



'Boy with fluffy hair' from the series *'100 family names'*,
1992–93
pencil on paper

La Trobe University, Geoff Raby Collection of Chinese Art.
Donated by Dr Geoff Raby AO through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2019. © Luo Brothers.
Photo: Jia De

In this early pencil work by the Luo Brothers, Luo Wei Dong, Luo Wei Guo and Luo Wei Bing, a young boy depicted with photorealist precision is nested within various iconographic codes of socialist China. Three disembodied Mao heads float atop marching flags in communist red, invoking a popular design for propaganda posters that saw Mao placed as the 'Great Red Sun'. Under the Great Leader's omnipresent gaze, Red Army soldiers, here depicted in the style of revolutionary woodcuts, stretch out muscular arms to grasp at the boy's collar and press weapons against the soft skin of his face. Just beneath them, a row of caricatured fat Western capitalists, pulling in the opposite direction, dance lightly on his shoulders.

Through all of this adornment, the child gazes out contemplatively, seemingly oblivious to the ideological battleground being staked out just behind him. His neutral expression and youthful innocence are an allegory of future promise, the raw material of a nation to be moulded. This neutrality is also a form of critique. This is not one of China's Little Red Pioneers, decorated with a quintessential red neck scarf and patriotically performing the nation, but rather a somewhat disoriented child, dressed up in the Mao suit of an adult and used as a prop through which to illustrate an adult's agenda.

The Luo Brothers, born in Guangxi, Southern China, are better known for their sculpture and lacquer works, which combine kitsch elements from Chinese folk art with well-known Western commodities to produce garish compositions in a style known as gaudy art. In contrast, this comparatively restrained drawing offers an early example of the sampling and repurposing of iconography from the Cultural Revolution that would come to be known as political pop in the early 1990s.

Genevieve Trail, 2022