

# LIME AND THE TREE LIANBING



OPERA GALLERY

LIME AND  
THE TREE  
**TIANBING**

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## FOREWORD

Opera Gallery Singapore is proud to present "Me and the Tree", a solo exhibition of Li Tianbing's most recent body of works. Open from 19 January to 4 February, the exhibition explores themes of memories, solitude and growth. Above all, it is a tribute to Li Tianbing's late father, who Li represents through the symbolism of a mighty tree – an allusion to traditional Chinese culture that often falls outside the radar of mainstream knowledge.

The notion of memories, specifically that of reinventing the past with the present, is one that Li beautifully transposes into an art form. By reshaping his own imagined reality of childhood, Li effectively creates a dialogue between reality, imagination and fantasy.

As a child, Li's father, who was a military man, was often stationed far away from home. Without a father figure in his life growing up, Li found solace and comfort in the trees around him. A symbol for lost time with his father and the tenacity of the present in moulding the past, the tree as a motif holds prime of place in this series. It is not only the theme, but also the subject chosen by the artist to examine something deeper and more dear to him. A number of pieces are juxtaposed with monochrome and vibrant backgrounds on the same canvas. Li's character(s) on the foreground are defined by their dramatic grey tones, as though they are cut-outs from his photographic archive. Yellow is the colour of his vivid daydreams, such as in the backgrounds of *The long board game on the yellow tree* and *A Hint of Autumn*, with the trees, the forest, the landscape illumed by the warm, striking light of the evening sun.

On occasion, such as in *Snuggling with a lamb in front of yellow flowers*, or *White snow and my goat lean together*, his character is accompanied by a pet; or in the case of *Children holding signs in front of the yellow tree #2*, Li is accompanied by illusory 'brothers' in the quiet comfort of branches. In these imagined scenarios, Li and his companions are taken away from the disturbances from the outside world and the collective historic-social context they were situated in – as though they have found an escape, refuge in a parallel world. And in this parallel world, Li is allowed the freedom of boyish insouciance and the joys of brotherhood, companionship and camaraderie.

Opera Gallery invites you to experience the tribulations and personal victories of Li Tianbing's enduring childhood, illuminated in order to be experienced once more in *Me and The Tree*.

GILLES DYAN  
Founder and Chairman  
Opera Gallery Group

STÉPHANE LE PELLETIER  
Director, Asia Pacific  
Opera Gallery Singapore



## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

"In Chinese culture, trees symbolize fathers. During my childhood, my father, who was a military man, was often stationed far away, so I rarely got to see him. Their generation was willing to sacrifice their families for the revolution, so for much of my childhood, I had no father figure. In my memories, trees often took on the role of my father and became my best companions. Being an only child, I often felt lonely, but the trees were always there for me. I could seek comfort in them and have conversations, just like with my father. The intimate bond I formed with trees became the most cherished memory of my childhood.

However, with urbanization, the trees from my childhood gradually disappeared. So whenever I return to my home country, I desperately search for the trees of my childhood. In my latest series of works, I attempt to reclaim those trees from my childhood. I play with my imagined siblings and pets in the forest. Due to the one-child policy of the 1970s, I didn't have any siblings. Pets were seen as symbols of capitalism and were opposed and even considered food. My artwork reflects the lonely childhood of my generation, but it is this loneliness that sparked my rich imagination and drove me to use painting to compensate for what was missing, to change the past with the present. My so-called childhood has entered another parallel world through my paintings. I strive to depict the most beautiful trees from my childhood in my artwork, most of which are yellow and radiate a bright sunshine.

I still remember the last time I held a solo exhibition in Singapore was eight years ago. Just as I was about to board the plane to Singapore from Guilin for the opening ceremony, my father passed away at that very moment. Eight years later, I finally made it to Singapore, and this exhibition's theme is the big tree symbolizing my father. Therefore, this exhibition is also a tribute to my father."



# ARTWORKS

**CHILDREN HOLDING SIGNS IN FRONT  
OF THE YELLOW TREE #2**

2023  
Oil on canvas  
162,6 x 198,1 cm | 64 x 78 in



CLIMBING ON THE RED TREE

2023  
Oil on canvas  
162,6 x 127 cm | 64 x 50 in





*Meditation in front of the red Space-time wormhole, 2023*

MEDITATION IN FRONT  
OF THE RED SPACE-TIME WORMHOLE

2023  
Oil on canvas  
182,9 x 208,2 cm | 72 x 82 in



**MY LITTLE DOVE IN FRONT  
OF THE GREEN FOREST**

2023  
Oil on canvas  
91,4 x 91,4 cm | 36 x 36 in



READING IN THE BANANA TREES

2023  
Oil on canvas  
162,5 x 198,1 cm | 64 x 78 in



READING THE NEWSPAPER  
IN THE BIG YELLOW TREE

2023  
Oil on canvas  
182,9 x 213,3 cm | 72 x 84 in



**RIDING A WHITE DEER**

2023  
Oil on canvas  
101,6 x 127 cm | 40 x 50 in



RIDING ON A WHITE REINDEER

2023  
Oil on canvas  
101,6 x 127 cm | 40 x 50 in



SELF-PORTRAIT  
WITH TWO WHITE PIGEONS

2023  
Oil on canvas  
198,1 x 208,2 cm | 78 x 82 in



SNUGGLING WITH A LAMB  
IN FRONT OF YELLOW FLOWERS

2023  
Oil on canvas  
101,6 x 101,6 cm | 40 x 40 in





Standing with an owl in front of a colorful banana tree, 2023

STANDING WITH AN OWL IN FRONT  
OF A COLORFUL BANANA TREE

2023  
Oil on canvas  
157,5 x 157,5 cm | 62 x 62 in



THE LITTLE LAMB IN FRONT  
OF THE SNOWY TREE

2023  
Oil on canvas  
91,4 x 91,4 cm | 36 x 36 in



THE LONG BOARD GAME  
ON THE YELLOW TREE

2023  
Oil on canvas  
182,9 x 198,1 cm | 72 x 78 in



THREE CHILDREN IN A RED TREE

2023, oil on canvas  
180,3 x 144,8 cm | 71 x 57 in



WHITE SNOW AND MY GOAT LEAN TOGETHER

2023  
Oil on canvas  
162,6 x 127 cm | 64 x 50 in





*With the deer in the blue forest, 2023*

WITH THE DEER IN THE BLUE FOREST

2023  
Oil on canvas  
152,4 x 127 cm | 60 x 50 in



A HINT OF AUTUMN

2023  
Oil on canvas  
101,6 x 101,6 cm | 40 x 40 in





## BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1974 in the southern Province of Guilin, in China, Li TianBing initially pursued a career in diplomacy, studying at the Institute of International Relations in Beijing. However, at the age of 22, he decided to follow his passion for art and enrolled at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He graduated from the program six years later with distinction. Today, he lives and works between Paris and Los Angeles.

Li TianBing's artworks are inspired by both Far East and Western influences, resulting in a unique fusion of Chinese painting, influenced by Taoism, and the teachings of his art professors in Paris, including Vladimir Veličković, Christian Boltanski, and Giuseppe Penone. Through the use of photographs, Li visually expresses his reflections on the past and his experiences in different cultures, while also layering the present through oil painting in a way that transcends time. In 2006, he composed a family album showcasing portraits of himself as a child, with the intention of critiquing China's one-child policy and its loneliness by portraying an imaginary family through multiple self-replications. This pivotal moment sparked the development of a fresh visual language in his art, where portraits hold a significant role in creating a dialogue between reality, imagination, and fantasy. This sense of confusion envelops the artist, blurring the boundaries between his own authenticity and imagination. The interpretation of his work incorporates themes of personal identity and drama, weaving a tale that incorporates the influence of multicultural factors.

When creating his compositions, Li TianBing primarily uses oil paint. However, he also incorporates drawing with Indian ink as another important form of expression. Additionally, he enjoys experimenting with watercolours, using both Chinese and European paintbrushes. Today, Li Tianbing's artworks can be found in various public and private collections, including the M+ Museum, and the Uli Sigg Collection in Hong Kong; the China National Museum of Fine Arts in Beijing ; the Minneapolis Institute of Art, and the Asia Society in New York, USA; and the Fondation Carmignac in Porquerolles, France.





## SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2022 *Kaléidoscope*, Opera Gallery, Paris, France
- 2020 Cuturi Gallery, Singapore
- 2019 Art Central Hong Kong, Mazel Gallery, Singapore  
*Urban Scene*, JD Malat Gallery, London, United Kingdom
- 2015 *Journey of the Lone Monkey*, Pearl Lam Galleries, Singapore
- 2012 Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, United Kingdom
- 2011 *A Game as a Pretense of Being*, Hong Kong Art Center, Hong Kong
- 2010 *Childhood Fantasy*, Contrast Gallery, Shanghai, China
- 2009 *ADAA Show*, L&M Arts Gallery, New York, United States
- 2008 *Me and my Brother*, L&M Arts Gallery, New York, United States
- 2007 Galerie Albert Benamou, Paris, France  
Galerie Loft, Paris, France  
Espace 1789, Saint-Ouen, France
- 2006 *Beizitou*, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, Zurich, Switzerland  
Galerie Deborah Zafman, Paris, France  
*Brand New Works*, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, New York, United States
- 2005 Musée de Gajac, Villeneuve, France  
*Li Tianbing*, Galerie Loft, Barcelona, Spain  
*Li Tianbing*, Galerie Loft, Paris, France  
*Li Tianbing*, Galerie Debora Zafman, Paris, France
- 2004 Galerie Albert Benamou, Paris, France  
Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, New York, United States
- 2002 Galerie Donzévananen, Lausanne, Switzerland
- 2000 Musée Marzelles, Marmande, France

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2022** *(De)constructing Ideology*, The Wende Museum, Culver City, Los Angeles, USA
- 2018** *Sea of Desire*, Fondation Carmignac, Ile de Porquerolles, France
- 2016** *Us is Them*, The Pizzuti Collection, Columbus, United States  
*Chinese Whispers*, Recent art from the Sigg Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Bern, Switzerland
- 2015** *Who's Afraid of Picture*, L'École Supérieure d'Art et Design de Grenoble, Grenoble, France  
*Dusk to Dusk: Unsettled, Unraveled, Unread*, Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, United States
- 2014** *Mind-Beating, China Millennium Monument*, Contemporary Art Museum, Beijing, China
- 2013** *Mind-Beating, The 55<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale*, Venice, Italy  
Biennale d'Issy, Musée Français de la Carte à Jouer, Issy-les-Moulineaux, France
- 2011** Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno (IVAM), Valence, Spain
- 2008** Art Basel Miami, L&M Arts, Miami, United States  
*Du vent dans les branches*, Sénat, Paris, France  
*Sport in Art*, Today Art Museum, Beijing, China
- 2007** *Sport in Art*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Shanghai, China  
National Museum of Fine Arts, Beijing, China
- 2006** *Mickey dans tous ses états*, Artcurial, Hôtel Dassault, Paris, France
- 2005** *Nature Détournée*, Institute of France, Munich, Germany
- 2004** Galerie Guislain, Etats d'Art, Paris, France  
Premier Prix Antoine Marin - Galerie Julio Gonzalez, Paris, France  
Arts et Justice, Galerie d'Art du Conseil Général des Bouches-du-Rhone, Aix-en-Provence, France
- 2003** Biennale d'Issy (award of the Biennale), Issy-les-Moulineaux, France  
*Pas n'importe où, juste à coté* (painting award), Couvent des Cordeliers, Paris, France
- 2002** *Première Vue*, Passage de Retz, Paris, France  
Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland  
Biennale de la jeune création de Houilles, Houilles, France
- 2002** Salon de la jeune création, Houilles, France
- 1999** Académie des Beaux-arts, Institut de France, Paris, France  
Museum of Modern Art, Dubrovnik, Croatia  
Pavillon Mestrovic, Zagreb, Croatia
- 1998** Galerija Progres, Belgrade, Serbia

## COLLECTIONS

- Uli Sigg Collection  
M+ Museum, Hong Kong  
Fondation Carmignac, Paris, France  
Guy Ullens Collection, Beijing, China  
Asian Society Museum, New York, United States  
The Ekard Collection  
Tiroche DeLeon Collection  
Pizzuti Collection, Columbus Museum OH, United States  
Red Mansion Collection, Mitcham, United Kingdom  
Saeb Eigner Collection, London, United Kingdom  
Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minnesota, United States



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*The long board game on the yellow tree, 2023*

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