

PearlLam Galleries

Pearl Lam Galleries presents Su Xiaobai: *Niao Niao*, coinciding with Art Basel Hong Kong



L-R: SU XIAOBAI b. 1949 **Vibrancy/Niao Niao – 8.**
SU XIAOBAI b. 1949 **100 Centimetres – 2100 公分-2.**

Hong Kong – Pearl Lam Galleries is delighted to present *Niao Niao*, a solo exhibition in collaboration with Su Xiaobai Foundation, showcasing the works of renowned artist **Su Xiaobai** from 25 March – X. This exhibition, coinciding with Art Basel Hong Kong, marks the gallery's long-term focus on abstraction.

Su Xiaobai pursued his postgraduate studies at the Kunstakademie Dusseldorf and was taught by Konrad Klapheck, Gerhard Richter. He embraces abstraction by consciously stripping his work of narrative and explicit meaning. Known for experimenting with lacquer, a resin-based material traditionally used for making lacquerware that can be dated back to 5th millennium BC, Su is drawn by its unpredictable characteristics. His core interest is to realize physical forms that are inherent to the material and diverse properties of lacquer.

Niao Niao [袅袅], is a new series of painting that Su has been working steadily on over the past two years. Niao in Chinese literally means being adrift and reflects the artist's reflection on displacement. "I have no hometown, but I embrace it", says Su, highlighting how he comes to terms with psychological void. His personal histories are often interwoven with the history of painting itself, giving weight to both material and non-objective expression but without conforming to specific traditional or cultural norms.

“Niao”, in Su’s words, “is an onomatopoeic word that evokes the imageries of smoking gently rising and curling. This series of work is meant to capture a sound that lingers, extending into melancholic echo much like the lingering emotions with a dense of nebulous present that drifts, permeates and eventually dissipates.” Furthermore, the concept of Niao Niao signifies the intellectual independence and integrity of a generation of Chinese diasporic artists who has been largely left out of the mainstream narrative from the post war debates about modernism, minimalism, abstract expressionism and art informel.

Inspired by the old roof tiles from traditional houses in Fujian province after his return to China from Germany in 2003, the shapes of tile are a recurring motif for Su’s oeuvre. The process of making painting is labour intensive. Individual artworks begin with a curvilinear and meticulously crafted base structure made with wood, geofoam and linen. The lacquer, mixed with turpentine, damar resin, stone powder, metal powders, and synthetic mineral pigments, undergoes a process of drying that produces a crystalline surface reminiscent of glaze. Su is always cognizant with how the edges of the painting and the work’s concave and convex surfaces affect our bodily association with space literally and metaphorically. The unpredictable interplay of drying stages, resulting in diverse textures, inspires Su’s ongoing experimentation. Embracing both failure and discovery have become integral parts of his process.

Colours are more than visual elements, for they are vessels of history and narrative. Su believes that colour, also a material, possesses a secondary essence, and he persistently explores new approaches to infuse his monochromatic works with subtleties. He seeks out pigments with storied pasts, such as Tyrian purple, or endows them with hidden personal meanings. He uses lacquer that had been sun-cured for half a year, blending it with pigment powder. The mixture was meticulously milled with a grinding machine until it reached a set consistency. The painting process involves multiple coats of clear lacquer, each applied over a few days, with the canvas exposed to the light by day and resting in darkness by night. The pieces are then left to cure in a shaded room for several days, allowing them to develop a luminous glow in time. Su is not interested to depict objects or figures with his work but actively engages with the concept of existence itself. For there is no determinate order, what is left in a painting has to do with ontology, and the works complete themselves based on their own order. Su claims: “All paintings are real and are responsible for their own existence; and what I care is the possibility for painting to exist independent of itself.”

This exhibition is organized into 3 distinctive sections to shed light on the richness of Su’s work and more importantly the meanings behind Su’s works are in flux.

With reference to the design of classical Chinese garden in Suzhou, the first section uses different layering of space to encourage diverging views of the artworks in relation to the movement of the viewers. A series of grey paintings is presented in an intimate and contemplative manner, expressing phenomenon of absorption, subtleties, diffusion, and containment. The inclusion of smaller painted tile works is to provoke associations with remnants that have withstood the weathering of history and time.

As one enters the second section of the exhibition, we see a number of small painted tiles with disparate shapes, suggesting a rendering of landscape of sort. The tile with intense red hue connotes something fleshy that is steeped with emotions. Moving to an open passageway that is conducive for perspectival readings of works, one sees multiple purple paintings that are undergoing a transformation, alluding to Su’s possible influences from Gerhard Richter. This space is anchored with a large blue diptych painting that alludes to the flow of water. The grey painting on the final wall depicts something atmospheric.

Progressing to the third section of the exhibition, the audiences enter a semi enclosed space that refers to Su's former studio at Weidingen, a small town in Germany bordering Belgium where Su spent a decade making art, cultivating the land and serving a small community. An old work dated back to 2003 is on display on one wall, at the center of the room are long working tables from Su's own studio. A few works of varying sizes and hues are hung on the adjacent wall. The intention is to convey artistic production as something open ended and to celebrate the artist's creative freedom is an ideal that cannot be restricted to set meanings.



SU XIAOBAI b. 1949 **Untitled**, 2024.

Pearl Lam Galleries remains a leader in encouraging dialogue between East and West and fostering cross-cultural exchange. Alongside the Hong Kong group presentation featuring Xiaobai's work, the gallery will also present an exhibition by Michal Korman at its Shanghai space, underscoring its dedication to promoting groundbreaking art across borders.

About Su Xiaobai

Su Xiaobai is a Chinese born German artist; he is one of China's most distinctive painters. He was born in 1949 in Wuhan, Hubei province, China. In 1965, he joined the School of Arts and Crafts in Wuhan, and from 1985 to 1987, he studied oil painting at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. In 1987, he moved to Germany to pursue his postgraduate studies at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf.

(Düsseldorf State Arts Academy), returning to China in 2003. He currently lives and works between Shanghai and Düsseldorf.

Before moving to Germany in 1987, Su's work inclined towards social realism. However, first-hand experience of avant-garde Western art radically affected his outlook. During the 1990s, his work became progressively less figurative, and following his return to China in 2003, it has increasingly focused on the essential characteristics of colour, shape, and surface. Having eliminated recognisable subject matter and imagery, Su's arresting and compelling art engages both with the language of Western abstract art and also with the traditions of Chinese philosophy including the Buddhist Sutra: "Everything is nothing, nothing is everything".

Solo exhibitions include Su Xiaobai: Blue (2022–23), Tina Keng Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan; To Gallivant: The Paintings of Su Xiaobai (2021), Tina Keng Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan; Beneath a descending moon, breathing (2019–20), Tina Keng Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan; And There's Nothing I Can Do (2018), Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Kobe,

Japan; Luminescence (2016), Pearl Lam Galleries, Singapore; and Su Xiaobai (2014), Almine Rech Gallery, Paris, France. Group exhibitions include Accidents [Part I] (2020), Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong, China; Abstract by Nature (2019), Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, USA; The World Is Yours, as Well as Ours (2016), White Cube, Mason's Yard, London, UK; Jing Shen: The Act of Painting in Contemporary China (2015), PAC Milan Museum of Contemporary Art, Italy; Perfection by Chance—A Yi Pai Series Exhibition (2015), Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong, China; Where Does It All Begin? Contemporary Abstract Art in Asia and the West (2014), Pearl Lam Galleries, Singapore; Chinese Contemporary Abstract: 1980s until Present: MINDMAP (2012), Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong, China; and Yi Pai: Thirty Years of Chinese Abstraction (2008), Beijing, China and Madrid, Spain.





About Pearl Lam Galleries




Pearl Lam Galleries is a driving force within Asia's contemporary art scene. Founded in 2005, the gallery plays a vital role in stimulating international dialogue and cross-cultural exchange between the East and West.

Following a rigorous programme, Pearl Lam Galleries presents museum-quality exhibitions that reevaluate and challenge perceptions of cultural practice in Asia. With a thoughtfully balanced roster of Chinese and international artists, the gallery is strategic in its curation, positioning itself as an educator.

The gallery maintains spaces in Hong Kong and Shanghai. With a team of international staff, Pearl Lam Galleries' reach is global, having presentations at major international art fairs including Art Cologne, Art Basel, Frieze Masters, and West Bund Art and Design.

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