

# Lam Wong: 21 ELEMENTS

Relation, Perception and Meaning

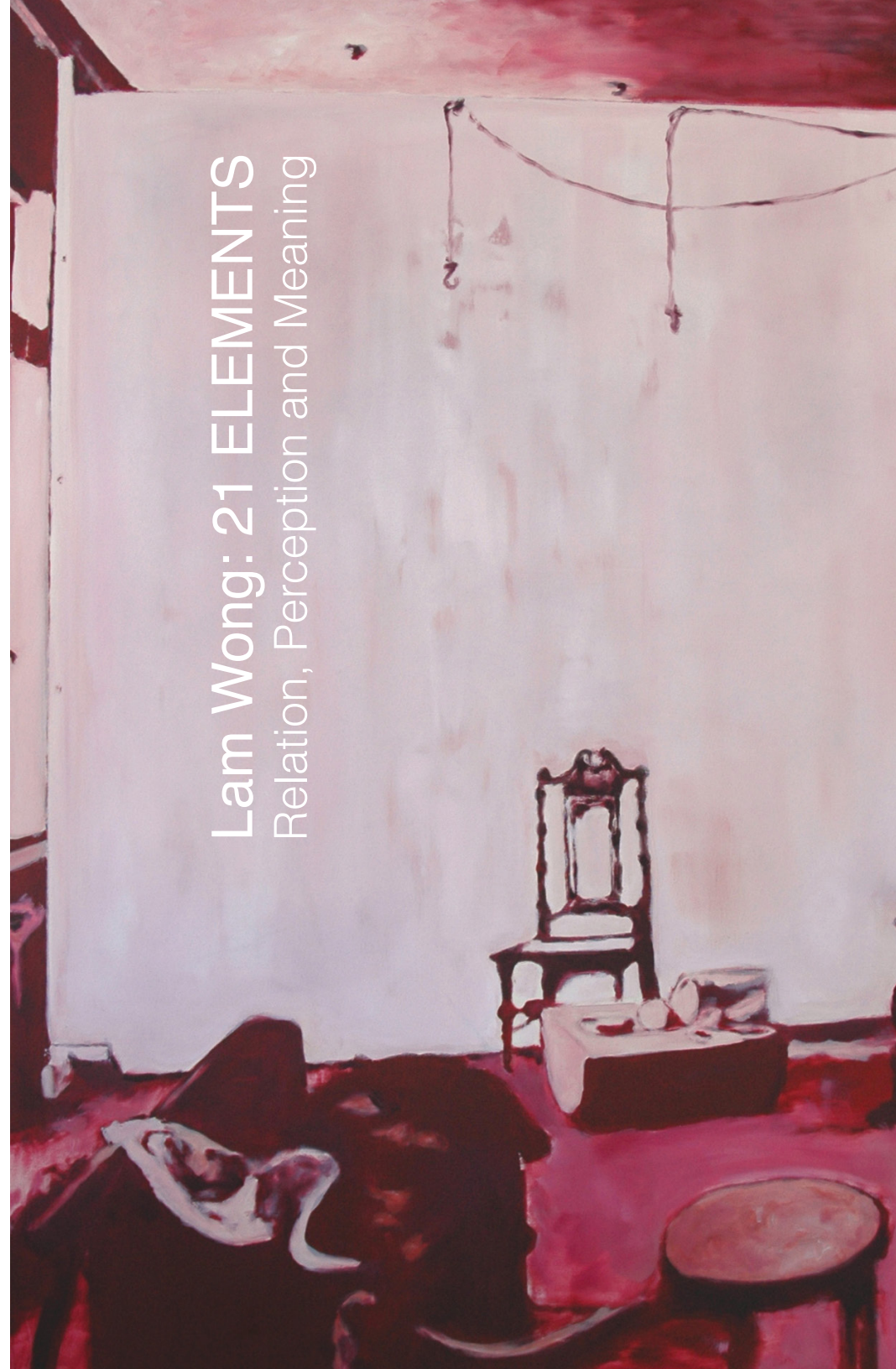
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“What do we really see when we see art?”

“In what ways, do we influenced by our memory, subconsciousness, personal bias, and social cultural conditioning?”

These are some of the questions being explored behind the 21 Elements painting exhibition. Lam Wong invites you to join him in his private investigation into the mysteries of memory and perception as they relate to art objects and their viewers. 21 Elements is an exhibition of oil paintings completed in the last eight years which serve as a self-referential exploration of what constitutes a person's reality with an aim to delve deeper into the meaning and process of creating art.

## About the Artist

“There is so much in this world that I don't understand and have little or no control over: time, space, memory, perception, reality, phenomenon, relationships, meaning, lust, art, human consciousness... there is so much. The subject of my art is the process I take to understand these exigencies of life. I am trying to understand how we all perceive and construct our realities.”

Born in 1968 to an artistic family in Xiamen, China, Lam Wong came of age in Hong Kong in the 1980s. His father was an expert calligrapher and his mother a pianist. At the age of 19 Lam moved to Canada. In Alberta and British Columbia he studied design, art history, and painting. Lam has lived and worked in Vancouver since 1998. As a visual artist, painting is now Lam's métier. Lam experiences the creation of his art as a spiritual practice, where he explores the perception of reality and the meaning and function of art.

## 21 ELEMENTS - Relation, Perception and Meaning

It may have been my illusion, but the people in art space always feel more beautiful. It is also my belief that Art is Made for Intimate Moments. In those frozen moments and stilled subjects inside a commercial free world lies my fascination and obsession about the viewers' minds, and the meanings the objects of art induced in them.

All things are defined by other things as well as their immediate environment. The objects are meaningless if they are not related to either their creators or observers. Also, in my view, all paintings are abstract even if they are recording real events. There's nothing real on a surface of a canvas if you really take a closer look, but it somehow evokes emotions when memory plays a role in the experience. This series of paintings is a study of the multiple layers of perceived meanings and their abstraction. It is an exploration of the relations and interaction between the viewers, art objects and the non materials (mind, space, time and memory). The paintings allow me to have a glimpse of the private moments of their viewers' personal experience with art, and once again allow you, as a new group of viewers, to experience a new reality in a different level of relations. However, this time it includes the filtering of my perception and interpretation of those moments. It's like an old Chinese saying: “There are Skies beyond the Sky.”

Lam Wong

Vancouver  
2010 09



**CD 318 (Re-Performance)**

2013

oil on canvas

44 x 68 in / 112 x 173 cm

**CD-318 (Re-Performance)**

A common theme amongst my paintings is that of time, memory, and the perception of reality.

I had been contemplating making a painting about Glenn Gould during a period where my wife and I were both quite into his music. While researching the subject, I happened across the story of the 'Re-Performance' of Gould's 1955 Goldberg Variations, a collaboration between Sony Classical, Yamaha and Zenph. In this "Re-Performance" project, advanced technology was used to analyze the sensitivity of Gould's finger movements while performing his original recording of the Goldberg Variations. A digital file encoded with this information was read by Yamaha's Disklavier Pro - a computerized player piano. A live performance of this master pianist, not in person, but re-performed by the Yamaha piano, was then recorded by placing the microphone near the approximate head position of Gould's, in an attempt to recreate his own musical experience. This story fascinated me, as it converged with the themes of memory, perception, time, and space that I always came back to in my paintings.

This painting is about Glenn Gould, about his piano, and also about his performance of Bach's Goldberg Variations. However, Gould is not present in the painting, a Yamaha Piano takes the place of his famous Steinway CD-318 that he owned through out his career, and even the music is computerized rather than performed by human hand. The painting plays on our notions of reality. I am curious - How do we perceive reality through reconstructing a past event? How does our memory recreate an imaginary performance that we so desperately hopes to witness again, whether it's for nostalgia or for pleasure?

Ultimately, nothing in this painting is real. The picture itself is a fake version. All elements are layers and layers of composed memories, twisted in different times and spaces. The only thing that binds all the elements together to create the illusion of reality is our collective memory.



## Silence

My life has always been surrounded by music. Both of my parents are musicians, and most of my family members including myself play the piano. As such, it has been a profoundly important part of my life.

But in a way, music is just a collection of sounds, organized between gaps of silence. Our perception of beauty found in these sound structures is based on subjective value and personal experience.

I have always thought about the curious role that the element of sound plays in the otherwise muted experience of viewing a painting. When we look at a painting that includes the element of sound, does it trigger certain audio or musical memories? How does sound manifest in the silent medium of painting, not through our sense of hearing but through our sight? In other words, can our eyes hear sounds?

So I thought, what if I painted a series of three paintings parallel to the three movements of John Cage's musical composition? John Cage was my subject of choice due to his continued effort to challenge the notion of music, and also his influence in my artistic development. The first movement is a painting of a close up study of his "Prepared Piano". The second movement is John Cage's amazing natural laughter. And lastly, the third movement is the busy street traffic outside the window of Cage's relatively quiet NYC apartment. While looking at these three paintings, do you hear music, laughter, traffic noise, or just silence?

**Silence (in 3 parts)**  
**Movement I: Prepared Piano**  
**Movement II: Laughter 2.04**  
**Movement III: Apartment**  
2011  
oil on panel  
16 x 20 in / 40 x 50 cm



**21 Elements**  
2010  
oil on canvas  
48 x 36 in / 120 x 90 cm

## 21 Elements

“A woman was walking by Joel Shapiro’s gigantic sculpture “20 Elements”. This painting focuses on one single element - the woman, the observer of art and her engagement with the sculpture... hence becoming one with the artwork, an additional element to the whole.”

## Silent Air

There is this Silent Air which connecting the art object and its viewers, the performance and its audiences. It is probably the most important thing in art because this invisible gap, is also the link that complete the relationship. It is where the consciousness and the meaning form and flow.



**Barrier**  
2011  
oil on canvas  
48 x 36 in / 120 x 90 cm

## Barrier

In traditional Zen practice, language is considered to be a barrier to experiential awakening. All ideas, worded theories, or texts claimed with authority are mere hindrances obstructing the truth. They block the free flow of direct perception into the nature of the mind. But even as words and thoughts cloud the mind, tea is able to evoke all senses directly, allowing a journey into the wordless realm '間'. 'Ma' is the space between objects, the silence between sounds, and the stillness between movements. 'Ma' transcends the ego and provides the ground for resting, enabling a peaceful realm to still the otherwise endless streams of thought and to stop the movement of delusional time.

This is the art of "Teaism", the spiritual practice that I have been engaging in for quite some time now.

Within tea, there is beauty and spirit, a spirit that is amplified in silence. Tea making is a form of meditation that promotes awareness and aliveness. Tea should always be about love, life, beauty, connection and kindness.



## The Lacemaker

During a family trip to Europe in 2005, we had the opportunity to visit The Louvre in Paris. Out of the many works of art found in the museum, one painting we particularly sought out was “The Lacemaker” by Vermeer, which in my mind is one of the most beautiful paintings in the world. However, by the end of the first day touring the museum, both my wife Mei and I had to face the disappointment of not being able to see it in person. The Dutch Painting Exhibition where it was located just happened to close for maintenance that day. So the next day, we returned to the Louvre just to see the one painting. It was worth the return trip in my mind, and we were more than satisfied giving ourselves another chance to see “The Lacemaker” and the other parts of the Louvre.

As we took a break at the museum cafe that day, I casually snapped one of many photos of Mei. It lay forgotten until many years later, when I decided to review the photos of the trip. I discovered then that amazingly, there were huge similarities between Mei's pose that day and Vermeer's Lacemaker. Appropriately, Mei herself is also a knitter who spends many hours working on her knitting projects. With this event in time, I came to realize that there might be a mysterious connection among perceived reality, imprinted cultural imagery, memory, and meaning.

### **The Lacemaker I (at the Louvre) The Lacemaker II (at home)**

2011  
oil on canvas  
16 x 20 in / 40 x 50 cm



**Blind Woman at a Photography Show (VPL)**

2010

oil on canvas

48 x 36 in / 120 x 90 cm

The Blind Woman

This was an extremely emotional painting for me to work on. The blind woman portrayed in the painting was in fact my late mother, Rita. Late in life, she had succumbed to complete blindness due to a disorder known as Rapid Glaucoma. Following my earlier step-father's death, I took on the role of caregiver and had looked after my mother full-time. This painting depicts a scene a few weeks before her tragic death. We had gone to the downtown library to attend a medical seminar on diabetes. A photography show was in the same area so I took the opportunity to look at the works after the seminar. Of course, my mother couldn't see so very often I needed to verbally describe our immediate environment or anything that required visual attention to her. While I was checking out the photo works, mom was sitting patiently and waiting for me peacefully. Before we left, I looked at her briefly and felt something... It was much later that I realized that her silence and patience on that day was love.