

Jeffrey TY Lee at Volta4 2008

Jeffrey TY Lee's most recent work, 'Sixteen Landscape Compositions - after Alexander Cozens' revisits 'The Descriptions of the Kinds of Landscape Composition' by Alexander Cozens, published in 1759. These sixteen Kinds were guides designed for *the young artist who did not possess enough of an Idea of a general subject*.

For Cozens, composing landscapes by invention was *not the art of imitating nature; it was forming artificial representations of landscapes on the general principles of nature*. His invention was neither about fantasy, nor realism. It was a classical, systematic method, a process that embodied a particular way of thinking, a particular way of seeing.

Type Nine is labelled 'Two hills, mountains or rocks, near each other'. For Cozens, the general form takes precedence over scale and other specifics. Identification as mountain or rock is superfluous detail.

Cozens described *the formation of the rational mind, which starts [at youth] with particular ideas of 'parts'... and progressively forms larger ideas of 'wholes', for example, gradually relating and subsuming the minutiae of leaves to the general pattern of their forms and growth on a branch, and then the pattern of branches to the general form of the tree, and so on, until the idea of the (compositional) 'whole' of a species of landscape is reached that is more than the sum of its parts.*<sup>1</sup>

Zooming in and panning out, TY Lee is fascinated with the apparatus we use to view, whether they be cerebral, cognitive processes or man-made viewing devices such as the video camera or the stereoscope.

'Fotoplastikon' 2007 is a 16mm film (transferred to dvd) taken from within the rotating viewing rotunda of the same name. This machine was invented immediately prior to cinema, and patrons visiting it would look through stereoscopes to see panoramic views. The stereoscope resembles binoculars and places a slightly different image in front of each eye - causing the viewer to experience the image in three dimensions.

The most minute change in repeated detail brings forth form- a trick of vision that appears to be more real than the photographic truth of the flat image. Much like Cozens' method, TY Lee's deliberation upon these 16 artificial landscapes is a re-editing, a generalization, an abstraction. But it is a detailed abstraction; the particularities are not removed, they are repeated and re-rendered until they make a new sense. The repetition does not overload us with information, instead it causes a change in our seeing - like a word repeated so often it takes on a new form, and becomes alien to us.

Repetition becoming form; we can read the work as script, or musical score. Each part signifies itself and something outside itself. An investigation into the describable qualities of the line, and into the duality of that line.

TY Lee speaks of drawing in terms of longing - *wanting to draw is wanting to participate in the world through one line* <sup>2</sup>. Michelangelo Antonioni said "the painter must uncover a static reality or at most a rhythm that can be held in a single image. ... [but] for a director the problem is to catch a reality that is never static, is always moving toward or away from a moment of crystallization, and to present this movement this arriving and moving on, as a new perception."<sup>3</sup>

Intricate scenes appear and disappear as you slowly unpick their meticulous rendering. TY Lee's careful work embeds a time process into each elaborate drawing. Participating through the line, rather than marking out a defined reality. The

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line is never static, repeated and repeatable, it is plural - indefinite, yet definite - singular. The line is abstract but never vague, unequivocal and determined.

These works are unplaceable, not because they are unrecognizable, but because their context is removed. They are at once an everywhere and by the same stroke a nowhere.

Elaborate abstractions made strange by their detail. *'Things are not as they seem nor are they otherwise'*<sup>4</sup>

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### notes

<sup>1</sup> Charles A. Cramer quoting Cozens in Alexander Cozens' *'New Method': the blot and general nature*, The Art Bulletin, March 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey TY Lee in conversation, March 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Michelangelo Antonioni: *The Event and the Image, The Architecture of Vision*, New York, Marsilio Publishers, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Miles discussing Jeffrey TY Lee, lecture notes, 2005.