

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

PARIS - BRUXELLES

LU CHAO

BLACK LIGHT

14th April - 22st May 2016

3, rue du Cloître Saint-Merri - 75004 Paris



Black light, 2015, Oil on canvas - 150 × 400 cm (59 × 157 1/2 in.)

«When I was a very small child I took the bus 217 everyday to go to school. Being small I was continuously squashed by a crowd of taller people pushing through, and it was often very hard to go in or out of the bus. The memory of this crowd often appears vividly in my mind. And so I am always very sensitive to crowd of people and the images of those where depression, helplessness and vulnerability are contained together always stayed with me as I grew up. At the same time I always like to observe each person trying to squeeze his way in a crowd of people, because I know very well that I am just like them, and looking at each of their faces I seem to be looking at myself. I always think that each face can tell a story, the story of an experience already past or a prediction of an event about to happen. All the small black people in my paintings are my response to all the strangers I've encountered in my life. I observe at the same time as I try to conjecture about each person I meet. And though I want to express the burden and uncertainty of life, I always think the greatest anguish in life is also its most beautiful part. While this thought may seem negative, and even depressing, it really makes me ever so curious about the next thing in life, just as sunlight illuminating an exuberant forest is beautiful, the part left in shadows possess their own mysterious kind of beauty because it is filled with pitch black light. »

Lu Chao, March 2016

The Galerie Nathalie Obadia is pleased to present *Black Light*, the first exhibition of London-based Chinese artist Lu Chao. As a painter that works almost exclusively in black and white, Lu Chao however creates illusions that echo different worlds, manifesting a wide range of artistic diversity.

Lu Chao first made a name for himself with his «crowd» series, of which the most recent works are presented in this exhibition. Whether it be a large black circle, a spatula, a piece of cake or an extensive grid, in a few rapidly executed strokes, the artist consistently portrays a crowd and interrogates the relationship between the individual and his surroundings. The individuals in his early paintings seem to fade away under the oppression of a strong collectivity. The depicted contradictions – disappearance and presence, solitude and companionship, disorientation and direction – may seem bizarre at first glance. Yet, they are deeply embedded in traditional *zen* thoughts. The Chinese philosophy has always made a distinction between the notion of “emptiness” and that of “nothingness”: “*empty does not mean or stand for 'nothing'. On the contrary, it means 'everything' that we cannot see it*”, Lu Chao explains. Similarly, “fullness” does not necessarily indicate the existence of anything. One might recall those who, throughout the long history of mankind, were devoured during the quest for a common future for the entire human race or forced into oblivion.

Lu Chao's focus on the dominant power of the crowd comes from the artist's own experience commuting by bus and metro while growing up in China. Since moving to London a few years ago, the rare presence of crowds similar to those in China has gradually shifted the artist's attention to the individuals making up the crowds. The new body of work presented in this exhibition is a reflection of this shift. When one looks closely at the figures, each one however seems to refuse to disappear. The artist plays with the ambivalence and uncertainty between appearance and departure, as well as the tension between submission and rebellion. Lu Chao avoids using his work as a vessel to transmit opinions, preferring to leave the door open for the viewer to freely interpret the pieces.

As the artist's first exhibition in France, this exhibition is also a moment for discovery. Many pieces in the exhibition reveal surprises and associations that completely differ from the aforementioned «crowd» series. While being a profound admirer of traditional Chinese thinking and painters such as Mu Xi, Ma Yuan and Xia Gui, Lu Chao also extensively reads Western philosophy and, especially since moving to London, visits exhibitions of Occidental masters, notably Rembrandt.

The *Black Mirror* series (2015) for example draws inspiration from traditional European decorative arts. Some of his landscapes, such as *Spot Light with Branch* (2015) and *Elsewhere no 3* (2015), lead us into the Romanticism and Expressionism of the German Black Forest, while others, such as the *Suspension* series (2015-2016), allure a transcending tranquility, floating under "the unbearable lightness of being." Moreover, his works could even bring out Modernist evocations, such as *Try to Draw Two Same Face* (2015)'s reminiscence of pop art and *Shell* (2013) or *Man on Wire* (2015)'s reference to Abstract Expressionist masters, such as Jackson Pollock and Franz Kline.

The blending of Chinese and Western cultures, of the traditional and the contemporary, is predominant in all of Lu Chao's works. Meanwhile, the artist insists that such a fusion happens naturally, beyond any active pictorial and visual reassembling. The artist's first French exhibition is therefore here to challenge a stereotyped reading of an artist's work that is solely based on cultural origin. Lu Chao aims to show a new generation of artists living in a global context, both in terms of space and temporality, and, as stated by Lu Chao's professor and famous Chinese realist painter, Liu Xiaodong ; a much more "liberated and sophisticated" tendency in Contemporary Art.

Damien Zhang

Lu Chao was born in 1988, in Shenyang , Province of Liaoning (China). He lives and works (United Kingdom).

Lu Chao graduated in 2014 from the Painting Department of the Royal College of Art in London (Master of Arts), and in 2012 from the Oil Painting Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts (Bachelor of Arts), in Beijing, China. His oeuvre has been selected for several noted solo and group shows which met with great critical and public success, notably *Saatchi New Sensation Shortlist*, at the Victoria House (London, United Kingdom), *Life and Hope* at the French Institute (Beijing, China), *Black Forest* at the Hadrien de Montferrand Gallery (Beijing, China).

Lu Chao has been the recipient of prestigious art prizes, as in 2014 with the *Painter-Stainers Goron Luton Award* at the Royal College of Art (London, United Kingdom), the *Solo Award Runners Up* (London, United Kingdom), the *RCA Studio* (London, United Kingdom), in 2013 with the *Lucy Halford Bursary* at the Royal College of Art (London, United Kingdom), in 2012 with the *Best Creative Awards* from the Central Academy of Fine Arts (Beijing, China), in 2011 with the *Excellent Sketching Award* from the Central Academy of Fine Arts (Beijing, China), or in 2012 with the *Silver Prize* at the Today Art Museum (Beijing, China).

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Joris Van de Moortel
Birds, Robin Hood, Acoustics, "Noise"
Notating, Detail
12 Mai - 23 July 2016

Lu Chao
Black Light
14 April - 21 May 2016

Jérôme Zonder
Garance
13 April – 21 May 2016

Valérie Belin
September -October 2016

Brook Andrew
28 May - 23 July 2016

Sophie Kuijken
1st June – 16 July 2016

Andres Serrano
November - December 2016

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