

THE NIGHTMAN COMETH YANG FUDONG SOLO EXHIBITION

Interviews

Opening: Mar. 16, 2013, Sat., 6.00PM-9.30PM

Artists: Yang Fudong

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Visiting Hours: Tue.- Sat. 11AM- 7PM, Sun. 11AM- 6PM

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An Interview on The Nightman Cometh

On March 11-12, 2012, Yang Fudong and Li Zhenhua continued their ongoing discussion of the artist's recent work. Translated from Chinese by Ying Liu.

LZ: In order to discuss *The Nightman Cometh* with depth, we might want to start by talking about *The Fifth Night*. *The Fifth Night* is a multi-channel installation – a more concrete theatrical attempt built upon your previous *Dawn Mist*, *Separation Faith*, which created a fête-like viewing experience and also played with the idea of synchronization. However, *The Nightman Cometh* is different – we can almost see the shadow of your much earlier work, *Backyard – Hey! Sun is Rising*. Of course it is more theatrical, and the different time periods are intermixed. The snow scene, in particular, is almost horrifying due to its extreme quietness. Those spotted deer and the gliding eagle take the audience out of reality and into a space where historical references converge. So I would really like to know where you took your inspiration from, and how you account for returning to the short film format, as well as utilizing a fantasy-rooted style.

YF: When a film focuses on space, it tends to emphasize the art of how to “be seen” in an exhibit. From *Dawn Mist*, *Separation Faith* (2009), to *The Fifth Night* (2010), to *One half of August* (2011), these are creations that were presented with such an intention embedded within the work, while *The Nightman Cometh* is apt to

highlight the “disappearing” part of things by utilizing drawn sketches and random video documentation. As for the reason for returning to the short film format, it is because I hope to make “film paintings”, or so-called film “sketches” to metaphorically represent the imaginary space which results from the perception of an artwork. The footage recorded from a monitor that was attached to a shooting camera took place during the production, which supplements discussion and the viewing experience. In a similar case, *The Fifth Night, Part II* also contains lots of “preview” segments. The viewer might find it interesting to see traces of “previews,” and this is something I would like to keep working with in the future. Now come back to *The Nightman Cometh*, this 20-minute film – its narrative has something to do with what I refer to as “hint film” that we have discussed before. A kind of narrative that would hint at things in order to express what words cannot communicate. And how to represent it in an independent movie, with elements such as narrative-contained imageries, actors, sets, and even something literary? It became the focus of my experiments during the production. Even though *The Nightman Cometh* looks like a period piece, I would consider it as a “neorealistic” approach. A meditative one. And it is only the feeling in the film that has to do with “neorealism” because in fact it questions contemporary reality as well as societal ideology.

LZ: You mentioned historical references, neorealism, as well as literary elements. So, what part of your experience drove you to shoot a baron in an ancient battlefield or an intellectual in post 1900s Shanghai, instead of setting it up with a contemporary cityscape as the backdrop, like what you did in *Backyard – Hey! Sun is Rising*?

YF: *The Nightman Cometh* gives such an impression of an old classical narration, not so much by recounting historical events, but in how it depicts contemporary reality through the lens of history. It brings up modern and current concerns through the subconscious by asking certain questions. There is a baron. There are characters and plotlines. There seems to be reenactment of stories or situations that took place hundreds of years ago, however, it makes no effort to recover history. Rather, its goal is to transport a sense of history and to create room for introspection into one’s subconscious reality.

LZ: As for you, does such reality truly exist?

YF: It seems rather pointless to focus on whether such reality is the truth or whether the truth truly exists. In *The Nightman Cometh*, it is more crucial to pay attention when the soldier or warrior reaches a moment where he has to decide whether he should disappear or keep fighting when the night falls. Along with trying to retain his last hope, those things mean more to me than depicting “truth” or “reality.”

LZ: *The Nightman Cometh* is more than just a video art piece. Besides the cinematic space you created, you also incorporated paintings and footage recorded off the monitor. I wonder if you can elaborate on the relationship between image created on set and the set uncovered by the monitor. Remember how we briefly talked about using paintings and playback video during your production, and how it resembles the process of archeological discoveries? Such additions seem to inform what is captured in your images by adding elements of the present tense, which is also marked by the past tense. There are connections not only in terms of aesthetics and relativity, but also in terms of the time continuum.

YF: By utilizing documentary footage, I hope to confuse the line between the set and reality and thus to create a sense of mistake (or departure from the principal part/element). Can it be counted as part of the film, for example, what appears on the monitor or rises from my subconsciousness during the shoot? How about the realistic documentary section? Does this constitute a “time film” segment in *The Nightman Cometh*?

LZ: Can you talk about how your paintings function in relation to the whole setup of the piece?

YF: Besides a short film, *The Nightman Cometh* also comprises eight oil paintings. The individuality of each of them is emphasized. Some stories in the whole piece are told through those images. That is also why I call them “sketch films,” because they give a sense of incompleteness, and the rest of the “editing” is to be done in the viewer’s consciousness. It is not unusual that film narrative is achieved through editing a series of shots into a sequence. So to some extent, the “montage” going from one painting to another can be more interesting, although they must be produced with the fundamental idea of film in mind, or say, under the direction of the “director.” When I paint, I don’t want to make something that is academic or absolutely painterly. What I care about more is to create a particular atmosphere and texture that has a handmade feel, as well as a narrative generated from painting-to-painting montage. The medium of oil on canvas or the quality of painterliness does not interest me much. The connections among those paintings could help render what I call “imagination film.” The images that ended up in the gallery were painted when the short was close to being completed. They make an alternative version of the film part of *The Nightman Cometh*.

LZ: There are those animals and birds in the images you created. Besides references to relationships between human beings and animals in contemporary culture, I was wondering if it also implies certain intellectual spirits that exist in Chinese tradition. Take the scene with the woman and deer for example. It can be done in painting. But I imagine it being problematic to show the eagle gliding off in the same way immediately after its gaze meets a man. Such contrast does not only reveal technical advantages in video art, but also in a way reveals what painting is capable of. One of the most important parameters of action is time, yet it seems almost impossible to convey that in painting. I hope to hear you elaborate on the different states of time appearing in the human-animal relationships you depicted, and how those shifts and transitions were made from “painting time” (2D paintings) to “film time” (action captured on moving image), and vice versa. To me, both scenes above, the one with goddess and deer and the other with man and bird, share painterly qualities. But it seems that the moment of the latter could only be captured with a camera.

YF: A lot of mediums and forms are applied in art making for the sake of expression. They seem drastically different but some may actually serve the same purpose. A film made by an artist is not a reason for being superior to other alternative means of expression. On the same token, something created by an artist doesn't necessarily make it experimental. In *The Nightman Cometh*, eagle, deer and related scenes are symbolic and emotional. It was shot conventionally, as far as utilizing common film language and method of representation go, but it succeeds in bringing life to objects. Even as an artist, I don't shy away from standards or tradition. I don't think they would make my work conservative. On the contrary, it is my way of conveying my ideas by taking advantage of them, and turning them into a foundation upon which my work could thrive. For example, the gliding eagle in *The Nightman Cometh*, is not merely a metaphor for impact, power and braveness, but it also signifies desolation. The deer family is loving, but where they are is cold and snowy, which foreshadows their miserable future with no food prospect. Such imagery also implies sadness. Communicating emotions through objects is not unusual in Chinese paintings history. Sometimes, applying familiar technique can be most effective in some cases. Occasionally you would see films that have only one take that is also static. So why can't the take be a physical painting that we call “painting film”? To explore the backstory in a painting is kind of like making out what's inside or outside a film frame. In my experience with film, characters and animals are usually set up to serve some narrative functions. Man, woman or even ghosts inevitably carry some symbolic meanings; seeing deer may make you think about warmth and happiness, while struggle and fight might come to your mind as witnessing an eagle. Wild chicken or little birds on rocks are likely to bring back memory of some ancient paintings because they are common subjects for traditional Chinese painters.

LZ: Animals in your work do make me think of traditional Chinese painting. But what is interesting is that you live in the modern time and received mostly western oil painting education. So spiritually, when it comes to treating animals in your work, do you stand closer with the Chinese painting tradition or the western?

YF: When I made a decision to include animals in *The Nightman Cometh*, what you were asking wasn't really my concern. It would have more to do with my background, experience, education and knowledge. For instance, I wouldn't raise the subject of the eagle to an academic level. I prefer it to remain on a universal level so that everyone can respond to some of its qualities in some way: violence, sharpness, encouragement, generosity, solitude, tragedy, etc. Further, by placing it in various weather conditions, it might trigger other associations and emotions. Meanings are given to an eagle by itself already, but depending on the context that's given, it can mean something very different. It can even alter the atmosphere. In this particular piece, the viewer experiences such changes in different parts of the film throughout. This is what I referred to as “hint film”. What's more interesting is not how it looks but what it can stir up inside the audience's mind as they feel the picture. Each as an individual. The work leaves room for imagination and also encourages it.

LZ: What are you implying with the baron (someone hurt) and the male in a white suit (someone lost in his search) in *The Nightman Cometh*? Especially when it is set against a gloomy, sleeting day, on a snow-covered ancient battlefield filled with artificial hills and rocks. Does it have to do with your ongoing attempt in search for a spiritual life?

YF: “Neorealism” is a kind of history theater where current and contemporary societal conditions come to play. Who exists in reality, the baron in his period costume or the ghost in a modern outfit? When the ancient battlefield scene and other historical events appear and reappear, where do they belong, in the past, the present or the night-falling future? How impossible it seems to make up your mind, when there is no easy answer to get from the narration! It is getting dark. The soldier or the warrior has to decide whether to disappear/escape (die) or to continue fighting, which of course might lead to the same fate – death. There is hope nonetheless. The body is essential, yet the soul is more precious still. It is the spirit which backs him up in life. How should we live our lives

now? How do we identify ourselves with neorealistic historical events and continue to search for spiritual meanings? What do we really want?

LZ: What will you do? Fight back or disappear?

YF: To resist or to give up. At this moment, the truth is not important in the context of neorealism. I will keep searching for hope. Two or Three Things about The Nightman Cometh. When making Dawn Mist, Separation Faith (2009), Yang Fudong sought a film form that would allow the viewer to construct and make associations freely. The work features a total of nine scenes entirely inspired by classical film plots. From romance to Kung Fu, they are connected in terms of aesthetics and the attribute of time. As the artist has described in the past, repetition occurs constantly throughout the piece while adjustments are made to certain variables, creating limitations with respect to aesthetic choices. This helps to expose the logic in time in all chosen sequences, in order to naturally reveal beauty in imperfection, surprises from abrupt bloopers, and a kind of penetration into the truth. Such an aesthetic paradox fosters added dimensionality to the piece. The presence of the camera, the film, and the projectionist creates multiple spatial relationships. Together with the exhibition space, they create a range of spaces for the work to occupy. They resemble stage, back stage, projection booth, etc. Hence, the viewer does not simply remain in their seat, but also acts on the stage and observes from the position of an outsider or even a projectionist. When the audience is able to roam freely in this manner, wearing multiple hats, it calls attention to the production process and ways of seeing, and the film is refreshed.

The Fifth Night, Part 1 (2011) was first exhibited at the ShanghART Gallery in Shanghai. Compared to Dawn Mist, Separation Faith, The Fifth Night, Part 1 has a more apparent agenda which deals with the aspect of time. In this piece, time in a theatrical sense is brought to the foreground, which, on the other hand, rules out the possibility of indeterminate interaction with the viewer. It returns to the method of auteur film: the experience of time is multi-layered, but it is derived from only one person's perspective. Seven cameras are put in motion simultaneously to record a story in which characters, scenes and plots interact in a common space and time. Yang dealt with seven complicated, outreaching perspectives and merged them into a parallel, yet expansive, visual experience. Meanwhile, the imagery of these seven screens forms a unified narrative that flows naturally in time. Distinct from Dawn Mist, Separation Faith or even the earlier No Snow on the Broken Bridge (2006), The Fifth Night, Part 1, though captured in a seemingly simplistic fashion, has a sophisticated shooting plan in which the experiences of theater and 360-degree painting converge. Similar to the process of revealing scrolls in Chinese painting, the film makes the viewer anxious about what is going to happen next. The difference, however, is that the film does not dictate a particular order in which it must be viewed. It can work going from left to right or from right to left. In this sense, it evokes the Western tradition of 360-degree panorama paintings; any point of focus can be the starting point for seeing, and the point of departure does not affect the overall narrative of the image.

One half of August (2011) is Yang's experiment inspired by architecture and visual space, in which he attempts to challenge the limitations of visual experience. He does so by projecting videos from his Seven Intellectuals in Bamboo Forest series onto buildings and architectural models and reshooting the projected images. A sense of theater is achieved through such a gesture. Meanwhile, scenes from the original films and the re-production of them together bring attention to the core architectural qualities of those buildings and models.

On some level, we can distinguish Yang's creative shifts and changes from the experiments in his work since 2009 which are discussed above. He is best known for his An Estranged Paradise (1997-2002), Backyard – Hey! Sun is Rising (2001), and Seven Intellectuals in Bamboo Forest series (2003-2007). However, in more recent years, he has applied his experience working in shorts to making feature-length pictures. He now works in a range of formats from regular film, to video art, to art film, all of which clash with convention; it is in this context that we should consider his more recent endeavors. Since 2009, Yang's work has been increasingly theatrical. His artistic evolution over the past couple of years almost makes us forget the characteristics and themes of his earlier work. There are some scenes in The Nightman Cometh (2011) that are shot entirely in a studio, and they make strange and unexpected departures from reality. Such a renewed style appears to be alienating to some people who are more familiar with Yang's early work. They have an idea of his old approaches, and so they may overlook some external interventions outside of the image frame. Take the monitor playback footage and hand-made painting for example. In a continuous exhibition space, they serve the purpose of keeping the work in touch with an external passing of time – a “present tense” that is added to the overall piece. As Yang puts it, the paintings “make an alternative version of the film part of The Nightman Cometh.”

The Nightman Cometh is not a gesture to return to the short film format, nor does it resemble any of his other practices after 2009. His goal remains the same, however – to overcome the limitations and confinement that normally surround a video artist. The effort is made evident through the theme of the intellectual's spiritual life, along with the artist's use of narration, metaphor, and complexity in imagery and time.

One might argue that there are allegories in The Nightman Cometh, but Yang may disagree. He probably didn't expect to make a fable film; however, the title gives it away. It's getting dark soon. Both you and I are ghosts in a fantastical reality.

From

Marian Goodman Gallery

http://prod-images.exhibit-e.com/www_mariangoodman_com/Yang_Fudong_Interview_March_2012.pdf

《夜将》访谈

访谈时间：2012年3月10日/11日

访谈人：李振华

被访人：杨福东

文本整理：李振华

李振华：从《第五夜》到《夜将》，再谈《夜将》的根源问题，《第五夜》是一个基于多屏幕录像、剧场的一次尝试，是基于之前《离信之雾》的观众游园式影像经验，和来自共时性观念的一次具体的尝试。那么回到《夜将》这个作品的时候，仿佛又见你早期作品《嘿！后房——天亮了》的身影，而《夜将》更剧场化和时光交错，也更静谧得有些恐怖的雪景中，那些梅花鹿或是振翅的鹰隼，都将观众带入一个脱离现实经验，融汇到历史经验的空间。我很想知道你创作的来源问题，以及在录像装置之后影像上回归短片长度，更魔幻的风格之来源。

杨福东：从以空间上的电影，强调艺术如何在展览上看待一个作品。《离信之雾》（2009年）、《第五夜》（2010年）到《八月的二分之一》（2011年）都是这个方面的创作，《夜将》（2011年）是在香格纳画廊呈现出来的，是一个不标准的呈现，一些绘画和一些随时拍摄的影像纪录，来强调那个消失的部分。从影像上又回到短片，绘画在创作的时候希望是绘画电影的概念，或是称为“手稿、草图（Sketch）电影”，是艺术品想象化的空间。监视器拍摄的部分是从拍摄的过程中，从监视器中看到的，作为讨论观看的部分，预览的一些痕迹可能是有意思的，象之前《第五夜》之二的版本，大量的Preview（预览）电影片段，未来也希望能继续尝试下去。回到《夜将》这个20分钟的作品，如果它是一句话，这么多年来坚持的影像的诉求，包括叙事，或是很大的双年展上的方法。短片里的叙事如同一个长期的状态下，如何设定表达，这也涉及到我们谈到的“意会电影”，有一种意会的叙事，而意会的叙事中独立影片中如何去呈现，包括叙事的画面或是演员和场景，甚至包括一些文学性的东西，或是真实叙事表达方面的创作，对我来说这是制作上的尝试。这些存在着气息的东西，电影《夜将》虽然看起来象一个古装片，对过去东西的一种叙事基础，但是我更希望它有一种沉着，另外意义上“新现实主义”的电影。所谓的“新现实主义”就是感觉，在片子里对现实和社会意识的思考。一个所谓的艺术短片是否必要要表述一些故事？

李振华：历史故事和你谈及的“新现实主义”，还有文学性问题，对你来说是一种什么样的经验，促使你拍摄一个古战场上的将军和1900年之后的文人形象，而不是你作品《后房》中呈现的上海的当代的城市景观？

杨福东：《夜将》有些古典叙事的感觉，与其说是古典历史故事的叙事，不如说是新现实的历史描述，是对当下和现在的感觉的潜意识体现或是设问。《夜将》中有将军，有人物有情节，如同几百年前的历史故事或是情景再现，不是对历史的还原，而是对现在的历史感的描述，和自我理解的表现更多是一个潜意识里的现实。

李振华：对你来说这个现实是存在的真相吗？

杨福东：强调现实的真相或真实的存在，在影片中是不重要的，在《夜将》中黑夜降至，勇士或是武士，选择消失还是继续战斗，还有就是寻求一丝希望的勇气，远大于真相或是事实的描述。

李振华：《夜将》不仅仅是一个录像作品，在影像的空间之外，还有着绘画和拍摄现场的影像监视录像。能否解释你所关注的这个被发现的现场和影像之间的联系，记得在现场我们曾经简短的说到绘画和监控录像的这个现场，类似于考古发现，时间和时态上，也为影像所呈现的过去时提供了一个当代的时态。那么除了在作品美学和关联性上，还有就是时态上的联系。

杨福东：纪录片影像我是希望呈现错误的（背离主体的）场景和现实，在监视器里显示的，在拍摄中下意识出现的，是否算是影片。而真实纪录部分，算不算《夜将》的“时间电影”？

李振华：能不能谈谈你的绘画在《夜将》装置中的作用和联系？

杨福东：《夜将》除了短片之外还有八张油画呈现在展厅中，更强调独立存在的，通过绘画来表现《夜将》的叙事，也是之前将其解释为 Sketch 电影，就是草图电影的原因。通过画面的未完成感，来完成意识剪辑。电影是通过蒙太奇的方法呈现叙事，而绘画方法和绘画之间的蒙太奇可能更有意思，当然绘画是有着导演意识的电影概念。我在尝试绘画，不是希望完成一张有学术或绝对绘画感的作品，不是对绘画（或画面感）的强调，而是强调手工绘画的气息、质感和呈现出的韵味，及其造成的画面之间的蒙太奇的叙事作用。草图（绘画）之间的这些连接，可以创造出我认为是“想象电影”。最后在展厅展出的是影像接近完成的时候画的。是《夜将》作品中的另一个版本的《夜将》。

李振华：影像中涉及的那些动物和鸟，除了当代文化中人和动物的关系之外，是否还存在着中国传统文人精神？在绘画中可能还可以出现女子与鹿的场景，而鹰飞却怎么也不可能存在于对视之后，不仅仅是录像表现的技术性问题，也是绘画的艺术线索中。动作作用在时间中的特性，往往是被绘画抹去的。希望你能解释关于人和动物关系中出现的不同时间状态，以及你创作中从画面时间（平面绘画）到影像时间（动作画面）是如何交替过渡的。你作品《夜将》中的仙女和鹿的接触，男人和鸟的对视。对我来说有着绘画的感受，而另外的一个只能从影像中获得鸟飞起来的瞬间。

杨福东：在艺术的创作中，有很多表现方法和形式是殊途同归的，不会因为存在着一种艺术家的电影，就可以超越其他各种表现形式。不能因为是艺术家拍摄的，就一定构成实验性的作品。在我拍摄的《夜将》中的鹰和梅花鹿或是场景，有着象征意义和情绪。我更希望是一种常规的表达方式，传统的赋予物体（生命）一种常规的语言和表现方法，在拍摄的时候是很传统，常规的影像表达。即便是艺术家，也会在影片中通过合适的拍摄方法，把这些方法使用到拍摄中。不会因为常规和传统，让作品变得保守。常规和传统也可以转化为支持自身创作的基石，体现自己的想法。

如《夜将》中的鹰飞，会让人感受到震撼、力量或英勇的隐喻，另外还带有悲凉的感觉。梅花鹿家庭给人温馨的感觉，但场景中的冰天雪地，却预示着无处觅食，也会有潜在的忧伤存在。如同中国的传统绘画，借物抒情。一般常见的艺术表达方式，有时就是作者最好的表述方式。

关于“绘画电影”，有些是一个画面的电影，反之一个电影可能是一个画面。是在绘画上找画的背景，在画内或是画外的意味。在电影的经验中，在人物设置和动物的设置方面，就会涉及电影的叙事。男女或是幽灵都带有某种象征的意义，看到鹿的时候会联想到温暖和幸福，看到鹰的时候会联想到挣扎和争斗，如野鸡或小鸟站在石头上，更像是文人画中对笔墨的认识。

李振华：当动物出现在你的作品中，会让我联想到中国传统绘画，但是因为我们生活在当代，以及你受到的油画教育。所以作品中动物的图像和精神联系就需要被从新探寻，是与中国传统绘画的精神传统相关，还是与欧美绘画的精神传统相关？

杨福东：我从开始选择动物或当动物出现在《夜将》的画面时，我没有设想是东方或西方的问题。它更多与我的成长背景、经验，和学习到的知识相关，以及对知识的理解。鹰对我来说不会将其上升到学术上的高度，我更愿意它是日常生活中一种人的共同感受——凶猛的、尖锐的、犀利的、勇敢的、大气的、孤独的、悲壮的，在不同的天气情况会引发不同的情绪。但是除了它本身被赋予的含义之外，尤其在被运用到作品里，会渗透出另外的气息。是影片中不同的环节去经历那种味道，变成视觉作品的经验反馈给观众。就是我之前说的“意会电影”概念，有意思的地方不是作者拍摄的如何，而是这个作品的气息和感觉呈现给观众的时候，观众作为个体的感觉和幻想。是观众想象的，让观众去想象的电影。

李振华：《夜将》中将军（受伤的人）和身穿西装的男性（迷茫中追索的人），有着什么样的隐喻。尤其一直在大雪中的的阴郁的天空和皑皑白雪的古战场，或是那些假山石，这与你试图探寻你一直强调的精神生活有什么关系？

杨福东：“新现实主义”的社会景观和现实社会景观下的历史剧场。就像古代的将军或是穿着现代服装的幽灵，哪个是真正存在于现实生活中的人？古代战场或是历史情景的再现，是属于过去还是属于现在，还是黑夜降至的未来？这些看起来没有答案的叙述，又和判断和决定呢！《夜将》叙事中的黑夜降至，黑暗中的勇士或武士，选择消失（灭亡）还是选择继续战斗，当然继续战斗也可能结局也是消失，而战斗也有着丝丝生存的希望。也许需要肉体，也更需要信仰，是支撑他生活背后精神的东西。我们如何在现实生活当中，或在新现实的历史生活中，如何定位、寻找精神生活？就意味着我们到底想要什么？

李振华：你倾向与消失还是反抗？

杨福东：这个时候所有的坚持与放弃，在新现实的历史当中，真相是不重要的。而我会寻找希望。