

BEYOND THE BODY: LUYANG "MANY DISPUTES AND CONFLICTS ARE CAUSED BY BINARY THINKING PATTERNS."  
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All images courtesy of the artist

The moment we assume we're something, our perception gets narrowed. Despite all efforts to release the material burdens, a layer of possessions, after the layers of ego, desire after desire, there remains the body. A sack of flesh reminding us of our pain and suffering in a confinement. Quite morbid. Aware of the limitations, some reach for the means to defy them. LuYang has dreamt up a digital exercise of escaping from the physical into pixels. "I feel this immersive power of liberation and freedom when creating works," the artist explains, "No concept can constrain my thinking, and I don't need to accept the measurement of social values. Many times, it seems like I have entered meditation."

Booming electronic music. Flashing colors and a kaleidoscope of lights. The LuYang universe opens its gates before yet another salvation-seeker. Truths disguised in pop idols, the illusion of power conveyed in mystical games, wonders of existence hidden in ancient bodily movements: a story of us all. A tale whispered to us in the void of night and luminescence of the sun. It's a place free of body-bound suffering, a plane created for LuYang's gender-neutral avatar DOKU. LuYang is a Chinese artist working with CGI, virtual reality and motion tracking. Though they don't really care for it. "My works are presented in these forms just because these technical means are easy to use - they are very good tools. I am more interested in exploring the core of things, such as philosophy, Buddhism, certain ancient wisdom and knowledge systems, psychology and neuroscience, etc. - these can help me explore the universe," they reveal. The artist's perspective on the medium of their work is refreshing. Away from the buzzy hype of cyber everything, LuYang's attitude towards modern solutions is beautifully neutral.

Even though LuYang's creations live mostly on screens, they found a semi-permanent home under the roof of London's Zabludowicz Collection. That's how LuYang *NetiNeti* was born. It's a complex series, encapsulating 10 years of work, each of them telling another chapter of LuYang's and DOKU's spiritually extravagant ventures. "I am very grateful to the professional curatorial team of the Zabludowicz Collection. Many exhibition ideas are perfected and advised by them. They contributed a great lot to this exhibition and its presentation," LuYang is full of praise for the gallery.

The title of the exhibition was inspired by the Sanskrit expression '*neti neti*,' meaning 'not this, not this.' LuYang populated the paradoxical grey sphere where all objects of consciousness wither. Away from material suffering, the protagonist of the universe and a digital replica of the artist, DOKU, exists in six versions corresponding with six paths of Buddhist reincarnation: Hell, Heaven, Hungry Ghost, Animal, Asura and Human. It plays on the human obsession with never-ending existence and experience, even if through different versions of ourselves. Yet, LuYang is a wise guide, luring us in with flashing superficiality so we get wrenched in the metaphysical guts vibing to the techno-psychedelic surroundings. "In the works you see in this exhibition, at their core are Buddhist and philosophical thoughts, with some characteristics of popular culture just used as a shell to cover the content. Making the shell well can attract audiences who are not interested in the core of the works. Some audiences may not be the target audiences of these Buddhist and philosophical thoughts at all, but they teach an slowly approach the core of the works from these shells," the artist shares. *NetiNeti* is a thoughtful psychological experiment, packing millenia-old religious teaching in an arcade game (which is an actual part of the exhibition).

Breaking down some mental barriers, LuYang introduces the concept of non-dual awareness of reality, the foolishness of the binary, at the same time acknowledging it is crucial to the perception of inner and outer landscapes. "For example, the feeling of happiness requires analogy/contrast with pain, otherwise, we would not have the binary concept of happiness and pain, and other 'opposing' concepts were also produced by analogy," LuYang sums up. Our world is made up of those. "Many disputes and conflicts are caused by binary thinking patterns. I just try to avoid such concepts, but it seems very difficult, and it requires wisdom."

LuYang understands beyond the binary just fine. Their work is a glorious mix of extremes, both equal and real. Bursting with sound and visuals, the emotions they cause feel primordial. It's as if transplanting the soul onto a digital canvas. One might experience a sense of relief. Non-material minimalism of the spirit away from the burdens of mortality. While we dream of a new kind of enlightenment, LuYang stays grounded. "I can't make assumptions for this because I haven't experienced how consciousness exists outside of my own body," the artist says. Still, they enjoy the sense of limitless creation when in solitude. "In Buddhism, there is a state of reincarnation called the Hungry Ghost Realm. In this Hungry Ghost Realm, there are hungry ghosts without bodies, and their consciousness will move around according to their own delusions, and they cannot be fixed to a geographical location to concentrate on thinking. So, I think having a physical body does not matter - peace of mind is the most important thing," LuYang wipes out delusions. With one foot in the cult of the avatars and cyber-spirituality, and the other with DOKU and other demi-gods, the realization eventually dawns upon us. It doesn't matter to which dimension we'll eventually ascend or what form we will take - without the balance, there's no real difference.

LuYang's definition of minimalism mirrors this thesis. "I never thought about it, and I didn't do much research on concepts of forms and styles. However, I have been living more and more in a minimalistic style over the years, and I feel this can make myself more peaceful and freer. Maybe this is the benefit of minimalism to me?" the artist ponders. In the end, for LuYang, the goal is to translate their visions and thoughts onto various canvases down to every detail, from a flame in Hell to a tear reflected in the plains of Heaven. All away from earthly everyday distractions, as LuYang explains: "The environment has little influence on me personally because no matter where I am, I just stay in a quiet room when I'm working, so it doesn't matter whether the room is in Shanghai or Tokyo."

Glued to the screen showing the short film *DOKU the Self*, we don't feel anywhere in particular. As the character parts with reincarnations questioning the reasons for pain, there's a sense of catharsis on the horizon. With the spirit split from the flesh, we watch the final scene of DOKU dematerializing in space. Piece by piece, their crystallized body shatters into space, free to float forever among all that is. With the last few particles dissipating into the infinite and having unpackaged everything that's inside, we feel closer to peace than ever. Closer to the self? Left with the kind of emptiness that includes everything. '*Iti iti*,' which is 'all this, all this.' The moment we assume we're everything, our perception expands. Would that be what DOKU was searching for? "The answer is in my work, and I don't like to describe my work with words," the artist asserts.

Under the guise of hedonistic entertainment, neon surfaces and flamboyant characters, LuYang teaches us the most precious lesson of all - the present. "I do not have the habit of envisioning the future or looking back to the past. I would deliberately not let myself think about everything from the dimension of time. Recalling the past is like trying to cast pebbles into peaceful water, it will cause a few ripples, with no actual meaning in these. Envisioning the future is like casting a fishing net on dry land - you'll get nothing." Now is all.