

MUSIC
Local acts take flight in StageFright / 27

CITY LIFE
BT writers' picks of what to see, do or talk about / 29

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Jane Lee's *Just A Moment I* (2015, left) comprises a thick stack of cards, the edges of which have been printed to create a landscape. At 52, Lee (below, left) has become one of the most collectible contemporary artists in Singapore. She started painting only in the early 2000s, holding her first solo exhibition in 2006. PHOTOS: STPI

The artist: Jane Lee

IN April last year, two works by Jane Lee came up for auction at Sotheby's Modern & Contemporary Southeast Asian Art sale in Hong Kong. The first painting comprised vivid red-painted strips of canvas wrapped around stretcher bars like a bandage. The price was hammered at HK\$437,500 (\$81,022) – much higher than its pre-sale upper estimate of HK\$280,000.

The second work was even more intriguing – a mesh of red dried paint drooping down from the stretcher bars. It was a painting without the backing of a canvas – the paint itself becoming its own canvas, so to speak. It sold at HK\$687,500 – more than four times its pre-sale upper estimate of HK\$150,000.

At 52, Lee has become one of the most collectible contemporary artists in Singapore. She started painting only in the early 2000s, holding her first solo exhibition in 2006. Before that, she had been a fashion designer, a job and passion that partly explain why she handles paint like fabric. She drapes, weaves and wraps paint on stretcher bars as if they were mannequins. Her eye for colour and

detail is exceptional. This year, for Singapore Art Week, Lee has collaborated with print and paper specialist STPI for a solo show that opens at its Robertson Quay gallery on Sunday.

The exhibition titled *Freely, Freely* sees Lee experimenting with a wide variety of media, such as paper pulp, plastic and metal.

The soft-spoken artist says: "I've never worked with paper and print before. But I've been meaning to get out of painting for a while and try something new... Working with paper pulp

is so different from paint. It's rough and dry and harder to negotiate. With paint, you add water to tame it. With paper, you struggle with dry material." But these challenges have made Lee's residency at STPI an invigorating one. It's questioned her perspectives and forced her to transfer her virtuosity from paintings to other media. The STPI gallery space has been configured to accommodate a much broader than expected vision – one that ranges from abstract sculptures and figurative prints to even video animation.

In one series of works, hundreds of paper strips are coiled around pins and arranged in a circle. It's a beautifully tactile work that recalls the abstract brilliance of her paintings. Another series has countless tiny birds raining over or under the artworks – the bird being a leitmotif of the exhibition themed on the concept of freedom. The two video animation works, the first she's ever made, show birds in motion.

Lee says: "I've been thinking of making works that are more accessible. In the past, I've dealt with abstraction – but that sometimes scares people off. So I decided to try figuration

this time, because I don't want to restrict myself to certain genres and ideas... I felt drawn to the image of a bird and idea of flight. In Singapore, everyone's always rushing about to get things done. Being free is a dream for many, so I chose the bird as a metaphor for freedom and dreams."

Freely, Freely by Jane Lee is on from Jan 17 to March 5 at STPI, 41 Robertson Quay. On Jan 17, Lee will discuss her art from 2.30 to 3.30pm at the gallery. Her works will also be featured at Art Stage, Booth C14, from Jan 21 to 24



The Singapore Art Week begins on Saturday and features more than 100 events over nine days – culminating in the country's premier art fair, Art Stage. BT Lifestyle talks to four major players about their roles, and pick out the must-see art of the week. **BY HELMI YUSOF**



CLASS ACT