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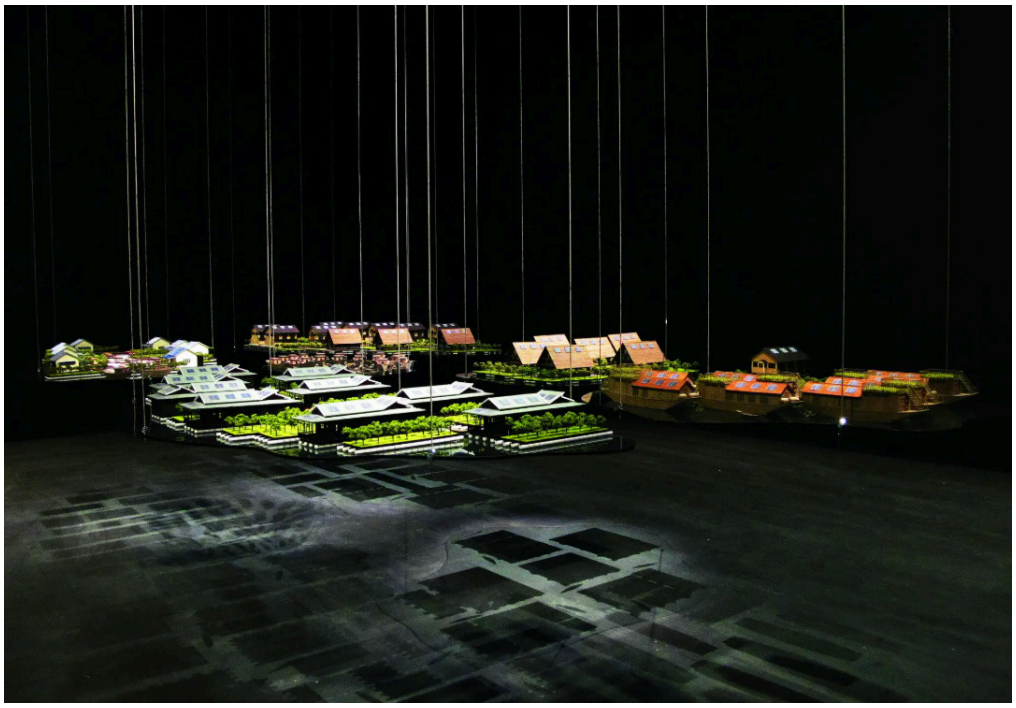
The New York Times

The Art World Explores Concrete Ways to Fight Climate Change

MUSEUMS, GALLERIES AND OTHER ART INSTITUTIONS ARE LOOKING FOR MEASURES TO REDUCE THEIR ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINTS.

By Alina Tugend | October 25, 2024



An installation by Tiffany Chung titled "stored in a jar: monsoon, drowning fish, color of water, and the floating world." It is part of the exhibition "Breath(e) Toward Climate and Social Justice" at the Hammer Museum.
Tiffany Chung

Visitors to the Hammer Museum's show "Breath(e) Toward Climate and Social Justice" will be greeted by powerful works portraying the widespread impact of ecological degradation: photos of citizens in Flint, Mich., waiting for clean water, a painting of a fish created out of spilled crude oil and contaminated sediment.

But increasingly, museums are realizing that presenting artwork that addresses the climate crisis is not enough — they also must consider their own impact on the environment.

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So, Hammer visitors won't know that most of the art items were shipped by ground or sea, rather than air, resulting in far less carbon dioxide emissions. Or that the exhibition catalog was printed using FSC paper, which comes from forests managed in sustainable ways, and wrapped in translucent paper rather than the typical plastic shrink wrap.

"It would absolutely be hypocritical for us to put on a show about climate change without questioning our implication in climate change," said Glenn Kaino, a Los-Angeles-based conceptual artist and co-curator of the show, which runs through Jan 5.

The Hammer exhibition is part of "PST Art: Art and Science Collide," a series of events taking place through mid-February 2025 at about 70 museums, science institutions and other spaces across Southern California.

Museums and galleries have long shown artworks related to the climate crisis, but in recent years, there has been more of an urgency for directors and curators to look at the environmental cost of heating, cooling and lighting their buildings and packing, shipping and exhibiting their shows. That also includes examining the ecological toll of using imported materials or artists from distant shores rather than local artwork and artists.

A photograph by LaToya Ruby Frazier titled "Moses West Holding a 'Free Water' sign on North Saginaw Street between East Marengo Avenue and East Pulaski Avenue, Flint, Michigan."
.via LaToya Ruby Frazier and Gladstone Gallery

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In part, the pandemic jump-started the process; people had time to think about issues that were pressing but difficult to focus on during the busyness of everyday life. Within the art community, discussions arose about collaborative actions geared toward the climate crisis.

What would it "look like to actually be able to come together and feel like we are empowered to do something — and imagine a future we can live in, rather than feeling this kind of existential dread?" said Laura Lupton, an art and climate consultant, who helped develop and coleads the Climate Impact Program that is part of the PST Art event. She co-founded the nonprofit Artists Commit in 2020.

As an industry, the art sector is far from the largest carbon emitter but it has an outsize impact because of how it operates: typically in large buildings with strict climate and humidity requirements.

Museums and other buildings devoted to art, "are some of the most energy-consuming buildings in a city," said Caitlin Southwick, the founder of Ki Culture, a company that works on coaching, training and providing services linked to culture and sustainability,

Some changes can happen at the individual facility level — as one example, many museums are replacing incandescent lightbulbs with LED lighting, which uses far less energy and lasts much longer.

The Nevada Museum of Art in Reno — the most rapidly warming city in the country — has been focused on sustainability. It estimates that its carbon emissions will be reduced by 19 percent when solar panels are installed in a few months, said Apsara DiQuinzio, the museum's senior curator for contemporary Art.

In addition, a major exhibition opening in March 2026 on the environment will include 190 artists. To reduce transportation and other environmental and financial costs connected to shipping art works, more than half of the 250 items to be displayed will be from the museum's permanent collection, DiQuinzio added.

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"MIA Highfin Blenny" by Brandon Ballengée, a painting made with crude oil and contaminated marshland sediment. via Brandon Ballengée and Jennifer Baahng Gallery, New York

But broader transformation necessitates an industrywide approach.

The Gallery Climate Coalition, based in London, started in 2020 as a group of 1,500 arts-related organizations worldwide seeking to reduce the industry's greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent by 2030. It is primarily funded by individual donations.

When the coalition was founded it introduced a carbon calculator, which was updated this fall, to help museums and galleries track and reduce their carbon emissions.

Alex Klein, head curator and director of curatorial affairs at the Contemporary Austin, said her museum tested the updated calculator, along with other museums, and found it useful.

"It helped us to start to think through what does it mean to track carbon?" she said. "Our ambitions in the future would be to have a carbon budget for our shows."

The Contemporary Austin was one of six museums awarded a pilot Climate Action grant in 2023 from the Teiger Foundation, which supports contemporary arts curators. The Climate Action program, included up to $20,000 per recipient — now $25,000 — and a year of working with a climate consultant.

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"Curators are so desperate to engage on climate change," said Larissa Harris, the foundation's executive director.

The Contemporary Austin used some of its grant to track carbon for its exhibition "Carl Cheng: Nature Never Loses," showing through Dec. 8. The exhibition of the California artist, among other things, examines the impact humans have on their ecosystem and the impermanence of both the built environment and nature.

It will travel to four other museums in the United States and Europe through 2027; they have all agreed to track certain lines of carbon emissions "so that at the end, we will have a base line for the field at large," Klein said. "Because you can't really know how to change things unless you know what needs to be changed."

For most museums, the energy used to control the building's temperature and humidity to preserve artworks is the largest part of their climate footprint, Southwick said.

Since the 1960s and 1970s, when HVAC systems became widely used, museums have largely held to a strict standard on the best climate for artworks: 65 degrees plus or minus two degrees and 55 percent relative humidity plus or minus 5, Southwick said.

Those numbers became "the holy grail," she said, and if museums wanted to borrow items from other museums, they had to typically agree to those climate controls 24 hours a day.

But all that is being questioned now and many other museums in Europe and the United States and their insurers are re-examining the issue. The Bizot Group, an organization of the directors of the world's largest museums, last year issued new green guidelines noting that it is now known that "museum collections survive exceptionally well under much wider climatic conditions than traditionally assumed."

Other ideas to lower carbon emissions include extending the time traveling exhibitions stay at one museum from a typical 12 weeks to no less than six months, so there is less packing, shipping, travel and building of new installations, said Anne Kraybill, chief executive of the Art Bridges Foundation.

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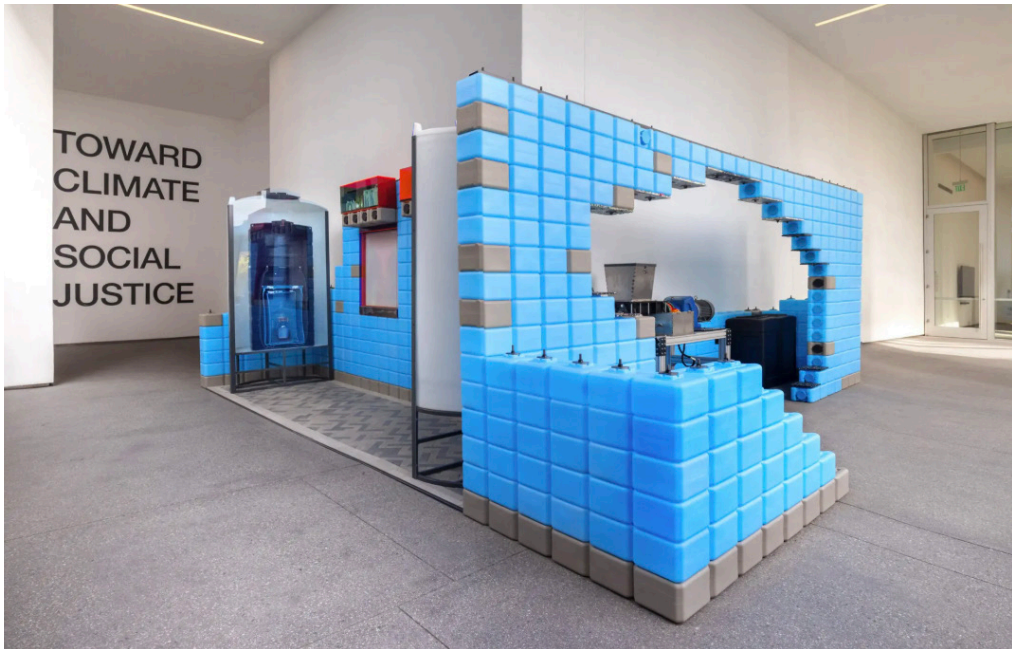

"Over Your Head and Under the Weather" by Lan Tuazon is made from different types of reconfigured plastic and other materials and includes an industrial shredder.
Sarah Golonka

Museums also need to work with artists to discuss sustainability, said Alexa Steiner, co-founder of Rute Collaborative consulting, and the climate consultant used by the Teiger Foundation. That can include discussing the types of materials an artist uses and the potential effect on the environment, how the work will be installed, and even the number of times the artist, if not local, will need to visit.

Increasingly, artists are aware that they don't want to just depict climate change but to use their creativity to combat it. Haley Mellin, a New Jersey-based artist and founder of the nonprofit conservation organization Art into Acres, said she shifted to painting outdoors about five years ago.

"This creates a seasonal studio without utility bills, climate control or studio rent, and my art is less of a large physical production," she said. "I can paint outdoors and clean up easily, then put the paintings in my carrier and walk to work."

Lan Tuazon, a Chicago-based artist, has a sculpture installation in the Hammer exhibition called "Over Your Head and Under the Weather."

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It is built with different types of reconfigured plastic and other materials and includes an industrial shredder. Visitors will have the opportunity to bring their own plastic to the Hammer and watch as it is shredded to be turned into future works by Tuazon.

The climate crisis has to be addressed by artists and museums, she says. But with her work, she wants to give people the power to realize they can make a difference.

“I think that there are accessible, everyday, small things that absolutely impact climate change, “ she said.

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NBCDFW LOCAL WEATHER NBC DFW 24/7 RESPONDS INVESTIGATION...

Dallas Museum of Art's new mural is a walk through memories of conflict and migration

TIFFANY CHUNG'S MULTI-MEDIA INSTALLATION IS ON VIEW IN THE MUSEUM'S CONCOURSE THROUGH AUGUST 3, 2025.

By Kimberly Richard | August 26, 2023

"Tiffany Chung: Rise Into the Atmosphere" is a multisensory installation consisting of two works, "Composition X" and "Poetic Landscapes Remembered."

Dallas Museum of Art's Concourse is much more than a hallway when an artist transforms it.

"Every time we change the Concourse, the museum changes completely," said Dr. Agustin Arteaga, the museum's Eugene McDermott Director. "When it's filled with art, it becomes a connector. It becomes a space for reflection."

As the sixth iteration of the Dallas Museum of Art's Concourse mural series, *Tiffany Chung: Rise Into the Atmosphere* inspires reflection on the experience of migration and war. The mural will fill the Concourse for two years, on view through August 3, 2025 and part of the museum's free general admission.

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Chung, a Vietnamese-American artist based in Houston, is known for her conceptual work and research-driven process that confronts the issues of conflict, geopolitical partitioning, spatial transformation, environmental crisis and forced migration in relation to history and cultural memory.

Rise Into the Atmosphere creates a new narrative about places currently defined by war, upheaval and displacement based on cultural memory and personal perspectives.

"Tiffany has created an installation that provides a needed antidote to the flat and stereotypical perceptions of displaced peoples and 'conflict zones' propagated by mass media. Instead, she offers us a more nuanced and human-orientated perspective and reminds us of the power of music and art to bring back beauty, humanity and hope," said Vivian Li, the museum's The Lupe Murchison Curator of Contemporary Art and curator of the exhibition.

Tiffany Chung: Rise Into the Atmosphere will be on view for two years, through August 2025.

The multisensory installation begins with what is heard. Collaborating with composer Isaac Hernández Campos, Chung created *Composition X*, an audio installation based on the experiences of those uprooted.

"*Composition X* interweaves music, sounds and spoken words created by 28 individuals from around the world with me," Chung said. "Drawing from their memories of their home, their experience of being displaced, of starting a new life elsewhere or simply their compassion or imagination."

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Composition X was inspired by Beth Gazo, a Syriac liturgical book of Syriac hymns and melodies, and the poetry of Rumi.

"So, my work on Iraq and Syria since 2010 also led me to appreciate Rumi's poem 'Where Everything is Music' while I was tracking conflict and displacement," Chung said. "It was such an uplifting and beautiful poem that could get you through such difficult times."

Carefully edited together, those experiences become a melody of memory.

"It was a long process of going back and forth with one draft after another. I don't even know how many drafts I have on my computer. It's just insane," Chung said. "It was a very elaborate process."

The version installed at the museum is structured in six parts, reflecting different emotional terrains. Chung used the sonic frequencies of *Composition X* to create the visual aspect of the installation, *Poetic Landscapes Remembered*.

"At the same time, I also wanted the visitors to have a sensorial experience of traversing though an evocative terrain, both familiar and unfamiliar landscapes and immerse themselves in poetic and sonic and visual possibilities in imagining people's memories and experiences," Chung said.

Working with media artist Mario Norton, Chung used 3D animation software to translate the sonic frequencies of *Composition X* into a landscape video. Carefully curated frames became printed elements for the mural.

Chung used the sonic frequencies from *Composition X* to create *Poetic Landscapes Remembered*.

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As a visitor walks through the Concourse, *Composition X* accompanies Poetic Landscapes Remembered, a striking patchwork of undulating colors, textures and patterns that makes up the terrain of the lived experience of ordinary people enduring extraordinary circumstances.

With every step, the Concourse transforms into a reflection of the untold stories of resilience, wisdom and hope.

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PRESTIGE

10 Most Famous Asian Contemporary Artists To Keep an Eye Out For

By Manas Sen Gupta | March 12, 2021

Asia has probably produced some of the biggest artists of incredible talents when it comes to contemporary art.

Cai Guo-Qiang, Pacita Abad, Tiffany Chung and Ai Weiwei are some of the famous names who have used this art form — which emerged in the late 20th century — to bring focus to the issues of our times ranging from personal matters such as isolation to socio-political causes such as migration. From everyday things like pins, chairs, tables and even fireworks, to videos and paintings, these artists use common objects as a form of expression. In fact, Ai's recent 2020 documentary *Coronation* made headlines for bringing to light the harrowing realities of the coronavirus situation in Wuhan.

In the last few decades, Asian contemporary artists have not only introduced unique styles to art but also helped trigger important debates on pressing issues. In the process, they have also won prestigious honours and awards, along with showcasing their work in various art galleries and museums.

Here's a look at 10 of the most famous Asian contemporary artists of all time that you should know about.

TIFFANY CHUNG, VIETNAM-US

Chung is one of Vietnam's most famous artists. (Image: SAAM/Smithsonian Magazine)

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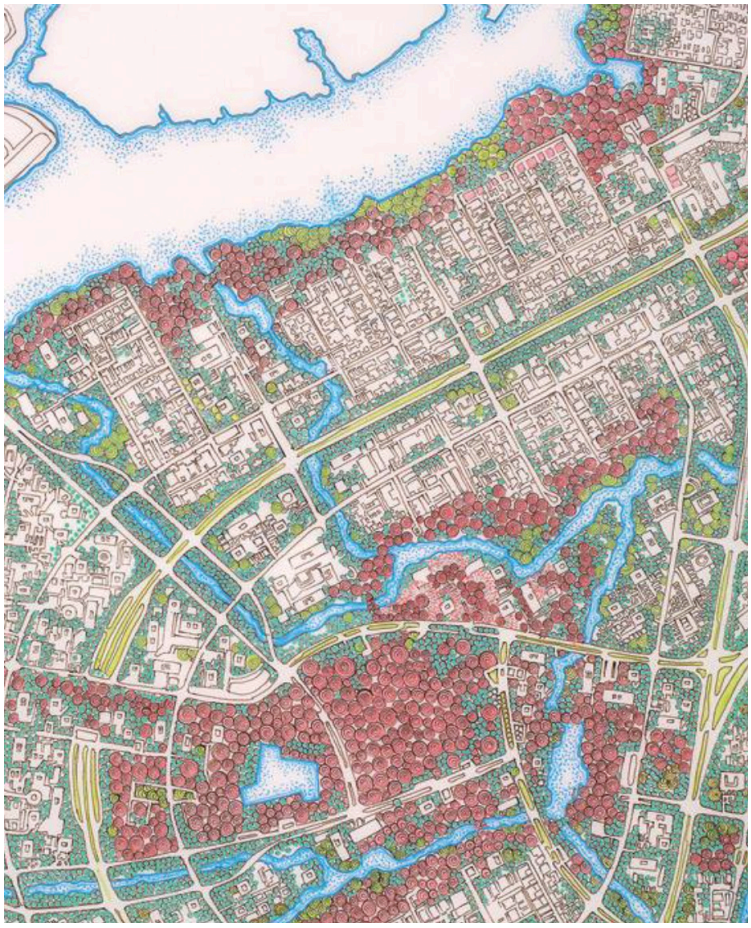
Known as one of Vietnam's most renowned contemporary artists, Chung depicts human migration, conflict, displacement, urbanisation and human transformation through her art. She draws inspiration from her own life as a Vietnamese refugee in the US following the Vietnam War.

A graduate and master of Fine Arts, Chung uses her knowledge of archaeology and cartography to create paintings in the form of meticulously drawn maps chronicling geological events and recent humanitarian crises. Her 2019 solo exhibition at the Smithsonian American Art Museum titled *Vietnam, Past is Prologue* — comprising paintings, maps and videos presenting the stories of Vietnamese refugees spread around the world — is just one of the examples. Her art has been exhibited at Venice Biennale, Johann Jacobs Museum in Zurich, and Museum of Modern Art in New York as well as renowned museums in many other countries. She currently lives and works in Ho Chi Minh City, where she co-founded the independent non-profit gallery Sàn-Art.



Her paintings are in the form of meticulously drawn maps.
(Image: vnheritage/Facebook)

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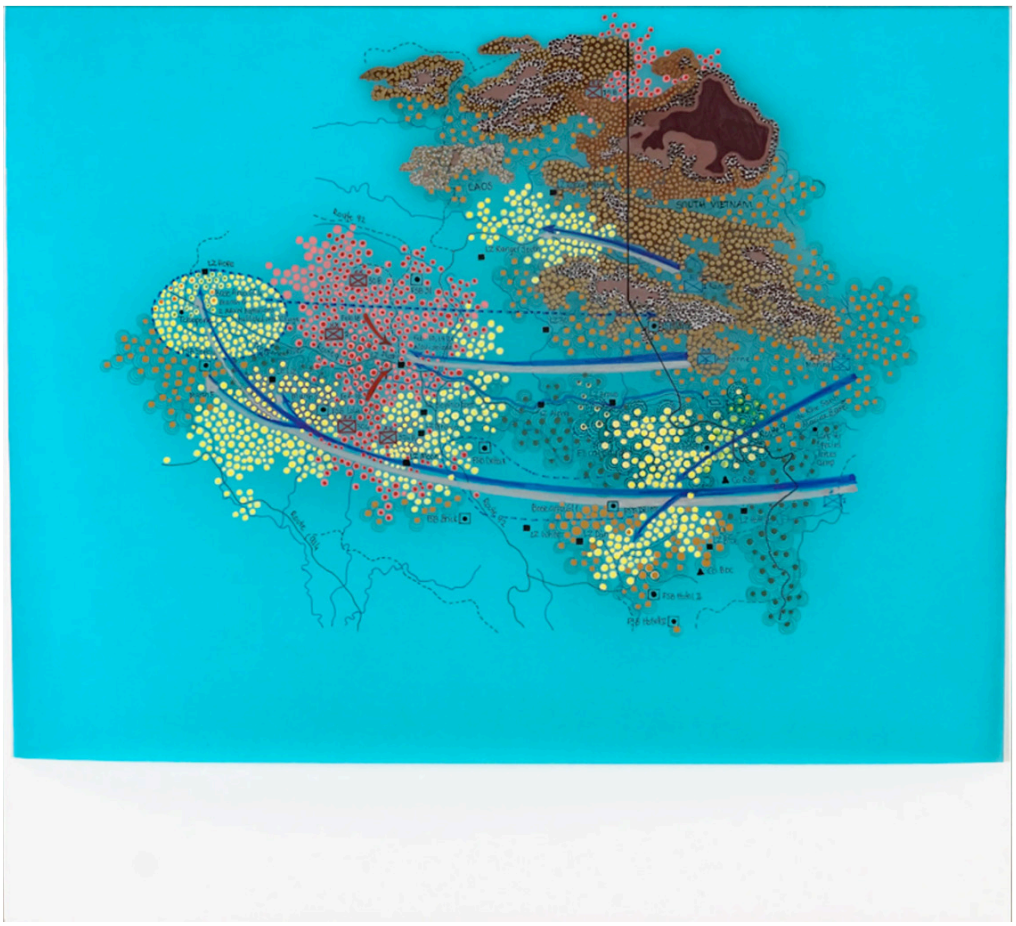
THE ART NEWSPAPER

Here are 2019's most visited contemporary art exhibitions

By Ben Luke | March 31, 2020



The Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil has long been a fixture in this category, but Ai Weiwei gives the gallery its first chart-topper since 2016. It has free entry and long opening hours—9am to 9pm—but, still, more than 9,000 visitors a day to Ai's show is a remarkable number. Five other free shows attest to their power in introducing audiences to less widely celebrated artists than Ai, such as Tiffany Chung and Trevor Paglen. But the top ten features only four institutions, with

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the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo making big gains: only one of the gallery's shows was in the top ten last year. Perhaps the standout number is the 676,503 visitors who paid to see Jean-Michel Basquiat at the Foundation in Paris. Notably, that is almost 2,000 more per day than for the free show of the US artist's work in Rio. Basquiat now stands alongside Picasso and Van Gogh as a blockbuster artist.

TOP 10 CONTEMPORARY ART EXHIBITIONS

Daily	Total	Exhibition	Venue	City	Dates
* An asterisk indicates that entrance to the exhibition and the museum was free					
9,172	598,818	***Ai Weiwei: Root**	Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil	Rio de Janeiro	21 AUG-4 NOV
7,026	676,503	**Jean-Michel Basquiat**	Fondation Louis Vuitton	Paris	3 OCT 18-21 JAN
6,019	356,867	***50 Years of Realism: Photorealism to VR**	Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil	Rio de Janeiro	22 MAY-29 JUL
5,839	1,132,800	***Trevor Paglen: Sites Unseen**	Smithsonian (SAAM)	Washington, DC	21 JUN 18-6 JAN
5,819	913,650	***American Art and Vietnam War 1965-75**	Smithsonian (SAAM)	Washington, DC	15 MAR-18 AUG
5,629	968,200	***Tiffany Chung: Vietnam, Past is Prologue**	Smithsonian (SAAM)	Washington, DC	15 MAR-2 SEP
5,149	378,846	***Jean-Michel Basquiat: Mugrabi Collection**	Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil	Rio de Janeiro	12 OCT 18-7 JAN
5,125	666,271	**Shiota Chiharu: Soul Trembles**	Mori Art Museum	Tokyo	20 JUN-27 OCT
5,125	666,271	**Aida Makoto, Yuan Goang-Ming, Zhou Tiehai**	Mori Art Museum	Tokyo	20 JUN-27 OCT
5,125	666,271	**Takata Fuyuhiko**	Mori Art Museum	Tokyo	20 JUN-27 OCT

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ASIA
Art Spectacle International Asia

Vietnam, Past is Prologue: Tiffany Chung at the Smithsonian American Art Museum

IN AN UNPRECENDENTED EXHIBITION IN WASHINGTON, TIFFANY CHUNG TELLS VIETNAM WAR'S HISTORY THROUGH VIETNAMESE EYES.

By C. A. Xuân Mai Ardia | August 19, 2019

"Tiffany Chung: Vietnam, Past is Prologue", 15 March – 2 September 2019, installation view at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D. C. Image Courtesy the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Photo: Mildred Baldwin.

Coinciding with the Smithsonian American Art Museum's major exhibition "Artists Respond: American Art and the Vietnam War, 1965-1975", the most comprehensive show to date to examine the contemporary impact of the Vietnam War on American art, "Tiffany Chung: Vietnam, Past is Prologue" is an unprecendented exhibition presenting the Vietnam War from not only the artist's personal perspective and history, but one that comes through the eyes of Vietnamese refugees in the United States.

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Internationally acclaimed Vietnamese-American artist Tiffany Chung, born in 1969 in Đà Nẵng, Vietnam, finally makes visible a history hidden in plain sight for the past forty-five years, in a context that to date has given most weight to the sentiments of an American collective memory and experience of the war in Vietnam. Her contribution to the Smithsonian's curatorial endeavour is invaluable and complementary to the American artists' show, bringing to the fore the so far suppressed or unheard voices of those who personally lived the trauma of the war in their own country and had to leave their homeland.

Chung's diverse, multimedia practice, which explores migration, conflict, and shifting geographies in the wake of political and natural upheavals, comes alive within the Smithsonian's historic galleries in a show that probes the legacies of the Vietnam War and its aftermath curated by Sarah Newman, the James Dicke Curator of Contemporary Art.

Presented in three sections, "Vietnam, Past is Prologue" features installations with maps, videos and paintings that highlight the voices and stories of former Vietnamese refugees, creating "an alternative story of the war's ideology and its effects", as the Smithsonian puts it. Chung has documented accounts that have been left out of official histories, while thoroughly researching archives that trace the worldwide migratory movements of Vietnamese refugees. The artist also brings in her own family history, through her father's role in the war. As Holland Cotter has written in his *New York Times*' review of the exhibition, "here you see the personal and the political meet, which is extremely moving".

"Tiffany Chung: Vietnam, Past is Prologue", 15 March – 2 September 2019, installation view at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D. C. Image Courtesy the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Photo: Mildred Baldwin.

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In the press release, the Smithsonian writes about the show:

"Vietnam, Past Is Prologue makes visible a history hidden in plain sight for the past forty-five years. Her subject, the War in Vietnam (1955–1975), has achieved a nearly mythic significance in the United States. In Vietnam, "the War" devastated life as it had been known, dividing time into a "before" and "after." Yet missing from the narratives told by these two sides is the perspective of the South Vietnamese, on whose behalf the Americans entered the war. Through meticulously drawn and stitched maps, emotional interviews, and intensive archival research, Chung explores the experience of refugees who were part of the large-scale immigration during the post-1975 exodus from Vietnam. She begins with a fine-grained look into one person's story—that of her father, who fought for the South Vietnamese military during the war, widens out to encompass the stories of former refugees from Vietnam, and pulls out further still to show the global effects of their collective migration in the war's wake."

"Tiffany Chung: Vietnam, Past is Prologue", 15 March – 2 September 2019, installation view at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D. C. Image Courtesy the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Photo: Mildred Baldwin.

A SPECULATIVE HISTORY OF A MAN'S PAST

"Vietnam, Past is Prologue" begins with *Remapping history: an autopsy of a battle, an excavation of a man's past*, which looks at Chung's own family history and involvement in the conflict in Vietnam. The artist's father was a helicopter

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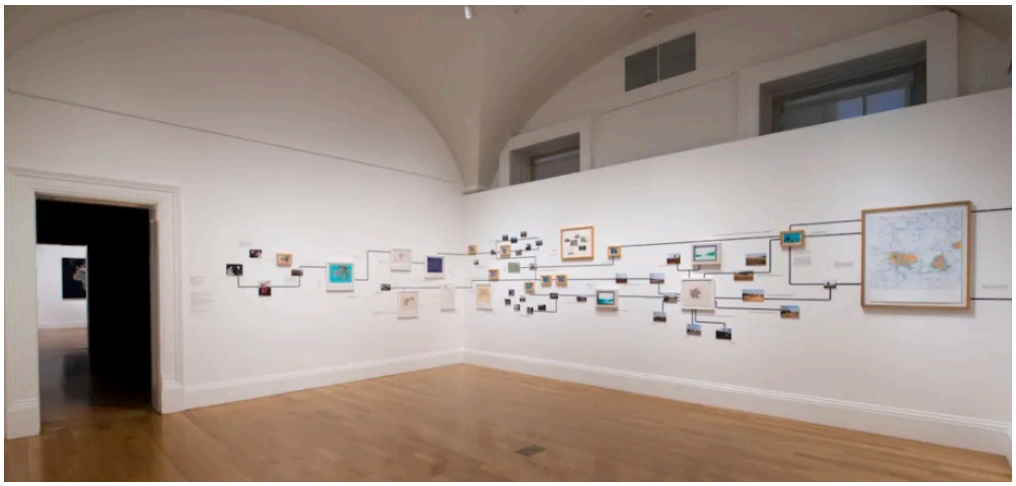
pilot in the South Vietnamese Air Force, working alongside the American forces. During one of his dangerous missions in 1971, he was captured in North Vietnam, where he was held prisoner for 14 years. Meanwhile, her mother waited for his release at their home in Central Vietnam, with their daughters. After he was freed in 1984, he moved with the family to the United States, becoming a respected pastor in a large Vietnamese community in Texas. Expectedly, he rarely shared his experience in combat and captivity, therefore Chung tried to reconstruct the puzzle herself, putting together old photographs, searching for old maps and painting them in her own distinctive style, as well as creating a speculative history of her mother's emotional life at the time and her own involvement.



"Tiffany Chung: Vietnam, Past is Prologue", 15 March – 2 September 2019, installation view at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D. C. Image Courtesy the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Photo: Mildred Baldwin.

Chung travelled to Vietnam, wearing the investigator's hat and tracing her father's steps, creating a detailed diagram of her discoveries with documentary materials that plotted her father's movements and the major battles he was apparently involved in. In parallel, Chung presents an interspersed sequence of events that documents the artist's own journey while piecing this history together. In the exhibition booklet, the curator writes:

"Part historical timeline, part personal scrapbook, the installation asks in a visceral way whose stories get remembered and how individual memories intersect with larger recorded narratives. Anchored by established events, it explores most poignantly a daughter's attempts to imaginatively recreate her father's story."

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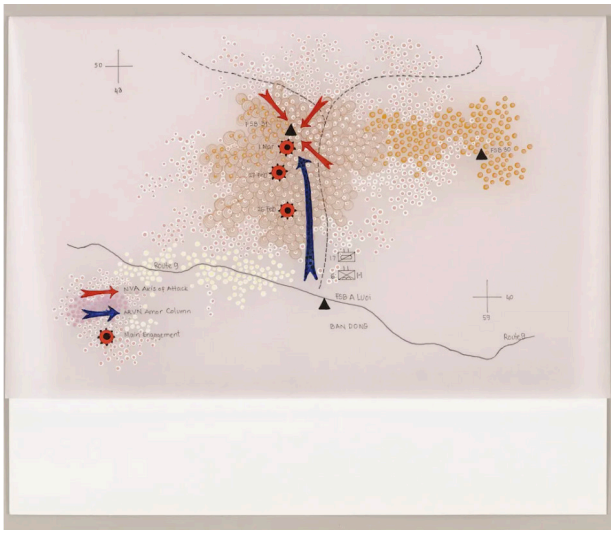

Tiffany Chung, *Operation Lam Son 719*, 2018, acrylic, ink and oil on vellum and paper; embroidery on canvas, set of six. Image courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York.

Chung's drawing and cartographic skills capture a violent history of suffering in a poetic way, displaying an aesthetic sensibility that goes hand in hand with her thorough research. Speaking with her back in 2017 when she presented this and other parts of the *Vietnam Project* in a gallery solo show at Tyler Rollins Fine Art, I mentioned to her Holland Cotter's *New York Times* review of her exhibition there and his comment about how she could communicate something so engaged and so deep through beauty, writing: "As with tattoos, images that seem to be decoratively superficial are personal, political and ineradicable." Chung then responded by quoting Benjamin Buchloh's own statement in his *Art Forum* review of the 2015 Venice Biennale, in which Chung's own maps from the *Syria Project* were on show. Buchloh wrote that "Chung now charts the forced movements of victimized populations and refugees, and of economically driven migration, pressing the epistemes of cartography and the diagram into service of the most productive project drawing could currently attempt." Chung then told me:

"The interdisciplinary approach in my practice can result in an overwhelming amount of research materials. And to transmit such knowledge and data to the potential audience through artworks is an intellectual and artistic negotiation – one cannot be without the other. Employing beauty and aesthetics to discuss very difficult subject matters has always been my strategy – using the universal language of art to draw people in first, only for them to be confronted with political issues or situations that they might not have been so willing to engage otherwise."

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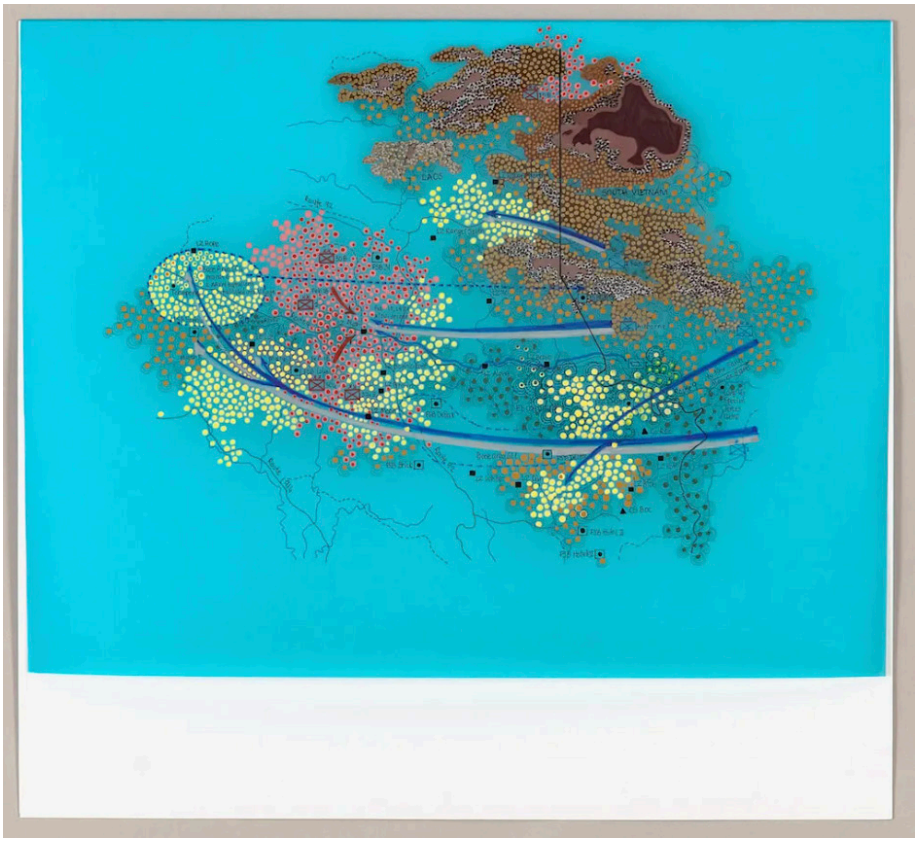

Tiffany Chung, *Operation Lam Son 719*, 2018, acrylic, ink and oil on vellum and paper; embroidery on canvas, set of six. Image courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York.

Focusing on her father's combat experiences, the vividly coloured maps feature clusters of dots, arrows, blue rivers, other lines and a variety of symbols that together supposedly offer a full view of what went on, geographically, historically and strategically, but that without a clear guidance cannot really be understood nor interpreted. They are beautiful and enthralling to look at, and one could spend hours on them trying to make the most sense out of them. As Newman writes, "Maps promise certainty, clarity, legibility; complex terrain is distilled and simplified, made accessible to those who consult them." However, she continues, although "Chung's handmade maps of battles in the Vientam War seem at first to uphold this elementary assurance",

"Without a key for guidance, it is impossible to discern the meaning behind the precise markings, and any intial promise of clarity melts into trailing lines and blooming clouds of colour."

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Tiffany Chung, *An Lôc region – former airfields and old rubber plantations*, 2015, oil and ink on vellum and paper, 31 1/2 x 25 in, 80 x 63.5 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York.

Specifically talking about *An Lôc region-former airfields and rubber plantations*, which maps the region in which Chung's father operated during the war and depicts the intersection of French colonial infrastructure with that of 20th century battles, Newman writes:

"The map clearly proclaims its historical and geographic specificity, but its significance is gleaned only in garbled whispers. Rather than convey one terrain, Chung attempts to communicate across gulfs of time and place, and in the face of deliberate suppression. … The places and events represented are searingly personal and historically significant, but the visual details are intentionally ambiguous. As much as anything else, the maps are documents of loss, speaking to the profound inaccessibility of the past."

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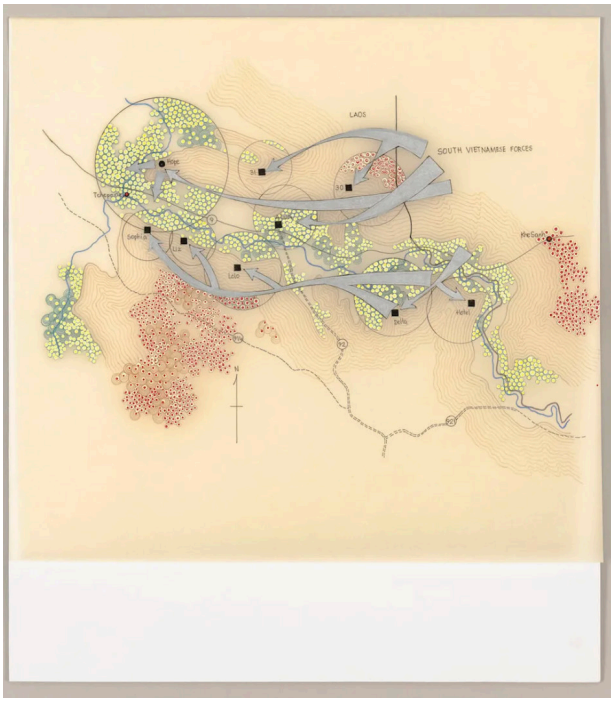

Tiffany Chung, *Operation Lam Son 719*, 2018, acrylic, ink and oil on vellum and paper; embroidery on canvas, set of six. Image courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York.

The large diagram installation itself defies clarity in favour of a partly imagined, poetic account. Even in words the artist can be both blunt and lyric, writing about the result of her father's participation in Operation Lam Son 719 in 1971 saying "His helicopter H-34 went down in flames/Hiding in a bunker", while writing about her mother's time spent alone waiting for his return by a riverbank is delicately expressed in poetry:

Walls of fog surrounded her tiny
frame, waiting and hoping for
my father to appear from the
other side through thick clouds
of mist. Or so she had hoped.

The curator eloquently writes about the work:

"Like the maps it contains, Chung's diagram delivers little of the desired clarity. Its most powerful contributions are poetic-imagined memories that substitute for a lost history. Chung's attempts to connect with her father's experience become a tantalizing memorial to an individual's past, always just out of reach."

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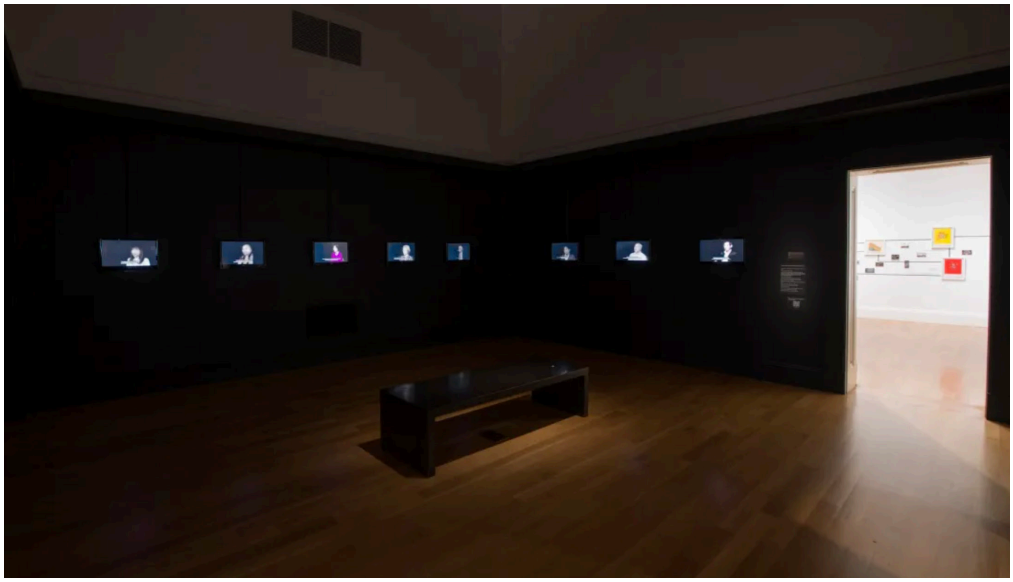

"Tiffany Chung: Vietnam, Past is Prologue", 15 March – 2 September 2019, installation view at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D. C. Image Courtesy the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Photo: Mildred Baldwin.

HEARING THE VOICES OF THE EXILED

As much as the first section is an intimate, speculative excavation of a man's past, the second is an objective, yet deeply personal account of refugees' experiences depicted through a series of screens displaying interviews with Vietnamese exiles. In his New York Times review of both exhibitions at the Smithsonian, Holland Cotter wrote that "if Ms. Chung had presented only one component of her complex show, a set of video interviews with an older generation of Vietnam refugees to the United States, that would by itself have been an invaluable contribution." Indeed, through the personal portraits in *Collective Remembrance of the War: voices from the exiles*, Chung uncovers memories and histories that have been hidden or forgotten, but that are significant to both Vietnamese and Americans. The work is a collection of 21 videos presenting the stories of former refugees from Vietnam living in Houston, Texas, Orange County, California, and Falls Church, Virginia, whom the artist personally spoke to. The people in the videos recount some of the horrors of war, their experiences of hunger, death of dear ones and reeducation camps in Vietnam. They express their anger towards the Communist regime as well as about their treatment by their US ally.

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"Tiffany Chung: Vietnam, Past is Prologue", 15 March – 2 September 2019, installation view at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D. C. Image Courtesy the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Photo: Mildred Baldwin.

In a personal conversation, Chung told me how it was an emotional endeavour for both herself, listening to the exiles' stories, and the portrayed, who at times found themselves short for words, deeply moved and in contemplation of their memories of suffering. One interviewee from Houston, Texas, recounts:

"The reason we fled in 1955 was because my father and my uncle, Pham Van Lan and Pham Van He, just finished their engineering degrees in France and came back to work at a mechanical firm in Hai Phong. One Sunday, my father and my uncle came to visit home from Hai Phong. My hometown was fifteen kilometers from Hai Phong, in a mixed military presence area. My father and my uncle stayed home that night. In the same night, VC guerrilla fighters came to take them away. I didn't know what they questioned them about, but they came to the conclusion that my father and my uncle were spying for the French. And just because they studied in France, the guerrillas ordered for them to be killed; their bodies were put in burlap sacks and thrown into the river, which were carried by the current out to the sea and disappeared. A month later, it was my other uncle's turn – because he went to a French school, he often read French newspapers, typically the Le Journal du Dimanche or the Paris Match. The guerrilla fighters came to search his house and saw those newspapers; I didn't know what they were thinking but they said that those were traitorous documents. So, they also took my uncle, cut him in three pieces and threw them on the road at a T-junction; his body pieces were left there until rotten before they allowed his family to bury him."

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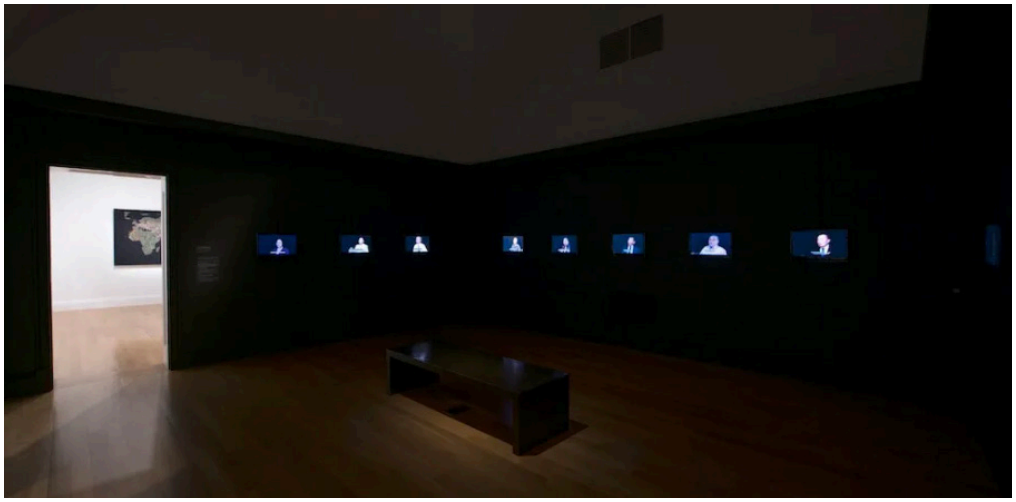

"Tiffany Chung: Vietnam, Past is Prologue", 15 March – 2 September 2019, installation view at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D. C. Image Courtesy the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Photo: Mildred Baldwin.

Shown alongside the interviews in this section of the exhibition is *Recipes of Necessity*, a 2014 video in which a group of Vietnamese people who stayed in their country after the war sit around a dinner table, sharing their experiences of living through the Subsidy Period (1975–86), when the Vietnamese Communist government imposed ambitious political and economic reforms. Various memories arise, of struggles for food and necessities, and of navigating the new currency system that made their savings valueless. The conversation scenes are interspersed with ones of a dance inspired by their stories, choreographed and directed by Chung.

Tiffany Chung, *Recipes of Necessity,* 2014, HD, colour, sound. Courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York.

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The testimonies and stories heard in the video portraits find an artistic, emotional counterpart in Chung's lecture-performance, in which she recites, reading theatrically on stage, accompanied by a musician playing moving cello Bach suites. What she reads are people's stories, history and emotions of the suffering and the war. One part goes:

"Early 1970
He used to fly special missions and stay at a military base in the highlands. His first-born daughter was just a few months old then. Everyday he'd submit end-of-day reports to an officer in the U.S. Special Forces and they became good friends. One evening, he was singing at an officers' club house; his American friend sat there and began to cry. They went outside to a dark place with no one around, and his friend cried even more:

'I am a patriotic soldier and I took an oath to be loyal to my country, the U.S. Therefore, I cannot reveal to you what my superiors have planned against you and your country; but I am crying for you.'

'I have several sons and now I don't know what I'd teach them when they grow up about being patriotic.' "

Tiffany Chung, *Reconstructing an Exodus History: flight routes from camps and of ODP cases*, 2017, embroidery on fabric, edition 2/2. Commissioned by Tai Kwun. Courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York.

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THE VIETNAM EXODUS PROJECT: A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

As if looking through a magnifying glass, and slowly taking it further away from her subject, first revealing a microcosm to gradually uncover a macro view of a much wider landscape, Chung closes the exhibition with a final section, *The Vietnam Exodus Project: reconstructing history from fragmented records and half-lived live*s. As Newman, writes, Chung widens "her focus from the singular to the collective, … transmuting personal memory into an expanded official history". In this section, with maps, documents and watercolours, she helps us engage with history on a global scale.

The largest single map in the show, *Reconstructing an Exodus History: flight routes from camps and of ODP cases* hangs twelve-feet-long across a single wall. The world map, with a navy blue background and delicately embroidered scarlet escape routes, represents the forced migration of Vietnamese people by plane from refugee camps in Asia and through the ODP (Orderly Departure Program) to worldwide locations 35 years ago. In one single glance, we can see how far the Vietnamese moved across the globe after the war.

"Tiffany Chung: Vietnam, Past is Prologue", 15 March – 2 September 2019, installation view at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D. C. Image Courtesy the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Photo: Mildred Baldwin.

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All the information Chung gathered to make this, as well as other maps, come from thorough research. A major source that determined much of her tracing the steps of refugees around the globe is the UNHCR (United Nations Hugh Commissioner for Refugees) in Geneva. In the centre of the gallery are some of these documents she collected at the UNHCR. Here, Chung has spent a significant amount of time researching documents, such as correspondence cables and records from goverment and intragovernmental agencies that dealt with the refugees from Vietnam. She coupled these investigations with information gathered from direct interviews with resettled people in places as far as Africa. Chung was thus able to make sense of some incomplete and fragmented documents, and understand the breadth of the Vietnamese migration, and her people's resettlements in unexpected places like Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. She mapped these escape routes like in a flight map one can find in inflight magazines, but its significance goes beyond the mere geographical function, to encompass the historiographic one, all the while conserving its main aesthetic value of a meticulousily executed work of art.

Tiffany Chung, *water dreamscape – the exodus, the camps and the half-lived lives*, 2017, 15 watercolors on paper, 13.75 x 21.75 in, 35 x 55 cm (14 watercolors), 23.75 x 45 in, 60 x 114 cm (one watercolor). Image courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York.

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Tiffany Chung, *water dreamscape – the exodus, the camps and the half-lived lives*, 2017, 15 watercolors on paper, 13.75 x 21.75 in, 35 x 55 cm (14 watercolors), 23.75 x 45 in, 60 x 114 cm (one watercolor). Image courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York.

FROM SYRIA TO VIETNAM AND BEYOND: TRACING GLOBAL MIGRATION

In 2017, and following an earlier, smaller presentation at Art Basel in Hong Kong in 2016 with Tyler Rollins Fine Art, Chung presented her project on Vietnam's refugees and migration in a gallery solo show at TRFA in New York, titled "the unwanted population". The *Vietnam Exodus Project* followed an earlier one, the *Syria Project*, which spoke of Syria's major contemporary migration crisis. At the time of the New York show, I spoke with Chung, trying to understand how her work on migration had developed over the years, leading from her own personal experience. She told me:

In regards to conflict and disaster induced migration, it is really old news. Going back to the Old Testament of the Bible and looking at maps of ancient times, we see people migrated for various reasons: from fleeing conflicts, persecution and torture, to exploring economic opportunities. Painfully, a great part of our human history is written through colonial and imperialistic ambitions of conquering and exploiting new lands, notably the global south. My own personal experience as a refugee living through war and the nightmares of its aftermath plays an ineradicable role of shaping my interest in world geopolitics and refugee migration.

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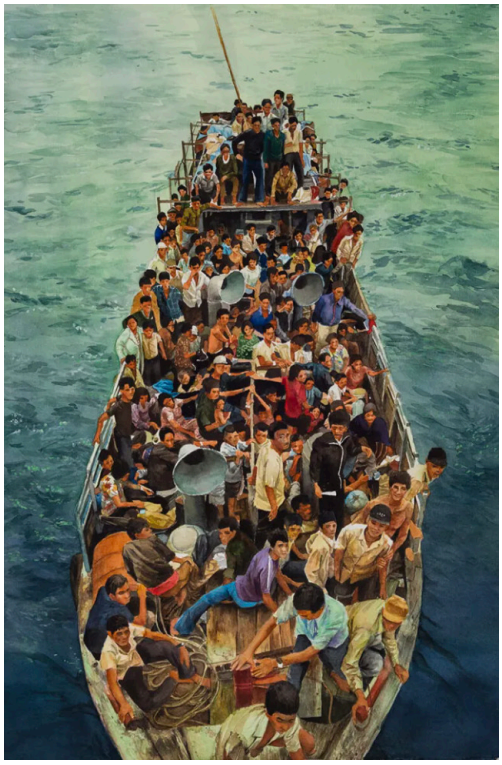

Tiffany Chung, *The Vietnam Exodus History Learning Project: the exodus, the camps and the half-lived lives*, 2017, watercolor on paper. Courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York. The Vietnam Exodus History Learning Project is carried out in collaboration with Hồ Hưng, Huỳnh Quốc Bảo, Lê Nam Đy, Nguyễn Hoàng Long, Đặng Quang Tiến, Phạm Ái, Võ Châu, and Hoàng Vy. © Tiffany Chung

Chung today recounts how it all somehow started in 2009, when she worked on a project that looked at several important conflicts of the 20th century:

"In 2009, I worked on 'scratching the walls of memory', a project that examined the Cold War through a number of important conflicts that shaped the 20th century, including the war in Vietnam. I always try to study a refugee migration movement by unpacking the root cause of it. Understanding the Vietnam conflict within a global context also created some distance and objectivity needed in tackling a war so close to home. Little did I know, emotions still ran deep. After presenting the project in 2010, I put the Vietnam conflict and its aftermath on hold until 2014. While working on the Syria Project (2012-ongoing), I realized the reason I was obsessed with the Syrian humanitarian crisis was because it bore some striking resemblances to the Vietnamese refugee crisis: the colonial history, the convoluted civil war turning into a proxy war – a new Cold War if you like, and the toll it takes on the population.

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Of course what has been going on in the Middle East is also complex in other aspects, but the Vietnam experience is mirrored to an extent – in the human tragedies and the policies. Tracking the conflict in Syria has enabled me to return to and embark on a much more comprehensive project that re-discovers, studies and maps the post-1975 Vietnamese exodus – on asylum policies (the Hong Kong Chapter), as well as the scope and scale of this migration to the unexpected regions of the global south (reconstructing an exodus maps.) After launching the Vietnam Exodus Project, I've also returned to confronting the Vietnam conflict through a number of projects, with the most recent being "Vietnam, Past Is Prologue", my [current] solo exhibition at the Smithsonian American Art Museum (15 March – 02 September 2019.)"

Tiffany Chung, *The Vietnam Exodus History Learning Project: the exodus, the camps and the half-lived lives*, 2017, watercolor on paper. Courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York. The Vietnam Exodus History Learning Project is carried out in collaboration with Hồ Hưng, Huỳnh Quốc Bảo, Lê Nam Đy, Nguyễn Hoàng Long, Đặng Quang Tiến, Phạm Ái, Võ Châu, and Hoàng Vy. © Tiffany Chung

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It is interesting to know how Chung worked on her *Syria Project* to better understand how her work developed into the *Vietnam Exodus Project*. The Syria case is the one which most people today can personally connect to, as it is the most recent and is a part of our contemporary life, affecting our everyday experiences. I asked Chung about her personal involvement in the Syrian refugee crisis and her own personal experience with it as well as her work with refugees:

"It's been 44 years since the post-1975 Vietnamese refugee crisis started, so there are a lot of literature and materials on this history for us to analyse and learn from. I could access vast volumes of files and documents during my research at the UNHCR in Geneva – as the policy is that it takes twenty years for certain records to be declassified and released for research purposes. Moreover, people have had time to process and are ready to speak out about their experiences. I was able to talk to the former refugees while doing fieldwork and tap into their personal and collective memories of the war and the exodus.

With the case of Syria, the war is still going on. The wounds are still fresh in people's hearts. It'd be insensitive and even disrespectful to ask questions. Therefore, I approach the Syria Project from two different angles – tracking the conflict and humanitarian crisis while examining asylum policies that have emerged in Europe. I then compare them with those of the Vietnamese refugee era, in hope of understanding the impacts of such policies on the refugee populations, then and now.

Moreover, I want to be useful by really getting involved, given the urgency of the current situation – whether through financial donations, connecting the ones in needs of legal advice to the right people, or just simply listen to their concerns and struggles. I've worked with refugee children in a project called Travelling with Art, a collaboration between Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark with a Danish Red Cross school, which has been running for 15 years now. I've formed friendship and stay in regular contact with some of the young Syrians through this program."

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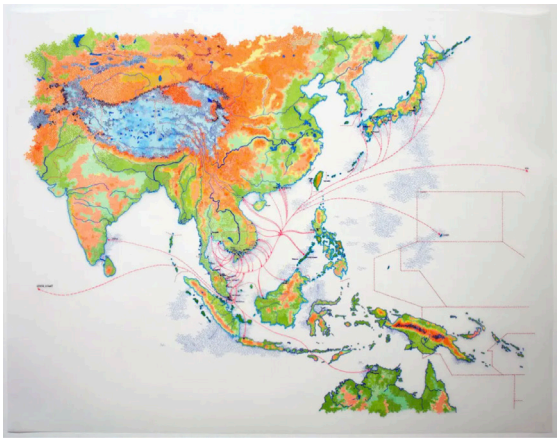

Tiffany Chung, *reconstructing an exodus history: boat trajectories in Asia*, 2017, acrylic, ink and oil on drafting film, 36 1/2 x 47 in, 110 x 92 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York.

Focusing closer to home, I asked Chung how her own personal history influenced her choice of addressing such issues, and why, now that years have passed since the Vietnam 'exodus', has she chosen to speak about it and bring attention to it once more. She replied:

"The Vietnam experience was too personal, too close to my heart, and for years I was just simply not ready to confront it. I needed the time to process my family's turbulent time during the war and the trauma of its aftermath. History is often written by the regime in power – the erasure of other people's histories is systematic in the case of Vietnam. This kind of politically driven historical amnesia has become a force that drives my work, to protest the political narrative produced through statecraft. The generation that experienced the war and the exodus first hand are either aging or dying, so recording such oral histories feels more urgent than ever. With the experience I've accumulated from unpacking other global conflicts, I finally feel more capable of studying the war and the Vietnamese exodus history with objectivity, clarity, and even distance in order to get the work done.

However, the situation in Syria is a matter of urgency, here and now. As we continue to witness how the war indiscriminately crushes and grinds the country, I address such issues in my work because I can and because it's almost unimaginable not to do anything. The war in Vietnam has shaped and informed the new Cold War, with Syria being its second major theater. It's crucial to bring back the Vietnam experience at this point in time to remind us that past is prologue. Without remembering and learning from the past, history will continue to repeat itself, times and again."

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Tiffany Chung, *water dreamscape – the exodus, the camps and the half-lived lives*, 2017, 15 watercolors on paper, 13.75 x 21.75 in, 35 x 55 cm (14 watercolors), 23.75 x 45 in, 60 x 114 cm (one watercolor).
Image courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York.

Chung also revealed what kind of research process she has followed in order to shed more light on this important moment in our global history:

"My research process employs two types: one is academic research and the other ethnographic fieldwork. The academic research encompasses literature on a specific crisis, with scholarly studies, media & NGOs' reports and archival records that could help me to analyze and reconstruct a particular history. The UNHCR in Geneva is one of the places that I would have to go to in order to collect the records on the Vietnamese refugees. In ethnographic research, I collect stories and materials from people, whether through social media or in real life. For the Hong Kong Chapter of the Vietnam Exodus Project, I spent about three years going to Hong Kong back and forth. I met and became part of a Vietnamese community there. The 'participant's observation' method was proven effective without my asking direct questions. People eventually shared their stories and some even asked me to record their journeys.

Launching the first part of this chapter at Art Basel HK in 2016 subsequently opened more doors for this project, as key players in the past saw the exhibition and approached me to share their experience of either working with or supporting the former refugees. I was able to establish working relations with several Hong Kong based human rights lawyers that had worked with the late Pam Baker in the '80s and '90s during the Vietnamese refugee era. With the support of Spring Workshop and Tai Kwun, we then organized three panel discussions, tackling a number of key policies embodied in the lived experiences of the former Vietnamese refugees through their own testimonies, the work of Hong Kong's NGOs such as "Art in Camp" and of the human rights lawyers assisting Vietnamese asylum seekers in the past in gaining refugee status, and the work of two Danish organizations in their efforts of helping current asylum seekers in Denmark."

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"Tiffany Chung: Vietnam, Past is Prologue", 15 March – 2 September 2019, installation view at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D. C. Image Courtesy the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Photo: Mildred Baldwin.

Chung's interest in migration is manyfold and encompasses a much wider history, ultimately colliding in her ongoing Global Refugee Migration Project, of which we might soon see new perspectives:

"In between the two specific case studies of the Vietnamese and Syrian refugee crises, the Global Refugee Migration Project (2015-ongoing) has emerged as an inevitable component to chart the movements of refugees globally. Currently based in Houston, a flight hub that connects the U.S. to Latin America, I've expanded my research to cover migration from Central America, focusing on Guatemala as a case study. The Guatemala Project aims to excavate layers of history, notably the U.S. involvement in Guatemala economically and politically, its 36-year civil war and state's oppression, and its continuous violations of human rights."

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FRIEZE

What the Vietnam War Can Teach Us About Today's Conflicts

'PAST IS PROLOGUE' IN TWO SHOWS AT THE SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM, FOLLOWING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE TET OFFENSIVE

By Ian Bourland | May 16, 2019

Edward Kienholz, *The Eleventh Hour Final*, 1968, multi-media.

The war in Vietnam, which spanned two decades from 1955 to 1975, occupies a troubled place in American memory. The bloody 'quagmire' imperiled US Cold War policy, claiming the lives of some 58,000 American troops and over a million North and South Vietnamese soldiers. (Many more were wounded, or left with long-term psychological trauma.) A draft packed the military's ranks with poor and middle class men, even as the connected, well-heeled and white (including three US presidents) studiously evaded combat. For a US already riven by the social upheavals of the 1960s, the protests that defined the latter half of that decade seemed an even more profound tattering of the social fabric. Many – especially the young – were galvanized in no small measure because the conflict was the most mediated to date: war correspondents on TV news and features in glossy photojournalism magazines all served to 'bring the war home', literally beaming it into the kitchens and living rooms of an affluent populace unfamiliar with the face of war.

Such dissonance was brought into jarring relief by California sculptor Edward Kienholz's The Eleventh Hour Final, first shown in April 1968 at the Gallery 669

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in Los Angeles, in the immediate aftermath of the Tet Offensive. The installation has been restaged for 'Artists Respond: American Art and the Vietnam War, 1965-1975' at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, an exhibition featuring over 100 works by 58 artists made during, and in reaction to, the war. Kienholz's tableau is a pitch-perfect recreation of a domestic living room, all cheap wood panelling and neat mid-century furniture; its spare interior is centred, naturally, around a console TV set, here rendered as a tapered plinth. The screen is frozen in time, recounting a familiar scene from the nightly news: a tally of US and 'Enemy' dead and wounded, the numbing abstraction of a war seen from the comfort of an emerald sofa. A forerunner to Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy, Kienholz deftly employs the grotesque to plumb the depths of trauma and repression. Here, he disrupts the scene's sterile veneer with a more uncanny transmission. A wax head gazes back from within the television and beyond the tallies, disfigured by napalm fire – that most famous of Dow Chemical products, rained from US warplanes upon the jungles of Southeast Asia.

Edward Kienholz, *The Eleventh Hour Final*, 1968, multi-media.

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Though his late-surrealist idiom was highly insouciant, Kienholz was finely attuned to the contradictions at the heart of the US project, and the darkness that pulsed beneath the endless sunshine and prim suburban exteriors dotting the country's landscape. In 1970, he began a proposal and study for *The Non-War Memorial*, tens of thousands of military uniforms articulated in clay, to be scattered across a formerly pristine meadow in Idaho, intentionally despoiled in an echo of the American defoliation and 'Rolling Thunder' bombardment of the Vietnamese countryside. According to the project documents (envisioned in 1970/1972) Kienholz envisioned this as a counter-monument to be built over the course of the summer by a 'mix of artists, students, activists, etc' before turning the project over to a museum.

The Non-War Memorial was never executed, but the study also appears in 'Artists Respond'. As curator Melissa Ho writes in an accompanying essay, '[there] is by now a recognized American art of the Vietnam War.…Yet it took years for this art to gain critical attention.' Importantly, much of this work was made by women and artists of colour, used novel forms of performance and visual culture, or represented important deviations from the modernist or minimalist party line.

Accordingly, for Ho, a great deal of this anti-war material 'was unseen, unexhibited, not written about, perhaps not even considered art…' In bringing such works together, 'Artists Respond' seriously considers projects long hidden from view: Corita Kent's bold screenprints; Terry Fox's 'defoliation' action; Timothy Washington's meditation on being a black draftee. They are interspersed with famed contemporaries such as Dan Flavin, Hans Haacke, Yvonne Rainer and Nancy Spero, whose projects are reframed and restored to their political immediacy. At the centre of the show are four large-scale montages by Martha Rosler, a mashup of magazine genres – consumerist comforts colliding with documented atrocities on the other side of the globe, in her iconic 'House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home' (1967-72).

Of course, from the Vietnamese perspective, the war didn't need to be 'brought home'. US involvement on the peninsula was part of a larger French and British colonial enterprise dating back to the 18th century, amplified in 1946 by the onset of the Cold War. The North, for instance, simply called the conflict 'The American War.' In addition to one million military fatalities on the Vietnamese side, more than two million civilians were killed. A palpable trauma lives on in

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the scarred landscape, and in the memories of a younger generation, many of whom were born to the conflict's more than 700,000 refugees.

Tiffany Chung, *Remapping History: an autopsy of a battle, an excavation of a man's past* (detail), 2015/2019
Courtesy: © the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York

This diaspora is global in scope, but concentrated in the US, mostly in California and Texas. In accounts of the Vietnam War – especially by artists – the experiences of Vietnamese people are often absent. The boldest aspect of 'Artists Respond', therefore, is that it has been paired with 'Tiffany Chung: Vietnam, Past is Prologue', a solo exhibition which showcases the artist's wide-ranging practice, from striking oil, ink and acrylic drawings to archival detective stories to moving video documentaries, across just a few small galleries.

Raised in Southern California, Chung was born in 1969 in Da Nang and returned to Vietnam in 2000. Her ongoing projects are acts of psychic cartography. She traces the flows of diaspora through elaborate embroidery, and excavates a long-forgotten 1971 aerial operation using family mementos and hand-made diagrams. *Remapping History: an autopsy of a battle, an excavation of a man's past* (2018) uses radiant colour to bring arcane tactical diagrams to life; it tells the story of Chung's father, an elite ARVN helicopter pilot, who was downed and held captive until 1984.

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Chung's is but one of countless such stories, of families separated in the fog of war or forced into exile. Her own acts of memorial are part of a larger mosaic, as a younger generation comes to terms with the past. In this sense, 'Artists Respond' and 'Vietnam, Past is Prologue' both contend that 50 years on (and during a state of endless war on multiple fronts), the conflict in Vietnam still has much to teach us. Fittingly, the interior of Kienholz's *Eleventh Hour Final* is static but for one thing: the latest issue of the *TV Guide*, resting between an ashtray and a floral arrangement. An augur of the carnage that now, as then, ceaselessly bombards our retinas. Past is prologue indeed.

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The New York Times

Vietnam, Through the Eyes of Artists

THE WAR AND ITS HUMAN TOLL HAD A PROFOUND IMPACT ON ARTISTS ADDRESSING THE TURBULENT TIMES. THE PERSONAL AND POLITICAL MEET IN A POIGNANT SHOW AT THE SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM.

By Holland Cotter | April 4, 2019

A detail of Leon Golub's "Vietnam II" (1973), at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.
The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub Foundation for the Arts/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY; Tate, London; Justin T. Gellerson for The New York Times

WASHINGTON — Whatever happened to "protest art" — issue-specific, say-no-to-power-and-say-it-loud art? Here we are, embroiled, as a nation, in what many in the art world regard as a pretty desperate political situation. Yet with the exception for actions by a few collectives — Decolonize This Place at the Whitney Museum, and Prescription Addiction Intervention Now, or PAIN, at the Guggenheim and the Metropolitan Museum of Art — there's scant visual evidence of pushback.

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Has the product glut demanded by endless art fairs distracted from the protest impulse? Has the flood of news about turmoil in Washington put out the fires of resistance among artists? Has protest art simply become unfashionable?

Such questions came to mind on a visit to "Artists Respond: American Art and the Vietnam War, 1965-1975," a big, inspiriting survey at the Smithsonian American Art Museum here. Everything in it dates from a time in the past when the nation was in danger of losing its soul, and American artists — some, anyway — were trying to save theirs by denouncing what they viewed as a racist war.

Of the '60s shows I've seen in the past few years, this one is the best, evocative of its time, and in sync with the present.

And, importantly, it comes with a second, smaller show that's far more than a mere add-on. Titled "Tiffany Chung: Vietnam, Past Is Prologue," it's a view of the Vietnam War era through Vietnamese eyes, the eyes of people on the receiving end of aggression. In the 1960s — before identity politics, before post-colonial studies — few museums would have thought to do such a show, but it absolutely needed doing.

A detail of Tiffany Chung's "The Vietnam Exodus History Learning Project: the exodus, the camps and the half-lived lives," 2017, at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C.
Justin T. Gellerson for The New York Times

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Ms. Chung, born in Vietnam in 1969, is an example of artist-as-researcher, one who taps into many media — painting, weaving, video, photography, writing — in her investigatory tasks. For her solo show, organized by Sarah Newman, the museum's curator of contemporary art, she approaches the American war in Vietnam, which was also a civil war, through the lens of family history.

Ms. Chung's father was a helicopter pilot in the South Vietnamese Air Force when he was taken prisoner in North Vietnam in 1971. He was held for 14 years. After his 1984 release, he moved with the family to the United States. Apparently, he rarely spoke of his time in combat and captivity, so his daughter tries to piece the story together herself, by assembling old photographs, painting locational maps and composing speculative accounts of her mother's emotional life, which inevitably colored her own.

The show's second section deals with the refugee experience in video interviews with 21 Vietnamese men and women who arrived in the United States in the war's wake. Together they represent a history that has never become part of the American view of the conflict, and that is being forgotten, if not deliberately erased, in Vietnam itself. It's a history of in-between-ness, of people, now elderly, who identify neither with the country they've come to, nor with the one they've left behind. Most feel abused by both.

In the show's third and last section, the perspective goes global, and also points to the future. A 12-foot long embroidered world map covers a wall. Lines of stitched colored thread trace the paths of forced South Vietnamese migration across the world. A nearby display of documents from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva gives a sense of the archival ardor that has gone into Ms. Chung's Vietnam project, while a set of small watercolors indicate a way to insure that research continues.

The watercolor images — of migrant camps, food lines, displaced families, crammed and capsizing boats — are paintings based on photographs taken in the 1970s and '80s, when the fallout from war was most crushing. They were created recently by young Vietnamese artists, commissioned by Ms. Chung, in Ho Chi Minh City. Most had no knowledge at all of the past depicted. Now they do.

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Smithsonian MAGAZINE

For Tiffany Chung, Finding Vietnam's Forgotten Stories Began as a Personal Quest

TO MAP THE POST-WAR EXODUS, THE ARTIST TURNED TO INTERVIEWS AND DEEP RESEARCH, STARTING WITH HER OWN FATHER'S PAST

By Roger Catlin | March 29, 2019

Tiffany Chung's innovative exploration into the untold history of the South Vietnamese since the war begins with her own story.

While her past work explored migration conflict and shifting geography in the wake of political and natural upheavals, "Tiffany Chung: Vietnam, Past is Prologue," her first major solo museum exhibition in the United States, currently at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, begins by looking deep into the story of her own father.

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He was a helicopter pilot for an elite flying team in the South Vietnamese Air Force who was taken prisoner in 1971, and spent 14 years in a North Vietnamese prison camp until the end of the war. Chung's family then immigrated to the United States, where the full details of his war-time experience remained a mystery, especially to her.

"We begin our search of a historical memory with a personal quest. That is my case," Chung says.

"Sixteen years ago, when I first attempted to trace my father's wartime journey, I encapsulated my experience of crossing from Vietnam to Laos." She took notes, mixed in with childhood memories and imagined his life in prison as she recalled her mother waiting for his return.

"Twelve years later, in 2015, I came across a photograph which prompted me to embark on another journey, this time to physically map the airfields that my father had frequented as a helicopter pilot. This lead to my learning and remapping of several historical events that were crucial in understanding the politics of the war in Vietnam between 1955 and 1975."

Easter Offensive 1972–NVA attacks of MR III & battle for An Lộc by Tiffany Chung, 2018
Courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York. © Tiffany Chung

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In a poem she wrote in 2015, she tells of her observations at an abandoned airfield in Quan Loi. "It's just another red dirt road," she writes. "It took him 10 minutes to fly his helicopter between Quan Loi and Loc Ninh airfields. It took me 45 minutes in a Toyota 4Runner."

As she gathered photographs, maps and shards of information, she began to create a huge diagram, that comprise her piece Remapping History: an autopsy of a battle, an excavation of a man's past, plotted out over 40 feet, across three walls.

Her meticulous maps, some with arrows; most without legends, become hints of various operations and attacks, with no trace of their successes or failure. They lay the land in dreamy, jewel-like colors but anonymous shapes, much like the land must have looked to pilots above, bombing it. A cartographer and archaeologist, Chung is skillful in her depictions, but purposely inexact in what she is showing.

"The places and events represented are searingly personal and historically significant, but the visual details are intentionally ambiguous," show organizer Sarah Newman, the museum's curator of contemporary art, writes in the 30-page catalog that accompanies the show. "As much as anything else, the maps are documents of loss, speaking to the profound inaccessibility of the past."

Chung put in two years of study at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva to research how the South Vietnamese left their homeland and spread to the rest of the world. A 12-foot long, meticulously embroidered map of the world shows the forced migration routes of the South Vietnamese by plane from refugee camps in Asia that were made through something called the Orderly Departure Program, the United Nation's resettlement program.

Chung's *The Vietnam Exodus Project: reconstructing history from fragmented records and half-lived lives* depicts a "comprehensive visual summary of how Vietnam's people and culture fanned out across the globe after the War," Newman says.

It's the first time the information has ever been presented this way and is based on correspondence cables and records from various governmental agencies that dealt with Vietnamese refugees. Chung's own family ended up in Los Angeles and then Houston, where she now works. But she found that an unexpected number of Vietnamese ended up in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America.

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The Vietnam Exodus History Learning Project: the exodus, the camps and the half-lived lives by Tiffany Chung, 2017
Courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, Hồ Hưng, Huỳnh Quốc Bảo, Lê Nam Đy, Nguyễn Hoàng Long, Đặng Quang Tiến, Phạm Ái, Võ Châu, and Hoàng Vy. © Tiffany Chung

Near the dark, brooding map are a series of distinctive watercolors of the migrations, usually over water. They weren't painted by Chung, but commissioned by her and completed by a group of young artists from Ho Chi Minh City, based on photographs of the period. Reproductions of some of the archival materials she gleaned from her research complete the piece.

But in between is a compelling video component, Collective Remembrance of the War: voices from exiles. Twelve monitors in a darkened room feature 21 former refugees from Vietnam living today in Houston, California's Orange County and nearby Falls Church, Virginia, describing their often harrowing experiences.

"My personal quest has indeed become an entry way into the collective remembrance of the war which has left tremendous impacts on the lives of many people," Chung says. "I'm honored to have taken on this huge task of unpacking this war through the perspective and experience of the Vietnamese-Americans that I interview and learn from. It has been my undertaking to fill up the vacuum in the narratives of this war, with the Vietnamese histories and memories which are vital in comprehending the war's legacies, but are often ignored in the American narrative of it and omitted from Vietnam's official record."

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"Foregrounding the voices of people who have been left out of official accounts, she asks whose stories get to be remembered and how do those stories become understood as history?" Newman says. "The exhibition is a remarkable feat of historical research and artistic imagination."

And because it is intended as a contemporary response to a large, concurrent exhibition, "Artists Respond: American Art and the Vietnam War, 1965-1975," Chung is also charged with the responsibility to make a generational statement with her innovative approach.

"Even within such familiar territory, Tiffany Chung's work shows us how much more there is to know" about the Vietnam era, Newman says. "Her exhibition opens our eyes to a history hidden in plain sight, illuminating the war and its aftermath from the perspective of those who lived through it in Vietnam, and giving voice to the mostly untold stories of the South Vietnamese on whose behalf the U.S. entered the war."

Seeing both of the two shows in conversation, she says, "gives us a glimpse in the way ideas ripple across oceans and across generations from the 20th century to today."

Additionally, says the museum's director Stephanie Stebich, "this is also a project we're delighted to put under the umbrella of our Smithsonian American Women's History initiative, to better amplify women's voices on the history of America."

"Tiffany Chung: Vietnam, Past Is Prologue," curated by Sarah Newman, continues through September 2, 2019, at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C. The exhibition is part of the American Women's History Initiative.

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HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Artist Tiffany Chung's maps trace tragic routes

By Molly Glentzer | January 4, 2019

Artist Tiffany Chung stands near her embroidered work "IDMC: numbers of worldwide conflict and disaster IDPs by end of 2016," which is on view in the exhibition "New Cartographies" at Asia Society Texas Center. Photo: Melissa Phillip, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer

Maps can reveal many kinds of truths, depending on the maker's agenda.

Asia Society Texas Center's engagingly provocative show "New Cartographies" illustrates this through the diverse work of four internationally prominent artists.

Sohei Nishino's terrific "Diorama Maps" contains thousands of collaged photographs from his travels through the streets of some of the world's densest cities. The carefully angled brushstrokes of Li Singsong's monumental 2D topographic painting "Beihei" evoke a zen landscape of peaks and valleys that look untouched by humans. Allan deSouza's sly, fictional maps rethink 19th-

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century colonial histories.

And then there are the two rooms of works by Tiffany Chung, who recently moved to Houston.

Her signature cartographic paintings and embroidered canvases — based on reams of data analysis, historical study and field interviews — are as hard-hitting as they are aesthetically pleasing. Examining how human conflicts, urban growth and environmental disasters have impacted people and cultural memory, they trace the routes of refugees and count casualties, among other things, often as a corrective to official accounts.

Chung also creates nuanced and topical sculpture, film and performance. She has participated in most of the major biennials or art fairs in Europe, Asia and the U.S.; and it's a rare year when she isn't juggling shows at major museums.

The Smithsonian Institution commissioned video histories for her upcoming solo "Vietnam, Past is Prologue," which is scheduled to open March 15, assuming it's not postponed by the government shutdown. Meanwhile, her "Thủ Thiêm — An archaeological project for future remembrance" is at Zurich's Johann Jacobs Museum through May 5.

Chung also conducts workshops with refugees and stages panel discussions on global issues that have nothing to do with showing art. "I don't think artists just need to make art anymore," she said. "We do so many things."

MOVING TO HOUSTON

Her route to Houston involves a story as layered as her work. On the surface, there's this: She wanted to be near her parents, who moved to southwest Houston from Los Angeles about nine years ago. She bought a townhome near River Oaks Shopping Center because the wide-open, naturally lit third floor makes a perfect studio. Further back, some things are harder for her to verbalize.

Chung, 50, doesn't talk much about the home where she grew up during the 1970s and '80s, Vietnam's early postwar years. There's not much to tell, she said.

She was raised by her paternal grandmother while her father, a South Vietnamese

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helicopter pilot captured in 1971 by the Viet Cong, spent 14 years as a prisoner of war; and her mother, a midwife but a 'traitor' by default, was sent to work in one of the government's harsh economic zones.

Her grandmother's place in Ho Chi Minh City was "just a small house, a typical house in Vietnam," Chung said. "There was so much hardship. People were packed like sardines in tiny houses with so many relatives who ran away from new economic zones. Either you lived in a city illegally or died."

Chung had finished high school by the time her family, including her parents, a brother and a sister, made it to California. They were among an estimated 2 million refugees who fled Vietnam after 1975, a diaspora that lasted well into the 1990s.

While the rest of her family embraced life in the U.S., Chung seemed destined to roam. She headed back overseas after earning her MFA in studio practice at the University of CaliforniaSanta Barbara, bouncing among Denmark, Japan and Vietnam for the first decade or so of her career.

In a sense, she was fleeing expectations, fed up with being pushed to explore her past in her art. Her early work was Pop-influenced and less politically sensitive. She made Ho Chi Minh City her base in 2007, the year she co-founded the independent, nonprofit contemporary art collective Sàn Art with Dinh Q. Lê, Tuan Andrew Nguyen and Phunam of the Propeller Group.

"When I came back to Vietnam, it was refreshing at first because nobody talked about it. The war was just a memory. I didn't have to deal with it," she said. "But soon enough, it started to feel really strange."

VIETNAM CLAMPS DOWN

The history she knew — and she thought everyone knew — had been erased. Vietnam's government still doesn't acknowledge its postwar diaspora. "It's not part of the national narrative," Chung said. "It's never been recorded in their official history, and they don't talk about it or teach it in schools."

So — how could she not? — she began to focus on hidden histories. She was already examining how urban development projects in Ho Chi Minh City were

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displacing people — work that led to the creation of her first maps and her anthropological approach to research. She had not set out to make maps, but the technique proved useful.

"I never start with a grand plan," she said. "I start doing something small, and it keeps growing because I cannot stop."

She launched her still ongoing "The Vietnamese Exodus Project" as a quiet protest against what she calls "politically driven historical amnesia." Early on, she boldly commissioned young artists to make drawings based on vintage photographs of Vietnamese refugees in Asian asylum camps, so that they would learn to ask questions.

Nothing happens legally in Vietnam without permits — even art exhibits must be approved. And the more celebrated Chung's work became, the harder she had to work to outwit censors — literally staying ahead of them, say, when a crew from Bloomberg came to film a documentary about her. Once, trying to cross into Cambodia, she was denied exit. "It happens all the time; either that, or you are refused entry, or they detain you at the airport," she said.

Then in 2017, Vietnamese diplomats pressured a Japanese organization to pull Chung's work from a major museum survey in Tokyo. "Living in Vietnam, everything is censored there. But to be censored in another country — that is something unheard of," she said. "It was a big blow. I learned a lot about cultural diplomacy and about us being artists living in a region where there's no support from the governments."

Although she still had an international platform, she feared more and tougher retribution at home, so Chung packed up her studio and left. "It was just the last straw," she said. "I was tired."

ALLYING WITH SYRIANS

This is not the story she really wants to share. "I am not interested in that rhetoric of hardships in the region," she said. "My work is not about that. That is just something you deal with, coming in. And when you can't deal with it anymore, you leave."

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She declined interviews after the Tokyo incident because she didn't want to embarrass the Japanese curators or be thought of first as a censored artist, detracting from the work.

Her art speaks volumes enough, eloquently and subtly.

The paintings on vellum — a deliberately slippery and semi-transparent medium — collapse time with layers based on different periods of history. Chung's punctured, embroidered canvases sparkle with metallic threads, grommets and baubles — as precise as her vellum pieces but more metaphorically loaded by the medium of needlecraft, which implies the strength and silent power of women, and acts of endurance and waiting.

Chung's compelling 2010 installation "scratching the walls of memory" suggests a classroom with a single desk. It was inspired by an old building in Hiroshima's Fukuromachi Elementary School compound, where scrawled messages were uncovered in 2002 as the space was being made into a museum.

Chung envisions her setting as a space where survivors of a number of 20th-century conflicts have left fragments of painful narratives, with text embroidered on cloth satchels crafted from recycled army tents or written neatly on handmade chalkboards.

She undertook that piece to put her family's story into context and see a bigger picture of forced migrations. But it was unusually personal — revealing, for example, how her mother had stood alone in the fog, pining for Chung's father as she peered across the 17th Parallel.

That stirred up such raw feelings, Chung abandoned Vietnam-based work for a while. She started two other projects that also continue to evolve — one based on the Syrian refugee crisis and another examining histories of global migration.

"Focusing on someone else gives me distance and objectivity to look back without feeling so emotional," she said. "With time, you gain more experience. You can focus on aspects of the history other than your own."

She has returned to and expanded "The Vietnam Exodus Project" for the Smithsonian show, speaking with former refugees in Houston, northern Virginia

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and California because she now sees so many parallels with displaced Syrians. "History keeps repeating itself," she said, "so why can't we learn?"

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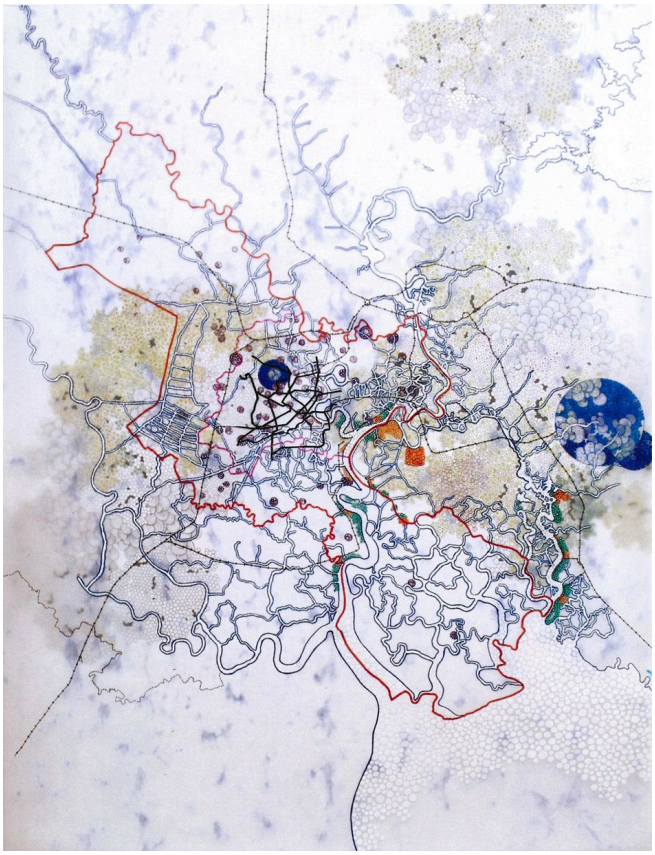
ARTASIAPACIFIC

Tiffany Chung: To Be Remembered

By Sylvia Tsai | October 2016



flora and fauna outgrowing the future*, 2010, micro pigment oil and alcohol-based marker on vellum and paper, 109.25 x 70 cm*

Though Tiffany Chung's art practice involves exhaustive research, statistical and comparative analyses, and fieldwork into political traumas, natural disasters, and humanitarian crises around the world, her works can be surprisingly beautiful. Chung is best known for her maps – delicately rendered with oddly serene colors – that visualize painful events, drawing upon her own lived experiences and the data she has gathered. These cartographic drawings are designed to initially captivate viewers, who then, upon realizing the subjects, feel both their heaviness and urgency. At other times, her works take shape though photographs,

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installations, videos and performances, and collectively have examined history not only in Vietnam, where she was born, but in Syria, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Japan and elsewehere.

Chung was born in 1969 in Da Nang, Vietnam. She and her family were among the hundreds of thousands who fled the country during the mass exodus that began in 1975 after the American-led war in Vietnam. They eventually settled in Los Angeles. After studying at art schools in California and several residencies in Japan, in 2007 Chung moved back to Ho Chi Minh City, where she is currently based. That year, she also helped to co-found San Art, Vietnam's leading nonprofit space. In 2016, Chung participating in "Illumination" at Denmark's Louisiana Museum of Modern Art and "Demarcate: Territorial Shift in Personal and Societal Mapping" at the San Jose Insitute of Contemporary Art. Her works will also be at the Taipei Biennial in September and the group show "Insecurities: Tracing Displacement and Shelter" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York this October.

I first discussed Chung's practice with her in 2015 in Hong Kong, on oneof her many trips to the city, as part of her ongoing research into the stories of Vietnamese refugees, with whom she has cultivated personal relationships. After meeting again during Art Basel Hong Kong this past March, where she debuted the first part of this Hong Kong project, I corresponded with Chung to get an update on her work, "The Vietnam Exodus Project" (2009/2014–). That display includes maps pinpointing correctional facilities, detention centers and refugee camps formerly located in the territory, statistics of yearly arrivals and departures of Vietnamese refugees, and the group's movement around the region, I also took this opportunity to speak about her earlier works and her long-standing interests that have informed a decade of art-making.

10°45'39"N106°43'23" E *(detail), 2013, excavated concrete tiles, 128 x 64 x 30 cm. Courtesty the artist and Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City.*

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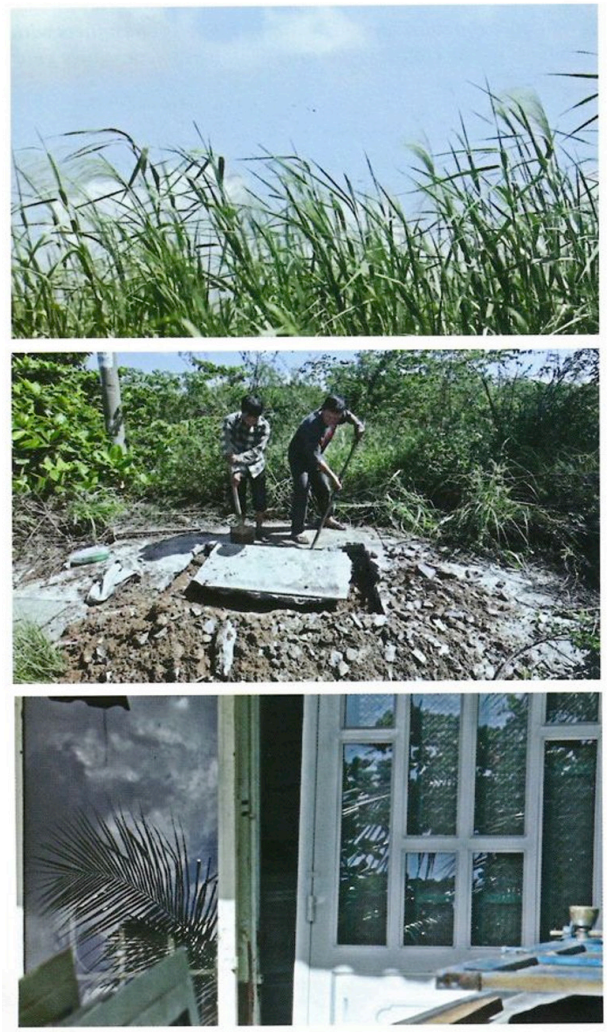
The political reforms and economic development of Doi Moi launched in Veitnam in 1986, dramatically transformed the country. What about these changes to the urban fabric inspired you to begin making your cartographic works in 2007?

I was living between Japan and the United States at the time when I first saw some photos of gigantic, man-made landforms in Cu Chi, a town in the outskirts of Saigon [present-day Ho Chi Minh City], which were signs of rapid urban development. the land in this town (and in many others) was being excavated and the soil was transported to other developing ares in the city for ground leveling. This practice has created phenomenal shifts in the physical landscape of these places and prompted my interest in the way spatial transformations are linked to economic developments in postwar Vietnam.



an archaeologic project for future remembrance*, 2013, stills from three-channel HD color video with sound: 6 min 26 sec. Courtesty the artist and Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City.*

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I decided to move back to Saigon for the second time in 2007 [the first time was in 2000] to examine how such changes were transforming a place, a community and a society. Some of my maps, such as *flora and fauna outgrowing the future* (2010), also explored urban development of Saigon in relation to environmental issues. These works were based on urban planning charts of HCMC 2020, the Ho Chi Minh City's public transportation targets set for 2020 that will include the expansion of the mass rapid transit system, and reports by ICEM [International Centre for Environmental Management] called "HCMC Adaptation to Climate Change Study," which looked at the extreme climate impacts resulting from the development of Saigon.

Juxtaposing ICEM analysis with the reality of urban planning in Saigon, I used colorful dots and patterns to mimic microorganisms and to metaphorically suggest the rapid development as rootless – similar to the microscopic plants of fungi, which thrive in decay and feed off other organisms.

Has tracing the urban spraw, of Saigon helped you connect with the rebirth of the country you had been away from since childhood?

I don't necessarily think about reconnecting to the motherland when I do this kind of work. A fault line withim the nation's past, the Vietnam conflict is still used as a universal trope for historical trauma. Therefore, I'm more concened with how my work can document and discuss the micro, hidden histories to counterbalance the "grand" narratives produced through statecraft.

What compels me more that official historical accounts are the stories of ordinary Vietnamese people like my mother and father – he was captured in Laos and imprisoned as a POW [prisoner of war] in Northern Vietnam for 14 years, during and after the conflict – and of people who lost their youth or lives fighting this convoluted war. I'm interested in the stories of the hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese who were either sent to the "new economic zones" within Vietnam or fled to the sea. I want to preserve their memories and experiences of the war, its aftermath and current development in the name of progress, so that they will not be distorted for certain purposes or erased into oblivion.

With these intentions in mind, I overlay and juxtapose historical and current maps to reveal the connection between past imperial violence and current political motivations – as in my mapping of Iraq and Syria – or to expose contemporary processes of globalization, as in my remappings of Sharjah, Saigon and Tokyo.

Is there a particular area of Saigon that has stood out in your research?

A major mixed-media project I made, which traces the development of Saigon, is an archaeology project for future remembrance (2013). It investigates a 657-hectare [1,623-

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acre] master-planned mega-project called "Thu Thiem New Urban Area," a land (re) development project with an enormous scale of forced evictions. About 14,600 multi-generational households were removed from Thu Thiem, once the most densely populated area in Saigon just across the revier from the city center. Many of the displaced residents trace their ancestors back to the area for more than three generations.

Inspired by archaeological discoveries in the 1940s by figures such as Louis Malleret of the Oc Eo culture (1st–7th century CE) in the Mekong Delta, as well as anthropologist Erik Harms's essay ["Knowing into Oblivion: Clearing Wastelands and Imagining Emptiness in Vietnamese New Urban Zones" (2014)] and book on urban development in Ho Chi Minh City [*Luxury and Rubble: Civility and Dispossession in the New Saigon* (2016)], my work examines the notion of "reclaiming wastelands [*khai hoang*]," a state rhetoric used throughout different time periods in the history of Vietnam's national land development.

I also seek to preserve th ememories of the disappearing Thu Thiem by excavating (ahead of time) the foundation of a demolished home and retrieving some artifacts left behind in the rubble of this urban jungle, and to imagine the future of ruins of the planned "Thu Thiem New Urban Area." Initially I had hoped to excavate the site of a former military post built on the riverbank of Thu Thiem by General Nguyen Huu Canh when he was establishing Saigon in 1698. This military post was called "don Ca Tre" or "don Giac Ngu" [subsequently changed to "Fort du Nord" when occupied by the French from 1887 onwards]. However, upon figuring out the exact location, I discovered that it's currently occupied by a local police station that keeps watch on the contested land. I still periodically visit a temporary art shelter and some evicted residents to get updates on their compensation claims and current situations.

Your maps depict not only areas of urban development but places of war or conflict, where communities have been displaced, and also countries that have been impacted by natural disasters such as the 1906 earthquake and firest in San Francisco and the 1995 earthquake in Kobe. With so many countries affected by these situations at the moment, how do you select which ones to focus on, or which issues to delve into?

My cartographic drawings and installation works, as a whole, examine issues of conflict, migration, urban progress and transformation in relation to history and cultural memory. At the core of all this are the issues of displacement that I try to unpack.

I usually approach projects with caution and self-reflection. I pay a lot of attention to the current state of the world but find it diffucult to articulate the perplexities of conflicts and even natural catastrophes. While some artists were responding to the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake in Tohoku through art projects, I went to stay in Kobe for a few months to conduct fieldwork on the memories of the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. Often I need to resort to history in order to structure and analyze what's in front of me.

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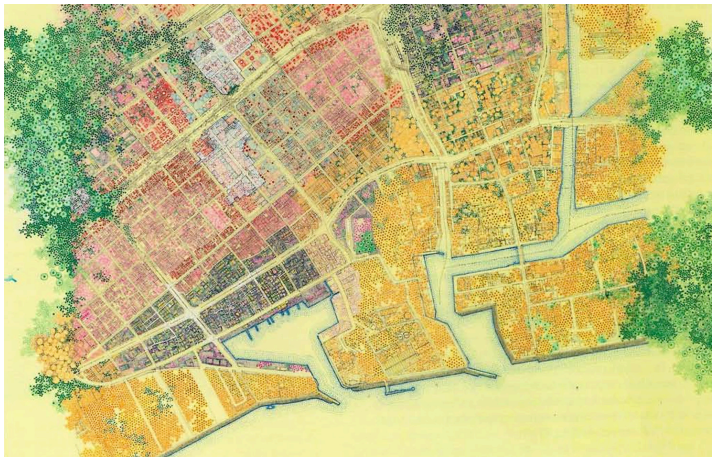

Kobe urban planning map after 1995, *2015, oil an dink on vellum and paper, 79 x 100 cm.*

Learning from history through preceding conflicts and disasters helps to elucidate the incomprehensible present. So one project usually leads to another, as I keep trying to connect the dots.

Can you walk us through your meticulous process of research and documentation? How has your process evolved in the past nine years?

My grueling research process follows a traditional structure of research exploration and methodology as practiced in social sciences. I explroe, select questions for investigation and examine published materials (academic studies, expert investigations and media reports) in the area of inquiry. I conduct archival or library research to collect an danalyze historical records and documents. For field research, I do empirical data collection of participant observations, individual/group interviews and case studies. In order to make people feel confortable or not to disturb the conversation flow, I sometimes don't record or take notes during the interviews. I take mental notes and write them down as soon as I get back. People tend to repeat their stories over and over again, so I'm usually able to memorize most details. After collecting data and statistics, I usually input them on spreadsheets for crosscheck and further analysis. With personal stories, after extracting data I'd turn them into something between journal entries and poetic writings. At some point, I have to stop myself from getting carried away in the research process and start to materialize the finding into some intellectual and creative forms.

"The Syria Project" (2014), shown in "All the World's Futures" at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015, was a poignant reminder of the ongoing refugee crisis in Syria. What compelled you to make that body of work for the international event, and were there notable parallels between what is happening in Syria now and what happened to

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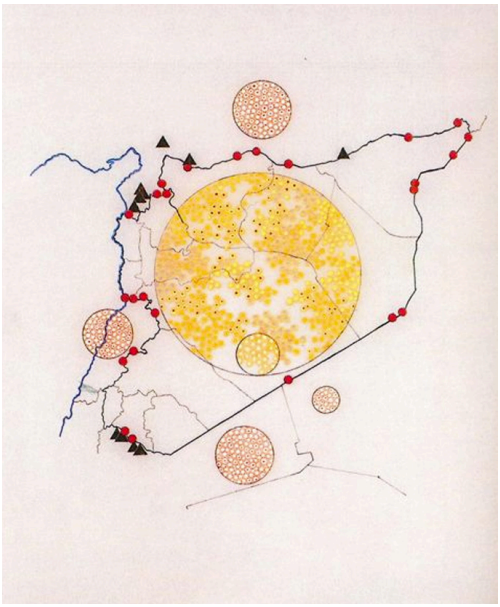
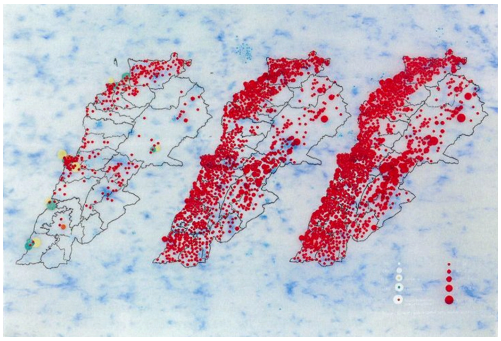


UNHCR/Reuters Syrian refugee crisis–refugees as of 02 sept 2012: 235, 368–IDPS as of Jan 2012: 988,272, *2014, part of "The Syria Project," 2014, oil and ink on vellum and paper, 42 x 30 cm*

Vietnamese refugees during the late 1970s and thorugh the '90s?

"The Syria Project" is an ongoing tracking of the Syrian humanitarian crisis, which traces back to the coonial partitioning of the Middle East with its politically constructed borders, as seen in the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement between the British and the French to divide the region between their spheres of influence. I started the project long before Okwui Enwezor selected it for the 2015 Venice Biennale. The sement presented at the biennale consists of 490 cartographic works mapping areas of conflict and the growing number of refugee



UNHCR Lebanon time-series Syrian registered refugees–June 2012: 25,411–June 2013: 480,512–April 2014: 1,044,8982: 988,272, *2014, part of "The Syria Project," 2014, oil and ink on vellum and paper, 79 x 100 cm*

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camps, tracking statistical data related to deaths, refugee and IDP [Internationally Displaced Person] numbers. In order to make such works, I had accumulated infographics, reports, and analyses of the conflict and refugee cris since 2012, tracing back to their sources for statistical data and further understanding of its current civil war.

Processing traumatic events takes time and distance. However, the urgency of the Syria conflict, with torrents of refugees pouring into the region and crossing over the Mediterranean, really inspired me to delve right into it. After some time, I realized why I was obsessively drawn to this particular crisis. As a former refugee myself, the Syrian humanitarian crisis bears striking resemblances to the Vietnamese mass exodus between 1975 and 1995, still vivid in the mind: the colonial history, the civil war, the influx of refugees into the immediate region, the boat escapes, the makeshift camps, the prolonged detention, the constant shift in asylum policies, the host countries' domestic resentments and the international community's compassion fatigue.

You visit Hong Kong often to conduct fieldwork for "The Vietnam Exodus Project (2009/2014–) about the city's Vietnamese refugees. What specifically triggered your interest in the community in Hong Kong?

"The Vietnam Exodus Project" is an in-depth study of the post-1975 Vietnamese exodus that focuses on the largest group of Vietnamese refugees that left the country after 1975, and who were reductively termed "boat people" by the international community – the "flotsam and jetsam" of the Vietnam conflict. This group constituted the world's largest and most important refugee group in the latter part of the 20th century.

The Hong Kong chapter of this history is considered the most complex and unique one. Pillar Point, the last Vietnamese refugee camp in Hong Kong – and Asia – was closed down in 2000. The remaining asylum-seekers from Pillar Point were allowed to integrate into Hong Kong society, in addition to a large group of ethnic-Chinese Vietnamese refugees and Vietnamese asylum-seekers that Hong Kong had already absorbed during the early periods.

I'm interested in studying the current Vietnamese community in Hong Kong because they're a visible embodiment of the emerging conundrum of refugee migration patters – when the state of being in-transit has shifted ot permanent settlement. As the United States was the most desired resettlement destination for most Vietnamese refugees (followed by other Western countries), those who have settled in Hong Kong remain forever in-transit, psychologically. With the in-between and transitory nature of Hong Kong as their first asylum refuge, the Vietnamese who have spent many years in detention – many were born and/or grew up in detention centers and refugee camps – find it almost impossible to integrate into its society as permanent residents. This unusual refugee-migration trajectory topples the long-established narrative of refugees resettling in the West and becoming regular immigrants and citizens there, a disjuncture I've aimed to explore in my work.

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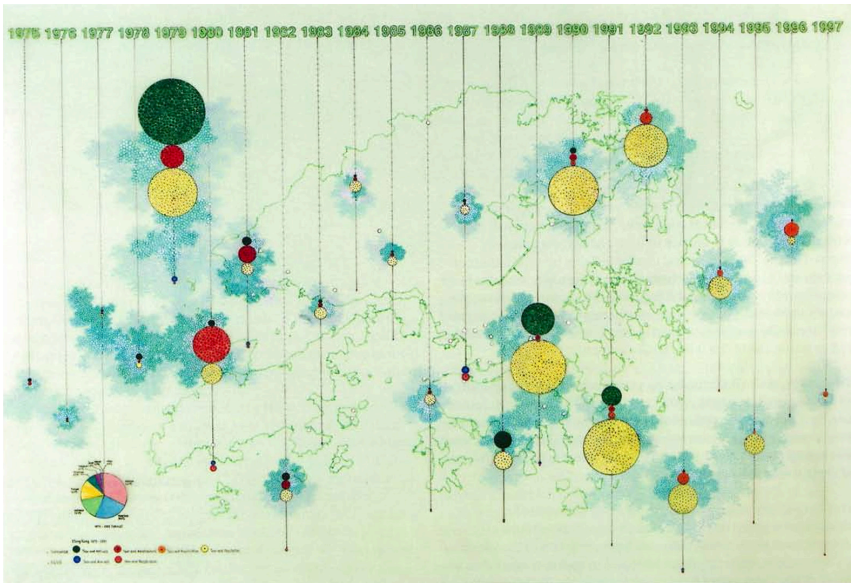

HKSAR statistics on yearly arrivals and departures of V-refugees from 1975-1997*, 2016, part of "The Vietnam Exodus Project – Hong Kong Chapter (1975-2000)," 2009/2014–, acrylic, ink, and oil on vellum and paper, 79 x 100 cm*

Can you speak about your time with them? Were there particular places that they showed you or experiences they shared that really resonated with you?

I came to know some of the Vietnamese people in Hong Kong thorugh personal and church connections. I spent a lot of time taking the bus with them around Hong Kong and simply listening to their stories. We would sometimes go visitour fellow Vietnamese who were homeless and living under the bridge in Sham Shui Po. We would also go back to the sites of the former detention centers and refugee camps together. I just happen to be a person who speaks their mother tongue, shares their collective history and therefore can be trusted.

During these conversations, some have raised profound questions on the meaning and implication of being "stateless." Upon being released from the camps, many of the refugees had been issued a travel document by the Hong Kong authorities with the "stateless" status printed in it. While some of the Vietnamese in Hong Kong were able to become citizens, others continue to carry the "stateless" travel document until today. Learning their stories and struggles has helped to shape the angle from which this study is set to go forth.

"The Vietnam Exodus Project" is a multipart work, the first of which was shown by Tyler Rollisn Fine Art at Art Basel Hong Kong earlier this year. A particularly compelling aspect of the presentation was the work Flotsam and Jetsam (2015-16), for which you engaged a younger generation of Vietnamese artists. Could you tell us about this piece?

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Hong Kong did not turn away any boat entering its waters. However, it was criticized for its inhumane treatment of Vietnamese refugees and "asylum-seekers," such as the confiscation of personal belongings, lengthy detentions, prison-like camp conditions, its closed-camp policy, screening policies and refoulement [forcible returning of refugees to their home country] after the implementation of the UN-adopted Comprehensive Plan of Action of 1989, an agreement that aimed to regulate clandestine departures and resettle refugees from Southeast Asia. And over in Vietnam, the post-1975 mass exodus is not officially recognized as part of the country's national narrative. It is neither a political nor humanitarian discourse to be examined or debated. People's traumatic, horrendous, experience of fleeing in unseaworthy boats – facing death, rape, robbery, hunger, thirst and cannibalism – has been deliberately erased.

My painting installation *Flotsam and Jetsum* examined the impacts of these policies on the Vietnamese refugees asylum-seekers in Hong Kong during the time: drug abuse, violence, children growing up in detention (and their ducation or lack thereof), people's mental states induced by asylum policies, and domestic resentments and stigmatization of the Vietnamese refugees within Hong Kong. In an attempt to experiemnt with how visual art can evoke curiosity and awareness of hidden histories, I commissioned a group of young artists from Saigon to render archival photographs of the Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong – obtained from both the UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] archives in Geneba and former refugees' personal collections – into watercolor paintings.

They all did amazing work: these young artists studied the old, faded photographs thoroughly and managed to capture the most minor details. They obsessively observed, pondered and imagined the fate of the people in the photographs. They breathed and painted what seems to be from another lifetime – fragmented stories, lives and experiences of another generation and another history – vignettes they had only vaguely heard about. During periodic critiques that I scheduled to monitor their progress, they asked questions and pursued discussions that led to better understanding of this history. The project has compelled these young artists to acknowledge and confront this traumatic chapter of Vietnam's history. Despite government censorship, I plan to continue this project with new groups of artists within Vietnam, as a gesture of protest against what I call a "politically driven historical amnesia."

How many more parts of "The Vietnam Exodus Project" do you envision? Will it evolve into other artistic forms?

"The Vietnam Exodus Project" is structured similarly to that of a book, divided into different chapters. I'm currently working on the Hong Kong chapter while continuously collecting materials for other regions. Subsequent chapters will inevitably cover Southeast Asia and will remap the geographical breadth of the Vietnamese refugees beyond the Western sphere, which will decenter the typical narrative of refugees resettling in the US and Europe.

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Together with "The Syria Project," it will form a comparative study of forced migration as committed in different national contexts. I am aiming to unpack refugee and asylum policies imposed on the Vietnamese and to offer insights into the impact of constant shifts in asylum-policy-making on already traumatized and distressed people, so that past struggles will not go unmentioned or wasted but instead, potentially bring positive change to the current and future refugee crises around the world. And who knows, I might end up turning all of this into a book eventually!

Flotsam and Jetsum, *detail, 2015-16, part of "The Vietnam Exodus Project–Hong Kong Chapter (1975-2000)," 2009/2014–, watercolor, ink, acrylic, vinyl, Plexiglas, video and text, 28 works on paper": 30 x 42 cm each; 40 text pieces on Plexiglas panels: dimensions variable; videos and text on electronic tablets: 15 x 26 cm each. Painting illustrations by Ho Hung, Le Nam Dy, Nguyen Van Du and Nguyen Kim To Lan.*

Two works,* HKSAR statistics on yearly arrivals and departures of V-refugees from 1975-1997 *(2016) and* Flotsam and Jetsam *are now part of the collection of M+ here in Hong Kong. The works mark an important moment in the city's history that may not be well known to the general public. What is the significance of these works staying in Hong Kong?

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The Vietnamese refugee crisis in Hong Kong represented a significant historical moment for the city, not only in terms of humanitarian work. The design and implementation of the various asylum policies at the time were impacted by the immense influx of refugees and the pressure from multiple sides: the British colonial government, the international community, the domestic public and mainland China prior to the 1997 handover. A lot of decisions and lessons have gone on to set the cornerstone for Hong Kong's current debates on asylum issues. The truth is that many people of the older generations in Hong Kong still recall the memories of the Vietnamese refugee era. Many people were involved in either helping or protesting agains the refugees.

At Art Basel Hong Kong this year, many Hong Kong people came to see my work. They wished to learn, reminiscence or share their experiences and memories of the time with me. To my astonishment, some ghosts of the past resurfaced, such as policy makers, human-rights lawyers, NGO volunteers, ex-CSD police [Correctional Services Department] and of course, former Vietnamese refugees. For all these reasons, it was imperative that the works remain in Hong Kong. I might add that an exhibition of these works would not be allowed in Vietnam today. As such, I'm especially grateful that M+ has realized their significance; the museum's acquisitiokn is, to me, a great acknowledgement, and encourages the continuation of this project.

Your practice, whether in the form of the cartographic drawings, sculptures, photographs, or video, is a reminder of how art can bring attention to forgotten histories and urgent issues. Do you see your work as a vehicle to stir social consciousness?

When one is given a voice and a platform, it is an obligation and privilege to speak out responsibly on behalf of others. When I was a young art student, with a refugee background and the baggage of the Vietnam conflict, I never dreamed I would be doing this kind of work. It's a blessing to be given such opportunities, but that comes with profound responsibilities. I continue to struggle and fuble in figuring out what we can do when confronted by injustice and pain in a world in which only a small group of people holds the power and makes decisions for all of us. So, stirring social consciousness through art is a great thing but not enough, due to the limitations of what art can achieve. I aim for my work to go beyond the realm of art and contribute to international policy-making on issues concerning borders, refugees, as\ylum, at least for the time being.

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The European Business Review

Tiffany Chung, Contemporary Artist

April 16, 2016

Tiffany Chung is one of Vietnam's most respected and internationally active contemporary artists. Based in Saigon, Chung has received wide acclaim for her exquisite cartographic drawings and multi-media practice that explore spatial and sociopolitical transformations interwoven with the lingering resonances of historical trauma. She was awarded the 2013 Sharjah Biennial Prize and featured in 2015 Venice Biennale main exhibition All The World's Futures.

ON GENDER AND CHOICES

I majored in photography and art as soon as I started college. My decision to choose

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art as a career was affirmed during graduate school, when I became more convinced of how art could influence and shape culture and society. It was also a challenge that I wanted to take on – to have my voice as a woman artist in the art world largely dominated by successful male artists.

ON SAN ART AND DEVELOPING CONTEMPORARY ART IN VIETNAM

My family migrated to the US from Vietnam as refugees after the war. One of the biggest challenges when I first came back to Vietnam in 2000 was the lack of an art infrastructure and a supporting community that would come together and actively engage in the socio-political issues of a fast changing, post-war society. So I co-founded San Art with Dinh Q. Le and two other artists in 2007. Under the leadership of Executive Director Zoe Butt and our board members, San Art has been playing an active role in promoting critical thinking concerning interdisciplinary practice and knowledge of art within our community through a series of exhibitions, a residency program and an education program called 'Conscious Realities.' San Art has become a key meeting point that introduces a broad array of international visitors (artists, curators, researchers, collectors and much more) to the local artistic community. San Art would not be where it is today were it not for a select handful of international foundations and private individuals who have supported us in our struggle to support artists in a country with no financial support for contemporary art.

ON MENTORING THE NEXT GENERATION OF VIETNAMESE ARTISTS

We have come a long way in the past fifteen years. Young Vietnamese artists these days are eager to learn and practice contemporary art, despite the lack of critical thinking in the education system here. With San Art programs mentioned above, we aim to continue supporting and equipping artists with knowledge beyond art; to experiment beyond their training in the plastic arts, to collaborate and research within other disciplines of research and innovation. In turn, a number of artists have been active in the region and even in the international art scene. I hope young Vietnamese artists understand the most important aspects of this field of work are the genuine interest in issues that matter to society, and the tenacity to keep it going; that our quest for knowledge would take us on a journey rather than just to arrive at a destination. I certainly hope they can sustain their practice by developing a critical voice that demands changes in our society and especially in the education system

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here, which [in the past forty years] has been deliberately promoting what I call 'politically-driven historical amnesia.'

ON BEING AN ARTIST

I wake up everyday grateful for being able to do what I do and looking forward to materialize my research and ideas. Living in Vietnam with its current political state, I want my work to function as a protest against this 'politically-driven historical amnesia' that I spoke earlier. It is important to encourage the viewer to enter my work through its exciting visual, before realizing the heavy conceptual framework.

As I explore issues of urban progress and transformation, the link to history and geopolitics is inevitable. My academic and ethnographic research leads to excavating and remapping certain unrecorded or denied histories in countries currently under dictatorship, and those with colonial or imperial legacies. Being given a platform such as the Venice Biennale 2015 has made me think more about my responsibility as an artist. How do I, a former refugee, contribute to the on-going dialogue on global refugee issues? And continuing from this platform, how do my studies of the Vietnam Exodus history inform the development of asylum policies to be applied towards the Syrian refugees and those from other countries? How does my work analyse past experiences and provoke thoughts that lead to the demand for better changes?

ON SUCCESS

If success means the satisfaction of doing the work you love and being able to contribute to society, then the two most important key factors are having genuine interests in social issues that matter to your own as well as the global community, and the tenacity to keep working, knowing that your work can make a difference however small it is. Perhaps I have been surviving in the art industry because I pay very little attention to what people in the art are currently interested in but instead keep myself occupied with research projects that allow me to unpack and learn from history and world geopolitics. I am just happy to have art as a tool and a platform to explore and discuss things that I am deeply concerned about. It is such a luxury.

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ON FUTURE CHALLENGES

There are always challenges that need to be overcome and dreams to be fulfilled. I will feel so blessed to be able to continue doing this work in the years to come.

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ARTASIAPACIFIC

Tiffany Chung's "The Galapagos Project: on the brink of our master plans" and "an archeology for future remembrance"

By Ruben Luong | January 24, 2014

TIFFANY CHUNG, stored in a jar: monsoon, drowning fish, color of water, and the floating world*, 2010*

Adding to her portfolio of colorful, revelatory cartographic works, Da Nang-born artist Tiffany Chung remapped old Saigon maps for her recent exhibitions, "The Galapagos Project: on the brink of our master plans," and "an archaeology for future remembrance," at Galerie Quynh's two locations in Ho Chi Minh City earlier this month. Illuminating what is not readily apparent in conventional maps, her meticulous drafts and installation works survey how land has been erased or dramatically altered as a result of urban progress.

On display at the gallery's downtown location, "an archaeology for future remembrance" looked at Thu Thiem, a 657-hectare outer district of Ho Chi Minh City that was cleared to accommodate pending real estate projects. Near the gallery entrance, three large-scale maps of the area, rendered in micro pigment ink, gel ink, and oil on vellum and paper,

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appeared like microscopic cultures. The first, *Đồn Cá Trê* (c. 1698) in *Le Brun's 1795 urban planning map of Saigon* (2013), shows Saigon in relation to Thu Thiem. Erratic bursts of tiny green topography—in the form of patterned, flower-like clusters—populate its surface amid staggering, vein-like ducts of the Saigon River. Through her extensive research with Erik Harms, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Yale University, Chung reveals a colonial view of the land as a wilderness-wasteland suitable for urban cultivation.

TIFFANY CHUNG, stored in a jar: monsoon, drowning fish, color of water, and the floating world*, 2010*

In her second remap, *1972 Thu Thiem Development Plan by US AID* (2013), Chung redrew Thu Thiem as a distinctly new urban area, absent of the wild flora patterns. Here, the area is transformed into a large pore of compact, gray buildings and thin green parks. Maroon, cell-like, and almost cancerous, structures filter through the land, foreshadowing an inevitable decline. They are emphasized further in six smaller maps, including landscapes of a people yet to come – *HCMC ICA plans for New Thu Thiem Urban Area* (2013). These continue Chung's polychromatic cell motif, but progress to show a dismal, deindustrialized Thu Thiem, sparsely scattered with the maroon cells. With Thu Thiem serving as her latest case study on urban development, Chung simultaneously contemplates, recaptures, and forecasts the cycle of erasure, growth and destruction of land in modern societies.

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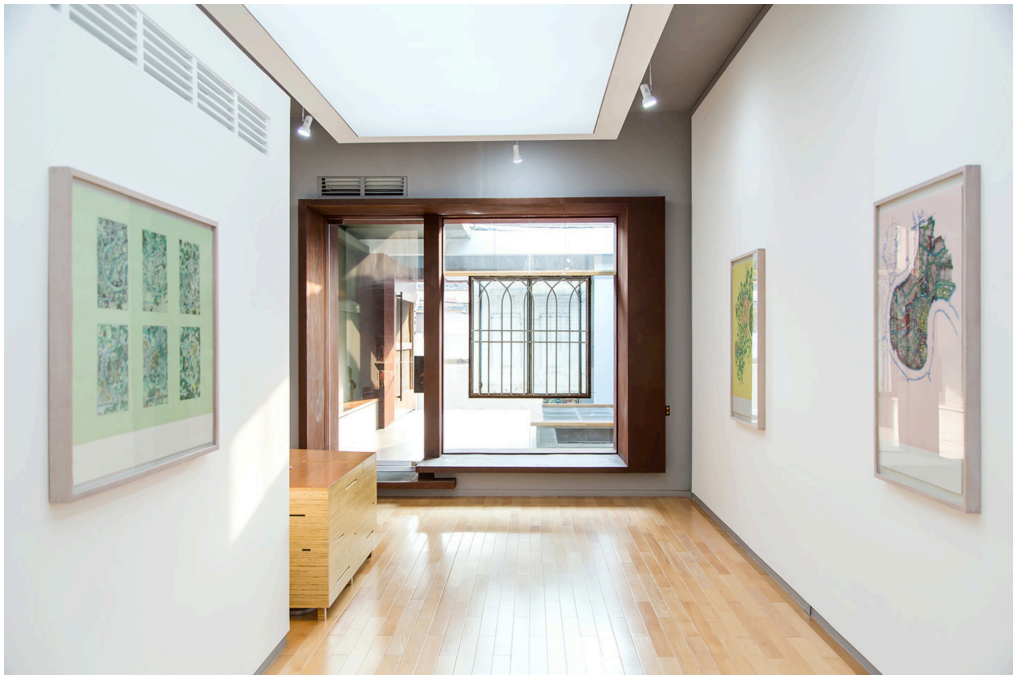

Installation view of Tiffany Chung's "an archaeology project for future remembrance" at Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, 2013. Courtesy Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City.

Chung looks at other important cases of land transformation in her ongoing series "The Galapagos Project: on the brink of our master plans," shown at Galerie Quynh's home base. Upstairs, her *snow covered paths, winter evergreens and defunct coal mines* (2012–13) featured a remap in green, white and orange cells marginalized by protruding networks of outlined coal mines in Yamaguchi, Japan. The work explores post-industrial decline due to natural disasters or climate change. *HCMC extreme flood prediction 2050 – ADB & ICEM reports* (2013), for example, is based on predictions that Ho Chi Minh City and Vietnam's lower Mekong Delta region will undergo a fatal flood in 2050 due to global warming. A chilling illustration of icy blue cells set within diverged and crackled regions of exposed raw pink, the remap parallels Chung's installation also created in response to the flood prediction titled stored in a *jar: monsoon, drowning fish, color of water, and the floating world* (2010-11), displayed throughout the back of the upstairs gallery. The installation presents a "floating town" modeled in wood veneer, plastic, aluminum, paint, and foam, suspended from steel cables on six separate islets of Plexiglas. The hanging islets form an almost three-dimensional map, with homogenized water hamlets supporting solar panels, rainwater harvesting systems, canoes for transport and vertical and rooftop gardens that eerily conceive the futuristic aftermath of the 2050 flooding.

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With her research-fueled practice, Chung probes the slow degradation of cities and towns, treating them as living organisms with beautiful microbial remapping and elaborate miniature models. Her abstract cartographic artworks require close study and examination; they underscore complex civilizations rarely immune to forces of history and demographic change.

Tiffany Chung's "The Galapagos Project: on the brink of our master plans," and "an archaeology for future remembrance" were on view at Galerie Quynh from December 4, 2013–January 10, 2014.

Ruben Luong is an arts writer based in Vietnam.