



MINDS

29 April – 14 October 2023

MĨNH

29 April – 14 October 2023

MĨNH is an everyday word which refers to our bodies and selves, but it also means us; about who we are as individuals as well as how we exist together.

Through the work of artists and writers, MĨNH explores Vietnamese and Chinese diasporic life in Australia today, and questions what it means to be who we are now. Presenting 17 contributors, the exhibition reveals these collective memories, yearnings and preoccupations.

Dacchi Dang
Christina Huynh
Matt Huynh
Phương Ngô
Đình Huy Nguyễn
James Nguyen
Lucia Tường Vy Nguyễn
Lynn Nguyễn
Kim Phạm
Victoria Pham
Vivian Pham
Hoài Mạnh Tất
My Lệ Thi
Bic Tieu
Huyen Hac Helen Tran
Maria Trần
Garry Trinh

Curated by Sheila Ngọc Phạm
in collaboration with FCMG.



The MĨNH exhibition is supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Cabrogal gulbangadyu
ngurrayin wadyimanwa
Fairfield City Council
Ganunigang wagulra
gulbangadyidyanyi
miwanaba Dharugngai yura.

Fairfield City Council
acknowledges the Traditional
Owners of the Cabrogal of the
Darug Nation and recognises
their ongoing relationship to land,
place, culture and spiritual beliefs.
FCMG pays respects to Elders,
past, present and emerging and
acknowledges the importance
Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander People continue to
play within our community.

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INTRODUCTION

Sheila Ngọc Phạm

In 2005 I went along to a talk held at the Liverpool Regional Museum, featuring Vietnamese American writer Andrew Lam, who had published a collection of writing called *Perfume Dreams: Reflections on the Vietnamese Diaspora* (2005). Curators Hoang Vo and Cuong Phu Le from Casula Powerhouse had invited him to speak as part of the public programming for *The Fall of Saigon: Collected Fragments of Post 75 Generation*.

Back then I was still unsure of how to make sense of what my family had been through in Vietnam and their subsequent escape. At 24, I was still grappling with our settlement in Australia, which certainly didn't feel like a 'forever home'. My father often discussed our life here as being a temporary sojourn because one day we would return. But I was beginning to understand that I was part of a global diaspora.

I've been casting my mind back as we've been developing MÌNH over the past year, because it feels vital to link this new exhibition at Fairfield City Museum & Gallery (FCMG) to the important work which preceded it. As Audrey Lorde said, "continuity does not happen automatically, nor is it a passive process." There is a lineage, and our work here picks up where others such as Hoang Vo, Cuong Phu Le and the late Dr Boitran Beatty-Huynh left off.

MÌNH is the first major exhibition at FCMG to focus on the local populations which radically transformed the area more than forty years ago. It is by no means an exhaustive survey of artists with roots in Vietnam, but a cross-section largely drawn from the Fairfield area and its surrounds, on Darug land and beyond. Through this intergenerational and cross-disciplinary artistic dialogue, the works in this exhibition explore the infinite tangents of diasporic life.

After watching Andrew Lam speak that day in Liverpool, he let me interview him, and all these years later one of his comments seems particularly relevant to MÌNH: "Identity is, to me, open-ended — a continuum. There's the core sense of who you are and that will never really change. But then there's additional layers of who you become and they also change you."

Sheila Ngọc Phạm *curator*
April 2023

Năm 2005 tôi được tham dự một buổi nói chuyện ở Bảo tàng Khu vực Liverpool. Diễn giả hôm đó là nhà văn người Mỹ gốc Việt Andrew Lam, người xuất bản tuyển tập *Những giấc mơ hương (Perfume Dreams: Reflections on the Vietnamese Diaspora)*. Hai giám tuyển ở Casula Powerhouse, Hoàng Võ và Cường Phú Lê, đã mời Andrew Lam tham gia vào việc lên chương trình công khai cho tuyển tập *Sự sụp đổ của Sài Gòn: Thu thập các Mảnh vỡ Thế hệ Hậu chiến 1975*.

Hồi đó, tôi vẫn chưa biết làm thế nào để hiểu được những gì mà gia đình tôi đã trải qua ở Việt nam cũng như cuộc trốn chạy của chúng tôi khỏi Việt nam sau đó. Năm 24 tuổi, tôi vẫn trăn trở với việc định cư của chúng tôi ở Úc, và không có cảm giác đây là "nhà mình". Ba tôi thường nói chuyện về cuộc sống ở đây như một nơi ở tạm ít bữa vì một ngày nào đó chúng tôi sẽ quay trở về quê hương. Nhưng tham dự buổi nói chuyện của Andrew Lam đã đánh dấu sự khởi đầu trong nhận thức của tôi về việc tôi là một phần của cộng đồng hải ngoại toàn cầu.

Tôi đã nhìn lại quá khứ khi chúng tôi làm các công việc chuẩn bị cho MÌNH trong năm qua, bởi vì điều vô cùng quan trọng đối với tôi là chúng tôi kết nối triển lãm này ở Bảo tàng và Phòng tranh Thành phố Fairfield (FCMG) với những gì quan trọng đã được làm trước đó. Như Audrey Lorde đã nói, "kế tục không phải là cái tự diễn ra, cũng không phải là một quá trình thụ động." Đã có một truyền thống để mọi người ghi nhận, và công việc của chúng tôi ở đây là kế tục những gì mà Hoang Vo, Cuong Phu Le và cố Tiến sĩ Boitran Beatty-Huynh đã để lại.

MÌNH là triển lãm lớn đầu tiên ở FCMG tập trung vào những cộng đồng dân cư đã thay đổi hoàn toàn khu vực này hơn 40 năm trước. Đây tuyệt nhiên không phải là một cuộc khảo sát toàn diện về các nghệ sĩ có nguồn gốc từ Việt Nam, mà là một mặt cắt ngang, chủ yếu được phác họa từ khu vực Fairfield và các vùng lân cận, trên vùng đất Dharug và xa hơn nữa. Thông qua cuộc đối thoại nghệ thuật liên thế hệ và liên ngành này, các tác phẩm trong triển lãm này khám phá một số trong vô vàn khía cạnh của cuộc sống hải ngoại.

Sau buổi nói chuyện ở Liverpool, Andrew Lam đã đồng ý trả lời phỏng vấn, và đây là nhận xét của anh, mà suốt những năm sau đó, tôi luôn cảm thấy đặc biệt phù hợp với MÌNH: "Đối với tôi, bản sắc là một cái gì đó mở — một sự liên tục. Trong mỗi người đều có một phần cốt lõi, cái sẽ không bao giờ thực sự thay đổi. Nhưng ngoài phần đó, có những tầng bổ sung, là phần làm nên con người bạn, và chúng cũng thay đổi bạn."

Sheila Ngọc Phạm, *đồng giám tuyển*
Tháng 4 năm 2023

ARTIST

Dacchi Dang

Dacchi Dang is a Sydney-based photographic artist, independent researcher, and a former board member of the 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. He has exhibited nationally and internationally and received numerous grants, residencies and commissions. Dang attained a Doctor of Philosophy degree, awarded by the Queensland College of the Arts, and a Master of Arts in Photography from the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales.

Dang's installations use aesthetic and poetic language to comment on the life of Vietnamese and Chinese/Vietnamese diaspora. He draws on his personal experience as a refugee and the stories of the Australian Vietnamese community to present and preserve cultural memories and stories for future generations. Dang's work aims to break down cultural barriers in the sharing of diasporic voices to promote better understanding between communities in Australia.

Messenger is a series of black and white images that explores and documents the urban landscape in Cabramatta and the diasporic Vietnamese community's lives and works since 1975.

Children's kites figure literally and metaphorically in this work. My childhood memories consist of fond times when I would go up to the rooftop of my family home and look up at the sky, daydreaming about the unknown world. Kite-flying became a ritual for many Vietnamese kids because it was a way to forget the daily chaos and brutal events during the Vietnam War. Children made and decorated their kites, transforming them into devices conveying their dreams — messengers. Children competed to see who could fly their kites the highest, sending beauty into the sky, sending our thoughts and dreams to our loved ones and others around the world.



Pai Lau Gate, Freedom Plaza,
Cabramatta, 2022
Photographed by Dacchi Dang
for the *Messenger* series kite designs.

ARTIST

Christina Huynh

Christina Huynh is a muralist and illustrator based in Western Sydney who paints under the name 'STYNA'. Her art practice explores muralism, illustration, and picture books from watercolour, pencil, and ink to aerosol and acrylic. Christina creates characters and stories in her work that express her everyday thought, experience, and memory. Since completing a Bachelor of Design in Visual Communication at Western Sydney University in 2011, Christina has been working as a freelance artist painting murals in local cafés and restaurants. In 2018, Christina was granted her first public art project, the Dale Parade Mural Project for the City of Canterbury Bankstown. Today, Christina continues to work with local councils and schools, focusing on art-for-purpose, place-based projects, and collaborations.

Curiosity, fantasy, and imagination animate my artmaking practice. As a firm believer in the beauty of the day-to-day and a believer in life that happens 'for' you, the artmaking journey is, in contrast, lonely and, at times, filled with despair. I centred this work around something that makes my home feel other-worldly – my grandma's wicked teapot collection. She has chosen each teapot for its quirkiness and sturdiness. My grandparents' home in Wakeley has inspired many of my illustrations and murals because my sister and I spent so much of our childhood gallivanting around their backyard with the rest of the neighbourhood kids. And so, this work is very much about childhood nostalgia. Each piece is a portal into a past feeling or memory. The character is part lotus, part ranchu goldfish – a recurring detail that represents my affinity for creating characters and their worlds. I paint the lotus, which blooms from murky water, because it represents strength, resilience and purity. For six years and counting, I've painted goldfish – creating these characters as a form of therapy whenever I feel the seriousness and pressures of life – which seems like a lot of goldfish and pressures.

—
Grandma's Teapot (2023)
Digital design for mural
Courtesy of the artist



ARTIST

Matt Huynh

Matt Huynh is an Emmy Award-winning visual artist. His brush and ink paintings are informed by *sumi-e* ink painting and comic books. Huynh's interactive comic *The Boat* was awarded a World Illustration Award and *Cabramatta* was nominated for a Will Eisner Comic Industry Award. His animated VR documentary, *Reeducated*, was honoured with an SXSW's Special Jury Award for Immersive Journalism and Best of VR award by Venice Film Festival. Huynh's comics, animation and illustrations have been exhibited by MoMA, the Smithsonian and the Sydney Opera House. His work can be found at www.matthuynh.com.

Cabramatta is an autobiographical comic about growing up in a community of Vietnam War refugees resettled in Australia's heroin capital. The work straddles formal tensions as a comic designed to be read in the pages of *The Believer's* print magazine, as well as an interactive webcomic transcending the beats and boundaries of page turns and panel layouts with an infinite scroll, autoloading animation and buzzing sound design.

This presentation also balanced the two voices - subjective personal childhood memories and an omniscient narrator providing explanatory historical context for an international audience. The perception of the community and its recorded history is questioned with quotation marks containing lazy labels. Likewise, the (un)reliability of childhood memory is presented with syrupy brush and ink lines. Theatrically flat staged compositions lay bare the conceit of imagined scenes connecting lost gaps between documented history, news media, memory, gossip and open secrets.

The hyperactive collage across mediums grasps at the experience and challenges of preserving and making sense of a community's history with what has survived in memory, historical documentation, collective imagination and the bias of an external gaze.



Cabramatta (2019)
Interactive comic stills
Courtesy of the artist

REFLECTION

Matt
Huynh

More than any race or nationality, I identify as the child of refugees raised amongst a community of immigrants. When I studied at university and was asked to describe where I came from, I had to reach across shires and train lines to make legible the repercussions of wars relegated to South West Sydney. Moving to work overseas, I've had to reach across borders to explain our political history. When returning home to speak to younger students, I find myself leaping across class experiences to a new generation growing up in a food tourist destination hotspot.

For MÌNH, I've responded to the question of what it means to be who we are when displaced refugees have settled in their 'forever' homes, with a work that is simultaneously reflective and a warning. If we are not stewards of our own histories, they will be lost, or worse - our stories will be told for us.

REFLECTION

Hoài Mạnh
Tất

While we are constantly on the journey to discover our current 'mình' and looking forward to the future 'mình', we seem to constantly run into friction under the surface.

In order to move forward, we are forced to reflect our relationships with the past 'mình' and these reflections are brutal confrontations that exist only within our minds. Yet, they could also manifest through the little interactions that we tend to avoid or delay until they catch up to us in urgency and demand our attention and acknowledgement.

Đình Huy
Nguyễn

Mình means the self and the collective self that we share with our family, loved ones, neighbours and strangers alike.

To us who had to say goodbye to our home country and everything and everyone we knew to move to another country at such young ages, mình also means the severing of the self.

To us who had to forge new identities when we arrived in Australia, mình is something we're still searching for.

ARTIST

Phương Ngô

Phương Ngô is an artist and curator living and working in Naarm (Melbourne). He is currently co-director of Hyphenated Projects with Nikki Lam and holds a PhD from RMIT. His practice explores the intersections of history, memory, and place. Through archival process rooted in a conceptual practice, he seeks to find linkages between culture, politics and oral histories and historic events, which in turn dictates the materiality of his artistic output.

Between 1 and 2 million people fled Vietnam at the fall of Saigon. Of this it is estimated that 500,000 people perished at sea. Decades later, hope still lingers for many of those that have survived. Without a body how can one be sure?

In *Article 14.1* artist Phương Ngô lived on public view for 10 days on the same supplies his parents had on their boat, occupying his time by folding origami boats out of hell bank notes. In this iteration for MÌNH, visitors are invited to also partake in the folding of boats. While doing so they will have the opportunity to listen to narrative recordings from other Vietnamese refugees. Similar to the original performative work, the origami boats will be burnt at the end of the exhibition in honour of those who were lost and continue to be lost at sea.



Article 14.1 (2019)
Performance stills
Courtesy of the artist

ARTISTS

Hoài Mạnh Tất & Đình Huy Nguyễn

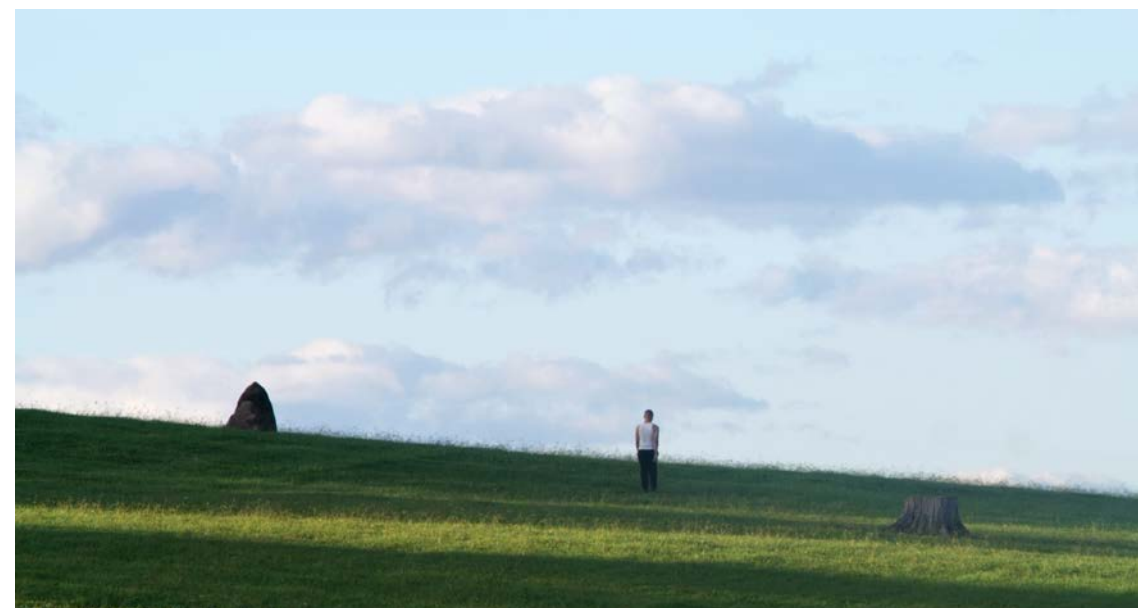
Hoài Mạnh Tất (Diamond) is a filmmaker and a visual storyteller based in Western Sydney. Born in the city of vibrancy and contradictions, Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, also known as Sài Gòn, Việt Nam, and later experiencing some of the most formative years in the western suburbs of Sydney since the age of 17, Diamond's work has always found its core exploration in the nuanced conflicts of identities and languages that breathe in between spaces. Her focus in stories is deeply inspired by her experience growing up in a mixed cultural household of French, Hong-kongese and Vietnamese identities, as well as influenced by the challenges, sacrifices and tenacity of her family's immigration experience.

Đình Huy Nguyễn is a graphic designer based in Western Sydney. Born in Ho Chi Minh City, Huy has so far spent half of his life in a small town in the Mekong Delta region called Trà Vinh and the other half in the western suburbs of Sydney. He centres his practice around the tension between the placed and the displaced and the state of flux as the state of being. This is reflected in the clients and projects he engages with—socially-minded projects with a focus on empowering and representing diverse voices and underrepresented communities.

reasons not to call is inspired by a memory. Huy remembers being summoned by his mum to say hello to his grandma during one of her weekly intercontinental phone calls to check up on her parents. It was a while ago, back when Vietnamese families had to purchase prepaid phone credits at Asian grocery stores. It used to cost around 30 bucks for an approx. 30 minute call. So when called upon, Huy found himself tongue-tied: sick from anxiety and over-preciousness. He didn't know what to say to grandma and was well aware they only had 3 minutes of credits left. He mumbled a 'hello bà ngoại', fighting against the snot that started to gather inside his nostrils, while teary-eyed.

reasons not to call is about guilt. Guilt of not calling our loved ones enough. The guilt of not expressing ourselves enough. The guilt of not being enough.

Making this work has helped us confront our guilt. It is an exorcism into our deepest fears and shames, revealing our inability to reconcile the people we used to be with the people we are now. During the process, we ask ourselves—are we proud of who we've been and who we've become?



reasons not to call (2023)
Video still
Courtesy of the artists

ARTISTS

James Nguyen & Victoria Pham

Spanning art, technology and science, Victoria Pham is an Australian sound artist, evolutionary biologist and writer. She is based between Paris and Sydney. Her works have been exhibited and presented by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, TATE Britain and West Space Gallery, amongst others.

James Nguyen works with documentary practice, installation and performance to examine the politics of art, self-representation and how decolonising strategies can contribute to diasporic dialogues. His work has been included in group exhibitions across Australia, including *The National*, Museum of Contemporary Art, 2019. Recent exhibitions include *Re:Tuning*, with Victoria Pham and collaborators at the Sydney Opera House.

RE:SOUNDING is an artist and community-led project that seeks to Repatriate the sounds and practices of the Đông Sơn Bronze Drum. With the collective contributions of our friends, families, and colleagues, we are challenging what it means to repatriate cultural objects and reclaim cultural knowledge in a contemporary and community embedded setting. As we share the sounds of these instruments online and in real life performances, we challenge our audiences to generate and share their own encounters with this instrument so that its practice can exist beyond ourselves and the landscapes that we have been dispersed to.



RE:SOUNDING, image of surface of a Đông Sơn drum (2020)

RE:SOUNDING, percussionist Salina Myat performing and recording on the Đông Sơn drum (2020)

Courtesy of the artists

REFLECTION

James
Nguyen

Victoria
Pham

Mình is a term that is about the selflessness of the self. It is something embodied and shared. As people resettled in Australia and other places of colonial occupation and disturbance, it is particularly difficult to find a sense of belonging and place that is ours. As settler-colonisers on Stolen Aboriginal Land, this place has never been and will probably never be ours. We live, work and exist here, yet we have to create and invent our own forms of connectedness as globally diasporic people.

Mình perhaps offers us a concept that simultaneously offers us something for ourselves (của mình), and for each other (chúng mình). Most relevant for our project and a call to reclaiming our cultural sounds and musical heritage is akin to lovers calling out “mình ơi!” to each other. When we call, reach out and listen together, we start to reclaim our physical, sonic, and cultural belonging together.

REFLECTION

Phường
Ngô

We come from all the experiences of those that have come before us, and our experiences will continue in future generations. Mình is the collective past, present and future of who we are as a people.

Garry
Trinh

In 2018 I travelled to Cairo on my own to visit the Great Pyramids. I was in Egypt for 3 weeks.

Everywhere I went, street vendors yelled out “China, China, China” to grab my attention. I told them I was Australian. “But your face! your face!” they replied. I have never felt more culturally assimilated into Australian society as I did when I was in Egypt.

WRITER

Lucia Tường Vy Nguyễn

Lucia Tường Vy Nguyễn is a Vietnamese Australian writer exploring the intersection of Southeast Asian folklore, ludic violence, and global technoculture. Her writing has been featured in publications such as *Kill Your Darlings*, *Art Collector*, and *LIMINAL*'s non-fiction anthology, *Against Disappearance* (Pantera Press, 2022). With her collaborator and friend Reina Takeuchi, she has exhibited at SomoS Art House Berlin and wrote an essay for *Going Down Swinging* which won the Non-Fiction category in the 2022 Woollahra Digital Literary Awards. She is invigorated by the opportunity to play and dream within, around, or even outside capitalist structures of "work".

*L*ve P*em* is braided together from two forms of correspondence that toy with the eros: profanities affectionately exchanged with my partner; and swear words censored by my family in the Vietnamese they taught me to speak. I want to indulge in the impudence and play that undergirds profanity (swearing, cussing, hexing, cursing, fucking); in other words, the eros (aliveness, energy, exploration) that animates life. Funnily enough, the first words my boyfriend taught me in any of the six languages he speaks were a variation of "motherfucker".

Profanities are often employed for affects deemed incommunicable, used to colour an otherwise grey attempt to rebuke, or fashioned into invitations for jest, intimacy, confrontation, or knowing. As such, swearing satisfies the eros not only as a vehicle for intensity, but also as a signifier of vitality. In reflecting on how *mình* is understood as an address tailored for an intimate public, *L*ve P*em* embodies a resistance against formality and a flirtation with the shameful, the tasteless, the honest.

WRITER

Huyen Hac Helen Tran

Huyen Hac Helen Tran is a Vietnamese-Australian writer living and working on Wangal land. She's been described as having chaotic aunty energy, which she thinks is iconic. Her work can be found in *Sydney Review of Books*, *SBS Voices*, *The Suburban Review*, *The Big Issue*, *Peril Magazine*, *The Wayward Sky Anthology* (2021) and more.

Triptych begins from memory. When I close my eyes and imagine my family home, two things are always there. The first, our family altar display. The second, a lacquered tableau of 100 horses running around a river, split into three panels. This image, so close to my heart, embodies multiple connotations of the Vietnamese word *mình*. The phrase *của mình* means mine/ours, what belongs to me/us. *Mình* also means body and represents the cumulative whole of something. For me, these meanings are connotative of overlapping parts; childhood ebullience, the nature of change, and the dichotomy of my lived experience as a second-generation Vietnamese-Australian.

Triptych is a depiction of this co-existence. I look to the moving parts, the flow of water, the resilience within. The home here acts as a cornerstone to understand both the pulse of existence, unique to my cultural heritage and Vietnamese diasporic experience. I accept the migratory state and reflect on my innate, almost desperate need to either come/go back home in my own way, harnessed by the weight of memory. Are the horses coming or going? What about myself? What about you?

James W. Goh

One of the most obscured details about the Fairfield area is hidden in plain sight: a significant portion of the community, and, by extension, the Vietnamese diaspora in Australia, is Hoa — Han Chinese from Vietnam. Indeed, there are traces of the Viet Hoa everywhere, from the traditional Chinese characters that accompany Vietnamese script on storefronts and the Mingyue Lay Buddhist Temple in Bonnyrigg — one of the largest Han Chinese Buddhist temples in the Southern Hemisphere — to the voices alternating between Cantonese, Vietnamese, Teochew, and other languages on John Street in Cabramatta.

The Hoa are also known as the Chinese-Vietnamese, Vietnamese-Chinese, and Sino-Vietnamese; this can be confusing for all these terms also include those with mixed backgrounds. The term “Hoa” originates from the Vietnamese *Người Hoa* and Cantonese 華人 (*waa4 jan4*). “The Hoa consist of Han Chinese who, over centuries, migrated (and assimilated) to Vietnam as colonial administrators, settlers, merchants, and political refugees; correspondingly, they embody a through line connecting imperial Han Chinese expansion, Vietnamese dynastic rule, French colonialism, and Vietnamese nationhood.

Despite this ongoing presence, historical and cultural circumstances have conspired to obscure the presence of the Hoa. In Vietnam, the dominant ethnic group, the Kinh, like other majority groups, have appropriated the national category for themselves. And so, the Hoa have tended to identify as diasporic Han Chinese (唐人) because there is

no discourse of multiculturalism for them to inhabit. Abroad, the Hoa have either been subsumed under the categories of Mainland Han Chinese or (Kinh) Vietnamese. Today, it is difficult to discern Hoa from Kinh with certainty because, in 1958, the Ngô Đình Diệm regime issued a series of decrees that retroactively conferred Vietnamese citizenship upon all Hoa born in Vietnam, mandated exclusive use of the Vietnamese language in Hoa-administered schools, and forced the Hoa to Vietnamise their names.

As unremarkable as recognising Hoaness may be for those who grew up in Vietnam, I hope that naming and registering Hoa presence here provides second-generation Hoa, like myself, with an entry into their own origin stories — stories that have been diminished, repressed, or relegated to the margins of dominant histories.

To attend to Hoa presence is to think about Kinh and Hoa histories as entangled with one another, to think about diasporic affiliations beyond nationalist imaginaries, and to do away with nationalist ideologies of authenticity, purity, and reproduction. By registering the Hoa, then, we take seriously the multivalency of our local community and multiply what we encompass when we reflect on *mình*.

James W. Goh has writing published in *diaCRITICS* and the *Sydney Review of Books*, and has appeared on *Backstory Podcast by Reel Asian*. He is interested in histories of empire, modernity, race, and relationality.

Fairfield地區在眾目昭彰之下，隱藏着最不為人所知的細節：該社區的一大重要組成部分，更確切地說，是散居在澳大利亞的越南人——Hoa，即來自越南的漢族人。誠然，觸目所及，越 Hoa 的蹤跡隨處可見，從店面越南文字旁的繁體漢字，到 Bonnyrigg 的明月居士林——南半球最大的漢族佛教寺廟之一，以及 Cabramatta 的約翰街上，盈耳盡是交替互換的廣東話、越南語、潮州語和其他語言。

Hoa 也可以用以統稱越南華人【英語：Chinese-Vietnamese、Vietnamese-Chinese和 Sino-Vietnamese】；這可能會造成混淆，因為這些術語還可以用來形容具有混血背景的人士。“Hoa”一詞源自於越南語的 *Người Hoa*，以及廣東話的華人 (*waa4 jan4*)。Hoa所指稱的族群，是指幾個世紀以來，移居（並被同化）到越南的漢族，包括殖民地土政者、定居者、商家和政治難民等；與此相應的是，他們的由來體現並展示了一條連接漢族帝國擴張、越南王朝統治、法國殖民主義和越南建國歷史的直線。

儘管Hoa族群持續發展並存在，但礙於種種交織互纏的歷史和文化因素，致使 Hoa 的存在沒沒無聞。在越南，主流族群，京族，與其他主要族群一樣，已經將族群類別的話語權據為己有。因此，Hoa 傾向於自我認定為散居的漢族（唐人），因為他們沒有可依循憑藉的多元文化主義話語，來定義自我。在海外，Hoa 則被歸入大陸漢族或（京族）越南人的範疇類別。時至今日，已難以確切地把 Hoa 從京族中區分出來，因為在 1958 年，吳廷琰政權發布了一系列的法令，包括運用法律追溯力授予所有在越南出生的 Hoa 越南公民身份，另強制在 Hoa 所管理的學校裡使用越南語，更強迫 Hoa 將他們的名字改成越南語。

對於在越南長大的人來說，承認 Hoa 族身分可能無足輕重，但我希望在這裡說明和申述 Hoa 的存在，能為像我一樣的第二代 Hoa，開闢一個進入有關他們族裔源流故事的入口，窺見一些被削弱、壓抑，或被排拒至主流歷史邊緣的故事。

關注 Hoa 的存在，即將京族和 Hoa 的歷史視為彼此糾纏、密不可分的整體，藉此思考超越民族主義想像的僑民關係，並消除有關民族主義的真實性、純潔性和繁殖意識形態。故此，通過對 Hoa 的鄭重認證，我們更認真對待有關本地社區的多價性，並在反思 *mình* 時，得以擴充並豐富我們自身所代表及擁有的一切。

ARTIST

Lynn Nguyễn

Lynn Nguyễn is a visual artist and illustrator from Sydney, Australia. She graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Art in Photography and has worked as a photography assistant doing post-production at a small studio. These experiences led to a fascination with digital technology, something that is pervasive as a tool and source of inspiration within her practice.

Her work at its heart is deeply influenced by folklore and sci-fi/fantasy, as well as the harmony, natural beauty, and emotional storytelling of baroque and romantic art. Combining her own unique style of detailed line work and decorative imagery, she creates narratives imbued with longing and sometimes mad obsession.

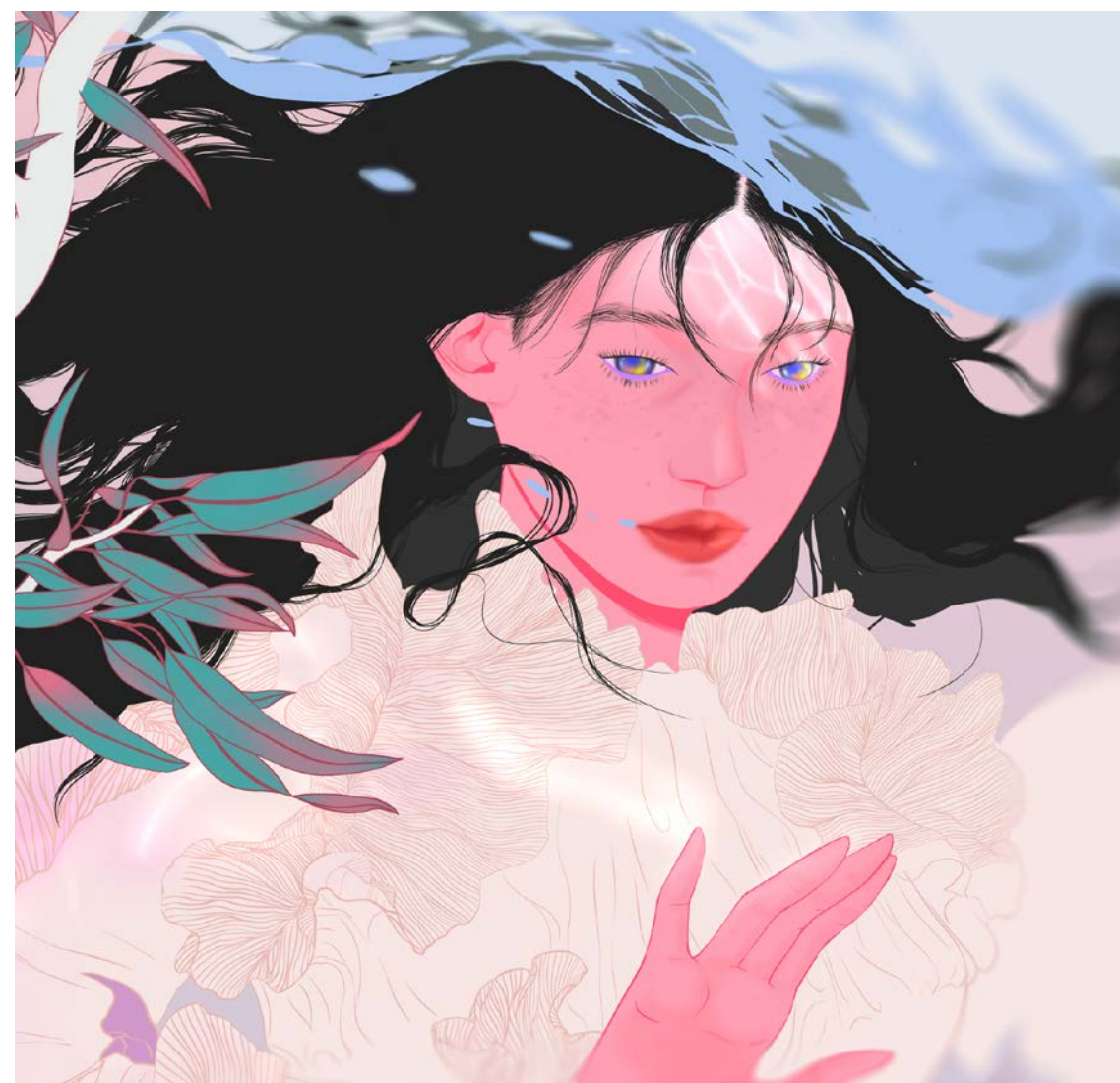
In 2019 she started the project *DARKSEA* with J.S.D. Andrews as a space to explore a more intuitive style of creating, through sound and vocalisation.

Someone I love frequently tells me about his dreams, which are always so vivid and “so real.” We discuss them at length, laugh at the more absurd details, and try to decipher their meaning.

Do our dreams actually say anything about our hopes and fears? Can they uncover any hidden truths within our memories? Or reflect our “real” state of mind? Or are they just like dust that our brains accidentally kick up while we’re deep in REM sleep?

Recently, it occurred to me that the urge to examine my dreams is not unlike trying to make sense of my “real life” experiences.

Echo explores how our memories, longings, and struggles with identity can manifest within our subconscious and serve as vehicles to process strong emotions and engage with ourselves. I wanted to present these ongoing conflicts through a scene from a recurring dream of “travelling” in water. The artwork is softly surreal and references familiar imagery unearthed from both mundane and hidden places, gently oscillating between delirium and wonder.



Echo (2023)
Digital illustration
Courtesy of the artist

REFLECTION

Lynn
Nguyễn

Back home, to my father and my extended Vietnamese family, I am con or chị and sometimes cháu. There are many words I can use to refer to myself and convey who I am. I wonder, *what can the word mình convey?*

My ông nội and bà nội were school teachers in Vietnam so they understood the significance and power of knowledge. They arrived in this country with my father, aunts, and uncle bearing only their language, and it was important that this language was passed on to me. These lessons were a way to nurture new and existing relationships and to invigorate our connection to the distant Vietnam described within their stories.

When I speak Vietnamese, I feel a sense of belonging and community that I have not often known growing up in Australia. *Mình* is a word that allows me to bind *I* and *us* together.

REFLECTION

My Lê
Thị

Tôi đã sống hơn nửa cuộc đời ở Úc kể từ khi rời Việt Nam vào năm 1985 khi mới ngoài 20 tuổi. Tôi được coi là “thế hệ 1.5”. Cuộc sống đã dạy tôi giá trị của lòng tốt, sự hào phóng và tình yêu bằng cách cho tôi thấy ánh sáng và mặt tối của con người. Tôi cảm ơn cơ hội ở Úc để tôi có thể chia sẻ kinh nghiệm và ý tưởng của tôi thông qua nghệ thuật. Triển lãm “MÌNH” này là một cuộc triển lãm nghệ thuật tạo hình quan trọng trình bày tác phẩm nghệ thuật của cộng đồng đã đến từ hải ngoại. Thật vinh dự khi được đóng góp một phần trong cuộc triển lãm này.

I have lived more than half my life in Australia since arriving from Vietnam in 1985 in my early 20s. I am regarded as a “1.5 generation”. Life has taught me the value of kindness, generosity and love by showing me the light and the dark sides of humanity. I am grateful for this opportunity to share my experiences and ideas through my art. This exhibition presents a vital display of art from our diaspora. It is an honour to be part of it.

WRITER

Kim Phạm

Kim Phạm is a screenwriter and filmmaker from Western Sydney. Kim is currently co-writing the screen adaptation for Vivian Pham's debut novel, *The Coconut Children* (2020). The duo go by 'The Sisters Pham'. Kim is also working on a second draft of *Bird Hands Beaver a Fishmint Bouquet*, her screenplay which is a dark coming-of-age comedy; imagine if *The Breakfast Club* was directed by Bong Joon Ho and based in Bankstown. Supported by CuriousWorks, she has also directed a short proof of a concept film based on her screenplay for *Bird Hands Beaver a Fishmint Bouquet*. In 2022, Kim won the Heyman Mentorship Award for her novel adaptation of her screenplay which will provide her with a 12 month mentorship with Dr Kathryn Heyman and a full editorial report from HarperCollins.

Growing up, we never talked about our feelings. "Thank heavens for the sun today" meant mum was missing Vietnam. When she would peg *cải chua* on the rotary clothesline, that meant she was thinking of her sisters and the old days when they would dry and pickle mustard greens together on their rooftop terrace. And when she cooked *phở*, that meant she had granted our most earnest wishes even though she didn't enjoy eating it herself. Words to describe what we were feeling never came easily to us, not the least because of the generational divide between us and our parents, but because of the way our culture reveres - or has been forced to revere - the shrouding of emotions with silence. This encompasses pain, and it certainly encompasses love. However, our vocabulary for tastes, textures, and flavour profiles is extensive. We learnt to read menus before we learnt to read any folktale in Vietnamese. In *Mẹnu*, I have written a menu and in so doing adopted a method of translation that all children of immigrants use in their daily lives to understand their parents' basic emotions.

WRITER

Vivian Pham

Vivian Pham is a Vietnamese novelist, essayist, poet and aspiring folklorist from southwestern Sydney. In high school she wrote a novel called *The Coconut Children*, which was published in March 2020 by Penguin Random House. She has twice been a delegate to the International Congress of Youth Voices. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and Creative Writing and is currently writing the film and stage adaptations of *The Coconut Children*. She also teaches creative writing workshops with Story Factory, the same not-for-profit creative writing centre for young people that provided her literary start.

// *Jean Paul Sartre writes about stickiness as an ontological phenomenon: "Plunging into water gives a different impression; I remain a solid. But to touch stickiness is to risk diluting myself into viscosity." Food, ritual, and song were all water to me. But beauty was honey.*

We live here, but so much of our life is elsewhere. Certain aspects of our culture, transplanted from Vietnam, felt entirely foreign and irreconcilable with the white suburban world beyond our front yard. Although this caused some pain, it also made it easier to protect. The food, for example: the pungency of fish sauce and fermented shrimp paste that I loathed and then learned to crave. I knew none of my teachers or friends at school would understand this sensation, and this placed it firmly in my possession. There was the ritual offering of papaya to a portrait of Buddha, and the asking for it back when the fruit had time to ripen in nirvana. And there were the Vietnamese songs from the pre-war 'golden era': coarse, crooning and charming. Who else but me listened to these songs, I wondered, thinking myself a historian. But the beauty standards of Vietnam were not frozen artefacts in the way food, song, and ritual were. On the contrary, they commented on my flesh and in so doing threatened to make me malleable. When I overheard my aunties gather like crows to discuss how much prettier-than-me a fair-skinned cousin was, I tried to lighten my own complexion with lemon juice. On the one hand, I wanted to celebrate where my parents had come from and who I was. On the other, I wondered if it was worth having a self you had to constantly preen, diminish, and compromise in order to assert that very selfhood.

ARTIST

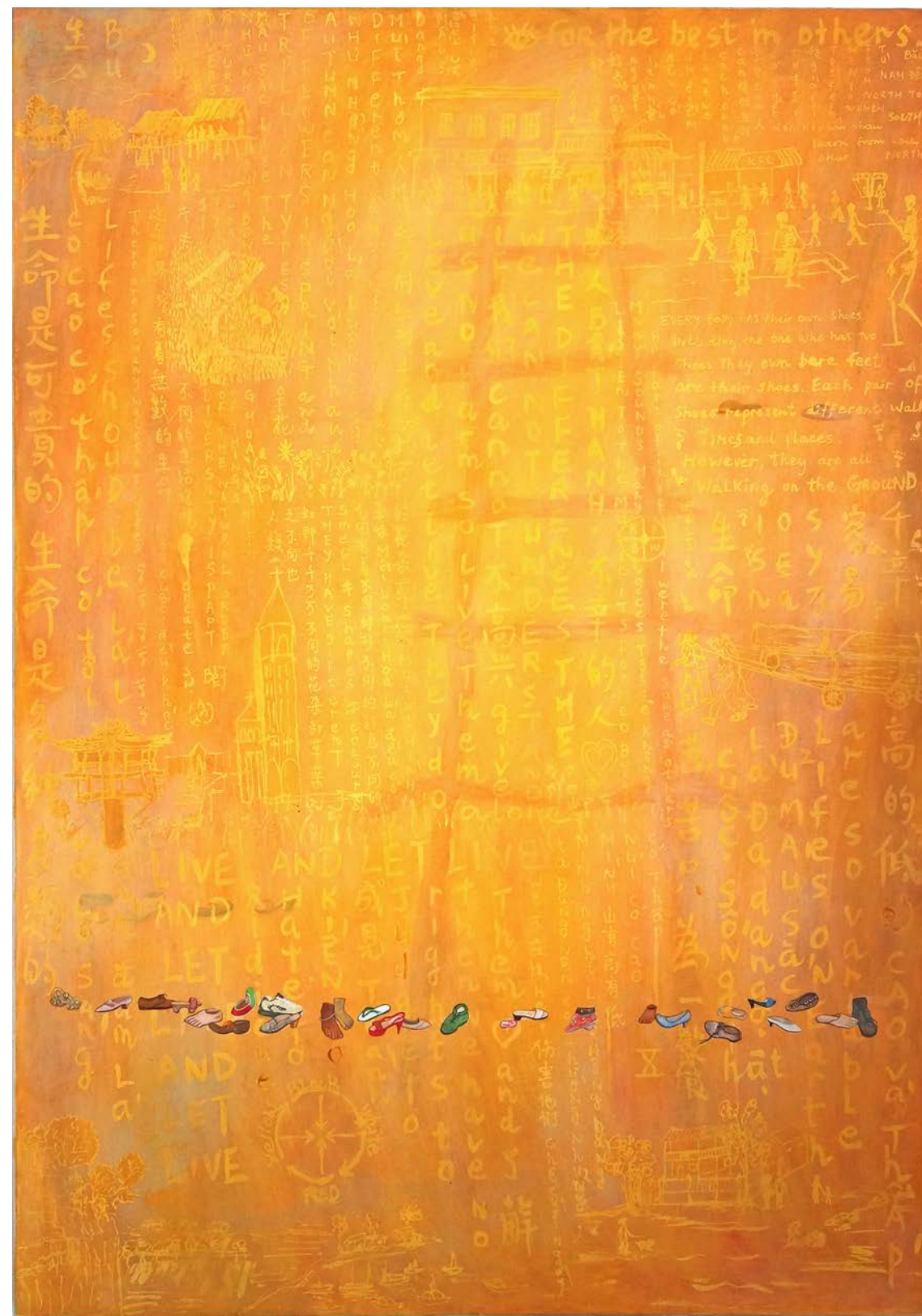
My Lê Thi

My Lê Thi grew up in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam. Her heritage is Vietnamese Central Highland and Chinese. An orphan from the age of ten, Thi worked in a salted fish shop and taught herself art and music in her spare time. When the fish shop was burned down in 1975, she found work as a performer - dancer, singer and musician. The fallout from the American war and the subsequent war with China from 1978 made life in Vietnam very difficult for young Thi and the Chinese Vietnamese population. She came to Australia in 1985, firstly studying Fine Arts at the Northern Territory University in Darwin (BA '94). She then moved to Sydney in 1994 and studied Arts Management at the University of Technology and Digital Interactive Media. Thi's arts practice is multidisciplinary and collaborative, and she teaches art to people who have learning needs. Her work expresses concern about the human condition, speaks of love and harmony and opposes racism and discrimination. Thi's work has been included in many major exhibitions in Australia, the United States, and various countries in Asia and Europe. Her work has also been used as one of the case studies in the High School Visual Arts Curriculum since 2004.

I use various art forms to express stories about people from all walks of life. Like many other migrants who have been through traumatic experiences as well as observing various struggles and the human condition, art has helped me to go beyond myself and explore ideas with new positive meaning. I use art to draw on my experiences, to accept, to learn and to see things from different points of view.

In my work, I use basic visual elements such as skeletons, our common human inner structure. To symbolise the different human skin tones I often use black, white, yellow and red. I use commonly understood items such as wheels, ladders and footwear with a mixture of languages and colour to express the connection between places, cultures and races. My major focus is on communicating the differences and similarities between people. At a purely visual level and at deeper levels the work is reaching out to our common humanity beyond race, class, politics and religion.

Transformation (2003)
Acrylic on canvas
Courtesy of the artist



James Nguyen

Collecting Vietnamese Ceramics

Most people may have heard of Han, Chinese Song, Korean Joseon, and Japanese Edo and Meiji ceramics. Renowned for their exquisite quality, vibrancy, and bright celadon glazes, these northern cultures are just as critical to the technical and stylistic influence of neighbouring Bang Chiang, Thai Sawankhalok, Khmer, Cham, and Filipino Kalinga pottery on the lesser-known Vietnamese ceramics.

Paying attention to all these influences, I am only now beginning to appreciate the muted elegance and unique expression of gốm cổ Việt (ancient Vietnamese ceramics). Culturally and geographically situated within the most significant maritime trade routes of Asia, the Indo-Pacific, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean, the globalisation of ancient gốm is profoundly rich heritage. Vietnamese gốm includes Lý-Trần gốm men ngọc (jade celadon), gốm men trắng (ivory celadon), gốm hoa nâu (brown flower glaze), gốm men trắng vẽ lam Chu Đậu (blue on white ware), and perhaps my favourite, đồ sành cứng xám (unglazed grey Đông Sơn and Cham stoneware).

I started obsessively collecting and rediscovering gốm cổ Việt for myself when I first moved to Melbourne. Feeling homesickness for friends and older family in Sydney, I became awestruck by the contradictory scale that these humble, yet historically loaded vessels encapsulated. Disconnected in my new home, I began to surround myself with a surrogate gốm family. Very much like my actual relatives, gốm cổ Việt have been similarly dispersed and scattered throughout the world.

These cups, plates, and vases also held their particular stories of trauma and survival. A large portion of gốm cổ Việt were looted from burial sites or stripped from family altars and temples as people fled war. Most eventually have ended up in international antiques markets and auction houses in Australia, America, France, Germany, and Japan. Some have been recovered from ancient shipwrecks. A few are now carrying the recent chips and breakages that I myself had absentmindedly inflicted on them.

“ This personal collection of gốm cổ Việt is not only a cultural home away from home, but personifies the sublime condition of Vietnamese diasporic displacement. ”

As I was building and accumulating my personal collection of gốm cổ Việt, I started to reflect on how museums and institutions continue to be gatekeepers of significant collections of ethnographic materials throughout the world. I recognised how many private collections from Japan, Europe and the West only enter public consciousness when they briefly appear on deceased estate sales to be almost immediately reabsorbed back into the private market. Was I inevitably replicating the same possessiveness of outsiders who had caused the profound displacement and looting of these objects in the first place? My own journey into rediscovering Vietnamese ceramics is implicated in the cultural gate-keeping that prevents access, cultural analysis, and engagement to these materials under the misguided presumption of cultural reclamation and preservation.



At the moment, I am working towards a community-led, and redistributive model of conservation. Instead of holding onto these objects for the rest of my life, until I gift them to museums or instruct for their sale on the antiques market, I will use this collection to help repay family, friends, and members of the Vietnamese diaspora who continue to be collaborators on new and upcoming art projects. I will slowly introduce gốm cổ Việt family to my diasporic family. The hope is that others can take on the work of maintaining and caring for the objects of their own cultural heritage. This community will share in the collective responsibility and privilege of preserving the histories and adding their own stories and investigations to the broader knowledge and meaning of every gốm plate, cup, or vase.

Vietnamese ceramics collection
Courtesy James Nguyen

ARTIST

Bic Tieu

Bic Tieu is a designer, object maker and jeweller. She is also a lecturer teaching in the School of Art and Design at the University of NSW. She is interested in ways objects are holders to stories, cultures, and knowledge.

Bic's works draws on traditional and contemporary craft and design methods inspired by her Asian-cultural lineages to investigate themes of personal and cross-cultural narratives. She is interested in how material can manifest cartographic visualisation to investigate new kinds of cultural objects that are representative of the hybrid cultures, life experiences and identity represented in the diverse cultures in Australia. Bic's practice revel in materiality expressed in object-based forms to create better understanding of cultural diversity, decolonisation and the Asia-Australia context.

My personal narrative and practice as an object cultural maker is the catalyst for seeking a visual language that is representative of the hybrid cultures shared by many. This project draws upon my personal narrative and identity as an Australian with Chinese-Vietnamese lineage and growing up in the Fairfield West community on Darug land.

Growing up in the Fairfield West community, we celebrated festivals that were significant to the Chinese and Vietnamese communities. It was natural for my family to see 'our scene' as being the neighbouring suburbs around Fairfield, which were enclaves of migrants, social places for eating, grocery shopping and opportunities for speaking our first languages. Places like Cabramatta are a visual confluence of cultures – shop signs, food packaging and fruit and vegetables.

Charms of Fairfield is a celebration of these icons, presented as a graphic and jewellery design installation of charms. The charm is a very old, ubiquitous form in jewellery. Charms are objects in many cultures that are often worn, carried and charged with magical powers and auspicious meaning. There are 43 charms in the exhibition, the number of years I have been in Australia.



Charms of Fairfield (2023)
Metal
Courtesy of the artist

Bic Tieu would like to acknowledge that the material cost for this project was funded by the UNSW School of Art & Design 2022 Research Grant Scheme.

ARTIST

Maria Trần

Maria Trần has made significant contributions to the Australian film industry. A Vietnamese-Australian transnational artist, she lived, studied, and worked in Fairfield for 25 years before moving to the US. She is a director, actor, martial artist, activist, and cultural practitioner, with a background in psychology, filmmaking, and working with diverse communities. Trần is best known for her international action blockbusters, such as *Fist of the Dragon* (2014), *Death Mist* (2015) and *Tracer* (2016). She is also the founder and managing director of Phoenix Eye Films, a female-led and culturally diverse art and film company based in Western Sydney. Trần is a passionate advocate for greater representation of Asian Australians in the media and entertainment industry, and has spoken at various events about issues of cultural diversity and gender representation in film and television.

The COVID pandemic brought on a tsunami of anti-Asian sentiment all over the world. Terms such as 'Kung Flu' were used by Donald Trump. Racism is no laughing matter, and one of the most difficult topics to address; but what if we made it an action film, Asian-centric and led, dealing with all the tropes of racism?

Operation Kung Flu (2021) is a film that entertains us with the notion of how we deal with racism in a Hong Kong action, female cop genre way – a genre that rose to popularity in the '80s-'90s where women were the forefront of action movies across Asia. In particular, the action hero of *Operation Kung Flu* provides a much-needed counter-narrative to the stereotype of Asian women as submissive, passive, and weak.

My work is deeply rooted in my own personal experiences and cultural heritage, as well as my passion for storytelling and exploration of the cinematics of martial arts action genres. I draw inspiration from my upbringing in a Vietnamese-Australian immigrant family, as well as extensive training in martial arts. Through my work, I seek to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about Asian cultures and identities, while also celebrating their richness and complexity.

Operation Kung Flu (2021)
Movie poster
Courtesy of the artist



ARTIST

Garry Trinh

Trinh is an artist working in photography, video, painting and works on paper. He makes art about the uncanny, unexpected and spontaneous moments in daily life. He is inspired by his surroundings and from the vast visual output of mass culture. His works are about a way of looking at the world, to reveal magic in the mundane. He is never bored and never late. He holds a BA in Psychology and a BA in Visual Communications / Photography and Digital Imaging from the University of Western Sydney.

Trinh identifies himself as Australian, Vietnamese/Chinese.

Naomi Campbell was once sued by a former friend, after the supermodel had punched and kicked her for wearing a similar outfit. Inspired by this and other unspoken fashion faux pax, Trinh spent an afternoon posing with strangers who happened to be wearing the exact same cardigan as the one he had on.

The creation of *Same same* was made spontaneously. Trinh believes our clothes play a role in shaping our identity. The fashion brands we choose to wear and how we wear them are signifiers to others about our personality, status, identity and values.

When he is not wearing a black cardigan, he likes to lounge in sneakers, shorts and t-shirts designed by skateboarders and artists who shaped his identity. Trinh spent much of his youth at the Fairfield City Leisure Centre skate park.



Same same (2005)
Digital photograph
Courtesy of the artist

Sheila Ngọc Phạm

Sheila Ngọc Phạm is a writer, editor, producer and curator. Her writing has been published in literary and mainstream publications including *Sydney Review of Books*, *Griffith Review* and *The New York Times*. She was a finalist for the 2021 Pascall Prize for Arts Criticism for her essay, 'Coming of Age in Cabramatta'.

Her recent features include profiles on Hanoi-based artist Thái Linh for COLORSxStudios and San Diego-based singer Phương Tâm for *The Guardian*. Sheila is also a contributing editor to the Diasporic Vietnamese Artists Network's online journal *diaCRITICS*.

Sheila has written for and collaborated with cultural institutions including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Fairfield City Museum & Gallery and the Powerhouse. Her research for the State Library of NSW led to her curation of an exhibition of rare mid-century Đông Hồ paintings for the Amaze Gallery, drawn from a little known part of the library's collection.

A co-producer for the SBS podcast series, *My Bilingual Family* (2022), Sheila also has a background in media, previously holding editorial roles at the ABC. Her audio documentaries for Radio National include the series *Tongue Tied and Fluent* (2021), which focused on multilingualism in Australia, as well as *The Lost Cinema of Tan Hiep* (2016) and *Saigon's Wartime Beat* (2012).

Her family began their life in Australia as resettled refugees in Adelaide, which is where Sheila was born in 1981. She has spent most of her life in south-western Sydney but has also lived and worked in the United Kingdom and Thailand. She currently lives on Darug land with her husband and two children.

MÌNH

This catalogue was published to accompany the MÌNH exhibition at Fairfield City Museum & Gallery, 29 April – 14 October 2023.

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