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Su Xiaobai's Alchemical Universe

Collateral Event of the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia,
9 May – 22 November 2026, Palazzo Soranzo Van Axel, Cannaregio 6099, Venice.
Admission Free.

The Su Xiaobai Foundation, in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), presents *Su Xiaobai's Alchemical Universe*, an exhibition of paintings by internationally acclaimed Chinese artist Su Xiaobai, organized as an official Collateral Event of the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia (2026). Curated by Stephen Little, Curator of Chinese Art and Head of the Chinese, Korean, and South and Southeast Asian Art Departments at LACMA, and designed by architect Kulapat Yantrasast (WHY Architecture), the exhibition offers an unprecedented survey of Su Xiaobai's practice. Born in Wuhan, China (1949), Su Xiaobai studied at the School of Arts and Crafts in Wuhan, the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, and later the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, where he developed a visual language bridging Chinese artistic traditions and European modernism. Since 2003, he has worked almost exclusively with natural lacquer, transforming a material historically associated with ritual and decorative objects into a powerful vehicle for contemporary abstraction.

Installed across the historic rooms of Palazzo Soranzo Van Axel, the exhibition presents 35 works, from the artist's first lacquer experiments in 2003 to recent paintings created especially for Venice. A central focus is Su Xiaobai's newest series, *Niao Niao*, a Chinese poetic phrase embodying sensations of transience and evanescence. These quiet, meditative works are rendered in

monochromatic tonalities reminiscent of classical Chinese ink paintings, ranging from black to a wide and subtle range of greys. In Su Xiaobai's hands, lacquer becomes an alchemical agent. A single painting can consist of up to twenty layers of lacquer, some of which, partially hidden, have been scored and abraded, then further covered with veils of translucent lacquer in which are suspended the artist's unique mix of powdered pigments and occasional powdered metals, the preparations of which is part of his unique alchemical process. While the titles of Su Xiaobai's paintings are often ambiguous, whether rendered in Chinese or English, the images they present are doorways into the complex inner world of a global artist equally grounded in very different cultures, Asian and European.

"Combining Chinese tradition with European experimentation, Su Xiaobai's work investigates the possibilities of lacquer, turning it into layered, tactile works that explore and reveal depth, materiality, and transformation," said Michael Govan, CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director of LACMA.

"At the heart of the Foundation's mission lies a belief that traditional and craft materials can serve as conduits for discovery. In the hands of artists like Su Xiaobai, they open pathways to new forms of artistic expression," added Scott Stover, Executive Director of the Su Xiaobai Foundation.

Featuring works loaned from the Su Xiaobai Foundation, *Su Xiaobai's Alchemical Universe* marks a major milestone in the artist's international career and provides audiences with an immersive encounter with one of the most distinctive artists working today.

For further information and press images: press@suxiaobai-foundation.org

About the Su Xiaobai Foundation

Su Xiaobai Foundation was founded in 2024 to preserve, promote and interpret Su Xiaobai's art and archives, and to support initiatives with a focus on his vision and craft. The Foundation seeks to support artists and scholars who share Su Xiaobai's commitment to reviving traditional materials and techniques in the production of contemporary art, through exhibitions, research and international dialogue.

In 2026, the Foundation launched a Curatorial Residency in Shanghai in collaboration with the University of Southern California's Roski School of Art and Design, providing annual funding for selected residency candidates to pursue new research. Among the Foundation's future activities is support for a symposium in the US on contemporary artists repurposing traditional materials.

<https://www.suxiaobai-foundation.org/foundation>

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