

A solo exhibition by

Tuấn Mami

TUẤN MAMI

Born in 1981 and graduated from the Vietnam University of Fine Arts in 2006, Tuấn Mami is a Hanoi-based multidisciplinary artist whose practice spans across installation, video, performance and conceptual art. Constantly exploring new methods of expression, Tuấn Mami burst into the international art scene for his daring, and increasingly meditative experimentations in both private and public spaces, analyzing the condition of human encounters (with each other and with the world around them) and critiquing the current state of society; while also attempting to shift or change (the perception of) this state. Other than being as a creator, Tuấn also participates and contributes greatly in the development of the local art scene, founding the mobile art centre MAC-Hanoi in 2012, and co-founding Nhà Sàn Collective in 2013; while performing as Visiting Faculty at the San Francisco Art Institute in the same year. He has participated in numerous exhibitions, art events and residencies, both at home and abroad including 'Skylines with Flying people 3' (Hanoi, 2014-2016), 'In.Visible Borderline' (MetaHouse Art Space, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 2016), 'Krisis' (Bonington Gallery, Nottingham, UK, 2016), 'Plastic Myths' (Asia Culture Center, Gwangju, South Korea, 2015) etc.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS:

MAR 24: 'Living on the Edge' - a panel discussion between Tuấn Mami and Khvay Samnang on art practices that look into the physical and mental degradation of the environment and the human psyche as a result of man's hyper-industrialisation.

APR 07: Art Tour with Bill Nguyễn.

BILL NGUYỄN

Bill Nguyễn is an artist-curator interested in researching and developing an alternative, locally-driven method and platform for curation in Vietnam. After graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Studio) from the School of Art and Design, Nottingham Trent University (UK), Bill returned to Hanoi in 2008, re-entering the scene through multiple trajectories in the art community: engaging as an artist, curator and educator. Between 2009 and 2011, he designed educational workshops for Hanoi DOCLAB Centre for Experimental video and documentary filmmaking. In 2012, he co-led the education program ARTLAB focusing on cross-pollinating art and other creative fields for undergraduates and young artists. In the same year he co-founded Manzi Art Space (Hanoi), and started collaborating with Nhà Sàn Collective (Hanoi) as guest curator. Select recent projects include: '0395A.ĐC: A solo exhibition by Ly Hoàng Ly', The Factory (2017), 'Skylines With Flying People 3, Nhà Sàn Collective (2016); 'Into Thin Air', Manzi (2016). Bill is an alumnus of the 8th Berlin Biennial Young Curators Workshop and a participating curator of the CuratorsLAB initiated by the Goethe Institut South East Asia; and is currently curatorial assistant at The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre (Ho Chi Minh City).

THE FACTORY

The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre ('The Factory') is the first purpose-built space for contemporary art in Vietnam, established April 2016. As an independent private initiative, it creates and hosts interdisciplinary activities in order to introduce and expand knowledge of art and cultural trends, both past and present, in and beyond Vietnam. The Factory also offers a publicly accessible reading room of art educational resource; workshop and co-working space; replete with café, bar and restaurant. Operating as a social enterprise, all profit from sale of art and business on-site supports the running costs of its Arts Centre.

Address: 15 Nguyen U Di, Thao Dien Ward, District 2, Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam

Phone: +84 (0)28 3744 2589
Email: info@factoryartscentre.com

Website: www.factoryartscentre.com

With thanks to the following for their support: Super friend team: Đỗ Văn Hoàng & Phạm Minh Đức With thanks to the following for their support: Super friend team: Đỗ Văn Hoàng & Phạm Minh Đức (Panda Po) [DOP] | Tạ Minh Đức, Lê Xuân Tiến, Quân Đình [cameraman] | Nguyễn Hữu Hải Duy [sound designer] | Nguyễn Huỳnh Phương An [designer, photographer] | Lê Dũng Hiệp [engineer] | Linh Cam & Nguyễn Mạnh Long [technical assistant] | Hiền Văn ceramic workshop | Rijksakademie Residency | Marianne Peijnenburg & Anthony Sgard [ceramic artist] | The Factory: Ti-a [founder] | Zoe Butt [artistic director] | Lê Thiên Bảo [curatorial assistant] | Dương Mạnh Hùng [translator] | Nhung Lê & Ngân Huỳnh [graphic designer] | Sơn Đoàn & Vi Phạm [sponsorship & promotion] | Huỳnh Văn Tuấn and co., Nhơn Lê, Tuấn Nguyễn, Khanh Trần, Lộc Lê, Thảo My, Bội Nhi [installation crew] | Nguyễn Thị Thanh Nữ [legal consultant] | Huy Hà [facilities] | Hằng Nguyễn [accountant] | Thủy Design House, Nhà Sàn Collective, Coeverything, Ga0, Nhật Q. Võ, Dương Anh Xuân [equipment support]

in one's breath - nothing stands still

2/3 - 9/5/2018

"There is soil, bare soil

There is water, muddy water

This is where it all begins"

(excerpt from 'Đẻ Đất Đẻ Nước')

The project 'In One's Breath Nothing Stands Still' by Tuấn Mami borrows its inspiration from the ancient Mường* epic 'Đẻ Đất Đẻ Nước' ('The Birth of Soil and Water'), from which immerses a belief that there is spirituality in all beings, that the creation of the world is constantly in a state of chaos, where humans struggle to cohabit harmoniously with other creatures, and especially with themselves. Conducted on the basis of the artist's ongoing fieldwork in the stone mining areas of his hometown, Hà Nam, since 2014, this multimedia body of work investigates and documents the pollution and significant loss of biodiversity caused by overexploitation of natural resources, and its devastating consequences on the structure of culture, and the people inhabiting this land.

The vectors that traverse the almost human-less environment of 'In One's Breath Nothing Stands Still' infers the greed of industrialisation and modernisation; the arrogant privileging of human desire, the violent decay of nature, and the irreversible decline of a society as it moves towards the ideal. From the grandioseness of the exhibition space and the sporadic arrangement of the works, to the cool and detached characteristics of the imagery this exhibition points to a future after catastrophe.

Fragile traces of human existence are found

among landscapes in different states of ruin.

Is this the resurrection of heaven, or the start of a cosmic destruction?

Is this the end of Mother Nature, or her new beginning?

This uncanny premonition of impending disaster is intensified by the dual visualisation of opposing qualities: stillness and movement, proximity and distance, silence and noise. It is as if a dystopia is casting its ominous shadow over everything as it hovers between dreams and nightmares, resurrection and extinction, past and future. By revealing a scene marked by both conflict and hope, and by making visible the unspoken and unheard reality of his land and people, Tuấn Mami demands us to face the ultimate truth: humanity, for all their reflecting, contemplating and scrutinising - is once again trapped in the destruction of their own makings.

*The Mường is an ethnic group native to Vietnam and is the country's third largest of 53 minority groups, inhabiting the mountainous region of northern Vietnam.

Organized and sponsored by:

THE FACTORY
CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTRE

With support from:



Promotional partner:

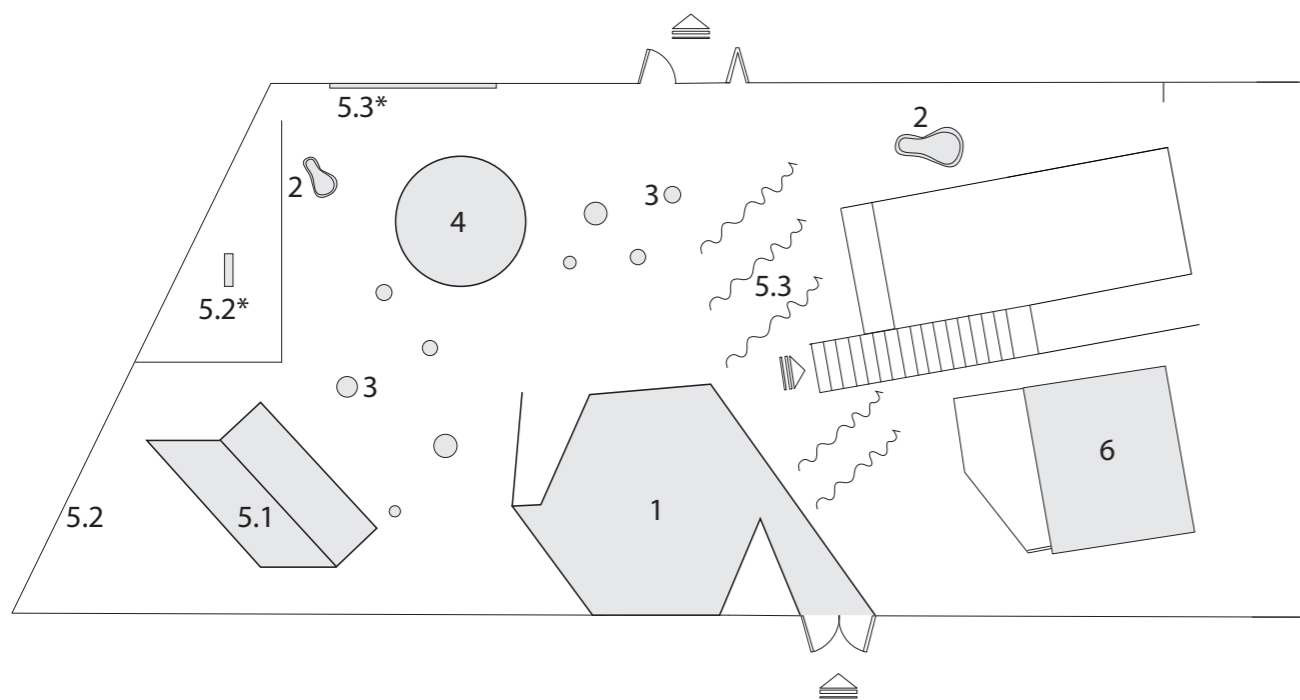
Le MERIDIEN
SAIGON

1

In One's Breath
Six channel video
installation
30 seconds
roughly the length of a
breath of air. On loop

Set up in a hexagon shaped room, the six channel video installation acts as an entrance through which we enter the sphere of 'In One's Breath - Nothing Stands Still', capturing several images of mountains and forests, all with a thin layer of white mist. At first glance, this serenity recalls the art of Chinese landscape painting, where the depiction of nature is often treated as a realm of paradise that holds magical powers. Other times, it is seen as expressions of the individual artist who longs to escape the quotidian world and social chaos, to commune with nature, as an act of self-cultivation and political response. What tale, however, does Tuán Mami's treatment of landscape tell?

The vast whiteness, under which the rock formations and trees are buried, is in fact rockdust - the residue of mountains which have been subjected to violent activities of mining. Over the last two decades, numerous rock mining companies have been established in Hà Nam where the artist grew up. Everyday mountaintops are blasted, rocks removed, forests obliterated, debris filling up streams, contaminants seeping into waterways, thousands of homes shaken to their bones, and thousands of lives slowly poisoned to death. What seems visually tranquil at first, slowly and silently reveals a different tale of beautification.



2

Lakes
Soil, rockdust, cement
& wild plants
Various sizes

Exiting the video room, a constellation of different artworks across the space appears. Scattered on the floor, one body of sculptures resembles lakes and ponds, frozen; their shapes uncannily remind us of graves for those unnamed or forgotten. Are these for Mother Nature, or have humans dug their own death? Made with rockdust, soil and plants, the work represents the symbolic cycle from death to rebirth, where scraps from the aftermath of destruction are used towards the creation of an artwork - something with a new life of its own.

3

Mountains
Interactive sculpture
Soil, rock, moss &
automatic motion sensor
Various sizes

This post-apocalyptic landscape (with almost no human in it) is given reprieve by a game of hide-and-seek. Look carefully and a glimpse of baby mountains, of various sizes, can be found, sometimes standing by themselves, other times forming pairs or groups. Start walking towards these structures, and we realize they are always running away from us, always out of our reach. It is as if we have been set up for failure from the start, constantly chasing that which we cannot control, that which we are not meant to take ownership. In the midst of it all, a rounded room stands tall. Step in it, and the fun stops. In front of us, a mound of rockdust appears to be breathing, or exploding. Every once in a while, puffs of dust randomly shoots up, as if the mound is talking back at us, pointing at those who are found guilty. In both of these artworks, human to artwork interactivity is desired and called for, but not granted nor satisfied. Silence becomes the ultimate punishment; distance becomes the only means of communication.

4

Explosion
Automatic engine & rockdust
60 x 40cm (DIAM. x H)

5. Archival areas

The materials accumulated and displayed in these Archival areas open a window into Tuán Mami's working process, illustrating the artist's multimedia approach (including video, photography, installation etc.) to the execution of ideas, whilst also showcasing a number of models of and experimentations with works-in-progress relating to the project

5.1, 5.3 & 5.3*

In this area, a tent-like structure made of bamboo sticks, rocks and sheets (similar to those temporarily set up by roadsides and used by the inhabitants of Hà Nam to gather and rest) has been assembled. Inside and around it, a collection of still and moving images reflect Tuán Mami's observations during his ongoing field trips since 2014. Some act as original sources of inspiration, and refer to the works exhibited in the main space (for example, snippets of the lake-like sculptures, and the moving and breathing mountains, are seen once more here). Others bear the same abstract and serene visual effects and qualities (found in the six channel video installation, and the video experimentations surrounding the tent). Most depict the brutality of the pollution and destruction of both the natural and human worlds. Found satellite footages of ripped-open mountains are placed side by side with snapshots of factories, cranes and trucks in action. Images of houses and temples - with cracks caused by dynamite blasting, most covered with curtains of different shades of purple (some of which the artist had actually traded, and now erected on the other side) - are paired with photographs of the everyday in Hà Nam, all of which are eerily buried in a layer of whiteness.

By installing inside the tent a bottle of spirits (made with plants collected from fast-disappearing mountaintops), several shot-glasses and a visual booklet explaining the brewing process, Tuán Mami has transformed this space into a site of conversation. Throughout his research trips, the artist encountered numerous men, women and children, each of whom had helped him pass obstacles, or shape the conceptualisation and realisation of the project. 'In One's Breath - Nothing Stands Still' started as a personal quest, and is evolving into a communal journey - one to be shared, known about, and continued. Here, the spirits and glasses act as an invitation to participate; the invitation stands in for action; and action generates change.

5.2 & 5.2*

The video experimentations spilling around the tent structure contemplate the juncture between dreamed and rational encounters of the unexplained. Deploying various cinematic techniques, with a non-linear narrative, soaked in a soundtrack made up of several Sine waves* at different frequencies and sounds recorded on-site and made abstract, this dream-like visual chaos requires our eyes and ears to never rest. Aerial scenes of tattered forests dissolve into close-ups of machines eating away at nature. Ritualistic objects and places 'jump-cut' in between long shots of people engaging in absurdist acts (eg. a man restlessly jumping on a dune of earth; a group of women - their faces hidden behind masks - standing still as if made out of stone; a boy eagerly communicating with us - his voice muted). In a separate room, a metal rectangular-shaped sculpture holds two videos inside. Look into it, and like smoke, a fisheye view of buildings and nature being demolished to pieces gently fades in and out, with a sense of intentional violence and destruction.

Based on Eastern teachings of the Five Elements (Earth, Water, Fire, Metal and Wood), and man's dependent and submissive (but also at times, abusive and destructive) relationship towards this system of belief, these video experimentations explore: the blurry line between our desire to overrule the natural world, and the most basic elements we need from it to survive; the blindness that comes with our obsessive worshipping of the elements, and our inability to see the cruelty we choose to expose our fellow human beings to; our dangerous flirting and exploitation of nature, and our risky attempts at playing God (believing we are the all-knowers of the world, the architects of time and space, and the commanders of the works of creation).

*Sine waves are the most basic elements in the creation of a sound, often occurring in pure and applied mathematics, physics, engineering and many other fields (for example, they are used to test our hearing ability; and are known to help aid the healing of hearing impairment and loss). As a forceful and hypnotic entity, sine waves can help guide our brains into different states of consciousness.

6

Masks
Ceramic, metal
Sculpture:
34 x 25 x 30cm
(H x W x D)
Pedestal:
170cm (H)

Separated (or moved away?)
In solitude (or by neglect?)

Standing by itself above the rest of the exhibition, and embodying the remaining traces of solitary survivors, the human form in this last body of works exists as empty, hollow-face masks hovering in space. Each sculpture is a one-to-one ceramic reproduction of real-life headgears, often used by the inhabitants of Hà Nam when working on the fields, in factories and mines, and when undertaking protests. Functioning as a tool of protection (from both environmental pollution and identity exposure), the mask not only stands in for the deliberate lack of the human voice and figure apparent throughout the exhibition, but also acts as a commemoration to those who have withstood the test of time, to continue to witness, to fight, to guard and to protect. It is a reminder that in this time of darkness, there is still room for hopes. Hope - that one day their voices will be heard, their actions recognised, their legacy written down in history. Hope - that what they have achieved, and what they have never achieved, would continue to inspire ourselves and generations to come. Hope - as Tuán Mami once stated - that "In death, there will be life; and in catastrophe, there will be regeneration. Always."