# Contemplation Contemplated: Review of *Title Untitled*

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In the visual art tradition, calling an artwork Untitled isn't something new, especially when the artist deliberately prefers that the artwork speak for itself. Yet this practice perhaps tells of our subconsciousness—our assumption that everything ordinary should come with a name tag, or some meaning prepackaged by the language that eases our cognitive workload. At this point, we are too often puzzled, even annoyed, by this cunning lack of guidance to the arts that forces us to look for meanings on our own.

But for Nerve and Vee Leong, this trickery doesn't seem Byzantine enough. Indeed, the two brains behind the theater performance, ***Title Untitled*****, pleonastically double down on the self-referential, Kosuth-esque conceptual art wordplay of the title**, hinting at the unpredictable, unfathomable performance that one should not come with any expectations, in which they excel in secrecy.

With that said, the performance is not entirely unforeseeable if one is familiar with the creative minds behind it. One of the two brains, **Nerve**, the HKAPA-graduate is a well-established experimental musician, sound artist, composer, and multidisciplinary artist for over two decades, and **Vee Leong**, a Goldsmiths-graduate playwright and director, has also been devoted to all forms of experimental and interdisciplinary performances for over 20 years especially with a focus on text-based and intermedia art.

Besides the masterminds, a slew of emerging artists was also involved with the project: sound artist **Jasper Fung**, visual artist **Kensa Hung**, theater designer **Lau Ming-hang** on the lighting design, dancer **Carman Li**, musician **Annisa Cheung**, and actor **Keith Leung**. It is nonetheless a robust lineup that sparks curiosity.

Kicking off the performance by Leung who delivered a monologue centered around teaching perspective in a painting class—the twelve boxes, placed perpendicularly against the audience, created a sense of direction, an **intriguing spatial design** that **attempts to translate 2D perspective into 3D space beyond the classical *trompe-l'œil* illusion**, like the Italian Renaissance-built Teatro Olimpico.

However challenging, the **vanishing point beyond the boxes, with a grayly painted canvas at the far corner, outlined the spatial structure of the whole performance.** The concept of perspective was somehow emphasized narratively in the opening and the ending that warped the nine-section performance—The Form, The First Sound, The Vowel, The Libretto, The Gesture, The Song, The Interpretation, The Silence, The Last Sound.

Throughout *Title Untitled*, **sound performances, monologues, gestural performances**, and even an **interactive section with the audience** were interspersed within the temporal structure, resulting in a loosely put performance that could easily remind one of the absurdist theatre.

**The spoken monologue, the non-verbal utterance, and the ludicrous vocalization—a discord sung** by Leung, Li, Cheung, and Nerve himself—**resulting in a Heteroglossia between verbal and non-verbal.** While the sporadic **intervention of Fung's sound-emitting devices came and created a trifling disturbance**, and Lau's lighting design often added to the comedic effect, **Cheung's singing of a Cantopop-style song composed in gibberish Cantonese was the highlight of the stage.** Often taunted for being ballad-centric, the music genre wasn't only ridiculed but also subverted by Cheung's virtually professional singing with nuances and details, and **the absurdity is further highlighted by the LED lightboxes with subtitles.**

Contrary to the titular title suggests, there are ostensible intentions behind *Title Untitled*, as explained by Leong in the house note, **"The structure of the performance resembles the overpainting technique in art, where the process intervenes, hides, corrects, and postpones meaning through the layering of these colors while simultaneously creating and approaching meaning."** Adding onto this palimpsestic process is Nerve's explicit **reference to Wittengenstein's division of the world—the sayable world, the boundaries of language, and the unsayable world.**

These two worldviews are like **two forces in a dialectic relationship that collide, wrestle, and compromise, resulting in a performance that, at times, is incongruous, incidental, intertwined, and impactful.** With that said, the Hegelian idealism of the "transcendent territory beyond language," dubbed by the subtitle of *Title Untitled*, overelaborates on the conceptualization. As the performance ended with this **"transcendent territory" of silence, the audience, at times reticent, still contemplated.**


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