LuYang has been wrestling with that question ever since completing his studies in New Media Art at the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou in 2010. It led him to create a stunningly complex body of works over the last decade that includes 3D animated films, virtual and augmented reality projects, computer games, motion capture performances, installations, and lightboxes. To make them, the artist has worked with a wide range of collaborators, including neuroscientists, pop stars, psychologists, software developers, experimental composers, traditional dancers, poets, robotics companies, philosophers, and science-fiction writers, among others. The results are engrossing and fantastical, techno-psychedelic and sometimes terrifying, united in their attempt to tackle such enormous topics as biology, reincarnation, or even global environmental destruction.

In all of these, as in LuYang’s biography, gender is fluid. So are age, religion, and nationality. Don’t expect to settle the knowledge of which pronouns apply to the artist—these shift in nearly every exhibition handout, article, or interview. And, starting with this exhibition in Basel, the artist’s birth year will be omitted in promotional matter so that he (the pronoun of choice for the moment) approaches ever more accurately the agelessness of his digital avatars.

For **LuYang Vibratory Field** at Kunsthalle Basel, the artist’s first solo exhibition in Switzerland, nearly every room evokes a different cosmos. It is as if his 3D animations and computer games spawned the physical environments in which they are nested.

To enter the exhibition is to find oneself in a dimly lit temple of sorts. It is lined with flags and banners in the spirit of a religious festival, with four altars flanking its sides. Each of these serves as a viewing station featuring an individual work made by the artist in the years just after he graduated from art school. And each of these depicts different epic battles between neuroscience and religion—with the titles hinting at their darkly humorous gatherings of “wrathful gods” and “transcranial exorcisms.” Beyond them, and serving as the room’s vibrant centerpiece, is the five-channel video work, *Electromagnetic Brainology* (2017). It references Buddhist and Hindu teachings on the interconnectedness between the body (and its nervous system) and the four elements. Surrounding the main projection are videos portraying the gods associated with air, earth,
ROOM 1

   HD video
   14 min 37 sec
   Music: gameface

2. God of the Brain, 2017
   HD video
   8 min 3 sec
   Music: gameface

ROOM 2

1. Material World Knight, 2018
   3-channel HD video
   22 min 15 sec
   Music: Satellite Young

2. LuYang Delusional Mandala, 2015
   HD video
   16 min 27 sec
   Music: DJ Cavia

ROOM 3

(in running order)

1. UterusMan, 2012–13
   HD video
   11 min 20 sec
   Music: Squarelou
   Manga in animation: HHUUAZZII

2. LuYang Delusional Mandalas, 2015
   HD video
   16 min 27 sec
   Music: DJ Cavia

3. LuYang Gong Tau Kite, 2016
   HD video
   3 min 24 sec
   Music: Not-Even-Anything-Land by Yllis

4. Electromagnetic Brainology Brain Control Messenger, 2018
   HD video
   10 min 8 sec
   Actor and Voice: Chan Momo
   Composition: Daisuke Hirayama, Sei Fukuyama (Invisible Manners)
   Lyrics: Tomoharu Matsuda

ROOM 4

1. LuYang the Destroyer – Game, 2021
   Computer game

2. LuYang Delusional World – Game Record, 2020
   HD video
   30 min 57 sec
   Music: gameface
   Powered by Meta Objects
   Dancer: Qin Ran
   Hell scene: Extreme John

3. The Great Adventure of Material World – Game, 2019
   Computer game
   Music: 2080
   Program: Meta Objects

4. The Great Adventure of Material World – Game Films, 2020
   HD video
   26 min 22 sec
   Music: 2080
   Program: Meta Objects

5. LuYang Delusional World – Game, 2020
   Computer game
   Music: gameface
   Powered by Meta Objects
   Dancer: Qin Ran
   Hell scene: Extreme John

   HD video
   19 min 8 sec

ROOM 5

1. DOKU PsyFi – Human, 2023
   Aluminum, fabric, LED light system
   210 x 140 x 12 cm
   Courtesy the artist and Société, Berlin

2. DOKU PsyFi – Hungry Ghost, 2023
   Aluminum, fabric, LED light system
   210 x 140 x 12 cm
   Courtesy the artist and Société, Berlin

3. DOKU PsyFi – Heaven, 2023
   Aluminum, fabric, LED light system
   210 x 140 x 12 cm
   Courtesy the artist and Société, Berlin

4. DOKU PsyFi – Animal, 2023
   Aluminum, fabric, LED light system
   210 x 140 x 12 cm
   Courtesy the artist and Société, Berlin

5. DOKU PsyFi – Asura, 2023
   Aluminum, fabric, LED light system
   210 x 140 x 12 cm
   Courtesy the artist and Société, Berlin

6. DOKU PsyFi – Hell, 2023
   Aluminum, fabric, LED light system
   210 x 140 x 12 cm
   Courtesy the artist and Société, Berlin

7. DOKU – Heaven, 2022
   4K video
   4 min 37 sec
   Music: liiii

8. DOKU – Animal, 2022
   4K video
   4 min 37 sec
   Music: liiii

9. DOKU – Asura, 2022
   4K video
   4 min 30 sec
   Music: liiii

10. DOKU – Hungry Ghost, 2022
    4K video
    4 min 5 sec
    Music: liiii

11. DOKU – Hell, 2022
    4K video
    4 min 32 sec
    Music: liiii

12. DOKU – Hello World – Human, 2021
    4K video
    3 min 30 sec
    Music: liiii

13. DOKU the Self, 2022
    4K video
    36 min 4 sec
    Music: liiii
    Trumpets: Feng
    Sound effects: Woody

All works, unless otherwise mentioned, courtesy the artist.
fire, and water. They are armed with various medical devices, attempting to restore the well-being of those who have gone through the four forms of universal suffering—birth, aging, illness, and death.

This temple segues into a room rendered as a kind of sci-fi control center, incorporating the three-channel video *Material World Knight* (2018). A triptych of sorts, it imagines a future where three types of beings have emerged: cloned humans, cyborgs, and AI robots. The ensemble bursts with sensory stimuli and draws the viewer into a sugar rush of pulsing color and music in which macabre cyborgs, strange mutants, and the artist’s own head—turned into a giant kite—alternately dance, fight, and carry us with them to alternate realities.

Next is a series of cage-like gaming stations: audiences are invited to adopt characters—from the androgynous UterusMan to the all-powerful World Material Knight—previously encountered in the exhibition. Except now, it is possible to play with them or, as them, explore the universe, acquire energy, or be destroyed, only to be reborn. Yet, in these games, nothing is what it seems. And hell might be around the corner. Even if some boast anime’s candy-colored, fast-paced action, just as many depict creepy scenes in dystopian landscapes. And while some follow the typical role-playing gaming format with narratives geared toward completing “quests,” battling (or ducking) enemies, and achieving “victory,” LuYang uses them all to explore the (sometimes traumatizing) spiritual plane of existence, rather than simply to entertain by way of a competitive, adrenaline-fueled format.

Given that the exhibition transports visitors across worlds, it is perhaps fitting that the final room, in two parts, is modeled on an airport and airplane. The space features the artist’s most recent exploration of rebirth by introducing DOKU, LuYang’s genderless, digital stand-in. Short for “Dokusho Dokushi,” the character name is a reference to a Buddhist sutra, a canonical scripture, which means:

"We are born alone, and we die alone.

Lightboxes in the first half of the room, akin to advertising screens like those found in airports, present the six digital avatars of DOKU. They suggest reincarnations of the artist in the guise of six virtual proxies inspired by Buddhist and Hindu cosmologies: DOKU Animal, DOKU Asura, DOKU Heaven, DOKU Hell, DOKU Human, and DOKU Hungry Ghost. Each lightbox is titled DOKU *PsyFi* with the addition of the name of the avatar that is depicted in larger-than-life illuminated form (all 2023). Stationed like sentries in the airport’s waiting area, they are accompanied by short videos foregrounding the characters’ special abilities as they dance, move, and shimmy on six screens.

In the second half of the room, the airplane interior area, you encounter the artist’s magisterial narrative film, *DOKU the Self* (2022). Its creation was no small feat: LuYang traveled to Bali (Indonesia) and Kerala (India) to investigate how dancers of the ritual Balinese Legong and Indian Kathakali dance styles have, for centuries, trained their bodies to move so symmetrically that they appear robotic. Literally embodying the idea of humanity’s ancient longing to escape mortality, these dance traditions inspired LuYang’s various exuberant DOKU films in which ancient choreographies meet cutting-edge computer-generated technologies. To make the videos, motion capture cameras record the gestures of different dancers, each of which has been equipped with markers attached to their bodies. These recordings were combined with the artist’s own facial expressions, documented using specialized software and high-precision 3D scanners. The result is projected onto a large screen framed by rows of airplane seats, conveying the story of DOKU. Summoned from the artist’s memory and lived experience of narrowly escaping an airplane crash while traveling amid the pandemic, the video conjures DOKU as seated on a passenger airplane, moving between dream states and paranoia as the world crumbles and doom looms all around. In the process of this transcendental voyage, he reincarnates into his six avatars.

From the temple to the airport, the different spaces of the exhibition are testimony to LuYang’s wildly frenetic imagination. Winner of the 2022 Deutsche Bank “Artist of the Year” award, his world-building proves to be as much virtual as physical. In the exhibition—one of the most comprehensive presentations of this artist’s production of the past decade—
visitors experience an immersive journey into the persistent themes driving LuYang’s practice. The works’ humor, depth, and singular magnetism open doors to worlds (and the concerns that accompany them) that may look terrifying and strange but also, at times, not so far from our own.

LuYang was born in Shanghai, CN; lives and works in Tokyo.

The exhibition is made possible through the generous support of the Burger Collection, Hong Kong (in the spirit of TOY).

The mediation projects are realized through the generous support of the Beisheim Stiftung and the Canton of Basel-Stadt.

Thanks to Max Burger, Monique Burger, Dimitri Erhard, Britta Färber, Zilu Gao, Johannes E. Hoerning, Joanna Lisiak, Aita Sulser, Martin Stoecklin, Daniel Wichelhaus, Marius Wilms, and Melina Wilson

Special thanks to Société, Berlin

Guided tours through the exhibition

Public guided tours on every first Sunday of the month in German
05.02.2023, Sunday, 3 p.m.
05.03.2023, Sunday, 3 p.m.
02.04.2023, Sunday, 3 p.m.
07.05.2023, Sunday, 3 p.m.

Guided tour by curator Elena Filipovic in English
22.01.2023, Sunday, 3 p.m.
Registration at kunstvermittlung@kunsthallebasel.ch

Tandem guided tour in German
12.03.2023, Sunday, 3 p.m.
Kunsthalle Basel and SAM Swiss Architecture Museum offer a joint tour of their current exhibitions, highlighting the intersections between architecture and art.

Mediation and public programs

Basel Museums Night: Performing the Future
20.01.2023, Friday, 6 p.m.–2 a.m.
Special program with performances, a LuYang inspired Becoming an Avatar workshop, and Talk to Me, where one can learn more about the works in the exhibition through one-on-one conversations

Theater Basel workshop in German
22.02.2023, Wednesday, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
In cooperation with Theater Basel, a performative workshop will take place in the exhibition.

Mal•Mal – draw from a live model in the current exhibition, in English and German
22.02.2023, Wednesday, 6 –8 p.m.
22.03.2023, Wednesday, 6 –8 p.m.
19.04.2023, Wednesday, 6 –8 p.m.
Materials will be provided.

Schreibwerkstatt, in German
04.–06.05.2023, Thursday–Saturday
Writing workshop in cooperation with the Schule für Gestaltung Basel and lyrix – Deutscher Bundestwettbewerb für junge Lyrik

Fantasy Basel – The Swiss Comic Con
18.–20.05.2023, Thursday–Saturday
Show your Fantasy Basel – The Swiss Comic Con entrance ticket or come in your Fantasy Basel costume and get free admission to the exhibition.

In the Kunsthalle Basel library, you will find a selection of publications related to LuYang.

Follow us on Instagram and share your photos and impressions with #kunsthallebasel.

More information at kunsthallebasel.ch

Kunsthalle Basel / Basler Kunstverein is generously supported by the Canton of Basel-Stadt.

Support for Kunsthalle Basel’s yearly program is provided by Saint Laurent.

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