

さびしさや一尺消えてゆくほたる 流螢斷續光，一明一滅一尺間，寂寞何以堪。 ——立花北枝

擬人的質變 — 談中村圭吾的藝術

文 | 嚴仲唐

生於1984年的日本當代藝術家中村圭吾，運用經典的繪畫技巧以當代的風格呈現繪畫新的可能性，其中袖珍的尺寸與比例更是在精緻的筆觸下暗示人類存在的渺小，擁有非常令人眼睛一亮的新鮮感，經過長時間研究與觀察也不失色。

自我意識的省思

中村圭吾的作品乍看之下是可愛的，經過仔細觀察後，表面上是孤寂的，不過在寂靜的表象下，有驚人的深度，也有充滿希望的光亮。靜態的小貓或小熊玩偶看著燭光好似在思考著什麼，觀賞者進而推測畫中主角的自我意識型態，實質上，藝術家巧妙的利用作品中的場景促使觀眾產生心裡投射，賦予了畫中角色豐富的情感與生命。

自我意識是構成人類思想的重要指標之一，藝術家將畫中的角色擺放在點著蠟燭的甜點面前，間接的將它們擬人化，給予了看似為自我意識的眼神。值得一提的是，在如此的靜物構圖之下，暗指出有安排、悄悄平行的譜出宗教的觀點，在冥冥之中，大局已被注定。

中村於2016年畫了他最大張的畫作，畫面中小貓玩偶面對著金屬的倒影，牆上則是載著倒影容器的影子與自身的影子，看似簡單的安排卻充滿神秘感。幾乎每件作品都有的燭光是畫面唯一的光源，也是製造陰影的源頭，看著這樣的景象，小貓玩偶是否能分辨出自己、以及倒影、倒影的影子與自身影子之間的區別？或許在精神上，這四者又分別代表了不同程度的自我意識。

卡哇伊文化

中村圭吾運用了多彩繽紛的符號學、脈絡以及文化底蘊，身為一位日本當代藝術家，卡哇伊文化更是靈感重要來源。迷你的畫作大小加上甜美的主題在視覺上更提供了微小但確切的幸福，也就是大家所常說的小確幸。如此可愛的文化同時是極度極端的對比也是引人入勝的切入點。

可愛與渴望被愛，中村的作品用最簡潔的方式點出當代人的問題癥結，在科技發達人手一機的狀態下，誰還會鍾愛玩偶？玩偶成為歷史的一部份，象徵著人類互動的演變，而玩玩具的行為本身就是一種孤獨，透過如此的思維，藝術家呈現出文化的改變，不見得是一定偏向某種絕對的定論，而是開放討論與省思。



Keigo Nakamura
Candle, cat, rabbit
oil on canvas
2016
116.5 x 91.0 cm

卡哇伊文化是當代文化快速發展的產物，製造近乎戀物一般的嚮往青春與可愛的趨勢，改變了人與人之間的互動方式以及預料的社交行為。中村的畫作在這樣的背景下創造出形物化的物質慾望，也喚起美好的童年回憶。在看似僅是可愛的外表下，提出許多的問題，邀請觀看者一同思考，在快速的壓力中喘息、放鬆，重新審視社會價值觀。

經典脈絡

第一眼視覺接觸到中村迷你的油畫時，經典藝術史影響的影子是有跡可循的，舉例來說「明暗對照法」（*chiaroscuro*）在中村的作品中佔有一席之地，是文藝復興時期被達文西（Da Vinci）、卡拉瓦喬（Caravaggio）、林布蘭（Rembrandt）等大師所使用的技巧。

利用光與影來詮釋形體與體積是非常優美的，中村運用明暗對照法充分顯露出光的重要，也在他的構圖中將畫面中的張力更加神秘化，這在他最近的系列中尤其明顯，在製造對比前於畫面底層由單一色彩的背景作為起點。

靜物畫的歷史悠久，中村的作品衍生出獨特的個人風格，同時也與莫蘭迪、畢卡索等大師相呼應。根據美國藝術史學者撒瑟琳的文章「消費社會中的靜物畫」中，他將靜物畫的藝術史主要分為四大階段：「（一）、17世紀的“虛榮”畫。（二）、獨立的18世紀靜物畫。（三）、19世紀暗示性馬內、惠斯勒、塞尚等畫家互動的靜物畫。以及（四）、20世紀必不可少的消費社會普普主義靜物。」

中村的作品有趣的反映出靜物藝術歷史中的各個階段，卡哇伊文化就好比十七世紀的虛榮畫一般，以及十八世紀獨立的靜物，十九世紀呼應出中村浪漫的一面，以及商業化的二十世紀，結合各種元素，他成功的創造出靜物畫的二十一世紀新的章節。

隱蔽的符號學

藝術史學者保羅·巴羅爾斯基曾說到：「靜物畫可以被解釋為對所有事物的虛榮的評論、無常、與



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死亡……」解析中村的作品，很難不想背後的符號學與暗藏的含義。燃燒的蠟燭代表快速流失的時間，不可避免的生命之終結，凍結在一瞬間，好似毫無情感。暗喻慶祝的蠟燭在蛋糕上，光環與陰影都是可以解碼的視覺蹤跡。

簡潔與複雜的二元性是中村最引人入勝的特質之一，透過他的創作，他提問簡單卻永遠無解的哲學繆思，無絕對的解答，等待觀眾與畫面中的主角進行互動，加深了視覺與概念上的深度。

靜物之外

中村的作品集所呈現的不只是精心打造的人類的本質劇場，他更能將生命注入靜物畫中並且融會貫通。這樣的雙面觀點在雙向都開發了不同深度的可能性，像是鏡中鏡的折射，生命以及/或是無生命的矛盾在觀眾想更加清晰的檢視的同時變得理性模糊失焦，越想看清就越看不清。

在法文，靜物的直接翻譯就是死亡與自然，這樣的擬人演變成中村畫中的主角，不管是小貓、小熊、鴨子或兔子玩偶、玩具，都成為社會的微觀，像歷史、時事與想像力一同產生共鳴。

從近乎宗教般的角度檢視，中村所運用的明暗顯示出人類生命的脆弱。偽裝成看似無辜的物件，像是甜點、玩具，表象毫無重要性，被藝術家作為發聲的工具，檢視存在主義等問題。

了解中村視覺語彙最好的辦法是平衡符號象徵的詮釋以及直接表達的意像。燭光，柔弱不堪，卻也無比強大，許個願，再吹熄吧！

さびしさを一尺消えてゆくほたる

Oh this loneliness! For a moment it went out, the firefly's light.

— Tachibana Hokushi

Personified Metamorphosis - On Keigo Nakamura's Art

Text by Jason Chung Tang Yen

Born in 1984, the contemporary Japanese artist Keigo Nakamura, utilises classical brushstrokes in a contemporary style to present new possibilities of painting. The miniature size and scale of the works implies how small human beings are in the universe with the exquisite brushworks, this refreshing outlook is constant in his works that remains after long periods of observation and research.

Awareness of the Self

Upon first inspection, Keigo Nakamura's works seem to be cute, after close examination, the surface appears to be introverted, however, under the façade of solitude, there is unexpected depth and optimistic brightness. The calm stuffed cat or bear, looking at the candlelight, as if thinking, leading the viewers into the picture to reason the subject's self awareness, in fact, the artist has cleverly used the setting in the paintings to create a projection of the mind to the audience, giving the depicted subjects life and abundant sentiments.

Self awareness is a pivotal structural lighthouse of the human mind, the artist has placed the characters in front of desserts with lit candles, indirectly personifying them, giving them seemingly self-aware looks. What is worth mentioning is, in such a still life composition, the religious point of view is implied, parallel to the divine plan, in fact, all has been decided in advance in the grand scheme of all things.



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Nakamura painted his largest painting to date in 2016, the image, a cat figurine faces the reflection on a metal surface, the metal container and its own shadows on the wall, ostensibly simple but mysterious. Similar in his other recent works, the candlelight is the sole source of light, the source of shadow, upon viewing a scene like this, can the cat figurine tell among itself, and its reflections, the shadow of the reflection and its own shadow? Perhaps these four individually represents self awareness on different levels

Kawaii Culture

Nakamura has employed various symbolisms from different contexts of cultures, as a contemporary Japanese artist, Kawaii culture is an important source of inspiration. The miniature paintings with a

sweet overtone of subject provide a visual microcosm of happiness that is precise, which is what people usually call 'a little happiness'. This adorable culture forms an tremendous contrast to the extreme, while at the same time an enticing point of entry.

Delectableness and the longing to be loved, Nakamura's works point out issues in the contemporary society in a succinct way, in a time with technological advances where everyone has at least one electronic device, who would still desire a stuffed animal? It has become part of history, symbolizing the evolution of human interaction, the act of playing with a doll itself is meant to be solitary, from such mind-set, the artist presents the change of culture that is not necessarily a conclusion toward a certain angle, but rather, an open discussion and rationale.

Kawaii culture is the product of rapidly manufactured cultures, producing the direction of a pseudo-fetishization of youth and cuteness, this has drastically changed the way people interact with each other and the expected social behavior. Nakamura's paintings have formed the personified material lust under this preexisting background, at the same time, bringing back blissful childhood memories. The superficially banal and adorable surface encumbers various questions, inviting the viewers to ponder together, to breath and relax under the swift pressures, reevaluate the key values of society.

Classical References

Upon initial visual contact to Nakamura's petite paintings, the influences from classical art are evident. For example, chiaroscuro, a technique developed during the Renaissance is an obvious influence on Nakamura's works, reminiscent of Da Vinci, Caravaggio, and Rembrandt's masterpieces.

The idea of volume and form defined by light and darkness is very attractive, Nakamura's use of chiaroscuro help intensify the importance of light, which further mystifies the tension in his imagery. This is clear in his recent works which he starts his works on a monochromatic background before creating contrast.



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As there is a long tradition in still life paintings, Nakamura's oeuvre has created a personal style, all at the same time echoing artists like Picasso and Morandi. According to Rémy G. Saisselin's essay titled: Still-Life Paintings in a Consumer Society, he presented the four phases of still life painting, which are: "(1) the 'vanity' picture of the 17th century, (2) the autonomous still life of the 18th century, (3) the still lifes non-illustrative of discourse by painters such as Manet, Whistler and Cézanne in the 19th century and (4) the Pop art still lifes dictated by the imperatives of a 20th-century consumer society."

Nakamura's works, interestingly, reflects the history of still life paintings, with the Kawaii culture referencing the vanity picture of the contempo-

rary 17th century, and the somehow independent phase of the 18th century, his works are also very much affected by the romanticisms of the 19th century and the commercialised world of the 20th century. In a combination of hybrid elements, he has successfully created a new chapter of still life art in the 21st century.

Covert Semiotics

Art historian Paul Barolsky has argued that still life paintings are “understood as commentaries on the vanity of all things, on transience and death...” Looking at Nakamura’s works, it is difficult not to think about the symbolisms and its underlying meanings. Burning candles represent the fleeting time, inevitable end of life in a fixed moment that is seemingly emotionless. The implied festivity of celebratory symbols such as cakes with candles and shadows and halos are all visible traits to be decoded.

This duality of simplicity and complexity is one of the most alluring qualities of Nakamura’s works, through his works he poses simple questions on life that has no definitive answer. It is an open dialogue that awaits the viewers to engage with the subject, which opens up the path in depth both conceptually and visually.

Beyond Still Life

Nakamura’s oeuvre presents not only the reflections of the human condition in meticulously crafted scenarios; he is able to transcend life into still life, and vice versa. This duality of viewpoints create depth on both sides of the spectrum, like infinite mirrored images. The paradox of life and/or the absence of life becomes even more ambiguous in terms of making out the edge of rationality.

In the French language, still life literally translates into nature morte, which means nature and death, the personification that metamorphosed in Nakamura’s characters, weather it’s a stuffed cat, bear, duck or rabbit figurines, act as a microcosm of society in resonance to history, current events, and imagination.

In an almost religious point of view, Nakamura employed light and darkness, juxtaposing the brittleness of human life. Disguised as seemingly innocuous objects such as slices of desserts and toys, in the sheer pettiness of the subjects of the paintings, the artist pose questions of existentialism.

The best approach to understand Nakamura’s visual linguistics is to balance the translation of the motifs and the direct visual impression. The light of a candle is fragile yet powerful at the same time, make a wish, then blow it out.
