



GALERIE QUYNH CONTEMPORARY ART

âm sáng

NGUYỄN HUY AN

JUNE 13 - JULY 27, 2019

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INTRODUCTION

Galerie Quynh is pleased to present *âm sáng* – Nguyen Huy An's second solo exhibition at the gallery. *Âm sáng*, a phrase invented by the artist, communicates a sensation of light, shadows, and reflections. While *sáng* is translated as 'light', *âm* refers to yin (the female principle in nature) and suggests the spiritual world.

In *âm sáng*, Huy An finds inspiration in the rich folk and religious traditions of Northern Vietnam – scavenging relics, curiosities and memories from temple sites, theatres and distinguished actors. Once collected, these items are subtly manipulated and re-appropriated by the artist, drawing out reflections on the threads that run between the reality of today and the cultural heritage of epic mythologies and sacred communal rites that are very much a part of Huy An's consciousness.

Huy An's artistic practice has long built on his fascination with the objects, mundanities and spaces of daily life, particularly in and around his native Hanoi, and with the shadows they cast. Previously, the shadows he explored were more concrete but here, in sympathy with the subject matter, they have become more obscure, ambiguous, even mental shadows perhaps, cast not by an object's corporal form but by its cultural and historical mass instead.

Originating in medieval times, the distinct styles of Tuong and Cheo Theatre embody ancient Confucianist value systems, centered on courtly and quotidian rural life respectively. They were sources not only of entertainment, but of moral teachings and social satire as well. A central aspect of the Mother Goddess, or Dao Mau faith is a highly-charged spirit possession ritual called *hầu đồng*, whose ceremonies include singing, dancing, and a haunting musical component known as Hat Van.

In a series of externally-sourced negatives taken of a village temple and a procession of the village deity, Huy An deliberately collected 'unusable' over-exposed film. The images are washed-out, almost abstract and the audience is forced, as with all negatives, to see them in the light, peering carefully at and almost through the image, to glimpse the echoes of detail that remain.

Traces of rituals are to be found throughout the exhibition as seen in the thousands of delicate termite wings in *Night of Thuong Ngan*. At an evening *hầu đồng* ritual at Dong Cuong Temple to celebrate the forest goddess Thuong Ngan, Huy An became captivated by a swarm of flying termites, cavorting in the air above the worshipers' heads, having been drawn in by the temple's lights. The next day he found wing fragments

of the insects scattered in the temple grounds, so he collected them; inert, indifferent yet enduring participants in the ceremony of the night just passed.

A major work in the exhibition *in search of Suy Van's hair* is presented in a stark room, filled only with the oral theatre of Huy An's voice, recounting his ultimately fruitless search for the lustrous hair of a renowned actress famed for her portrayal of the doomed heroine Suy Van. Huy An has always been drawn to the raven hair of Vietnamese women, and as with his earlier work *Hair on Table* (2005), presented at the 14th Istanbul Biennial, the material acts as a conduit for his meditations on

femininity, on the shifting ascendancies of the heroic, the melancholic and the powerless in a woman's role in society.

With a number of works, Huy An allows only a glimpse of an object, channeling the audience's perspective down to a narrow focal point, eliminating distraction and visual noise. He sees these objects, or certain details of them, as points of departure, spurring us to deeper thoughts on what exists behind them, and on their cultural and personal resonance.

ABOUT NGUYEN HUY AN

Born in 1982 in Hanoi, Nguyen Huy An is among the most dynamic and innovative artists of his generation. Nguyen Huy An has participated in numerous exhibitions and performance art festivals over the last decade including *Looking for the Divine Beings*, Nha San Collective (2017); 14th Istanbul Biennial – *SALTWATER: A Theory of Thought Forms*, curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Istanbul, Turkey (2015); *Mien Meo Mieng/Contemporary Art from Vietnam*, Bildmuseet, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden (2015); *Residual: Disrupted Choreographies*, Carré d'Art – Musée d'Art Contemporain, Nîmes, France (2014); *If The World Changed*, Singapore Biennale (2013); *sounds of dust (somniloquy)*, 943 Studio

Kunming, China (2011); *Anatomy of an assembly line with an error*, Nha San Studio, Hanoi, Vietnam; *Lim Dim*, Stenersen Museum, Oslo, Norway (2009); *Tam Ta*, San Art, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (2009); and the Nippon International Performance Art Festival (NIPAF), Tokyo, Japan (2007).

In 2010 Huy An co-founded with artists Vu Duc Toan and Hoang Minh Duc the performance art collective The Appendix Group (Phu Luc). The group has performed in festivals in Vietnam, Singapore, China and Poland.

Huy An lives and works in Hanoi, Vietnam.

WORKS

all texts by Nguyen Huy An



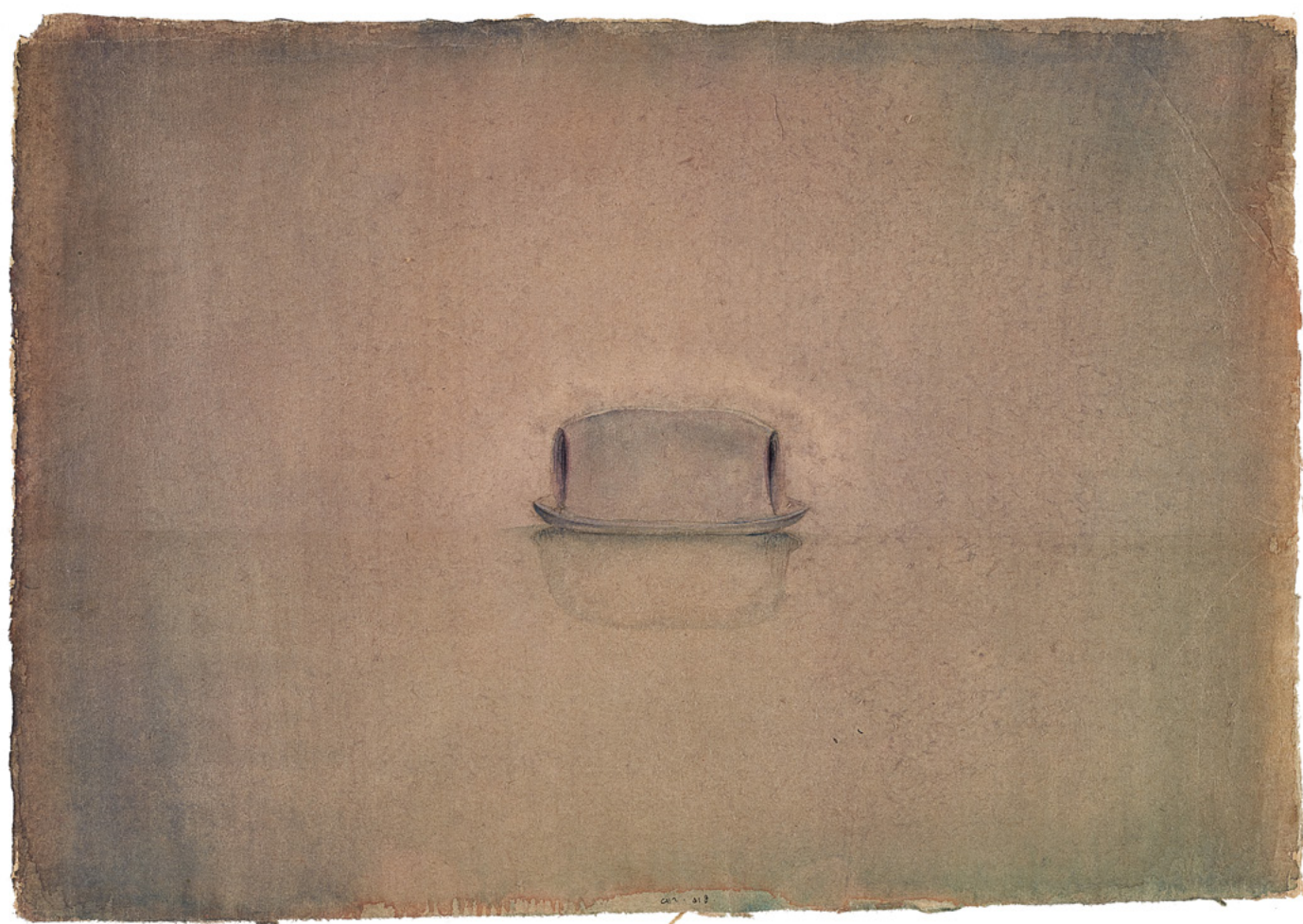
Installation view: ground floor

The boat paintings depict thuyền nan.

*These boats don't seem to have any apparent function except
to move along the river.*

*They look stagnant and communicate a feeling of
immobility, as if they don't have any direction.*

I am drawn to the dark holes in the boats.

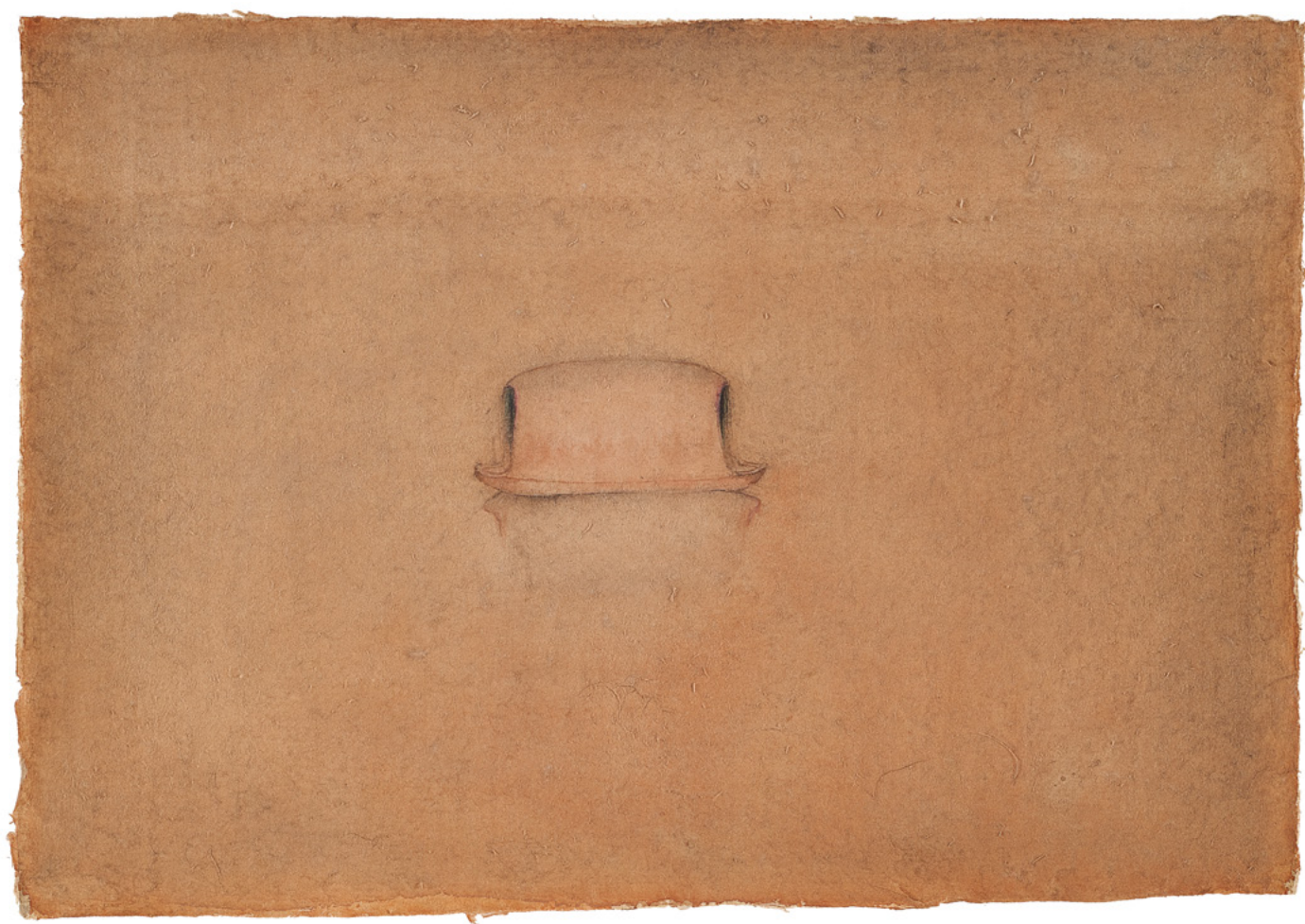


Boat no.1

2018

watercolour on Dó Paper

35.4 x 50.7 cm

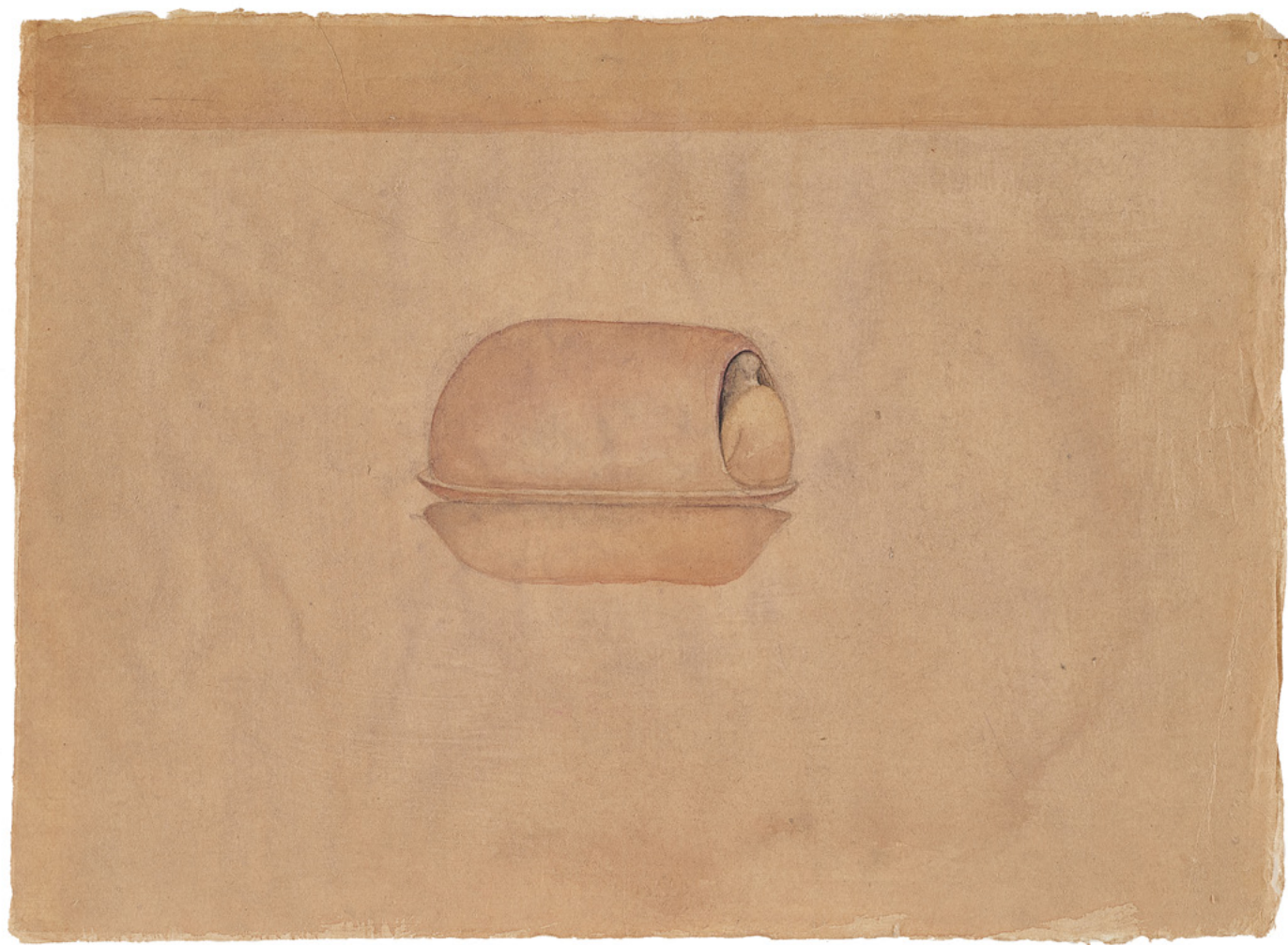


Boat no.2

2018

watercolour on Dó Paper

35.4 x 50.4 cm



Boat no.3

2018

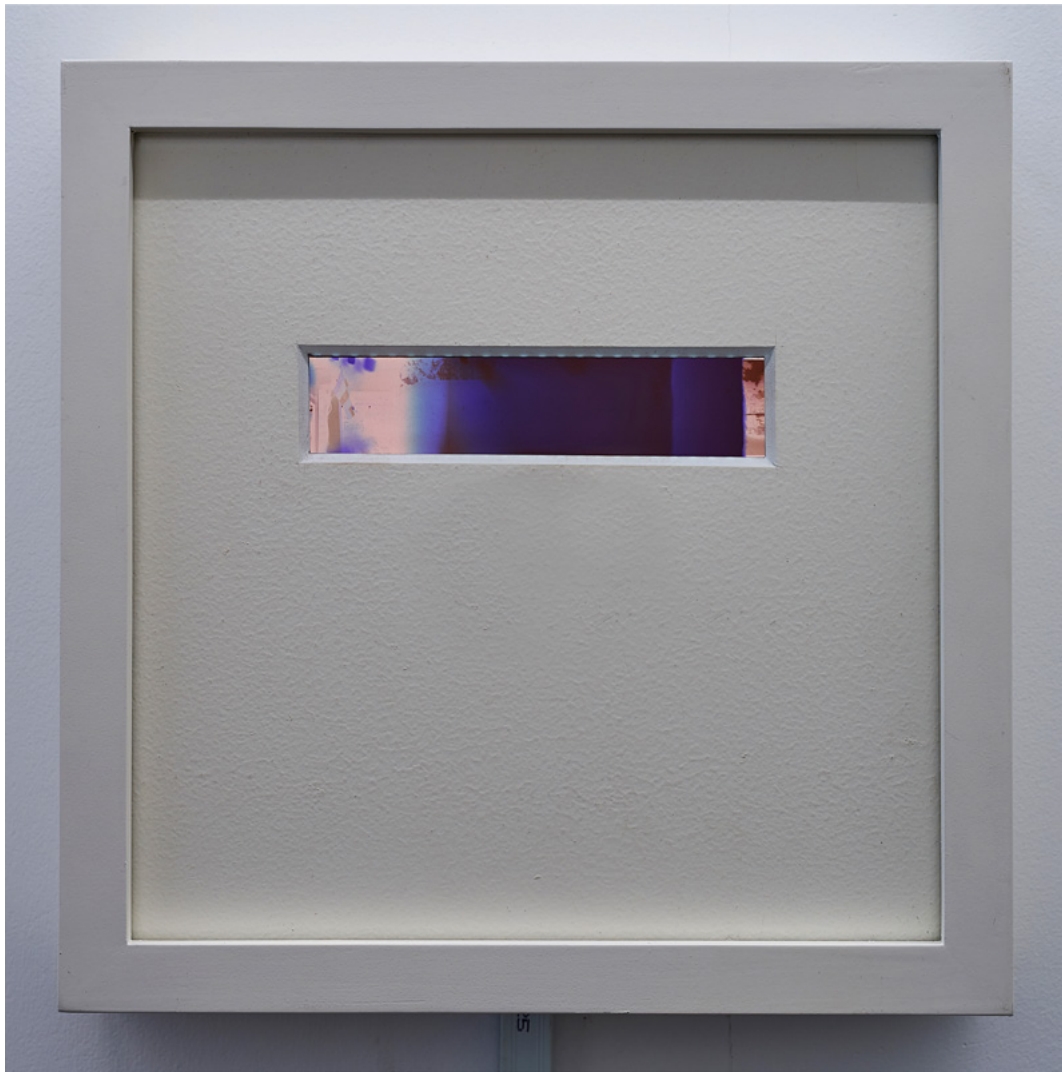
watercolour on Dó Paper

38 x 52.3 cm

6cm of found, light-leaked film from an old film roll.

Gazing carefully at it under the light,

I see the roof of an old temple.



light-leaked landscape

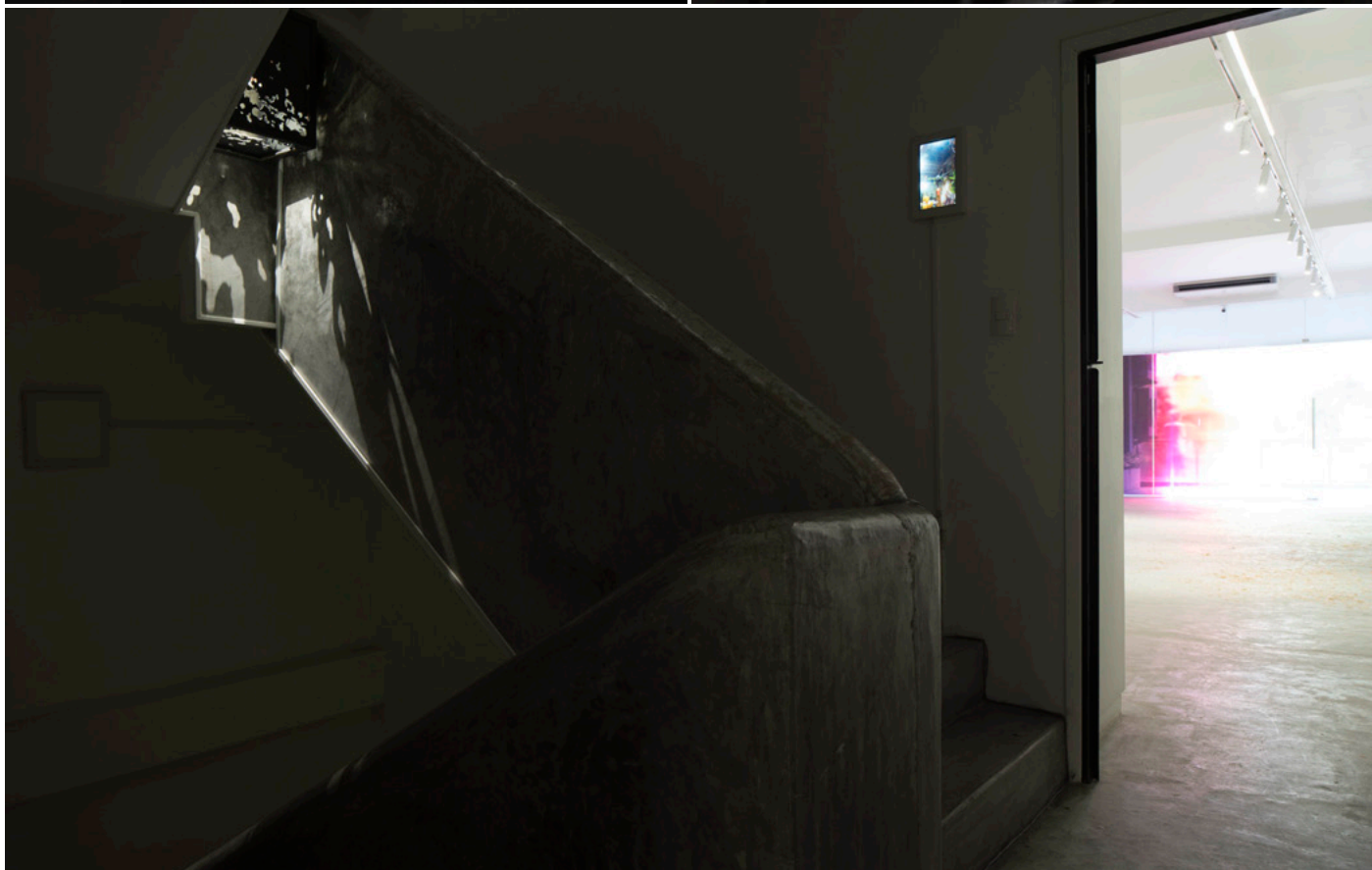
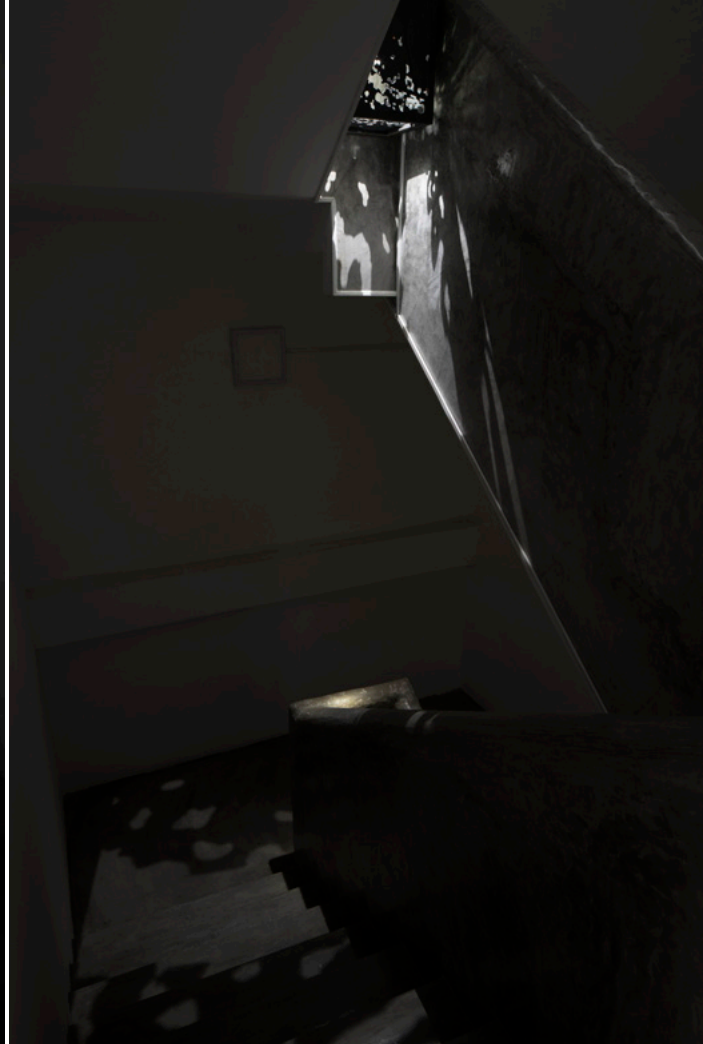
2018

damaged film, light box

23.5 x 23.5 x 5.8 cm (film: 3.5 x 6 cm)



At an antique store on Vạn Phúc Street, Hà Đông, there's a rusty bronze headpiece on display. This kind of headpiece, named xung thiên is often used to worship the higher gods. The shop owner isn't aware of the origins of the headpiece. I used the patterns engraved on it to design a light piece.



patterns

2018

CNC cut wooden box, halogen light, flashlight
dimensions variable



Installation view: mezzanine

After having driven back the Mongolian invaders, Trần Hưng Đạo cast his sword into the Lục Đầu River, a symbolic act of cleansing it from impurities. From then on, at that part of the river, soil and alluvial deposits accumulated into a strip of earth that resembles the blade of the sword.

In 2001, the management board of Kiếp Bạc Temple requested Mr. Bùi Quang Thắng, an artisan from the village of Đông Xâm¹ to make a replica of the sword for the temple. The sword of Trần Hưng Đạo has only a few sparse and vague descriptions in myths and legends, and there were no pictorial sources for reference. After many failed attempts to re-create the sword, Mr. Bùi was eventually successful and his sword was accepted as a sacred artifact of the temple. Mr. Bùi made two casts of the sword: one that he sent to the temple and one that he kept for himself. For some reason, Mr. Bùi entrusted the second version to me.

¹ Đông Xâm: The name of a traditional craft village in Hong Thai, Thai Binh that specializes in silversmithing.



a fissure

2018

silver-plated bronze sword sheath, wooden box

2.5 x 0.5 x 100 cm

At the Fifth Gate of Phủ Vân Cát, the distich reads:

“Bách gia họa tượng dĩ nhân kiệt

Kỉ độ di hài lục địa chi”

*“far and wide, the tale of the courageous is spread
the embroidered shoe leaves its mark on the sacred land”*

The word hài in the distich refers to a pair of shoes. There’s a tale told in the area of Phủ Dầy, which worships the Mother Goddess Liễu Hạnh: When the Goddess left for heaven, her husband and her child remained on earth. From time to time, she came back to visit them, though discreetly in order not to violate the laws of heaven. One day, when she was picking vegetables for her child, she was accidentally seen. In a rush, the Goddess disappeared, leaving behind one of her shoes. The locals discovered the shoe and worshipped it as a sacred object at Ngã Mountain (which also bears the shape of a shoe). This is just one of the tales that reflects the origin of the name Phủ Dầy.

I was able to commission an artisan in the village of Đông Cứu¹, in Thường Tín, to re-create the shoe: a bright red shoe, embroidered with the phoenix motif, which represents the Mother Goddess Liễu Hạnh. This kind of embroidered shoe is often used in hầu đồng ceremonies.

¹ Đông Cứu: The name of a traditional craft village in Thường Tín, Hà Nội that specializes in embroidery. The village is also famous for its royal garments and garments used in hầu đồng sessions.



a pit
2016
embroidered shoe, LED light
diameter: 9 cm

Statues worshipped in temples always have a hole in their backs. When a statue is brought to the temple for worshipping, a shaman must perform a ceremony to invite a god into it, by putting into the hole a few certain symbolic items (five-colored threads, charms and such), and then cover it. Before the statue is removed from the temple, they also have to perform a ceremony to part with the god.

I found this statue in a barren ground in the village of Sơn Đông¹. It has been so severely damaged that I couldn't perceive its original identity.

¹ Sơn Đông: The name of a traditional craft village in Hoài Đức, Hà Nội that specializes in crafting religious statues.




a hole

2018

found gilded Buddha statue

diameter: 3 cm



*On the night of the 19th, and the dawn of the 20th of May
2017, termites flew out from the surrounding mountains into
a hầu đồng ceremony at Đông Công Temple¹, Yên Bái.
The next morning, I picked up the fallen termites' wings on
the floor of the temple.*

¹ Đông Công: The name of a Mẫu temple in Văn Yên, Yên Bái, that worship the Mother Goddess Liễu Hạnh.



đông cuồng night

2017

single-channel video, sound, decal, termite wings

video: 1' 51"

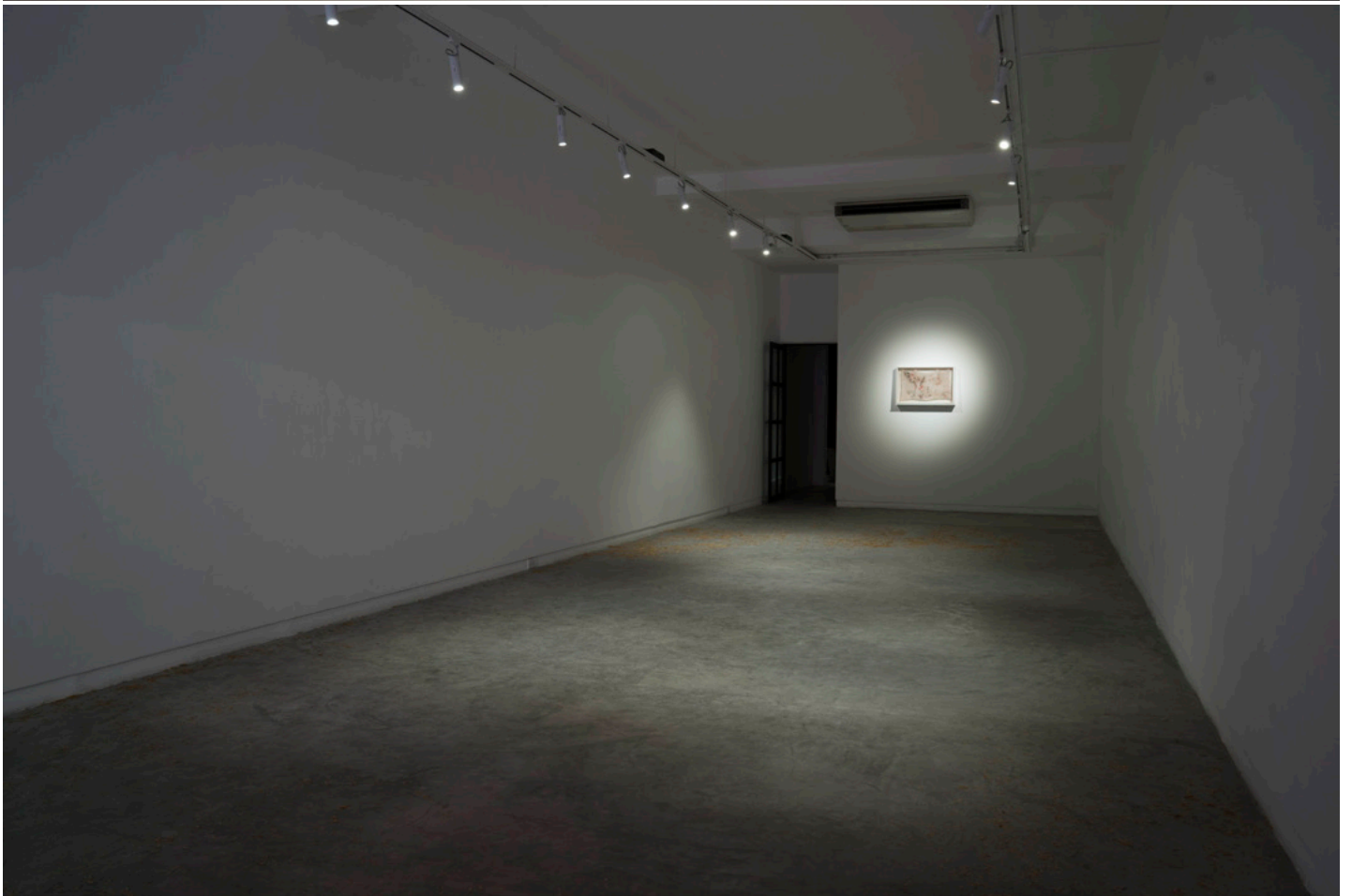
decal and termite wings: dimensions variable





Between 2015 and 2016, Mr. Xuân Quí portrayed a variety of historical characters: the consort Thân Cảnh Phúc, Ngô Quyền, Kim Lân, Tiết Giao, Phạm Khánh, Trùm sò, Đội Bắc, Trịnh Lang, Trần Nhân Tông and other characters in different excerpts from the original plays. During this period of time, he used this handkerchief to remove his face paint and makeup after each performance¹.

¹ Face painting is a significant feature of the Tuồng theatre. Using color and expressive strokes, the performers paint on themselves a mask that conveys the characteristics and the fate of their characters.



portrait

2015-2016

cotton gauze handkerchief, make-up, wooden box

48 x 72.3 x 14.5 cm (handkerchief: 43 x 67.5 cm)



I collected this stage curtain from a retired gentleman who used to work in an old theatre in Hanoi. When the man retired, he took with him old stage curtains and repurposed them for his own use.



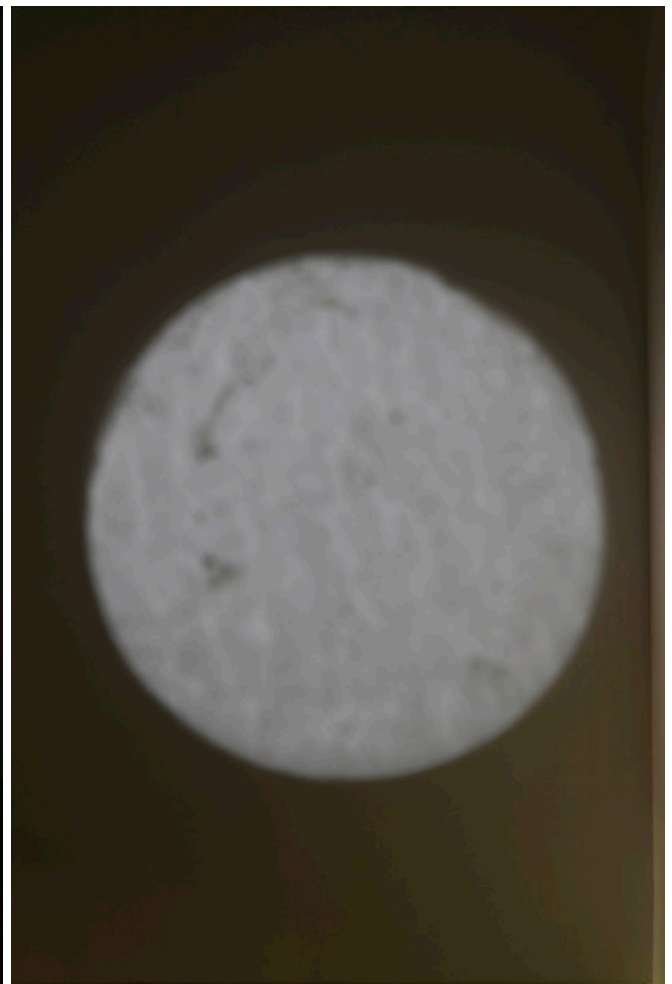
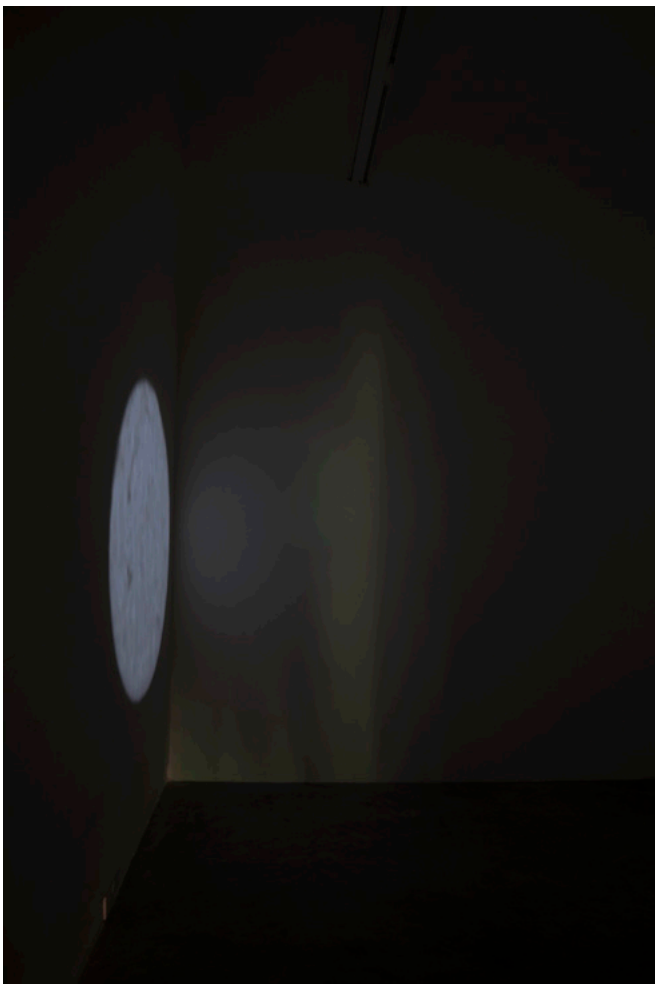
backstage curtain
2019
red velvet curtain
dimensions variable

*Mãn Thu¹ gazed into this mirror to put on her
makeup and became Hồ Nguyệt Cô.*

*Hồ Nguyệt Cô² gazed into the spring and saw herself
turning into a fox.*

¹ Mrs. Mãn Thị Thu, a renowned actress in Tuồng since 1959, is famous for her roles in a variety of Tuồng plays, namely Hồ Nguyệt Cô hóa cáo, Đào Tam Xuân, Mộc Quế Anh dâng cây, Mị Châu - Trọng Thủy.

² Hồ Nguyệt Cô is the titular character in the play Hồ Nguyệt Cô Hoá Cáo. She is a fox in human guise that wields tremendous power and beauty thanks to the power of a mystical jewel. She married the young general Tiết Giao; yet the marriage ended in tragedy when Giao stole the jewel from her. Without the artifact's power, Hồ loses her magic and returns to her original form.



Hồ Nguyệt

2019

handheld vanity mirror, flashlight, wooden box
dimensions variable

*This audio recording recounts my journey to find the hair
of Súy Vân in the Chèo play Kim Nham.
The search was futile.*



tóc. audio

2015-2019

audio recording

2' 14"

Around the latter part of 2015, Huy An happened to pass by the old Chèo theater on Kim Mã Street in Hanoi where he found an old banner for a play, timeworn and dusty. The banner's details were indistinct, yet the faint form of a dress and long black hair were immediately identifiable to him – it was the scene in which the character Súly Vần feigned insanity in the Chèo play Kim Nham.

It brought back memories of seeing that scene (which Huy An didn't quite understand) on a black-and-white TV: a woman hysterically laughing and crying, maniacally dancing and singing, her long black hair unkempt and disheveled. The scene was unsettling, yet he was drawn to it out of curiosity. Though Huy An never finished watching the scene, the haunting image of the long black hair was ingrained in his mind... then came the thought of using it in an artwork, and the thought of actually collecting it.

“It shouldn't be hard. It must have been a wig, lying around collecting dust in some prop storage. These days, no one watches Chèo anymore,” he thought. “I only need to be a bit creative.”

A few days later, he asked a friend who used to work in a Chèo troupe and found out that Thúy Ngần (the actress who played Súly Vần) did not wear a wig but in fact, the actress possessed long, natural hair. The excited friend took him to see Thúy Ngần in Mai Dịch.

When he arrived, Thúy Ngần was not at home. She told Huy An over the phone that she cut her hair when she retired. The long hair that accompanied her through a lifetime of playing the role of Suy Van became too difficult to maintain in her daily life.

“I cut it off and sold it to a hair merchant,” she said.

Sometime later, Huy An came across a hair merchant that he knew, to whom he told the story. The merchant said, “Hair that beautiful is highly valued and always used as extensions. Some salon owner must have used it to extend somebody's hair.”

As such, the tale was over.

BIOGRAPHY

NGUYEN HUY AN

Born in 1982 in Hanoi, Vietnam

Lives and works in Hanoi, Vietnam

EDUCATION

2008 BFA in Fine Art, Vietnam Fine Art University, Hanoi, Vietnam

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2019 *âm sáng*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
- 2018 *Canh sáu | Calculus Exercise #6/5*, Manzi Art Space, Hanoi, Vietnam
- 2014 *78 rhythms*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 *Asia Live! Performance from Vietnam*, various venues, Poland
- iNTO THiN AIR*, Hanoi, Vietnam
- Alluvium*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
- 2017 *The Three-Cornered World*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
- Look for The Divine Beings*, Nha San Collective, Hanoi, Vietnam
- So Far So Right*, Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts, Taipei, Taiwan
- Skylines With Flying People 3*, Nha San Collective, Hanoi, Vietnam
- IN:ACT NIPAF Asia WS 2017* by Phu Luc (The Appendix Group), Nha San Collective, Hanoi, Vietnam
- 2016 *Vietnam Eye: Contemporary Vietnamese Art*, Casa Italia, Hanoi, Vietnam
- Reunification-1 Journey* by Phu Luc (The Appendix Group), Nha San Collective, Hanoi, Vietnam
- Reimagine the Artist/Artisan*, Six Space, Hanoi, Vietnam
- 2015 *14th Istanbul Biennial – SALTWATER: A Theory of Thought Forms*, curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Istanbul, Turkey
- olio. v2*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
- Mien Meo Mieng/Contemporary Art from Vietnam*, Bildmuseet, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden

- 2014 *The Clouds Will Tell*, Nha San Studio, Hanoi, Vietnam
Disrupted Choreographies, Carré d'Art – Musée d'Art Contemporain, Nîmes, France
- 2013 *IN:ACT 3 International Performance Art Festival* by Phu Luc (The Appendix Group), Nha San Studio, Hanoi, Vietnam
Singapore Biennale, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore, Singapore
The Grapevine Collection, Vietnam National Museum of Art, Hanoi, Vietnam
I – CAMP, Muong Cultural Space Museum, Hoa Binh, Vietnam
- 2012 *Skylines With Flying People*, The Japan Foundation, Nha San Studio, Manzi Art Space, Hanoi, Vietnam
Future of Imagination 8, International Performance Art Event, Goodman Arts Centre, Singapore
- 2011 *IN:ACT 2 International Performance Art Festival* by Phu Luc (The Appendix Group), Nha San Studio, Hanoi, Vietnam
U Lanh Tinh - ULT, L'Espace, Hanoi, Vietnam
Sounds of dust (somniaquy) by Phu Luc (The Appendix Group), 943 Studio, Kunming, China
6m long table, Factory Bar, Hanoi, Vietnam
Anatomy of an assembly line with an error, Nha San Studio, Hanoi, Vietnam
- 2010 *IN:ACT 1 International Performance Art Festival* by Phu Luc (The Appendix Group), Nha San Studio, Hanoi, Vietnam
Tam Ta, Sàn Art, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
Streets of Memory, Viet Art Centre, Hanoi, Vietnam
Tam Ta, The Bui Gallery, Hanoi, Vietnam
3 CHU VI / 3 Perimeters, Nha San Studio, Hanoi, Vietnam
Con Tiep, L'Espace, Hanoi, Vietnam
- 2009 Group Exhibition, Studio 25, Hanoi, Vietnam
Lim Dim: Young Vietnamese Artists, Stenersenmuseet, Oslo, Norway
- 2008 *Chewing in 10+*, 10th anniversary, Nha San Studio, Hanoi, Vietnam
Ket Noi: Vietnam-Singapore Performance Art Event, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore, Singapore
3 Days – 3 Artists, L'Espace, Hanoi, Vietnam
- 2007 *Sneaky Week: Performance Art Project in Public*, Arts Network Asia, Hanoi, Vietnam
Nippon International Performance Art Festival (NIPAF), Japan
- 2006 *The 14th Festival of Performance Art*, Blue Space Gallery, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
Dom Dom, performance event, Nha San Studio, Hanoi, Vietnam
- 2005 *Nhung Vien Soi*, Nha San Studio, Hanoi, Vietnam
- 2004 Group Exhibition, Nha San Studio, Hanoi, Vietnam
VO, Vietnam Fine Art University, Hanoi, Vietnam

WORKSHOPS / TALKS

- 2017 Emerging Artist Program, Nha San Collective, Hanoi, Vietnam
- 2015 Trong-Ngoai Bong-Toi, Nha San Collective, Hanoi, Vietnam
- 2010 Workshop, Almaz Studio, Hanoi, Vietnam
Performance Workshop, Goethe-Institut Hanoi, Vietnam
- 2007 *Improvisation*, performance art workshop, Nha San Studio, Hanoi, Vietnam
- 2005 Performance workshop, Nha San Studio, Hanoi, Vietnam

RESIDENCIES

- 2018 MoT+++, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
- 2010 Contemporary Yunnan (943 studio), Kunming, China

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2017 Ha Thuc, Caroline, "VIETNAM Urgences," *artpress*, February 2017, Paris, France
Cheng, Rikey, "SO FAR SO RIGHT", *Art Asia Pacific*, Hong Kong
- 2016 *Vietnam Eye: Contemporary Vietnamese Art*, ed. Serenella Ciclitira, Skira Editore, Milan, Italy
Corey, Pamela, "Vietnam," *Catalyst 1.0*, A publication by Art Stage, Singapore, 2016
- 2015 Were, Ian, "14th Istanbul Biennial: Armenian Shadows and Whispers," *Kulture/Pulse Magazine*, October 2015
Ardia, Mai, "Mien Meo Mieng: Vietnamese contemporary art in Sweden – in pictures," *Art Radar Journal*, 3 July 2015
Lien Truong, "Art Spaces Series - Galerie Quynh (Part 3)," *diaCRITICS*, 9 March, 2015
- 2014 Dao Mai Trang, *Nghe thuat va Tai nang*, The Gioi Publishers, Hanoi, Vietnam
Butt, Zoe, *Disrupted Choreographies*, exhibition catalogue, Carré d'Art – Musée d'Art Contemporain, Nîmes, France
- 2013 Tran, Quynh, "Singapore Biennale: Tran Luong on Contemporary Vietnamese Art," *BLOUIN ARTINFO*, October 14, 2013
- 2011 Codet, "Hoa si Nguyen Huy An: Cuoc chien giua bong va hinh," *soi.com.vn*, June 25, 2011
- 2010 CHENG, Enoch [interview], "Interview with Nguyen Huy An," *Asia Art Archive*, March 2010
- 2009 Taylor, Nora, "What's Art Got to do with It?," *C-Arts*, November – December 2009



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