

## SCENE ASIA

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## A Political Bent, Except in His Art

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Lee Kit

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HONG KONG — Lee Kit is known for incorporating mundane details of his life into his installations, so it was perhaps fitting that he won the Hong Kong art fair's Art Futures Prize for a show that included a sculpture made from a lacquered and compressed used towel.

The prize, which came one day before his birthday, is one of many accolades the 34-year-old has received this year, following his inclusion in a New Museum group show, "The Ungovernables," and another one at the Museum of Modern Art in New York ("Print/Out"). Later this year, he will have solo exhibitions in Beijing, Shanghai and Turin, Italy.

Mr. Lee began his career as a painter. Household linens—sheets, towels, tablecloths and curtains—serve as the canvases for his abstract works. After painting the linens, he often incorporates them into his daily life, using them for their original functions and making them part of a continuous performance.

Other objects from his studio also figure into his installations. A desk, which he had scratched a hole into, appeared in his piece for "The Ungovernables." "Probably my most important work," Mr. Lee says. "I chose to install it in a really terrible, narrow space in New Museum and combined it with cardboard paintings and readymade objects." Long associated with Fo Tan, an artist enclave in Hong Kong's New Territories, Mr. Lee surprised some by moving to Taipei this month. He spoke to the Journal about the relocation, his prize-winning work and why he's more interested in political life than political art.

### The Wall Street Journal: Why are you moving to Taipei?

**Mr. Lee:** The rent for the studio in Taipei is much cheaper. I can still fly to Hong Kong once a month, and the cost of the Taipei studio and plane ticket is still lower than the rent of my Hong Kong studio. I need some physical distance from Hong Kong. It's not just the art scene. It's the whole society. When I watch the news in Hong Kong, it gets me riled up. The daily news makes me angry.

### Anything in particular?

From the new chief executive C.Y. [Leung], to the police, to general things, the city has changed a lot. I just get so riled up. I mean, I watch the news in Taipei too. In March I had to travel a lot, and I was only in Hong Kong for about a month. I watch the news when I'm outside the city. I spend at least an hour on it. I don't know why, but when I watch the news outside of Hong Kong, I'm fine. When I'm away, I watch the same quantity of news, but I'm more OK with it when I'm not here. So I wanted to move to Taipei and give it a try. I've discovered that if I don't keep a studio in Hong Kong, when I stay with my parents, I see friends and family more often. If I don't have a studio here, I don't have to work.

### You were a fixture of Fo Tan's artists community. How did living there so long influence your work?

I hardly go out. I was always in the space in my studio. I was in my second studio in Fotan for seven or eight years. Because I didn't go out very often, every detail meant something. For instance, a hole in the wall is a regular sight, but I would stare at it for a very long time, and then I'd come up with something. I'd see a lot in the bathroom, even though, really, there isn't that much in a bathroom. I guess I just wanted to project my state of mind upon a space. That studio was really important in my development. But I did want a change. I can't just rely on that studio. It's good to have a change of scenery.

### What was the inspiration for "Something in My Hand," which won the Art Futures Prize?

There was no inspiration. How should I put it? I've been working on the ball for a while. At the time, I didn't consider it a work. Back in 2006, I was in my studio, I woke up one morning and wanted to toss a ball around. I didn't have a ball in the studio. There was a towel on my table. I had this sudden urge to cut it up and turn it into a ball, so I did. I worked on it for about a week, and then the emotions were all gone. After that, I tossed it around from time to time. But I really didn't think it was a work then.

### How does it fit in with your previous work?

The form is really different. Before, I wouldn't use so many readymade objects. The booth was mostly comprised of readymade objects. But the core idea is the same, except that previous work I would take one idea and stretch it really far, postponing the moment over years and years. But this time, it was really condensed. I compressed the moment into the objects. Also narration: There was narration in some of my previous work. It's present in this piece, but it's more abstract.

### Why did you settle on the everyday as a central part of your art?

I guess you could say that I had no interest in other things. I didn't set out to make daily life my focus. Well, actually, I have more interest in politics than art, but I don't want to make politics a subject matter in my work. If you look at it a certain way, daily life is very political.