

Z.T. Nguyễn

Facts Are Bigger in the Dark

05.16 - 07.12.2025

The night was wide open and blowing headlights like a sea. He stood against the wind and let it peel him clean.

— Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red* (1998)

Warm rinse, cream black, papers that bloom with heat and hang like torn silk pinned up against a thick nighttime wind. In the exhibition *Facts Are Bigger in the Dark*, Z.T. Nguyễn demonstrates their distinctive, highly sensorial drawing vernacular. On tiled paper surfaces constructed of standard 8.5 x 11 inch paper sheets—a utilitarian, letter-sized unit that evokes government documents, medical records, visa applications, and academic assignments—Nguyễn's acrylic and graphite drawings locate ideological productivity in an embrace of the fragile and itinerant nature of paper. The drawings are lightly creased from being folded, packed, and carried from place to place, some strung up plainly with archival tabs and pins. They are laden with imprints of their own transience, and the crossing of various physical and emotional thresholds. In this way, Nguyễn's drawings resist the stasis of standard art objects and instead channel movement as emblematic of contemporary experiences of refugeeism and border-crossing. The designed mobility of the works refer directly to Nguyễn's familial history, acting as a material translation of what it means to choose to carry or leave behind. Nguyễn's drawings also unfold as nighttime scenes, which position the self and the body in unsettling atmospheres of potentiality and uncertainty. Existing between daylight and dusk, Nguyễn's psychic landscapes are incubators of quietude, freedom, dreaming, and rumination. At the same time, the night for Nguyễn also functions as a backdrop for the elicit, dangerous, or mysterious: where sexual proclivity, drugs, nightlife, and clouded logic coalesce with the fearful folkloric worlds of demons, ghosts, and magic. Positing the night as the seatbed of erotic power, the intimate scenes depicted in Nguyễn's works also have a restorative quality, in applications of pleasure as well as politics. Such spaces of rest generate the necessary erotic energies that fuel revolutionary activities and liberation movements.

Equally felt in Nguyễn's works is a certain rite of passage of the queer diasporic experience, which subverts masculinist tropes and heroic narratives of Americana. Nguyễn renders their works in hues that are difficult to classify and pin down: somewhere in between orange or pink, in proximity to but not quite the intensity of red, or a washed-out lavender sitting closely outside the depth of violet. Works like *Insectoid* (2024), *Hold Me* (2024), *Jeans* (2024), and *Neck* (2025) signal a voyeurism as well as an escapism for those othered by their lived contexts, injected with youthful fantasy and a touch of the sci-fi monstrous. *Cat and Mosquitos* (2024), *Red Night* (2024), and *Home* (2024) are cloaked in mystery and a sense of longful waiting. The text-based *Obey* (2025) seems to dance between the self and the state. Several sculptural installations distort reality, dominance, and power, as diaspora-coded poetic assemblages that collapse intergenerational lexicons of domestic consumption.

In the simmering, sticky night of Nguyễn's world, compositions of incompleteness, uncertainty, and unknowability serve to queer, obscure, and nuance our ideological thresholds. Through bright, vaporous washes of color and inky graphite marks, Nguyen's figures seem to call from

a state between waking and sleeping, of vulnerability and permeability of the soul. In *Facts Are Bigger in the Dark*, Nguyễn's body of work reflects on sites of dreaming, fantasy, and shadow, to speak to the imperceivable nature of being, a trace of opposites: a roaring, reddish rest that foretells a waking rallying.

Words by Sofia Thiệu D'Amico

Z.T. Nguyễn (b. 1997, United States) is an artist currently based in New Haven, CT. He has exhibited at Klaus von Nichtssagend, New York; Asia Art Archive in America, Brooklyn; the RISD Museum, Providence; NARS Foundation, Brooklyn; and the Vincom Center for Contemporary Art, Hà Noi, among others. He has participated in residencies and fellowships at the Textile Arts Center, Brooklyn; The Alternative Art School & MALLAM Contemporary Art Museum, online; and Asia Art Archive in America. Nguyen received his BFA in Painting from the Rhode Island School of Design (2019) and is currently on the cusp of receiving an MFA in Painting & Printmaking at the Yale School of Art (2025).