Galleries

5 Must-See Shows in Hong Kong During Art Basel

The editors of The Asia Pivot have selected key solo exhibitions for between-fair viewing.

Lap-See Lam, *Generation (Ancestor) /Generation (Descendant)* (2026). Courtesy of the artist and Blindspot Gallery.

Cathy Fan & **Vivienne Chow** • March 23, 2026

Hong Kong Art Week is back, with Art Basel running alongside a range of satellite fairs, art auctions, museum exhibitions, and high-profile gallery shows. Below, five key solo exhibitions at galleries throughout the city that spotlight Hong Kong artists, or artists of Asian heritage, selected by the editors of Artnet Pro’s The Asia Pivot newsletter.

“Remembrance: A Tribute to the Work of Dinh Q. Lê”

10 Chancery Lane Gallery, through May 16

Installation view of “Rememberance: A Tribute to The Work of Dinh Q. Lê” at 10 Chancery Lane Gallery. Courtesy the Estate of Dinh Q. Lê. Photo: 10 Chancery Lane Gallery.

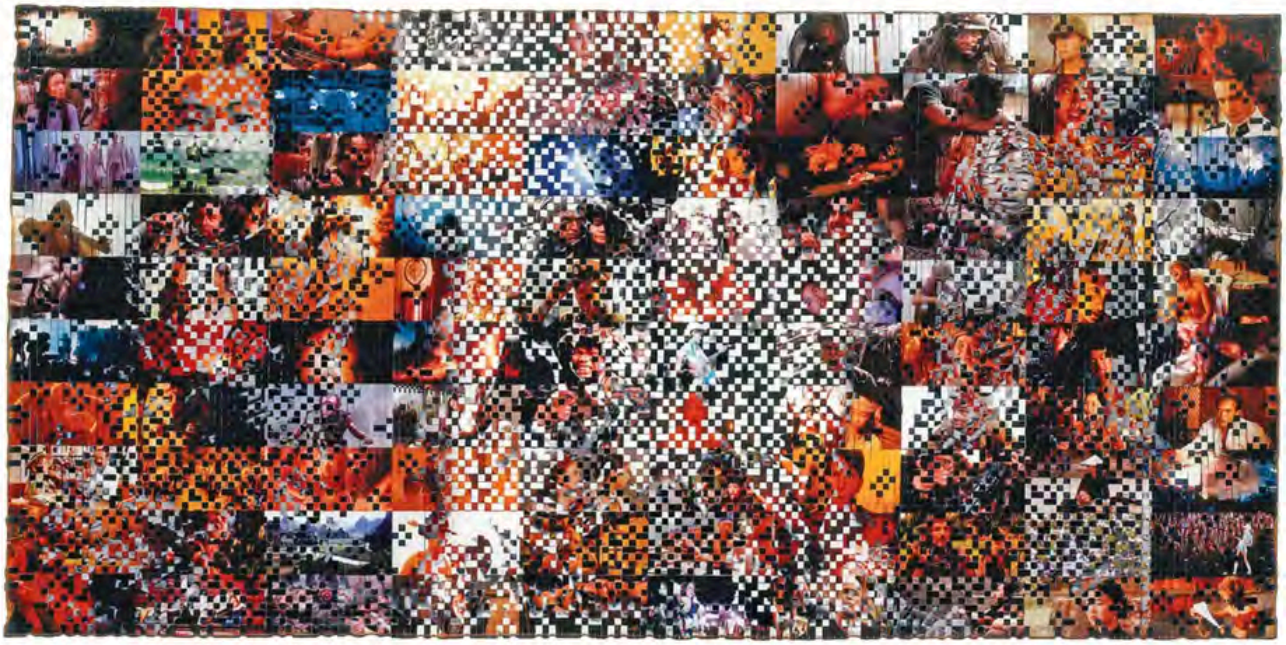
This exhibition is a tribute to the legacy the artist Dinh Q. Lê (1968–2024), a key figure in shaping how the Vietnam War has been understood through art. Born in southern Vietnam in 1965, he fled the country as a child and grew up in the United States. This experience of displacement continued to inform his work. Returning to Ho Chi Minh City in the 1990s, he began to look closely at how history is constructed—through images and through storytelling, with a focus on what is left out. Lê is best known for his photo-weaving technique, in which he cut and interlaced photographic fragments into dense, textile-like surfaces. Drawing on sources from personal archives to Hollywood films, these works collapse different image worlds into one. The result is often disorienting: It becomes hard to separate fact from fiction, or personal memory from collective narrative. Beyond his own practice, Lê also played an important role in shaping Vietnam’s contemporary art scene, co-founding Sàn Art as a space for younger artists and exchange. —*Cathy Fan*

ARTFORUM

Dinh Q. Lê

Elizabeth Leach Gallery

By Richard Speer



Dinh Q Lê, *Immolation in Color*, 2002, C-print, linen tape, 33 1/2 × 67 3/4".

Although his practice encompassed works across many media, Vietnamese American artist Dinh Q. Lê (1968–2024) was best known for his elaborate photo-weavings: strips of photographic paper interlaced to form tapestries of often incongruous imagery. He adapted this technique from traditional grass-mat weaving, a skill his aunt taught him during his childhood in Hà Tiên, near the Cambodian border. Nine photo-weavings were included in "Dinh Q. Lê: A Survey 1995–2023," among them an example from his breakout series From Vietnam to Hollywood, 2001–2005, exhibited to much acclaim at the 2003 Venice Biennale. For Immolation in Color, 2002, he painstakingly crisscrossed long, thin ribbons of chromogenic prints into a grid. The strips' horizontal axis lines up images from big-budget Vietnam War films such as Apocalypse Now and Platoon, while the vertical axis coalesces into journalist Malcolm Browne's disturbing 1963 photograph of Buddhist monk Thích Quang Đúc self-immolating at a crowded Saigon intersection. The piece appropriates cinematic conventions to counter Hollywood's grandiose, condescending fantasia of Vietnam. Its dimensions mimic wide-screen aspect ratios, while the woozy superimposition of images suggests the midpoint of a cross-fade, when two shots commingle in ghostly overlap.

The dissonance between diametric paradigms—the crass illusionism of movies versus the principled decision to commit suicide as protest—underlines the fun house–mirror grotesqueries of the conflict Americans call the Vietnam War and Vietnamese people call the American War.

Four photo-weavings in the gallery's rear alcove referenced the Khmer Rouge's invasion of southwestern Vietnam in 1978, which forced Lê's family to flee to Thailand when he was ten. In Cambodia, 1995, and Untitled (Tuol Sleng and Angkor Temple), ca. 1998, serene imagery of Buddhist and Hindu statuary contrasts with mug shots of prisoners interred, tortured, and murdered in Tuol Sleng, Phnom Penh's most notorious extermination center. Untitled (Gandara Buddha with Sistine Chapel), ca. 1997, and Untitled (Self-portrait with Angel), 1997, suggest the uneasiness the artist felt as a refugee in Thailand and, later, an émigré in the United States—a perennial outsider wedged between cultures. In the self-portrait, he depicts himself caged inside the robes of an angel depicted in the Pérussis Altarpiece, 1480, which he encountered at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (he lived in the city from 1990 to 1992, while studying for his MFA at the School of Visual Arts). Peering out through prison bars, subsumed within an adopted culture's Judeo-Christian iconography, he meets the viewer's gaze stoically, a visual echo of the faces of doomed Tuol Sleng internees.

Lê's ties to the Pacific Northwest, although not widely known, were tacitly acknowledged in the exhibition. His first home in the US was in the farming town of Banks, Oregon, where his family lived briefly before relocating to Los Angeles. Nearly three decades later, in 1996, gallerist Elizabeth Leach met the twentysomething artist in Seattle, where he was visiting friends, and was so taken with his ideas and photo-weavings that she signed him on the spot. Hers was the first commercial gallery to represent him. He went on to have nine solo shows in Portland between 1996 and 2023, dying of a stroke a year later at the age of only fifty-six. With Leach's encouragement in the early 2000s, he began to think of the gallery as a creative incubator for developing experimental and conceptual work. Several of those works were included in the survey. In a readymade titled The Infrastructure of Nationalism, 2009, he festooned a bicycle with Vietnamese flags—a common presentation for selling patriotic souvenirs in Southeast Asia—reimagining the colorful decorations as a commentary on the ubiquity of pro-government symbols. The Last of the Alchemists, 2013, a four-and-a-half-foot-long lacquer box adorned with silver leaf, contained over 160 feet of unexposed photographic paper. The box is sealed, the material never to be touched by the light of day.

Created as he transitioned from film to digital photography, it functions as a reliquary for the lapsed alchemy of the darkroom. More tomb than container, the work's elegiac tenor permeated the exhibition, which coincided with the first anniversary of Lê's untimely death and the fiftieth anniversary of the Vietnam War's conclusion. The unexposed, unprocessed film seemed an apt metaphor for the unfinished work of a life and career cut short.

Portland MONTHLY

AT THE GALLERY

Dinh Q. Lê's Art Captured the Experience of Assimilation

At Elizabeth Leach Gallery, three decades of the internationally renowned Vietnamese American artist's work juxtapose propaganda and documentary.

By Jason W. Lê • March 13, 2025

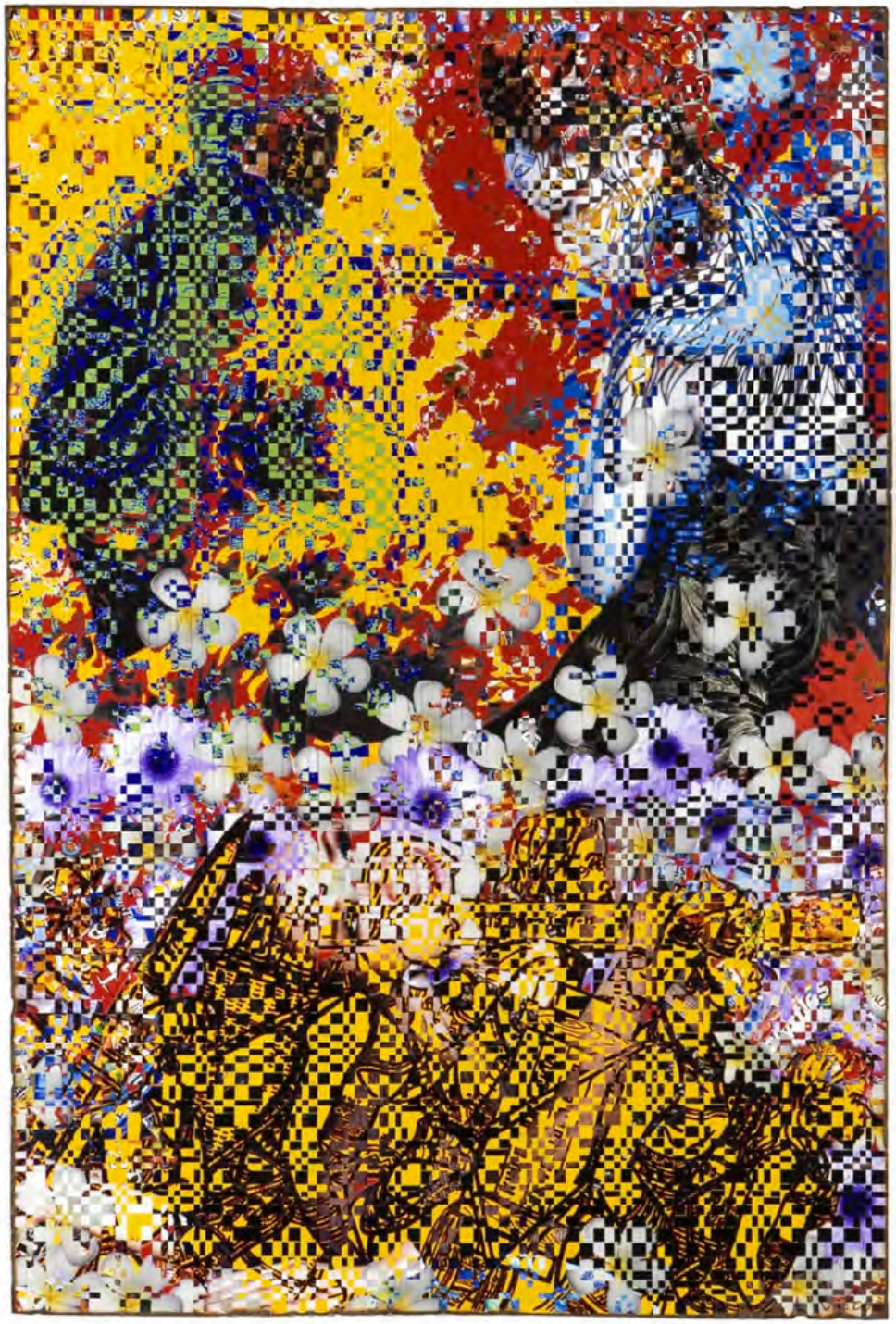
A posthumous Dinh Q. Lê survey draws from Elizabeth Leach Gallery's three-decades working with the artist.

IMAGE: COURTESY MARIO GALLUCCI/ELIZABETH LEACH GALLERY

MY MOTHER RECENTLY REMINDED ME that this April marks 50 years since the end of the Vietnam War. Which also means it's been 50 years since she, her six siblings, and her parents left Vietnam for America, displaced by the fall of Saigon. I had texted to ask if she knew of the Vietnamese American artist Dinh Q. Lê, who gained international acclaim for his works critiquing the insidious effects of displacement and cultural assimilation. She brushed me off, as she often does when I bring up art, and reminded me she's a retired accountant—implying the arts belong to a social world beyond her own. Yet when I showed her Lê's work, she understood it immediately.

“The feelings of those who left the country as a result of the war are all so similar,” she told me, “especially for those who grew up half there and half here. We don’t really belong anywhere.”

Lê, who died last April, was best known for his photo weavings. The biggest of these deftly assembled collages—whether displayed in the spacious rooms of MoMA, in New York, or the Musée du quai Branly, in Paris—tower over you, impossible to take in all at once. It’s especially true at the (relatively) compact Elizabeth Leach Gallery here in Portland, which is showing ***Dinh Q. Lê: A Survey 1995–2023*** through April 26. Instead, you’re compelled to scrutinize them up close, admiring their hundreds of tidy strips carefully woven into something between photograph and artisanal object. They combine what, at quick glance, seems like a disparate variety of images: haunting portraits of Khmer Rouge prisoners blend with photographs of Angkor temples and stills from Hollywood war films; tender Vietnamese family photos dissolve into Western logos. Yet there is no definitive point where one image ends and another begins. Truth and fiction collide, but their dissonance makes it quite easy to parse manufactured memory from harsh reality—if you know what you’re looking for.



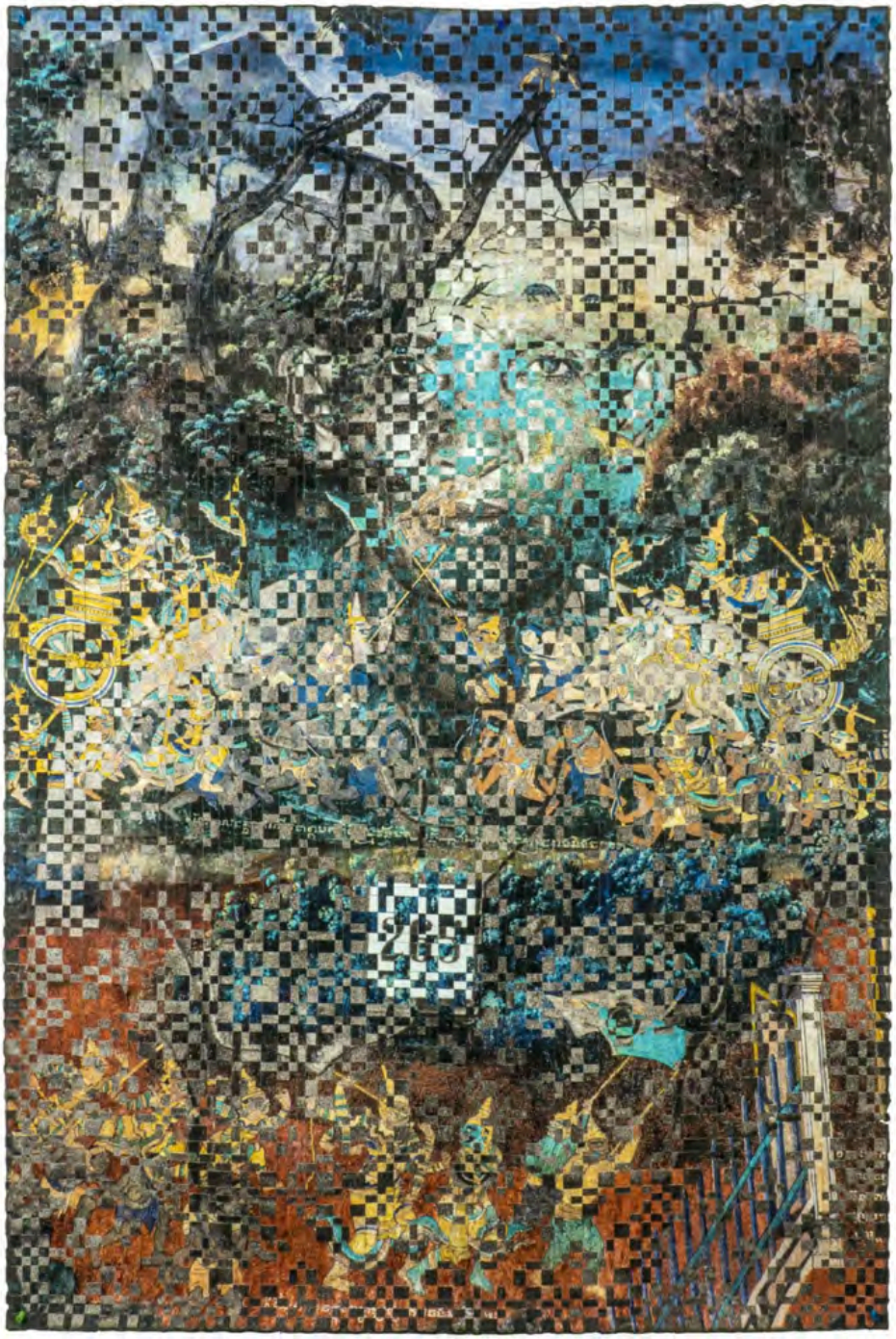
Lê's celebrated collages combine found and original photos using a weaving technique he gleaned from Vietnamese grass mats.

IMAGE: COURTESY ELIZABETH LEACH GALLERY

The disorientation of assimilation was Lê's subject, the complicated experience of giving up something you knew, something that was once yours, to something else greater than you. From discrete worlds, he conjured a new chimeric whole.

Lê Quang Dinh, better known to audiences beyond Vietnam as Dinh Q. Lê, was born in 1968 in Hà Tiên, a small town near the Cambodian border in southwestern Vietnam's Mekong Delta. He immigrated to the US in 1979, after the Khmer Rouge invaded his hometown, eventually studying studio art at University of California, Santa Barbara and photography at the School of Visual Arts in New York. Quickly after graduating, Lê's work found a global audience, featuring in festivals like the Venice Biennale and documenta and sitting in the collections of the Tate Modern and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

"Dinh was very thoughtful, very loyal. Very smart, very special," Elizabeth Leach told me recently. She was beside him since the early days. Lê lived in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) for most of his career, but he spent the better part of the '90s between New York and LA. A collector introduced him to Leach on a trip to Seattle, and in 1998, she brought his first show after grad school, *The Headless Buddha*, from Los Angeles to Portland for an encore run. In the nearly three decades since, Lê had eight solo shows at Elizabeth Leach Gallery. As a result, this current exhibition reads more like viewing a devoted patron's collection than wandering through the grab bag you might expect of a major artist's survey. Here, lesser-known photographic series and a few sculptures supplement Lê's signature photo weavings, offering entry points into the breadth of his long career.



Cambodia Reamker #20 (2022), one of several large-scale photo weavings on view at Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

IMAGE: COURTESY ELIZABETH LEACH GALLERY

Lê developed his photo weaving technique early and refined it over the decades. His process involved shredding both his own photographs as well as found and archival images before weaving them back together using a method he learned watching his aunt weave grass mats back in Hà Tiên. At first glance, the patterns look like a simple over-under-over-under. But Lê had tricks to cannily manipulate their focus. *Cambodia Reamker #20*, for example, brings forth the ghostly trace of a Khmer Rouge prisoner whose contours disappear into the checkered weave; a scene from *Reamker*, Cambodia's national epic poem, overlays. Quite literally, the piece embeds Khmer Rouge victims into Cambodia's history.

Dinh Q. Lê: A Survey 1995–2023 features several sculptures and photographic projects in addition to Lê's better-known collage works.

IMAGE: COURTESY MARIO GALLUCCI/ELIZABETH LEACH GALLERY

Throughout his career, Lê used this traditional craft as a bridge to explore the impact of images and the stories they tell. He complicated history by depicting the nuance of how his new homeland digested his former. In his work, the art historian Lucy Lippard once wrote, "Apparent contradictions are transformed into visual ebb and flow, cultural give and take."

Lippard's "give and take" is on full display at the Elizabeth Leach show. Combining historical documentation with media-fabricated narratives, Lê calls into question the veracity of memory, positioning it as a moving target depending on who is telling the story.

Immolation in Color, a photo weaving from 2002 stretching more than five and a half feet across, combines stills from *Apocalypse Now* and *Born on the Fourth of July*, American-made war films set during what's known in Vietnam as the American War, with an iconic photo of Thích Quảng Đức, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk who protested the persecution of Buddhists by way of self-immolation in 1963. Merging the two, Lê confronts our tendency to sensationalize violence (and, ultimately, desensitize ourselves to it) by getting our history from Hollywood.

Untitled (Self Portrait with Angel), from 1997, is one of the earliest pieces in the show.

IMAGE: COURTESY MARIO GALLUCCI/ELIZABETH LEACH GALLERY

In an earlier weaving, *Untitled (Self Portrait with Angel)*, Lê zooms from collective experience to personal. An angel rendered in the European Catholic painting tradition (highlighting his affinity for Western art) contains a photograph of himself. His likeness peers through gaps in the warp that could either be read as a windowpane or bars of a prison cell. It's unambiguous which culture dominates the picture, but it's also, more than anything, a poetic visualization of being between places.

That's to say, as usual, my mother is completely right. A deeply unanchored feeling runs through Lê's oeuvre. But her response isn't just about the accuracy of Lê's emotional capture. Though his work represents elements of her own life, his ideas aren't limited to the Vietnamese American experience, or a historical moment, or even the broader immigrant experience. Lê's work reaches past craft techniques, multimedia studio practices, and contemplations common in the identity politics–focused era of contemporary art he came up in. Especially in his photo weavings, the literal enmeshment of multiple cultural experiences through art history and popular culture, from various global and social positions, presents an emerging third space, one that holds both positions without complete assimilation. My mom, I believe, saw the potency in Lê's work for what it is, the newfound agency it gives to the collective and the individual—who's starting over, surviving, finding and understanding oneself. His pictures are of a place for people who don't really belong anywhere.

Alta

LEE STARNES

The Diaspora Returns

Born in Vietnam and raised in California, a cohort of artists have come back to the land of their birth. There, they're making bold, often political work—and hoping not to run afoul of government censors.

BY JOE FYFE | PUBLISHED: JUN 24, 2024

For a recent show at Emasi Nam Long, a gallery in Ho Chi Minh City, the curator installed an overhead track on which a small spotlight moved back and forth as it traversed the space, like how police in helicopters search for suspected criminals at

night, or how the crews of U.S. “Huey” helicopters, for a short time, used spotlights to seek out the Vietcong in darkness during the American War.

The curator, Hanoi-based Vân Đỗ, wrote that “the focus has shifted from the production of new works. Instead, there is growing interest in efforts to record, revisit, write and rewrite history.” For example, *Forefinger* (2021), by Trần Tuấn, is a cassock-size sculpture of the trigger digit of a hand, covered with retrieved and blank dog tags. Like many of his peers, Tuấn is an activist concerned with promoting art to a wider community. His artist’s statement refers to his father and uncles, who cut off their forefingers to avoid conscription during the war.

The catalog for the exhibition, titled *White Noise*, states that Tuấn’s works are often inserted into public spaces and are prompted by his desire to open dialogues on topics ranging from history to present affairs. The verb *insert* points to the renegade character of placement that often is a necessity for public art.

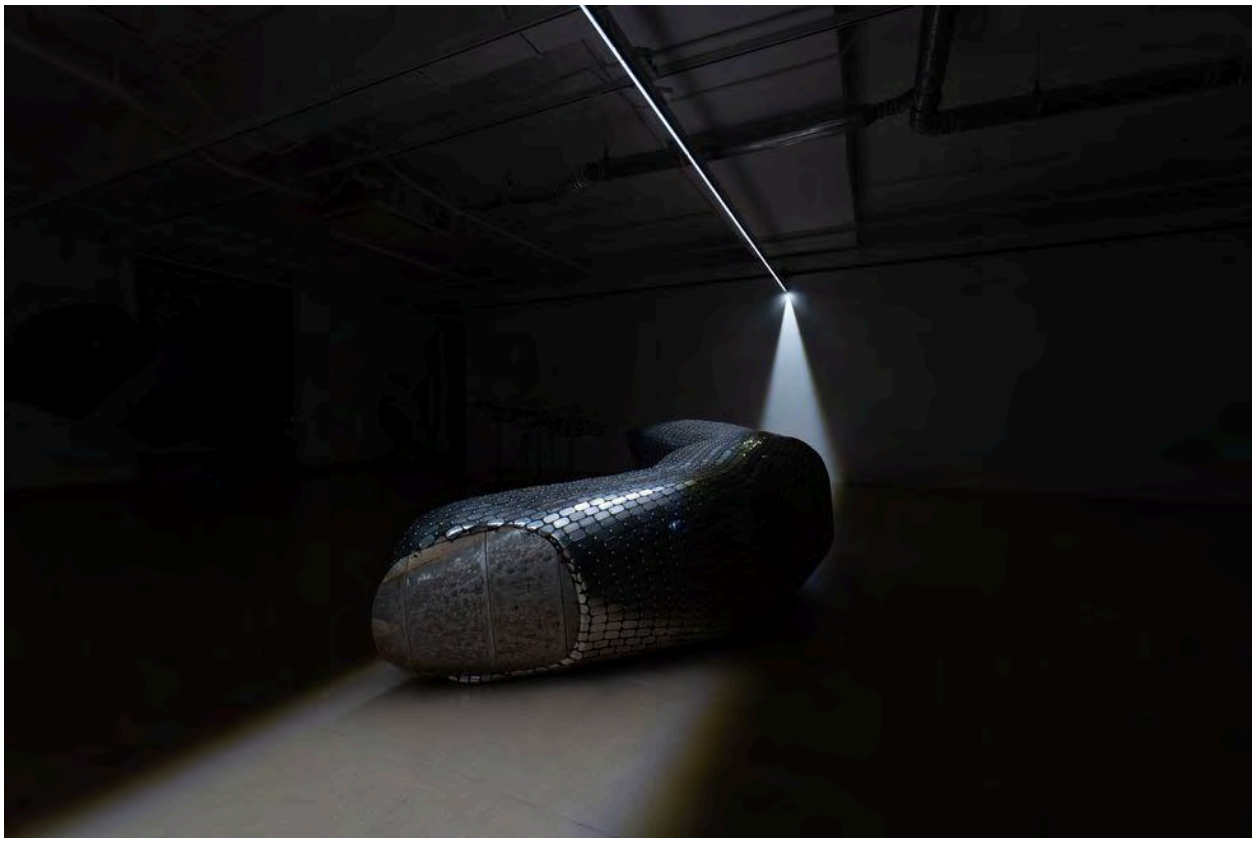
Vietnam is where I first witnessed one of the major themes of this new century: the minds and hearts of a rising populace can be satiated and controlled if one pins them under a continuously toppling wall of consumer goods. Transparency of government workings, free flow of information, freedom of expression, and access to challenging works of aesthetic complexity are all things the Vietnamese government has a history of suppressing (much like China and a number of Southeast Asian countries).

There have always been hurdles to being an artist here, but as Vietnam’s relationship with the United States has shifted from hostility to economic interdependence, the dominating Communist Party has dropped the pretense of tolerating art that poses questions that should not be asked. Among the generation of artists, writers, and gallerists who are now midcareer and who have attained international stature are several Californian diasporans. These individuals have developed a radicalized practice through their exposure to the pedagogy of the Golden State’s art schools.

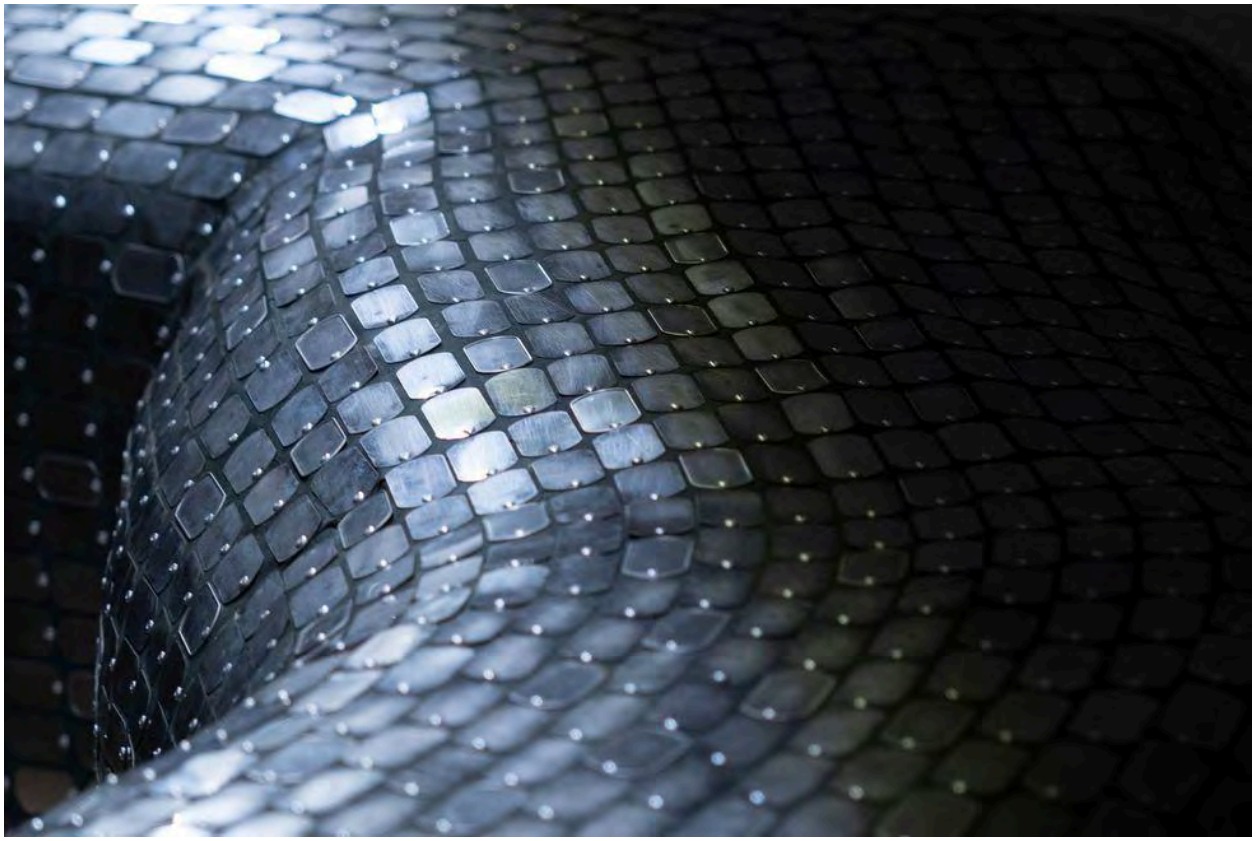
I’m here on my sixth visit since 2002. In 2006 and ’07, I lived in Vietnam and in Cambodia as a Fulbright Fellow in journalism. At that time, I participated in what was meant to be an artist-organized exhibition, *Saigon Open City*, an ambitious kind of regional biennial formed in the absence of any government cultural infrastructure. It failed when it became apparent that

the Ministry of Culture was never going to allow it to fully open. Since then, artists have pushed on despite varying degrees of harassment. The German philosopher and critic Walter Benjamin once expressed that history is written by the victors and should be written by the vanquished. But here in Vietnam—ultimately victorious, as the citizenry will attest, over the French, the Americans, and the Chinese—they have vanquished their own artists. And yet it is the artists who persist in making works that are a form of service, writing the suppressed history of Vietnam and exposing its present corruption.

The patriotism of the Vietnamese people that many of us are old enough to remember from the 1960s remains in its artists.



Trân Tuân's *Forefinger* (2021) represents a trigger finger severed to avoid conscription. Below: Detail of dog tags, which cover the digit.



© TRÂN TUÂN; NGUYEN ART FOUNDATION

HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

I visit Richard Streitmatter-Tran where he lives with his young family in the far reaches of District 7, about a half hour from downtown Ho Chi Minh City. The route there passes through a two-lane, truck-choked industrial corridor that serves the enormous shipping container port on the Saigon River. It leads eventually onto wider streets bordered by very recently built high-end malls, apartment buildings, golf courses, and parks and, beyond those, to his suburban neighborhood.

Streitmatter-Tran, like many of his artist colleagues of his generation, was born in Vietnam but raised elsewhere. He attended Massachusetts College of Art and Design and has a U.S. passport. In addition to making art, he has run alternative art spaces—most notably, Dia Projects, which began in 2010 and for a number of years mounted exhibits in a building on the still intermittently elegant Đồng Khởi Street in downtown Saigon. Streitmatter-Tran now operates

Dia Projects out of his studio. He tells me that unlike in earlier times, contemporary Vietnamese art is being collected by a rising moneyed class within the country, and exhibition spaces are being privately funded.

For a seven-year period—starting in 2005—every application to exhibit his work in the country was rejected. Talking about current censorship, he says that officialdom is still sensitive to political and ecological themes in artworks but has lightened up on sexual and religious imagery. "But one has to be aware.... The censors aren't stupid."

Many of the most prominent artists of the emerging generation are women who appeared with the contemporary art historian Pamela Nguyen Corey in July 2022 on the online series *The New Social Environment*, produced by the art publication the *Brooklyn Rail*. (The *Rail* was cofounded and continues to be published by Phong Bui, who was born in 1964 in Huế, Vietnam.)

I catch up with Corey in the burgeoning District 2, an expat-dominated bedroom community. She is the author of *The City in Time: Contemporary Art and Urban Form in Vietnam and Cambodia*, a recently published look at contemporary art of the region in relation to the city as signscape, an environment of messages and portents. She teaches, along with Streitmatter-Tran, at Fulbright University Vietnam. Corey is of Vietnamese and American heritage. She did undergraduate work in studio art at UC Irvine before turning to history of art and visual studies at Cornell. I ask her about the influence of Southern California's art departments on some of the most prominent diasporan artists, and she notes that at the time she was at Irvine, a good portion of the faculty had recently graduated from California Institute of the Arts and were very political.

I arrange to see Dinh Q. Lê, whom I met during my Fulbright fellowship and when he was helping organize *Saigon Open City*. He had left Hà Tiên while still a boy, after the border incursions by Cambodia. I remember Lê telling me how he gripped his mother's hand as they were led through water to a small boat. His mother dealt in jewelry, and all their worldly possessions were in a bag in her other hand. During my visit, I note Lê's undiminished energy and curiosity. But tragically and without warning, he would die of a stroke a few months after I meet with him.

When Lê was 10, he and his family arrived in Simi Valley, and after high school, he attended UC Santa Barbara. There he studied with the artist Ann Hamilton, who was in the forefront of installation art using traditional household crafts, like stitching and embroidery, as metaphorical and analogical tools, and with Richard Ross, a photographer who saw his work as a method for social action and documentary. Lê, who considered himself "essentially a collagist," said that the Dada works available at the university's library—including those of the German post–World War I protest artists Hannah Hoch and John Heartfield—were of foundational importance to him.

Today, Lê is revered as an important international artist. At New York's Asia Society, in the mid-2000s, he showed an extensive patchwork of vintage photographs sourced from a Saigon used bookshop (one I recalled visiting when it was still in existence on Đồng Khởi) as well as acclaimed early work: an extensive series titled *From Vietnam to Hollywood*, in which he used a straw mat–weaving method, taught to him by an aunt, to combine images from American films about the war in Vietnam with documentary photography from that period or, in other examples, images of Cambodian victims of the Khmer Rouge interlaced with details of Angkor Wat. At the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2010, he showed a once-working helicopter built from odds and ends by two Vietnamese farmers, accompanied by a film that intercut scenes from movies and news footage of the American War, dominated as it was by choppers, with testaments from survivors of it. Among other layers of irony, this homemade version made oblique reference to the Arthur Young–designed Bell-47D1 helicopter that is famously displayed in midair in the permanent collection of the museum's design department.

Lê was the cofounder and chair of Sán Art, an independent arts organization. It has a history of offering residencies and curatorial training and maintains a library stocked with criticism and theory, much of it brought from abroad in artists' personal luggage to skirt censorship. Lê explained that while some private organizations try to avoid censors, Sán Art has always sought approval from the Ministry of Culture before each exhibition. He said the strategy is one where the idea is to get the censors "used to the art."

Sán Art is located in an office building in District 4, just south of the city center, in a raw space with a ceiling height of about 14 feet. Inside, *The Disoriented Garden… A Breath of Dream*, by Trương Công Tùng, is on display. Situated in semidarkness, the installation is a

Gesamtkunstwerk that has a film element, a music soundtrack, a collection of ceramic pottery, tubes, flowing water, a shallow trench dug into the cement flooring, a narrow carpet of beading slumped over an assemblage of plants and machinery, soil, and stone, with a series of lacquer paintings by the artist hung on the gallery walls. Many of these materials are reused as the venues for Tùng's artworks change; his themes are based on the culture and ecologies of Vietnam's Central Highlands, home to more than 30 ethnic groups. The region sustained damage from carpet bombing and defoliation during the American War and, later, suffered exploitative agricultural schemes. Images in the hour-long filmed component include scurrying insects before a full moon, accompanied by flute music. A figure outfitted as a vagabond character passes through the film at moments, symbolizing the many disenfranchised survivors of the war who continue to populate the Central Highlands. The accompanying literature states that Tùng sees the artist as a vessel "through which voiceless beings express themselves." It is a soothing, alluring, mysterious installation that exemplifies the combination of poetic and political characteristics often found in contemporary Vietnamese art.

LEE STARNES

Dinh Q. Lê attended UC Santa Barbara before returning to Vietnam. He led an influential arts organization and exhibited his work internationally.

THE RETURNING DIASPORA

Another artist who migrated to California by boat during the diaspora is Tuan Andrew Nguyen. He left at age three and was first in Texas, then joined the Vietnamese expat community in Long Beach before moving to Irvine, where his family lived with two others in a two-bedroom apartment.

Nguyen returned to Vietnam in 2005 after majoring in fine arts at UC Irvine and later completing his MFA at CalArts. At Irvine, he was influenced by Daniel Martinez, a social provocateur across mediums, and Andrea Bowers, a painter and activist. At CalArts, he studied under Michael Asher, whose post-studio classes were famous for their umpteen-hours-long critiques that would pull apart all material and associational supports, and under Sam Durant, perhaps best known for a group of sculptures reproducing 30 monuments to those killed during multiple so-called Indian Wars—Indigenous peoples and white settlers—located around the United States and all conforming to the same obelisk shape as the Washington Monument. A year after his return to Ho Chi Minh City, Nguyen described the situation in a statement accompanying his project *Proposals for a Vietnamese Landscape*:

> ***Vietnam is a paradox in its political operation and its economic progression. Theoretically, government censorship reigns supreme over the landscape. But even that's at odds with the reality. Trends that are becoming popular with Vietnamese youth culture, like hip-hop, are deemed as western influences and warned against, sometimes outwardly censored, by the government. All the while, advertising agencies pay big money to exploit and use these same trends to sell consumer goods in their marketing campaigns.***

Last August, he had a well-received exhibition at the New Museum in New York City. Nguyen is recognized for his work with the Propeller Group (helicopters again) artist collective and for his films, collaborative paintings, and sculptural objects, many of which, like those of his teacher Durant, use the concept of the monument. *Enemy's Enemy: Monument to a Monument* (2012), for example, is a Louisville Slugger baseball bat carved into the image of Buddhist monk Thích

Quảng Đức, who immolated himself in 1963 in protest of the Vietnamese government's repression of his faith.

Nguyen is represented in Vietnam by Quỳnh Pham, director of Galerie Quynh in Ho Chi Minh City. Pham returned to Vietnam in 1997, having left Da Nang as a child, fleeing on a boat by way of Vung Tau and eventually being rescued by an American ship. She feared water for a long time afterward, she says. Her father was a South Vietnamese fighter pilot whom she only met much later in life; he had, apparently, another family elsewhere. She was initially in a refugee camp with her other family members, then spent time in Guam and Camp Pendleton before settling in Chula Vista.

While in high school, she came across *The Arrest of Christ*, a Northern Renaissance painting credited to the Workshop of Hieronymus Bosch, at the San Diego Museum of Art. She was moved, began to study art, and became an assistant to the school's art teacher. She studied art history at UC San Diego, volunteered at the Quint Gallery in La Jolla, excelled as an intern at the Smithsonian, then returned west to work as the only nonwhite staffer in the development department at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego in La Jolla. There, she says, she had so little money, she "bucked the caste system at the museum" and went fishing at lunchtime with the gardener to get something to eat.

After Pham came back to Vietnam, she began writing for *Asian Art News* and curating exhibitions. Soon, with aid from her husband, she wrote a cogent business plan, secured backers, and opened her own gallery. She still represents several of the painters she met upon returning, including Tran Van Thao, one of the Group of 10 artists, known for being the first abstract painters in Vietnam.

Phạm's experience with art institutions in the United States prepared her for "doing everyone's job" at her own gallery. Her business functions as a for-profit entity while also operating as a promotional and educational extension. She's moved the gallery several times, and the current location is the most ambitious yet, with four floors of galleries, offices, and temperature-regulated storage and a shaft that runs through the building with a winch for moving large sculptures.

LEE STARNES

Tuan Andrew Nguyen with a kinetic sculpture in his Ho Chi Minh City studio. He moved back to Vietnam in 2005 and is represented by Galerie Quynh.

LEE STARNES

Tran Luong, who has long been in the vanguard of Vietnamese artists, serves as the director of the Art Patronage & Development organization in Hanoi.

PATRIOT GAMES

I had not been to Hanoi since 2007, and the city doesn't appear to have changed much except for the traffic pattern. Lines of cars and motorbikes that previously encircled legendary Hoàn Kiếm Lake, a symbol of national pride and of the former imperial seat, have been redirected to the perimeters to accommodate tourism. Many surrounding tree-lined streets seem to have benefited from the rerouting.

I've come expressly to see Tran Luong, whom I met on my first visit 22 years ago. Since his beginnings in the meteoric group of painters known as the Gang of Five, he has always been in the forefront of postwar Vietnamese art. In many ways, his career is a pursuit of the social ideal of being an artist: "keeping a distance from object art," he says, while drawing on the principles of kung fu, "making sure there is an accent on craftsmanship."

As a child, Tran was sent to the country, as most children in Hanoi were, during the American bombings. While traveling abroad during the mid-1990s, he was exposed to pop art and abstract expressionism, finding the idea of revolution in Jackson Pollock.

Tran stages creative actions to reach people who—owing to poverty or simply being uninformed—would never think of entering an art gallery. These creative actions include *Moving Forwards and Backwards* (2009), in which he invited people to brush their teeth in an outdoor space, first performed in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, near the Tonlé Sap River, and *Welts* (2007–), in which he asks audience members to take his red scarf and hit his body with as much aggressiveness as they please. In one interview, he said that though there was pain involved, "I feel very happy. Not really *happy*, but I feel this kind of high, like taking drugs. Because I can feel like the real part of a million people, not just only me anymore." Closely connected to the Goethe-Institut in Hanoi, Tran learned curation, "bringing the idea of making institutions form political ideals," and cofounded Nhá Sán Studio, the first nonprofit experimental art space in Vietnam.

As in Ho Chi Minh City, independent arts organizations in Hanoi have begun to receive patronage from the private sector. Tran is the director of Art Patronage & Development, which is supported by UpGen Vietnam, a facilitator space for businesses that provides the group with a studio, learning center, and gallery.

In the APD gallery space is a reprised exhibition from two decades ago, *Green Red & Yellow*. The show explores Vietnam's march into economic gain (green), its contradictory Communist program that stops real development of a modern society (red), and the idea of the individual creative element (yellow)—of softness, the free mind, LGBTQ identity, natural roots—that has been left out of the equation. Tran tells me that "20 years later, we are dealing with the same issues; the radical content is still new." The show was originally held at the Goethe-Institut Hanoi, with 16 artists, and received thousands of visitors in two weeks.

Among the artists I have known, Tran has the most original, most poetic vision. Years ago, I described him in *BOMB* magazine as "Whitmanesque…the way he unites his personal experiences with nature and national identity." Soon, Mousse, the important European art

publisher, will issue a book on him, and a retrospective of his work will travel to multiple countries.

Tran tells me that he is “not just an artist but an organizer of people; my center is the border between art and society.” Like other contemporary Vietnamese artists, in Ho Chi Minh City as well as here in Hanoi and elsewhere, he is affected by the huge gaps between the rich and poor, his country’s consumerism and corruption, and the ongoing struggle for freedom. But, he says, “I still love living here. I get up and I still have energy.”•

Correction: The print version of this story incorrectly stated that Richard Streitmatter-Trần was banned from exhibiting in Vietnam in response to one of his artworks dealing with ecological harm; his applications to exhibitions were rejected without feedback. We also erred in stating that he went six years without a show in Vietnam; he went seven years without a show in the country.

ARTFORUM

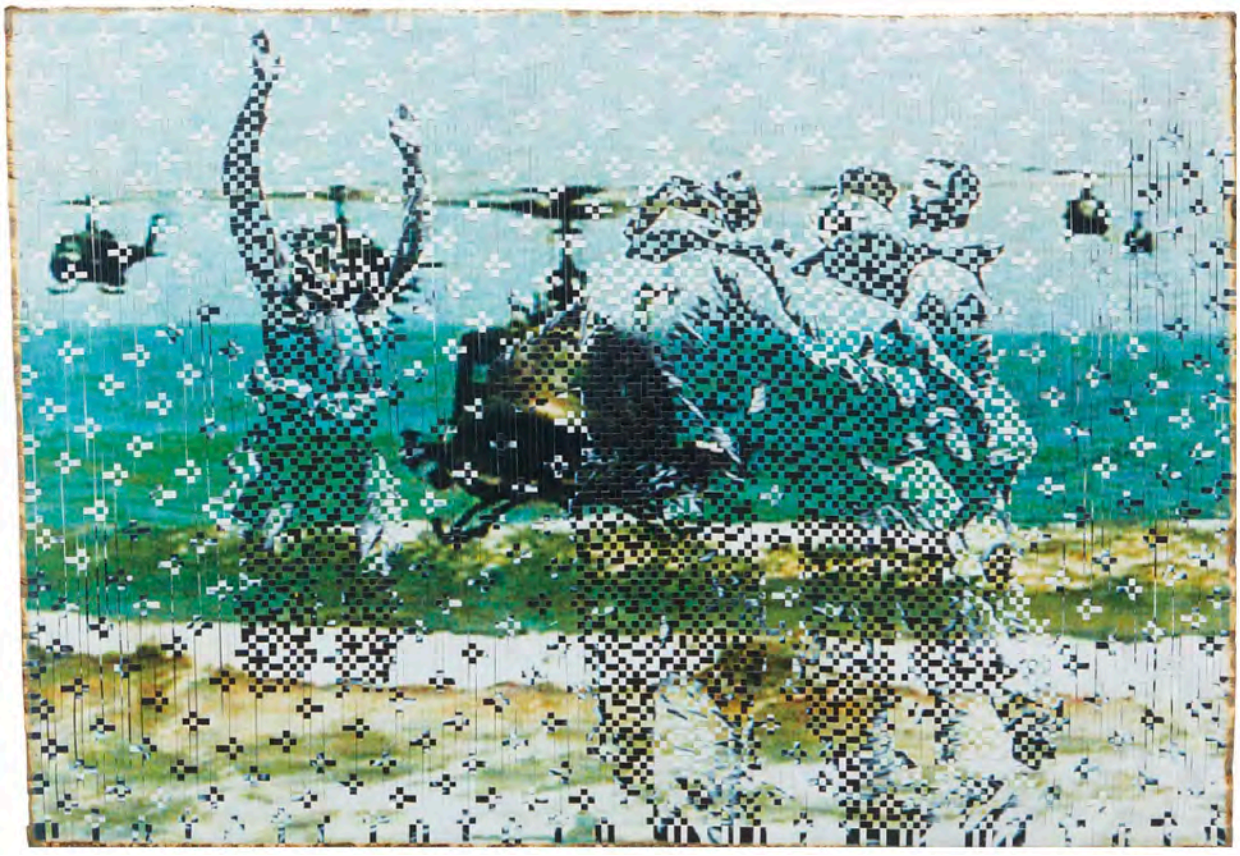
DINH Q. LÊ (1968–2024)

By Hung Duong

Dinh Q. Lê at STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery, Singapore, 2018. Photo: Toni Cuhadi.

MY FIRST AND, SADLY, last interview with Dinh Q. Lê transpired in his studio in 2022, though we had known each other for years. The summer humidity was welling against the windowpanes as Dinh reclined in his wooden chair, enjoying a rare moment of respite in his creative domain. With his distinctive voice—slightly high-pitched, like a scratchy record—he told me about his childhood in Kiên Giang, Vietnam, his fateful voyage to American shores in 1978, his tumultuous education in California, and then his homecoming to Saigon in 1997. Gradually, his life unfurled in front of me, chapter by chapter, pixel by pixel, a photographic tapestry of memory, dedication, faith, and vision.

Dinh's early life was colored by history. He recounted to me his experiences in the refugee camps in Thailand as a young teenage boy, how each family was allotted only a tiny square mat on which they ate, slept, quarreled, and made love. During those sweltering, sleepless nights, pressed tightly against other heaving bodies, Dinh would stare at the mosquito net above his head and let his imaginings of America run wild. Despite being an unwilling participant in the catastrophic theater of the Vietnam War, he was excluded from the discourse around it upon landing in America, as the US scrambled to salvage its postwar reputation with biased narratives. As a student in Walter Capps's popular course at the University of California, Santa Barbara, "The Vietnam War and American Religion," Dinh openly complained that the course curriculum was prejudiced against the Vietnamese experience in its emphasis on the testimonies and experiences of US veterans. In 1989, he directed his frustration into an early series of posters that he plastered across the university campus. In these mostly black-and-white broadsides, journalistic American images of the war appear alongside statistics about casualties on the Vietnam side.



Dinh Q. Lê, *Persistence of Memory #10*, 2000–2001, C-print, linen tape, 45 × 63″. From the series “Persistence of Memory,” 2000–2001.

Dinh was determined to stake a claim to the histories of the Vietnam War through his art. Uninterested in picking ideological sides, he was solely invested in unpacking the complex experiences of unnamed people who suffered through the war. This desire propelled him to return to Saigon in the late ’90s, to retrace his roots and uncover accounts that had been buried by Vietnam and overlooked in the US. This homecoming resulted in a number of storytelling projects, beginning with *Damaged Gene*, 1998, in which Dinh transformed his research on the horrendous repercussions of Agent Orange in Vietnam into a cabinet of grotesqueries, from cheerful figurines of conjoined twins to double-collared student uniforms and other articles of children’s clothing printed with logos of corporations that would eventually be sued by the Vietnamese government for their involvement in chemical warfare.

I can still vividly recall the experience of installing an iteration of this series for the 2022 exhibition “Illuminated Curiosities” at the Nguyen Art Foundation in Ho Chi Minh City. As I unpacked each doll, ironed each uniform, and cradled each pacifier in my palms before placing them behind Plexiglas, I was on the verge of tears. My mind became flustered with questions about the fates of Agent Orange survivors and how they would describe their experiences of the war. Such was the power of Dinh’s haunting works: The objects’ combination of innocence and eeriness introduced me to another perspective on a community that I’d grown up hearing about constantly, yet that remained on the periphery of my historical consciousness. Dinh’s storytelling was political but not politicized: He interspersed harsh realities with a generous dose of poetics and sensitivity toward marginalized communities—people whose lives were quickly swept under the rug after the war ended.

> **Dinh's storytelling was political but not politicized: He interspersed harsh realities with a generous dose of poetics and sensitivity toward marginalized communities.**

At the core of Dinh's work was photography and its shape-shifting magic. Dinh was widely known for his practice of photo-weaving, inspired by Vietnamese grass mats, for which he cut found and archival images into strips and wove them into larger compositions. In the early series "Persistence of Memory," 2000–2001, he combined scenes from Hollywood films depicting the war, such as *Apocalypse Now* (1979), with documentary images, while the recent "Cambodia Reamker" series, 2021–24, interweaves images of murals from the Cambodian Royal Palace in Phnom Penh with portraits of people imprisoned by the Khmer Rouge. However, Dinh's multimedia assemblages were also heavily influenced by his profound understanding and intricate use of photography as a material and medium. For the installation *Crossing the Farther Shore*, 2014, Dinh sewed together hundreds of found photographs depicting life in South Vietnam before the war that had been abandoned by families when they migrated after 1975. The result—a group of lacy, fabric-like sheets that he suspended in the gallery to form monumental cubes—re-created the mosquito nets from his refugee-camp memories while simultaneously lampooning the Minimalist movement, which he deemed an escapist reaction by American artists during the height of the conflict. Floating like pixelated specters, these quilted objects reminded us not only of the untold stories of Vietnamese boat people but also of the fictionalizing capacity of the photographs.

Dinh Q. Lê, *Crossing the Farther Shore* (detail), 2014, seven parts, found photographs, thread, linen tape, dimensions variable.

When I delivered a talk about this series at the National Gallery Singapore in 2023, I was also tasked with giving a brief tour of the works, which were then on display as part of the survey exhibition "Living Pictures: Photography in Southeast Asia." As the guests navigated around the cubes, leaning in closer to observe the faces and decipher the scribbled notes behind the photographs, I snapped a photo and sent it to Dinh. "I am initiating people into your temple, *anh oi*," I joked, using the Vietnamese term for older brother. He laughed, commenting that I was his high priestess. We continued chatting as the works murmured their tales into the guests' attentive ears.

To many outside Vietnam, Dinh Q. Lê was simply a magnificent artist whose works struck a critical chord amid the narratives of the Vietnam War. But to us in Saigon, particularly the artists, writers, and art workers who became aware of

unresolved political conflict in Vietnam thanks to his art, Dinh was a mentor, a trailblazer, a visionary, and a great friend. As a cofounder of Sàn Art, a platform that has invigorated contemporary art in Vietnam and Southeast Asia since 2007, Dinh remained steadfast in his commitment to nurturing young Vietnamese artists through exhibitions, residencies, and educational workshops. His wish was for Sàn Art to become not only a reflective space for local artists but a bridge connecting them to the arena of global art. “The world needs to know about them,” he exclaimed. Ever generous with his time and rigorous in his feedback, Dinh has paved the way for many now-famous Vietnamese artists. Words cannot describe our collective gratitude.

Two Xerox posters by Dinh Q. Lê, 1989.

In my last memory of Dinh, some three months before his untimely passing, he appears not as an artist but as a makeshift dealer—Sàn Art had a booth at the art fair S.E.A. Focus 2024, in Singapore, and was presenting a group of novice artists

from Vietnam. Watching Dinh excitedly explain these previously unknown artists and their works to collectors, curators, and institution directors—even though he complained later to me that his voice was gone after the vernissage!—I could not help but feel an affectionate well of admiration for this dedicated man. One of my greatest regrets in life was that we did not have lunch in Singapore. Alas, "what if" questions are cheap.

When he came back to Vietnam more than twenty years ago, Dinh made a promise to uplift Vietnam and its artists, and he was faithful to that promise until the end. The last image that he posted on his Facebook profile was of his barely finished studio, looking out to the ocean in his hometown in the Mekong Delta. The sky was vast and the water an unblemished navy blue. The ocean, which brought him to foreign shores decades ago, now carries him to his final station. Wherever you are, Anh Dinh, may peace be with you. Here is to your next adventure!

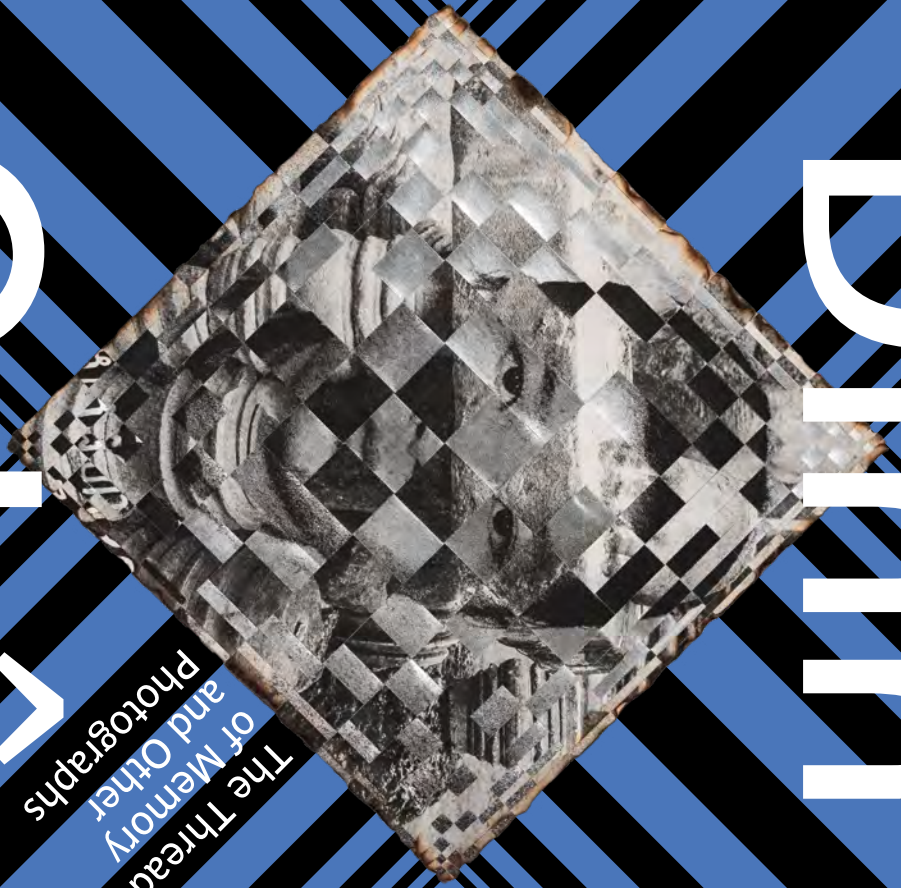
Hung Duong is a writer and translator based in Vietnam.

VISITOR GUIDE
→ FROM FEB. 8 — NOV. 20, 2022

MUSÉE DU QUAI BRANLY
JACQUES CHIRAC

Dinh Q. Lê

The Thread or Memory and Other Photographs



The Marc Ladreit de Lacharrière gallery

The Marc Ladreit de Lacharrière gallery, inaugurated in 2021, houses temporary exhibitions each year, with a new perspective on the history of non-Western arts. It is in this regard that support has been given to the exhibition *Dinh Q. Lê: The Thread of Memory and Other Photographs*, by the "Marc Ladreit de Lacharrière Fund for Knowledge and Promotion of African and Oceanian Civilisations".

Ramayana #12

Introduction

Dinh Q. Lê, born in 1968 at Hà Tiên in Vietnam, has built up a rich, complex oeuvre since the 1990s through different techniques in which photography plays a big role. This exhibition looks back at the career of this leading artist whose work has been seldom seen in France up to now.

For Dinh Q. Lê, an image is matter to be explored and transformed. These selected works retrace the main themes over his twenty years of artistic practice. Photography, video and drawings combine new, subtle ways of telling stories of geopolitics twined around lived experience, history twined around personal tales.

Dinh Q. Lê spent his childhood in Vietnam but had to flee his country in 1978 to take refuge in the US. At the end of the 1990s, he chooses to come back to Vietnam and he opens the biggest contemporary art centre of the country : Sàn Art. He now has an international career.

Curator : Christine Barthe, Head of Photographic Collections Heritage Unit, Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac

In partnership with the artist Dinh Q. Lê

A portrait of a socially minded artist: four questions for Christine Barthe, exhibition curator.

Dinh Q. Lê's work is not exhibited much in France. How have you designed the exhibition pathway to present his work?

The idea is to offer a retrospective. This retrospective isn't exhaustive, but we display around twenty works that give a good impression of the oeuvre he's produced and the way he's worked since the 2000s. Above all, I wanted to show his work in more depth compared to the exhibition 'Perspective and Infinite Connections' presented at the museum in 2020.

What role does photography play in his work?

Photography plays a big role. At the same time, he's never taken shots himself since he first studied art. He uses photography to make something else. He deconstructs existing photographs and gives them new meaning. Photography is more like a resource to him, matter to be transformed.

Where does this photo-weaving technique come from? What does it represent to him?

It's something he developed early on in his career. He doesn't only use this technique, but it often features and that's quite peculiar to him. It's a really simple technique, the same one his aunt would use to weave mats. For him, it's a way of combining two different registers of images

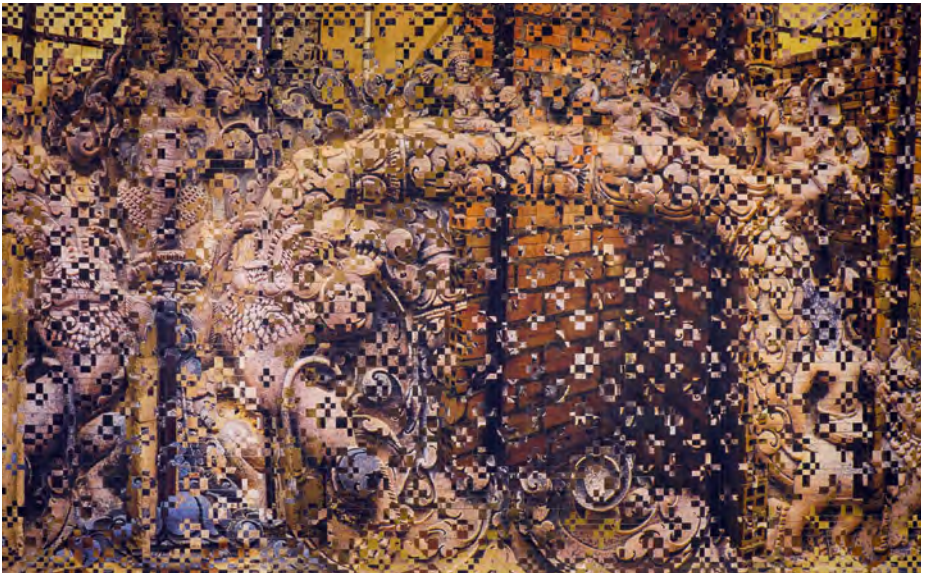
He uses portraits and news images. Some well-known images, including those of the Vietnam War, are weaved with posters or Hollywood film scenes. This builds up a surprising artistic subject based on a principle that's actually quite simple. It produces a highly pictorial result, one that's very meaningful but a little ambiguous as there are always at least two ways of reading the image.

Splendor and Darkness (STPI) #26 2

Splendor and Darkness (STPI) #4 3

Dinh Q. Lê tells some of his story through that of his country, including the story of the Vietnam War. Is his work a way of giving a voice to those deprived of one?

This issue of finding expression, of giving people a voice, is very important in his oeuvre in general. Several of his works relate to this issue, like his work *The Farmers and the Helicopters*. They explore how we can avoid speaking in other people's place, how to give a voice back to people – a Vietnamese voice he knew was a minority when he was a student in the US. He expresses that well in regard to representations of the Vietnam War – it's always the Americans we give a voice to. Beyond the issue of portrayals of the Vietnam War, he was really concerned about giving a voice back to people who rarely speak up. That's what we find in *Light and Belief: Sketches of Life from the Vietnam War*, one of the major works displayed in the exhibition, based on a collection of drawings by socially minded artists on the war front and on accounts he collected by interviewing these different artists. They touch on striking subjects that are rarely evoked.



WANT TO KNOW MORE?

/ Take a guided tour with a guide (1 hour, all ages from 12 years, in french only)
/ Discover the special issue of the magazine "Gradhiva" dedicated to the exhibition (publication to be published in may 2022, 20€, in sale at the Bookshop of the museum)
/ Meet the artist Dinh Q. Lê and Christine Barthe, curator of the exhibition, on the 10 February at 6.30 pm, at the Jacques Kerchache reading room (museum's hall ; free entry subject to available places)
/ Listen to the talk "L'objectif anticolonial : Photographie et nationalisme vietnamiens, 1865–1930", with Jacqueline Hoàng Nguyễn (Konstfack / KTH École royale polytechnique, Stockholm) ; Marie-Agathe Simonetti (University of Wisconsin–Madison) Édouard de Saint-Ours (University of St Andrews / Université Le Havre–Normandie), on 4 May, at 5pm, at the Jacques Kerchache reading room (free entry subject to available places)
/ Consult a selection of books in the Jacques Kerchache reading room

OPENING TIMES

/ Tuesday to Sunday, 10.30am to 7pm, late night opening on Thursdays until 10pm (admission for members from 9.30am, except Sundays)
/ Closed on Mondays (except during school holidays)
/ Free entry each first Sundays

This exhibition was produced with the support of Marc Ladreit de Lacharrière

RENSEIGNEMENTS

/ www.quaibranly.fr
/ contact@quaibranly.fr
/ + 33 1 56 61 70 00

ENTRANCE OF THE MUSEUM

/ Entrance Debilly: 37 quai Branly – Paris 7e
/ Entrance Université: 218 rue de l'Université
/ Entrance Bassins : 206 rue de l'Université
/ Entrance Alma : Passage de l'Alma
/ Access for disabled visitors: 222 rue de l'Université

BOOKING

www.quaibranly.fr
+ 33 1 56 61 70 00

BECOME A MEMBER

Enjoy one year of unlimited access and priority admission to the musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac.
Become a member on the day of your visit and save €10 on your Pass*!
/ Solo Pass: €25 instead of €35
/ Duo Pass: €50 instead of €60

FOLLOW US

www.quaibranly.fr
#ExpoDinhQLe

**valid only at the museum on the day of your visit for the purchase of a Solo or Duo Pass (cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer), available in the membership area from Tuesday to Saturday 10.30am to 5.30pm and on Sundays from 2pm to 5.30pm (closed on the first Sunday of the month).*

ARTASIAPACIFIC

SHOWS JUN 09, 2022

Dinh Q. Lê's "The Thread of Memory and Other Photographs"

BY JULIA TANSKI

DINH Q. LE, Ramayana #11, cut and woven photographic prints mounted on strips of linen, 165 cm x 220 cm. Copyright the artist. Courtesy 10 Chancery Lane Gallery.

Upon seeing Dinh Q. Lê's work, one's instinctive reaction is often to move closer. Lê's meticulous photo-weaving process, inspired by Vietnamese grass mat weaving, creates intricate collages of found images that tie identities, histories, and memories engrossed in conflict and displacement. His retrospective at Musée du quai Branly in Paris allows for a wide-angle vision of his socio-historically-charged, layered photographs, installations, and videos, dating from 2004 to today. Current geo-political crises can be mirrored in these works, with oppression and power-induced strife affecting communities across the globe.

Installation view of **DINH Q. LE**'s "The Thread of Memory and Other Photographs," at Musee du quai Branly, Paris, 2022. (Center) Adrift in Darkness, 2017, digital print on Awagami bamboo paper, laser-cut and weaved around cane structure, dimensions variable. Photo by Leo Delafontaine. Image courtesy of the artist and Musee du quai Branly.

This is the second time Lê has been exhibited at the Musée. The first time was as part of a group show on photography in 2020, where his mosquito-net-like installation, Crossing The Farther Shore (2014) was shown. Another woven photo-installation was at the center of this solo exhibition. Adrift in Darkness (2017) features three, hanging, black-and-white boulders, created with tiny portraits of the recent refugee exodus from Africa and the Middle East woven compactly together with rattan.

Lê and his family were forced to leave Vietnam in 1978, living in refugee camps in Thailand before moving to the United States. "[Adrift] takes reference from the images of people packed so tightly on a rickety old boat [. . .] As one who did the same to escape the harsh Vietnamese communist regime at the time, issues of this mass exodus and the fear and rejection of Europeans have been on my mind lately," Lê explains. Paradoxically, in this sea of abandonment, the rocks float.

DINH Q. LE, Untitled 9, 2004, Fuji Professional Color Paper, 85 × 170 cm. Copyright the artist. Courtesy 10 Chancery Lane Gallery.

This play on the elements is also present in the series “From Vietnam to Hollywood” (2003–), with works such as Untitled 9 (2004), where stills of American war films and images of Vietnamese people during the Vietnam War are interwoven against a background of orange fire. The weaving’s contrast of color and black-and-white heightens its disorienting effect, alluding to the chaos of war. Lê’s vision, derived from his exposure to the American imaginary and personal experience, juxtaposes fictitious and propagandistic depictions of war with its realities, becoming a unique testimonial of this period and its tremors in the present day.

Part of another series, “Cambodia Reamker #11” (2021) uses the same weaving technique but with former prisoners at Tuol Sleng, the S-21 extermination center, as its main subject. Brutal realities of Tuol Sleng are fused with the Khmer Reamker relief at the Royal Palace of Phnom Penh and Angkor Wat. Depicting the extreme oppression a culture is capable of, the series forces broader questions of humanity as a whole.

DINH Q. LE, Light and Belief: Sketches of Life from the Vietnam War, 2012, 70 drawings, pencil, watercolour, ink and oil on paper, dimensions variable. Installation view at “Dinh Q. Le: The Thread of Memory and Other Photographs,” Musee du quai Branly, Paris, 2022. Photo by Leo Delafontaine. Image courtesy of the artist and Musee du quai Branly.

Nearby, the video-installation Light and Belief: Sketches of Life from the Vietnam War (2012) brings together drawings by artists who were sent alongside North Vietnamese soldiers to document the war effort during the Vietnam War, and a documentary filmed by Lê of the artists sharing their experiences as artist-soldiers. Their stories, which include junctures of joy amidst the turmoil, add to the cacophony of perspectives that Lê’s works offer, further complicating generalized ideas of individual experiences in conflict.

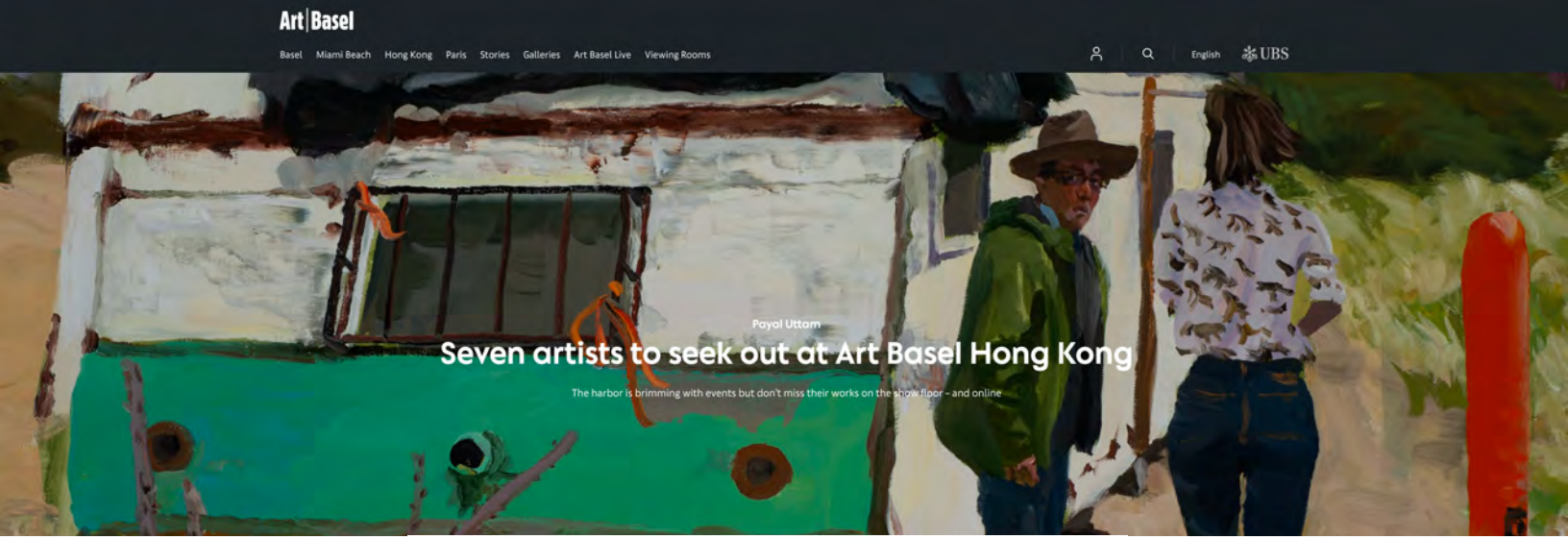
DINH Q. LE, South China Sea Pishkun, 2009, 3D animation still, digital print on color photographic paper, 127 × 220cm. Copyright the artist. Courtesy 10 Chancery Lane Gallery.

South China Sea Pishkun (2009), visible diagonally from Light and Belief, is another video work. It combines footage of a peaceful sea with synthetic images of helicopters crashing into the water, recalling Operation Frequent Wind, the mass evacuation of Americans, their allies, and locals in South Vietnam via helicopters in 1975 during the Fall of Saigon. Pishkun is an Indigenous American term referring to a hunting method where bison are urged to jump over a cliff en masse. Here, the helicopters are similarly nosediving to their demise in the sea.

Below the exhibition space are the museum's collections of South and Southeast Asian art, including sculptures and weavings from the ancient Khmer and Cham cultures. The dialogue created between these antique pieces and Lê's works is poignant, enabling the viewer to constantly refocus, redirect, and recharge their understanding of the exhibition with broader historical contextualization.

That his photography-based works could be experienced in different ways—as sculptures, videos, and tapestries—is indicative of Lê's use of photography. He uses it less as a means unto itself and more as a resource, "a matter to be transformed." Zooming in and out, the audience put themselves into the position of the artist, occupying a space between the United States and Vietnam, between the imaginary and reality, constantly meditating between varying perspectives of history.

Dinh Q. Lê's "The Thread of Memory and Other Photographs" is on view at Musée du quai Branly, Paris, until November 20, 2022.



Dinh Q. Lê, Khmer Reamker #12 , 2021. Courtesy of 10 Chancery Lane, Hong Kong, and STPI, Singapore.

Dinh Q. Lê
10 Chancery Lane, Hong Kong, and **STPI, Singapore**

As a child, the Vietnamese artist Dinh Q. Lê learned how to weave grass mats from his aunt, a tradition he has transposed to his contemporary art practice. Casting a critical eye on the role of the media and photography in constructing biased narratives of the Vietnam War, he shreds historic photographs and interlaces the pieces, so that they become vivid tapestries that tell a different story. Hong Kong's 10 Chancery Lane will exhibit one of his largest photo-weavings to date, *Khmer Reamker* #12 (2021), which reworks a mug shot of a teenage girl who was tortured and killed by the Khmer Rouge regime in one of its most notorious prisons. Instead of portraying her simply as a victim, he seeks to bestow a sense of dignity on her and her country.

OREGON ARTSWATCH
OREGON'S ARTS & CULTURE NEWS

ARTSWATCH FOCUS

Seeing Double

Double-exposure photographs by Mike Vos, Dinh Q. Lê and Gary Burnley speak to our polarized times and expand our consciousness

AUGUST 30, 2021 // ARTSWATCH FOCUS, PHOTOGRAPHY, VISUAL ART // BRIAN LIBBY

It all started with a waterfall I knew I'd seen before. Only this waterfall seemed to be coming through a window.

The picture, a double-exposure by Portland photographer Mike Vos, I'd found on his website after receiving a press release from Blue Sky Gallery about Vos and artist Kelda Van Patten being selected for residencies at the Sitka Center for Art and Ecology. Included in the press-release email was a thumbnail image one of Vos's double-exposure photographs from his ongoing *Dead Cities* project. The image is a double exposure combining a shot of Snoqualmie Falls in Washington with a shot of a square window amidst a wall of lapped wood siding with a few stray bullet holes.

Snoqualmie Falls in a window, from Mike Vos's "Dead Cities" project.

Of course this is the waterfall made famous by film director David Lynch in the opening credits to his landmark 1990-92 TV series *Twin Peaks* and its 18-episode sequel from 2017, *Twin Peaks: The Return*. I knew it well, not just as a Lynch fan and past interviewer, but also because nine years ago I'd made Snoqualmie Falls the subject of one of my own short films.

Yet even without those personal or pop-cultural hooks, Vos's image was arresting, with its frame within a frame and its juxtaposition of clean-lined (if weathered) building and unruly falling

water. Yet the transparency of the window and the falling water also somehow felt related. It seemed like a statement, a manifesto even: that, as Lynch continually explores, time and memory are transitory and mysterious.
Quite an impact for a photographer who wasn't even showing this month in Portland.
Once I started thinking about Vos's photos, however, I began to notice other artists exhibiting this fall who also combine images and explore overlapping ideas: the photo weavings of Dinh Q. Lê, *Monuments and Memorials* at Elizabeth Leach Gallery; and Gary Burnley's *The Known World* at Blue Sky Gallery (both showing through October 2).

Of course this is the waterfall made famous by film director David Lynch in the opening credits to his landmark 1990-92 TV series *Twin Peaks* and its 18-episode sequel from 2017, *Twin Peaks: The Return*. I knew it well, not just as a Lynch fan and past interviewer, but also because nine years ago I'd made Snoqualmie Falls the subject of one of my own short films.
Yet even without those personal or pop-cultural hooks, Vos's image was arresting, with its frame within a frame and its juxtaposition of clean-lined (if weathered) building and unruly falling water. Yet the transparency of the window and the falling water also somehow felt related. It seemed like a statement, a manifesto even: that, as Lynch continually explores, time and memory are transitory and mysterious.
Quite an impact for a photographer who wasn't even showing this month in Portland.
Once I started thinking about Vos's photos, however, I began to notice other artists exhibiting this fall who also combine images and explore overlapping ideas: the photo weavings of Dinh Q. Lê, *Monuments and Memorials* at Elizabeth Leach Gallery; and Gary Burnley's *The Known World* at Blue Sky Gallery (both showing through October 2).

Imagining A World Without Us

Vos's untitled photographs are part of an ongoing series called the Dead Cities Project. Its first chapter, *Someday This Will All Be Gone*, debuted at Pushdot Studio in February 2020, but the exhibition was cut short due to the pandemic. The next chapter and exhibit is scheduled for 2022.
In all cases, Vos is imagining a world devoid of people, where their ruins are slowly retaken by nature. "It's not intended to be this sci-fi dystopian world," he explained. "It's more, 'Let's give the earth a chance to heal.'" Double-exposure photography was a way to show a kind of before and after. "In galleries, people would say, 'That's an interesting abandoned factory,' but they wouldn't take away the narrative. I started to think, 'How do I tell this story without having to explain the context constantly, and convey the story in the image itself without words?' This concept of wildlife returning was easier to convey when I was superimposing mountains and trees over the tops of abandoned buildings. People started to respond a lot more strongly to it, and to see there was a larger idea. It seemed like I struck a nerve with that."

Mike Vos's double-exposed Satsop nuclear cooling tower, as if swallowed up by time.

Vos grew up skateboarding and surfing in Santa Barbara before moving to Portland in 2004. Particularly as a skater, he grew accustomed to seeking out abandoned locations to ride. Fellow skaters have often given him ideas of not just where to skate but also where to take photos. But Vos's biggest inspiration comes from Alan Weisman's 2007 book *The World Without Us*, which encourages us to see a process of human decline that has already begun. Vos even had a dialogue with the author after sending Weisman his work.

"He said, 'You don't have to imagine a world that's crumbling. It already is," Vos explained. "You just have to go find it. It looks like you already are.' He's right. almost every major city has large, abandoned places."

All of which made one of Vos's other most arresting images, featuring a massive, nearly 500-foot-tall cooling tower from the Satsop nuclear power plant near Elma, Washington, a natural. In the double-exposure image, the trees seem to be saying that even a structure this large can be swallowed up in time.

The Satsop plant never opened for business. Drowning in debt, the project was mothballed on the eve of its completion. Vos is certainly not the first to photograph this mammoth building. One cooling tower provided the backdrop for the 2014 movie *Transformers 4: Age of Extinction*; another tower appeared in 2017's *Transformers 5: The Last Knight*. But the symbolism of its backstory was irresistible.

"We as humans have built these places that we think are too big to fail. Something as ambitious and gigantic as this, they probably thought it would provide so many jobs, so much power, that there's no way it was not going to work," Vos explained. "For it to not even open is surreal in a way, but also a little bit telling. We can't even think about our civilization failing."

Weaving Time and Memory

While Vos is relatively new to photography, artist Dinh Q. Lê has been exploring a different kind of double-image making for well over two decades. And while their approaches and motivations differ, each one's work makes me appreciate the other.
Lê was born in 1968 in Hà Tiên, a Vietnamese town near the Cambodia border. At the age of 10, with the Cambodian-Vietnamese War raging, his family emigrated to America by boat, but two of Lê six siblings were lost along the way. The artist received art degrees from the University of California, Santa Barbara (perhaps even crossing paths with Vos) and later the School of Visual Arts in New York; in the latter's MFA program, Lê first began the technique of cutting and weaving together photographs.

Details above, center, and below from Dinh Q. Lê's woven-images series "Monuments and Memorials." Images courtesy Elizabeth Leach Gallery.


DO NOT TOUCH!

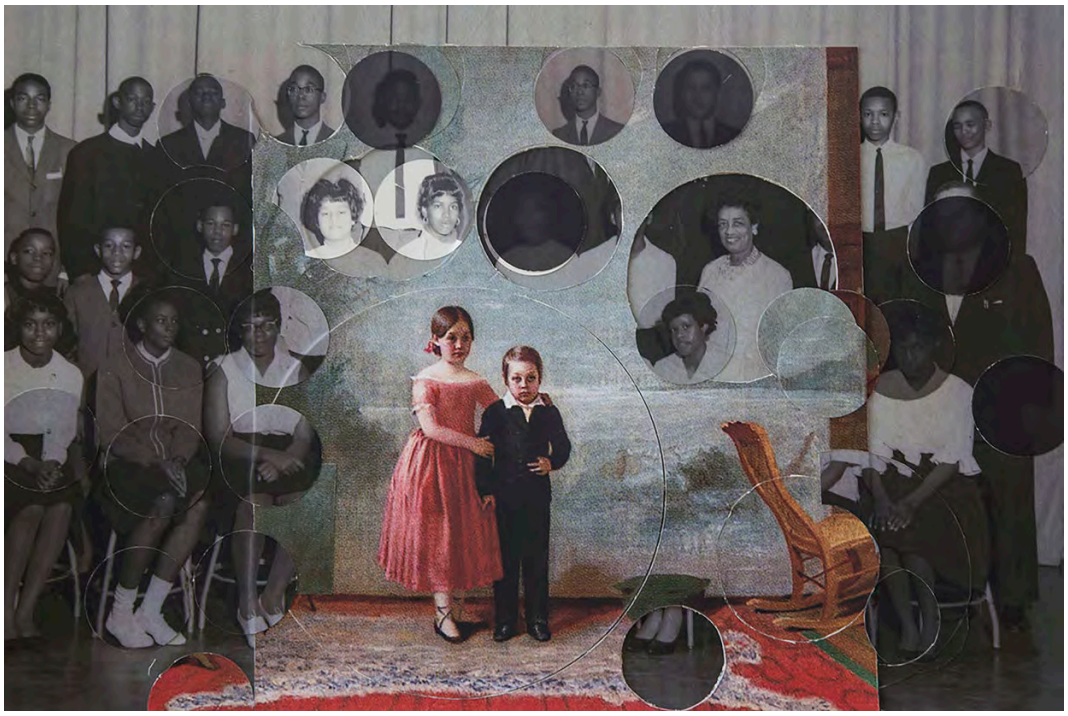
“He started doing the weavings because it was a way for him to take these multiple narratives and weave them together: his different personal experiences,” said Elizabeth Leach Gallery director Daniel Peabody. “But also his aunt had taught him grass-mat weaving. But it’s not necessarily a traditional weave structure. He’s making choices about which images to bring forward. You see different kinds of loops to make sure different details come to the fore. It creates this incredible texture. We always present them framed, but I get the privilege of handling them unframed. And they are like fabric. They have this fluidness to them.”

The multiple narratives Peabody mentions in *Monuments and Memorials* start with images of Angkor Wat, which Le actually photographed years ago and returned to during the pandemic, while Vietnam (where he now lives again) was under quarantine. “He’s this American citizen who lives back in Vietnam now. He’s been watching from afar the reckoning we’ve had with monuments and memorials, and what’s being glorified and what’s being taken away. In Cambodia, Angkor Wat is even on the flag,” Peabody said.

Woven in and out of those images are what at first appear as differently shaded geometric abstractions: solid bands of color that begin to destabilize and erode the pretty pictures of Angkor Wat monuments. Yet these portions of the photo weavings actually depict portions of the walls and floors at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh. “He talked about how during the rainy season, Angkor Wat’s volcanic stone goes into a more yellow, golden, orange color, and that that’s related to the color of the walls at the Tuol Sleng museum, as well as the bricks,” the gallery director added. “The brown and yellow are the two colors of the checkerboard floor, because it was an old high school that they had converted to a prison.”

If some of these squares are showing light on masonry at different times today, it makes the work about the passage of time in different ways: through the course of one day and over years or centuries. “It’s about time,” Peabody agreed, “and it’s about memory.”

Changing the Conversation



Gary Burnley, untitled photo collage, 2017. Courtesy Elizabeth Houston Gallery.

After setting out to write about Vos and Le, when I encountered the work of Gary Burnley it became clear that while the topic here is double-exposure, there's something about the rule of three.

Burnley is a collage artist, but his work is principally a marriage of two visual languages: classical paintings and historic photography, principally of Black citizens.

"The discipline of portraiture has historically been a grasping at social status and economic power, giving permanence to the idealized visions of beauty it describes. But Burnley imbues the medium with a doubly disruptive capacity, juxtaposing and overlapping imagery from different periods and sources, and softening their discrepancies with circular cutouts," Chicago photographer and writer Robyn Day explained in an essay for New York's Elizabeth Houston Gallery about Burnley's work, accompanying an exhibit there opening in February of this year. "Reframing an Ingres, Courbet, or Coypel, he populates their canvases with those who have been left outside the art historical canon, centering the lives of Black women, men, and children at the core of cultural dialogue."

Gary Burnley, "Mabel," 2016. Courtesy Elizabeth Houston Gallery.

Burnley, whose solo show at Blue Sky Gallery comes after being named in a Top 50 selection at the local Photolucida festival in 2020, was born in 1950 in St. Louis, Missouri. After earning fine-art bachelor's and master's degrees from Washington University and Yale University, he's

been a working artist since the late 1970s. But Burnley's artwork was particularly shaped in part by his experience returning to his hometown in the late 1980s as one of six artists chosen to be part of a design team for St. Louis's new light rail system, the MetroLink, which opened in 1993. "In travelling the city scouting station locations and routes, a flood of memories from my youth would come to me in the evening," Burnley explained by email. "After the project was complete, my studio work took a more intimate and personal turn. I began working with the bits and pieces of the memories that had returned. I have been working with collage in one form or another since, almost 20 years."

Gary Burnley, "Aunt Hagar's Children #3," 2020. Courtesy Elizabeth Houston Gallery.

His recent photo-collages come after years exploring historic stereographic cards and artwork, which helped him conceive a kind of otherworldly language marrying Black portraiture and classical imagery, all underscored by the notion of how people recognize images and their connotations differently. Burnley said he was after "an unpredictable, magical, real but not real, there-but-not-there quality. Instead of using two versions of the same image to produce a 3-D effect, I began combining contrasting images to produce another kind of hybrid image."
The Blue Sky exhibit's title may be *The Known World*, but the work, Burnley added, "is as much about exploring worlds I don't fully understand. I intended the title to imply a geographic metaphor. Black Americans learn to navigate the boundaries of worlds with both clear and not so clear borders. Identity is a key component in Western history's understanding of representation. Black Americans grow to accept the duality in our experience, the hidden ghosts

of contradiction lurking in how we are seen and how we view ourselves. My interest in collage, in physically joining images and portions of images, is ironically to see myself, my identity as one, complete and whole."

Gary Burnley's "Watson and the Shark 2020" incorporates images from John Singleton Copley's 1778 painting "Watson and the Shark," in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Courtesy Elizabeth Houston Gallery.

Breaking Through

Abandoned buildings dissolving into the encroaching natural world; the idealistic, awe-inspiring landmarks that societies build versus the brutal subjugation they carry out; humble photo-portraits from a marginalized community cut into beautiful historic paintings commissioned by history's most affluent power-holders: What do Vos, Lê and Burnley's artworks have in common, besides juxtaposing two types of imagery?

For starters, they seem united by the violence implied in the imagery: the bullet hole in the window, the torture of political prisoners, the exclusionary mistreatment of Black Americans. Yet all three artists find a kind of earned beauty, perhaps in part by exposing types of darkness to the light.

Of all things, I'm reminded of something that movie director Gus Van Sant told me in an interview for the *Christian Science Monitor* many years ago, on the occasion of his 2002 film *Gerry*. Though it starred two familiar Hollywood actors, Oscar winners Matt Damon and Casey Affleck, *Gerry* was the first of three straight films in which Van Sant explored long takes that were the antithesis of blockbusters, throwing hundreds of shots in succession at its audience. The director recalled the advice a film professor back at the Rhode Island School of Design had given him: "Cutting is a violence."

In that way, perhaps the juxtaposition of two basic images or image types in these double-exposures, photo weavings and collages is not just about the combined effect or the riffing of one image off another, but the transition itself, which can be violent but can also lead us to some kind of greater truth.

In recent years we've seen Portland and America at their best and worst, with unprecedented threats and disruptions to daily life and storms of misinformation threatening to drown out the real story. But these times also bring opportunities for breakthrough. Each artist is talented enough alone to merit our entire gaze. Yet taken together, the work has a collective, propulsive momentum: a waterfall that crashes through the bullet-ridden window.

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

ArtSeen

The Asia Society Triennial

By David Carrier, Yung-Wen (Mag) Yao, and Paul Gladston

The exhibitions *We Do Not Dream Alone*, the inaugural Asia Society Triennial, and *Dreaming Together* at the New-York Historical Society bring together works by over 40 artists selected from the collections of both institutions in a thoughtful and very welcome showcasing of the work of Asian and Asian-diasporic artists still underrepresented in mainstream Euro-American contexts. When we read about this ambitious two-part project—the first collaboration between the Asia Society Museum and the New-York Historical Society—we thought that perspectives from multiple reviewers were needed. At this moment, when the movement of people and even artworks is difficult, the mere existence of this two-museum show is a major accomplishment. We are immensely thankful to our colleagues at both institutions for providing essential support for our review of the first part, which had to be organized remotely.

Walk straight west from the Asia Society on New York's Upper East Side, go across Central Park, and then uptown seven blocks on the Upper West Side, and you get to the New-York Historical Society. This isn't a long walk, but though close geographically, these are very different institutions. The Asia Society's collection includes both contemporary and traditional art by artists of Asian identity, and it regularly organizes shows of Asian and Asian-diasporic, including Asian American, art. The New-York Historical Society holds a distinguished collection of American art and artifacts. *Dreaming Together* is an important opportunity for the New-York Historical Society to showcase works by artists of Asian identity in New York.

Starting with the Venice Biennale, first held in 1895, and continuing more recently with countless international surveys of contemporary art worldwide, including major biennales and triennales across the Asia-Pacific region such as those of Shanghai, Gwangju, Taiwan, Busan, and Sydney, large-scale international exhibitions have become an enduring and important art world ritual. Announced themes of "urban and natural environments," "protest and rebellion," "individuals and identities," and "borders and crossings" at the New-York Historical Society show strike familiar notes. But what's distinctive about *We Do Not Dream Alone* and *Dreaming Together* is their shared and timely concern with anti-Asian xenophobia as well as wider issues of disadvantage and exclusion raised by the Black Lives Matter movement. Appropriately, the titles of the exhibitions are derived from a passage in the Japanese-born Yoko Ono's book *Grapefruit* (1964): "A dream you dream alone may be a dream, but a dream two people dream together is a reality." There are further titular resonances with the group known as the "Dreamers": migrants to the USA protected by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals act, and by association the contested idea of the "American Dream."

At the New-York Historical Society, standout juxtapositions include the proximity of Huang Yan's *Chinese Shan-Shui (landscape)—Tattoo* (1999), showing a body seemingly tattooed with a representation of a traditional Chinese landscape painting, and Thomas Cole's 19th-century luminist epic, "The Course of Empire" (1833-1836), reflective of contemporaneous fears that America's Eden-like pastoralism would eventually be overrun (as perhaps it now is) by the decadence of empire. Resonant between the two is a shared trans-cultural desire to arrive at a harmonious reciprocity between humanity and nature. Equally notable, not least because of their sheer, presumably ironical, scale, are hanging scrolls by Dinh Q. Lê featuring distorted images of the World Trade Center in flames on 9/11 (2016), the significance of which also riffs on Cole's paintings.

Dinh Q. Lê, *Scrolls 1 and 4 from WTC from Four Perspectives*, 2016. Two C-print scrolls (exhibition prints, 2020). Asia Society, New York. Exhibition prints courtesy of the artist © Dinh Q. Lê. Photo: Perry Hu © Dinh Q. Lê.

At the Asia Society Museum, Xu Bing and Sun Xun's individual responses to the American Declaration of Independence will almost certainly be an epiphany for many viewers. Both make references to the under-discussed impact of Chinese thinking on ideas developed by the US's "founding fathers" during the 18th century. Xu Bing's *Silkworm Book: The Analects of Confucius* (2019), a work using threads woven by silkworms as an intervention with a printed copy of the Chinese classic text the *Analects*, and Sun Xun's *July Coming Soon* (2019), an interpolation of Americana into the format of a traditional literati-Confucian landscape, also resonate with Daoist ideas of a spontaneous reciprocity between culture and nature as well as the hubris of over-rationalizing human intervention.

Ghiora Aharoni's *Thank God for Making Me a Woman, III* (2019) features an assemblage comprising Islamic religious jewelry and a muslin robe worn traditionally by men in India, with the eponymous phrase hand-embroidered on its interior in a mash-up of Hindi, Urdu, Hebrew, and Arabic; it is spectrally emblematic of the shifting cultural cross-currents running through these exhibitions. Similar entanglements also pervade Australia-based artist Nasim Nasr's video *33 Beads (unworried) #1* (2018), which deconstructs, while paradoxically highlighting,

the differing/intersecting cultural significance of beads used in conjunction with prayer, contemplation, or distraction from worry.

The Asia Society show's sheer diversity and the quality of individual works is certainly impressive, though audiences less familiar with Asian art may have gained greater insights from a sharper focus on specific themes common to works by a smaller group of artists. The New-York Historical Society's strategy of juxtaposition points successfully to durable similarities as well as differences between the visual cultures of Asia and Euro-America while also drawing attention to pressing present-day concerns with social justice. Questions also remain, however, as to just how accessible the particular cultural contexts and significances of the "Asian" works included in *Dream Together* have been made to visitors, and indeed, to what extent a unifying trans-institutional attention to current political struggles, no matter how important and pressing, serves to overwrite those contexts and significances.

Exhibitions representative of particular cultural identities face an inescapable dilemma. Cultural identities can no longer be considered as "pure" or "isolated;" they are more open and fluid than ever before, intersecting with each other through the intense global connectedness of everyday life. This is highlighted by contemporary art where diverse cultural elements give shape to distinct lived realities while conspicuously informing creativity in a now globalized context. An emphasis on cultural distinctiveness may make for clarity but may also downplay the complexity of less definable trans-cultural resonances. Attempts to reconcile the two are hugely problematic and, indeed, politically loaded. It would be invidious to find too much fault with *We Do Not Dream Alone* and *Dreaming Together* for their entanglement in that dilemma. It is with respect to these intractable tensions—as well as others between clarity and complexity of messaging—running through both exhibitions that their most telling significance lies. As Yoko Ono suggests, the idea that no one is dreaming entirely alone is grounded in the reality of intersections between differing individuals and cultures.

Contributors

David Carrier
taught philosophy in Pittsburgh and art history in Cleveland. He is writing a book about Maria Bussmann.
Yung-Wen (Mag) Yao

Yung-Wen (Mag) Yao is an Assistant Professor in Critical Theory and Cultural Studies at TaTung University, Taipei, Taiwan. Her research focuses on relationships between contemporary art and Chinese soft power.

Paul Gladston is the inaugural Judith Neilson Professor of Contemporary Art at the University of South Wales, Sydney. He has written extensively about contemporary art in/from the People's Republic of China and the Asia-Pacific region with specific regard to the concerns of critical theory.

https://brooklynrail.org/2021/02/artseen/Asia-Society-Triennial

ARTnews

ARTnews in Brief: Bangkok Art Biennale Names Partial Art List for 2020 Edition—and More from November 12, 2019

BY ***The Editors of ARTnews*** POSTED **11/11/19 5:28 PM**

Tuesday, November 12, 2019
Bangkok Art Biennale Reveals Partial Artist List

The **Bangkok Art Biennale** has named 16 international artists who will participate in its second edition, which will open in the Thai capital on October 10, 2020. The first group announced includes Anish Kapoor, Dinh Q. Lê, Leandro Erlich, Julia Fullerton-Batten, Thanet Aowsinsiri, and Lu Yang. The presentation's theme will be "Escape Routes," with a focus on environmental, social, and political issues. The artists "will offer art practice as mind escapism where meditation, contemplation, ritualism, healing, and performance become the essence of hope and optimism," Apinan Poshyanada, artistic director of the exhibition, said in a statement. The biennale's curatorial team includes Sook-Kyung Lee, senior curator of international art at the Tate Modern in London; Wutigorn Kongka, assistant professor in the departments of architecture and fine art at King's Mongkut Institute of Technology Ladkrabang in Bangkok; and Ong Puay Khim, former deputy director of curatorial programs at the NTU Centre for

How a Landmark Show by LGBTQ Artists in Thailand Is Sowing the Seeds of Tolerance Across the Region

news.artnet.com/exhibitions/lgbt-exhibition-bangkok-thailand-1715448

November 26, 2019

Sunil Gupta, *The New Pre-Raphaelites #5* (2007). Collection of Sunpride Foundation. Image courtesy of artist.

The Bangkok Art and Culture Center in Thailand has opened a historic exhibition of LGBTQ-themed art. On view through March 2020, the show is the largest-ever survey of regional contemporary art that engages with the history of the LGBTQ community in Southeast Asia.

Curated by a team led by Chatvichai Promadhattavedi, the exhibition emphasizes shifting social frameworks and challenges to established norms, while promoting tolerance and conversations that are sometimes taboo in the region. It presents works by more than 50 artists from Thailand, India, and China, many of whom identify as LGBTQ.

“For the wider region, our neighbors in Southeast Asia will see that Bangkok is doing a

major art exhibition on the LGBT theme, signifying its acceptance," Promadhattavedi tells Artnet News. "Hopefully, our neighbors might then consider it safe for them to venture into it, too."

Thailand is considered to have a higher level of tolerance for the LGBTQ community than many other Asian countries. Yet while Bangkok is recognized as a generally gay-friendly city, exclusionary practices and discrimination are not uncommon.

The curator hopes that governments will recognize that the tourism, banking, and finance industries could be boosted by the projection of a "reasonable and tolerant" international image. Since the exhibition opened on November 23, it has received nearly 6,000 visitors, including those coming from schools.

Cindy Aquino, *Bond* (2013). Collection of the artist, image courtesy of artist.

The exhibition, titled "Spectrosynthesis II—Exposure of Tolerance: LGBTQ in Southeast Asia," is making its second stop on a tour that began at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Taipei in 2017. It is sponsored by the Sunpride Foundation, an organization dedicated to promoting the creative history of the LGBTQ community.

"I look forward to seeing how the exhibition will encourage greater discussion and foster

"I look forward to seeing how the exhibition will encourage greater discussion and foster a more equitable world for the LGBTQ community and their allies," the foundation's executive director, Patrick Sun, said in a statement.

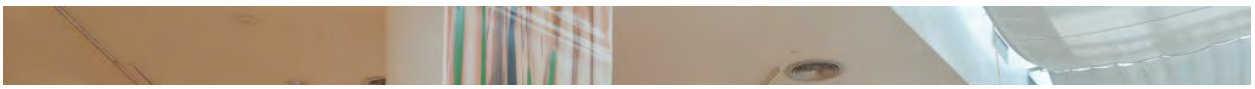
The show includes new commissions from artists such as Balbir Krishan, David Medalla, Arin Rungjang, Anne Samat, and Chov Theanly, which are on view alongside works by Danh Vō, Ren Hang, and Dinh Q. Lê.

One of the works on view, by the Thai artist Jakkai Siributr, features three large-scale textile works patterned with geometric motifs that play on the pink triangles used by the Nazi party to identify and shame "homosexuals." The symbols in Siributr's *Quilt Project* (2019) have since been reclaimed by the gay community as a symbol of pride.

Meanwhile, Arin Rungjang, who represented Thailand in the 2013 Venice Biennale, is presenting a new video installation inspired by his childhood fascination with a transsexual acquaintance.

See installation views of the exhibition below.

Installation view of "Spectrosynthesis II—Exposure of Tolerance: LGBTQ in Southeast Asia," on view at the Bangkok Art and Culture Center in Thailand through March 1, 2020. Image courtesy of Bangkok Art and Culture Center and Sunpride Foundation.



Installation view of “Spectrosynthesis II—Exposure of Tolerance: LGBTQ in Southeast Asia,” on view at the Bangkok Art and Culture Center in Thailand through March 1, 2020. Image courtesy of Bangkok Art and Culture Center and Sunpride Foundation.

Installation view of “Spectrosynthesis II—Exposure of Tolerance: LGBTQ in Southeast Asia,” on view at the Bangkok Art and Culture Center in Thailand through March 1, 2020. Image courtesy of Bangkok Art and Culture Center and Sunpride Foundation.

Installation view of “Spectrosynthesis II—Exposure of Tolerance: LGBTQ in Southeast Asia,” on view at the Bangkok Art and Culture Center in Thailand through March 1, 2020. Image courtesy of Bangkok Art and Culture Center and Sunpride Foundation.

“Spectrosynthesis II—Exposure of Tolerance: LGBTQ in Southeast Asia” is on view at the Bangkok Art and Culture Center in Thailand through March 1, 2020.

Follow artnet News on Facebook:

Want to stay ahead of the art world? Subscribe to our newsletter to get the breaking news, eye-opening interviews, and incisive critical takes that drive the conversation forward.

Komkrit Tepthian, *Giant Twins* part of the Bangkok Art Biennale 2018, at the Wat Arun temple in Bangkok. Photo: Jewel Samad/AFP/Getty Images.

Contemporary art may not the first thing most people associate with Bangkok, but Thailand's capital city is hoping the inaugural Bangkok Art Biennale will change all that.

Although the three-month event was announced at the Venice Biennale in 2017, this sprawling affair has a few key differences from the so-called "Art-World Olympics." Most importantly, admission is free (tickets to the Venice Biennale will run you about $28), and the art is peppered across more than 20 locations around the city, including the landmark East Asiatic Building, the temples of Wat Pho, Wat Arun, and Wat Prayoon, and inside a shopping mall.

Yayoi Kusama's installation at Bangkok Art Biennale 2018. Photo: Jewel Samad/AFP/Getty Images.

The citywide art extravaganza is composed of more than 200 works made by 75 international artists from 33 countries, and around half of the artists are Thai. The biennial managed to nab art stars like Elmgreen & Dragset, Marina Abramović, and Yayoi Kusama as participants, and it counts the Guggenheim's Asian Art Curator Alexandra Munroe and artist Rirkrit Tiravanija as advisers.

If the marquee artists help get people through the doors, organizers also hope the event will bolster local artists and the country's contemporary art scene. In a statement, artistic director Dr. Apinan Poshyananda said the Bangkok biennale's emphasis on local artists will offer visitors a different perspective on contemporary art: "Looking into the contemporary art in the West, I feel it is so stagnant and jaded. This can only be a response from the plaguing presence of uncertainty, terrorism, Brexit, the economy, and fear. Come to Bangkok and go beyond bliss."

The Bangkok Art Biennale runs through February 9, 2019. See pictures from the inaugural event below.

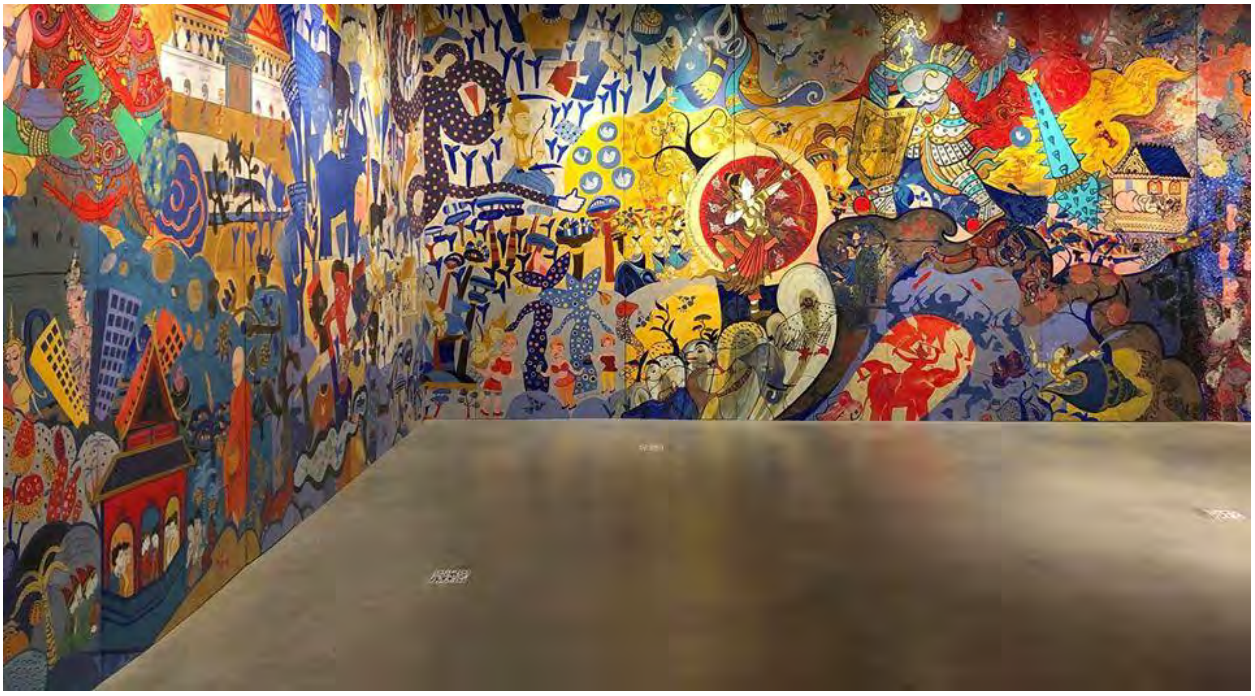
Nino Sarabutra's 'What Will We Leave Behind,' part of the Bangkok Art Biennale 2018, at the Wat Prayurawongsawas Waraviharn temple in Bangkok . Photo: Jewel Sawad/AFP/Getty Images.

Aurèle Ricard, *Malong* (2018). Courtesy of the Bangkok Art Biennale.

Choi Jeong Hwa, *Basket Tower* (2018) at the Bangkok Art and Culture Center. Courtesy of the Bangkok Art Biennale.

Marina Abramovic, “Method.” Courtesy of the Marina Abramovic Institute, Benaki Museum. Photo: Pano.

Huang Yong Ping, *Zuo You He Che* (2005–06). Photo courtesy of the Bangkok Art Biennial.



Hooptam Lao-Thai, *The Adventure of Sinxay* (2018). Courtesy of the Bangkok Art Biennale.

Alex Face & Souled Out Studios,*MEMORY HOUSE* (2018) detail. At the Bank of Thailand Learning Center. Courtesy of the Bangkok Art Biennale.

Elmgreen & Dragset, *Zero* (2018) at the East Asiatic Building. Courtesy of the artist and Bangkok Art Biennale.

Pannaphan Yodmanee, *Sedimentations of Migration* (2018) at various locations. Courtesy of the Bangkok Art Biennale.

Lee Bul, *Diluvium* (2018) at the East Asiatic Building. Courtesy of the Bangkok Art Biennale.

Stills from Kawita Vatanajyankur, *The Spinning Wheel*, *Untangled*, and *Dye* (2018) at the Peninsula Bangkok. Courtesy of the Bangkok Art Biennale.

Follow artnet News on Facebook:

Want to stay ahead of the art world? Subscribe to our newsletter to get the breaking news, eye-opening interviews, and incisive critical takes that drive the conversation forward.

Caroline Goldstein

Editorial Assistant

The New York Times

ART & DESIGN | ART REVIEW

Southeast Asia Stakes Its Claim in the Art World

By JASON FARAGO SEPT. 27, 2017

Until recently — the 1990s, let's say — an American critic keeping tabs on new art would concentrate on New York's museums and galleries; cast an occasional, often dismissive eye on Western Europe; and perhaps try to visit Los Angeles now and again. No longer. By the '90s the idea of a single avant-garde was dead and buried, and in its place arose a pluralist art ecosystem that spans the planet. It makes larger intellectual demands than ever, and requires us to accept that we'll never see everything or understand it completely. In the new global art world, even we New Yorkers are provincials.

Perhaps nowhere benefited as much from this shift to a pluralist art world as Asia, where the 1990s saw an explosion of biennials and triennials. The Gwangju Biennale, Asia's most important such exhibition, began in 1995 in South Korea, and

was soon followed by large-scale shows in Shanghai, Taipei, Fukuoka, Yokohama, Singapore, Jakarta, and a half dozen other Asian megacities — all of which introduced Asian audiences to foreign art and pushed their own region's figures to the international forefront. In these exhibitions, as well as in the new museums and art schools that arose around them, traditional styles of painting, drawing, pottery or calligraphy fell by the wayside, and installation, video and performance served as lingua franca.

The art in "After Darkness: Southeast Asian Art in the Wake of History," at the Asia Society on Park Avenue, is the fruit of this global shift. The work here comes from Indonesia, Myanmar (or Burma) and Vietnam, though with just seven artists and one collective, it's small enough to avoid the curse of the "regional show" and doesn't force any unity on a diverse lineup. Not every work here is a masterpiece, but all of them plumb the roiling past and fractured present of places that, with a combined population of nearly 400 million, we have no excuse to be clueless about.

The most internationally prominent artist here is Dinh Q. Le, who immigrated to the United States as a child and returned to Vietnam in 1993. His enlightening project "Light and Belief" (2012) unites 70 ink drawings and watercolors, which the artist collected from elder figures at work during the Vietnam War, with a long, lightly animated video in which Mr. Le interviews these older artists about the social role of art before the biennial age.

"Uncle Ho highly regarded the arts," says one of these older painters, referring to the party leader Ho Chi Minh. "The artist must also be a warrior," another recalls. Mr. Le's video forces a reconsideration of the proficient but academic works on paper he has collected: a woman in a conical straw hat, say, or a soldier disguised amid dappled trees. "Light and Belief" also, rather brilliantly, reintroduces ignored chapters of Vietnamese art — which looks regressive to us now, but was resolutely "modern" in the art schools established by the French colonial regime — to global institutions that have little understanding of them.

The war locally termed the "Resistance War Against America" also informs the regretful art of the Vietnamese collective known as the Propeller Group. In a two channel video, "The Guerrillas of Cu Chi" (2012), we see a 1963 propaganda film set at the Cu Chi tunnels, the underground passageways outside Ho Chi Minh City used by the Vietcong. (The soldiers there, an enthusiastic narrator declaims, "were never afraid of hardships and always found ways to kill Americans.") Across the gallery is a second, slow-motion video, shot at the tunnels today; the grounds above have been converted into a shooting range for tourists, and gleeful Americans spend $1 to fire AK-47s while their friends capture the fun on their phones.

"The Dream," another work by the Propeller Group, consists of a half-complete Honda Dream motorcycle, of the kind used to skip through Hanoi's wild traffic. But its wheels, engine, seat, and even pedals are missing; the body stands denuded, an uncanny object more sculpture than vehicle. The parts were snatched, we see in an

accompanying video, by thieves in just a single night. As in China, nominally communist Vietnam has embraced brakes-off turbocapitalism, and the old dream of society has been picked clean.

The Burmese artists here have an even more direct engagement with local political circumstances. Htein Lin, a dissident from Yangon, turned to art not while visiting some international exhibition — Myanmar is among the poorest countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and was essentially closed to foreign influence until the 2010s — but rather during a six-year spell in prison. His ghostly installation, "A Show of Hands," features hundreds of white plaster casts of raised right hands, each one an index of a political prisoner like himself. What makes the work more than an easy ode to people power is the associated video, in which we watch Mr. Htein Lin cast the hands of monks, journalists, poets, and youth activists, each of whom recounts their past run-ins with the military dictatorship with surprising lightness.

F.X. Harsono, perhaps the most prominent artist in contemporary Indonesia, is represented here by both earlier sculptural installations that took direct aim at the Suharto regime, as well as a more recent video. "The Voices Are Controlled by the Powers," from 1994, consists of more than a hundred carefully arrayed wooden masks, but they've been chopped in half; their mouths are cut off and piled in the center. From the title on, it's about as direct a protest against free speech as you can make without just hoisting a placard.

"Writing in the Rain," a performance filmed in 2011, shows Mr. Harsono writing his name in Chinese characters on a pane of glass, only for his calligraphy to be wiped away by streams of water; as the downpour continues he keeps it up, and the ink spills to the floor. (The artist is ethnically Chinese, a minority in Indonesia.) To a western critic like me, the gesture reads as an obvious reboot of Marcel Broodthaers's noted 1969 film "La Pluie," in which he hopelessly attempts to write poetry in a rainstorm, but where that Belgian provocateur proposed an art unfixed from clear meaning, Mr. Harsono's political gesture could not be clearer, or more locally focused.

It isn't wrong to criticize art as blunt as this, in which symbols function not as elements in a complex, imaginative system, but in strict one-to-one correspondence with political or social ills. Yet what works in New York may not work in Jakarta, and while we now have to evaluate art at a global scale, we also have to study the particular circumstances in which "global" contemporary art took root in local cases. In these three countries, an outward-facing practice of "contemporary art" marched in step with local reform movements, engaged with free speech, economic fairness and multiparty democracy. If some artists in this show seem to be speaking a bit too literally, that may be because influencing local audiences was a more urgent calling than winning the approbation of far-off western institutions.

And part of reckoning with a global art world is expanding one's tolerance for

things we don't understand. It means more looking, more reading, and more sympathy too — sympathy for art that may not resemble what we most like, and of which our mastery can only be fragmentary. If, as the Chinese artist and dissident Ai Weiwei has asserted, contemporary art is a kind of freedom, then our need to appreciate this art has only increased now that Indonesia and Myanmar, as well as Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines, are taking an antidemocratic turn. That may be a more important vocation than hunting in vain for a single avant-garde in a world as large as ours**.**

After Darkness: Southeast Asian Art in the Wake of History
Through Jan. 21 at Asia Society; asiasociety.org

INTERNATIONAL ARTS

The Artist Dinh Q. Le Expands His Gaze to Worlds Beyond Vietnam

By AMY QIN OCT. 1, 2015

TOKYO — The video opens on a Japanese man in a World War II-era uniform, lying in the grass. Later he runs through a forest with a rifle strapped to his back, then crawls on his elbows among tall reeds, stalking an imaginary enemy. He sings love ballads at a karaoke bar and shows off his collection of military uniforms to no one in particular. Dressed as a bartender, he talks about Japan's role in World War II, about the Vietnam War and his interest in battlefield re-enactments.

"We Japanese lost the war," he says to the camera. "That's a simple fact. But why did we? Why did we start that war? No one has discussed this for 70 years. War is evil. That's about it. But why?"

The video, by the artist Dinh Q. Le, is titled "Everything Is a Re-Enactment." Yet throughout its 26 minutes, a viewer is also questioning: Is this real or staged? Why is the man always alone?

The uncertainty is intentional. The mutability of history, memory and human experience has been a recurring theme of Mr. Le's work. The artist, 47, has often brought this preoccupation to explorations of the war in Vietnam, where he was born. "Everything Is a Re-Enactment," one of two new works being presented in a solo exhibition, "Dinh Q. Le: Memory for Tomorrow," at the Mori Art Museum in

Tokyo, represents an expansion of his gaze to regions beyond Vietnam and the United States.

The show, which runs through Oct. 12, is Mr. Le's first large-scale exhibition in Asia. It is also the first time that the Mori, which focuses on midcareer Asian artists, has put the spotlight on a Southeast Asian artist, and is only its second major show since it reopened in April after extensive renovation.

"Before this exhibition, I was kind of concerned that some people might be offended by this new piece," said Natsumi Araki, a curator at the Mori who organized the exhibition, "because it looks a little right-wingish with its focus on this guy in a military uniform. But people have shown a lot of interest in the piece. It gives us a lot of clues in terms of discussing our past from different angles."

With its overall emphasis on wartime memory and reflection, the exhibition comes at a particularly apt time in Japan. For several months countries around the world have been marking the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, sometimes, as in China and South Korea, criticizing Japan for what they see as the government's refusal to fully come to terms with its history of aggression.

While the Japanese government has expressed remorse for what Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called the "immeasurable damage and suffering" inflicted during the war, Mr. Abe has also appointed right-wing revisionists to some government posts and has paid visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine, where Class A war criminals are memorialized along with millions of other war dead.

Mr. Le himself has visited the shrine, out of curiosity about the growing right-wing movement in Japan, since 2009, when he was doing a residency in Tokyo. It was during a visit last year that he came across a group of men dressed as World War II soldiers.

His eye was drawn to one of the younger men, who seemed to be lagging behind the group. That is how he met the subject of his video, a 40-year-old bartender named Nakaura Yoichi.

"Here is somebody who is very curious about Japan's World War II history but

has found it difficult to find places where people are willing to talk about it openly and in a balanced way," Mr. Le said in an interview. "The shrine is one of the only communities where he can have this conversation. Unfortunately, it's all from a very problematic perspective."

Problematic perspectives abound in the show. The opening piece, "The Farmers and the Helicopters," is perhaps the most notable of the 25 works presented here. In this three-channel video from 2006, the image of the helicopter as a symbol of military strength is undercut as Mr. Le juxtaposes parts of Hollywood movies, news footage and interviews with Vietnamese who, understandably, have different views of an aircraft that often terrorized them from above. Installed alongside the projection is a helicopter built from scratch by a young Vietnamese mechanic, who is interviewed in the video, and a friend.

Reviewing a show by Mr. Le at the Museum of Modern Art in 2010, Holland Cotter of The New York Times called the video "remarkable" for "its visually tight and ideologically porous weave of fact and fiction, memory and illusion, with the elements of each pair in constant, volatile interchange."

Elsewhere at the Mori, the artist uses editing to challenge other war-related stereotypes. In "From Father to Son: A Rite of Passage" (2007), he splices together scenes from the 1979 film "Apocalypse Now," starring Martin Sheen, and the 1986 film "Platoon," starring Charlie Sheen, so that father and son, both of whom play American soldiers in Vietnam, appear to be speaking to each other.

Mr. Le said he first envisioned a piece about the relationship of fathers, sons and war in the late 1980s, during a course he took about the Vietnam War while studying for his undergraduate degree at the University of California, Santa Barbara. His family had fled to Southern California from war-torn Vietnam in the 1970s, and he was troubled by what he saw as the one-sided, America-centric history of the conflict that was being taught.

"Many of my classmates had fathers or relatives who participated in the Vietnam War, so the class was extremely emotional," he said. And while not hearing any Vietnamese views presented disturbed him, he said he "came to understand that this was the generation that was trying to understand and be closer to their fathers."

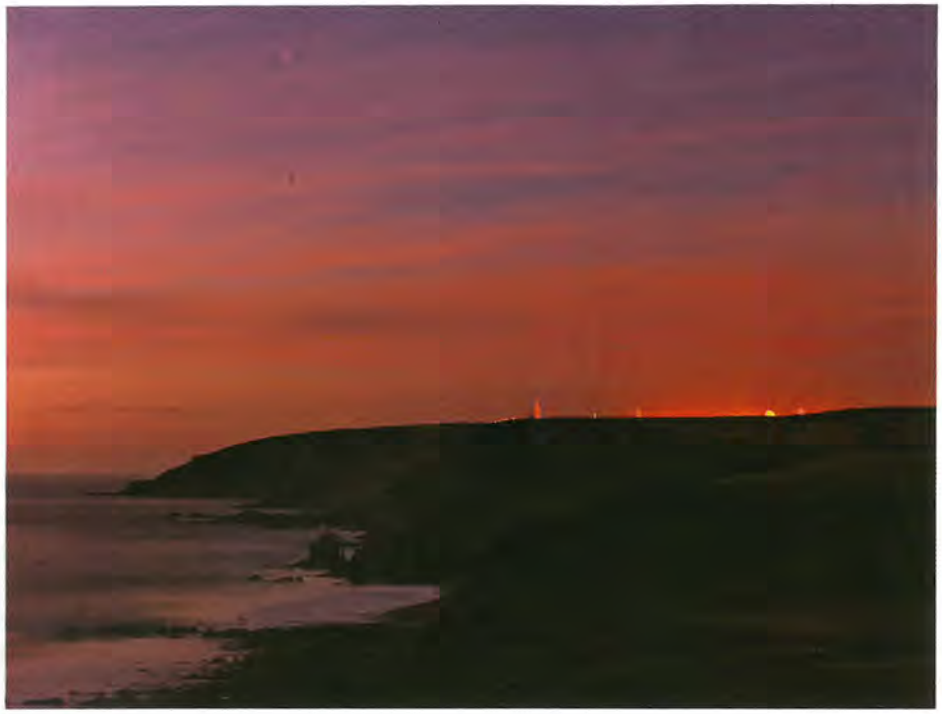
These days, having spent so much of his life trying to understand the past, Mr. Le is preparing to set aside the subject of war to address another matter of conflict: the scramble for natural resources and island territories. Inspired by what he called a “drama of absurdity, greed and human suffering” in the mid-19th century, he is planning a video installation dealing with what happened when a global craze for guano, a natural fertilizer made from bird droppings, led the United States to take possession of a cluster of islands off the coast of Peru. (The three-part installation is to be presented for the first time in January at the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham, England.)

Yet even with this new subject, he has discovered how the past reverberates in the present.

“It’s kind of similar to what China is doing in the South China Sea,” said the artist, who spent several weeks in Peru in August. “The U.S. wanted guano, and the Chinese want control of the energy resources and waterways. It’s just history repeating itself.”

A version of this article appears in print on October 2, 2015, in The International New York Times.

From left: **Trevor Paglen**, ***NSA/GCHQ Surveillance Base, Bude, Cornwall, UK*, 2014**, ink-jet print, 36 × 48". **Ming Wong**, ***Windows on the World (Part 1)*, 2014**, production still from the video component of a mixed media installation. Photo: Glenn Eugen Ellingsen.



FRANKFURT

"TREVOR PAGLEN: THE OCTOPUS"

FRANKFURTER KUNSTVEREIN · June 20–August 30 · Curated by Franziska Nori · "What you see is what you see," Frank Stella famously pronounced, but nothing could be further from the truth for Trevor Paglen, for whom what is seen is just the beginning. The New York–based artist's lush, technologically enhanced imagery reveals what is hidden—secret satellites suddenly appear like bright stars, classified military bases emerge as shining Babylons, drones manifest as tiny black blots in the sky—and yet such visualizations do not stop at some tautological objectivity. Rather, they mark a vast world of covert information beyond our reach. This exhibition presents twenty-five projects, including *Autonomy Cube*, 2014, which provides a zone of private, anonymized Internet access; documentation of Paglen's investigations; and a contest for the best photographs of "landscapes of surveillance" in Germany, from American NSA bases to embassies, inviting the public to join Paglen's never-ending hunt.
—*Michelle Kuo*

BEIJING

"MING WONG: NEXT YEAR"

ULLENS CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART · June 11–August 9 · Curated by Venus Lau · A native Singaporean currently based in Berlin, Ming Wong playfully reimagines cinema classics through a transcultural lens, populating the films of such directors as Wong Kar-wai, Ingmar Bergman, and Roman Polanski with "impostors"—usually the artist himself, or hired actors—and inverting the films' titles. Part homage, part satire, Wong's re-creations transform race, gender, and nationality into fluid categories of identification. In *Life of Imitation*, 2009, for example—the artist's contribution to the Fifty-Third Venice Biennale—three male actors of Chinese, Malay, and Indian descent, respectively, reenact an infamous scene from a Douglas Sirk melodrama in which a mixed-race daughter proclaims to her black mother, "I'm white. White!" For his first Beijing solo exhibition, the artist will fuse Alain Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1971), and Cantonese opera in two video and installation works commissioned by UCCA.
—*Fiona He*

TOKYO

"DINH Q. LÊ: MEMORY FOR TOMORROW"

MORI ART MUSEUM · July 25–October 12 · Curated by Araki Natsumi To escape the cross-border incursions of the Khmer Rouge, Dinh Q. Lê's family fled Vietnam for the US in 1978, when the artist was a boy. Lê has returned to his native country—he now lives in Ho Chi Minh City—and much of his work engages themes of place and memory, cross-cultural experience, history, and conflict. "Memory for Tomorrow," the first major solo exhibition by a Southeast Asian artist at the Mori, features more than twenty works made since the late '90s. These include several photo-tapestries—Lê's contemporary spin on traditional Vietnamese grass mat weaving—digital prints; and multimedia installations, including *The Farmers and the Helicopters*, 2006, a three-channel video accompanied by a helicopter made entirely of scrap metal. The exhibition will also showcase a new video work commissioned by the Mori—a profile of a nightclub manager in southern Japan who spends his weekends reenacting the Vietnam War.
—*Weng Choy Lee*

BRISBANE

"ROBERT MACPHERSON: THE PAINTER'S REACH"

QUEENSLAND ART GALLERY | GALLERY OF MODERN ART · July 25–October 18 · Curated by Ingrid Periz · Since the 1970s, Brisbane-based artist Robert MacPherson has produced a diverse set of works that critically engage the materiality of painting, often employing a vernacular of the quotidian: Objects such as road signs, paintbrushes, shoes, and office stationery proliferate throughout his oeuvre. Over the years, critics and curators have cast MacPherson as an exemplar of Minimalism, abstraction, the archival impulse, and Conceptualism, but the meaning of his works has remained elusive. Perhaps answers will be found in "The Painter's Reach," MacPherson's first major museum survey in his hometown, an outing that will consist of more than sixty works, from acrylic paintings on canvas and Masonite to the artist's trademark assemblages in his "Frog Poem" series, 1982–. The catalogue will feature essays by Angela Goddard, curator Ingrid Periz, and Trevor Smith (who organized MacPherson's monumental exhibition at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in Perth back in 2001).
—*Charles Green*

Dinh Q. Lê

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY RUBEN LUONG

Weaving photographs, stockpiling relics and sifting through Vietnam's troubled past in Lê's home and studio near Ho Chi Minh City—a messy, modernist haven for the pursuit of his intense yet subtle practice

Dinh Q. Lê in his studio near Ho Chi Minh City weaving strips of glossy Fuji photographic paper for his new project.

Dinh Q. Lê's four-story home-studio is a 25-minute drive from the center of Ho Chi Minh City. It also happens to be a five-minute walk from the home of his aunt—the same aunt who taught Lê the grass-mat weaving techniques that he still uses today in his woven photographs. The area used to be controlled by communist forces at night, before the end of the American-Vietnam War in 1975, and was one of the most dangerous areas in which to live. Fifteen years ago, it was wetlands and rice fields, but a boom in construction has led to new residential areas trickling in from wealthier neighboring districts. Lê purchased two lots in the area nine years ago and worked with an architect to design the basic structure of his home. The other buildings on his street are colorful and have open balconies; the front facade of Lê's home is streamlined and minimalist, with clean, vertical window panels and a limestone-tiled exterior.

It rained heavily the night before I arrived, flooding the front gate and leaving the morning hot and muggy, typical of the rainy season in July. Entering the narrow outdoor foyer, we are flanked by exotic planters and ancient statues of deities, which seem to follow us as we walk into the garage. Buddha statues, in particular, inhabit every corner. To my right is a kneeling stone pair, carefully draped with regal Chinese scrolls. But the remainder of the garage is an extensive hodgepodge of stockpiled boxes and strewn supplies. Buried beneath the clutter are antique side tables, ornate urns and other unexpected treasures.

Lê's studio is located in an adjoining room, the door to which is obscured by the heap of paraphernalia. But before we take a closer look at his workspace, Lê is eager to show me his vast collection of antiques upstairs. As we climb, he warns me that it's a bit chaotic everywhere. He's been busy getting his current works ready before he leaves to celebrate his mother's 80th birthday in California, where he and his family moved in 1978. Lê, ten years old at the time, has always been at a crossroads, given his American upbringing and his Vietnamese heritage, prompting the elaborate photo weavings combining evocative Vietnamese and Western war images that he produced as a graduate student at the School of Visual Arts in New York.

Identity, memory and history are concepts that continue to permeate Lê's works and installations, but perhaps with a greater urgency since his homecoming to Vietnam in 1996. Of six siblings, he is the only one currently residing here. Meanwhile, he's been collecting as many Vietnamese artifacts as possible, perhaps to better reconcile with his past. What began as a simple endeavor to find everyday furniture for his home soon became a borderline hoarding and antique-collecting habit, turning Lê into the artist-historian hybrid he is today.

At the top of the stairs, we arrive at the central parlor that connects Lê's sleek kitchen to his living-room space. Hanging there is a framed photo weaving from his famous series "From Vietnam to Hollywood" (2003–05). In the series, Lê juxtaposes images by photojournalists with those from Hollywood movies about the American-Vietnam War, confronting and challenging very different depictions of the conflict.

Leaving the parlor, we pass through French doors and enter the spacious living room, where Lê likes to read and research. It is a museum of Vietnamese relics—a rooftop centerpiece from a demolished Vietnamese-Chinese pagoda rests on a side table near the entrance, while two dark-wood curio cabinets displaying an elegant menagerie of more than 200 ancient ceramics line the left wall. Lê speaks

with particular reverence of the deceptively contemporary-looking pieces created during the Ly dynasty that flourished in the 11th and 12th centuries. He reveals that he spends hours scouring an antique shop on Le Cong Kieu Street in the city center for these bygone treasures. Then, crossing to the other side of the room, he tells me the story behind the three wooden Buddha statues standing against the wall, which were buried after the Funan kingdom of southern Vietnam was ransacked by the northern Champa kingdom 1,500 to 2,000 years ago, adding earnestly that he loves to work surrounded by beautiful objects.

Lê's ability to trace the memory and history of each object indicates a narrative ingenuity, which is reflected in his installations. Stacks of books and papers are sprawled out on one end of the long antique table, including three piles of faded black-and-white photographs from before the American-Vietnam War. When Lê moved back to the land of his birth, he searched in vain for his own family photos, but later purchased eight boxes of stray ones. He used 1,500 of these to create a huge hanging quilt, *Mot Coi Di Ve* (1998). On the back of each lost photograph appears a quote from Vietnam's famous literary work, Nguyễn Du's *The Tale of Kiếue*, or from interviews with Vietnamese-Americans about the war, or from letters written by soldiers and their wives. More recently, photos from these same boxes were used in *Erasure* (2011), a multimedia installation in which the images were scattered throughout a bleak re-creation of a shipwreck.

Some of Lê's other antique finds indicate that his works are increasingly documentary in nature. For *Light and Belief* (2012), he helped produce a film featuring interviews with Vietnamese artists sent into battle. To accompany the film, he exhibited charcoal and watercolor sketches by these artist-soldiers. He delicately lays out the drawings for me, which are protected between layers of dilapidated Vietnamese newspapers from the 1990s. There are poignant scenes of militia activities in caves and youthful portraits of Vietnamese soldiers—the drawings will be displayed again at the 2013 Carnegie International, in Pittsburgh, beginning in October. Both *Erasure* and *Light and Belief* are testaments to Lê's commitment to preserving firsthand knowledge of the war. He explains that most Vietnamese are too fatigued to study it, preferring to move on, while the current government's strict control of information often distorts the truth to fit its version of past events.

These are ideas and issues that Lê consistently ponders whenever he's photo weaving in his downstairs studio, a plain, concrete-tiled room with a low platform built for these projects. Weaving can be a long process, depending on the complexity of the work. He has no assistants—he says that he is allergic to managing people—so his studio is very quiet, allowing him to meditate on future projects. He works in the evenings, from half past eight to three o'clock, or sometimes four o'clock, in the morning. The neighbors used to think he was crazy when they heard him closing his rickety automatic shutter gate so late at night.

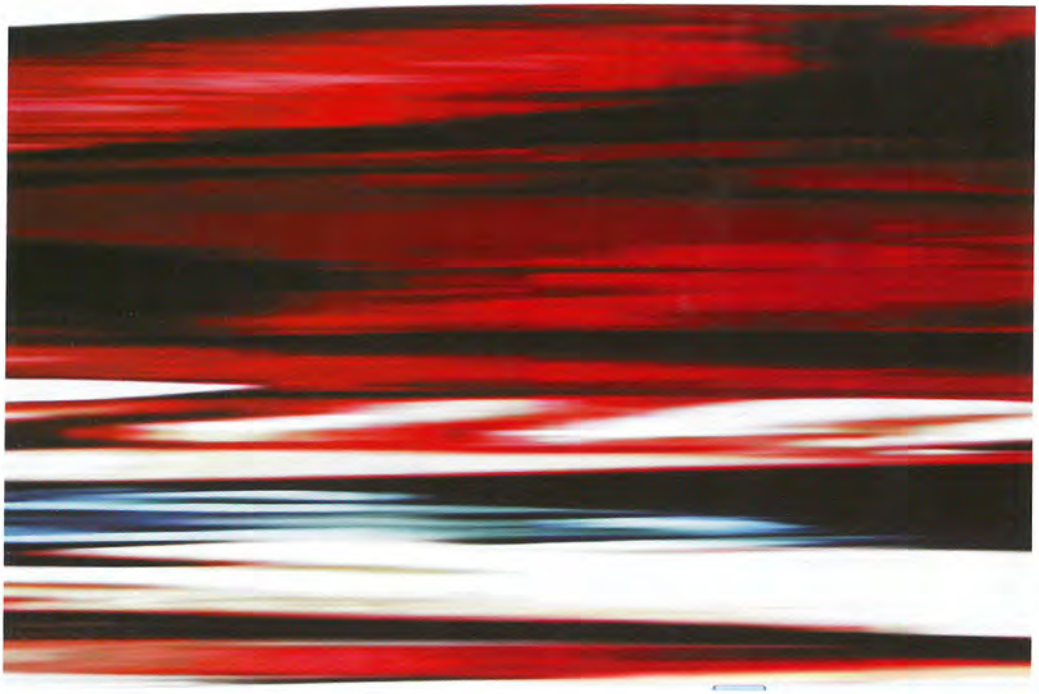
In his studio, Lê is in the process of weaving glossy photographic paper to test the effect for his current project. He throws down a woven mat directly in front of fastened black-and-white strips of paper, plops down and pulls the strips through roller-coasters of

(Opposite page, top)
History books, a collection of lost photographs and art supplies in Lê's living room.

(Opposite page, middle)
Lê's antique collection includes over 200 ancient ceramics.

(Opposite page, bottom)
Ancient statues of deities rest on the floor in Lê's studio.

(This page, top and bottom)
Lê presents old watercolor and charcoal portrait sketches from artist-soldiers in the American-Vietnam War.



(Top)
Computer detail of Lê's stretched version of US Army photographer Ronald L. Haeberle's iconic photograph of Vietnamese women and children before the My Lai Massacre of 1968.

(Bottom)
Rolls of large-scale Fuji photographic paper for Lê's latest project.

loops by hand and then tapes them in place. For this new project, Lê is creating a series that involves different treatments of four iconic war images direct-printed on large-scale Fuji photo paper. He spent the previous evening selecting the final images—including Malcolm Browne's famous photograph of a Vietnamese Buddhist monk immolating himself in the street in 1963—which he will transfer to a USB drive for processing at a local print shop.

Later, we look at the four images on his computer. The first of the treatments, Lê explains, is to weave the photos with RGB strips, breaking down their physical structures and rendering the basic colors of the images. The second treatment is to stretch the proportions and component colors of each of the four photos using Adobe Photoshop, afterward printing them on 50-meter rolls of photo paper that will cascade and oscillate from the ceiling. Lastly, he wants to expose rolls of light-sensitive photographic paper to the actual site of at least one of the original photographs. The paper will capture the light of the area and eventually turn black, but nevertheless manifest the physical memory of the original image at its exact location in Vietnam. These works are destined for an exhibition at the Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland, Oregon, at the end of September.

Lê's project is so cerebral that he almost struggles to articulate it. But it's precisely this kind of research and conceptual thinking, derived in part from his artistic education in the United States, that he wants to promote among young artists in Vietnam who have not had such opportunities and struggle with self-censorship.

In 2007, he co-founded Sàn Art gallery in Ho Chi Minh City to support budding local artists. The gallery later rolled out a residency program that recruits three young artists every six months to help them develop exhibitions. Lê mentions that one of the current resident artists has made an appointment to meet him here at his home this same week, in order to help flesh out an art proposal. These days, young artists are lucky to get mentorship from an artist of Lê's standing. Visiting his home-studio, they'll find inspiration in his words, and also, perhaps, from the many Buddhas at his side.

See our website for Arabic and Chinese versions of this article.
يمكنكم قراءة ترجمة عربية لهذه المقالة في موقعنا على الانترنت.
欲阅读此文章的中文版本请登陆我们的网站

The New York Times

October 10, 2013

Global Extravaganza, but on a Human Scale

By ROBERTA SMITH

PITTSBURGH — The 2013 Carnegie International is a welcome shock to the system of one of the art world's more entrenched rituals. This lean, seemingly modest, thought-out exhibition takes the big global survey of contemporary art off steroids.

With only 35 artists and collectives from 19 countries, the latest Carnegie says no to the visual overload and indigestible sprawl frequent to these exhibitions. It also avoids the looming, big-budget showstoppers — aptly called festivalism by the critic Peter Schjeldahl — for which they are known. Actually, the Carnegie all but leaves festivalism at the door: "Tip," the immense, shambling, cheerfully derivative barrier of wood, fabric, cement and spray paint by the British sculptor Phyllida Barlow, just outside the museum's main entrance, is probably the show's biggest single art object. Inside, almost nothing on view dwarfs the body, addles the brain or short-circuits the senses. It's just art. Did I mention that half of the artists are women?

The 2013 Carnegie has been organized by Daniel Baumann, the director of the Adolf Wölfli Foundation at the Kunstmuseum in Bern, Switzerland, and Dan Byers and Tina Kukielski, two Carnegie curators. It may contribute to its deviation from convention that the curators have little experience with big surveys and don't belong to the international curatorial cartel that circles the planet.

Their selections often evince a gratifying affinity for color, form, beauty and pleasure, and a lack of interest in finger-wagging didacticism. They have appended to their show an impressive newly installed display of Modern and contemporary works from the museum's permanent collection that highlights acquisitions from the previous Carnegie Internationals (and includes a boxy, tilted, very red and much stronger piece by Ms. Barlow).

The show itself accounts for much of the tangled strands of today's art, with emerging artists under 35 in the slight majority, and somewhat older ones adding ballast. There is space for occasional mini-retrospectives, including a sizable gallery filled with nearly 35 years of text pieces, photo works and bright, diminutive riffs on Russian Constructivism by the mercurial Conceptualist Mladen Stilinovic. A group of 19 increasingly robust paintings by Nicole Eisenman traces the evolution of her incisive reinterpretations of early Modernist figuration

and mingles with new plaster sculptures. For example, “Prince of Swords,” a large male figure with hands blackened by an overused smartphone sits on a plinth usually occupied by plaster casts in the museum’s collection.

A cache of 57 undulant visionary landscapes by the American Joseph Yoakum (1890-1972) and 10 finely textured, scroll-like drawings of phantoms by the Chinese Guo Fengyi (1942-2010) — both formidable outsider artists — are included as if it were no big deal. The distinction was rendered moot by the extraordinary insider-outsider pileup of “The Encyclopedic Palace” at the Venice Biennale. Yoakum may qualify as the greatest artist in this Carnegie simply because his art has stood the test of time the longest.

Outstanding among the less familiar artists are two Iranians. In the 1960s and ’70s, especially, Kamran Shirdel (born in 1939) made effortlessly structural, quietly subversive films, intended as propaganda, that were often banned by both the regime of the Shah, which commissioned them, and that of its Ayatollah successors. Rokni Haerizadeh, 40 years younger, lives in exile in Dubai and has an unerring gift — shaped by Persian painting and perhaps by Goya and Art Spiegelman — for reworking found photographs into disturbing, if often beautiful, animations. His subjects here include the 2009 Iranian demonstrations and Britain’s latest royal wedding.

Less expected is “The Playground Project,” a show-within-the-show organized by the Swiss writer and urban planner Gabriela Burkhalter. Its dense history of postwar playground design — possibly better as a book — culminates in a wonderful assortment of art from the Carnegie’s annual art camp for children. This summer’s used teaching plans devised by the artists Ei Arakawa and Henning Bohl, who also contribute a playground-focused video. Though the Carnegie has no stated theme, the excellent catalog places emphasis on play as essential to art and life; “The Playground Project” gives liberating experiential form to its thesis.

This Carnegie International exposes the supposedly great divide between object-oriented or, as some would have it, market-driven art, and activist, socially involved art and suggests that they are not nearly as mutually exclusive as often supposed. To one side are the audacious computer-generated abstract canvases of Wade Guyton and the equally innovative handmade plaster and casein tabletlike abstractions of Sadie Benning, as well as the richly colored sculptures of Vincent Fecteau, which negotiate a new literally convoluted truce between the organic and the geometric.

On the other are Mr. Arakawa and Mr. Bohl’s art-camp collaboration and the especially inspiring social activism of Transformazium, a three-woman collective that relocated to Braddock, just outside Pittsburgh, from Brooklyn six years ago, determined to make a difference. Their latest effort, part of the Carnegie show, is a permanent art-lending service in the library of this recovering town, stocked with works donated by the other artists in the

Carnegie, local residents and Transformazium friends across the country.

But the exhibition repeatedly illuminates the ground where form and activism overlap. In addition to the films and animations of Mr. Shirdel and Mr. Haerizadeh, this area includes Zoe Strauss's small, remarkably lively color photographs of local residents in Homestead, another struggling Pittsburgh-area town. Also here are Zanele Muholi's imposing black-and-white photo portraits of South African lesbians and transgendered people, and the striking welded steel assemblages of Pedro Reyes, from Mexico, which turn out to be amazing percussive instruments, even as you realize that they're made from deactivated guns. Henry Taylor's implacable paintings of African-Americans and Sarah Lucas's stuffed-pantyhose sculptures of brazen women are confrontational in both medium and message.

This exhibition attests to the health of object-making of all kinds and also to art-oriented activism, as in the Arakawa/Bohl art classes and Transformazium project — suggesting that play is the crucial, underlying connection. But it points up the hazards, if not laziness, of curatorial intervention and appropriation of other artists' art. Paulina Olowska has put on view some puppets from a once-flourishing Pittsburgh puppet theater; their intensity makes her photo-based paintings look wan. Gabriel Sierra paints the museum's Hall of Architecture deep purple to little effect, other than evoking the Brooklyn Museum's installation missteps. And Pierre Leguillon strews 30 pots by the great ceramic artist George E. Ohr (1857-1918) around a Hirst-like vitrine, along with Ohr's zany promotional photographs. This is not art, it's art abuse, especially painful since Ohr is as great as Yoakum, whose wall of drawings is adjacent.

The exception is a display of 100 pencil and ink drawings made by North Vietnamese artists during the Vietnam War that the Vietnamese artist Dinh Q. Le is presenting, accompanied by his poignant documentary about some who are still living. They speak for themselves on film, as do the quick, deft ink or pencil renderings of soldiers and civilians on the wall, which fuse Eastern and Western traditions with personal expression, functioning as document, artifact and art.

The 2013 Carnegie International remains on view through March 16 at the Carnegie Museum of Art, 4400 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh; (412) 622-3131, carnegieinternational.org.

The New York Times

August 12, 2010

Vietnamese Voices Against a Whir of War

By HOLLAND COTTER

Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times
"Projects 93: Dinh Q. Le" at the Museum of Modern Art includes a helicopter built from scratch, right, and a three-channel video by Mr. Le.

In slumberous mid-August thousands of visitors fidget and drift through the Museum of Modern Art, finding almost everything worth photographing and almost nothing worth more than a point-and-shoot glance. But in one gallery — basically a wide glorified corridor — people tend to stop, focus, even settle down in front of a three-channel video by the Vietnamese-American artist Dinh Q. Le projected across a long wall.

Titled "The Farmers and the Helicopters," the video is partly and spectacularly about the Vietnam War. We first see a panning shot of forests and rice paddies in aerial view. Then helicopters arrive, swarming, landing, lifting off, buzzing and shuddering through the sky, spewing men and rockets, crashing explosively, then rising to buzz some more. Classic shock and awe.

Interspersed with these noisy scenes are recent interviews with Vietnamese people. A former Vietcong soldier recalls how, more than 40 years ago, he shot at an American chopper to make it go away, and it did. A woman describes her first sight of an American helicopter around the same time. She was so disconcerted as it hovered over her that she could only look up at the pilot and smile.

A younger man, a self-taught mechanic named Tran Quoc Hai, speaks of his lifelong infatuation with such flying machines. He says that after studying old examples in Vietnam war museums and doing some Internet research he teamed up with a farmer friend and built a helicopter from

scratch, for commercial use, but also to serve as a positive symbol of his country in the contemporary world.

As it happens, we can see this symbol firsthand; it's installed in a gallery next to where the video is playing. And the two pieces constitute Mr. Le's solo show, part of MoMA's Projects series. Mr. Le was born in 1968 in South Vietnam, near the Cambodian border. The war that the Vietnamese call the American war was at full bore, though he has few personal memories of it. He does have memories, traumatic ones, of Khmer Rouge soldiers invading his hometown a decade later, at which point his family fled to Thailand and on to the United States.

They ended up in Southern California, where Mr. Le studied art, eventually earning an M.F.A. in New York City. In 1993 he returned to Vietnam for the first time and soon decided to stay. He now lives in Ho Chi Minh City, though, like many artists with thriving careers, he travels a lot.

In the 1990s Mr. Le became known internationally for ingeniously formatted photographic work that addressed his bicultural history. To create that work he gathered various kinds of pictures — family snapshots, outtakes from 1960s news documentaries, stills from Hollywood war films — and reprinted them all at the same size. He then cut the prints into thin strips and, using a traditional Vietnamese technique for making grass mats, wove the strips into composite images, in which real and fictional, personal and political, Vietnamese and American overlapped and coexisted.

As time went on, and postwar Vietnam became a tourist destination, he wove in corporate logos and references to Southeast Asian pop culture. The art that resulted was the product of sharp, complex critical thinking, about an Asian war whose history had been written almost exclusively by the West, about an Asian culture with which the West was for a time intimately and violently engaged, but about which it knew almost nothing.

Obviously there was fuel for a polemic here. For the most part Mr. Le steered clear of that, offering instead a distanced view of a cultural history that he had been born into, but, as an immigrant living away from it, had absorbed secondhand and primarily from an American perspective.

The MoMA exhibition, organized by Klaus Biesenbach and Cara Starke, is an extension and expansion of the photographic montage. The medium has changed, but the weaving continues. The video, with its rhythmically alternating images of past and present, is very much a woven thing. So, in its clunky, jerry-built way, is Mr. Tran's life-size helicopter.

Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times

Dinh Q. Le's video at MoMA, "The Farmers and the Helicopters," intersperses noisy war scenes with recent interviews with Vietnamese people.

Assembled from recycled scraps — a car seat, some tractor wheels, an engine salvaged from a Russian truck — it doesn't look sleekly sky-worthy, especially if compared to the Bell-47D1 helicopter that has long been a fixture of MoMA's design department. But it works, sort of. In an early test flight it lifted six feet off the ground. Its performance has improved since, but, more significantly, Mr. Tran's project has gained wide popular notice in Vietnam, where it is viewed as emblematic of the country's effort to move beyond the devastating war and forge something constructive from its heritage.

Many Westerners have yet to see Vietnam in this changed light. For them it is still a place defined by a war. And that war, though fought on Southeast Asian soil, remains very much a Western event: our war, our drama, our tragedy, our history, which may be one reason that MoMA audiences are so enthralled by the video.

Mr. Le is well aware of this proprietary attitude and takes steps in his video — on which he collaborated with two Vietnamese artists, Phu-Nam Thuc Ha and Tuan Andrew Nguyen — to shake it up. When first seeing the work's war scenes, we assume we're watching authentic documentary footage. Some of it is, indeed, authentic; but much is lifted from commercial films set during the Vietnam War.

Awareness of the discrepancy can be unsettling. Even when we know we're dealing with two different species of filmed reality, we may not be able, in practice, to distinguish examples of one kind from the other. So we're just left with doubt. And suddenly it's hard to know how to react to anything we're seeing.

In a video interview an older women describes how, during an air attack decades earlier, she tried to camouflage herself by tying branches to her body. Her comment is immediately followed by a surveillance-style view of someone hiding in tall grass that is churned up by propeller wind. Is this an illustrative clip from a documentary or from a movie?

And what's the reality quotient in a quick, blurry shot, taken from above, of a man who makes little beseeching bows as he holds up a child, like an offering, to an ascending helicopter? It would be comforting to take this heartbreaking vignette for a cinematic invention, though it probably isn't.

Uncertainty is the right attitude to bring to the study and writing of history. And it is, on the whole, the one Mr. Le brings to his art, and notably to his remarkable video, with its visually tight and ideologically porous weave of fact and fiction, memory and illusion, with the elements of each pair in constant, volatile interchange.

And certainty, in some measure, has its place too. In the guise of positive thinking, it has served Mr. Tran and his collaborator in a D.I.Y. helicopter enterprise well. That the first product of their labor is now on display in New York may be taken as proof. And that it is specifically at MoMA is the result of further certainty: the museum is sure enough of the strength and value of Mr. Le's art to have acquired the contents of his current show — gripping images, overhauled histories, Vietnamese voices — for its permanent collection.

"Projects 93: Dinh Q. Le" is on view through Jan. 24 at the Museum of Modern Art; moma.org.

Article link: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/13/arts/design/13dinh.html?ref=arts

ARTFORUM
JANUARY 2010 INTERNATIONAL

FUKUOKA, JAPAN

4th Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale

FUKUOKA ASIAN ART MUSEUM

Invoking community but largely devoid of the "community-oriented" art that has lately become ubiquitous, i.e., interactive and relational art, this fourth installment of the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale instead sought to explore the notions of *kyosei*, coexistence/symbiosis, and *saisei*, revival/reconstruction—expressed in English with the telling title "Live and Let Live: Creators of Tomorrow." Much of the work highlighted a subjective autonomy and self-expression that is often perceived as being at odds with ideas of community, perhaps closer in spirit to Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau's celebrated notion of a "radical and plural democracy." Yet even within the particularities of individual expression, there was frequently a direct and often eloquent display of social conscience and a pointed critique of power.

Higa Toyomitsu's *Akai-Goya* (The Red Bitter Gourd), 1970–72, powerful black-and-white photographs from his hometown of Okinawa—images of protests against the American military presence, off-duty soldiers in Ray-Bans, Japanese prostitutes, and the ramshackle towns on the island—conveys an unabashed sense of indignity and anger that's still palpable today. In a more guarded vein, Shahzia Sikander's video *Bending the Barrels*, 2008, features footage of a Pakistani military marching band, often decked out in full regalia and playing with evident gusto. Sikander's images slyly reveal—even without the help of the heavy-handed text placed over them—the threadbare symbolism of the military spectacle.

Perhaps the finest work along these lines is Dinh Q. Lê's six-and-a-half-minute, digitally created video *South China Sea Pishkun*, 2009, depicting helicopters plummeting one by one into the ocean. Referencing the account of how the American military was forced to ditch its own helicopters as it fled South Vietnam at the end of the war, Lê both excavates a little-known drama and creates some hauntingly beautiful imagery.

The inverse side of production, and as necessary to the continued functioning of capitalism, destruction was also the subject of a formidable

Dinh Q. Lê, *South China Sea Pishkun*, 2009, still from an animated video in 3-D, 6 minutes 30 seconds. From 4th Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale.

video installation by Bangladeshi artists Yasmine Kabir and Ronni Ahmmed. Shot in the otherworldly ship-breaking yards of Chittagong, *The Last Rites*, 2008, depicts teams of humans, tiny against the hulking metal carcasses of oil tankers and cargo ships that they painstakingly tear apart. Literally working themselves to death as they breathe in asbestos and other toxins while earning barely enough to buy food, the workers are, like the machinery, victims of planned obsolescence. The horrific antihumanism of the global economy lays itself bare.

The inclusion of Cai Guo-Qiang seemed surprising—can one think of a more state-sanctioned or spectacle-devoted artist?—but his work, particularly the video documentation of his Beijing Olympics opening fireworks (notoriously revealed as digitally enhanced for TV audiences) offered an exemplary counterpoint to Korean Kim Seongyoun's *Fireworks*, 2005. Her video, which overlays footage of a fireworks display in Pusan with images shot in the slums across the river, effectively collapses the distance between the spectacular image of national celebration and the abject reality it attempts to obscure.

Two works, both utilizing the strategy of the *dérive*, attempted to chart possible "escape paths" from within the urban matrix. Yet whereas Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba's *Breathing Is Free: 12,756.3*, 2007–, three monitors showing the artist jogging in various patterns (carefully plotted on a GPS) in various cities (he formed a water hyacinth in Ho Chi Minh City), ultimately goes nowhere, Atul Bhalla's *Yamuna Walk*, 2007, with its 161 photographs documenting a five-day journey through Delhi following the course of the Yamuna River, has a buoyancy, simplicity, and poetry that speak of another idea of community: one in which subjects are self-determining.

—*Charles LaBelle*

ART PAPERS
SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2009

DINH Q. LÊ
PORTLAND, OR

Near the entrance of Dinh Q. Lê's *Signs and Signals From the Periphery* stands a crudely constructed fountain fashioned from a PVC spigot that gushes water into a blue plastic bucket, where it is recirculated by a pump [Elizabeth Leach Gallery; May 7–June 27, 2009]. Like the nine other works in the exhibition, which include found objects, re-creations, and photographs, *The Fountain—for BN*, 2009, documents the ad hoc assemblages erected by Vietnamese street merchants to signal availability of grey market wares. In *Bicycle Repair Signals*, 2009, a grid of sixteen photographs, tires hang like wreaths off telephone poles, bound together or wrapped in colorful ribbon. In *Porn Here*, 2009, a triptych of photographs shows DVDs wedged between chunks of concrete to signify porn. In *I am Large. I Contain Multitudes (1)*, 2009, a bicycle purchased from a Vietnamese street vendor showcases an array of rearview mirrors affixed to an improvised shelf system. Signs of wear, rust, and the visibly handmade nature of the merchant's bicycle contrast with the shiny machined surfaces of the small mirrors. Lê translates these vernacular signifiers from daily life into the vocabulary of the white cube, while maintaining their status as coded objects whose origins are far removed from the gallery context.

Dedicated to Bruce Nauman—presumably in reference to *Self-Portrait as Fountain*, 1966, Nauman's own homage to Duchamp's infamous urinal—*The Fountain* bears ties to both contemporary Vietnam and the legacy of Western conceptual art. While the confrontational noise and movement of water flowing through the fountain most immediately serve as a proxy for the bustle of contemporary Vietnamese street life, the object can also be understood as a stand-in for the artist himself. Throughout his career, Lê has continually returned to explorations of his own identity as a Vietnamese artist who immigrated to the United States with his family at the age of eleven to escape political unrest. He spent the remainder of his childhood in the US. where he also studied art, before returning to live in Ho Chi Minh City over fifteen years later. While Nauman used his own body to transform Duchamp's porcelain urinal into a performative act, Lê transforms the iconic fountain back into an object—and a functioning one at that. Perhaps more importantly, it is an object specific to twenty-first century Vietnamese culture.

These "signs and signals" indicate a nation in transition, a developing nation struggling to reconcile socialist ideology with an emergent free market. The hastily constructed assemblages are temporary, as easily assembled as they are disassembled, while the three merchant bikes on view—literally markets on wheels—embody the transient nature of these grey market entities.

A tension exists between the original value system from which these objects emerged and their performance as signs from "the periphery" in the very different value system of the gallery. Lê's appropriation transforms these cheaply manufactured goods into luxury commodities. While Lê does not overemphasize the implications of this transaction between the Vietnamese streets and the well-established American art economy, he certainly does not make any attempts at reconciliation. Instead, he plays in the margins between the street and the white cube, exterior and interior, illegitimate and legitimate, function and sculpture. As such, Lê not only brings issues of contemporary Vietnamese identity to the forefront, he also uses these objects and documents to study the process of translation between cultures, economies, and environments, and the mechanisms by which meaning is formed through collective understanding.

—Katherine Bovee

ARTFORUM

Dinh Q. Lê

ELIZABETH LEACH GALLERY
417 N.W. 9th Avenue
May 7–June 15

Making its international debut at this gallery, "Signs and Signals from the Periphery" is Vietnamese and American artist Dinh Q. Lê's most recent body of objects and photographs. Lê reimmigrated to Vietnam almost a decade ago, immersing himself in the distant home he knew mostly through family stories. Lê first captured international attention in the 1990s with disturbingly hallucinogenic hand-plaited photo-weavings that synthesize Vietnamese political history and popular American visions of the Vietnam War, like Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 *Apocalypse Now*. Lê also created garish plaster multiples of mutated children in his "Damaged Gene" series, 1998, and sold these tchotchkes in a Vietnamese market stall—souvenirs of the human cost of war.

Dinh Q. Lê, *Gasoline 4 Sale Signals*, 2009, sixteen color photographs, overall 8 x 14'

"Signs and Signals" penetrates deeper into Vietnamese culture through the idiosyncratic present tense, exploring Vietnam's vital gray-market economy in the form of its most interesting objects—exquisitely funky thingamabobs created by Ho Chi Min City merchants in order to market their goods and services. These textless material signifiers aren't re-creations; Lê has purchased and imported each artifact directly from the streets of his hometown. Serial photographs of similar objects in their original contexts surround and further illuminate the emotional and material significance of the objects. Brightly painted Mylar-wrapped bicycle tires, strapped to street signs or wrangled into freestanding pyramids, advertise bicycle-repair shops; dangling iridescent DVDs signal the availability of pornography; and paper funnels thrust into the tops of bricks advertise gasoline. These deeply engaging artifacts suggest outsider art and contemporary sculpture while questioning the viewer's ability to see outside his or her own cultural framework. Lê's new works are indices of an arguably third-world culture confronting first-world conventions, artistic and otherwise.

— *Stephanie Snyder*

ARTFORUM
JANUARY 2009 INTERNATIONAL

2008 Gwangju Biennale
Singapore Biennale 2008
3rd Yokohama Triennale

VARIOUS LOCATIONS

Philip Tinari

THIS PAST FALL, with the consecutive openings of six "Asian biennials," the deliquescent 1990s and early-2000s trend toward establishing new large-scale exhibitions in increasingly far-flung locales bore fruit, such as it is. And as might have been anticipated, these shows were also attended by the repeatedly aired critiques that such efforts do little more than adapt a late-nineteenth-century model of display to newly ascendant societies; and, further, serve as highbrow smoke screens cynically deployed in the service of nationalist political regimes, neoliberal economic interests, or narrow municipal agendas. But to make either of these points in the present context is to pick up a debate that has, in fact, faded in the years since the first Gwangju Biennale of 1995. Back then, recall, questions about globalization, and about the place of "Asia" (always a problematic concept in and of itself) in this new order, plagued the intelligentsia. Just a short time earlier, economist Ezra Vogel had paternalistically anointed South Korea one of the "four little dragons" driving the region's economic growth and political progress. Somewhere along the line, though, the "little dragons" (the others were Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore) became the "Asian tigers," and the terms of the debate shifted away from what 2008 Gwangju Biennale artistic director Okwui Enwezor calls "the anxiety of the periphery."

In the intervening years, biennials and triennials in the region proliferated rapidly, spurred on by ever-more-confident metropoles and their rivalries. Taipei got one in 1998, Shanghai in 2000, Yokohama in 2001, Guangzhou in 2002, Singapore in 2006. This year, these shows joined Sydney and Gwangju as points on what organizers called the "Art Compass"—an emerging-market redux of the 2007 European "Grand Tour." But even before this latest grand gesture of art tourism, there was something shared and celebratory about this group of exhibitions. The 1998 Taipei Biennial, for example, launched with a weirdly poetic statement from its ubiquitous artistic director, Fumio Nanjo, perhaps the genre's key practitioner: "Asia is aglow today. Asia destructs, constructs, and transforms."

It was against this backdrop that Enwezor set to work on this year's Gwangju Biennale, engaging as a kind of starting point the May 18, 1980, citizens' uprising against South Korea's military dictator Chun Doo-hwan. The biennial in fact was instituted to commemorate this event, which initiated a trend toward democratization and civil society. Enwezor is fascinated by the uprising: In it, he finds a story of civil unrest and democratic progress with nationalist and anticolonial implications that countervail what he sees as the "tendentious display of historical narcissism" characterizing the West's ongoing nostalgia for the Paris Spring of 1968. He writes:

> Paris tends to be focused almost exclusively in the past, while Gwangju is caught up in a ritual of annual passion over the meaning and symbolism of May 18. At the same time, representations of the two tend to associate with two distinct historical legacies: the modernist avant-garde on the one hand and the peasant and anti-colonial resistance on the other. Yet, whatever the distinct differences between Paris and Gwangju, or the modes in which they are commemorated, what is indisputable is how they each set in motion a fervent belief in the politics of spectacle.

And how better to respond to spectacle than through a deadpan homage to the semantics of the global corporatocracy? Enwezor titled his biennial, which closed in November, "Annual Report: A Year in Exhibitions" and structured it as a series of distinct interventions united only by an unstated set of aesthetic considerations, subsumed within a simple temporal framework. The largest of three subsections of "Annual Report," titled "On the Road," comprised restagings of thirty-six exhibitions—ecumenically drawn from venues around the world, institutional and commercial alike—that had taken place during the period preceding the biennial's opening. This core unit of "twice-born" exhibitions (the term, from the Sanskrit *dvi-ja*, is that of biennial cocurator Ranjit Hoskote) was punctuated by forty-eight "Insertions" of single artists and collectives, and spread beyond the main five-gallery Biennale Hall into the nearby Gwangju Museum of Art and the far-off Uijae Museum of Korean Art.

Somewhere along the line, the "little dragons" became the "Asian tigers," and the terms of the biennial debate shifted away from what 2008 Gwangju Biennale artistic director Okwui Enwezor calls "the anxiety of the periphery."

The success of the exhibition came to rest on a curatorial bricolage (a favorite Enwezor term) of flow and juxtaposition. Thankfully, he is a master of this modality. In

Opposite page: Office/information center for the exhibition "Bokdukbang Project" (one of five "position papers" from the 2008 Gwangju Biennale), curated by Sung Hyen Park, Daein market, Gwangju, 2008. Left: Daniel Faust, *Yukon Liquor*, 2001, color photograph, 31 x 22". From the series "Alaska," 2001–2009. From the 2008 Gwangju Biennale. Right: Claire Tancons's exhibition-as-procession, "Spring," Gwangju, 2008. (Work pictured: Marlon Griffith, *Runaway/Reaction*, 2008, mixed-media performance.) From the 2008 Gwangju Biennale.

one narrow corridor, for example, two Insertions—Area Park's early-'90s black-and-white photographs of South Korea's pro-democracy protesters and of the demilitarized zone, and Daniel Faust's ironic, William Eggleston-ish meditations on the working class and built environment in Alaska—hung across from each other, both groups of photos evincing, in very different ways, a Robert Frank–like sense of the artist as observer of his own nation. Upstairs, a pared-down version of Taryn Simon's *American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar*, a series of images of little-seen centers of power (such as the art collection at CIA headquarters and the contraband room at John F. Kennedy Airport) shown in March 2007 at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, took its place next to Hans Haacke's January outing at Paula Cooper, also in New York. (Haacke's iconic *Sol Goldman and Alex DiLorenzo Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* was displayed on the wall separating the two artists, in what appeared to be a formal nod to the evolution of American-style institutional critique as well as a poignant acknowledgment that American-style democracy and capitalism remain deeply flawed.) Praneet Soi's painted miniatures of war-on-terror atrocities inhabited a downstairs gallery at the Uijae Museum, whose permanent collection (included in "On the Road") houses work by Uijae Huh Baikryun (1891–1977): One of Korea's last acknowledged masters of another traditionalist pictorial tradition, the ink-and-wash mode known as literati painting, Uijae was an early advocate of the South Korean farmers' movement, which can be seen as a precursor to May 18, and strongly resonates with the political address of Soi's miniatures. Yes, there were also veterans of other recent biennials—Steve McQueen's *Gravesend* and Thomas Demand's *Yellowcake*, both on view in Venice in 2007, to name two—and no shortage of rotely repackaged New York and London gallery shows (Gerard Byrne from Lisson, Isaac Julien from Metro Pictures, etc.). But in the end, Enwezor's curatorial position of anti-thematization paradoxically allowed linkages and variances to articulate themselves with the subtlety usually sought, and less often achieved, in thematic shows.

A group of distinctly curated "position papers" elaborated parallel, perhaps ancillary points consistent with the biennial's overall agenda. Patrick Flores's "Turns in Tropics: Artist-Curator" offered a comparative meditation on four examples of this hybrid figure and on their influence on the Malaysian, Philippine, Indonesian, and Thai scenes of the '70s and '80s. The show-within-a-show functioned both as historical object lesson—Apinan Poshyananda, now an elder-statesman intellectual, was making video spoofs with a VHS camera in Bangkok in 1987?—and scholarly thesis, advancing a claim consistent with Enwezor's highlighting of the bricolage of the periphery. In keeping with the logic of juxtaposition, an "Insertion" of darkness, mazes, and mirrors by Ken Lum, himself an artist-curator, filled out this gallery at the Gwangju Museum of Art. Claire Tancons's "position paper," "Spring," a dramatic, Caribbean-inspired procession around the traffic island at the epicenter of the May 18 protests, was among the biennial's highlights, and struck me as the perfect instantiation of what Enwezor claimed to seek in "the link [the biennial] makes to the uprising by using the spectacle of street protests as a symbol for establishing an open structure of cultural interaction." One could simply never conceive of such a procession—a whimsical riff on an earlier student protest, this one featuring contributions by various artists and culminating in the burning of MAP Office's bamboo-and-rice-paper floats—happening in Beijing or Shanghai. And yet the state here was fully on board. The next morning, Enwezor's thumbnail visage smiled out at me from the front page of the government-run *Korea Times*.

GWANGJU'S NATIONALIST and regionalist agenda, and Enwezor and company's meditation on that agenda, seem almost baroque in their complexity compared with Singapore's unabashedly transparent conflation of art and real estate (a marriage officiated by authoritarian technocracy and bankrolled by speculative capital). If ever there was a curator who knew how to work this liminal zone, it is Fumio Nanjo. Now the director of the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, Nanjo—who maintains a consultancy offering "a wide range of services in [the] art field"—is the Prometheus of the Asian biennial: Taipei, 1998; Yokohama, 2001; Singapore, 2006. Singapore, which loves nothing so much as stability, decided to retain him for a second go as artistic director. In return, they got things like a spreadsheet providing the exacting viewer with each artist's year of birth, residence, and preferred "genre." This year the biennial's theme was simply "Wonder," following on 2006's "Belief." In the two-page essay at the front of a giveaway guidebook that is the exhibition's only publication, Nanjo writes, "To experience wonder is to open one's mind." He goes on to cite the dictionary definition of "wonder," and concludes with the statement: "Art is now becoming a part of people's lives." The audio guide is brought to you by Bloomberg, and the all-venue pass includes a discounted ride on the Singapore Flyer Ferris wheel. You get the picture.

Upon arriving in Singapore, I met a group of Malaysian curators and artists at an outdoor bar in the Tanglin Camp complex, a former military base that had been the main site of the 2006 biennial. It was now home to a Ben & Jerry's, wine bars and fusion restaurants, and furniture stores, none of which had been there two years before. Perhaps this illumination of the stakes of the previous edition colored my trek among SB2008's venues the following day. By the harbor, on the Central Promontory Site ("with 360 hectares of prime land for development," per

This page, left: **Chaw Ei Thein, Aung Ko, and Richard Streitmatter-Tran, *September Sweetness* (detail), 2008,** 5½ tons of sugar, 82 11/16 x 82 11/16 x 102 3/4". From the Singapore Biennale 2008. Right: **Dinh Q. Lê, *The Farmers and the Helicopters* (detail), 2006,** mixed media, video. Installation view, South Beach Development, Singapore. From the Singapore Biennale 2008. Opposite page, from left: **Apichatpong Weerasethakul, *Morakot (Emerald)*, 2007,** still from a color video, 11 minutes 50 seconds. From the Singapore Biennial 2008. **Jonathan Meese, *DR.NO-METABOLISM IN MOOMINGYM like SOLDIER-FLASH-BLUE de MING (BABYKINGKONG IS BACK IN FANTOMAS-GYM, thanks ... 1912-2012), 2008,** mixed media. Installation view, Shinko Pier Exhibition Hall, Yokohama. From the 3rd Yokohama Triennale. Photo: Keizo Kioku.

the guidebook), a Shigeru Ban pavilion made from shipping containers housed a few unrelated marquee works: Hans Op de Beeck, the Kabakovs, Anthony McCall. The core site was the recently vacated city hall, which was newly encaged by chain-link barriers in anticipation of the Singapore Grand Prix a week later. The staid Brit-colonial civic building is not a horrible exhibition venue. Video installations occupied courtrooms, while downstairs, a boutique invite-only art fair called Showcase Singapore scattered twenty-some galleries into a maze of former clerks' offices. But the works given the most prominent locations were astoundingly bad: In the central atrium, a layered acrylic abstraction by Singaporean painter Jane Lee; in the former barristers' cafeteria, a grouping of fiberglass maggots by Pham Ngoc Duong and fetus-shaped gourds in formaldehyde by Han Jong-Gun; in another main hall, Wit Pimkanchanapong's *Singapore*, a Google Earth floor map of the city, on which viewers could mark their favorite places with Post-its. It all felt like a high-rent exercise in vaguely premised, gesturally biennial-esque art.

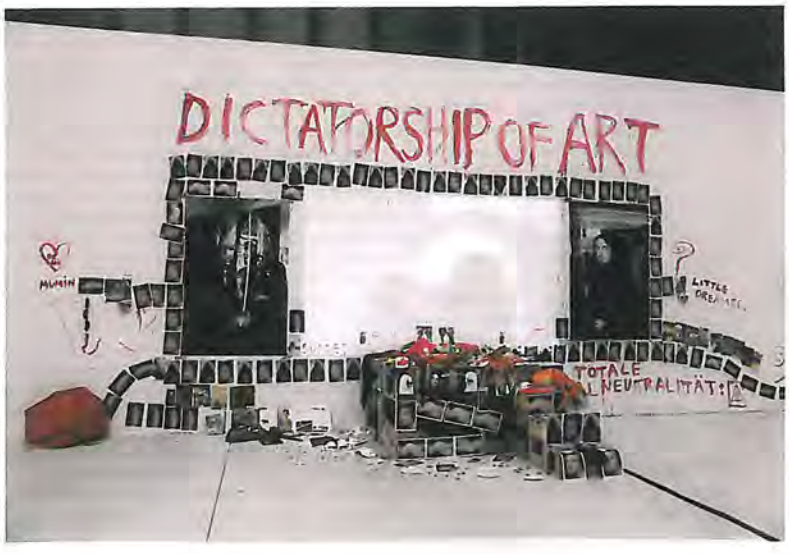
However, to the credit of Nanjo and his team, which also included Matthew Ngui and Joselina Cruz, the curatorial tentacles of this biennial extended far beyond the standard international fare. Nanjo's position as a man about Asia has allowed him to build a network that draws in works like the short films of Kyrgyz artist Aktan Abdykalykov. And there were some successful works, particularly in the South Beach Development, a cluster of '30s Deco army barracks just blocks from downtown. Heman Chong served up a room of wall paintings made from office-supply stickers, and Dinh Q. Lê presented *The Farmers and the Helicopters*, 2006, a sculptural and video meditation on Vietnamese peasants who try to build their own Huey. Working with Myanmar artists Chaw Ei Thein and Aung Ko, Richard Streitmatter-Tran constructed a pagoda in the Burmese Buddhist vernacular, made entirely of sugar. This was perhaps the most compelling interpretation of Nanjo's easy theme: sculptural space at once referencing traditional architecture, white-cube Minimalism, and visceral sensation. By the third day of SB2008, the pagoda was covered in flies.

IT IS TEMPTING to read the Yokohama Triennale as an unarticulated hybrid of Gwangju-style cultural localism and Singapore-style speculative boosterism. Yokohama shares some of Gwangju's self-consciousness about its perceived peripherality, even though (or perhaps because) it is Japan's historic port of entry and lies just thirty minutes from downtown Tokyo by subway. And like the Singapore Biennale, this triennial has been a vehicle for converting sites like the nineteenth-century Red Brick Warehouse, on the waterfront, into pleasant places to eat, drink, and shop. There is even a Ferris wheel. The municipal authorities are sophisticated enough, or at least technocratic enough, to hand the artistic reins over to (Western or Western-validated) specialists. And so the all-star curatorial team paired three of the busiest curators in Europe (Daniel Birnbaum, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Beatrix Ruf) with Akiko Miyake of the Center for Contemporary Art Kitakyushu and Hu Fang of Vitamin Creative Space, the latter a savvy gallery in Guangzhou that has a proven genius for parlaying widespread skepticism about the rote commercialism of most Chinese art into curatorial authority and financial gain.

These five were handed a theme, "Time Crevasse," by artistic director Tsutomu Mizusawa. "Art shakes up our everyday perceptions. . . . It can horrify us, give us courage, console us, or provide us with what we need to face life," Mizusawa noted in a brief text reminiscent of Nanjo's that was the only elaboration of the exhibition concept anywhere in sight. But scant narration does not necessarily equate with aesthetic failure, and the crevasse proved capable of engulfing A-listers and up-and-comers alike. The show centered on the Shinko Pier exhibition space, with an agile system of plywood walls designed by Ryue Nishizawa duly deconstructing the white cube. The selection of seventy-two artists would feel familiar to anyone who knows the curators—a perfect equilibrium of the long-canonized (Marina Abramović, Yoko Ono, Matthew Barney, Douglas Gordon, Paul McCarthy, Joan Jonas, Rirkrit Tiravanija), the recently canonized (Mark Leckey, Tino Sehgal, Paul Chan, Jonathan Meese, Miranda July, Cao Fei, Terence Koh, Jérôme Bel), and the hopefully soon-to-be-canonized (Mario García Torres, Shilpa Gupta, Pak Sheung Chuen, Pedro Reyes). This being Japan, there is a significant conceptual and performance-based history with which to engage, and a second-floor film archive in the Red Brick Warehouse presented a stunning selection of works from the Fluxus moment and its aftermath, with pieces like Atsuko Tanaka's *Round on Sand*, 1968, and the collective Hi Red Center's *Shelter Plan*, 1967. This was echoed in a substantial program of new performances realized in the few days surrounding the opening—works by Jonas, Meese, and Aki Sasamoto among them.

And yet in the end, Yokohama appeared an almost archetypal instantiation of the international exhibition format, impeccably designed and unrelentingly cool, with no particular political or curatorial agenda anywhere in sight. Perhaps Obrist was saving the agendas for his Frieze-week Manifesto Marathon happening later that month. Or perhaps this utter subsumption of local into transnational, of site into space, marks the twilight of the "Asian biennial," which may prove, to twist another Obrist biennial title, a genre that never should have been named. □

PHILIP TINARI IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF *ARTFORUM*.



Los Angeles Times

Dinh Q. Lê at Shoshana Wayne Gallery

By Christopher Knight, Times Art Critic
October 3, 2008

Gene Ogami / Shoshana Wayne Gallery
FACING FORWARD: A detail of Dinh Q. Lê's "Portrait #2," currently on view at Shoshana Wayne Gallery in Santa Monica.

The 12 powerful new photographic collages by **Dinh Q. Lê** in his fifth solo show at the Shoshana Wayne Gallery advance the trajectory of the artist's work. They add a layer of complexity missing from most of the earlier collages I've seen.

Lê emigrated from Vietnam to the U.S. with his family in 1979 (he was 11), and later he did graduate art study in New York; now he lives and works in Ho Chi Minh City. His binational personal history has underpinned earlier series of pictures, which showed such things as documentary images of the Vietnam War cut into strips and physically woven together with strips of stills taken from Hollywood movies about