

PearlLam Projects

Special Announcement

Su Xiaobai's Alchemical Universe on view as an official
Collateral Event of the 61st Venice Biennale

Preview 7–9 May, 2026
Exhibition dates 9 May–22 November, 2026, 10am–6pm (closed on Tuesdays)
Venue Palazzo Soranzo Van Axel, Cannaregio 6099, Venice, Italy

Free admission made possible through the generous support of East West Bank



L: SU XIAOBAI b. 1949, **Generous-Green**, 2015, Oil, lacquer, linen, emulsion, wood, 190 × 182 × 14 cm (74 3/4 × 71 5/8 × 5 1/2 in.)

C: SU XIAOBAI b. 1949, **Treasure**, 2025, Oil, lacquer, linen, emulsion, wood, 165 × 164 × 18 cm (65 × 64 5/8 × 7 1/8 in.)

R: SU XIAOBAI b. 1949, **Admire**, 2025, Oil, lacquer, linen, emulsion, wood, 175 × 168 × 16 cm (68 7/8 × 66 1/8 × 6 1/4 in.)

Images courtesy of the Su Xiaobai Foundation and Pearl Lam

Pearl Lam is delighted to announce that gallery artist Su Xiaobai's solo exhibition *Alchemical Universe* will be presented by LACMA and the Su Xiaobai Foundation as an official Collateral Event of the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. 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. These preparations are all 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.

"Having worked with Su Xiaobai for over a decade, it is a pleasure to see his work recognised in this context. *Alchemical Universe* reflects an important moment in his ongoing practice," says Pearl Lam, Founder of Pearl Lam.

"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," says 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," adds 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.

The exhibition is kindly supported by East West Bank.

For further information and press images, please contact press@suxiaobai-foundation.org.

About Su Xiaobai



Image credit: © Su Xiaobai Foundation, 2026. Courtesy of the Su Xiaobai Foundation.

Su Xiaobai (b. 1949, Wuhan, China) lives and works between Shanghai and Düsseldorf. He studied at the Wuhan School of Arts and Crafts and the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, and later at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf (1987–92). He is a member of the Düsseldorf Artists' Association (VdDK 1844).

Initially trained in Social Realism painting, Su Xiaobai shifted toward abstraction following his experience in Germany. Since the early 2000s, he has developed a distinctive practice that redefines painting through a sustained exploration with lacquer. Working with hand-formed supports, he constructs layered surfaces that emphasise process, transformation, and the passage of time. These works exist between painting and object, not as representations but as self-contained presences that unfold through light, depth, and perception.

Situated between Western abstraction and Chinese philosophical thought, Su Xiaobai's practice engages with emptiness, materiality, and being as dynamic conditions. By transforming traditional materials into a contemporary visual language, his work reflects on how form, matter, and perception are continuously in flux.

Recent solo exhibitions include *Su Xiaobai on Paper from the Museum DKM Collection*, 8th Drawing Biennale (2025), Nuremburg, Germany; *Niao Niao* (2025), Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong, China; *Su Xiaobai: Blue* (2022–23), Tina Keng Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan, China; *To Gallivant: The Paintings of Su Xiaobai* (2021), Tina Keng Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan, China; *Beneath a descending moon, breathing* (2019–20), Tina Keng Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan, China; *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 *Metamorphosis: Chinese Imagination and Transformation* (2025), China Institute Gallery, New York, USA; *A Diary of States of Mind* (2023), Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong, China; *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. Su Xiaobai's work is held in major international collections.

About Stephen Little

An authority on East Asian art, Stephen Little grew up in Southeast Asia and the Near East. He received his BA from Cornell University (1975), MA from UCLA (1977), and PhD from Yale University (1987). He served as Curator of Chinese Art at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco (1977–1982) and the Cleveland Museum of Art (1987–1989); Curator of Asian Art at the Honolulu Academy of Arts (1989–1994); Pritzker Curator of Asian Art at the Art Institute of Chicago (1995–2002); and Director of the Honolulu Academy of Arts (2003–2010) before coming to LACMA in 2011.

His research interests include Chinese and Japanese painting, Chinese and Korean calligraphy, Chinese ceramics, and the classical arts of Southeast Asia. His publications include *Chinese Ceramics of the Transitional Period* (1983), *Visions of the Dharma: Japanese Buddhist Paintings and Prints in the Honolulu Academy of Arts* (1991), *Spirit Stones of China* (1999), *Taoism and the Arts of China* (2000), *Chinese Paintings from Japanese Collections* (2014), and *17th-Century Chinese Paintings from the Tsao Family Collection* (2016). He was awarded the College Art Association's Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Award for Best Museum Exhibition Catalogue for *Taoism and the Arts of China* in 2000 and the Art Libraries Society of North America's George Wittenborn Memorial Book Award for *17th-Century Chinese Paintings from the Tsao Family Collection* in 2016. Between 2003 and 2008, he led an international team that organised the first exhibition to explore the Vajrayana Buddhist art of Bhutan entitled *The Dragon's Gift: The Sacred Arts of Bhutan* (2008). Little has taught at the University of Virginia, the University of Chicago, the University of London, Occidental College, UCLA, and Harvard University.

About LACMA

LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of more than 150,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. Committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories, LACMA exhibits and interprets works of art from new and unexpected points of view that are informed by the region's rich cultural heritage and diverse population. LACMA's spirit of experimentation is reflected in its work with artists, technologists, and thought leaders as well as in its regional, national, and global partnerships to share collections and programs, create pioneering initiatives, and engage new audiences.

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.

About Pearl Lam Projects

Pearl Lam is an international programme of off-site exhibitions and artistic collaborations. Building on the gallery's permanent space in Shanghai, the programme operates across numerous cities, including Hong Kong, enabling the gallery to present work by and expand opportunities for its diverse roster of international artists beyond its year-round gallery programme.

Follow Pearl Lam

 @pearllamprojects
 @pearllamprojects
 @pearllam
 Pearl Lam Projects

 艺术门
 藝術門
 藝術門
www.pearllam.com

Press Enquiries

Primary:

Su Xiaobai Foundation
press@suxiaobai-foundation.org

Asia:

Charmaine Chan
Associate Director, PR & Marketing
charmaine@pearllam.com
+852 2522 1428