

## New Formats, Expanding Horizons

“Change is the force that motivates me as an artist, a mother, and a person. Change requires us to alter comfortable routines, to rethink paradigms, to try new ways of doing things.”

Lenore R.S. Lim

Lenore Lim’s unique dynamism as an artist lies in her ability to be traditional and adventurous at the same time. While in her almost twenty-year career as an art professional she has faithfully adhered to printmaking and resisted the compulsion to vacillate between art forms, she can hardly be labeled as conventional and obstinate. There is an exciting boldness in the “conservativeness” of her art. In the same manner, her uncowed explorations and experimentations bear marks of inveteracy and rootedness.

Lim has always had an innate openness to changes and new experiences, and a big decision to relocate to New York in the late 1980s literally expanded her horizon and brought her to the field of printmaking. New York brimmed with museums, galleries, art stores, art schools, and artists, and the astonishing spirit of the place opened new perspectives for Lim which instigated new ideas and flamed artistic inspirations. An exhibition she saw at the Museum of Modern Art featuring the works of seven outstanding printmakers so captivated her, and until now she vividly remembers standing before the impressive pieces of Robert Rauschenberg and telling herself, “Perhaps if I concentrate on printmaking, one day I could come up with equally wonderful works . . .” By 1989, she was balancing her art teaching job at the UN International School with printmaking classes at the School of Visual Arts. With a newly-formed but already absolute commitment to printmaking, she successfully mounted her first solo show at the Philippine Center in 1991.

At her present stature—multi-awarded and internationally recognized and established—Lim could very well opt to just continue with the printmaking techniques she had already perfected, and acceptably plateau in the process. But she did not. Instead, she continues to evolve and explore new territories while still operating within the parameters of printmaking.

Although most comfortable with techniques that retain the traditional charm of hand-pulled prints, she became equally at home challenging herself with contemporary graphic processes that enabled dabbling with technology. Her favored “past” processes include carborundum monoprint, for which she uses Plexiglas as a base; collotype, which combines elements of printmaking and photo processing; solar etching, which she personally learned from Dan Walden, inventor of solar plates and advocate of safer alternative printmaking techniques; and chine collé, which incorporates lightweight pieces of paper into the print to produce interesting effects.

In her current works, Lim has moved farther away from relying on craft and the use of the press to further experiment with high technology. From initially appreciating technological developments as a boon to quotidian concerns like time management, she now harnesses them as an integral facility in her art production. And with her predilection for imagery culled from nostalgic recollections, cherished traditions and immaculate nature, the artist has distinguished herself as the printmaker who combines an inclination towards things old and simple with a strong desire for the cutting edge.

Giclée print is the new format introduced in the portfolio of Lim, created by the artist through an expansion of her collaborative circle which now includes Paul Plaine and Wally Rodriguez who helped produce these current works at the Plaine and Chamberlaine Studio also in New York. Lim’s giclées revel in their newfound freedom from size restrictions. They address different concerns and generate different effects even as they use the same compositional imagery of her smaller, “old” prints. This is clearly demonstrated in *Ginkgo*, a composition of the beautiful fan-shaped leaves of the ginkgo tree which is known for its longevity. In the enlarged, giclée edition, the unique contours of the leaves become front and center of artistic focus. Looking at this print, one cannot help but be reminded of painter Georgia O’Keeffe, who, when questioned about her big flower paintings, simply quipped, “I decided that if I could paint that flower in a huge scale, you could not ignore its beauty.”

Another series, *Evocations*, magnificently evolved in impact by evolving in size. First created in 2007 as an experimental mix-matching of the spit-bite, intaglio and chine collé techniques in a 12" x 12" format, these are now nearly four times the size in giclée. The shifting tonal values, layered subtle colors, and whorling lines—all magnified—made the abstract beauty of nature's details more prominent. Stripped of opacity and depth and minimally colored, the image of the iris flower was dissociated from its fragrant floral character and instead essentialized into an organic form floating in space like a weightless pinion. "Evocations" shows the artist's personal vision of nature that transcends ordinary appearances.

In the '80s, Lim took computer art photo-etching lessons at the School of Visual Arts in New York under Elaine Breiger. It was her first foray into digital art, which was still a relatively new field at that time. She learned from Breiger the basics of digitally exploring and manipulating compositional form, color, value, texture and contrast; and as the years passed, her prints increasingly manifested a keen eye for image alterations in the quest for interesting compositions. *Hibiscus*, which are two giclées printed in pink and orange versions, are striking for the petal striations that powerfully contrast against the pale ground of the paper. Again, we see the artist's move to linearly abstract the subject, but unlike the *Evocations* series, abstraction in this case curiously ended up making the blooms more alive, as the heavy lines appear like arteries through which the lifeblood of the flowers flows.

In some prints, instead of form, the manipulation of color and texture become the focal point of Lim's digital explorations. *Helyconia's Offering*, *Weeping Willow*, and *Serenity* successfully convey landscapes of lingering solitude through the use of a limited palette of soft colors melding in quiet harmony.

*My Mother's Veil* is another outstanding 44" x 104" giclee print. With a singular object, Lim successfully created a visual embodiment of several abstract concepts—romance, relationship, tradition and continuity. This print is a product of a well-thought idea, excellent material selection, and careful composition using high technology. It also brings attention to the role of the flatbed scanner in Lim's art. Not only is the high tech equipment a means of transferring image, it is foremost an obliging viewfinder for the artist. With ease, Lim rearranged and rescanned the delicate material until she arrived at a satisfactory pictorial field of an unfolding wedding veil with soft creases and overlapping diaphanous layers. Tweaked to a golden sepia, the print glows with the same glow we imagine the artist's mother possessed when she wore it on her wedding day, as well as the satisfied glow that Lim must've had upon seeing this artwork emerge in print.

From one outstanding piece to the next, Lim presents *Constant Evolution I* which she first did as a carborundum monoprint. The horizontal giclée print gives a strong suggestion of a left-to-right progression and transformation of patterns, obscuring the fact that it was actually produced with plates repetitively filtered and juxtaposed.

The selection of works in Lim's current exhibit shows the breadth of her thematic creativity, which spans from artistic facility with abstract compositions that experiment purely with formal elements to a palpable delight and ease in nostalgic and nature-derived compositions.

While other art forms revel in tempestuous abandon, printmaking, by its belabored nature, develops specialized skills and hones what may be called "disciplined creativity" in an artist. The idea may seem ironic, but looking at Lim's works, we see the realness and validity of such kind of artistry. Lim continues to earn respect for her dedication to the realm of printmaking while satisfying an unbounded spirit for experimentation and technology. The situation she has chosen to immerse herself in poses difficult challenges, and not all artists have the talent and maturity to take them on.

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