

Hao Ni
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Images courtesy of the writer



Exhibition view of Night Sculpture



Ni Hao's Night Sculpture at Taipei Fine Arts Museum

THE RESTLESS SOUL HIDDEN IN THE DARK OF NIGHT: NI HAO'S NIGHT SCULPTURES

潛藏於深夜中的不安靈魂：
倪豪的《夜雕塑》

The beams from the headlights of a car penetrate the darkness of the seaside windbreak in the middle of the night. A horde of nocturnal insects swarms towards the light source, repeatedly crashing against the headlight casings with apparent dogged obsession. Upon hearing this description, we may recall a particular scene from a thriller film, or a memory of something we inadvertently noticed during a night outing. A variety of associations can be drawn, but they all seem to have to do with fear, especially that feeling of unbusiness when you are aware of the imminent arrival of something unknown. At the same time, this is the unique atmosphere and emotion which *Night Sculptures* by Ni Hao, a young Taiwanese expatriate artist in the U.S., expresses.

Born in 1989, Ni was the youngest artist to receive an honourable mention at the Taipei Arts Awards 2014. After moving to Canada with his family in 2000, he studied art in the U.S., majoring in sculpture, and began adopting ready-made objects as his main mode of creation. As a result, Ni's sources of creativity are very diverse. His inspiration for *Night Sculptures* came from the following words spoken by Bruce Lee: 'Empty your mind, be formless, shapeless - like water. Now you put water into a cup, it becomes the cup, you put water into a bottle, it becomes the bottle, you put it in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Now water can flow or it can crash. Be water, my friend.' Taking *Night Sculptures* as an example, Ni used the violent imaginings, derived from his observation of nocturnal insects crashing into car headlights, as the core to develop a series of works - that sense of crisis lurking in our consciousness which is ready to pounce at any moment, similar to the nature of water. The artist transferred this sentiment into different vessels. Be it cigarettes, a sultry woman hidden behind a chiffon veil, car headlights, or the water drizzling from a giant food cart, they all emanate an atmosphere of peril, like a road movie full of unknown twists and turns.

Fresh tears, hot blood and wet kisses seem to be essential elements of a road movie. At the same time, they are also the romantic notes in Ni's work. The title of one of the pieces in *Night Sculptures* comprises these three components. He dismantled the English letters from the silver trademarks embedded in car bodies, arranged them into the six words, and fixed them on an air filter, with its soft texture being the artist's metaphor for the human body. Ni states that tears and kisses are physiological reactions which only manifest themselves when humans are in heightened emotional states. The pressing of the metallic letters, which represents such abstract emotional responses, onto the air filter symbolising that the body is an allegory of the emotional

impacts we experience in daily life. What are these impacts? Are they caused by natural disasters, or the damage resulting from the high-speed collision of two manmade objects? In response to this, the artist suggests that from reading those words alone, one is easily led into thinking about how the body reacts during a car crash. They could also be the cold words used to convey messages when people in love are in heightened emotional states or overwhelmed with grief at the brink of separation. He also hopes that they can be subtle whispers and murmurs which enable viewers to relate to their own personal experiences.

Through the direction and interpretation of objects, Ni visualised and materialised formless human emotions. The soul of *Night Sculptures* is the violence and fear within us, always looking for opportunities to break free. The work tells of our unique emotions, abstract yet intense, by immersing the audience in visual images like those from road movies in both a direct and subtle manner. These emotions, in turn, will bring back certain memories for the viewers. In other words, they may reawaken that restless and fearful soul lying deep within.

「深夜海邊的防風林中，一道車燈劃破黑暗，隨之而來的是一群夜行昆蟲一窩蜂地向光源奔去，彷彿充滿執念地不斷撞擊燈罩。」聽到這段描述，我們似乎想起了某部驚悚片的某個場景，也好像是某次夜遊時不經意注意到的記憶片段，它可以有各種不同解釋，但好像都意味著恐懼，特別是心中知道某個未知事物即將到來時，心中那忐忑不安的特殊情緒，而這同時也是台灣旅美年輕藝術家倪豪《夜雕塑》一作中，所傳達出的獨特氛圍與情感。

1989年出生的倪豪是2014年臺北美術獎中，最年輕的獲獎藝術家。2000年舉家遷往加拿大，之後在美國接受藝術教育專攻雕塑，並開始以現成物為主要的創作模式。也因此倪豪的創作取材十分多元，他在《夜雕塑》的創作理念中引用了李小龍的一段話：「放空心靈，放棄形式，無以形狀，若水一般。水倒入杯中即成杯，入風中即成風，入壺中即成壺，平和流動之水亦可有無堅不摧之勢。要如水一般，我的朋友。」以《夜雕塑》為例，即是倪豪觀察夜行昆蟲撞擊車燈時所衍生出的暴力想像為主軸所發展出的系列作品，那些隱藏在生活表面底下隨時要呼之欲出的危機感，就是近似於水的存在，由藝術家將其承載於不同的素材之上，香菸、隱身於薄紗後的性感女郎、車燈與大型餐車上源源不斷交織出的危險氣氛，彷彿一部充滿著未知情節的公路電影。

「fresh tears」、「hot blood」及「wet kisses」看似是公路電影中的必備元素，同時也可以是對倪豪作品所下的浪漫註解。這三個詞彙是《夜雕塑》系列中其中一件作品的標題，他將鑲嵌於汽車車體上的銀色商標英文字拆解後，拆成這三個標語直接鑲嵌於空氣濾網之上，其柔軟的質地是藝術家對人類身體的隱喻。倪豪表示，流淚與接吻皆是人類在極度激動的情緒下才會出現的生理反應，當這些抽象的情緒表現化為金屬文字重重地擠壓在象徵肉體的濾網之上時，便同時帶人們在日常生活中的情緒衝擊。這樣的衝擊是什麼？是天災亦或是英雄人造物互相撞擊後的人為災難？對此，藝術家進一步指出，單讀這些字時，很容易去想到身體在車禍中所產生的反應，也有可能是在戀愛時的激動情緒或毒癮戒絕的分離場景，用這些冷冽的字眼去傳達這些訊息，也是希望透過某種輕聲細語、耳語呢喃的含義方式讓觀眾聯想到他們自己的親身經歷。

透過對物件的編導與詮釋，倪豪將無形的人類情感訴諸於物質的視覺與實體化，而《夜雕塑》的靈魂就是日常生活中在我們背後蠢蠢欲動的暴力與恐懼，透過時而直接時而含蓄的形式讓觀者浸淫在公路電影式的視覺場景當中，傾訴一段抽象卻又強烈的獨特情感。而這份情感也將透過觀眾一來一往的交流，勾起他們腦海中記憶片段，換句話說也可能喚醒了內心深處某個不安且恐懼的靈魂。

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