordinary sensibility, particularly in her speciality of visual art, and she devotes herself whole-heartedly to painting and sculpture.

However, she has advanced beyond the over-used stereotypes of art expression. From her study, researching, and contemplation, she establishes her own unique ideas. Mastering various materials and media, she has consistently progressed in her development as an artist. In past years she has had solo exhibitions, participated in group shows and international art activities in Taiwan, Japan, USA, Europe and Australia. She continually demonstrates her new ideas, new concepts and new works. She never repeats herself, nor looks back into the past. The new concept entitled "Being and Transformation" appears in a group of works of various forms, and yet concentrates on this single theme.

What is "Being and Transformation"? It is an open and wide art horizon where one can run freely, graze the animals freely, farm the earth freely and create future generations. In this open horizon she ambitiously creates her worlds, full of fantasy and rich in ideas.

"Being" is The universal discipline and order of all things under the cosmos. The continual changes in heart / spirit experiences and rational understanding is defined as "Transformation". "Being" is the subjective solidity. It generates the objective "Transformation". It emerges as a sensual feeling and experience which leads to the discovery and creativity of "Beauty". Spiritual/material, rational/emotional, traditional/modern, east/west — all these meet and exist together in life's sentiments and the universe's expansive philosophy. In her art, the elements encounter each other, harmonize and balance and from this she recreates "Natural". The meaning of Jun T. Lai's "Sculpture Natural" is Time Natural, Space Natural and Humanity Natural. The method by which she interprets nature is by discovering the natural, abstract forms found in it.

In her theme "Rising Horizon", we see objects in different mass and proportion condensed in the space between heaven and earth. And from this space comes a new space, new meanings, a new vision. "Being" has within it "Transformation" and the purpose of "Transformation" purpose is "Being". Jun T. Lai admires "Natural", she sings the praises of "Natural", and beyond "Natural" she reaches a new "Rising Horizon".

Approximately 10 years ago, Jun took red, green, yellow and black from the light and color spectrums and used them in her work "Neither Coming Nor Going". Colors were floating, transforming, and flying in space, and constructed a subtle impression of light and color. In this way she went beyond the "Natural" limits, broke the regulations of "Being" on light and color, and in "Transformation" provided the highest sensual feeling. This effect couldn't be imagined nor was it visually fulfilled by either the Impressionist or Abstract Expressionist artists.

Recently in her work "Transformation", she admired and worked with light and color in its infinite expressions. Now she has returned to work with the life relationship between "Pure Form" and "Natural Form". No matter if it is line, form, color, material; no matter if it is space, time, rhythm or illusion; no matter if it is people or object (natural or ready made), thought or feeling; no matter if it is motion or stillness, solidity or void, light or shadow, or form or no form. In between these complex organic relationships, she incorporates the religious attitude of "Ultimate Concern" and compassion and expertly harmonizes them into "The Field Force of Condensation". This produces a spiritual space of tension, constructed from physical, mental and psychological dimensions. From the "Void", she realizes the existence of being, expressed in her work "Teaching of the Broken Arm Primordial Buddha Samantabhadra" which is the Buddhist stage of "Nirvana". It portrays that state which is free and unhindered, just beyond the ordinary, shedding suffering until one reaches "Genuine Void" and "Subtle Possession", a Zen ultimate stage.

However, it is not religious beliefs that she is presenting, but enlightened new meanings of "Being" from natural principles. From the view point of Existentialism popularized by Sartre and Trans-materialism of Taoist and Zen masters, she views things as "Neither Existing Nor Not Existing", "Neither Form Nor Appearance", "Neither Here Nor There", and "Follow Circumstance and True Appearance". All these phenomena are actually other forms of "Transformation". In her recent work "Position/Human", she presents her idea even more precisely. She not only concretely demonstrates the dual opposition of ideas existing/not existing, positive/negative, void/solid, form/appearance, but she also finalizes "Not Negative", "Not Not Existing", and "Resting In The Natural State". These are similar to the "Empty Emptiness" concepts of the Great Vehicle school of Buddhism. In her works of art, these concepts are the invisible format upon which her pieces are based. Here we cannot explain "Being and Transformation" by scientific reasoning. It is the ideal which transcends aesthetics, and she successfully accomplishes this transcendence to the realm of wholeness.

Jun is in the beginning of her middle age, at the peak of her life. She is rich in conceptual thinking and creativity. She has behind her already an outstanding body of work and an excellent reputation. She is, as the Japanese critic Toshiaki Minemura commented on her work "March Peach Blossom Sees Flying Red", "brilliant, luminous, glowing and lustrous." Jun T. Lai will undoubtedly produce a more fruitful, mature and abundant harvest season — that shall always be the expectation of "Summer".

Lee Tsai Chin
scholar and sculptor
Spring 1995