

MARTOS GALLERY

Gladstone, Sebastian, "The Many Masks of Jennie Jieun Lee," *Foundations*, Fall 2015

FOUNDATIONS

The Many Masks of Jennie Jieun Lee

By Sebastian Gladstone



Isabela, 2015
Glazed Stoneware, 18" h x 19" w x 1" d

The exciting reality of contemporary art lies in its ability to transcend mediums, movements and the divide between the abstract and the representational. The ceramic masks of Jennie Jieun Lee are bold, dynamic sculptures and simultaneously hold their own as expressive, personal paintings. The masks speak on several different levels, exposing varying conceptual and emotional planes. Based initially on memories of Agoraphobia and childhood, Jieun Lee expressed that the masks began as "disappearing into a psychological landscape of color and textures." The works that emerge from this process present these abstract concepts in an explosive yet palatable form.

On the surface, Jieun Lee's work creates an instant aesthetic recognition, similar to looking at a flower or a pretty blue sky. Swaths of color and texture sweep across the flattened faces. Among cracks of gloss glaze and matte clay, reminiscent of De Kooning or Frankenthaler, the color fields present their own emotive responses. The mix of texture and color, layered on top of the contorted faces, leaves a lasting and nostalgic impression; the impact is not exactly clear, though it does not aim to be in the first place. Jieun Lee's masks occupy the unexplained places between thoughts, or fleeting feelings of déjà vu that can't be neatly placed.

The medium of ceramic— typically seen on plinths, tables, and shelves— is a novel statement when flattened and hung on a wall; the form breathes new life into the age-old technique. The final kiln firing of these works manifests the fixed emotions and facial expressions, frozen in time for the viewer.

The power in this work lies in its ability to project complex narratives while simultaneously expressing relatable emotions. A layman with no understanding of the history of art can appreciate the ceramic masks as much as an institutional curator, with completely different, yet equally valid, perceptions. As shown here, language— beyond that of the visual— is not necessary to relate expression. The relatable experiences that these masks present can be consumed simply through their contrasts in texture; hard and soft, smooth and rough. One can almost feel Jieun Lee's fingerprints moving across the wet earth.

When looking back on these 1000 years from now the timeless approach could be mistaken for a ceremonial piece perhaps made by a Raku master or by an artist of the 2000's. The great question being would it matter, and would it really affect the experience they presented?



Symphony No.5 (disco remix), 2015
Glazed Stoneware, 16"h x 17"w x .5"d



Arthur, 2015
Glazed Stoneware

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Symphony No. 40 (G Minor), 2015
Glazed Stoneware, glass, 16"h x 17"w x .5"d

JENNIE JIEUN LEE



Minuet in G Minor (the lover's concerto), 2015
Glazed Stoneware, 14"h x 18"w x .5"d