

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

*Catherine Lee: Time*

July 22, 2017 – September 9, 2017

Opening reception: Saturday, July 22, 6–8pm

Artist's talk: 7pm

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *Time*, an exhibition of sculpture and painting by Catherine Lee—the artist's first presentation at the gallery.

Catherine Lee's sculptures (as small as a fist or as large as a sedan standing on end) are faceted polygons or polyhedra made from clay or cast metal. Freestanding, hung on the wall, or placed on shelves or plain steel pedestals—some are singular works, others are grids of dozens of nearly identical, handmade components. They resemble pottery shards, knife blades, arrow heads, amphorae—objects archaeologists might pull out of the ground to puzzle over how people made and used them in ancient times.

Bronze, iron, glass, ceramic—Lee works with materials she can transform with fire. She pours molten metal into molds and lets it solidify; she fires clay in a kiln to temper it. "Mutability is what interests me," she says. Working with fire also necessitates giving up a measure of control, something Lee embraces whenever possible.

Raku is one of Lee's favored ways of making ceramics, in large part because of its unpredictable and irreproducible results. Crackled colors and textures—always completely unique—arise by flirting with catastrophe. When raku firing—which involves removing red-hot ceramics from the kiln and cooling them rapidly—sculptures can melt away to nothing, split or crumble, or the glaze can separate from the clay body. This extreme thermal shock means works in progress are easily lost. Drama, risk, and luck characterize much of Lee's creative process.

Metalworking and firing clay are technologies developed by early humans: heating metal to change its shape was widespread by 3,000 BCE, while the earliest pottery fragments have been dated to 14,000 BCE. Archaeology has been a lifelong passion of Lee's; she has even visited a handful of dig sites. Holding an artifact from thousands of years ago, Lee feels a connection—a bridge that can span huge amounts of time—to the person who made it. "I may not understand the exact meaning...or exactly why others may have been compelled to make what they've made, but I do understand this need to create a thing that somehow defines ourselves, as we are now, or as we were then."

Much of Lee's work speaks to the core tenets of humanity, perhaps especially her shallow, flat, serial wall sculptures. Single rows (or several) of up to about 60 similar geometric shapes, each form looks vaguely like an ancient tool—but varies slightly from its neighbors in shape, glaze, or patination. These works read as groups of individuals coming together to form a community or some kind of social system. They point to the human impulse to design and make (by hand) implements for farming, hunting, protection, worship, or storytelling. And as if tallying the dailiness of these activities, Lee's multiples could even appear to function as primitive calendars.

The Quanta Paintings also record the passage of time, even if obliquely. Each square painting is made up of a grid of squares. Lee fills in each cell with a single color, one at a time—but in random order. She then works her way back through the entire piece, unit by unit, applying a second color on top of the first. (Ideally, she can resolve a painting with two layers of color, but some take as many as six.) In the 1970s, Lee was making Mark Paintings, which were similar, gridded canvases—except she filled in squares linearly: left to right, top to bottom. These early paintings documented her daily experiences and shifting moods in a diaristic way that, although abstract, viewers might be able to intuit by considering variations in density and pacing. The newer Quanta Paintings still qualify Lee's days, but their arbitrary

compositions focus less on the self and more on a bigger, cosmological scale. The word *quantum* refers to the smallest possible unit of something (a photon, for example, is a quantum of light). Lee's recent canvases, despite their personal origins, feel like abstractions of the universe: assortments of particles floating in space, waiting for the precise (and elusive) conditions that might lead to the formation of a star, a moon, or a living thing.

Although Lee's work is informed by her passion for archaeology, her work is not about the past. It deals with the timelessness of creation, whether by us, our ancestors, or the mysterious workings of the universe. For millennia, we have made tools, love, and families—but beyond survival, making *meaning* has been our most primal driving force.

Catherine Lee was born in 1950 in Texas. She lived and worked in New York for 30 years but has called the Texas Hill Country home for the past two decades. She has had solo shows at the Irish Museum of Modern Art (Dublin), Keramikmuseum Westerwald (Germany), Kunsthaus Wiesbaden (Germany), Musée d'Arte Moderne (France), and Omi International Arts Center (New York). Some of the institutions that own her work include the Blanton Museum of Art (Austin), Contemporary Austin, Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), Museum of Fine Arts (Houston), Museum of Modern Art (New York), San Francisco Museum of Art, and Vancouver Art Gallery