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Why Did the Neon Sign Cross the Road?

By TINA KELLEY



“Infinite Light,” by the French artist Laurent Grasso, will light up Hunter College’s pedestrian bridge over Lexington Avenue, at 68th Street. (Photo: John Bentham)

There’s a local festival of lights going on tonight at Hunter College, celebrating more than the usual holidays of Sept. 25 (National Crabmeat Newburg Day and, of course, the birthday of Sequoia National Park).

“Infinite Light,” by the French artist Laurent Grasso, will light up Hunter College’s pedestrian bridge over Lexington Avenue, at 68th Street, at 6:45 p.m. The lighting kicks off an exhibit of contemporary works called “to: Night,” featuring 40 artists musing upon celestial bodies, city life after dark, and “the nocturnal impact on color and light perception, and voyeurism.”

Mr. Grasso’s work, a repeating rendition of the words “day for night” made of clear glass tubing and blue neon gas, tips its hat to B-movie cinematography, François Truffaut, and his movie by the same name.

The blue Mr. Grasso chose is the same used as a filter put on the camera to make a daytime scene look shot-in-the-dark. In French, the term translates as “la nuit américaine,” Mr. Grasso, 35, said. He likes the ambiguity of the piece.

“‘Day for night’ is a kind of artificial night, and ‘night for day’ could be the reverse of this idea.”

His other work [pdf] has included installations illustrating fake eclipses and artificial aurora borealis, as well as lighted helium balloons that create an artificial day.

The work has also appeared at the Busan Biennale and Le Citadel in St.-Tropez. But he is particularly charmed by the idea of the piece floating above a Manhattan avenue.

“The transparency of the bridge for me is very interesting, because it’s like the letters are in suspension with the sky behind,” Mr. Grasso, 35, said in a cellphone interview while he was at the B&H store, buying extra memory space for his camera to document the lighting.

“In a way, it’s my American night,” he said.

The exhibition can be seen at Hunter’s Leubsdorf Art Gallery, at the same intersection, through Dec. 6 and at the college’s Times Square Gallery, 450 West 41st Street, through Nov. 15.