

# LEE KIT

## BORN 1978, HONG KONG LIVES AND WORKS IN HONG KONG

Lee Kit has developed an extensive body of work that intertwines considerations of art with his notions of living an agreeable life. Although sweetly sentimental upon first approach, the artist's painting, video, and installation work confront systems of production and consumption, responding to a feeling of oversaturation and articulating a need to cultivate a greater sense of self.<sup>1</sup> Reflecting upon this condition, he has observed that "we are products too. I think this is a time to enhance individual practice, to change something within our daily lives."<sup>2</sup>

Often the artist's gestures are small and unfold gradually over time. *Scratching the table surface*, 2006–08, is a table of sturdy, plywood construction with a seafoam-green Formica top. In the studio, this table has offered the artist a simple setup and ideal workspace. But the table has also provided Lee a quiet, reflective place to spend time when he is not working, and for two years, his finger scratched away at one particular spot in its surface, breaking through to the wood construction beneath. As a regular practice, the scratching reflects an interruption of daily routine dictated by other people and pressures, a structuring of personal time, and a determined use of that time on his own terms. The table provides the artist a few moments—to wait, and perhaps plot his next move.

Lee's cloth paintings, for which he is perhaps best known, began in 2003 as a means to explore applications for art in daily life. The hand-painted striped and plaid pieces are rendered in soft hues and, to this day, are used as sheets, curtains, and tablecloths around the artist's apartment. When exhibited in a gallery, they often appear unmounted and unstretched on the wall; one might also serve to cover a reception table and then be re-hung, bearing marks of the evening's festivities.

The cloth paintings assume expanded emotional dimension in the artist's "Story" series, in which he abstracts elements from photographs he finds on the internet. In the titles, Lee constructs his own narratives around the images. Photos of a group of friends enjoying an afternoon picnic inspired *Story 3: Mary and Linda, born in Japan and currently live in the States. One day they went picnic with friends, including Peter. Three of them enjoyed it so much and since then, they live happy ever after*, 2010, in which the original pictures are paired with a red-checkered cloth work (its pattern borrowed from the picnic blanket in the original photo) and a cardboard painting of a bag of Ruffles potato chips (one of the available snacks). In this composition, Lee draws out those aspects that make the image of a picnic so appealing, inviting the viewer's projection of memory, desire, and imagination. Why does a red-checkered pattern make for the perfect picnic blanket? Why do these potato chips remind one of afternoons as a child? Lee's *Story 3* asks the viewer to think about how that certain pleasure of a picnic has come to be associated with material goods.

*How to Set Up an Apartment for Johnny?*, 2011, is a major project that plugged into the commerce of the Art Basel art fair, where it was presented. Lee turned the project space into a model home, a domestic environment replete with a kitchen, living area, and washroom; a laminate floor was laid, and a sofa and dining table with chairs were arranged, to suggest how the space might be lived in. His cloth paintings were used for the shower curtain, tablecloth, and window covering, and the space was also stocked with a number of the artist's product paintings. The installation represented the artist's ideal Hong Kong apartment and was accordingly offered as a single work and priced by the square meter (at the city's current real-estate rates). During the fair, Lee sat in the space and performed the role of an agent, inviting visitors to sit with him and imagine a life in the apartment. A small television played news clips lifted from YouTube that depicted footage from Hong Kong's revolutionary past—a reminder of the larger reality beyond these walls.

—Ryan Inouye

1. Stephanie Bailey, "Four Discussions with Hong Kong Artists: Leung Chi Wo, Lam Tung Pang, Morgan Wong, and Lee Kit," *Yishu Journal of Contemporary Art* (May–June 2011), 86.

2. Lee Kit quoted in Stephanie Bailey, "Four Discussions with Hong Kong Artists: Leung Chi Wo, Lam Tung Pang, Morgan Wong, and Lee Kit," 86.