

## 來自浮華的深層: 曾建穎與他的造像

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「木與夜孰長」這個不尋常的展名原本出自戰國時代諸子百家墨子的《經說下》篇。根據曾建穎的說法，這展覽名稱更直接的源頭是來自陳傳興的《木與夜孰長》（2009）一書。曾建穎在其創作自述中提到，他自己並不想陷入戰國墨家或名家的詭辯話術，但是這次在亞紀畫廊所展出的作品內涵，許多應該還是來自 2019 年底以來思考到 Covid-19 對這個世界的內外衝擊以及改變。此外，陳傳興《木與夜孰長》一書中的〈中國繪畫空間的代數假想〉篇章也應該在曾建穎的創作中扮演著關鍵角色。

今年才滿 35 歲的曾建穎出生於臺灣的南投，先後畢業於國立臺灣師範大學的美術系，以及國立臺北藝術大學的美術研究所。熟悉臺灣藝術生態的藝術觀察者都會知道，這兩所性質迥異的學校，在他藝術學習歷程與品味的形塑上，必然會出現許多拉扯與矛盾。這些拉扯、撕裂與矛盾，或許可被視為曾建穎創作的內在性格之重要組成。

今年八月初與他約好在位於淡水的工作室觀看作品。在返回臺北市區的捷運上，我反覆思考著這位我觀察多年的年輕畫家，以及在筆記本所寫下的幾個訪談關鍵詞：美人畫、女性肖像、造像記、虛妄、物質性與精神性。然後，還有那個「木與夜孰長」的展名。

### 關於東方與西方

長期以來，臺灣的教育體系裡，所謂「東西方文化之比較」，始終被視為一種在知識論裡合理的討論範疇：例如「東西方哲學比較」、「東西方藝術比較」。問題是，這種籠統的「東西方」之比較，不僅忽略了地理大發現以來所認知的「地球是圓」的說法，更無視當代還有所謂「南北貧富差距」的問題（Global south）。臺灣美術學院的課程分類迄今，許多系所依然還在使用「西方媒材」與「東方媒材」的分類方式來教育學生。曾建穎在創作自述中提到「早些年我其實有意的想要靠近西方多一些，以一種『中學為體西學』為用」的概念在看待我的創作。」晚清四大名臣之一的張之洞（1837-1909）所提出「中學為體，西學為用」的主張，不僅無法幫大清帝國找到現

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代化的出路，他把西方的學問視為一種純然的應用技術（applications and techniques），事實上無法釐清大清帝國與歐美國家在科技上認知的差距。

幸運的是，曾建穎這些年來對於「體用說」或「東西說」，已經有了自己的反思與體悟。他意識到，這種割裂式的二元價值觀，並無法在創作上讓他擁有一個完整的靈魂與創作的主體性。2017年他獲得亞洲文化協會（ACC）的贊助計畫獎勵，然後在隔年前往紐約、印尼、與中國的四大佛教石窟旅行，不僅豐富了他在視覺圖像的累積，更在心靈的層次上讓他超越了「東西二元論」的限制，進而形成了一個更有自覺的個體。

## 關於美人畫

以美麗女子描繪為題材的繪畫，在中國畫史多以「仕女畫」稱之，而在日本則用「美人畫」居多。原本，日本在江戶時代的「美人畫」多以藝妓、游女、町人等社會身份較為低下的女性為主；但是進入明治與大正時代之後，「美人畫」的主角則逐漸轉換成為帶有時髦摩登色彩的現代女性為主（例如，鏑木清方 1878-1977 的作品）。然而，對於曾建穎女性題材作品更有直接影響的，應該是鏑木清方的臺籍女弟子—陳進（1907-1998）。以陳進 1935 年的《悠閒》為例，這件典藏於臺北市立美術館作品中，身著墨綠色旗袍橫臥在眠床上的大家閨秀，她旗袍高領的扣子與綢緞蚊帳的金質扣環都是採用日本畫中的「盛上」技法（將顏料逐次的堆高，以產生立體的效果）。這樣的手法，在此次所展出的《珍珠刑》【The Unbearable Lightness】、《珍寶》【Precious】、《天體系》【Metaphysics】中，都有大量的使用。

曾建穎作品中最難討論的並非技術上的問題，反而是他試圖透過這種非常物質性的表現手法來討論作品中人物的內在精神性。「盛上」這種技法不但考驗作者的耐心與體力（顏料必須在一層乾了之後，才能再上第二層，如此反覆數次）。這種非常重複與物質性的堆疊，以《珍珠刑》為例，也暗示了一種懲罰與痛/快感。這種結合重複、積累、穿刺與浮誇奢華的裝飾，表面上是一種財富的炫耀，但是也會令人懷疑「到底要多少才能夠獲得真正的滿足」？「你知道嗎？珍珠作其實源自於異物入侵兩扇貝（一種珠貝）的結果」，曾建穎在對談中如此的提醒我。這個提醒，可能也同時隱含了包含性、財富、物質與精神上的多重含意。

## 關於都會的夜晚與造像

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在與曾建穎對談的過程中，又會發現他其實是一位對於古典知識（繪畫史與神秘學）非常熟悉的創作者。當他談及「自己的創作語言深受佛教造像的方法學啟發」，他其實有兩層意義：第一層是，原始佛教從釋迦牟尼圓寂到印度的貴霜王朝（公元前二到第三世紀）之前，佛教事實上處於一個「無佛像時代」。之後，大乘佛教興起，佛教的理論開始轉向，大約在貴霜王朝時期才開始出現佛像與菩薩像的製作。曾建穎多年來的人像作品，如他自己所言的並非是在製作「肖像畫」，而是在處理一種有集體性格的「眾生相」；他的技法，深受中國佛像（特別是敦煌壁畫與泥塑金剛力士像的肌肉感）在造型上的影響。仔細來看，這些出現在作品中透過暈染方式與明暗法來處理的肌肉感與軀體關節，五官與身軀的輪廓線條，並非源自西方的解剖學，而是來自他長期觀察佛教與東亞繪畫的結果。

在訪談中，我們也討論到了《夢露》【Dream a Little Dream】這件作品。他提到了去年在公視以及Netflix 上映的《華燈初上》，然後他想在作品中表現出女人味，或是一種女性特質

（femininity）。《夢露》畫面中的女性頭像，佔據了畫面將近 1/2。她的右手點燃了一根紙煙，煙霧徐緩上升；她的左手，以近似蓮花指的姿態，輕輕的托在臉頰上。女子的頭髮盤起，並且明顯有 sedo（日式發音）之後的造型感。在接近完美弧度的眼線與假睫毛之下，是她看向左方的迷濛雙眼。曾建穎說，這看似“混濁”的眼球，事實上用到了日本畫顏料中的「薰銀泥」所製作出來的特殊效果。

《華燈初上》會讓人聯想到臺北林森北路附近六條通的日式小酒館。在 1970~1990 年代，當時臺北還有許多日本商社的時代裡，這些日式小酒館的媽媽桑曾經帶給許多日本商人夜晚在異國獨處時的安慰。「夢露」兩個字，除了在直接的字義上會有短暫之意外，又會讓人想到 1960 年代好萊塢女星瑪麗蓮·夢露（Marilyn Monroe, 1926-1962）在演藝事業有如旭日東升之際，竟然香消玉殞，得年僅 36 歲。

此次展覽中的另外三件作品，《胭脂》【blush】、《取火》【Threesome】以及《如是我聞》

【Whitness】則呈現出曾建穎如何利用日本的水干顏料，營造出有如夜店般的迷幻色彩。值得注意的是，這些光與色其實不是來自外在，而是發散自這些人物的內在顯影。都會夜生活裡的五光十色、夜店裡煙霧瀰漫與電音的快速節奏，以及充滿慾望、勾魂攝魄的眼神。針對人類的「五感」（眼耳鼻舌身）的探索，似乎在此又更進一步的要求（或邀請）觀者能夠感同身受的，透過他在畫面上所營造的螢光色與顆粒感，進入到都會夜生活裡的感官世界。

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## 「木與夜孰長」

在《夢露》這件作品中，女子手上拿的香菸在透視法的表現上，其實並不符合文藝復興時代所發明的焦點透視法。陳傳興在〈中國繪畫空間的代數假想〉一文中，已經細膩的分析出歐洲文藝復興時代的投影幾何透視法與中國傳統繪畫裡的空間表現的差異——這之間的差異，並非對與錯的問題，而是我們作為觀者應該如何觀看作品的問題。

「木與夜孰長」，無論是在墨子的論辨，或是曾建穎展覽提問，都無意也無法做出最終的解答。如果，文藝復興時代所發明的焦點透視法是「唯一」、「科學」且「正確」製作繪畫的方式，那麼西方繪畫史大概到了 19 世紀就應該在攝影術發明的 1830 年代宣告終結，因為「繪畫」已經完成了歷史階段性的任務。但，焦點透視其實只是一種技術，而非繪畫藝術的全部。在將近長達一年的時間與曾建穎的訪談與互動，我在這次「木與夜孰長」的展覽中，看到了他企圖要去跨越長期以來被誤讀的「東西方差異」。在這次展出的作品中，我們不僅看了東方，也看到了西方，還有更多中國、印度、日本與臺灣的元素。在曾建穎作品中時常出現的蝙蝠（會飛的哺乳類）、青蛙（兩棲類）這類具有雙重特質的生物。他也很喜歡用 in-between（介於）來討論他作品裡的部分構成。在臺灣 50 歲以下的創作者，曾建穎在知識上是罕見同時具有跨文化與跨歷史理解的創作者。在精神上，他的極端敏銳與敏感，雖然讓他的身心時常處於焦慮與疲憊的狀態，但是他總是能夠一次又一次的在展覽中帶給世人新的視覺驚艷。

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From the Depth of Vanity:

Chien-Ying Tseng and His Iconography

Article by Chao-Jen Wu

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The exhibition's Chinese title *What is Longer, A Tree or A Night* can be traced back to *Exposition of Canon II* written by Mozi during the Hundred Schools of Thought of the Warring States period. According to Tseng ChienYing, the exhibition title is a direct allusion to Tsun-shing Chen's book titled *What is Longer, A Tree or A Night* (2009). In his artist statement, Tseng explained that he avoided making reference to Mohism or School of Logicians' sophistic speech during the Warring States period. Nevertheless, many of the works on display at Each Modern this time are reflections of internal and external impacts that Covid-19 brought to the world in 2019. Furthermore, the chapters on the "Algebraic Hypothesis of Chinese Painting Space" in Cheng's book also played pivotal roles in shaping Tseng's creation.

Born in Nantou, Taiwan, the 35-year old artist graduated from the Department of Fine Arts at National Taiwan Normal University and the Graduate School of Fine Arts at Taipei National University of the Arts. As most art observers in Taiwan would know, these two widely distinct schools must have presented the artist with contradictory concepts over the course of his art style formation during the learning process. Perhaps these interactions, struggles, and conflicts are exactly what constitute the internal qualities of Tseng's artwork.

In early August this year, I took a closer look at Tseng's work at his Tamsui studio. On my MRT ride back to Taipei, I could not stop thinking about this young artist whom I have observed for many years. Some of the keywords I wrote down from the interview with Tseng include: beauty paintings, female portraits, grottoes, delusion, materiality and spirituality, which are all summed up by the exhibition title—*Skin Depth*.

For a long time, Taiwan's education system has always compared between Eastern and Western cultures as a part of its epistemological discussion. Some common examples include the "comparison of Eastern and Western philosophies" and that of Eastern and Western arts. This type of generic comparison not only neglects the geographic finding that "Earth is spherical," but also ignores modern issues such as the wealth gap between the North and South (Global South). Many of the programs at Taiwan's art institutes are still teaching students by making distinctions between Western and Eastern media. As Tseng mentioned in his artist statement, "I purposefully adopted a more Western approach in the early years to give my work a Westernized Chinese style." Proposed by Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909), one of the four famous officials of

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the late Qing dynasty, the Westernized Chinese style has failed to find urbanized solutions for the Qing Empire. By perceiving Western knowledge as pure applications and techniques, this concept could not clarify the technological gap between the Qing Empire and European American countries.

Fortunately, Tseng has developed his own reflections and views on physical ontology and East-West dichotomy. He has realized that such dichotomous values actually prevent him from creating a holistic spirit and subjectivity. In 2017, Tseng received sponsorship from the Asian Cultural Council (ACC) for a trip to New York, Indonesia, and China's four major Buddhist caves. This trip not only enriched the thickness of his visual graphics, but also inspired him to break through the limits of East-West dichotomy on a spiritual level, thereby making the artist more self-aware than ever before.

## Beauty Paintings

Throughout the art history of China, beautiful female portraits are nicknamed “beauty paintings” while they go by a different name—“bijinga” in Japan. Traditionally, bijinga from Japan's Edo Period mostly featured women in lower social classes, such as geisha, prostitutes, and merchants. By the Meiji and Taisho periods, the protagonist of bijinga had gradually transformed to fashionable modern women (such as in Kaburaki Kiyokata's paintings, 1878-1977). Tseng's female portraits had been directly influenced by Kaburaki Kiyokata's Taiwanese pupil Chin Chen (1907-1998). Currently in the collection of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Chen's 1935 artwork *Leisurely* features a noble lady laying on a bed in a dark green cheongsam. The buttons on her high collar and golden buckles of the silk mosquito net are depicted by using the moriage technique in Japanese paintings (gradually layering the paint to produce 3D effects). In this exhibition, this technique can also be found in paintings such as *The Unbearable Lightness*, *Precious*, and *Metaphysics*.

Instead of sophisticated techniques, the most challenging elements to interpret in Tseng's works are his attempts to explore inner spirituality through highly materialistic expressions. The “moriage” technique does not only pose a challenge on the artist's patience and physical strength (the next layer of paint can only be applied after the previous layer dries up, and the step needs to be repeated several times). Taking *The Unbearable Lightness* as an example, this redundant and materialistic layering also implies a kind of punishment and painful pleasure. While the repeated accumulation of puncture and luxurious decoration may appear as an ostentation of wealth, they also make people wonder “how much more is needed to achieve true satisfaction.” During the interview, Tseng reminded me that pearls are the end-product of irritants inside two fan shells (a type of mollusk). Perhaps this is also a multi-level metaphor for sex, wealth, materiality, and spirituality.

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## Urban Night and Iconography

In my conversation with Tseng, he demonstrated a high level of knowledge about classical art history and occult. When he talked about how “his language of creativity was deeply inspired by Buddhist iconography,” he actually referred to two phases. The first phase is the Aniconic Period between the Buddha’s death and India’s Kushan Empire (second to third century BC). The subsequent rise of Mahayana Buddhism had transformed Buddhist theories in a way that Buddhist and Bodhisattva statues began to be made during the Kushan Empire period. Rather than human portraits, Tseng seems to be creating collective religious paintings through the techniques and styles of Chinese Buddhist statues (especially the muscle texture from Dunhuang murals and clay statues of the Vajra Warrior). More specifically, the muscle texture and body joints are painted by smudging and shading. Rather than following the approach of western anatomy, Tseng outlined the facial features and bodies in his paintings based on his long-term observations of Buddhism and East Asia paintings.

During the interview, we also discussed the painting titled *Dream a Little Dream*. Tseng spoke about last year’s TV series *Light the Night* on PTS and Netflix, in relation to his attempt to express femininity in his artwork. The female portrait in *Dream a Little Dream* takes up nearly half of the image. The character lights up a cigarette in her right hand as smokes gradually ascend in the air. Her left hand lightly touches her cheek with the pinky raised. The character has clearly “sedo” (styled) her hair into an updo, as her misty eyes look to the left with perfect eyeliners and fake eyelashes. Tseng created these seemingly “cloudy” eyes by applying special effects from the silver clay of Japanese paintings.

*Light the Night* reminds viewers of the Japanese bars near Taipei’s Rokusjyodori on Linsen North Road. Back in the 1970-1990s when there were still many Japanese enterprises in Taipei, the mama-san in these bars had comforted the loneliness of many Japanese businessmen during the night. Other than the literal meaning of a short lapse of time, the title *Dream a Little Dream* also brings back memories about the 1960s Hollywood star Marilyn Monroe (1926-1962), who was only 36 years old when she passed away at the peak of her career.

The other three pieces of artwork in this exhibition: *Blush*, *Threesome*, and *Whitness* demonstrate how Tseng uses Japanese mug pigments to create the colors of nightclub illusions. It is worth noting that these lights and colors are radiated from within the characters rather than from the outside. By portraying the glamorous urban nightlife through smoky nightclubs, fast-tempo electronic music, and alluring eyes full of desires, the exploration of the five human senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch) asks (or invites) viewers to experience the urban nightlife through fluorescent particles on the image

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## *Skin Depth*

In *Dream a Little Dream*, the perspective expression of the woman's cigarette was distinct from the focus perspective technique invented during the Renaissance. In the article "Algebraic Hypothesis of Chinese Painting Space," Cheng provides a detailed analysis of differences between the projective geometric perspective of European Renaissance and spatial expression of traditional Chinese paintings. These differences are neither right nor wrong—they only provide insight as to how viewers should interpret these works.

*What is Longer, A Tree or A Night* is a rhetorical question that neither Mozi nor Tseng could answer in their argument or exhibition. Imagine the focus perspective technique from the Renaissance period was the only "scientific and correct" way to make paintings, then the history of Western painting should have been ended by the 19th century after the invention of photography in the 1830s. However, focus perspective is only a technique rather than the entirety of fine art. From my interviews and interactions with Tseng over the span of nearly one year, I saw his ambition to step across the long misinterpreted "East-West differences" in this *Skin Depth* exhibition. The exhibits feature Eastern and Western styles along with elements from China, India, Japan, and Taiwan. Tseng often features dual-quality animals such as bats (flying mammals) and frogs (amphibians) in his works. He also likes to discuss the elements of his work from an in-between perspective. Among young Taiwanese artists below 50 years old, Tseng is one of the rare artists with cross-cultural and cross-historical knowledge. Despite always feeling anxious and tired, Tseng's spiritual sharpness and sensitivity enable him to continuously impress viewers with new visuals at every exhibition.