

Hong Kong

## **Su Xiaobai** solo exhibition

### **'Painting and Being'**

A solo show of lacquer paintings by one of China's most celebrated contemporary artists, curated by Paul Moorhouse



Su Xiaobai, **Tolerance 2** (2013)  
Oil, lacquer, linen and wood, 168 x 168 x 16 cm

### **Exhibition Dates**

14 May 2014–15 July 2014

Monday–Saturday, 10am–7pm

**Press preview:** Monday, 12 May, 2014, 3–4pm

**Opening reception:** Tuesday, 13 May, 2014, 5–8pm

Pearl Lam Galleries, 601–605, 6/F, Pedder Building, 12 Pedder Street, Central, Hong Kong

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**HONG KONG**—Su Xiaobai is a major and singular artist, part of that legendary generation who left China in the 80s. Over the last ten years or so he has developed a sensuous yet

rigorous art that defies classification, as befits an artist who studied at Kunstakademie Dusseldorf in the 90s, and yet whose own chosen medium, lacquer, is steeped in Chinese history. His reputation is continuously growing, and his art can be found in museum collections from China through Taiwan and Germany, while galleries from France to China vie to showcase him.

Pearl Lam Galleries is delighted to present this new solo show **Su Xiaobai: Painting and Being** to coincide with Art Basel in Hong Kong, curated by the distinguished curator of Western abstract art Paul Moorhouse. Formerly of Tate and now at London's National Portrait Gallery, Moorhouse has curated shows with Lucien Freud and Gerhard Richter, among others.

Pearl Lam Galleries is the leading gallery voice in Asia in supporting abstract art. Su Xiaobai's exhibition follows on from the gallery's acclaimed exhibition *Chinese Contemporary Abstract: 1980s until Present: Mindmap*, in which Su was a distinguished participant.

There is nothing simply traditional about Su's arresting and compelling art which both engages with the language of Western abstract art, and also with the traditions of Buddhist Sutra: 'Everything is nothing, nothing is everything'. There are connections between an artist like Malevich's use of the black square as icon and Su Xiaobai's sculptural abstracts, as well as connections between the artist's work and traditions of Chinese art (in for example the use of red and black). In an interview, Su has said that he 'has left nothing behind'—that is, he has rejected nothing he has learned—and this is very visible in his ravishing and thoughtful paintings.

The new exhibition at Pearl Lam Galleries provides the first opportunity to see the quite extraordinary work of Su Xiaobai of the last two years. These paintings attest to the artist's continuing intense vision, and yet reveal that he remains as ambitious and exploratory as ever. These new works are both hedonistic and mystical, and defiantly sculptural while exquisitely painted. In the exhibition, there is a preponderance of white works, where the tension between the refined surfaces and fractures in those surfaces produces an intense emotional experience, which is complemented by an installation overseen by the artist who lights each work so it emerges from the surrounding darkness. These paintings are extraordinary objects.

Paul Moorhouse in an essay in the catalogue accompanying the show puts the importance and singularity of Su Xiaobai's recent achievement in the necessary context:

*"The imperative to create a purely abstract art—visual statements free of external references and intrusive associations—has been a surprisingly elusive quest in 20th century Western art. From Kandinsky onwards, meaning in whatever guise has proved resilient, encouraged perhaps by formal relationships and the tensions that inevitably result when the dynamics of opposition and sympathy are given a place. It may be that only by denying overt visual 'incident', as such, that the associative qualities of a work of art can be denied, permitting its autonomous identity to emerge unscathed. In Su's work, this exclusive approach has been remarkably liberating, permitting the creation of paintings which as far as possible shake off the ubiquitous compulsion to interpret, encouraging instead a response to their intrinsic nature."*

## About Su Xiaobai

Su was born in 1949 in Wuhan, the capital city of Hubei province. In 1965, he joined the School of Art and Crafts in Wuhan, and from 1985 he studied oil painting at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. Throughout that time his work inclined towards social realism. After receiving an Arts and Culture scholarship in 1987, he attended the Kunstakademie in Dusseldorf. First-hand experience of avant-garde Western art radically affected his outlook. While in Beijing, Su studied the techniques of traditional painting and accumulated his abilities in expressive techniques. In Germany, he strived to break away from the skills he mastered in Beijing, and developed a visual language rich in personal experience, life observation, and abstract symbols. During the 1990s his work became progressively less figurative, and

following his return to China in 2003 it has increasingly focused on essential characteristics of colour, shape and surface. Su unrestrainedly experimented with oil, lacquer, linen, wood, etc, as a substitute for oil on canvas, where lacquer and linen are in a purely structural and balanced composition. These elements alone underpin the creation of paintings whose self-contained presence is both affective and mysterious.

## About Paul Moorhouse

Paul Moorhouse has been Curator of 20th Century at the National Portrait Gallery, London since 2005. He began his career as a curator at the Government Art Collection in London before joining Collections at Tate, and later Contemporary Art. He is a specialist in international 20th century art and has organised numerous exhibitions, including *The Queen: Art and Image* (2011–12), *Gerhard Richter Portraits* (2009) and *Pop Art Portraits* (2007–8) at the National Portrait Gallery. He has published extensively; recent publications include *Anthony Caro: Presence* (2010), *Gerhard Richter—Painting Appearances* (2009), *Pop Art Portraits* (2007), *Interpreting Caro* (2005), as well as numerous exhibition catalogues, among which recent titles include *Tony Bevan Self-Portraits* (2011), *Bridget Riley—From Life* (2010), and *Frank Auerbach: London Building Sites 1952–1962* (Courtauld Institute 2009). His monograph, *Cindy Sherman*, will be published this year. Moorhouse is currently organising a major exhibition, *Giacometti—Pure Presence*, to be held at the National Portrait Gallery, London in 2015.

## About Pearl Lam Galleries

Founded by Pearl Lam, Pearl Lam Galleries is a driving force within Asia's contemporary art scene. With over 20 years of experience exhibiting Asian and Western art and design, it is one of the leading and most established contemporary art galleries to be launched out of China. Playing a vital role in stimulating international dialogue on Chinese and Asian contemporary art, the Galleries is dedicated to championing artists who re-evaluate and challenge perceptions of cultural practice from the region. The Galleries in Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore collaborate with renowned curators, each presenting distinct programming from major solo exhibitions, special projects and installations to conceptually rigorous group shows. Based on the philosophy of Chinese Literati where art forms have no hierarchy, the Galleries are dedicated to breaking down boundaries between different disciplines, with a unique gallery model committed to encouraging cross-cultural exchange.

Contemporary Chinese abstract art is heavily represented in the Galleries roster. Influential Chinese artists Zhu Jinshi and Su Xiaobai, who synthesise Chinese sensibilities with an international visual language, are presented internationally with work now included in major private and public collections worldwide. The Galleries have also introduced leading international artists such as Jenny Holzer, Jim Lambie and Yinka Shonibare MBE (RA) to markets in the region, providing opportunities for new audiences in Asia to encounter their work. Pearl Lam Galleries encourages international artists to create new work which engages specifically with the region—collaborating to produce thought-provoking and culturally relevant work.

Pearl Lam Design shows works by established and emerging international designers, including Maarten Baas, Mattia Bonetti, André Dubreuil, and Studio Makkink & Bey, in exhibitions and design fairs around the world. They are invited to push the boundaries of traditional Chinese art and craft techniques and create new works that reflect their experiences in China. A fourth gallery and concept store devoted solely to design will open shortly in Shanghai.

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## Press Enquiries

Megan Leckie / Pearl Lam Galleries  
[megan@pearllamfineart.com](mailto:megan@pearllamfineart.com) / +8621 6323 1989

Dylan Shuai / Sutton PR Asia  
[Dylan@suttonprasia.com](mailto:Dylan@suttonprasia.com) / +852 2528 0792

[www.pearllam.com](http://www.pearllam.com)