

“Semi-Auto Wandering Gods”

Artist	Lu Pingyuan
Curator	Zoe Diao
Opening	16:00 – 19:00, May 17, 2024
Dates	May 17 – July 6, 2024
Venue	MadeIn Gallery, No.1, -1F Sunken Garden, Lane 9 Qufu Road, Jing'an District, Shanghai

MadeIn Gallery is pleased to present Lu Pingyuan's solo exhibition “Semi-Auto Wandering Gods” on May 17, 2024, featuring his latest series of works and performance. This is the artist's fifth solo exhibition with MadeIn Gallery.

“Semi-Auto Wandering Gods” represents Lu's contemplation, research, and experimentation on the human belief system — in particular, the tradition of exorcism rituals — and the logic of image generation by artificial intelligence in the post-pandemic era. For the artist, the use of AI technology in his works is not out of a search for novelty or shortcuts, but a means to explore the commonalities between modern life's dependence on technology and the divine-seeking, sacrificial rituals that permeate human history. The images and text generated in collaboration with AI also resonate with Surrealism's experiments in unconscious painting and writing. Serving both as a fictitious nursery rhyme and an ambiguous prophecy, the exhibition title guides the audience back to an animistic mindset and to reconsider the relation between the primitive and the advanced, imitation and creation, subject and time.

“Nuo Yi”, also known as “Nuo Sacrifice,” first mentioned in *Rites of Zhou - Summer Officer - Fang Xiang Shi*, is one of the oldest verifiable rituals to ward off epidemics and entertain gods. Stemming from his observation of imagery and landscape in folk beliefs, Lu's interest in the Nuo rituals is a continued inquiry into the act of “asking the gods”: It may not be that deity statues embody human wishes, but that humans are the medium for conducting gods and spirits.

The works on view consist of deity statues, talismans, embroidery, paper-cuts/carpets, and utensils, all of which are derived from ancient Chinese Nuo rituals and reference elements from Shaman, contemporary Nuo plays, and Youshen (i.e. Pageant on Immortals). The seven deity statues are created by AI based on folk deity statues, sacrificial masks, and archaeological data, a process that to some extent removes human traces and allows the formless gods to return to an abstract space beyond human consciousness after being given form by humans. The names of each deity statue are also AI-generated, and while they have Daoist connotations, they lack sanctity and even convey humor — as if our instinctive reactions to these unexpected deities can lead to a true redemption by them. After the opening performance, the seven statues will be displayed on custom made stands at the gallery.

Echoing the divine statues is the hanging silver talismans "God's Dictionary". In Daoism, talismans bridge the "essence of the Dao" with the "essence of things" and serve as a covenant with the heavenly deities. But as Michael Taussig suggests, "artifacts created for the purpose of imitation can endow a person with powers beyond the object being imitated." If the brushstrokes in between text and image are replaced with the realistic and concrete ribbonfish, does the symbol leading to divinity retain only divinity itself? On the walls of the gallery hall are four gray-white embroidered pieces, stripped of decorative colors and stylized patterns; their blurred figures recall the ghosts of mythological stories, leaving only traces of narrative devoid of content. Similarly severed from ones' original function are the paper-cuts commonly seen in modern Nuo plays. The vertical channel leading to the deities turns into a horizontal jigsaw puzzle, prompting the audience to adjust their inherent cognition.

Linking the entire exhibition is a toad-shaped incense burner in the shape of a Wi-Fi transmitter. The artist believes that the Internet plays an indispensable role in this unusual Nuo ritual, like the burning of incense in sacrifices, both intangible and omnipresent. Just as modern society's reliance on search engines is akin to divination, the attempt to seek answers from the unknown is precisely an inquiry within the known. Humanity thus observed seems no different throughout the ages. Innovation lies partly in discovering knowledge and information that has long existed and yet been overlooked.

About Lu Pingyuan

Lu Pingyuan was born in 1984 in Zhejiang province, China, lives and works in Shanghai. Lu Pingyuan's artworks involves a variety of media, including texts, installations, videos, paintings and others. For a few years, Lu Pingyuan concentrated his practice on the writing of "stories" as a unique type of media for art creation. These short "stories" significantly broaden the artworks' state of existence in the real world, extend the inherent spirit of art itself. His works have been exhibited extensively in both national and international museums and biennales.

Recent solo exhibitions include: "One Night at a Gallery", SSSSTART Museum, Shanghai, China, 2022; "Trapping Cooking, Cooking Trapping, It's a Lovely Life", OCAT SHENZHEN, Shenzhen, China, 2022; "The First Artist", MadeIn Gallery, Shanghai, China, 2021; "Imperishable Affection", Powerlong Museum, Shanghai, China, 2020; "KOLA", chi K11 Art Museum, Shanghai, China, 2019; "La Malle aux Trésors", Mansion de Hermès, Shanghai, China, 2018; "Lost Child", ONEHOME Art Hotel, Shanghai, China; "HOME ALONE", MadeIn Gallery, Shanghai, 2017; "James Stanley-The Seventh Earl of Derby", Center for Chinese Contemporary Art, United Kingdom, 2016; "ON KAWARA", MadeIn Gallery, Shanghai, 2016; "Unexpected Discoveries", MadeIn Gallery, Shanghai, 2015. He participated in numerous group exhibitions, including: "Poetry by the Barbarian", ASE Foundation, Shanghai, 2024; "Launching a New Era--Body and Language as

Manifesto”, YUAN Art Museum, Beijing, 2024; “Crossing the River by Feeling the Collectors”, C`PARK Haisu, Shanghai, 2023; “2023 Chengdu Biennale”, Chengdu Art Museum, Chengdu, 2023; “White Holes: The Mysteries and Modern Perception of Oracle Bone Script”, 798 CUBE, Beijing, 2023; “START”, Start Museum, Shanghai, 2022-23; “Advent: Inventing Landscape, Producing the Earth”, Qianshao Contemporary Art Center, Shanghai, China, 2019; “Extreme Mix-Guangzhou Airport Biennale”, Guangzhou, China, 2019; “Land of the Lustrous”, UCCA Dune, Beidaihe, China, 2019; “Edge of the Wonderland-Thailand Art Bi-ennale”, Krabi, Thailand, 2018; “Artist is Present”, Yuz Museum, Shanghai, China, 2018; “Long March Project: Building Code Violations III – Special Economic Zone”, Long March Space, Beijing, China, 2018; “11th Shanghai Biennale”, Power Station of Art, Shanghai, China, 2016; “9th Liverpool Biennale”, Liverpool, England, 2016; “A Beautiful Disorder”, Cass Sculpture Foundation, England, 2016; “Mountain Sites: Views of Laoshan”, Si Fang Art Museum, Nanjing, China, 2016; “3rd Ural Industrial Biennial of Contemporary Art”, Ural, Russia, 2015 etc. Lu Pingyuan was nominated for the 4th Art Sanya “Huayu Youth Award” and the 1st Porsche “Young Chinese Artist of the Year”. Lu Pingyuan’s work proposal, Tree, was shortlisted for the third and fourth High Line Plinth commission in 2020.

About Zoe Diao

Zoe Diao (b. Changchun, China) is a scholar and curator living and working in New York. She is currently interested in environmental humanities, material culture and storytelling. Diao received a BA Art History from China Academy of Art, Hangzhou in 2012. With support from China Scholarship Council, she pursued her postgraduate study in the Department of Archaeology, Durham University, UK and received her first MA in 2014. From 2014 to 2018, Diao worked as Assistant Curator at Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA), Beijing, was a specialist at Xiling Yinshe Auction, and worked as Exhibition Manager at Long March Space, Beijing. Among the many exhibitions she worked on, she co-curated *William Kentridge: Notes Towards a Model Opera* (2015) with UCCA Director Philip Tinari, and curated *New Directions: Li Ming* (2015-16).

Diao moved to New York in 2018 and earned a Masters in Art in Museum Anthropology from Columbia University in 2019. She worked as a contracted associate researcher of Global Arts at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, where she assisted the 2019 and 2022 Asian Art Council meeting in San Francisco and Kingston, Jamaica, and worked with Dr. Alexandra Munroe on the special off-site exhibition of Guggenheim’s Asian Art Initiative *Yu Hong: Another One Bites the Dust* (2024). In 2021 Diao was selected as the inaugural Asymmetry Curatorial Fellow at Whitechapel Gallery, she completed a six-month residency at the museum and Delfina Foundation, London. In the past ten years, Diao has translated and edited several art publications, including *Inside a Book a House of Gold: Artist’s Edition for Parkett* (2012); *Six Drawing Lessons* (2015); *Peter Doig: Cabins and Canoes, The Unreasonable Silence of the World* (2017) and *Chinese Art Since 1970: The M+ Sigg Collection* (2021).