

Analysis of *The Listless Lion* by Joey Leung

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Joey Leung (2017)

The Listless Lion

Chinese ink, gouache, ball pen, acrylic,
colored pencil on paper

36(H) x 104 cm each (set of 2 pieces)

Joey Leung Ka-yin, an independent contemporary visual artist in Hong Kong, was one of the five representative Hong Kong artists who is featured at the *Picturing Hong Kong* exhibition. She received her Bachelor of Arts (2000) as well as her Master of Fine Arts (2007) from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Born in 1976 in Hong Kong, Joey Leung has exhibited her paintings in over 40 group shows in Hong Kong and oversea as well as held six solo exhibitions at galleries throughout the course of her career. She has been working on a series called “Photo-mirror” since 2012, a juxtaposition of not only drawing but also photography. Her works have been collected and bought by the Hong Kong Museum of Art as well as many other foreign collectors oversea. Joey Leung is best known for her ink paintings with the traditional and modern elements of *Gongbi*, *doggerel* as well as comic drawing.

Through many of her own paintings, Leung embraced as well as established her own contemporary style by combining the elements of traditional fine-line painting skills through effectively using *Gongbi* and popular modern culture. Unlike the older traditional style ink painting, the subject matter depicted by Leung is shown as cartoon-like comic drawing while the scenery is often presented as a magical, fantasy setting. The subject matter throughout Leung’s ink paintings is usually a group of girls with distinct facial expressions in a scenery that is related to the nature. There are short poems written mostly on the top corner of the paintings in Cantonese known as *doggerel*, which helps to create a poetic feeling as a whole. The short poems, *doggerel*, tie everything together as the artist questions the value of old tradition in a new contemporary world that we are in today.

When I visited *The Listless Lion* by Joey Leung at the exhibition, I immediately was intrigued with this particular painting. It is the kind of painting that makes you look twice and every time you look at it, you will find something different in it. The painting seems to be telling a pictorial story of the tired lion by consolidating a modern cartoon like subject and a traditional Chinese scroll. The artwork also appears to be set in a phantasmagorical world with girls bending their legs in order to form mountain ranges. The legs are covered in leaves, flowers and many exotic plants of various colors. They are also encircled by waves of long black hair, representing the uncharted water flowing around the colorful mountain ranges. The lines used are extremely thin and fine, especially when showing the individual strands of the voluminous long hair as well as the details of exotic plants on the mountain ranges. Leung was able to achieve this thin line by using *Gongbi* and mastering the traditional fine line technique. If you look closely at the painting, you will find a sluggish lion laying on the top of one of the mountain ranges. The artist also had *doggerel* written on the top left corner happens to describe the unmotivated and demoralized condition of the lazy lion, suggesting Leung’s own feelings as she is questioning the old values in today’s modern society. The juxtaposition of the subject matter presented in the ink painting shows the notion of fantasy in a surreal dreamland toward modern society. Leung also used variety of equipment to create this particular painting such as Chinese ink, gouache, *Gongbi*, acrylic and colored pencil.

By constantly pushing the limits of different media usage, she successfully incorporated elements of traditional Chinese art into this painting with modern meaning behind it.

Joey Leung's work can also be seen as the interpretation of traditional images with a modern twist to it since this piece of painting is textured and painted much like a traditional Chinese styled *Gongbi* work along with the *doggerel*; however, she preserves a contemporary feel through subject matter by efficiently applying varies of bright colors. *The Listless Lion* allows us to picture Hong Kong's landscape scenery through Leung's innovative perspective. Her work conveys intimate feelings as well as her lively imagination through the unique presentation of legs bend together as mountain ranges in Hong Kong and long black hair as the river around it. Nevertheless, Joey Leung successfully created something exceptional by fully taking advantage of traditional Chinese fine line skills mixed with contemporary modern concept.

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