

## **Wee Shoo Leong | Living in Stillness**

Wee Shoo Leong and his wife go to their local community centre to dance once a week.

When he visits me at the gallery we talk about dancing and yoga rather than discussing his paintings. Shoo Leong loves Latin dance and modern jazz. He explains that because he was a ballet dancer in his younger days he understands that movement comes from stillness of the mind, so that only the part of the body that is required to move actually moves and the rest is still and relaxed.

These sessions with Shoo Leong are very useful for making me understand how he takes control of his mind and focuses on whatever he does, and he does it with passion and conviction.

From his studio 14 floors above the ground with a grand view of treetops and the West Coast, Shoo Leong focuses his thoughts on canvas. This is the world that he invites his viewers into when he paints.

Shoo Leong's paintings are immense, substantial and full of charm and surprises.

By immense, I mean big: when the subject is well-placed on the canvas it conveys a correct sense of proportion and therefore appears grand and spacious.

Shoo Leong applies carefully layered colours onto his canvases, blending warm with cool, and at first the total effect is calm and harmonious. Then he fixes his final touches of strong colours on what he considers the focal points and with his final touch the painting sings. Shoo Leong's paintings are heavy with substance.

Shoo Leong's choice of objects provides charm and surprises in his paintings, most notably the rusted old lamp and the clumsy oil pump. The loaf of bread also has its own personality.

Since the 1980s Shoo Leong has practised one important concept in executing his paintings and that is to accurately define form, volume and dimension. He considers every object - be it fruit, flower or bowl - as a sculpture. Shoo Leong gives a three-dimensional treatment to every aspect of an object, even a piece of string or a single leaf, in order to give it roundness and thus volume and dimension.

Shoo Leong judiciously places each object in his painting while at the same time considering every space between the objects. In particular observe the ethereal spaces between the elegant lines of the birdcages which are associated with his still life paintings.

He stage-manages shapes, colours, space, lines and background, successfully allowing the main "actors" to play their lead roles.

Contrasts play an important role in Shoo Leong's paintings: a voluminous object fills the

canvas and set next to it he adds fleeting whispers of leaves or other small objects. Sometimes Shoo Leong creates a movingly seductive background such that only a small gesture added to the surface is enough to complete the work.

Vigour, life and intensity come from Shoo Leong's use of colours. Not many artists can command multiple primary colours - red, green, yellow and blue - in the way that Shoo Leong succeeds in achieving. He introduces not only a shimmering monochromatic background but also a background of varying colours and lines in which he challenges himself by introducing one of his colourful objects that I mentioned earlier.

But the most unexpected aspect of Shoo Leong's paintings is life within the stillness, for example the 'chain hanging from the pipe' in the painting entitled *The Brass Chain*. Observe also the gentle flowers in the the paintings entitled *Sunlight, In the Gentle Breeze* and *Alone*: to the viewer it seems that at any moment the leaves and stalks will begin to flutter.

To enjoy Shoo Leong's paintings one must be with him as he celebrates the richness and vitality of both life and nature.

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