

Red Vertical Lines on Yellow
160 x 110cm; 2015



Red and Yellow Horizontal Lines
140 x 95cm; 2015

and sure definition recalls the ways in which for example the Abstract Expressionists in the USA and the Tachistes in Europe used black in a vigorously expressionistic manner.

The preceding brief discussions hint at the variety and range that characterise Hou Leong's painterly resurgence as exemplified by the works in the present exhibition. His art is a hybrid, a fusion of Chinese and Western traditions and techniques that results in a beautifully modulated and subtly insinuating body of work that celebrates cultural identity and cultural identities.

Peter Haynes
Consultant Curator
Canberra, August 2015

10 Black Vertical Lines on Red
160 x 110cm; 2014



14 Black Horizontal Lines and Some Red Lines
95 x 140cm; 2014



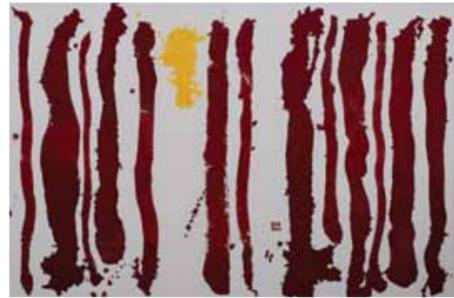
Red Brushstrokes and Black Splashes
110 x 160cm; 2015



6 Vertical Brushstrokes and One Spot
160 x 110cm
2015

The Silk Road Gallery
19 Kennedy Street, Kingston
Open 7 days, Sun-Tues 10-2, Wed-Sat 10-4
Exhibition open Saturday 5 September – Sunday 4 October 2015

HOU LEONG.
THE CALLIGRAPHIC
EXPRESSION.



Red Vertical Lines and One Yellow Splash
95 x 140cm; 2015



6 Black Vertical Brushstrokes
110 x 160cm; 2015



Multiple Black Brushstrokes on Red
110 x 160cm; 2014

HOU LEONG. THE CALLIGRAPHIC EXPRESSION.

Hou Leong was born in Shanghai, China in 1964 and studied at the Shanghai Huashan Fine Arts School from where he graduated in 1983. He became an Australian citizen in 1992 and studied at the ANU School of Art where he graduated with First-Class Honours in 1995. He achieved a degree of fame and attracted critical attention from such luminaries as John McDonald with a series of digital photographs made in 1994 titled "Hou Leong – An Australian". Perhaps the best-known of these is "An Australian (Crocodile Dundee)" in which his bespectacled face is photo-shopped onto Paul Hogan's body. This, and other images in the series, produces a double-take in viewers whose expectations are subverted by the insertion of the Asian face onto otherwise instantly recognisable Australians. These works were clever and incisive statements about identity, and particularly how an Asian migrant sites himself within an Australian context. The series was complemented by others. One from 1995 dealing with the juxtaposition of iconic Australian places with equally iconic Chinese ones included the Sydney Opera House set on the shores of the Li River and Uluru linked with the Great Wall of China. The juxtapositions created a bewildering sense of the awkwardness of the posed combinations; an awkwardness that mirrored the questions of personal (and national) identity alluded to in the 1994 photographs.

Immediately after graduating Leong participated in a number of solo and group exhibitions featuring the above series (and other works) from 1995 to 2001 including the prestigious Moët & Chandon Touring Exhibition (1995–1996); "I'm as Australian as Ampol", Australia House, London (1997); "Paradox", Australian Embassy, Paris (1997); "Transit" at the Art Gallery of NSW (1998) and "Federation – Australian Art and Society 1901–2001" at the National Gallery of Australia (2000–2001). Leong's early success was followed by a creative hiatus during which he pursued other endeavours including taking over the Silk Road Gallery in Canberra's Kingston, a business with which he is still intimately involved. While he may not have ventured into the



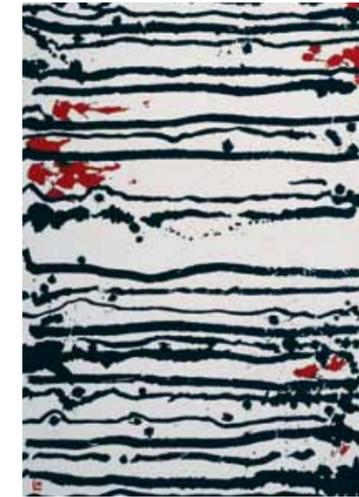
3 Large Black Splashes on Red
110 x 160cm; 2014

public realm for some years from 2001, his interest in art did not lessen and the present exhibition bears testament to this ongoing passion.

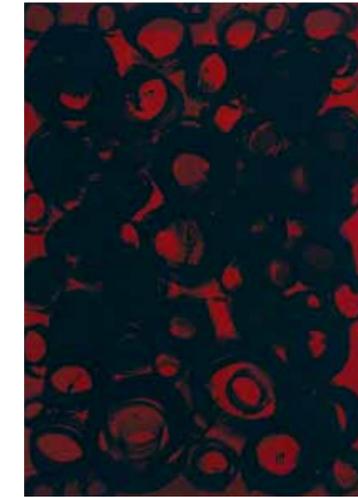
The works in the exhibition date from 2014 and in some ways continue Leong's early interest in the exploration of the question of identity, in the ongoing referencing of the place of one culture within another. While his photographic practice of the 1990s saw him using that medium to explore what it meant to be an Asian in contemporary Australian society, his recent work as evinced in the current exhibition is less concerned with personal identity and more with the expression of the elision of Chinese ways of looking at painting within a wider Western vision of that medium. The work is in a sense Leong confronting through his art his Chinese past with his Australian (Western) present in ways that do not diminish either but rather celebrate both. For Leong the synthesis of Chinese taste and technical methods with Western concepts has provided a rich source for imaginative expression.

In the works from 2014 the artist has elected to use either a dense and rich red palette or a lighter white ground for the surface onto which the decoration is added. Each work is designated by a descriptive title – Multiple Black Brushstrokes on Red, 10 Black Vertical Lines on Red, 3 Large Black Splashes on Red, Black Circles on Red and Black Horizontal Lines and Some Red Lines, 24 Black Horizontal Lines on White, Blue and Red Brushstrokes, Blue Vertical Lines and Red Brushstrokes. The simplicity of these titles belies the imaginative complexity that comprises each work. In 10 Black Vertical Lines on Red the ten lines of the title sit at the front of the picture plane in two neat bundles, one to either side of the canvas. Their blackness is accentuated by the lush red ground and underscored by the areas of grey-black wash that sit behind them. The central vertical space of red is enlivened by an organic splash of red that contrasts with the strict geometric verticality of the lines. The combination of the organic with the geometric, the real with the abstract, imbues this work with a tightly controlled visual tension. Leong's use of red is astute and he is able to capitalise on its tonal richness while simultaneously celebrating its cultural significance in a Chinese context. This is seen in less overt ways in Multiple Black Brushstrokes on Red. Here the dense black strokes move laterally across the surface of the canvas in a fluid surge that is tempered by the red ground behind. The natural world is evoked here and the suggestion of clouds floating through a sunset sky filled with menace of a storm is hard to avoid. The calligraphic and gestural brushstrokes in this work stand in stark distinction to the more rigid linearity of the previous work.

Red as expressive tool rather than as background is exploited to great effect throughout this body of work. Leong uses it often, sometimes with multiply grouped verticals (Red Vertical Lines on Yellow (2015) for example) or as more liberated individual marks (Red Brushstrokes and Black Splashes (2015) and Red Splashes on Yellow (2015)) with the latter randomly dispersed across the canvas in gestures signalling



24 Black Horizontal Lines on White
140 x 95cm; 2014



Black Circles on Red
160 x 110cm; 2014

movement and activating the pictorial surface. Leong's yellow is a marvellously lush tone, full of vigour and life and is used by him as background, or as highlight with very potent aesthetic results. Leong also understands the efficacy of a white canvas. White as background creates a clean spare field on which the various colours used by the artist disport themselves, again activating the space and creating dramatic contrasts and combinations.

Leong also incorporated black into many of his works. In some (6 Vertical Brushstrokes and One Spot (2015) and 6 Black Vertical Brushstrokes, 2015) the winsome almost inchoate gestures beautifully evoke the atmospheric landscapes of Chinese ink paintings. (It should be noted that ink is the artist's preferred medium in all these works). Other works utilising black (14 Black Horizontal Lines and Some Red Lines, 2015) proffer a more substantial input of black and this density