

Jolene Lai

Beside You

February 4 - February 25, 2017

(Los Angeles, CA) - Thinkspace is pleased to present new works by Jolene Lai in her third solo exhibition with the gallery, *Beside You*. Known for her narrative paintings in which characters are caught somewhere between dream and dread, Lai reimagines archetypal stories drawn from myth, Chinese folklore, and fairytale and transforms them into surreal compositions. By combining the uncanny with familiar scenes and contexts from the everyday, Lai arrests our imaginations in a state of suspended disbelief. Her world is full of contrasts, extended metaphors, disorienting manifestations of fantasy, and hallucinatory dreamscapes weaved into otherwise familiar settings. In *Beside You*, Lai explores a progression of childhood scenes gone strangely awry, where the imagery is both whimsical and increasingly phobic. The playful naiveté of the children's story ebbs into an ever encroaching sense of darkness and ends, entangled, in shadowy linings.

Born in Singapore and now based in Los Angeles, Lai studied graphic design and began her career designing movie posters. She eventually decided to pursue her fine art practice exclusively, exhibiting solo for the first time in 2012. Lai works primarily in oil on canvas and mixed media on watercolor paper to create beautifully chromatic works, densely populated with characters and haunted by ambiguous stories. Devised to be freely read by the viewer, Lai stages compelling, and at times puzzling, scenes that lead us down the proverbial rabbit hole. In *Beside You* Lai begins with the familiar as a point of entry into the work, whether it be a domestic interior or an urban setting, and then allows the illogical progress of fantasy to overcome the conventions of reality.

Lai is inspired by everything from mythologies, Asian culture, and children's stories, to fashion editorials, cityscapes, and illustration. She is always seeking new "sets" and stages for her characters and their outlandish encounters. Aesthetically, her work combines the beautiful and the grotesque with the quiet and the excessive in fluid and unexpected ways, just as innocence in her imagery tends to be shadowed by the suggestion of something sinister or dark. Her previous work has included strangely faceted, marionette-like figures, faceless characters, doubles, automatons, and stylized doll-like girls. Her imagery remains universally accessible in its psychologically motivated nuance.

Beside You is a world of melancholic nostalgia in which a little girl can as easily dissolve into candy as she can laugh amidst a city invasion of monster octopi. Here, a house fills with water as a quiet onlooker observes the descent of the drowned, and a carousel horse bursts through an otherwise ordinary domestic interior. There are no impediments to the possible here; it is a world unhinged from plausibility and law. When we look at Lai's work in *Beside You*, we are asked to project, to infer, and to create stories, to draw from the trappings of our own memories. A mirror to our fantasies and subconscious, Lai's work pulls us into the thick.

Anthony Clarkson

Trail of Wandering Thoughts

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Concurrently on view in the Thinkspace project room is *Trail of Wandering Thoughts*, featuring new works by Anthony Clarkson. A painter, designer, and illustrator, Clarkson has worked extensively in the music industry, designing album artwork for prominent bands as the lead graphic designer of a well-known Los Angeles record company. In 2005, he began exhibiting his own work and focusing on his fine art career, returning to the expressive stream of consciousness style to which he had always gravitated.

Clarkson's acrylic paintings and mixed media works are ghostly and surreal - dreamlike meanderings through eerily cast dimensions. Stylistically dark, they feel like haunted eruptions of the subconscious. Combining character-based narratives with the unexpected juxtaposition of suggestive symbols and absurd elements, they create jarring nightmarish figments and provocative associations. At times playful and others nihilistic, his works are graphically and illustratively inspired to elicit a gut reaction.