

Lifestyle, Arts & Culture

# #MensFolioMeets Korean Hyper-realist Artist Lee Jung Woong

Ink that reveals all.

By Charmaine Tan

October 05, 2022



Introspection is a key part of experiencing art, and Korean artist Lee Jung Woong has pretty much mastered that to challenge the limits of human perception. This is most evident in his formidably executed Brush painting series, which situates Oriental brushes in the centre of rhythmic and energetic brush strokes. Only they are just hyper-real paintings of brushes — just like the way there is often more to a story than meets the eye.

While this process of discovery seems to so perfectly create that specific headspace to get pensive about worldly things like perception and life, the mind of Lee Jung Woong is a curious one. There is a certain clarity in intention and his Korean identity which does not escape the art, but there is also a dynamism to Lee Jung Woong that can also be minutely picked up from the organised chaos of his ink explosions.

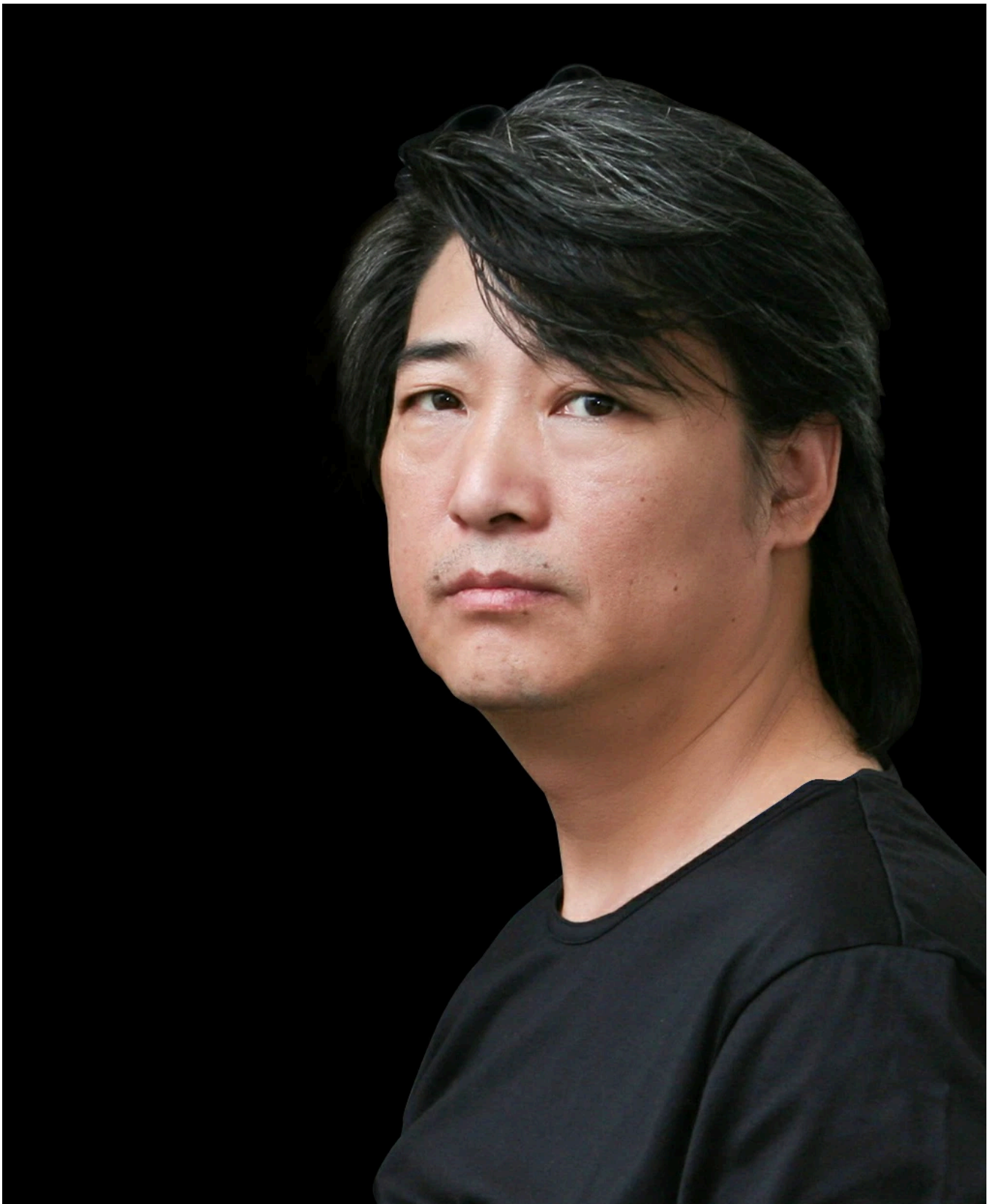
Here, we speak to the artist to learn more about his fascination with brushes, his roots, and how his relationship with art and nature has developed over the past few years of his career.

**Hello Jung Woong! How have you been?**

Very well, thank you! I have been working very hard these past two years, but I am happy to be able to travel again, and glad that Singapore is my first destination, thank you for the invitation!

**Could you describe your art style in 10 or less words?**

That is a challenge! I would say hyperrealistic and abstract, as well as introspective, metaphorical and self-reflective. It is also profoundly Korean, and you may recognise it by the brush subjects.



**Actually, how did you get into art? Were you an artistic person since young?**

Even as a child, I always felt attracted to art, I believe I was born for it. The more I learnt, the more I wanted to do it myself. Studying the history of Korean art and being inspired by the talent of Korean masters was also a way to connect to my culture and my Korean identity.

**What do you usually turn to when you want to get inspiration for new work? Does it always stay the same or does it change?**

My work is very introspective, so inspiration mainly comes from within, but I have noticed that



working in a more natural setting – my new studio is outside Seoul, in a very quiet and soothing natural environment – brings me back to my roots. I grew up on an island, and to this day, I find going into nature to be very relaxing, and it allows me to “get in the zone”.

**How about the art-making process — can you take me through it? We have to talk about brushes — what about them fascinates you?**

When painting, I start with the ink marks. They may be large or small, regular or irregular, depending on my mood. Once this process is done and I am satisfied with the results, I move on to the hyperrealistic brush, which requires extremely meticulous and detailed work.



I came to collect painting brushes during my studies. The Chinese couplet, “文房四寶”, the Four Treasures of the Study — brush, ink, paper and inkstone, that are also reflective of Korean art, are what every artist should strive to master. One day, I realised that brush, ink, paper, and inkstone themselves could be art.

Focusing on these elements, I felt that the role of the brush was a metaphor for myself. The brush on the canvas creates a manifestation of me as I wield the actual brush. The brush encapsulates my intention, my gesture and the final result, the entire creative process.





My research with the brush and the role of the brush as a metaphor for the brush-wielding artist, merging the concept of creation and the very reality of a painting, led me to believe the brush should not be a simplified representation but be brought to life in front of the viewer's eyes. I like the idea of eliciting a show-stopping, second-guessing moment to bring viewers to reflect upon what they are seeing as an image.

**Where do your cultural roots sit in your practice? Of course, the Korean rice paper, ink and the Oriental brush itself are all odes to that, but the hyperreal brush in your works brings to mind your western painting major.**

My Korean heritage has shaped my visual culture from a very young age. I learned Western painting in my formal training, which expanded my horizons, but my Korean identity has always been the strongest in me, there is no denying where I come from.

**Besides the look, how are your new Blue – Brush works differently from the black one? How did the idea of changing the ink colour come about?**

After years of working on monochromes, I was looking to infuse emotion into my works. Going back to my childhood on Ulleungdo island, the blues of the sea and the sky and all their nuances were everywhere, and my relationship with blue is very emotional. It took me a long time, about 10 years, to create the “recipe” for the exact blue I was looking for, and even this process was an emotional re-connection to my youth.



**How has your art-making changed over the last two years? Is the approach or perspective of art now different or still the same?**

We were talking about nature inspiring me, and I believe that was, even more, the case during the pandemic. Being “stuck at home” meant no city life for me, I was staying at my studio, immersed in nature. The sky, the river and the forest were all I saw (which was very enjoyable, I am grateful for it!), and for my art, it meant delving deeper into this natural inspiration with the blue colours.

**What do you want people to feel from your artworks?**

My work is about bridging the gap between ideas and reality, between the intangible and the tangible, so I hope viewers of my paintings may feel a state of union between exteriority and interiority (物我一体); for body and mind to synchronise and to enter a state of therapeutic peacefulness that is coherent throughout the corporeal and the mental.





**To end on a fun note, what was your most played song on Spotify last year?**

I don't use Spotify, but my daughter has told me about it. Should I download the app?

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## Ode to Art presents Lee Jung Woong's hyper-realistic art

By SG Staff(<https://sgmagazine.com/author/sgstaff/>) | Oct 6, 2022(<https://sgmagazine.com/2022/10/06/>)

Even for the untrained eye, hyper-realistic paintings have always fascinated audiences with their mind-boggling illustrations of real-life images, rendered over a flat canvas. The astounding technique and hours of practice put into mastering the ability to shape the way we view a piece of art on the wall never ceases to put us at a loss for words.

Capturing both motion and stillness in a bid to express the essence of Hyper-realistic art, Korean artist Lee Jung Woong's latest *Control in Spontaneity* solo exhibition and *Brush – Blue* series of paintings is a refreshed take on his signature work around the Oriental brush, choosing to use the colour blue (instead of black) to present a meditative and reflexive side.



When asked why he chose to use blue, he told us that it was inspired by his memories growing up on the island of Ulleungdo, where the blues of the sky and sea left an indelible mark in him. After years of working on monochromes, the peace he gets from viewing the sky and river from his window is reflected in his new works.

With *Brush – Blue*, he shares that it was not a conscious decision to portray both spontaneity and the artist's control within a determined space, and more a result of his practice. "Spontaneity and control are not that different to me when they exist in the same, singular space. Only with utmost control can I deliver the sporadic, irregular marks that serve to emphasise the realness of the brush, that emulate reality as it is".

A large, dark, splattered ink blot on a white background, resembling a splash or a large drop of ink. The blot is irregular in shape, with many fine, radiating lines and smaller droplets extending from its edges, creating a starburst or explosion effect. The central part of the blot is a solid, dark grey or black, while the edges are more diffuse and lighter. The overall effect is one of dynamic movement and artistic expression.

To find out more, head over to Ode to Art's website here (<https://www.odetoart.com/>).

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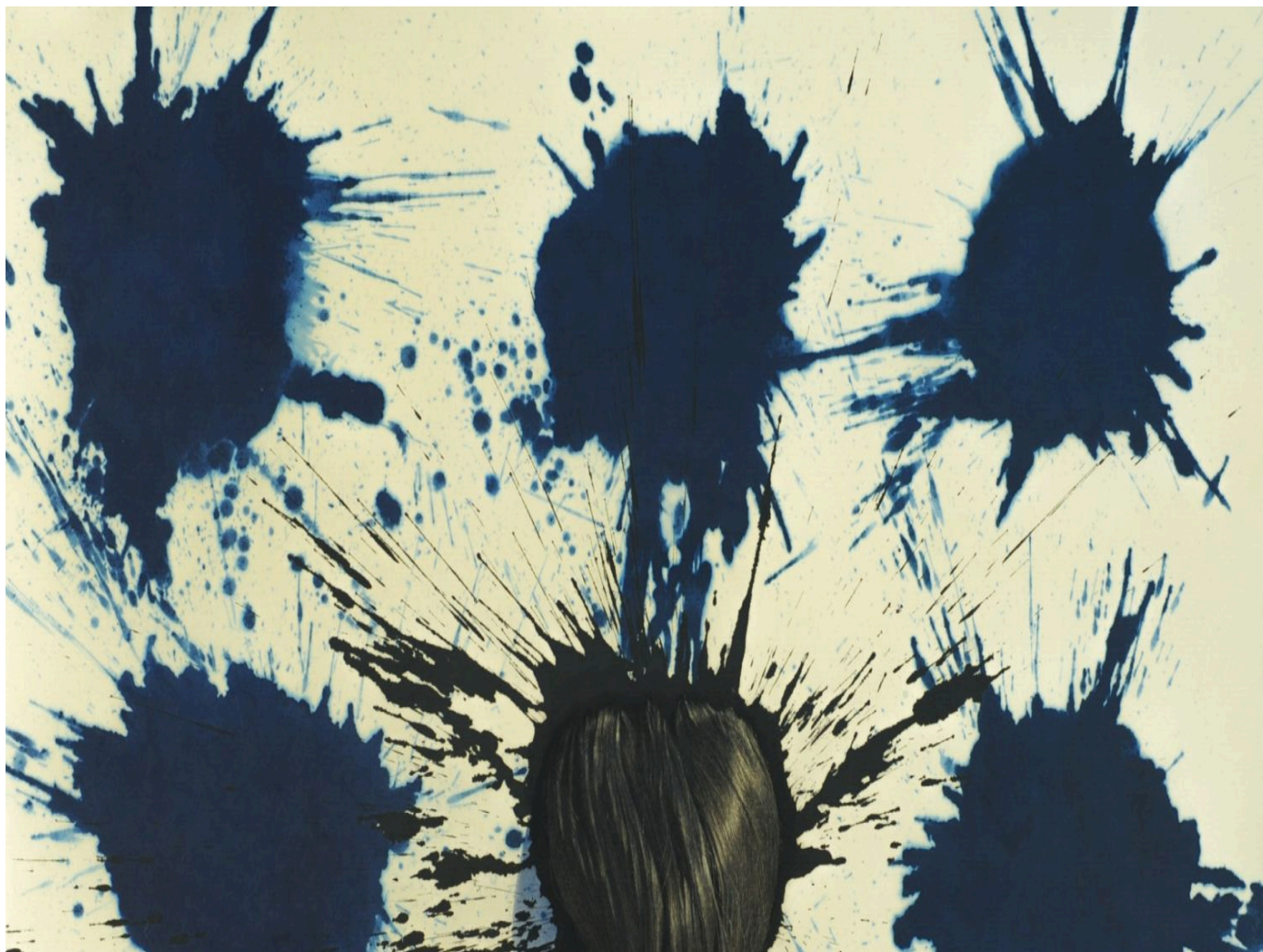


HOMES | DECOR

# Behind the Art: Lee Jung Woong and His Brush with Ink

By Hashirin Nurin Hashimi

Sep 16, 2022



Tatler+

**The Korean artist discusses his artistic process and his move from black to blue ink as part of his ongoing Brush series, with the**



## upcoming solo exhibition, “Control in Spontaneity”, at Ode to Art

**T**he brush, which is the very tool for calligraphy or painting, is the subject of Korean artist [Lee Jung Woong's](#) artworks of oil paint on *hanji*, or Korean rice paper. He takes inspiration from the theme of his previous series of still-life paintings featuring traditional motifs of Korean culture such as pottery, flowers, and stationery, including the Four Treasures of the Study [*mun bang sa u* (문방사우) in Korean culture, and *wén fáng sì bǎo* (文房四友) in Chinese culture], an expression used to denote the brush, ink, paper and inkstone used in [East Asian calligraphic traditions](#).

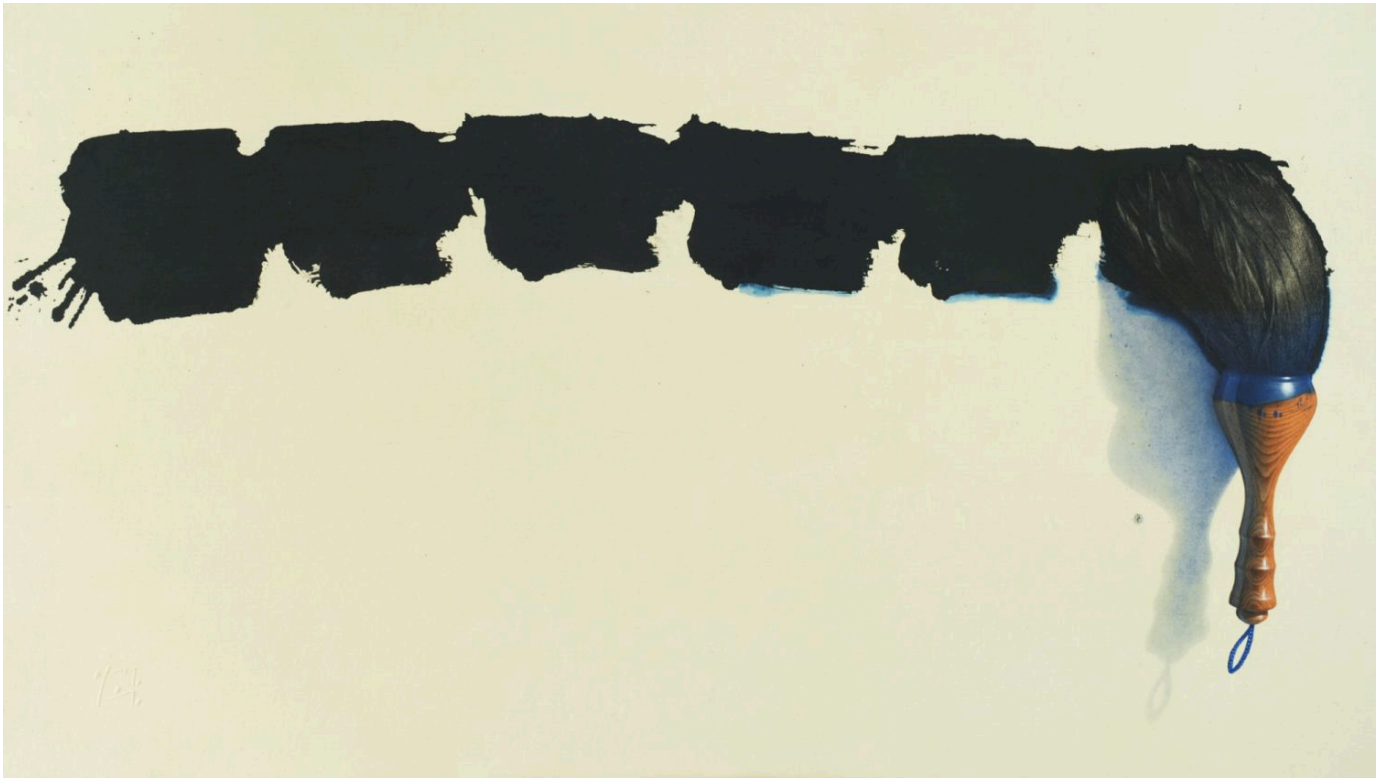
“I thought that the brush, ink, paper and inkstone, each in itself could be art, and they could be broken down into the process of the artwork itself,” says Lee, who became so fascinated with brushes that it led him to research on their different flexibilities, thickness and textures. He eventually amassed a collection so huge that he lost count.

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### Behind the Art: Lee Jung Woong



“Then one day, as I was staring at my huge row of brushes hanging in my studio, I realised that the brush itself should take centre stage in my body of work. I wanted to use a brush to paint a brush,” says Lee. It was in the year 2000, when brushes become the subject of his artworks. “The brush became a spiritual bridge, an anchor that connects all intangible elements of the work in the artistic dimension, to me, the artist. The brush is a tangible manifestation of the

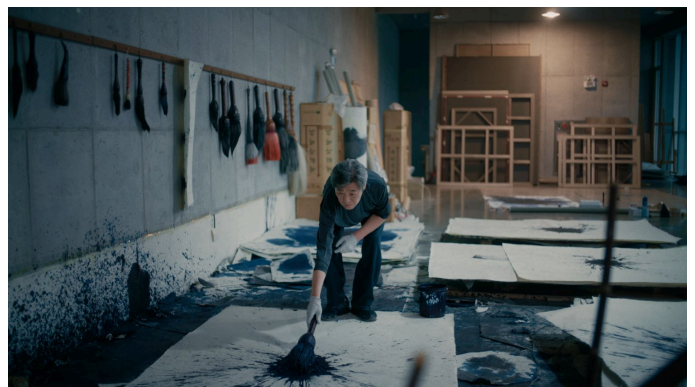
one who wields the brush. This way, the intangible—mentality and spirituality underlying the abstraction in my work—becomes one of reality.”

When he first started his Brush series, ebony ink was used. However, there was a limit to the nature of material to express the oriental texture and dreamy smudging by existing East and West inks/paints. A few years later, “I naturally wanted to include colours containing emotional preferences in my work. I have been fascinated by the colours of nature such as the river and the sky since the construction of my art studio in Gapyeong [Gyeonggi Province, South Korea]. I think unconsciously, I was influenced from the time when I lived on the seafront in my hometown of Ulleungdo [an island east of mainland South Korea] and I have been familiar with the blue colour of the sky and sea since young,” Lee shares.

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**ABOVE** Lee Jung Woong Space & Art in Gapyeong County, Gyeonggi Province, South Korea (Image: Daryl Eng Jun)



**ABOVE** Lee Jung Woong in his studio (Image: Daryl Eng Jun)

Ironically, black ink was chosen to explore the subject, after which blue paint was studied to express the subject. It took Lee nearly 10 years to manufacture and show the blue works to his audience. “I can’t tell you the exact process of the blending, but the East and West inks/paints are evenly mixed,” he explains.

Gallerist [Jazz Chong](#), founder and director of Ode to Art, says, “In my many years of friendship with Lee Jung Woong, I see in his works the gentleness and quiet confidence so characteristic of the artist himself. Each bold stroke of ink echoes his composure and emulates the ataraxy conferred by the boundless lake and sky surrounding his suburban studio space.”







Lee's signature style to trompe l'oeil painting comes from a distinctive visual approach. "I wanted to break down the irreconcilable boundaries that we perceive through the dichotomous aspects of abstraction and hyperrealism." And this can be seen in his upcoming solo exhibition, *Control in Spontaneity*, at Ode to Art, where "I have created a new kind of visual freedom".

Chong explains, "With the establishment of his studio, I witnessed the gradual transformation in Lee's style catalysed by this shift in environment—a predominant blue vehemently finds its way into his newest body of work featured in this exhibition."

The exhibition will feature 15 new works as part of Lee's latest Brush – Blue series.



**ABOVE** Ode to Art founder Jazz Chong with the artist in his studio (Image: Daryl Eng Jun)

And it is perhaps Lee's need to put incompatible elements in one place, blur the boundaries, and find freedom in them that informs his body of work. "I hope that everyone who sees my work will find freedom, as the hyper brush and abstract image denote the outside and inside of things," he says. "I hope to remain the artist of spirituality of the East, the freedom through the dichotomy of control and spontaneity, not an artist of Western materiality. And I also want to be an artist who knows only art."

*Control in Spontaneity by Lee Jung Woong runs from October 7 to November 7, at Ode to Art (01-36E/F Raffles City Shopping Centre).*

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By Asih Jenie  
Apr 07, 2025

