

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

BRUSSELS

LU CHAO

Black Fruit

Thursday 14 January – Saturday 6 March, 2021



Lu Chao, *Dark Energy No.4*, Oil on canvas, 190,5 × 250 × 4,5 cm

Galerie Nathalie Obadia in Brussels is honoured to present the new solo exhibition *Black Fruit* by Lu Chao after *Black Light*, in 2016, which took place at the Parisian gallery.

London-based Chinese artist Lu Chao (b. 1988) studied oil painting at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing (China) until 2012. Under the tutorage of the internationally renowned realist painter Liu Xiaodong, the artist learned to connect one's art practice to real life. Lu Chao continued his studies at the Painting Department at the Royal College of Art in London (UK), where he graduated in 2014 and received the Painter-Stainers Goron Luton Award. Being a London-resident for seven years now, the artist divides his time between London and Beijing.

Lu Chao's work is best known for his large-scale black oil paintings depicting miniature crowds of people in surreal settings. The artist consistently portrays a crowd to question the relationship between the individual and his environment that underlies man's insignificance in relation to the vastness of our universe, the great unknown. Through poetic renders, Lu Chao evokes a void to interrogate these existential philosophical topics, embedded in the Chinese Zen Buddhism where emptiness does not stand for 'nothingness', but on the contrary means 'everything that we cannot see'.

In the new body of work *Black Fruit* the mysterious is ever present. In sixteen compositions crowds are represented in the form of fruits, cakes, chemical particles or as funambulists creating a fantastical imagery. When viewed up close, the facial expressions of the many small-sized figures reveal both the resilience and the many upheavals experienced by humanity.

The solemn use of 'ivory black' paint in his artistic practice is inspired by the historical Chinese landscape paintings of the Song and Yuan Dynasties, where the artists used only black ink to create an alternating play of light and hues that was considered as 'colours'. This tonality in black gives structure to the image. In it, Lu Chao is constantly exploring new ways to expand his graphic and technical possibilities in his chosen visual language.

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The largest painting in the show *Dark Energy No.4* (2020) bears witness to the influence of traditional Chinese ink painting and the artist's play with scale, in particular the dark vast landscape with what appears to be a giant "Penjing" bonsai tree in the forefront completely eclipsing the ant-sized figures on the grounds. Inspired by Taoism, with its belief in the power of nature, this scene attempts to represent the dark energy that surrounds us and still eludes our comprehension, to bring to the fore the unconscious reality of humanity.

A great admirer of Chinese philosophy, Lu Chao has also immersed himself in Western ideology since moving to London in 2013, supplemented by visits to exhibitions by his favorite Western masters, notably Rembrandt, Lucian Freud, Goya and Francis Bacon.

Works such as the depicted ruin in *Relic No.7* (2020) or the apocalyptic scene of *Circulation No.2* (2020) are inspired by the European Romanticism, while the work *Babel* (2020) makes a direct allusion to the Tower of Babel by the Flemish Renaissance painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder which evokes the sin of hubris.

Moreover, his work has affinities with modern human science, such as in the *Funambulist* series reminiscent of the string figures of the American theorist Donna Haraway, where the dynamics of thought are stimulated to produce new connections and alliances.

Despite the artist's oath to solemnly use black paint in his artistic practice, Lu Chao includes in every exhibition a work of color for no specific reason. In this show three works have been composed in Van Gogh's blue. Strongly influenced by Vincent van Gogh's painting *Almond Blossoms* (1890), Lu Chao used a similar light blue to convey a kind of awakening and beauty. The large work entitled *Black Fruit* (2020) is completely covered in shades of blue, highlighting the intriguing subject of tree branches producing bodiless heads as fruits.

Interested in the enigmatic meaning of human life, Lu Chao's paintings are like uncanny dreams that reflect on human existence. Dominated by an increasingly daring use of black, the artist creates a body of work where content and form go hand in hand, each reinforcing. The artist's work goes beyond a mere amalgamation of Chinese and Western codes, which are much more complex and sophisticated in their tendency to raise multiple questions, both philosophical and socio-cultural.

"The Black Fruit is the 7th solo exhibition in black series after Black Forest, 2013, Black Mirror, 2015, Black Light, 2016, Black Box, 2017, Black Silence, 2017, Black Dots, 2019. One of the clues that clearly connects all the exhibitions is "Ivory black". The possibility of black dots is infinite. If the black dot is considered as a seed, the black fruit will breed from there. The fruit has different life cycles and different tastes, which metaphors human beings ourselves. Every moment affects our emotions, just like the taste of fruit, we can feel soft, hard, juicy, dry, sweet, sour, bitter, astringent... Above all, the fruit is not always sweet, but a complex. The fruit has a life cycle. It comes, breeds, and goes. When life comes to an end, glory disappears."

Lu Chao, October 2020



Lu Chao, *Black Fruit*, Oil on canvas, 150 × 200 × 4,5 cm

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Lu Chao was born in 1988, in Shenyang , Province of Liaoning (China). He lives and works in London (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 work 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) in 2014, *Life and Hope* at the French Institute (Beijing, China) in 2014, *Huangyu Collection* at the Chengdu Museum of contemporary art (Chengdu, China) in 2016, *Painting as Strait Gate* at the Hive Center of Contemporary Art (Beijing, China) in 2016, *Aurora* at the Soka Art Center (Beijing, China) in 2016, *All Happens after Sunset* at the Shanghai Museum of Contemporary Art (Shanghai, China) in 2017, or *Black Dots* 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) and 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), and the Silver Prize at the Today Art Museum (Beijing, China), or in 2011 with the Excellent Sketching Award from the Central Academy of Fine Arts (Beijing, China).

Lu Chao's works are held by important institutional and private collections, such as the Louis Vuitton Foundation (Paris, France) ; the Ghisla Art Collection (Locarno, Switzerland), the Sammlung Wemhöner Collection (Berlin, Germany) ; the Today Art museum Collection (Beijing, China), the China Central Academy of Fine art Collection (Beijing, China), the Fine art school Collection affiliated to the Central Academy of Fine Arts (Beijing, China) and the JNBY Collection (Hangzhou, China).

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Lu Chao

Black Fruit

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