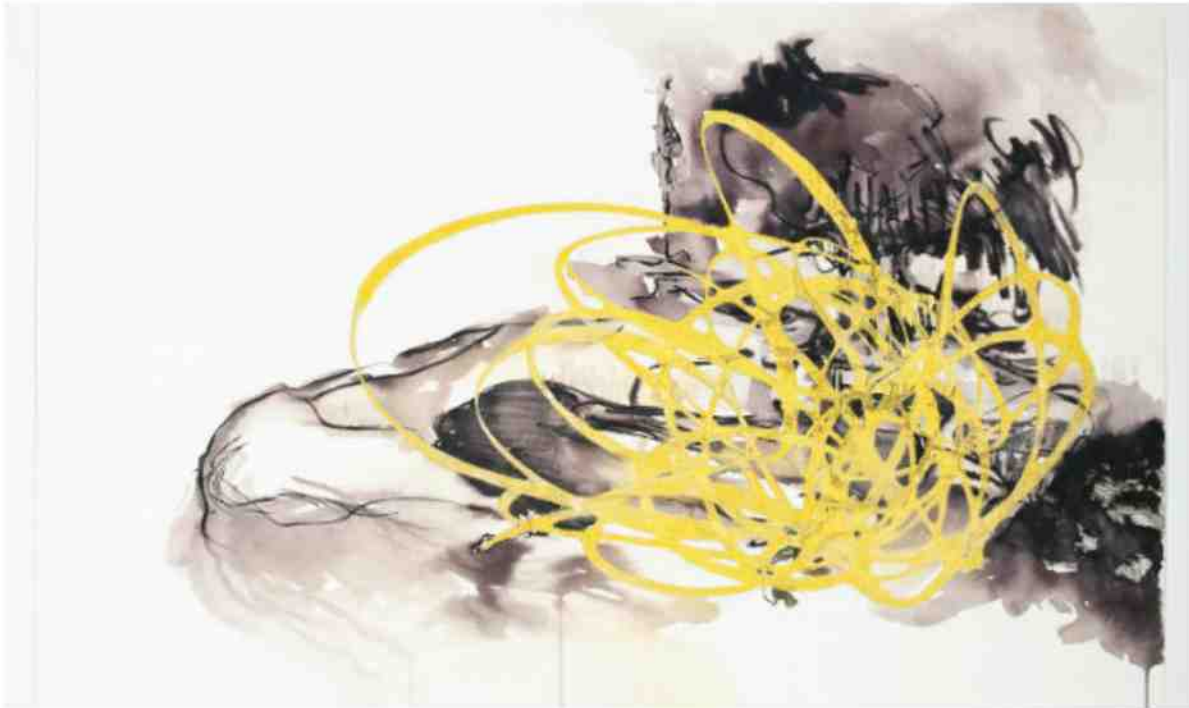


# BLOUIN ARTINFO

## Interview: Lee Bul On Humans and "After Humans"



Courtesy Lee Bul and Lehmann Maupin Gallery

Lee Bul "Indication No. 3," 2008, acrylic paint, india ink and pigmented ink on paper 42 x 56 cm.

by Zoe Li

Published: March 14, 2013



Lee Bul "Untitled," 2013, polyurethane panel, polyurethane casting, aluminum rods, acrylic paint 92 x 74 x 81.5 cm.

Korean contemporary artist [Lee Bul](#) is known for her architectural sculptures of a huge scale. However, for her latest show, the inaugural exhibition for [Lehmann Maupin's](#) brand new Hong Kong gallery, the artist chose to exhibit mostly her drawings on paper.

The sketches show Lee's state of mind and creative development over the years that it takes to generate a new sculpture. Two of her new works are also included: small-scale polyurethane painted sculptures. As well, there are two large-scale works of aluminium, stainless steel, wood, and mirror, demonstrating the dramatic impact of Lee's final work. The result is an intimate show that allows us into Lee's personal world of art creation, from start to finish. **Rachel Lehmann** calls it "an extension of Lee Bul's private studio."

We chatted with Lee on the eve of her exhibition's opening about her personal world, her philosophy, and her fantasy of a world without human beings.

**Why did you choose to do the exhibition in this way? Rachel Lehmann said it takes you a while to build up enough trust to allow people to see your drawings, which is a more personal side of your work. For the Hong Kong audience, they get to have this treat to your personal world straight off the bat.**

Of course this is for the public, but also I think because of this space, its character, and this architect (**Rem Koolhaas**) and my piece, I think it makes a new dialogue together. Maybe this is good for some kind of story for the audience.

When I'm making an exhibition I think about how can I make a visual rhythm? In a huge space we cannot exhibit these drawings, because we cannot focus on these drawings.

**When I view your work I am first struck by it's beauty, then I start to feel anxiety and maybe fear, because it forces me to confront questions about my existence.**

That's probably almost the correct way to what I really want from you. But basically I don't care (about how the audience reacts). When I make some piece, it is in order to deal with my life and I'm not calculating about the audience.

Even though I deeply, seriously think about the human (condition), the "human" is not the audience. I don't choose the audience, but I learn a lot from them. I know the audience will come but I don't know who.

"The audience" is not a wide meaning, I have an interest about you (as a human being), but I'm not calculating about you, I'm not guessing what you will feel.

**In an interview with the [Mori Art Museum](#), you once said that you felt like you were in a black hole. Do you still feel that way?**

Did I say that? Actually, it's getting worse.

Probably I'm getting old, so I feel I understand more than before. I understand the human and the world more than before. But I'm not clear about it. I still don't understand. I can't let go yet.

**How will this affect your work? One of the reporters today asked about the "darkness" in your work. Will your work become more "dark"?**

I don't think it's that dark. There is a very depressed part, a part about human depression, right? But it's also about our desire and our hope about life. Already I think the fact that I am making art is positive. Creating something is a positive action, even when I talk about depression and darkness of life. That's the irony of art.

And about my personal life, that's totally another issue.

### **That we can talk about now?**

Of course not. I want to talk about my work.

### **But your work is quite personal. Rachel Lehmann commented that you are a very emotional artist. How do emotions inform your work?**

It's not just one emotional moment. Sculpture takes a long time. In other mediums maybe it is possible to bring to some emotional moment, but sculpture is different. One piece takes three or six months, if I keep in one mood for six months that means I'm sick.

### **So it takes as long as six months to complete a work? Can you take us through your creative process?**

Mostly I start with drawing on the paper so most are very rough ideas. Sometimes it's just one line. Then I put the paper on the wall.

Everyday I pass by the drawings, always watching and thinking, then one day I decide to develop it. It is something I keep going back to, sometimes it takes years.

Then one day I decide I can make this one into three-dimensional, or one day I can so clearly imagine the material, color, and form and scale, everything.

### **What are some new themes that you are exploring now?**

I'm interested in human consciousness. There is a new piece about this, "[Via Negativa](#)" that was at the Artsonje Center last year.

It's not possible to ask what is the meaning of this piece, it erases that process completely. It's a different way than the classical way (of thinking about art).

It's very hard to talk about my ideas on human consciousness without any pieces to discuss, because I'm not a theory person, I use visual language and even when I'm thinking about it I'm using that visual language. So maybe next time we can talk about this.

### **You have a strong connection to architecture, seeing it as a representation of the human strive for physical and ideological perfection. Hong Kong is quite obsessed with architecture too. Has it struck you in any way?**

Actually it's paradoxical, right? (We strive for) a kind of ideal society here and now look at what happened to here. Probably most people are not thinking "this (society) is what we dreamed of." The reason for this is that there is no unlimited society. There is always limitations, physical, time, political, or economical limitations.

Here, economical rules are strongest. But I cannot judge this, because without these rules, then it's not possible with human society.

## **So you are not critical of human society?**

I was when I was younger, maybe when I was 20 years old. I thought I could find some solution, that there can be a better life. But now I don't think so. But that's not the end of life, humans can still live in this way.

(Human society) is one of the invention of human life. Anyway we do it, we will do it (create human society).

My position is always like this: there is no absolutely good and no absolutely bad. The more interesting question is why we repeating and repeating (our cycle of human civilization)?

I cannot say it's a mistake because mistake means already it is accepting that there's a right or wrong. But there's a whole process (in human civilization) of dream and play, develop, corrupt, and fade, then it starts again this whole process. I'm more interested in why we do this.

## **Why do we do this?**

Because it's our destiny. We cannot escape it. Most people already know this is human nature.

But even though we know that this is our whole destiny, at the same time we get all these complicated senses from our body, our brain, so it's not just a simple thing.

## **You provoke us to think a lot about human existence, but how about the afterlife? Do you believe in one?**

Actually, I think about "after humans." What will the world be like after humans (are gone)? Can we even imagine it? It is so paradoxical.

Here, yesterday night at around 6pm I was walking around and it was so noisy and I felt very pressed (by the crowds) and then I started thinking about the opposite scenario: without humans, what will it be like? I suddenly felt that it was hard to breath.

I cannot figure it out right now, because only humans can imagine (human society). I can imagine, after humans, it may be something kind of like sounds, it's not a visual, but some kind of very sharp sound that stays forever...waaaaa...

But hey, I didn't take any pills!