

Soir de Lune

Niu An, 2016

While I was working on this painting series, a fashion magazine interviewed me. As my interviewer and I started to talk about the French perfume “Soir de Lune,” it occurred to me that I should title the series “Soir de Lune.” I have always liked the word “tonight,” for it reminds me of the phrase “carpe diem” — both expressions seem to be telling me to seize the day and pursue my dreams before it is too late. In other words: tonight is the night.

There are two paintings in the Soir de Lune series. The first one is inspired by the story of Icarus in Greek mythology. Icarus tries to fly higher and higher, but when he comes too close to the sun, the heat melts his wax wings, causing him to fall into the sea and drown. For the second painting in the Soir de Lune series, the motif is “colorful clouds chasing the moon.” While pursuing something precious, just like Icarus, the clouds are lucky enough to float right beside the moon. Although both paintings in the Soir de Lune series are about longing and pursuing, the endings of their stories are quite different. Regarding the painting technique, I added extra water to the colors, creating a feeling of free flow in the picture. The lines were applied using the technique of “free sketch” from traditional Chinese painting. Thus, the painting implies the spirit of reclusion.

Selected Image:



Niu Ann (b.1968) , *Soir de Lune*, 2016, Acrylic on canvas, 79 x 79 inches (200 x 200 cm)

《今夜之月》

牛安，2016

以“今夜之月”為題，是因為在創作這幅畫時，剛巧我在接受一個時尚雜誌的採訪，在和記者談話時聊起法國香水“*Soir de Lune*”（今夜之月），我喜歡“今夜”這詞，它讓我聯想到另一詞“*CARPE DIEM*”，它們都給我有珍惜當下時間的感覺，即如要追求美好的夢想，那麼就要趁早。換一句俗話就是: *Tonight is the night...*

“今夜之月”有兩幅，第一幅的靈感來自希臘神話故事，伊卡洛斯為了高高地飛翔因太靠近太陽，蠟做的翅膀被融化而墜落身亡。這一幅用了“彩雲追月”為Motif。和伊卡洛斯一樣為了追求，彩雲卻幸運地和月亮用行。這二幅“今夜之月”，雖同樣表現渴望和追求但結局卻不同。

在表現手法方面，在顏色裏用大量水，讓畫面產生自由的流動感，同中國水墨寫意的線條來達到“隱逸”的精神境界。

作品節選：



牛安 (b.1968)，今夜之月，2016，丙烯畫布，79 x 79 英尺 (200 x 200 釐米)

“Three years on a stone”

Niu An

“Three years on a stone” is a Japanese proverb, meaning that persistence and hard work pay off. From the time I first started to paint the Scholar Stones series until the opening of my Microcosm solo exhibition, exactly three years have passed. To me, it is quite meaningful to depict a journey in life through a theme using the language of art.

Art is my destiny. Starting to learn Chinese calligraphy when I was a child, I went on to study western painting, and then went to Japan to study industrial design, interior design, and crafting. As a student of design, I noticed that the western concept of “less is more” was significantly inspired by the Japanese philosophy of Zen. Naturally, I was deeply fascinated by this. During my eighth year in Japan, I went to Kyoto and spent a year there, which unexpectedly determined my artistic direction. In Kyoto, I was enchanted by the dry landscapes in the Japanese Zen gardens. I used to ride to Daitoku-ji Temple almost every other day, order a cup of tea, and then just sit quietly beside the corridor of the tea house, contemplating upon the sea and the islands made by stones and sands, upon everything there.

At that time, I had started to paint the Men/Women/Self series, in search of an answer to the philosophical question “who am I?” Nevertheless, hidden deeply within myself was the pursuit of Kyoto’s Zen spirit.

After going back to my hometown, Shanghai, I was eager to gain a deeper understanding of traditional Chinese culture. Because of this idea, I thought about becoming one of the “Beijing drifters”, which is the dream of all young Chinese artists. This plan was eventually discouraged by the heavy smog in Beijing. I started to ask

myself a question: the reason I came back to China from America was that I wanted to be a Chinese artist, but why would I want to leave Shanghai for Beijing? Is it because I was looking for my roots? But Jiangnan* is my hometown, the land where I was born and raised. Perhaps what I had been searching for all those years lies in this: there are many remarkable Chinese artists, but could any one of them be considered as a remarkable Jiangnan artist? Is it possible for me to put more Jiangnan spirit in my work?

So I started to take action and worked really hard. Although I was someone who had spent only six days getting a driver's license, whenever I had time, I would drive to Suzhou for the gardens or to Huizhou to look at the old houses, at how rainwater ran around them and into the courtyard. I could not help but begin to paint. Gradually, I came to realize that I was trying to answer another question, which is "where am I from?"

I've been very interested in stones since I was young. I used to pick up a stone on every trip. It seems to me that stones in a garden are playing a symphony. If you step inside the garden, you would be touched, for the stones are alive. But I do not like artificial stones. To me, they are like acrobats doing car stunts. The charm of the stone comes from the natural process of its creation, which holds the philosophy of "less is more."

While painting a stone, I did not wish to only admire it, depicting it as the ancients did; nor did I want to conquer it, creating something completely unrecognizable. I was trying to feel it, to paint what I understood about it. It is kind of interesting to depict a stone as "thin," "open," "perforated," and "wrinkled," as well as "ugly," "majestic," "strange," and "clumsy." Nonetheless, the stone's happiness and sadness should also be depicted. How to capture the beauty of the stone? The only way is to let it be free.

I hope to learn the language of the stones and turn it into my own. Every stone has a different expression. For instance, there could be 30% pleasure, 10% anger, and 50% happiness, which is something difficult to describe. I believe the hardest part of painting is trying to express the artist's own changing emotions with a paintbrush. I used different techniques and strokes from Chinese calligraphy, creating not a character, but a painting. Although the structures of these paintings seem very spontaneous, not one stroke was carelessly placed, and all the details were made comfortable to look at for the audience.

The Scholar Stones series is about the Jiangnan people's sentiment for their homeland. As a Jiangnan artist, I believe this sentiment will always be a source of inspiration for me. As they say, if you keep sitting on a stone for three years, eventually, it will be warmed by you.

* Jiangnan is a region which encloses most of the area of Zhejiang and Jiangsu Provinces in China.

Selected Image :



Niu An (b.1968), *Humbly Scholar Stone-G*, 2016, Ink on paper, 17 x 16 inches (43 x 40 cm)

“石上三年”

牛安

“石上三年”是一個日本俚語，意思是經歷磨難。從開始創作《石在系列》到即將以個展的形式與大家見面，正好是三年。通過一個主題來闡述一段人生歷程，用藝術創作來表達也是非常有意義的事。

學藝術是我的宿命。自幼從書法入門，後學西畫，又留學日本學工業、工藝、室內建築設計。在學習設計中，發現日本人的禪意對西方設計的“less is more”（少則多）理念產生巨大的影響。自然，我也深深陶醉其中。在日本的第八個年頭，我去京都住了一年，在京都的經歷不經意間決定了我的藝術拓展方向。在京都，我被日式茶院裏的枯山水深深吸引，幾乎每隔兩天就會騎著單車去住所附近的大德寺轉轉，要一碗茶，靜靜地坐在茶院長廊邊，感受著用石頭和沙子營造出的大海、島嶼，感受著其中的一切……

雖然當時開始創作以人 / 女人 / 自身為主題的作品是為了回答一個“我是誰”的哲學問題，但心靈深處，還癡藏著那份對幽幽京都禪意的追求。

剛回到故鄉上海時，開始想對中國傳統文化做一點深入了解。這個想法曾激起去“北漂”的想法，那是所有文藝小青年的夢想，但最終被北京的霧霾攔下。之後，我開始反思：我從美國回中國的理由是想做一個中國藝術家，現在又要從上海到北京，這究竟是為什麼？是要尋根嗎？但我自己的故鄉是在江南，我在這裏生，在這裏成長。或許這就是我尋找多年的答案：在中國有很多優秀的藝術家，但有沒有一個可以稱得上是優秀的江南藝術家？是否讓自己的作品裏多透露出一些江南的情結呢？

於是我開始行動起來，加緊磨練自己。首先憑借在美國六天考出駕照的車技，一有空就開車去蘇州看園林，去徽州看四水歸一的老宅子……情不自禁地開始動筆了。漸漸地我明白了，我在回答另一個問題，那就是：“我從哪裏來？”。

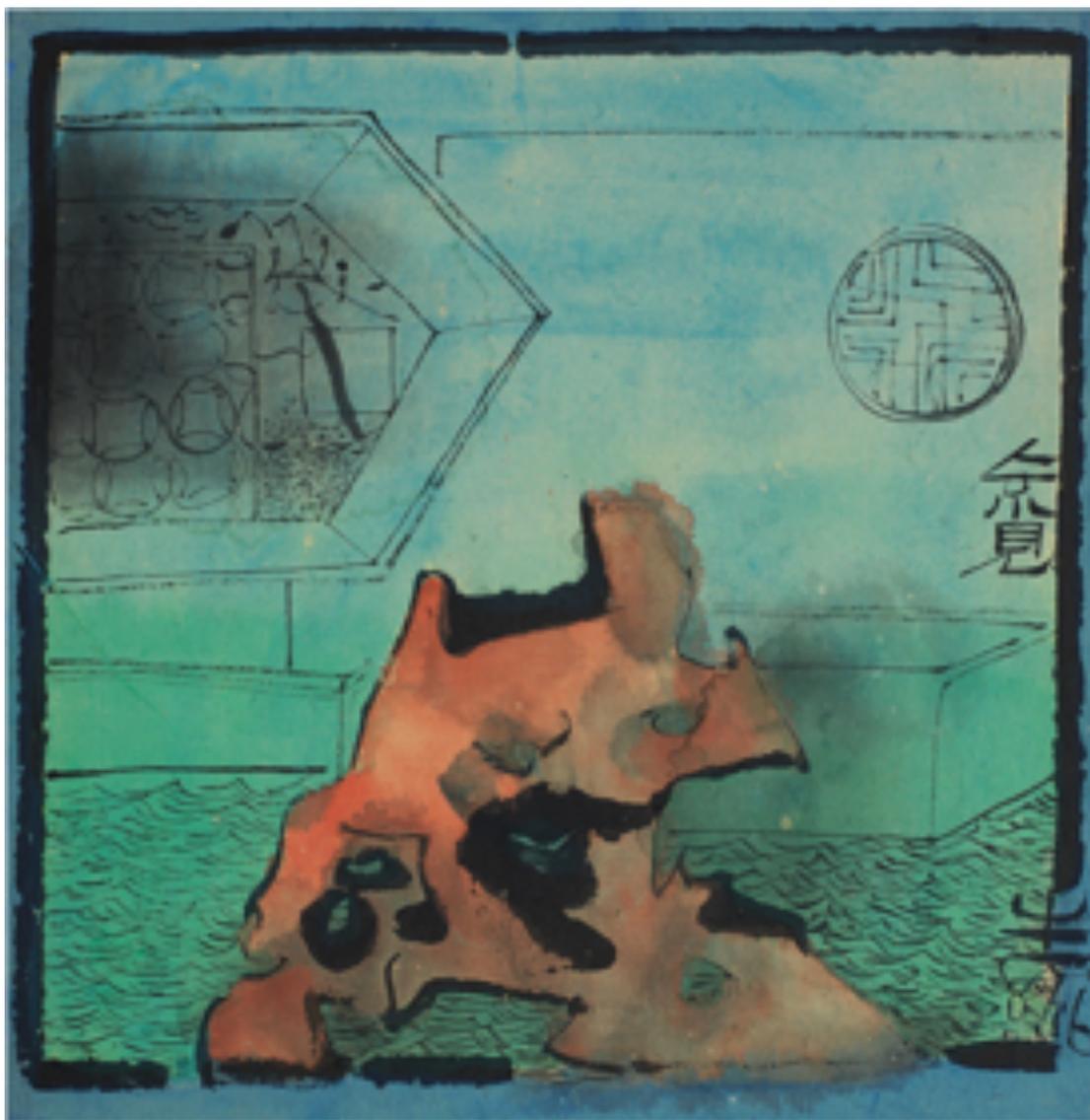
我從小就喜歡石頭，出遊時總愛撿塊石頭回來。我覺得園林裏的石頭是在演繹一部交響樂，一進去就可能會被感動，那裏的石頭就是一個個生命。但是我不喜歡假山石，總覺得他們是在表演車技的雜技演員。石頭之所以有魅力，是因為它自己有造化，是less is more的境界。

我畫石頭的時候，不準備只是欣賞它，像古人一樣地描繪它；也不想征服它，搞出面目全非的作品。我是在感受著石頭，把理解的石頭畫出來。畫太湖石的“瘦、漏、透、皺”，還有“醜、雄、奇、拙”，都是很令人激動的事。同時，我還要畫出它的喜、怒、哀、樂。怎麼才能把它畫得美呢？唯一的辦法就是讓它獲得更大的自由。

領略石頭的精神，然後化成自己的語言。每塊石頭的表情都不一樣的，比方說，一副作品中有30%的喜，10%的怒，50%的樂。儘管一下子很難表達清楚，就像在繪畫中，最難的是如何用畫筆表達畫家自身抑揚頓挫的情感一樣。我將書法裏的一撇一捺，側鋒、中鋒等筆法用進畫裏，最後塑造出來的不是一個字，而是一張畫。這張畫雖然構圖很自由，可是沒有一筆是草率的，同時在細節上處理到能讓人看得很舒服。

《石在系列》是中國江南人的一份鄉愁，作為一位江南藝術家，這份鄉愁將永遠是我的藝術靈感的源泉。石上三年，應生青苔。

作品節選：



牛安 (b.1968)，寒石-G，2016，設色紙本，17 x 16 英尺 (43 x 40 釐米)

The Scholar Stones series

Niu An, 2016

The Scholar Stones series explores an important philosophical question: "Where do I come from?" I hope to learn the language of the stones and turn it into my own language. Every stone has a different expression, which is something difficult to describe. In these paintings, you can find all kinds of emotions — they are the manifestations of the paintbrush. I used different techniques and strokes from Chinese calligraphy, creating not a character, but a painting. Although the structures of these paintings seem very spontaneous, not one careless stroke can be found. While painting the stones, I did not wish to only admire them, depicting them as the ancients did; nor did I want to conquer them, creating something completely unrecognizable. I was trying to feel them, to paint what I understood about them. It is kind of interesting to depict the stones as "thin," "open," "perforated," and "wrinkled," as well as "ugly," "majestic," "strange," and "clumsy." Nonetheless, the stones' happiness and sadness should also be depicted. The only way to capture the beauty of the stones is to let them be free. The Scholar Stones series is about the deep attachment that the people from Jiangnan have for their homeland, which I believe will always be a source of inspiration for artists.

Selected Image:



Niu An (b.1968), *Taoist on the Scholar Stone*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 79 x 56 inches (200 x 142 cm)

《石在系列》

牛安，2016

《石在系列》是在回答一個重要的哲學問題：“我從哪裏來”。領略石頭的语言，然後化成自己的语言。每塊石頭的表情都不一樣的，雖然你很難表達清楚，但在繪畫中，一定有其抑揚頓挫的情感流露出來，都是筆的表情。我將書法裏的一撇一捺，側鋒、中鋒等筆法用進畫裏，但最後出來的不是一個字，而是一張畫。這張畫雖然構圖很自由，但沒有一筆是草率的。我畫石頭的時候，不準備只是欣賞它，像古人一樣地描繪它；也不想征服它，搞出面目全非的作品。我是在感受著石頭，把理解的石頭畫出來。畫太湖石的“瘦、漏、透、皺”，還有“醜、雄、奇、拙”，都是很有勁的，還要畫出它的喜、怒、哀、樂。要把它畫得美，唯一的辦法就是讓它獲得更大的自由。《石在系列》是身處江南的中國人的一份鄉愁，我覺得這份鄉愁永遠是一個藝術家的靈感源泉。

作品節選：



牛安 (b.1968), 石上道者, 2017, 丙烯畫布, 79 x 56 英尺 (200 x 142 釐米)

Guanyin on the Scholar Stone

Niu An, 2017

The ideas for Guanyin on the Scholar Stone are a result of my previous works, the Scholar Stones series and the Guanyin series. I painted them around the same period. The stones in the Scholar Stones series are a very common motif in traditional Chinese painting, and Guanyin is a bodhisattva whom we worship. The Bodhisattvas enshrined and worshiped in temples are often stone Buddha statues. Thus, it seemed quite natural to put the two motifs together.

While the stone in Guanyin on the Scholar Stone conceals its stories from hundreds of years of experience, in the very same painting Guanyin waits for believers to be enlightened one day.

Selected Image:



Niu An (b.1968), *Guanyin on the Scholar Stone-Sutra*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 79 x 56 inches
(200 x 142 cm)

《石上觀音》

牛安，2017

《石上觀音》是結合《石在系列》和《觀音系列》後的創作結果。是和它們同一個時期的作品。《石在》中的石頭是中國傳統繪畫中常見的motif，觀音是被人敬仰崇拜的菩薩。菩薩一般是被供養在寺院廟宇裏的石像，這樣一來這兩者好像就有了一個天然的理由在一起了。

石上觀音中的“石頭”隱藏了它百年經歷的故事，石上觀音裏的“觀音”卻是神靈在等待他的善男信女們的頓悟呢。

作品節選：



牛安 (b.1968) ，石上觀音-心經，2017，丙烯畫布，79 x 56 英尺 (200 x 142 釐米)

Guanyin Series

Niu An, 2016

If you look carefully at the portraits in the history of Chinese painting, you will find that the figures are usually placed against a flat, empty background. However, this is not the case for the portraits of Buddha Guanyin, especially the Guanyin portraits in the Dunhuang murals. In these portraits, behind Guanyin is often a vast landscape, for Guanyin is a deity. Similarly, during the Italian Renaissance, the Virgin Mary is often portrayed as an ordinary woman. But to distinguish between the divine and the mundane, the artists surround the Madonna with earthly grounds and mountains. With this aesthetic (that connects the Chinese and the Western) in mind, I think it is rather an interesting endeavor to depict the amiable deity Guanyin with ink. Moreover, the landscapes depicted in the Dunhuang murals are less disciplined but more liberated and modest than those of the Tang and Song paintings. Colors have been applied with a great sense of naiveté and boldness, but are no less elegant or refined. I like this naiveté, a naiveté that evokes sincerity, kindness, and beauty. To paint the Guanyin in my heart in Niu An style is the reason why I started this ink painting series.

Selected Image:



Niu An (b.1968), *Grace of Guanyin-Mid-Fall*, 2016, Ink and color on paper, 17 x 16 inches (43 x 40 cm)

《观自在》系列

牛安，2016

如仔細觀看歷來中國畫中的人物畫，不難發現其人物的身後往往是平面的留白。然而在古代繪畫中，觀音的畫像卻不然，特別是在敦煌壁畫中，觀音的身後往往是與大山大水有著緊密的關聯，這是因為觀音是神。正如在意大利文藝復興時，藝術家描繪聖母像那樣，雖然聖母猶如人世間的女子，但在她背景中畫的是自然界的山川大地，以此來區別神和人的不同地位。我覺得將這種中西合並的審美意識，用水墨來表達可以親近你我的觀音像，會是一種很有趣的嘗試。另外，背景中的山水，我覺得敦煌壁畫中的山水風景不像正統唐宋山水那麼規範工整，它們是隨意的，樸素的，用色天真而大膽，同時又不失儒雅穩重，我喜歡這種“真善美”的率真感。用“牛安法”畫出“我的觀自在”就是這組水墨觀音的初衷吧。

作品節選：



牛安 (b.1968) ，觀自在-中秋，2016，設色紙本，17 x 16 英尺 (43 x 40 釐米)

Lines of Quality

Niu An, 2017

I pursue quality in lines. I consider the quality of lines to be very essential to an excellent painting. Lines do not have to be pretty, yet they should be painted with great courage and no restraints; they may seem disordered, but should never be indecisive; they could appear to be simple or minimalist, but should not be not careless or without a core.

Sometimes I would paint a line all in one stroke, echoing Paul Klee's famous saying "taking a line for a walk."

Sometimes I would paint thousands of seemingly chaotic lines. The lines intertwining with one another produce a strong sense of tension in the painting. Although some lines may seem unnecessary at first glance, they each turn out to be just as important as the next. There is no law concerning the thickness of the lines. Some lines are as thin as a mosquito's leg, capturing a faint and slightly neurotic emotion; some are as thick as the legs of an elephant, painted with an enormous brush, depicting a deep, intense feeling.

No matter what the lines are like, they should be lines of quality.

Selected Image :



Niu An (b.1968), *Lion Series-CARPEDIEMDIEM*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 39 x 79 inches (100 x 200 cm)

《有质量的线条》

牛安，2017

我追求畫裏面線條的質量。我認為一幅好畫它的線條應該是有質量的。這些線條不一定漂亮，但一定要有那種勇敢無畏的瀟灑；它們看上去可以很亂，但不能猶豫不決，拖泥帶水；同時，它們可以是簡單的寥寥幾筆，可是它們絕對不是草率，沒有主心骨的那種。

有時我畫的線條是從頭到尾一氣呵成的，有如保羅·克利所說，“帶著線條去散步”的感覺；

有時我畫成千上萬根看似瑣碎的線條，但它們相互交錯往返，非常自然地賦予畫面一種很強的張力，盡管有些線條也許不一定非要畫的，但事實上每一條線最終都不能少。線條的粗細也沒有規律，如有些線條細如蚊子腿，它們勾勒出輕盈但又帶神經質的情感，有些線條寬厚如大象腿，它們是用拖把般的大刷子刷出激動的情緒。

不管拿種線條，它們都應該具備高質量的表現。

作品節選：



牛安 (b.1968) ，有獅系列-卡布迪安，2017，丙烯畫布，39 x 79 英尺 (100 x 200 釐米)

The Latent Enlighten Series

Niu An, 2017

Studying oil painting as a child, then modern industrial design in college, I am significantly influenced by western aesthetics and theories on art. Moreover, I have always been quite partial to western post-expressionism. As a result, most of my works created in the past ten years explore personal emotions through topics such as human life, life and death, femininity, etc. Although western ideologies inspired these themes, they were manifested through techniques of Chinese calligraphy. It is because I grew up studying Chinese calligraphy, and I would sometimes naturally apply lines in paintings the same way as I do in calligraphic works. The thick lines and thin lines stand for the yin and yang of human emotions. Influenced by Chinese painting master Huang Binhong and his idea that "rough brushwork could build beautiful landscapes," I let lines run spontaneously in a picture and let the subject emerge from the interweaved lines. I think this resonates with the idea of "reclusion". When I was rereading some books on the history of traditional Chinese painting, I spent a lot of time thinking about the concept of "reclusion." Noticing that this idea is present throughout Chinese art history, I started to understand more deeply the sources of traditional Asian art rooted in the personality of Asian people. Gradually, my work started to focus more on Asian philosophy and aesthetics. A few years ago, I came to realize that "the essence of Tao (the way) is never fully shown"¹ while painting the Buddha Guanyin, thus creating a few related series. Since I have had some new thoughts on the meaning of "reclusion", I decided to explore more on this topic in my recent works.

Most of the motifs for the Latent Enlighten series come from famous traditional Chinese paintings or auspicious images in Chinese folk art — they are either human figures or

animals. Chinese Spring and Autumn Dolls is one of the works in the Latent Enlighten series. The ancient Chinese artists generally had two methods to express the concept of "reclusion." The first one is to paint with rapid and spontaneous brushwork, which is similar to the "Da Xieyi" (sketching ideas) style and the "Po-mo landscapes" ("splash ink") style. Other artists employ the literary concept of metonymy — by depicting a vast landscape and tiny human figures, the artists display the existing state of a recluse. I decided to combine these two methods. Nevertheless, the Latent Enlighten series is also inspired by Shi Tao's idea that "the ink is given by God, yet we paint by following our heart." Thus, the figure of the subject is hidden, but the spirit is shown. To display the formless yet eternal spirit and aura is the reason why I started to paint the Latent Enlighten series.

Selected Image:



Niu An (b.1968), *Latent Enlighten*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 79 x 79 inches (200 x 200 cm)

The first chapter of *Tao Te Ching* states "the Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao". Tao, which literally means a "way" or "path" in Chinese, refers to the primary principle underlying all being. (Stephen Mitchell, *Tao Te Ching: A New English Version*, Harper Perennial, New York, 1991)

《隱之系列》

牛安，2017

我少年時學的是油畫，在大學時學的是現代工業設計，接受的都是西方美學和西方審美思想。另外，我自身又偏愛西方的後表現主義，因此，前十年我的畫的主題基本上是以人生，生與死，女人等等來表現個人情感。雖然這些主題是受西方思潮影響，但在繪畫表現上卻應用了中國書法的技巧，那多半是因為從小練習書法的緣故，因此不自覺地就以書法的韻筆線條來表達畫面。其中不同的粗細線條代表情緒的陰陽，把各種各樣的粗細不勻的線條放在一個畫面裏，那是受中國近代書畫大師黃賓虹的“爛筆頭裏秀山水”思想影響，在紛雜錯落的線條中讓畫中的內容自己顯現出來倒也有一番“隱逸”的境地。“隱逸”是近來重讀中國傳統繪畫史書籍時，特別有感悟的字眼，覺得這個“隱逸”情節幾乎貫穿了整個中國繪畫歷史，也因此明白了東方美學及東方人格含蓄的出處。逐漸，我繪畫的內容轉向表達東方哲理和審美。幾年前因畫“觀音”悟出了“大道若隱”，以此為主題創作一些系列，近來因對“隱逸”的含義有了新的理解，“隱”的思想在近來的作品裏也就無法躲避了。

這個“隱之系列”中運用的motif基本上來自中國古代經典繪畫或民間流傳的各種吉祥圖案，它們或人物、或動物。這組“春秋童子”便是其中一例。對表達“隱逸”思想古人有兩種畫法，一種是用快速的筆法隨心所欲畫出隱逸之氣，即像現在的大寫意和潑墨山水；還有一種是用文學中的“借喻”，通過對宏偉山水的描繪加上寥寥幾筆對渺小人物的勾勒來展現隱居隱士的生活境界。我的這個“隱之系列”結合了這兩種表達方法，同時還受石濤先生

“墨受於天，畫可從心”的啟發。即，讓主角“無形而神”地隱起來，這就是力圖把無形的永恒的精神和氣韻表達出來，這便是我畫“隱之系列”的一個願望。

作品節選：



牛安 (b.1968)，隱之系列-胡璇舞者，2017，丙烯畫布，79 x 79 英尺 (200 x 200 釐米)