

Art & Photography / Culture Talks

## "The Unclothed Body is Our Primary Vessel": Photographing Vulnerability

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American photographer Jocelyn Lee seeks to explore the tactility of life – and her works are on show in London now



The Bath, 2016© Jocelyn Lee

For American photographer **Jocelyn Lee**, the most exquisite depths of beauty can be found within the fundamental vulnerability of life itself. Here, within the strength and fragility of the physical world, Lee looks at the subjects of sexuality, family, aging and death to express the transitory feelings of joy and melancholia that are inherent to the ephemeral nature of existence.

In *The Appearance of Things*, the artist's first UK solo show at Huxley-Parlour Gallery, Lee uses portraiture, landscape and still life to explore the tactile qualities of the living world, juxtaposing foliage, fabric and flesh to capture the transitory beauty of a moment that arrives as quickly as it disappears. Here, Lee discusses how the cycle of birth, blossoming and death can be a source of glory, power and strength.



**Jocelyn Lee**  
12 Images



**On the existential elements of life...**

"Vulnerability and sensuality are the beginning and the end of all my work. I am most interested in the existential questions of life: how we make our way on this planet, what we look like, and how we find meaning here. I look for subjects that spark my curiosity and carry richness. It is usually an intuitive attraction."

**On the power of the flesh...**

"All my pictures begin with the body and ideally nakedness. The unclothed body is our primary vessel, sensual home, and gateway to the rest of the world. I use the naked body as a way to break down both the defences of the viewer and my subject so that we can get to issues around beauty, pride, vanity, youth, sex, the desire to be loved, the desire to feel at peace, aging, and death. Often the beginning of authenticity is achieved through nakedness and time spent."



*The woods near the quarry, 2016© Jocelyn Lee*



**On the relationship between control and release...**

"I am definitely a director more than I am a photographer of the decisive moment. I build my scenes bit by bit. Once I have all the elements in one place, I let go and allow the subject to be who they are and let the landscape reveal itself. The pictures are meditations. My photographs can take a long time to make. My subjects relax and become at peace with the process, creating a kind of openness where things are laid bare."



*Dark Matter 2, pomegranate, 2016© Jocelyn Lee*



**On the cycle of life, love, and death...**

"I was trying to save my wedding flowers and put them in a large bucket of water. I watched how the light of the day and the qualities of the weather created an exceptionally beautiful, dramatic and narrative environment. Then the flowers began to decay and drop down into the base of the tub, or rise up and fall apart, depending on their particular form of aging and decomposition. I was in love and began to make the tub images obsessively, which was running parallel to my portrait work. I've never been a still life photographer but the organic material of the plants had a powerful parallel relationship to everything I was interested in with the human body."



*Raising the cherry tree, 2016© Jocelyn Lee*



**On the way an image enters the body...**

"I am a great believer in Roland Barthes' concept of the 'punctum' – the thing that pricks you when viewing an image and creates a moment of vulnerability that allows the picture to expand beyond its two dimensionality. It can be a small fact that opens the narrative and meaning beyond what you expect. This is not something one can control. It is about true authenticity that is raw and deeply honest. When viewer experiences this, it opens a vulnerability in themselves. This is the kind of exchange I want with my pictures."



*Barberry and Joyce, 2016© Jocelyn Lee*

*Jocelyn Lee: The Appearance of Things runs at Huxley-Parlour Gallery, London, until May 12, 2018.*