

Charlotte Patoux
c.h.i.patoux@gmail.com
318, Chaussée d'Uccle
1630 Linkebeek
Belgium

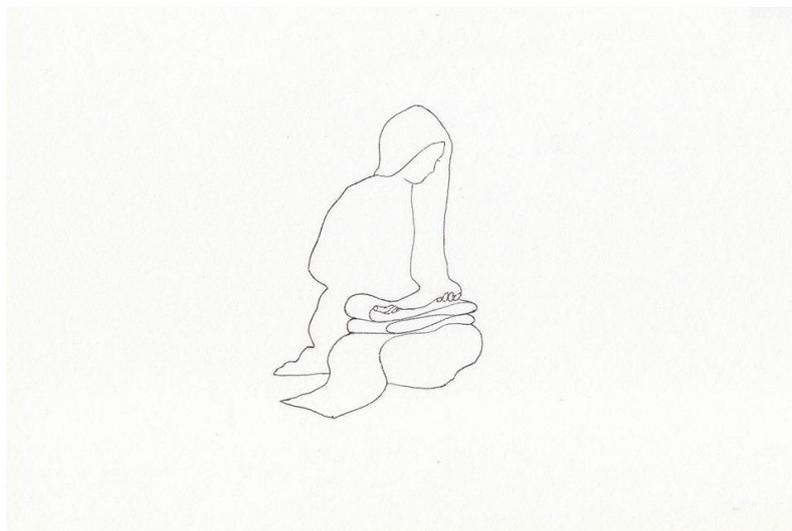
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+32 494 45 94 05

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Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Elena Paskaleva

THE POETRY OF LITTLE THINGS

Reconnecting-Recollecting Cultural Memory

*The Perception and Expression of Vietnamese Cultural Heritage by
French Viet Kieu Visual Artists in Saigon*



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Introduction

What is cultural heritage? How does it constitute our cultural identity transmitted through generations? And to what extent does it inform our perception of a cultural environment? Those general questions seem to define our “self” in today’s globalized world where communication and migration redefine the sense of place that transcends established geographical borders. The notions of identity and belonging are, now more than ever, not fixed in time and space as illustrated by today’s refugee crisis. Such phenomenon is not new; history is marked by migration crisis. Those displacements of people carrying their cultural identity and heritage in them resulted in new generations derived from past similar crisis: the diasporic return migrants. Growing up in a host country where their relatives were defined by cultural difference, those new generations decide to go back to what has been described to them as their “homeland” and, by doing so, they take part in the economical development of those emerging countries. At the crossroad between cultures and languages, this specific group embodies the concepts of transnationalism and transculturalism.

The main theme of the following research consists in finding how those multicultural identities are actualized and expressed. Acknowledging the discursive nature of heritage (Harrison, 2013: 12), story-telling is a means to define one’s cultural identity. However, as language is tied to culture, we might consider a more universal form of expression that transcends cultural categorization to cease the multi-faceted and fluid identity of diasporic return migrants. This research attempts to establish art and visual representation as individual conscious or unconscious means of expression of cultural identity. This will be demonstrated on the hand of a case-study focused on a specific group of diasporic return migrants in Vietnam: the French Vietnamese returnee artists of Saigon¹.

Research Questions

The main research questions examined throughout the thesis are the following: Who are the French Vietnamese return migrants² and what is their relationship to Vietnamese culture? What Vietnamese cultural heritage has been transmitted to them? And how do they perceive and express it?

The research was inspired by Viet Le’s doctoral PhD thesis at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, United States (2011) and his examination of Sandrine Llouquet’s artistic work through the lens of her “Viet Kieu” identity³. Applied to answer the research questions, Le’s approach was extended to the designated ethnographic group of French Viet Kieu visual artists of Saigon represented by Sandrine Llouquet, Bao Vuong, Mai-Loan Tu and Florian Nguyen.

¹ The name « Saigon » will be used to refer to Ho Chi Minh City as it is affectively preferred by local Vietnamese and the expatriated community living the city.

² They are locally called “Viet Kieu” which means Overseas Vietnamese.

³ This part of his thesis was first (partly) published in 2009 as a book chapter: Le, V. (2009) ‘Miss(ing) Sai Gon: Contemporary Vietnamese Diasporic Artists - Organisers in Ho Chi Minh City.’ in Lee, S. *et al. Essays on modern and contemporary Vietnamese art*, Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, pp. 111-122.

Sub-questions defined the structure of the thesis divided into an ethnographic part and an iconological part. In the first instance, a study of the artists as ethnographic subjects tried to determine: what are the different relationships French Viet Kieu from different generations entertain with regard to Vietnamese culture? What does their Vietnamese heritage consists of? How has it been transmitted to them? And how does their perception of it inform their daily experience of the Vietnamese environment? In the second instance, analysis and interpretations of their artistic production pondered: Is there any expression of the artists' Vietnamese heritage in their work? And how did the Vietnamese environment influence their art production after settling in Saigon?

Theoretical Framework and Method

The qualitative methods used to conduct the research combined content analysis of scholarly literature to establish the theoretical framework with participatory observation in the context of an internship at Salon Saigon, a private art space dedicated to the showcasing of Vietnamese culture and heritage through contemporary art⁴. Fieldwork allowed conducting semi-structured interviews constituting the main source of information for the research.

Seven years after Viet Le's thesis, the change of focus of the research required a re-adaptation of its theoretical framework.

On the one hand, sociological and ethnographical studies on American Viet Kieu by Nguyen-Akbar (2017) and Carruthers (2002) completed and actualized Viet Le's definition of the ambiguous and transformative Viet Kieu identity that he based on the ethnographic application by Joao Biehl and Peter Locke (2010) of the concept of "becomings" by Deleuze and Guattari (2004) (Le, 2011: 64-65). The recent study of Ho, Seet, and Jones (2016) combining the "push and pull" theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) provided a new perspective on the subjects' intention to settle in Saigon. Introducing the first chapter of the thesis, those theories helped establishing who the research subjects were, their relationship to Vietnamese heritage and how they negotiated it in their daily environment.

On the other hand, the perspective advocated by Nora Taylor (2011) encouraged the attempt to use an ethnographic approach of the artist to understand his/her artistic production as a conscious or unconscious expression of cultural heritage. In order to do so, Denzin's theory of interpretive biographies (1989) supported by Lucy Lippard's perspective on contemporary art (1989) and Eisner's psychological study of the process of art making (2002) highlighted keys for understanding the artworks in regard with the artists' life experiences and relationship to Vietnamese heritage.

Finally, Grete Lillehammer's (2010) method used to demonstrate the multiplicity and similarities in the perception of heritage depending on different stakeholders inspired the use of visual representations as means to study the perception of Vietnamese heritage by the subjects themselves

⁴ Salon Saigon. 2016. *About Salon Saigon*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.salonsaigon.com/en/about/>. [Accessed 18 October 2017].

through an analysis of their produced or selected works. Additional theoretical concepts have been used in each subchapter in order to contextualize and support the various arguments made in each part of the thesis.

In August and September 2017, an internship constituted fieldwork that provided direct and active insights on the contemporary art scene of Saigon while experiencing daily life in the cultural sphere of the city. Indeed, the internship took place at Salon Saigon. Opened in 2016, it is directed by the French Viet Kieu visual artist Sandrine Llouquet. One of the main tasks of the internship consisted in coordinating Salon Saigon's first outdoor exhibition of Mai-Loan Tu's work at L'Usine⁵. Visiting Bao Vuong's atelier for a presentation of his next exhibition project and setting up the Salon for the podcast of Florian Nguyen's talk for *The Renovation Generation*⁶ were some activities that generated an understanding of the working environment of the research subjects. Besides work, spending free time attending openings, private parties and other locations gathering the expatriate community gave an understanding of the living environment of the Viet Kieu. Empirical data were then collected through observation, discussions and personal analysis and were reported in manuscript notes.

Semi-structured interviews served as essential resource material on the artists⁷. Lasting from thirty minutes to an hour and forty, the interviews were conducted in French and in cafés and places usually frequented by the artists. While the first part of the interviews focused on the artist's history and relationship to Vietnamese culture, the second part treated their artistic production in general then in regard to Vietnamese culture. A final artistic task to answer an interview question was suggested and used to conclude the interview.

The choice of language and place were defined by the artists' affinities. French language, their mother tongue, seemed more appropriate to talk about the very personal topic of cultural identity. Put at ease in an informal context, they could express their thoughts without being restrained by vocabulary while using the subtleties of language to accurately convey their ideas. Such language question related to the perception and expression of cultural heritage was also important for me as a researcher. Indeed, as a native French speaking Belgian, I shared a deep understanding of language and a partly similar Western European cultural background with the interviewees. Those two significant aspects eased the understanding of the artists' perspectives on their relationship with Vietnamese culture and on their artistic production. Using artistic responses to conclude the interview was a choice driven by the profession as visual artists of the interviewees and my personal training as art historian acquired with a Bachelor degree in Art History.

⁵ *To shut his thoughts up, he paints them clear and watches them dry* - 30th of August – 12th September 2017, Salon Saigon outdoor exhibition, l'Usine Le Thanh Ton – HCMC, Vietnam.

⁶ Saigoneer/Dana Filek-Gibson. 2017. *Back Home Arts & Culture Arts & Culture Categories The Renovation Generation: Exploring What It Means to Be Young and Vietnamese The Renovation Generation: Exploring What It Means to Be Young and Vietnamese*. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://saigoneer.com/saigon-arts-culture/arts-culture-categories/10916-the-renovation-generation-exploring-what-it-means-to-be-young-and-vietnamese>. [Accessed 5 December 2017].

⁷ The full transcription of the interviews is available on demand as it was not included in the appendix due to the large amount of pages (63 pages) it represents.

Some limits to the research need to be underlined. First, the subjective proximity with the Viet Kieu artists could be questioned and needed to be embedded in a more theoretical framework that introduces each chapter. This proximity was nevertheless useful to explore analytically and with their collaboration the research questions applied to each artist's case. Second, the small sample of subjects constituted by four French Viet Kieu visual artists of Saigon is limited to draw general conclusions about the main research topic. However, the four of them offer a large panel of relationships with a specific cultural heritage according to their age, gender, generations and personal experiences. To extend the scope of the question related to the artistic expression of cultural heritage, further research could investigate, through comparative studies, the situation of returnees from different generation in another cultural setting. Furthermore it might also focus on French Viet Kieu artists from other disciplines, more generally established in different places in Vietnam or put in comparison with Viet Kieu living in France.

Structure

The structure of the thesis follows its research process. It focuses first on the understanding of the history and identity of those French Viet Kieu artists to underline their relationship to Vietnamese heritage. Establishing the larger context of Vietnamese society in parallel with the development of the Saigonese contemporary art scene draws a framework that contextualizes the experiences of the artists reported in their biographies. Then, the second part of the research consists in an iconological analysis of their artistic production through the lens of their interpretive biographies to identify the potential expression of Vietnamese heritage in their oeuvre. Finally, the two approaches are combined in a synthetic exercise that helped drawing conclusions on the transmission of Vietnamese heritage and the general definition of cultural heritage and identity. The appendix includes for each artist: a list of selected exhibitions and links to their biographies or CV, a selected bibliography⁸, a selection of a few artworks and some extra documents.

⁸ This includes the press release, announcements of exhibitions and interviews of the artists that were not directly mentioned in the footnotes due to the restricted amount of words for defined for thesis.

Four French Viet Kieu Artists

The Artists as Ethnographic Subjects: Vietnamese Diasporic Return Migrants

Literally meaning “Overseas Vietnamese” and locally used to designate diasporic return migrants, the term “*Viet Kieu*” emphasizes the link those people have with mainland Vietnam while it acknowledges their different mixed cultural background. This specific designation underlines the ambivalent status of those individuals that are considered as part and apart of Vietnamese society, navigating between ambiguous notions of belonging. French Viet Kieu visual artists have shared commonalities of experiences with American Viet Kieu working in finance on which ethnographic studies are mainly focusing.

In 2009, overseas ethnic Vietnamese and foreign-born offspring of Vietnamese parents could be granted dual citizenship by the Vietnamese government⁹. Those high-skilled migrants with their advanced education and good language proficiencies were thereby drawn into the nation-building project that was aimed for stimulating the economic growth of the country (Viet Le, 2011: 68). However, return experience to imagined “ancestral roots” for Viet Kieu was often fraught with difficulties resulting from their ambivalent cultural identity (Nguyen-Akbar, 2017: 1116). Indeed many face marginalization, incivility, extortion and other expressions of popular refusal of their national membership (Carruthers, 2002: 428). Viet Le explains this by the fact that returnees embody simultaneously painful pasts marked by the reasons their relatives left the country and hopeful modern futures of Vietnam, illustrated in their success within the Global Modern World (2011: 66).

On the one hand, as diasporic Vietnamese, the Viet Kieu’s identity is reminding Vietnam’s arduous history marked by wars and persecutions that generated important flows of migration. The end of the first Indochinese war (1946-1954) marked the decolonization of the country that resulted from conflicting values and the excesses of the exploitative politics established by the French colonial rule of Indochina (Buttinger, 1972: 65-69). At that time, Vietnamese officials among the new westernized urban middle class that studied abroad and served the colonial rule had to fly the war-torn country. The fear of reprisals and poor living conditions encouraged people to move to France (Duiker, 1995: 175-179). In 1954, the convention of Geneva represented the separation of the country between the South and the North Vietnam and the military involvement of the United States in the second Indochinese war (1954-1975), locally known as the “American War” (Viet Le, 2011: 3). Twenty years of armed conflict ripped the country apart. Between the 1960’s and 1980’s, many Southerners went studying abroad, notably in France, as legal immigrants sponsored by relatives to complete their education hoping for a better future¹⁰. The Fall of Saigon in April 1975 manifested the end of the war and the victory of the Communist Party that reunified the country under the

⁹ Hanoi Times. 2008. *Vietnam house approves dual citizenship for expats, diaspora*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://hanoitimes.com.vn/social-affair/2008/11/81E021DC/vietnam-house-approves-dual-citizenship-for-expats-diaspora/>. [Accessed 3 November 2017].

¹⁰ OFPRA. 2014. *Les conditions de réinstallation des Viet kieu au Viet Nam*. [ONLINE] Available at: https://www.ofpra.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/atoms/files/141002_vnm_retours_viet_kieu.pdf. [Accessed 7 December 2017].

Communist Republic of Vietnam. Authority on the South was reclaimed by naming Saigon, its capital, “Ho Chi Minh City”. Thus, the end of the Vietnam-American war did not stop destruction and persecution of the ones that once opposed the regime. Reeducation camps, forced labor, political indoctrination and dreadful living conditions forced many Vietnamese to fly the country. This caused a humanitarian crisis embodied in the fate of the “boat people”. Thousands of Vietnamese refugees fled the country through traumatic journeys on fortune boats and in refugee camps. The help offered by the international community resulted in massive flows of Vietnamese migrants in the United States, Canada and Western Europe (Freeman, 1995: 21-29).

On the other hand, in 1986, Vietnam re-opened and evolved from a collectivist economy to a capitalist market-driven economy with the implementation of the *Doi Moi* Policy. This illustrated the Vietnamese government’s desire to establish the country within the global market economy through industrialization and Modernization. The Viet Kieu with their Western high education combined with their cultural bounds to Vietnam acted as cultural mediators and as major actors contributing to this globalization process (Viet Le, 2011: 5-8). As the cosmopolitan and economical center of Vietnam, Saigon attracted many of those transnational subjects in the late 90’s and the first decade of the 2000’s. As a global city, Saigon is shaped by southern regionalism and the transnational cosmopolitanism tied to the city’s historical longing so that it offers a denationalized platform where expatriates and native Vietnamese people mingle in transnational capitalism (Corey, 2015: 135). Regarding the artistic scene in Saigon, the beginning of the year’s 2000’s showed the development by returnees and Western expatriates of many alternative initiatives such as A Little Blah Blah, Atelier Wonderful founded by Sandrine Llouquet and San Art founded notably by the American Viet Kieu artists Dinh Q. Le, Tiffany Chung. Collaborating with local artists, those independent artist-run programs and spaces evolved on a small scale based on informal social networks that successfully could circumvent censorship and the governmental bureaucracy established by the Communist Party. The impact of the diasporic return migrants oriented and introduced new artistic practices that served the formation of a critical artistic discourse and the development of a dynamic transnational contemporary art scene in Saigon (Corey, 2015: 141).

Such phenomenon illustrates the very specific place occupied by the dynamic urban environment of Saigon to construct Viet Kieu’s own sense of belonging (Nguyen-Akbar, 2017: 1116). Indeed as diasporic return migrants, they embody Aiwaha Ong’s concept of *Flexible Citizenship* (Ong, 1999: 87-109). If they are officially recognized as members of the national community with an “empty” legal status, Viet Kieu need to acquire practical national belonging through an accumulation of cultural capital asserting their “Vietnameseness” in order to integrate more easily (Carruthers, 2002: 424). Nevertheless, blurring the boundaries between local and global, Viet Kieu’s ambivalent identity allows strategic assertions of belonging that transcends this dichotomy and negotiates a third space mediating those spatial notions. Viet Le uses the concept of “becomings” by Deleuze and Guattari (2004) applied as an ethnographic approach by Joao Biehl and Peter Locke (2010) to define the multiple, fluid, situational and nested ambiguous Viet Kieu identity (2011: 64-65). Constantly fluctuating and adapting to its environment, their identity exists in a liminal state that negotiates the blurred boundaries between the local and the global, the status of Vietnamese and expatriate.

The specific status of Viet Kieu allows strategic positioning through crossing and bridging symbolic boundaries that distinguishes their situation from other cosmopolitan expatriates and from the local Vietnamese community. They legitimize their bound to Vietnamese culture through family network,

intimate social relationship and their claim to an “imagined” authentic return experience to an “imagined community” as defined by Benedict Andersons understanding of national belonging (1983).

If ethnographic studies mainly focus on American Viet Kieu working in finance, this theoretical framework can be applied to French Viet Kieu visual artists to investigate their specific experience as French-Vietnamese and as visual artists in Saigon put in relation with the reasons motivating their settlement in Vietnam.

The interviews showed that the artists’ social networks in Saigon were not specifically restricted to Viet Kieu or French expatriates but that they were based on shared interests, cultural references, humor and also language (for the ones less comfortable with speaking other languages). Most of them suggested that this was due to their French cultural background. However, this seems to be symptomatic of the general expatriate experience where people try to find a comfort zone based on the familiar and shared meanings that can be found with people from international and also local social environments. Such attitude defines a social boundary with the local Vietnamese population that is made noticeable in the residential choice of many Viet Kieu (Nguyen-Akbar, 2017: 1124). If some like Bao Vuong decide to live in the *hem*, small alleyways in “authentic” Vietnamese neighborhoods, the majority, as shown by Sandrine Llouquet and Mai-Loan Tu, lives in expat friendly districts in high-rise apartments or international shared houses.

Some “moral boundaries” expressed in their motivation to expatriate differentiate the Viet Kieu from other expats (Nguyen-Akbar, 2017: 1117-1120). Their intentions to migrate for long or short terms were thought to be motivated by the idea to reconnect with their “ancestral homeland” that was often somehow supported by some members of their family. Nevertheless, the relatives that had been the most affected by the wars and changes in the country might have expressed discouragements regarding such decision. Reconnecting with their cultural heritage was an initial impulse for all the artists. The impact such reconnection had on them, on their work and their living experience in Vietnam depends on their closeness to those “ancestral roots”. Such relationship varies according to the artists’ generation and initial contact with Vietnamese culture through education.

Furthermore, the settlement of our four Viet Kieu visual artists in Saigon constituted an opportunity for the development of their artistic careers. Their biographies illustrate that the very dynamic and small-scale contemporary art scene of Saigon and the advantages of the low living and material costs there were two elements that have motivated, allowed and eased their decision to migrate and to practice their art. Sandrine Llouquet’s boldness and entrepreneurship brought her to Saigon where she became a very active member of the beginnings of the contemporary art scene. Mai-Loan, saw in her break year in Vietnam a way to bring fresh air to her art and to explore the developing technique of tattoo art in Vietnam while, in France, this discipline is highly selective and closed. Finally both Florian Nguyen and Bao Vuong saw in their establishment in the bustling city an opportunity to focus and develop their artistic production thanks to the time, energy and resources this new living environment could offer.

Interestingly, those elements shaping the intentions of Viet Kieu artists to settle in Saigon after long or short previous stays in Vietnam correlates with a study that investigated the re-expatriation intentions of overseas returnees in Vietnam (Ho *et al.*, 2016). Combining the push and pull theory with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the study explained the intention of re-expatriation of

returnees by the attracting forces of positive career, quality of life and family outcomes defining the host country, in this case Vietnam. It was combined with the main predictors of the TPB notably a positive attitude towards re-expatriation and the encouraging influence of the social environment of the subjects regarding their decision of expatriation. Such analysis of the French Viet Kieu artist expatriation intentions is nevertheless restricted by the scope of the interviews that omitted to question essential aspects underlined by the study: the “push forces” of their home country and the issue of Reverse Cultural Shock (Ho *et al.*, 2016: 1951-1952).

Biographies and Relationships with Vietnamese Culture

With the defined ethnographic framework that established who were the Viet Kieu as ethnographic subjects and why did they come back, a case by case approach of each French Viet Kieu artist in its singularity and individuality will investigate: what are the different relationships French Viet Kieu from different generations entertain with regard to Vietnamese culture? What does their Vietnamese heritage consists of? How has it been transmitted to them? And how does their perception of it inform their daily experience of the Vietnamese environment? Through interpretive biographies (Denzin, 1989), major elements of answers to those questions will be underlined and will serve as keys for understanding the artists' work to find expression of their heritage instilled in it.

Sandrine Llouquet (b.1975 in Montpellier, France)



Fig. 1. *Sandrine Llouquet* by Hao Tran for Vietcetera.com, Salon Saigon, Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam), 2016..

Sandrine Llouquet's life path illustrates the ambivalence of the Viet Kieu identity. Llouquet grew up with separated Vietnamese parents and was French-educated. Her mother wanted deeply to integrate into French culture as she gave her children Western names and did not transmit Vietnamese language to them.

Yearly visits to her grand-parents were Llouquet's only sporadic contacts with Vietnamese culture. Those visits were imbued with mystery and sometimes marked by spirituality since her grand-parents practiced animism and the worship of ancestors. The artist identifies some ceremonies she attended as moments that impressed her childhood. Moreover, her grand-parents themselves seemed to be peculiar people with curious habits such as collecting random objects or constantly tinkering things.

She soon discovered her passion for drawing. She then studied Fine Arts at Ecole Pilote d'Art et Recherche, Villa Arson in Nice. Her Art History professors told her that she had the "perfect profile". Between two cultures, she was the embodied image of Modernity and Globalization. However, Llouquet followed her own path and neglected the expected track of an autobiographical art exploring the edges of her dual identity. Instead, she focused her personal research on Western philosophy, spirituality and the study of the unconscious.

In 1996, Llouquet visited Vietnam for the first time. The trip triggered her curiosity and encouraged her to deepen her experience of Vietnamese culture. Back in France, she elaborated on her own an academic exchange with the University of Fine Arts in Ho Chi Minh City. There, she was confronted with the ambiguity of her identity. If she could choose whatever classes she wanted, she was segregated from other students by being given private classes. Hopefully, the most curious Vietnamese students broke the rules and established contacts that later turned into friendships. For a year, she was taught traditional Vietnamese techniques of lacquer and silk painting while discovering daily life in Saigon. When she moved back to France, she developed her work and co-founded with her ex-partner *Wonderful*, an association promoting arts through exhibitions, parties and publications.

In 2005, she finally settled in Saigon where she created *Atelier Wonderful*, an art space located in her apartment organizing exhibitions, concerts and performances. Ever since she has been dynamically contributing to the development of the Saigonese contemporary art scene. Although she learned Vietnamese, she nevertheless purposely does not want to master it perfectly. Indeed not understanding everything from her environment helps her maintain the mystery and curiosity that triggers her imagination and directs her readings and artistic research. She pursued her artistic path and research through exhibitions at Gallerie Quynh¹¹ and worldwide. As a major figure of the contemporary art scene in Saigon, she shared her long experience and network with many upcoming artists she took under her wing. Among them are three French Viet Kieu: Bao Vuong, Mai-Loan Tu and Florian Nguyen.

Bao Vuong (b.1978 in Vinh Long, Vietnam)



Fig. 2. *Bao Vuong at the group show NGUCHONOBAY*, Galerie Guynh, Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam) 2017. (Courtesy of Bao Vuong).

Bao Vuong was one year old when his parents hastily fled Vietnam with some of their relatives as boat people. After an arduous journey passing through painful experiences in refugee camps in Malaysia, they finally arrived in France. The traumatizing experience marked him and his family that never dwelled on the memory of the dreadful journey.

¹¹ Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

In France, Bao was raised in a Vietnamese environment, isolated from other families and any other Vietnamese community. The only bonds he had with his relatives in Vietnam were albums filled with photographs of people he did not know. Not integrating to French culture, his parents did not speak French and instead spoke Vietnamese to their children. Bao identifies two major Vietnamese values that have been transmitted to him through his education: the value of hard work and the importance of the family and the roles everybody plays in it. He and his siblings have always worked in the restaurants and soy bean sprout cultures owned by their parents. Everybody had a specific role in the working life but also in the familial sphere. The father was the main authority and the mother was taking care of the whole family.

Coming of age, Bao wanted to be French and considered himself as such. He went through a rebel phase rejecting some aspects of the inculcated Vietnamese culture. To mark his opposition to the conventional path, he studied Fine Arts. At university, his professors interpreted his art through the lens of his past as Vietnamese boat people. Such theme was not consciously explored by the artist who nevertheless finished his five years of study with a work exploring the notions of identity and memory. After graduating he stopped producing for ten years and focused on his personal development.

In 2006, he visited Vietnam for the first time. Expecting to find a third world country, he was welcomed at the airport by crowd of crying relatives. They expressed the fear and apprehensions they experienced when they saw him leaving as a baby. Then, they found him back as a man. A pre-man, according to the artist. People from the old family albums were finally brought to life with their personality and own stories.

In 2012, turns of events and encounters, notably with Sandrine Llouquet, encouraged Vuong to settle in Vietnam to “complete himself” as he says. In Saigon, he was comforted by the modern cosmopolitan life of the city that reminded him of the one he had in France. Besides he reconnected with his parents and their families. Such change awakened a very personal sense of spirituality related to the discovery of his ancestors and Buddhism that offered him a new perspective on his own history. He sees his reconnection with Vietnam and his past as a means to cope with the disconnection he has had with his family history and to calm down his traumatic neurosis related to his journey as boat people. Such introspection reminded him that those elements appeared to have been unconsciously expressed in his art. It then sounded logical to go back to this medium to reflect on certain chapters of his life and to question his identity and heritage while fully enjoying the time, space and resources life in Vietnam provided. There, even though he speaks a bit of Vietnamese, Vietnamese people consider him as a foreigner. Interestingly, to the question about is cultural identity, he replies that he feels neither French nor Vietnamese, but that he belongs to another cultural group: the Migratory People.

Mai-Loan Tu (b.1988 in Créteil, Val de Marne, France)



Fig. 3. *Mai-Loan Tu at Exile Ink Vietnam* by Sabrina Rouillé, Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam), 2017.

Mai-Loan Tu was raised by a French mother and a Vietnamese father. Her father came to France for a study exchange before settling there with her mother. He led the path to all his family that followed him from Vietnam. Through him, she grew up in an environment heavily imbued with Vietnamese culture. Her childhood was marked by large family gatherings around Vietnamese food and where everybody spoke Vietnamese language. Her father used to speak Vietnamese to her when she was a child, but she forgot the language as she deeply regrets today. At home, the whole family was built around Vietnamese values and tastes. The respect of the elders is one of the main values that were taught to her. She was raised knowing that if her parents took care of her as a child; it was her duty to take care of them in the same way when they would get older. As a Zen Buddhist, her father advocated a very simple way of life, detached from material property and unnecessary things. She visited Vietnam with her family twice at the age of six and twelve. Then, she discovered an exotic “old Vietnam” with people going around on their bicycles and cities given an impression of villages.

Always passionate about drawing, she studied art in Paris before moving to Belgium for three years to study illustration at L’Erg. She finished her academic path in Barcelona where she started exhibiting her work. Back in Paris in 2016, she felt the need to give a new breath to her art and to explore the tattoo art in a more open environment.

She then decided to move to Saigon, the city of her father, to reconnect with her roots and to improve her knowledge of Vietnamese. Expecting to find the old and exotic Vietnam of her memories, she was surprised when she found a very modern and developed city. According to her, that was reassuring and made everything easier. As a Western-looking Viet Kieu, she was considered as a foreigner by the local population of Saigon. However, her Vietnamese name triggered local encounters who would then switch the language of the conversation from English to Vietnamese.

She discovered a very dynamic life and art scene where she got the opportunity to blossom, to develop her tattoo art and to produce new drawings she exhibited at Salon Saigon. Fruitful encounters she made during her stay encouraged her to start writing. In order to raise funds for an association helping disadvantaged children, she took part in an adventure that made her cycle with friends all across Vietnam. This powerful adventure gave her the strength to move on. Looking for new artistic stimulation, she changed environment to get closer to her family back in Europe and to

expand her practice with tattoo art. She then left Vietnam for Brighton in September 2017, enriched with her Vietnamese experience.

Florian Nguyen (b. 1988 in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France)



Fig. 4. Florian Nguyen presenting “Memory and Oblivion” by Cao Tri for Anyarena.com, Institut Français, Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam), 2016.

Florian Nguyen is half-French and half-Vietnamese on his father’s side. Raised in a French environment, his link to Vietnamese culture was made through his grand-parents. Nguyen is from the third generation of immigrants and only had sporadic contacts with Vietnamese culture. The family history was a delicate topic that was not talked about due to the difficult experience this represented for his grand-father who left Vietnam abandoning his family at the age of twelve. From a poor background, he escaped the difficult living conditions emphasized by the first Indochinese war. Wanting to integrate, his grand-parents did not transmit Vietnamese language to their children nor to their grand-children. However, some aspects of the culture might have been transmitted indirectly, “through miasma” according to Nguyen.

Besides those inputs of Vietnamese culture, Florian Nguyen had a French education. Being intensively involved in the practice of judo, he decided to quit this demanding world of sportive competition to do a bachelor degree in marketing and advertisement. Quickly, the creative and artistic aspects of the profession took over in his practice. In 2011, he founded with his older brother and his best friend a graphic design creative studio in Paris: Thirty Dirty Fingers. Next to this activity, as an autodidact, he developed his drawing skills and started exhibiting his work through small exhibitions in Paris.

In 2016, a family friend suggested him to do an exhibition at the Institut Français of Ho Chi Minh City. His exhibition “*Of Memory and Oblivion*” (June 2016) was an opportunity for the artist to explore his family history and his bounds with Vietnamese culture. Therefore Nguyen settled for a month in Saigon. He was impressed by the dynamic city that nourished his artistic practice. Moreover, being confronted with the Vietnamese environment gave him a different perspective on what he had assumed were personal characteristic behaviors of his grand-parents. Their straight-forwardness regarding comments on physical appearance or his grand-father habit to fix things in uncanny ways were very common “ways of being” of Vietnamese people. Finally he decided to settle there to extend his artistic research on memory and to deepen his understanding of Vietnamese culture by learning its customs and language. Interestingly, all his siblings felt the need to reconnect with

Vietnamese culture at some point by learning Vietnamese back in France or in Vietnam where they lived for short or long periods of time for working, studying or doing internships.

Four Shades of Viet Kieu

A synthetic reading of the life paths of those French Viet Kieu artists shows that the term “Viet Kieu” is applied to individuals that all present very different degrees of contact with the Vietnamese culture. Although they all grew up in France, their family environment and education heavily distinguish their individual relationships with it. While Bao Vuong and Mai-Loan Tu were directly raised in an environment imbued with Vietnamese culture, Sandrine Llouquet and Florian Nguyen only had sporadic contacts with it through their grand-parents. Those contacts were expressed in very specific forms for each of the artists: a research for personal development for Bao Vuong, an importance of the paternal figure for Mai-Loan Tu, mystery and curiosity related to spirituality for Sandrine Llouquet and peculiar ways of beings for Florian Nguyen. Finally, the elements defining those contacts seem to have informed the artists’ relationship with Vietnamese culture once confronted to it in their daily environment.

In order to identify the impact of their multicultural identity on their art, this conclusive table serves as a graduation scale of analysis based on their closeness to Vietnamese culture. It will help to establish an interpretive framework to understand their artistic practice through the lens of their Vietnamese heritage.

	Bao Vuong	Mai-Loan Tu	Sandrine Llouquet	Florian Nguyen
GENERATION	1 st Generation	2 nd Generation	2 nd Generation	3 rd Generation
DEFINING THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO VIETNAMESE CULTURE	SELF-DEVELOPMENT	PATERNAL INFLUENCE	MYSTERY, CURIOSITY AND SPIRITUALITY	WAYS OF BEING
LINK TO VIETNAMESE CULTURE IN FRANCE	Isolated family Photo Albums: Relatives	Father Extended Family	Sporadic contacts < Grand-parents	Sporadic contacts < Grand-parents (catholics)
TRANSMISSION OF VIETNAMESE HERITAGE	Close family and Education: → Hard work, → Family roles → respect of the elders → Language	Close Family, Relatives Education: → Respect of the elders, family → Zen Buddhism → Vietnamese Language but LOST	Total integration Education → No Vietnamese language → Western name BUT Visits to her grand - parents: → Mystery, Magic, Spirituality and curiosity	French Education BUT Visits to his grand- parents: → Behaviors + Language
INFLUENCE OF THE CONTACT WITH VIETNAMESE ENVIRONMENT:	SELF-DEVELOPMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of an Artistic production = way to cope with his family history • Authentic family experience and modern cosmopolitan life • Personal spirituality 	A NEW BREATH <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact with dynamic modern life and artistic scene • Developing tattoo art • Dare writing + practice of Vietnamese language < encounters 	MAINTAINING THE MYSTERY < Language <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal path, driven by her own research on spirituality, myths and Western philosophy and psychology 	CONNECTING WITH FAMILY MEMORY AND DYNAMISM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making sense of untold family history • Development of his artistic research → dare and experiments

Table 1. *Synthesis Four Shades of Viet Kieu*: Graduation scale and relationships to Vietnamese culture of the French Viet Kieu artists.

Iconological Study: Identifying Vietnamese Heritage

Since *Doi Moi*, the re-opening of Vietnam and the establishment of an open-market economy, three separated channels define Vietnamese contemporary art (Nguyen Quan, 2009: p. 67). The first channel is the propaganda art that follows the ideology of the Party while supporting it through exhibition in official public institutions. The second is the art market and works from independent artists related to the rise of tourism culture. Conical hats, women wearing *ao dai* and bucolic landscapes are the stereotyping symbols of the touristic imaginary representation of Vietnam. Inherited from colonialism and orientalism, this extremely commodified form of art faces copyrights issues and large production of fakes. The work of the studied Viet Kieu artists finds place in the third channel consisting in the art supported by foreign cultural foundations such as the Institut Français or the Goethe Institute, alternative spaces such as San Art or Salon Saigon and galleries like Quynh Galerie that are organized with the attendance of local and international artists.

Those non-governmental and international institutions are the key connectors of artists to the socio-economic system network of the global contemporary art market (Tomiuc, 2015: 5-6). As such, they ensure the promotion of young, mobile and entrepreneur artists whose work is presented through the strategic development of their profile as individual and discursive figures. In those circumstances, along with the artistic value of the works, it appears that cultural branding can be a means for building up credibility within the system of the international art scene (Tomiuc, 2015: 10). If Asian contemporary arts were for long understood only through cultural essentialism and spirituality related to orientalist conceptions of non-Western cultures, the progressive recognition of Asian artists within the international gallery system changed this general dynamic (Desai, 2013: 104-107). Vishakha Desai explains that this is related to the importance taken by diaspora communities. They integrated the Western authoritarian discourse and acknowledged the works of diasporic and non-Western artists. Indeed artists are now recognized as they use the visual globalized language of an international formal vocabulary defined by the Western avant-garde in order to express specific cultural references (Desai, 2013: 110).

Such hybrid artistic form seems symptomatic of the ambiguous identity of the artistic members of the diaspora. Indeed, Lucy Lippard (1990) asserts that making art for members of an ethnic minority is a way to reconnect with their cultural identity. Since visual representations are imbued with social and aesthetic meanings of the cultures they reflect and interact with, they enable the artists to make sense of their life experiences marked by interwoven cultural environments and senses of belonging. In her study on the expression of cultural and self-identity in the art of Korean and Korean American female artists, Caruso quotes Eisner (2002) asserting that art is a means of knowing. As such, it helps people making sense of a particular environment and their place in it so that the imaginative image artists create functions as a template by which they recognize their perception of the world influenced by their experience of it (Caruso, 2005: 76-77).

Such an understanding of art justifies the ethnographic approach of Vietnamese modern and contemporary arts proposed by Nora Taylor. She advocates an understanding of the artist as an ethnographic subject whose life is considered representative of the experiences affecting a group of human beings defined by historical, cultural and social circumstances related to the context of Vietnam (Taylor, 2011: 481). Establishing the art historian as a sort of “ethnographer” using methods

such as participatory observation and interviews to understand the artists' productions compensates the lack of academic sources resulting from the long neglect by Western scholarship of Southeast Asian modern arts (Taylor, 2011: 476). What restrained the application on contemporary artworks of Panofsky's iconological study methods based on textual sources and detachment acquired through temporal distance can then be compensated by the acknowledgement of cultural and intellectual distance provided by a contextual understanding of the artworks (Lysen, 2014: 43). Artworks are then understood through an analysis of their creation process that is influenced and defined by the artists' relationship to their cultural, historical and socio-economical environment.

Also used by Caruso is Denzin's theory of interpretive biographies (1989) to identify key elements of interpretation of artists' works that highlight and express their cultural and self-identity (2005: 71). Indeed, for Denzin by telling their life stories, people arbitrarily construct the meanings they give to their life experiences so that they can be understood by an audience that implicitly shares those consensual meanings with them. In that sense, their stories derive from a larger group of cultural, ideological and historical contexts that shape their discourse produced in a common system of understanding (1989: 72-73). The performative self-act of story-telling leads then to the creation of a culturally understood self that is open-ended, contextual and, as such, subject to interpretation (Denzin, 1989: 84).

This theoretical framework allows the use of the elements highlighted by the biographies of our French Viet Kieu artists in order to understand and interpret their artistic production as means of expression of their relationship to Vietnamese culture. Through the lens of the scale established in the ethnographic part of the study and with the interviews serving as a primary source of interpretation¹², I analyzed a selection of artworks¹³ in relationship with the following questions: Is there any expression of the artists' Vietnamese heritage in their work? How did the Vietnamese environment influence their art production after settling in Saigon?

¹² Transcripts available on demand.

¹³ All the figures were taken with the agreements of the artists from their websites or directly furnished by them with their courtesy.

Bao Vuong

Bao's biography¹⁴ demonstrates that art is, for him, a means to reconnect with his own heritage and family history in order to cope with his neurosis related to his detachment from it. Such assumption is illustrated in the narrative structure he brings into his oeuvre.

Bao did his first exhibition "*A travers*" ("*Through*" in English) at the Institut Français of Saigon in June 2016. The whole exhibition revolved around the only physical link he had back in France with his, then, unknown family: old photographs and family albums. Reconnecting with the past and a history he did not have the opportunity to live, Bao played with the pictorial medium to challenge and investigate his remote heritage that was then fixed in the nostalgic form of photographs. Coming to Vietnam, his once monolithic unknown past became a living heritage that could trigger the imagination of what his life would have been if he had stayed. Illustrating that, the artist played with the photographed space by extending it into imagined sceneries reminding the fantastic world kids create to make sense of what they do not know.



Fig. 5. Bao Vuong, *Le garçon et son palais*, 2016. Old photograph, watercolor, pencil, 40 x 60 cm.

The next chapter and exhibition he was preparing, "*Crossing*", made a dark and abstract reference to the traumatic journey his family went through as boat people. The series is built around representations of places without identity: just the dark sea, calm and yet threatening. Realistic abstraction expresses his deaf pain, reminiscent of a fading memory by not being really what it is, but bringing in the feelings of it.

¹⁴ He uses "Bao" as his artistic name.



Fig. 6. Bao Vuong, *THE CROSSING 1*, 2016. Black oil painting, 100 x 150 cm.

This narrative progression might establish Bao's work in the expected track of Viet Kieu artist and former "boat people" talking only about their own pasts. However, if his personal story constitutes the narrative frame that organizes the work he is showing, this is mostly a way to structure and make understandable his effervescent artistic production to the audience.

Bao's artistic practice defines itself by a large range of mediums, experiments and attempts to illustrate a topic in the most efficient manner. Bao's attitude toward mediums is multi-faceted. Sometimes he might think of a topic and look for the best medium to serve its expression. Other times, a specific medium inspires him to choose a certain topic. In other specific moments, topic and medium mutually inform each other making him assist to some creation he feels detached from. However, not all those attempts work. Indeed, Bao's artistic practice is characterized by trials, risks taking, experiments and a profound ability to fix and solve problems in, sometimes, surprising ways. The artist identifies this aspect of his artistic approach as the ultimate personal embodiment of his Vietnamese heritage and identity. However, it does not matter how chaotic the creation process might be, the result is always neat and pure, designed and refined. It becomes then, in some ways, impersonal in the sense that it is made accessible to everybody and could then be appropriated and interpreted by anyone who would read his oeuvre in his/her own terms. Indeed, are not photo album's everybody's link to a family history we might not know? And are there no similarities between all the traumatic journeys of refugees escaping a harsh reality?



Fig. 7. Bao Vuong, "Traditional Altar", 2016. Incenses, 40 x 40 x 60 cm.



Fig. 8. Bao Vuong, *Altar*, 2016. Plexiglas, jar with rice, Inkjet printing, 40 x 40 x 50 cm.

Those two versions of *Altar* are artworks demonstrating his general artistic process while they illustrate the influence the experience of returning to Vietnam had on him.

Driven by the desire to use art as a way to cope with his personal and family history, Bao first designed a very traditional *Altar*. In this first version, a self-portrait is drawn on incense sticks. Such altars are used during funerals, with incense being lit up so that their smoke allows dead spirits to join their ancestor's spirits. The installation referred to one of Bao's first memories in France: the funerals of his young uncle. During the ceremony he was assigned to hold the portrait of his relative, a symbolic role making him taking over his uncle's fate. Besides this personal memory, the re-appropriation of the altar is also a way to illustrate his own personal reconnection with spirituality and the ancestors he found back when he returned to his Vietnamese heritage. Interestingly, he made a second version of the altar by using modern materials. Here again, his attitude of experiments and trials is at stake in the fact that he took the risk to express his own idea of an altar where incense sticks are replaced by inkjet prints on burned Plexiglas. If the reference to the traditional altar is easily noticeable, Bao reinterprets it through his personal modern and design aesthetics.

The context of creation of the artworks underlines difference of perception of a depiction of heritage depending on the cultural background of its audience. His French friends were touched by the authenticity of the traditional altar and the whole concept related to the ephemeral aspect of the burning incense. However, his Vietnamese friends preferred the modern re-interpretation of a tradition because it challenged the constructed "authentic" and orientalist conceptions attributed to an imagined and authentic old Vietnam, outside of Modernity, stuck in its past.

As a conclusion, Bao's Vietnamese heritage seems to express itself through his very artistic practice. His experimental and risky approach uses various mediums that, when fixed together, somehow create effective artworks through which he reconnects with his past. If his narrative framework seems essentially autobiographic, Bao nevertheless always leaves space for broader interpretation of his work that can be applied to any experience of the "Migratory people".

Mai-Loan Tu

A Poetic Expression

Six pieds sous ciel (*Six Feet under the Sky*) is the most representative series of Mai-Loan's artistic practice. The series constituted her first exhibition that took place at Galeria Miscelanea in Barcelona in 2011. These characteristic artworks are a series of 212 poetically surrealistic drawings made out of a simple dark line and on an empty white sheet of paper.

Those works are the results of an artistic discipline she developed throughout the years and that she still practices today. They are visual representations of feelings she cannot express through words. They are inspired by her daily life, her readings of contemporary poetry and literature more than by images. She creates them through a virtuous circle of rituals she tries to maintain. She spends the whole day thinking about those unspeakable feelings. The events of the day nourish her reflection so that, when night comes, she goes to sleep thinking about it. The next morning, she visualizes an image that transcribes her indescribable feeling. After drawing a few sketches that can be only read by her, she finally starts drawing after drinking a few cups of coffee. She has thought so much about the image that she is almost directly able to reproduce it in one line. She might nevertheless have to readjust the composition. Most of this work takes place in the morning when her mind is sharp and when she is most efficient.

The results of such rituals are images of deceptively realistic lines that create uncanny combination of familiar elements. The surreal juxtaposition of images shocks the viewer at first then triggers his imagination in the pondering of this association. The experience of Mai-Loan's art is then characterized by different layers of reading. Her drawings are to be understood as short stories the viewer is invited to understand as it pleases him/her.



Figs. 9, 10 and 11. Mai-Loan Tu, *Untitled* (x 3) (of the series *Six Pieds sous Ciel*), 2011. Ball pen on paper, 16,5 x 21 cm.

Through the Lens of Vietnamese Heritage

Subconscious product of meaning, one drawing of the series stood out when interpreted through the lens of her Vietnamese heritage and values. During the opening of her first exhibition, Mai-Loan's father pinpointed one specific drawing. Untitled, the drawing represents a baby cradling an old man. She did not think about giving the drawing any meaning when she created it. Nevertheless the meaning appeared through the eyes of her father when he recognized in it the values he transmitted to her. Indeed, the drawing's meaning seems to illustrate the main value defining her Vietnamese education: if parents take care of their children when they are young, children are expected to care of their parents when they get older.



Fig. 12. Mai-Loan Tu, *Untitled*, 2011. Ball pen on paper, 16,5 x 21 cm.

According to her, an expression of her Vietnamese education is mainly to be found in the simple composition of her drawings. Its simplicity reminds the impact of the Zen Buddhist environment where she grew up. Indeed, a simple line composes the image on an empty white sheet of paper. Emptiness as a space of expression correlates with the dematerialized idea of Zen Buddhist philosophy that was inculcated to her by her father.

By the time Mai-Loan started the series, none of her drawings had titles since those uncanny associations of images explain feelings she cannot put into words. Interestingly, Vietnamese language is characterized by being a very visual language using such kinds of associations to describe feelings (Phuong, 1998: 469). Knowing that losing Vietnamese language was one of her biggest regrets, I formulate the hypothesis that there might be a link between those poetic visual combinations translating her inner feelings and a strong desire to learn again a language that uses visual metaphors to describe emotions.

Finding a New Verb

Few months after her settlement in Vietnam, the artist's work was selected next to those of Hoang Bich Phuong and Ngo Thi Thuy Duyen for the opening exhibition of Salon Saigon, *Bittersweet Whisper*. As she came to Vietnam to find a new breath for her art, did the contact with a Vietnamese environment influence her artistic production?



Fig. 13. Mai-Loan Tu, *En partant, son écho promis, pour la première fois, de lui laisser le dernier mot* (When he left, his echo promised for the first time, to leave him with the last word), 2016. Ball pen on paper, 29,7 x 21 cm.

Fig. 14. Mai-Loan Tu, *Il ne put jamais peindre cette couleur car elle n'avait pas de nom* (He could never paint this color because it had no name), 2016. Ball pen on paper, 29,7 x 21 cm.

The artworks composing the exhibition *Bittersweet Whisper* have a major difference compared with her previous series. She already used her detailed depictions of textures in her earlier series *Et on l'appellera Darwin* (2012, Premio del Dibujo de la SWAB, Barcelona). The innovation that appeared along with her reconnection with her cultural roots is the use of titles to name her art pieces. Not descriptive, her new titles are short poetic stories that add another layer of understanding to the drawings. Indeed, read in a third time, they convey an additional message free of interpretation. They then trigger the viewer encouraging him/her to formulate a different perspective on the drawings.

The literary nature of the change in Mai-Loan's production presents an interesting link with her approach to Vietnamese culture through language. A personal hypothesis establishes some parallels with the evolution in her art and her contact with the Vietnamese environment. As explained in her biography, she decided to move to Saigon motivated by the rediscovery of a language she lost. There, thanks to the influence of inspiring encounters, she found the courage to write poetic titles. Those titles themselves resemble metaphors or visual stories that add a different reading level to her artworks.

As a conclusion, interpreting Mai-Loan's work through the lens of her Vietnamese heritage underlines that her art seems to express it through form and content. On the one hand, she identifies the composition of her drawings as symptomatic of her Zen Buddhist education. On the other hand, her creation process is imbued with the expression of her subconscious. As such, some themes might directly reference elements that compose her identity and as such, her cultural identity. Moreover, the poetic nature of her work might underline a link with Vietnamese language as being in contact with it through a new environment generated a literary change in her artistic production.

Sandrine Llouquet

The artistic path of Sandrine Llouquet is marked by a determination to follow her own trail as she wanted to establish herself as a visual artist beyond stereotypes defining her only by her Vietnamese background. Refusing to be directly autobiographical, her work focuses on philosophy, psychology, the unconscious and some extended subtopics such as alchemy, esotericism and spirituality. For her, the oeuvre of an artist is to be understood as a whole. Therefore, she decided recently to organize her art through a narrative framework divided into chapters marking through exhibitions specific periods in her artistic production, her research and, by extension, her life.

This introduction underlines the inaccuracy should we look for the expression of her Vietnamese heritage in her art. Vietnamese culture appeared only through instant inputs during her French education. These blurred contacts were imbued with mystery and a sense of magic generated by those unknown cultural manifestations of Vietnamese customs. Her personal development is nevertheless tied to Vietnam as she decided to settle there. According to her own perspective on her oeuvre, it might be interesting to identify the influence living for twelve years in Vietnam might have had on her life and as such, on her art production. The evolution of her art throughout the years will then be examined by a comparison between two solo exhibitions, each of them marking a specific moment of her artistic research and life. Viet Le's analysis of *Milk* that took place in 2008 at Gallery Quynh¹⁵ will be used as a base of comparison with Sandrine Llouquet's latest exhibition: *Chapitre 3: Les 101 Grandes Déesses* (2017) at Le Point Commun¹⁶. The comparison will focus on the evolution of space in her drawings in parallel with the setting of the exhibitions in order to examine the impact of Vietnamese environment on her work.

Milk (2008): A Becoming?

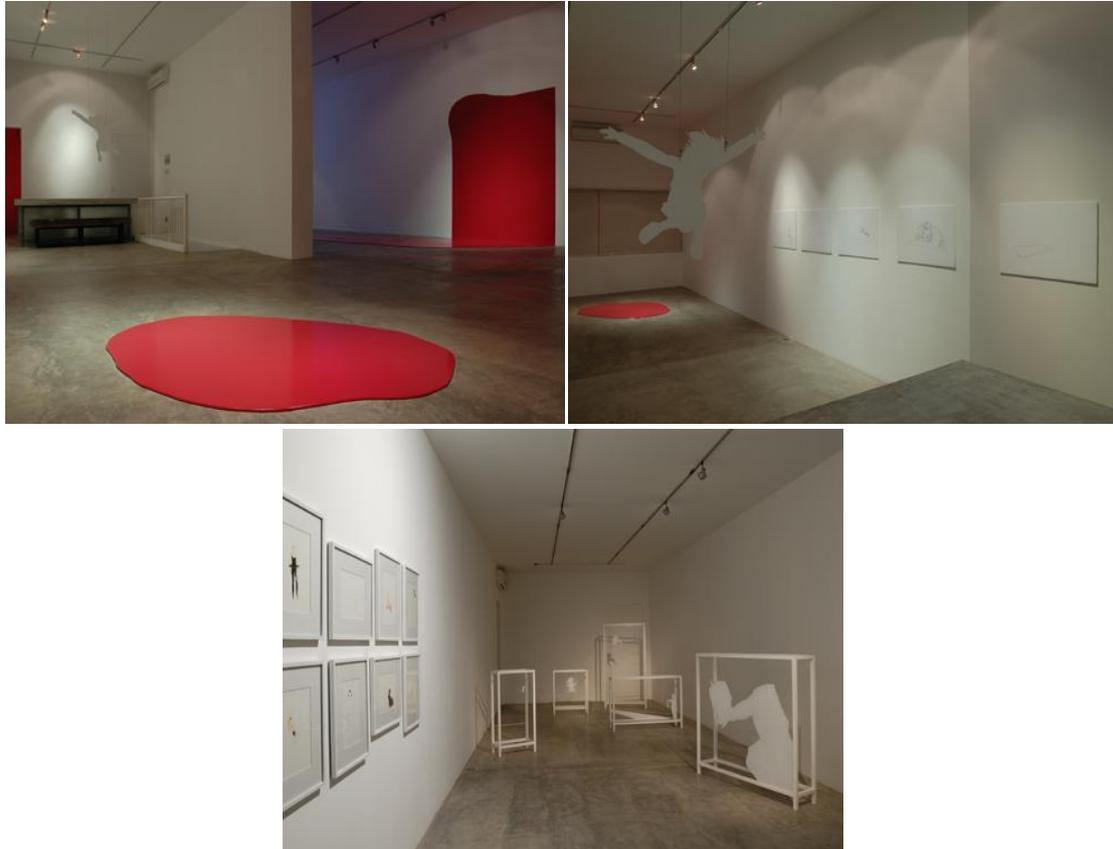
The exhibition *Milk* took place three years after Sandrine Llouquet established herself in Vietnam. It revolved around a specific body of works that illustrated the changes she was coming through while becoming mother. Indeed, the title *Milk* referred to mother's milk. Used as a verb "to milk" figuratively means "to extract" or "to exploit". So the tender reference to motherhood is related to a brutal act of separation. Sweetness and trauma are the binary terms through which Viet Le analyzed the exhibition to illustrate the ambivalent identity of Sandrine Llouquet as a Viet Kieu artist (Le, 2011: 59).

The exhibition space of *Milk* reflected the visual composition of her artworks back then. The emptiness of the exhibition space generated the visual isolation of artworks allowing fluidity of movement for the viewer. Indeed the background of the drawings melted with the white walls so that the exhibition constituted a homogenous whole. Adapting to the exhibition space and transforming it at the same time, the red puddles installations contributed to the homogeneity of the physical space of exhibition. However, if homogenous, the space was not fixed in a stable state as illustrated by the content of the drawings that rendered it transformative. This generated a spatial

¹⁵ Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

¹⁶ Annecy, France.

tension that put visitors simultaneously at ease and out of place. Such transformative dramatization of space coincided with the metamorphic Viet Kieu identity that Viet Le underlined in his analysis. Not strictly belonging to one culture or another, in a permanent state of transformation, they wander in an unstable state of acceptance and segregation by Vietnamese society (Le, 2011: 70).



Figs. 15, 16 and 17. *Milk* by Sandrine Louquet - Exhibition views, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam), 2008.

Interestingly, Le made an analogy between the composition of the drawings and the exhibition space. Hanged on white walls without any marked frames, the empty composition of the artworks visually extended the exhibition space. Doing so, the artist enforced her visual authority by leading the sight of the viewer to directly confront him/her with the central figures. The empty space of the sheet provides fluidity, breath and movement for the eyes of the viewer who was free to interpret the drawing without any defining context but was nevertheless straightforwardly guided towards the visual representations. Viet Le used Louquet's drawings to illustrate the ambiguity of the Viet Kieu artist. Indeed, he saw in the monstrous beings she depicted the embodied ethnographic concept of *Becomings* defined in Biehl and Locke's terms.

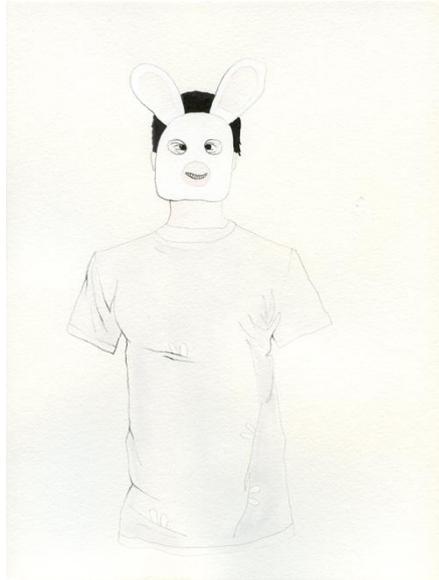


Fig. 18. Sandrine Llouquet, *Untitled*, 2008. Pencil, watercolors and China ink on paper, 21 x 29,7cm.

For example, this untitled drawing pictures an isolated mutant being in the center of a white sheet of paper. The central character appears as an ambivalent being: wearing a funny rabbit mask, it has no arms. Combining the sweet reference to a childish bunny mask with the missing limbs, the picture is at the same time sweet and violent. Lighthearted and mundane at the first glance, the injured body becomes monstrous with a closer look. Such a contradictory image playing with the visible and the invisible underlines tensions between representation and abstraction. Viet Le described it as “Mutant Abstraction”. This ambivalent being represents a breakdown with the logic of representation. It embodies transformation and adaptation as a state of being. As such, it is a “being in the state of becoming”. For Le, this was an accurate metaphor of the Viet Kieu as ambivalent subjects. They are between two cultural identities, materializing past and future in a permanent state of transformation and adaptation of their status within Vietnamese society (Le, 2011: 62-66).

“Chapter 3” and the Influence of Vietnamese Environment in Space

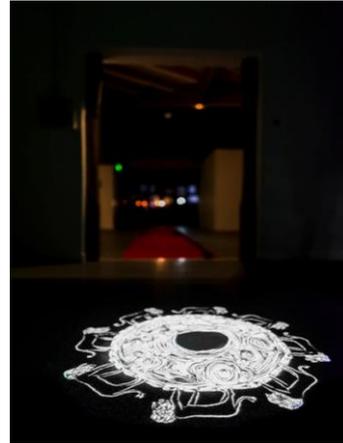
The exhibition *Chapitre 3: Les 101 Grandes Déesses* is the third chapter of a series Sandrine Llouquet started in 2013 while she designed the narrative framework in which she inscribes her art production. Understood as a whole, it evolves along with her self-development and research. Her readings on the human psyche generated a fascination for religions and beliefs expressed through performative rituals. Focusing on the female figure, the artist reflected on the influence religious practices have on society and the human mind. With this exhibition, she wanted to take the viewer on a journey through the collectively created expressions of the unconscious illustrated in ancient religious practices¹⁷.

¹⁷ Sandrine Llouquet. 2017. *Chapitre 3: Les 101 Grandes Déesses*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.sandrinellouquet.net/2017/09/chapitre-3-les-101-grandes-deesses.html>. [Accessed 3 November 2017].

I argue that there is a link between Sandrine Llouquet's research topic, the evolution of her art production and the relationship she has with her daily environment embedded in Vietnamese culture.

The thematic of her readings focusing on esotericism and the power of rituals are reminiscent of the relationship Sandrine Llouquet always had with Vietnamese culture. As explained in her biography, throughout her childhood and in her everyday life in Vietnam, Sandrine's contact with Vietnamese culture seems to have been defined by mystery and related to unknown customs that impressed her as a child and nourishes her inspiration as an artist today. Daily she is confronted with a purposely imperfectly known language and with strange everyday objects. She describes the Vietnamese environment as a multiplicity of absorbed and reinterpreted cultural and religious manifestations that inform contemporary life in Vietnam. Throughout her twelve years of settlement in Saigon, the visual artist absorbed those influences that trigger her artistic inspiration. Llouquet then creates a world impressed by her readings that she mingles with her personal experience of the Vietnamese environment: a dynamic structured chaos of cultural influences. This is made visible in the construction of her exhibition's space and in the composition of her drawings.

On the one hand, the physical space of the exhibition followed a narrative structure that creates a mysterious atmosphere. In the first room, drawings highlighted by dark frames were hanged on white walls. Following the angles of the room, white blocks contained various objects of a collection that have followed the artist throughout the different chapters of her oeuvre. Then, the viewer arrived in a dark transition room with an animated *mandala* projected on the floor. After circumventing it, the visitor went through a hallway where a red carpet flanked with columns at the entrance and an oversized braid lead to the last room. A door curtain opened on a dark busy space where artworks created for the exhibition but also repurposed from former ones and objects reminding feminine figures were accumulated forming a chaotic and curious set. The exhibition space reflects the narrative perspective the artist tries to bring into her work by emphasizing its chronological development. It is expressed through an accumulation of elements of the past composing the present state of her research. The path is progressively directed by specific constructive elements such as the *mandala*, the red carpet and its long braid all leading to the final room.



Figs. 19, 20, 21 and 22. *Chapitre 3: Les 101 Grandes Déesses* by Sandrine Llouquet – Exhibition views by Antony Leclerc, Le Point Commun, Espace d'Art Contemporain, Annecy (France), 2017.

Furthermore, an expression of the Vietnamese chaotically structured environment is to be found in the way her artworks constructed the exhibition space. Indeed, viewers were not directly confronted with them. Without this visual authority of the artists, viewers could freely wander in the structured space. If we found again fluidity of movement in the emptiness of the first room, drawings there were isolated from the exhibition space by using dark frames. Their composition did then not extend the exhibition space as opposed to *Milk*. Similarly, the accumulated objects were not directly brought to the visitors' sight as they were showcased in cabinets. Viewers were then free to see what they wanted instead of being visually forced to look at a central drawing or an installation. The *mandala* was central in the transition room, its circular movement and round structure correlate with the concept of fluidity of sight since a round shape has no end and no beginning. Further in the exhibition, objects are mingled all together, constituting a chaotic whole where the sight of the viewer can freely wander. We see then here an expression of the chaotic mix of influences defining her perception of the Vietnamese environment.

On the other hand, evolution in the drawings of Sandrine Llouquet might also illustrate such conception of her daily environment. First, architectural elements progressively integrate the negative space of the white sheet she used for *Milk*. This constructed space then constitutes a structured environment where the eye of the viewer can wander among its composing elements. Those elements are now historically and culturally defined and chaotically mixed together to create a

whole recalling cult places. Inscribed in her research on esotericism, the selected drawing depicts a structure reminding of a roman church. Second, this reference to a cultural space is subject to the artist's personal and humoristic reinterpretation of spirituality. This could be expressed in the displaced multicolored radiation coming out of the spire of the cathedral. This uncanny element contrasts with the dull colors of the structure. Could this be an unsettling way to bring in mystery and a magical atmosphere in the drawing? Some link could be made with Viet Le's interpretation of the uncanny combination of elements defining Sandrine Llouquet's work in *Milk*. He identifies this as a way for the artist to subliminally express her ambivalent identity as Viet Kieu by picturing simultaneously something familiar and recognizable but out of place so that the result depicts a strange structured chaos of cultural influences.



Fig. 23. Sandrine Llouquet, *Untitled*, 2015. Pencil, ink and watercolor on paper, 30 x 40,5 cm.

Conclusion

A comparative study of Sandrine Llouquet's work demonstrated the inaccuracy of the search for expressions of Vietnamese heritage in the art of Viet Kieu artists who were only indirectly put in contact with Vietnamese culture during their education. Nevertheless, those sporadic contacts with Vietnamese heritage seem to have informed the relationship the artist nurtures with Vietnamese culture in her living environment. Moreover, Vietnamese environment as an indirect source of inspiration appeared to have influenced her artistic production in its thematic and structure.

Between places and identities, Sandrine Llouquet's oeuvre illustrated her identity of « becoming » in *Milk* (2008). Nine years later, the situation has changed. In Vietnam, she established herself in the cultural environment she had only been confronted with through impressive animist practices. As a matter of fact, esotericism, rituals and the power they generate on the human mind became themes characteristic of her art after her establishment in Saigon. Those themes are expressed in the structure of her artistic space. A constructed chaos of cultural influences seems to have brought in stability to the mutant abstractions of her earlier work. Uncanny mix of culturally marked and fixed elements structure her recent compositions. She then seems to have found a balance, imbued with mystery were elements of fixed identity form a whole that illustrates her identity. To some extent, her contact with Vietnamese heritage served as a stabilizing pattern of her fluid identity, bringing sense and structure to it while acknowledging its chaotic and mixed nature.

Florian Nguyen

Looking at the artistic production of Florian Nguyen through the lens of Vietnamese heritage and the influence of his experience in Vietnam can be challenging. Indeed, as opposed to Sandrine Llouquet, Florian is from a third generation of Vietnamese immigrants. His grand-parents tried to integrate to French culture. The artist was then almost never directly confronted with cultural manifestations of Vietnamese language or customs. Moreover, because of his very recent settlement in Saigon in June 2016, the investigation of the influence the distinctively new Vietnamese environment had on his work could be questioned. It is nevertheless interesting to consider how the artist's attitude towards Vietnamese culture might inform his interaction with it in his environment and so how he re-appropriates it through his art.

For Florian, the understanding of a new place and culture requires an understanding of the language that is spoken in the distinct environment. Language gives access to much extra information and helps making sense of customs, behaviors and attitudes of local people. Indeed, Florian sees the subtleties of language as keys for understanding Vietnamese culture. I would argue that such analytical perception of a cultural environment is expressed and materialized in his art and that it could be applied to his perception of his cultural heritage.

Memory and Oblivion (2016)

Memory and Oblivion was the first solo exhibition of Florian Nguyen in Vietnam. With this proposition of exhibition, he saw an opportunity to reconnect with his family history through a thematic that would define his contact with the exhibition space in Saigon. The exhibition was then built around six childhood memories told by his grand-parents about their childhood in Vietnam. His approach consisted in artistically re-appropriate his grand-parents memories of the place in order to re-establish a link with his untold family history.

Florian Nguyen artistic approach is characterized by a creative process requiring analytical distance from his subject and the thematic it embodies. In the first instance, the visual artist had to accurately formulate the questions he asked his grand-parents since those were dealing with a topic that the family had never talked about before. Asking essential questions allowed his grand-parents to explore their personal memory and to deliver parts of it to the visual artist. Florian then tried narrating the memories by translating them in his own artistic terms. Therefore he created a "visual" language that figuratively represents memory and oblivion substances in order to express their processes and interactions. Through this re-appropriation, he established a connection with his grand-parents' history and through it with his personal bond to the exhibition space.



Figs. 24 and 25. Florian Nguyen, *Memories' substance* (left) and *Oblivion's substance* (right), 2016. China ink on paper, 12 x 12 cm (x2).

The artist's emblematic practice unifying his production is based on his particular treatment of details and textures. His very personal technique demands some sort of « meditative » approach to the creation process based on repetition of forms requiring time in the execution. At first glance, the eye of the viewer catches the main shapes structuring the drawing while, on a closer look, the viewer discovers a whole world of minuscule rounds and patterns that provide a new perspective on the whole artwork. Playing on different levels of perception of material representation through its composing elements, the artist introduces different layers of reading in his work.

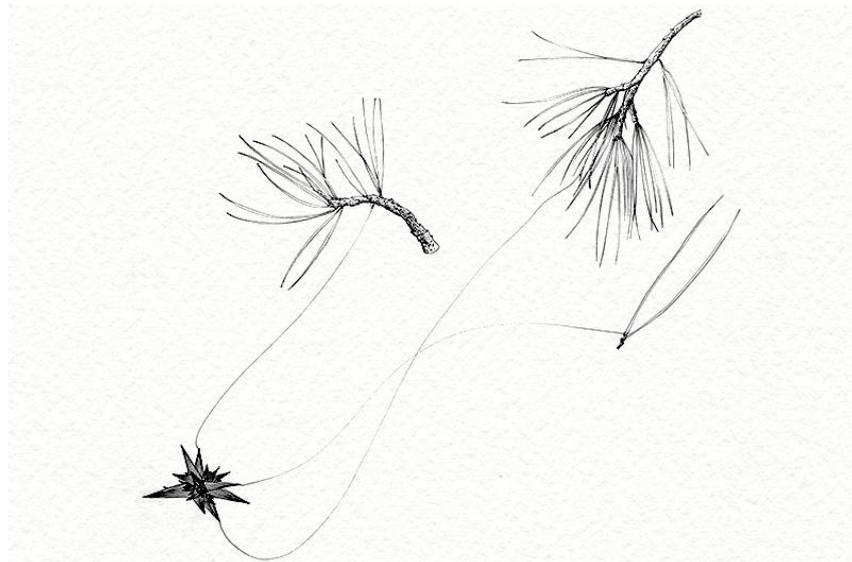


Fig. 26. Florian Nguyen, *Souvenir n°1 (Memory No. 1)*, 2016. China ink on paper, 76 x 112 cm.

With this exhibition, Florian defined an artistic research topic he developed during his stay in Saigon: the process and working of the restitution of memory through art. Such thematic correlates with the defining link that bounds him with the Vietnamese environment he evolves in daily. After only one year of settlement, has his interaction with this new environment influenced his art production as it did for Sandrine Llouquet and the others?

The Gestures of Memory (2017): From a Dynamic Environment to a Dynamic Practice

It seems early to identify how the work of the visual artist evolved in contact with Vietnamese culture. Without forcing the interpretation, the development and extension of his artistic research might nevertheless suggest that his analytical attitude has encouraged him to integrate elements of his new cultural context.

The artist describes Saigon as an energetic city imbued with specific creative flows and atmospheres. According to him, moving to a new place generated a space of freedom motivating him to take risks regarding his work as it provided room for experiments. As such, the artist extended his artistic research with a project made in collaboration with the French-Vietnamese choreographer Sébastien Ly, *Oraison*. The venture focusing on dance, body language and movements asked for innovation and trails of unknown techniques.



Fig. 27. Sébastien Ly (chor.), 2016, ORAISON, dance performance, 26 November 2016, Ecole Colette, 124 Cách Mạng Tháng, Ho Chi Minh City. Photograph by Florian Nguyen.

From that initiative the artist's second solo exhibition in Vietnam was born: *The Gestures of Memory* at L'Espace in Hanoi. As explained by the title, the chosen approach on memory was through body movements. To treat this dynamic topic, the artist integrated movement in his technique by using calligraphy brushes for a practical matter. He transposed his understanding of the movement in his artistic gesture. Doing so, he physically integrated the movement he represents in its illustration. However, unity of style and his treatment of hair and skin inscribed those different works in his global production.



Fig. 28. Florian Nguyen, *Danser la mémoire 3*, 2016. China Ink on paper, 77 x 56cm.

Without going too deep in the interpretation, I suggest that Nguyen's appropriation of artistic subjects might be symptomatic of his analytical approach trying to understand his environment in its own terms. Indeed, for the project *Oraison* that was based on movement and that evolves through space, the artist exhibited his oeuvre with installations *in-situ*. He drew on the walls and used neon lights to present his artworks. If wall drawing is a technique he often uses, the reinterpretation and integration of the neon light is, according to him, coming from his living experience in Saigon where neon is a common source of artificial light. With such exhibition settings, his drawings became an extension of the exhibition space. Combined with the very dynamic gesture of the technique he used, this whole project shows that he seems to have integrated the movement of his subject into his art. A personal hypothesis is that the choice of such topic and the interests shown in movement might have been an unconscious result of his interaction with the Vietnamese environment. More specifically, it might express an appropriation or rather integration of the dynamics that characterizes, for the artist, his new living environment: the bustling Saigon.



Fig. 29. *Memories x Movements* by Florian Nguyen – View Room 8 by Florian Nguyen, Ecole Colette, 124 Cách Mạng Tháng, Ho Chi Minh City, 2016.

Conclusion

It appears that Bao and Mai-Loan Tu, who have been directly confronted to Vietnamese culture in their education, seem to visually express consciously or not their cultural heritage in their work as summarized in table 2. In opposition, the works of Sandrine Llouquet and Florian Nguyen who were not directly confronted to Vietnamese culture do not seem to express their cultural heritage. However, in all cases, it appears that the artist's defining contacts with Vietnamese culture seem to inform their attitude towards a Vietnamese environment that is reflected in the evolution of their work after settling in Vietnam.

	BAO VUONG	MAI-LOAN TU
TRANSMITTED VIETNAMESE HERITAGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Family values: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Roles ▪Link to the ancestors (<spirituality) •Hard work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Family values: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Respect and care for the elders •Simplicity , detachment from material things
ARTISTIC EXPRESSION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Reappropriation and Personal reinterpretation of cultural objects •Tinkering, taking risks with mediums until it works 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •“Dematerialized” composition •Unconscious thematic: Family values •Visual poetry = an artistic language? < relationship with of Vietnamese language??

Table 2. Conclusive Table Iconological Study: *Bao Vuong and Mai-Loan Tu: Direct Transmission of Vietnamese Heritage,*

	SANDRINE LLOUQUET	FLORIAN NGUYEN
INDIRECT CONTACT WITH VIETNAMESE IDENTITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Mystery and Esotericism < cultural practice + relationship to Vietnamese language •Ambivalent identity: “Perfect profile” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Established family environment: daily life → personal characteristics and behaviors •Untold family stories
ARTISTIC EXPRESSION OF THE INFLUENCE OF VIETNAMESE ENVIRONMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Research thematic: esotericism, ancient religion, rituals, myths,... •Evolution of the perception of space: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪“Becomings” and Mutant abstraction ▪Structured mix of influences (<research) in fixed forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Analytical understanding of environment → personal reappropriation + development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Family history < memories: Simple compositions + degrees of reading < details → Reconnection with family history through distance and analysis, reflection ▪Incorporation of elements of his environment → mediums, thematic, artistic practice

Table 3. Conclusive Table Iconological Study: *Sandrine Llouquet and Florian Nguyen: Indirect Transmission of Vietnamese Heritage and Retrospective Influence of the Cultural Environment.*

Synthesis: A Fortunately « Failed » Experience

Experience

To conclude the research, a synthetic exercise mixing the ethnographical method of interviewing with iconological analysis of images was designed for the four French Viet Kieu artists. Its purpose was to make them reflect in their own artistic terms on what they identified as their Vietnamese heritage. Nevertheless, a mistake in the process of realization of the experience highlighted two different attitudes towards heritage in the artists' answers.

The experience was inspired by a method used by Grete Lillehammer to demonstrate the multiplicity and similarities in the perception of heritage depending on different stakeholders. Understanding heritage as an experience, she tried an original phenomenological approach by adding a drawing task to semi-structured interviews of her subjects, asking them to produce cognitive maps of a heritage site. Formalistic and iconographic analyses of the produced data demonstrated that the cultural perception of heritage structurally varied according to the different groups of interviewees (Lillehammer, 2010: 267).

Applied to the present research, the synthetic experience consisted in asking each artist at the end of his/her interview the following question: "If you had to artistically represent your own Vietnamese heritage, what would it look like?". Indeed, their status of artists allowed exploring artistic means of expression. In contrast with Lillehammer's subjects whose drawing task took place 30 minutes after the interview, the four Viet Kieu artists were given time to reflect on the very personal interview question. All of them spontaneously accepted to collaborate and seemed very enthusiastic about the project.

Not defining a specific deadline was a mistake. Indeed, the expected result was an artistic response to an interview question. However, because of the profession of the research subjects, giving them time to complete the drawing task consisted unintentionally in asking them to create artworks. Acknowledging the mistake, the exercise was redesigned asking each artist to pinpoint in their personal production an artwork illustrating their transmitted Vietnamese heritage.

The artists' reactions to this failed experience effectively served the interests of the research topic. Indeed, a critical perspective on the different answers given to the task underlined disparities in the relationship those French Viet Kieu had with their cultural heritage. Despite the readjustment of the exercise, two artists produced spontaneous artistic answers to the question. The latter were Bao Vuong and Mai-Loan Tu who have had a direct contact with Vietnamese culture through their close family environment and education. Sandrine Llouquet and Florian Nguyen preferred giving reflexive and introspective answers based on their oeuvre. Such difference in attitude correlates with the indirect relationship they had towards an indirect and questionable heritage they had barely been in contact with in their education.

Artistic Answers

Bao Vuong

When the exercise was proposed to him, Bao enthusiastically accepted and started describing spontaneous ideas coming to his mind. Few weeks later, he came up with the sketch of a draft project that illustrated, according to him, his Vietnamese heritage. It consisted in a self-portrait of him sticking out his tongue appearing on a structure made of intertwined sticks of Plexiglas. The viewer should look at the sculpture from a specific perspective to see the artist's picture.

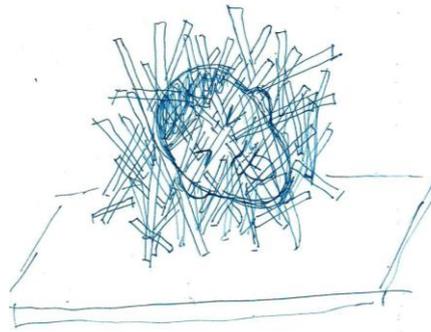


Fig. 30. Bao Vuong, Sketch of his draft project: *Expression of my Vietnamese heritage*, supposed to be made of ink on Plexiglas, 2017.

On the one hand, this Plexiglas Mikado game represents his idea of Vietnamese heritage expressed in society. He associated it with movement and with ants working in a colony. For him, Vietnamese society is a fast-moving organized chaos where everybody's hard work contributes to the further going and stability of the whole. Such reference to the value of collective work reminds his education and childhood where all the members of the family were assigned a task for the sake of the family. Such image then depicts what he considers as a definition of Vietnamese heritage.

On the other hand, the chaotic agglomeration of plastic translucent strips constituting his image also refers to what he identifies as the Vietnamese aspects of his personality. The messy structure mirrors the multiple influences composing his personality. First, it resembles neuronal connections as a network of the many influences composing his identity as Vietnamese. The surprisingly funny position of his mouth invokes the stereotypical pose young Vietnamese people do when taking pictures. Then, the fragile structure holds willy-nilly and seems difficult to realize. This whole creation process is inscribed in Bao's characteristic tinkering and experimental multi-media practice that he identifies as being an expression of the Vietnamese aspect of his personality according to him.

Finally, we might ponder the choice of Plexiglas as a medium. The artist said that he first thought about using white chopsticks in order to re-appropriate cultural objects referring to Vietnamese culture. However, he feared to depict a stereotypical idea of a traditional Vietnamese culture as it

had been the case for his first version of the artwork *Altar*. He then opted for a more modern reinterpretation by using a medium that fit his own personal sense of aesthetic and design.

To conclude, Bao Vuong's artistic expression of his Vietnamese heritage underlined the value of hard work for the common good that was inculcated to him during his education and that defines the Vietnamese environment he evolves in today. Moreover, he acknowledged the chaotic aspects of his personality and working process as his embodied Vietnamese quality that he readapts and reinterprets with his own modern aesthetic.

Mai-Loan Tu

Mai-Loan Tu's artistic answer was also very spontaneous as the exercised corresponded well with her artistic practice. Indeed, thinking about illustrating a personal topic such as cultural identity slightly resembled her realization process of the series *Six Pieds sous Ciel*.



Fig. 31. Mai-Loan Tu, *Mémoire de ses longs cheveux noirs* (Memory of her long black hair), 2017. Ballpen on paper, 16 x 21 cm.

In the first instance, Mai-Loan's emblematic simple line and dematerialized composition is representative of her education in a Zen Buddhist environment that she acknowledges as part of her Vietnamese heritage.

In the second instance, the presence of the title can be understood as the expression of the influence her experience in Saigon had on her work. Interestingly, she first sent the title before submitting the picture. In this case, even though it is still written under the poetic figure of a metaphor, this title is descriptive. It is then subject to a direct interpretation as it transcribes ideas and feelings she put in words before thinking of an image. Translated « Memory of her long black hair », the title encompasses various meanings and understandings of her personal Vietnamese heritage. First, it refers to her black hair, the only Vietnamese physical trait she has that was transmitted to her by her father who prefers when she wears it long better than short. Second, in the drawing, a simple line reminding a black hair poetically transforms into a surface on which the central female character writes her story. With the act of writing, an emphasis is put on the importance of the language. Moreover, the paper surface on which the story is written is also the surface on which she draws. Third, the position of the character recalls the act of introspection when reflecting on her

own heritage but it also reminds traditional depictions of sitting young Vietnamese woman. This last link established with Vietnamese heritage was done unconsciously by the artist who did not think about that when realizing the drawing.

In this artwork, Mai-Loan Tu features her Vietnamese heritage as the influence of Zen Buddhism in her composition and as physical trait bounding her to her father. The importance of language is here underlined by the representation of the act of writing that demonstrates the literary nature of her art.

Sandrine Llouquet

If Sandrine Llouquet was interested in the concept of the exercise, it appeared inaccurate for her to create an artwork that directly addresses her Vietnamese heritage. The exercise was then readapted and demanded the visual artist to appoint an artwork of her oeuvre that could represent, if not her Vietnamese heritage, her relationship with it. Sandrine selected an untitled drawing of her series composing the exhibition *Chapitre 2: Midi*. Influenced by her reading “Thus spoke Zarathustra” by Nietzsche, the series referred to the specific moment of her life at that time when she considered it at its climax.



Fig. 32. Sandrine Llouquet, *Untitled*, 2015. Pencil, watercolor, ink on paper, 40.5 x 30 cm.

Sandrine described this aquarelle as one of her most autobiographical works since it represents her relationship with Vietnamese heritage during her childhood. The central dull modern French pavilion symbolizes her integration to French culture imposed by her mother. It shows the stereotypical French middle-class house where she grew up. Drawn with a pencil, the habitation looks sad compared to the colored background. The inside is dark with a window opened towards brighter landscapes. This illustrates her present perspective on the attitude of her mother at the time. If she acknowledges the courage it takes to integrate, she nevertheless criticizes it. Hidden under the house is a sleeping dragon. The dragon is a recurrent symbol that has frequently appeared in her work for the last five years. This was especially manifested in the title of the exhibition *Chapter 1: Where I Attempt to Drown the Dragon*. She relates the mystical animal to her readings on alchemy at the time. For her, the creature symbolizes a certain form of perfected condition reached after the dragon was killed and then reborn in a majestic state. On the surface, is a rabbit sitting calmly next to

a whole. The animal constantly appears in her work, mainly under the form of a cuddly toy. As a reference to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, it represents in for the artist the link between the conscious and the unconscious. Standing next to the whole, he could wake up the sleeping dragon.

In addition, to make a reference to the previous iconological study of her oeuvre, it is worth mentioning that the artwork depicts a structured space in color. It might indeed be interesting to underline that such a directly autobiographical work shows elements representing different aspects of her identity in fixed forms. Stability of symbols seems remarkable in comparison with the retrospective nature of the work. Drawn in 2015 at a moment when her life was considered at its climax, her *becoming* beings found their place in a constructed environment.

As a conclusion, Sandrine Llouquet sees her Vietnamese heritage as something that was hidden but present within her and that needed to be awakened. When asking her if the dragon was awake now, she answered: "Yes. It is well awake now!"

Florian Nguyen

Florian Nguyen, as a French Viet Kieu from the third generation, was uncomfortable trying to identify his personal Vietnamese heritage and finding how it appears in his art. Indeed, he grew up detached from Vietnamese cultural manifestations as his grand-parents, the only link he had with Vietnam, negated this part of their identity in order to integrate to French culture. The artist highlighted the fact that all questions related to cultural identity require precise definitions of the concepts of identity, culture and what defines territories and borders. He nevertheless answered the question with his characteristic analytical perspective by selecting artworks that illustrated his Vietnamese heritage in his own terms, through the lens of his personal history.



Fig. 33. Florian Nguyen, *Portrait Papou Profil* and *Portrait Mamou Profil*, 2015. China ink on paper, 76 x 112 cm (x2).

The works he selected picture the people who embody his physical link with Vietnamese heritage: his grand-parents and the family history they wrote through their lives and experiences. Those large size portraits are inscribed in his artistic practice that requires taking analytical distance from his topic in order to represent it and appropriate it through his personal style. His specific focus on details and materials needed time and patience to draw; it took him seven months to complete those works. This long creation process brought him to reflect on the stories of his grand-parents to make it his own through his art. By selecting those artworks, the artist emphasized the fact that the transmission of cultural heritage lays in familial structure. If it is not directly manifested through specific cultural practices, it nevertheless transpires through little things of everyday life. Indeed, some specific ways of being and behaviors he associated to the personalities of his grand-parents were given different meanings when the artist settled in Vietnam. He understood and identified those little things as Vietnamese cultural heritage once he was confronted to a Vietnamese cultural environment.

Finally, his critical examination and desire to understand the Vietnamese environment he evolves in its own terms lead the artists to identify his Vietnamese heritage in its essentialized means of expression: family and the influence it had on the construction of his personality.

Conclusion

The research on the perception and expression of Vietnamese heritage by French Viet Kieu artists underlined many different aspects of the cultural identity characterizing the social group defined as “Viet Kieu”.

Comparing the biographies of the artists highlighted the fact that the term “Viet Kieu” is generalized and used to describe individuals defined by many different bounds to Vietnamese culture. Those bounds lay in the familial structure and in confrontation with their environment. Therefore, some of their life paths demonstrate that the transmission of Vietnamese heritage was done mainly through their education. The most striking cultural values those Viet Kieu incorporated are related to the roles in the family and respect of the elders, the value of hard work and collaboration, and integrity through simplicity. The desire of integration to another cultural environment made contacts with Vietnamese culture less perceptible and as such more difficult to identify for some. However, what those Viet Kieu artists understand as heritage expresses itself indirectly and seems to inform the relationship they nurture with the Vietnamese environment once confronted with it.

In all the cases, settling in Vietnam was a choice that gave them the ability to dare experimenting and developing their artistic practice. Notably for Bao Vuong and Florian Nguyen art was a means to reconnect with the cultural memory of their family while Sandrine Llouquet and Mai-Loan Tu’s work progressed and completed itself by encouraging them to reflect on personal interests that informed their relationship to Vietnamese culture, namely religious practice and language.

Finally, the research tried to use art as a form of expression to determine and examine Vietnamese cultural identity. Indeed, art understood as an ambiguous language consciously or unconsciously conveys messages that are subject to viewers’ interpretation. On the hand of the artists’ perspective on their own art production and through the lens of their personal and family history, the research tried to establish what was their Vietnamese heritage and under which forms it was transmitted to those different generations of return migrants.

Transmitted Vietnamese Heritage

Introspectively, what all the interviewed artists identified as an expression of their Vietnamese heritage were behaviors and specific aspects of their personality that define how they interact with their environment.

Trying to fix everything until it works willy-nilly, paying respect and care for the family, valuing the essential and avoiding the unnecessary, mixing different sources of inspiration to re-appropriate them by making it your own,... All those little things do not seem to be obviously related to any specific cultural heritage at first sight. However, once confronted with Vietnamese culture in their everyday life environment, the artists took a different perspective on those ways of beings constituting their personality. When reconnecting with their cultural heritage, they went back to

what has been described to them as part of their history, of their family and as such their personal heritage. There, they recognized similarities in the « ways of beings » and attitudes of the people in the distinctly Vietnamese and new environment they evolved in. This generates a different perspective on those behaviors that started to bear cultural meaning as they try to make sense of them as elements of their family history and all the other elements that built them the way they are.

According to those conclusions, how could we define their Vietnamese identity or, by extension, the general concept of personal cultural identity? It appears that cultural heritage is constituted by all those « ways of being » that have been transmitted to us through the familial structure and that we understand through the lens of a «cultural identity». In the case of those French Viet Kieu artists, they try to pinpoint behaviors that appears to them as “Vietnamese” in confrontation to their environment but also in their understanding of cultural distinction. So, what makes it **their** cultural heritage? From a relativist perspective, our conclusion brings us to think that it is the poetry of little things they create and write through the meanings they attribute to them.

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Fig. 1. *Sandrine Llouquet* by Hao Tran for Vietcetera.com, Salon Saigon, Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam), 2016.

Source: Hao Tran. 2016. *Sandrine Llouquet: How Vietnam's Mystery Keeps this Artist's Work Dynamic and Experimental*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://vietcetera.com/sandrine-llouquet-how-vietnams-mystery-keeps-this-artists-work-dynamic-and-experimental/>. [Accessed 13 December 2017].

Fig. 2. *Bao Vuong at the group show NGUCHONOBAY*, Galerie Guynh, Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam) 2017. (Courtesy of Bao Vuong).

Source: Courtesy of Bao Vuong

Fig. 3. *Mai-Loan Tu at Exile Ink Vietnam* by Sabrina Rouillé, Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam), 2017.

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Fig. 4. *Florian Nguyen presenting "Memory and Oblivion"* by Cao Tri for Anyarena.com, Institut Français, Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam), 2016.

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Appendix

Acknowledgements

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Sandrine Louquet

Selected Exhibitions¹⁸

2017

Chapitre 3: Les 101 Grandes Déesses, Le Point Commun, Annecy, France

The Foliage (Group Show), Vincom Center for Contemporary Art, Hanoi, Vietnam

The Three-Cornered World (Group Show), Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

2016

Kenpoku Art 2016 (Group Show), Ibaraki, Japan

2015

Chapitre 2: Midi, L'Espace, Hanoi, Vietnam

Carne Vale, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Transmutation (Group Show), Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

2014

Papier(s) (Group Show), Fondation Salomon, Annecy, France

Onward and Upward (Group Show), Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

DAISY, DAISY – Ode of digits (Group Show), Sàn Art Production x Phuong My, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

2013

Chapter I: Where I attempt to drown the dragon, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Sovereign Asian Art Prize (Group Show), Southeast Asian finalists' exhibition, Espace Louis Vuitton, Singapore

2012

Ligne de fuite, Saigon Domaine, organized by Post-Vi Dai Collection, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

2010

The Complex of the Glass Frog, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Collective Memories: Together in Electric Dreams (Group Show), Give Art, Singapore

No Soul For Sale 2 (Group Show), Tate Modern, London, UK

2008

Ce que je dis trois fois est absolument, 3x+ (curated by Bertrand Peret), Le mois de l'image, San Art, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Milk, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

¹⁸ This selection stops at 2008 with *Milk* and only includes a few of the many group exhibitions, projects and other activities she took part in. To find the biography, bibliography and the complete CV of the artist: Galerie Quynh. 2017. *Sandrine Louquet*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://galeriequynh.com/artist/sandrine-louquet/>. [Accessed 13 December 2017].

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Selected Artworks



Sandrine Llouquet
Untitled
2015
Installation: Mixed media
Various sizes

(View from *Chapitre 2: Midi*, L'Espace, Hanoi (Vietnam) but accumulative collection of objects reused throughout the exhibitions)



Sandrine Llouquet
The Wounded Healer 2
2015
Pencil, watercolor, ink on paper
40,5 x 30 cm

(*Chapitre 2: Midi*, L'Espace, Hanoi (Vietnam))



Sandrine Llouquet
An Opportunity to wear my Princess Dress
2014
Pencil, ink and watercolor on paper
30 x 40,5cm



Sandrine Llouquet
Entering the Ruins of the Motley Cow
2014
Pencil, ink and watercolor on paper
30 x 40,5 cm

(*Carne Vale* (duo show), Galerie Quynh, HCMC (Vietnam))



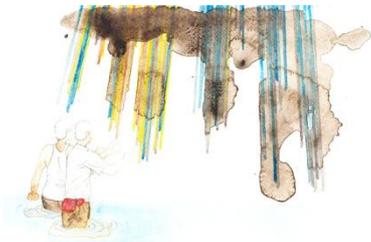
Sandrine Llouquet
Mout waiting
2013
Pencil, watercolor on paper
40,5 x 50,5 cm

(*Chapter 1: Where I attempt to drown the dragon*, Galerie Quynh, HCMC (Vietnam))



Sandrine Llouquet
Untitled
2013
Charcoal on paper
21 x 29,7cm

(*Chapter 1: Where I attempt to drown the dragon*, Galerie Quynh, HCMC (Vietnam))



Sandrine Llouquet
Untitled (part of a series of 6 drawings)
2012
Pencil, watercolor on paper
23 x 30cm



Sandrine Llouquet
Untitled
2008
Pencil, aquarelle, China ink on paper
21 x 29,7 cm

(*Milk* exhibition, 2008, Galerie Quynh, HCMC (Vietnam))



Sandrine Llouquet
Untitled
2008
Plexiglas, Acrylic paint, wood and metal

(part of the installation *Playground*, for the exhibition *Milk*, 2008, Galerie Quynh, HCMC (Vietnam))



Sandrine Llouquet
Untitled
2004
Aquarelle and China ink on paper
21 x 29,7 cm

Bao Vuong

List of Exhibitions

2017

KROSSING-OVER Festival (Group Show) – April 2017, Fine Arts Museum Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
« **NGUCHONOBAY** » (Group Show) with Sao La collective - March-April 2017, Galerie Quynh – Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

2016

« **[FEEL] in/out: memories x movements** » (Group Show) with Kerman Prod. - Novembre 2016, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.
« **À TRAVERS** » (Solo Show) – June-July 2016, L’Espace, Institut Français – Hanoi, Vietnam.

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An Ninh Thu Do. 2016. *Triển lãm – sắp đặt “Qua”: Âm ảnh của họa sĩ tha hương*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://anninhthudo.vn/hau-truong/trien-lam-sap-dat-qua-am-anh-cua-hoa-si-tha-huong/685097.antd>. [Accessed 13 December 2017].

Song Moi. 2016. *Tìm lại ký ức quê hương qua triển lãm của nghệ sĩ người Pháp gốc Việt*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://songmoi.vn/van-hoa-nghe-thuat/tim-lai-ky-uc-que-huong-qua-trien-lam-cua-nghe-si-nguoi-phap-goc-vie>. [Accessed 13 December 2017].

Selected Artworks



Bao Vuong
The Crossing VI
2017
Oil painting on plywood pannel
120 x 85 cm



Bao Vuong
336 items
2017
Oil painting, plastic cups, inkjet prints on plastic, carton box an neon lights
200 x 90 x 45 cm



Bao Vuong
BAG II
2017
Plastic bag, water and ink printed on rice cake
18 x 14 x 10 cm



Bao Vuong
Femme
Old photograph, watercolor, pencil
20 x 30 cm

(*A travers*, L'Espace, Institut Français, Hanoi (Vietnam))



Bao Vuong
Combien de temps déjà (How long ago)
2016
Old photographs , walnut stain
60 x 50 cm

(*A travers*, L'Espace, Institut Français,
Hanoi (Vietnam))

Extra Documents

Presentation of The CROSSING (page selection)

THE CROSSING :

Une nuit de 1979, mes parents quittaient leur vie pour fuir les tragédies d'une guerre. Ils s'embarquèrent sur un bateau. Je s'aurais qu'un an et notre voyage aura duré onze mois ...

Il y a quelques années, je suis revenu m'installer au Vietnam. J'y découvre la mémoire enfouie de ma famille. J'engage alors une exploration de mon passé vietnamien qui va déterminer mon travail artistique.

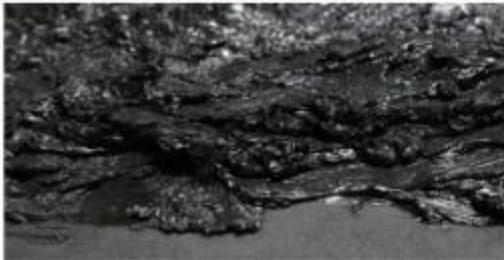
Actuellement, je développe une série de peintures et d'installations, intitulée "THE CROSSING", où j'évoque la traversée en mer de ma famille.

Les **peintures**, intitulées aussi "The Crossing", sont des représentations de l'océan la nuit avec la peinture à l'huile noire.

En peignant des portraits de noyés et notamment les vagues qui les submergent, j'ai pris conscience de la force de la peinture noire. J'ai réalisé que les vagues n'avaient pas besoin d'autres couleurs et que les reflets de la lumière seuls suffisaient à faire exister la mer.

Ces peintures sont des projections des nuits en mer de milliers de migrants passés et actuels. Des milliers de personnes se sont retrouvées plongées dans l'obscurité, sans repère, à la merci de passeurs. Cette noirceur accroît l'angoisse d'une mort imminente et de la perte de tout ce qui faisait leurs vies jusqu'alors ; et font face à un vide immense.

Si la couleur noire évoque les peurs et les angoisses de l'exil, les reflets de lumière sur ces reliefs de peinture représentent la lueur d'espoir qui permet la survie, la promesse d'un monde meilleur. Dans ces tableaux, tel le yin et le yang la matière noire et les reflets de lumière se complètent et se révèlent l'un l'autre.



Dans les **installations** sont représentés des souvenirs de personnes en exil. A moitié noyés, ils sont mis dans des contenants comme en attente.

2 Items : sur une pile de cartons, des bocaux en verre enferment des visages que nous apercevons en filigrane. De la peinture noire flotte sur l'eau en pellicule épaisse. Cette matière à l'aspect godronné en suspension coule peu à peu sur les visages.

Cette installation fait référence aux migrants clandestins qui voyagent dans des conditions inhumaines, et sont souvent considérés comme des produits en transit. Ici dans l'attente d'une délivrance, l'eau s'évapore peu à peu, et ne restera bientôt que le souvenir d'une vie.

36 Items : il est aussi question de contenants, de peinture noire et de transparences. Ici l'identité se morcelle, se réduit à quelques échantillons d'elle-même. En prenant du recul, nous apercevons un corps. En se rapprochant, se dévoilent des portraits flous et "lointains". L'apparence faussement ludique de cette installation interroge notre rapport personnel face à la disparition d'un individu. Que reste-t-il de l'existence d'une femme, d'un homme lorsqu'elle est réduite à une accumulation de traces ?

BAG : est composée d'un sachet plastique, accroché au mur, dans lequel un visage est plongé dans l'eau. Ce travail évoque une humanité jetable et nous interroge sur les différentes identités qu'on peut endosser ou abandonner au cours de notre vie.

Détail de "The Crossing VII"

2/13

BAO VUONG

Je suis né dans la ville de Vinh Long au Vietnam. J'ai grandi dans le sud de la France où j'ai étudié en écoles d'arts. Je suis diplômé du DNAP et du DNSEP (Diplôme National Supérieur d'Expression Plastique). Après mes études, je m'installe à Paris où je travaille dans le milieu associatif. En 2013, je suis revenu vivre au Vietnam. Je réside et travaille maintenant à Ho Chi Minh Ville. Dans ma pratique artistique, je raconte le manque et la recherche de mes racines.

EXPOSITIONS :

Juin-Juillet 2016
Exposition personnelle « À TRAVERS » à l'ESPACE, Institut français de Hanoi

Novembre 2016
Exposition collective avec la Production KERMAN « [FEEL] in/out : memories & mouvements » ancienne école Colette.

Mars-avril 2017
Exposition collective « NGUCHONBAT », à la GALERIE QUINH, avec le collectif Sao La

Avril 2017
Exposition collective, Festival KROSSING-OVER, dialogue entre danse, littérature et arts visuels.
Musée des Beaux Arts de Ho-Chi Minh Ville.



CONTACTS :

www.baoartworks.com

chezbao@hotmail.com
[facebook.com/chezbao](https://www.facebook.com/chezbao)
+84.(0)9.95.415.475

185/2 Tran Kê Xuong, Phu Nhuan District,
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

10/13

Presentation Altar

Je suis né au Vietnam un peu après la fin de la guerre ; mes parents ayant dû fuir le pays quand j'avais un an, nous avons pris la mer comme des milliers d'autres « boat people ».

Nous avons été accueilli dans des camps de réfugiés en Malaisie pendant une longue année avant de pouvoir être acceptés par la France, où j'ai grandi.

Lorsque j'étais enfant, je vivais en vase clos avec mes parents, mes frères et sœurs. Nous essayions de nous adapter au mieux à notre nouveau mode de vie mais nous étions quand même dans une sorte de bulle culturelle où nos traditions restaient encore très présentes. L'un de mes premiers souvenirs est la cérémonie funéraire de mon jeune oncle qui était venu avec nous sur le bateau. Il est mort un peu après son arrivée en France dans un accident de voiture. Les quelques jours de rituels avant son enterrement, la maison était remplie de l'odeur des encens. Ce parfum si particulier me replonge encore maintenant dans ce souvenir triste.

Je suis revenu m'installer au Vietnam après mes 30 ans, afin de pouvoir retrouver mes racines et des liens avec une culture dont je ressentais le manque.

En quittant la France et ma vie parisienne, j'ai retrouvé plus de temps pour une pratique artistique mais aussi un nouvel intérêt pour une recherche spirituelle. J'ai pu renouer un lien fort avec les traditions de ma culture d'origine à l'occasion de ce retour. Particulièrement celle du culte des ancêtres, pratique très répandue dans les familles vietnamiennes. Je rapproche intimement ce culte à mon premier souvenir d'enfance.

Les défunts nous hantent et nous rejoignent plus particulièrement lors de ces cérémonies et moments de prières quotidiennes, dans lesquelles nous souhaitons le salut de leurs âmes, leur demandons protection. Pour ma part ce moment de recueillement devant un autel devient souvent un moment de paix, durant lequel les êtres disparus reviennent comme une force intérieure qui me construit.

Cette œuvre intitulée « Autel » est une suite de mon travail sur la mémoire commencé à mon retour au Vietnam, dans lequel j'utilise des objets traditionnels ainsi que des souvenirs qui refont surface.

J'ai eu l'idée de représenter un visage en observant des traces de brûlures noires sur les tiges d'encens créées par le croisement de deux tiges disposées très près l'une de l'autre.

La pensée d'une communion avec mes aïeux et des personnes qui sont dans mes prières m'a donné l'envie de me représenter moi-même dans cette oeuvre, comme étant leur continuation. J'aime à penser que je porte leur héritage et qu'ils revivent à travers mes pensées.

Les encens brûlent comme se consomment nos vies
Nous sommes et nous retournons à la poussière
Nos esprits comme les fumées d'encens s'élèvent tels des prières
Montent dans les airs et s'unissent à l'espace infini

Mai-Loan Tu

List of Exhibitions

2017

To shut his thoughts up, he paints them clear and watches them dry (Solo Show)– 30th of August – 12th September, Salon Saigon outdoor exhibition, l'Usine Le Thanh Ton – HCMC, Vietnam.

Saigon skill vol.5 (Group Show) – August 2017, La Fenêtre Soleil – HCMC, Vietnam.

2016

Bittersweet Whispers (Group Show)- December 2016, Salon Saigon – HCMC, Vietnam

Episcopo E3 (Solo Show) - April 2016 - Nantes, France

2015

20/20 Artistes Solidaires (Group Show) – November 2015, La Maison des Babayagas – Paris, France

Hiers & au travers (Solo Show) - 2015 - Paris and Nantes, France

2013

(Group Show) - 2013, Espai Barra de Ferro - Barcelona, Spain.

2012

Grafikalem (Group Show) – November 2012 – Conservatoire du Patrimoine Ecrit de Arles (COPEIA), Arles, France.

Solo Show – June 2012, Gallery Miscellanea – Barcelona, Spain.

Contemporary Art Fair SWAB(Group Show) – **Precio de Dibujo** - May 2012 – Barcelona, Spain.

Seis pies bajo el cielo (Solo Show) – 5th – 27th February 2012, Museum Anzoatégui (MUAN) – Barcelona, Venezuela.

Solo Show – November 2012, Gallery Marcs y Casas- Barcelona, Spain.

2011

Group Show, Gallery Espai Barra de Ferro – Barcelona, Spain.

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Selected Artworks



Mai-Loan Tu
*Il compta 2 mains sous ses 10 doigts,
l'histoire ne dit pas comment
He counted 2 hands under his 10
fingers, the story doesn't tell how*
2016
ball pen on paper
21 x 29.7 cm

(Bittersweet Whispers, Salon Saigon,
HCMC (Vietnam))



Mai-Loan Tu
*La couleur prit peur et se cacha dans
l'ombre
The color got scared and hid in the
shadow*
2016
Ball pen on paper
21 x 29.7

(Bittersweet Whispers, Salon Saigon,
HCMC (Vietnam))



Mai-Loan Tu
*Le dernier pas sonna d'un ton plus
aigu, car l'air retint son souffle, si
bien qu'on ne l'entendit jamais
tomber.
The last step sounded a tone higher,
because the surrounding air held its
breath, so we never heard him fall*
2016
paper cut
60 x 84 cm

(Bittersweet Whispers, Salon Saigon,
HCMC (Vietnam))



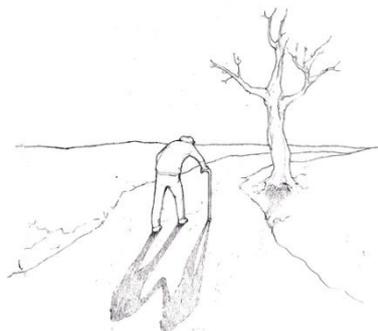
Mai-Loan Tu
Untitled
2016
Ball pen on paper
21 x 29,7 cm



Mai-Loan Tu and Louis Crevier
Hier et au travers
2014
Collaborative artwork and
installation : papercut (Mai-Loan Tu)
and Video projection (Louis Crevier)



Mai-Loan Tu
Untitled (series Six Pieds sous ceils)
2012
Ball pen on paper
16,5 x 21 cm



Mai-Loan Tu
Untitled (series Six Pieds sous ceils)
2012
Ball pen on paper
16,5 x 21 cm



Mai-Loan Tu
Untitled
2012
Paper cut and ball pen
21 x 29,7 cm



Mai-Loan Tu
Et on l'appellera Darwin
2012
Paper cut and ball pen on paper
100 x 70 cm

(Premio del Dibujo de la SWAB,
Barcelona, 2012)

Florian Nguyen

List of Exhibitions

2017-2018

Small is beautifull (Group Show)- 8th of december 2017 - 21st of january 2018, Artefact Gallery – Paris

2017

Alliages (Group Show) - 27th of September - 16th of December, L'Arc museum - Le Creusot

Instincts (Group Show) - 21st of September to 27th September, curated by All Mecen - Paris France

Then I can turn the world upside down (Group Show) -15th of July-15th of August , Salon Saigon - HCMC Vietnam

Les gestes de nos mémoires (Solo Show) - 21th of April – 4th of June, L'espace - Hanoi Vietnam

2016

Memories X Movements (Group Show) - 26th November - HCMC Vietnam

La Palmeraie (Group Show)- 24th to 25th September - Ivry sur Seine France

De mémoire et d'oubli (Solo Show)- June, Institut Français du Vietnam – HCMC

L'Archipel (Group Show)- May - Paris France

L'Anvers (Group Show)- May - curated by Collectif Dérive - Paris France

Frozen Market (Group Show)- March - curated by Collectif Dérive - Ourcq Blanc, Paris France

L'appart (Group Show) - February - curated by Collectif Dérive - PARIS

2015

Vagos canes 2 (Group Show)- Mays - Brussels Belgium

Art is A Live (Group Show) - January - La Maroquinerie - Paris France

Art is A Live (Group Show)- January - Le New Morning - Paris France

2014

The erasable billboard- 11th of October, New York, Melbourne, Amsterdam, London

Expographe (Group Show) - September - Paris France

2013

The erasable billboard (Group Show)-11th of October, Paris, Berlin

Chaque Pétale est Une Fleur (Group Show) - May - A2Z Gallery - Ivry sur Seine France

2012

Poissy Talents (Group Show)- May - Poissy France

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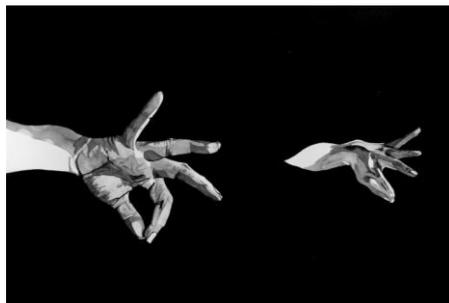
Selected Artworks



Florian Nguyen
*02.EB.05a / 4.BB.05 /
4.DA.05 *180*
*(Pyrite / Magnétite /
Quartz *Sables / Sand)*
(Installation)
2017
Painted sand, neon's light
and drawings (77x 77cm)
with ink on Canson's
paper
270 x 190 x 87cm



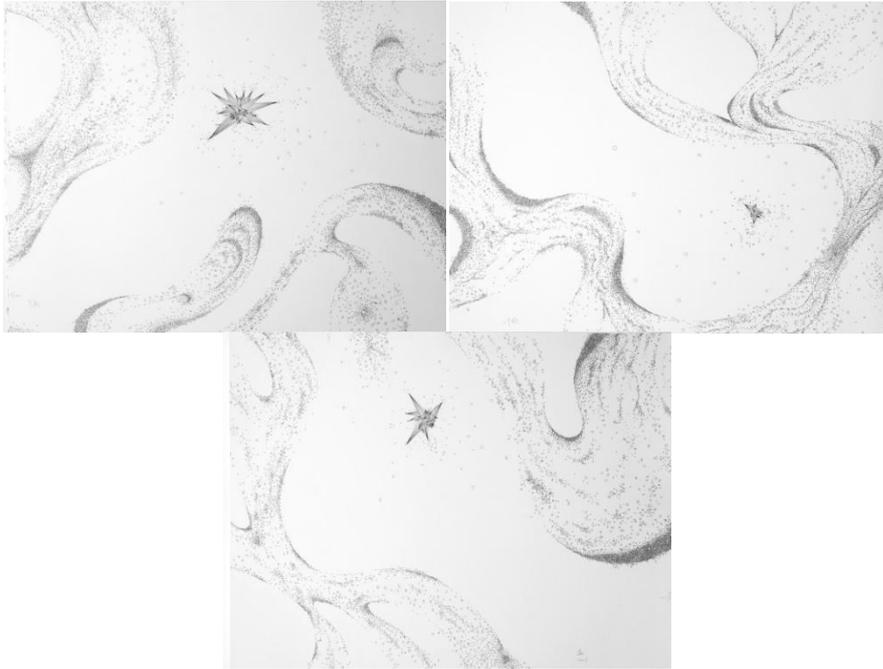
Florian Nguyen
*ces derniers jours
je me dissous
dans les contours*
2017
China Ink on Canson
paper
76 x 112 cm



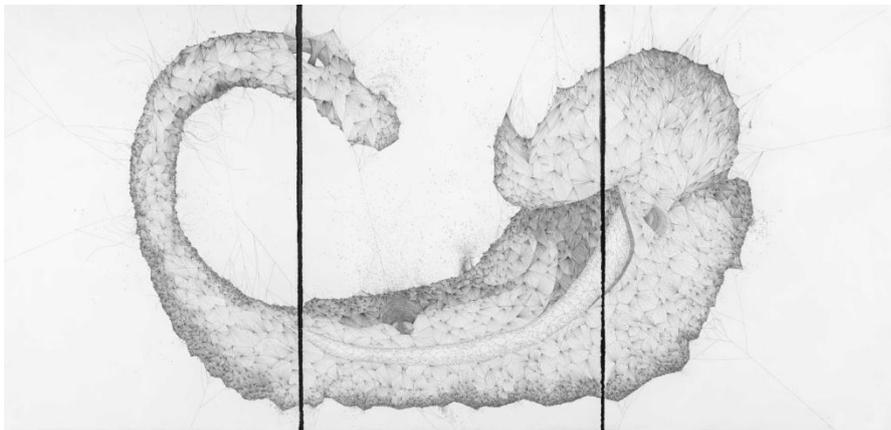
Florian Nguyen
Gesture n°3 - Smile
2017
China ink on Canson
paper
56 x 38,7cm



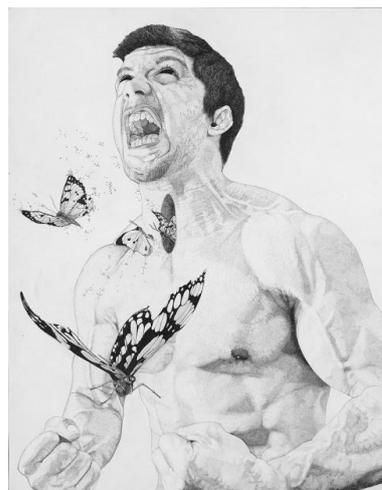
Florian Nguyen
Dancing the memory n°1
2017
China ink on Canson
paper
73,3*56 cm



Florian Nguyen
Restoration's process of memories - Mamou
2016
China ink on paper
28 x 37 cm



Florian Nguyen
Hippocampe
(Hippocampe)
2016
China ink on paper
112 x 228 cm



Florian Nguyen
Au Fond des Gorges
2013
China ink on paper
50 x 65 cm

Extra Document

Text: Artwork Representing his Vietnamese Heritage

nguyen florian.

dessinateur / plasticien.

A :

Chung Cu Minh Thanh
259 Le Van Luong HCMV
W :
www.floriannguyen.com

T :

+33 6 25 79 92 65
+84 9 68 81 43 54

M :

bonjour@floriannguyen.com

Objet : Texte

J'appartiens à la troisième génération, mes grands-parents ont quitté le Vietnam dans les années 1950. Ils étaient encore enfant.

Notre histoire est peuplée de « zones d'ombres » et la transmission de l'héritage culturel vietnamien dans ma famille s'est fait sous le couvercle de l'idée d'intégration au sein de la société française.

La langue vietnamienne ne nous a pas été transmise mais d'autres choses sont passées, des détails, des manières de se tenir, de parler...

J'ai longtemps expérimenté ses manières d'être sans y prêter attention. La façon dont mon grand-père répare les choses, la cuisine de ma grand-mère et sa manière de bouger.

Depuis mon installation ici, à Saigon j'ai retrouvé certains traits dans d'autres personnes, à d'autres endroits.

La question d'héritage et d'identité culturelle est pour moi trop vaste. Il faudrait dans un premier temps définir l'identité culturelle d'un pays. Qu'est-ce qui fait que nous sommes français ? Vietnamien ?

L'appartenance à un territoire, l'histoire commune, la langue...

Je ne pense pas qu'il y ait des cases à cocher, je pense que cette question d'identité amène à beaucoup trop d'autres questions. Ne serait-ce que la notion de territoire qui amène à celle des frontières, à leur création, à leur légitimité.

Je ne peux donc que raisonner et chercher à comprendre au sein de mon histoire. La réponse amenée n'a aucune volonté d'affirmation et pourrait même prendre la forme d'autres questions.

J'ai ainsi mené des discussions avec mes grands-parents à propos de leurs souvenirs du Vietnam, de ce qui est resté et à sans doute été transformé avec le temps.

Ces échanges ont amené à une première exposition « De mémoire et d'oubli, Kí ức và lãng quên ». Cette exposition est construite autour de trois souvenirs d'enfance de chacun de mes grands-parents.

Les deux portraits ci-joint sont des pièces importantes de ce projet. Ils peuvent être vus comme simplement des recherches plastiques sur leur visage mais pour moi ils représentent plus.

Leur intérêt ne réside pas seulement dans leur aspect mais plutôt à la marge. Dans la démarche et le parcours qui a amené à leur création.

Ils ont été élaborés dans la lenteur, environ 7 mois pour les deux portraits. La technique employée est répétitive et m'a amenée à réfléchir. J'ai essayé à chaque geste de garder la pensée de mes grands-parents, de ne pas perdre le fil. Réfléchir à ce qui a été transmis, ce qui a été perdu.

Ce travail m'a permis de comprendre un peu ou tout du moins de me poser d'autres questions.

J'ai tendance à croire que l'héritage culturel se transmet au sein de la structure familiale par une addition de petites choses dans une sorte de miasme, sans que l'on s'en rende compte.

Nguyen Florian.

Dessinateur

website : www.floriannguyen.com

instagram : [florian_ngyn](https://www.instagram.com/florian_ngyn)

mail : bonjour@floriannguyen.com