

Life Lines - Catalogue Essay

Abstract painting is arguably the most questionable, yet curious code of artistic expression of all.

To the uninformed it may appear as a senseless experimentation, a waste of energy, time and materials. They may doubt its purpose, and ask what visible beauty can possibly be captured within its non-descript forms?

The creative process, however involves the artist setting out upon a personal journey, where conscious, preconceived structures are far from the desired outcome. The process involves an intimate exploration of feelings, with the aesthetic results being difficult to predict.

When Indonesian artist Ketut Sugantika embarked on his quest to create a series of paintings for his exhibition "Life Lines" at Tadu Contemporary Art in Bangkok, open 27 October – 12 November, he was preoccupied with only one thought, to address the feelings and emotions of the most recent period of his life.

In the evenings during the months of May through to September he would retire to his studio in Singapadu, Bali, committed to reflect upon his life. The energy of memories, both wonderful and otherwise, he would then translate into vibrant works of art.

An essential approach to abstract painting is to detach from the workings of the conscious mind, and simply allow intuition to steer the motion and momentum of the brush strokes. Colour too is an important part of this process because this too reveals various things.

Sugantika's outpouring translated into a visual code that may initially be perceived as rather simple, yet this is far from the point. Abstract painting has no boundaries, what's important is to follow the inner voice. Gone was his characteristic style of abstract painting from the past, characterized by dynamic explosions of colour and form. Yet what evolved is colourful flowing lines resonating from his heart.

Yet within these seemingly simple expressions may be revealed responses to his recent experiences in life. His wavy lines are far from being straight and rigid, yet are curving up and down, a reflection of the rollercoaster of life.

Experimenting with aesthetic elements Sugantika utilizes both acrylic and oil house paint with alternating levels of sheen and an array of colour combinations. Ranging from iconic Balinese cultural symbols, red, black and white through to compositions predominated by white yet in relationships with greys, black, yellows or blues. He tests various unusual fusions, from pink to light green and mauve, all in the process of engaging with his inner self.

Some surfaces he scratches back to reveal undercolors, while in other compositions the busy, random, pulsating background colors shine through to create potent contrasts. Drips of paint flow across adjacent lines, in both vertical and cascading motions adding to the visual impact. The omnipotence of colour is constantly interacting within and without, while on the subliminal level it is communicating directly with the sub-conscious mind.

"Through the layers of color that are overlapping, layer by layer, I have tried to cover up certain memories so that they became faint. But the more I try to cover them up, the more this seems obvious," Sugantika said.

"In fact I left a few colors in the background showing through to be part of the work's aesthetic impact. Such is life. In the end I must admit that these memories become an inseparable part that bring color to my life. Therefore the brush strokes of color resemble wavy lines such as frequency lines, or natural lines within the landscape. Of course, they are a reflection of human life which is never constant."

"Good and bad memories remain a part of my life's journey pushing me to explore and study myself in the process of becoming whole."

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