

PRESS RELEASE

Necessary Fictions: A duo-exhibition by Tammy Nguyễn and Hà Ninh Phạm
Opening 16 August, 2019



(top image: Hà Ninh Phạm | bottom image: Tammy Nguyễn)

How do the tools and stories we inherit guide our lives? How are artistic imaginations re-determining the value and significance of these often presumed cultural legacies? In *Necessary Fictions* two artists explore the role of cartography and myth, their command of illustration within the painterly medium - across canvas, paper and wood - unveiling two distinct surrealities. Artists Tammy Nguyễn and Hà Ninh Phạm respectively reveal the architectural and anthropomorphic dimensions of desire - their images playfully morphing the worlds of human, flora and fauna - revealing the study of time and morality as a deeply flawed, exploitative landscape whereby human whimsy often rules supreme.

For thousands of years, mapping the world has been an integral part of human intrigue. Maps help broaden the horizon of our mind, aiding the identification of star constellations, the discovery of new terrain, and the exploration of other cultures. They show how the world was laid out at a particular time, of how different peoples perceived the earth (and heavens) - physically, mentally and religiously. Maps are a source of wonder, but they are also tools exploited for the purpose of power, telling others where they can or cannot go, stifling human movement, restricting activities within specific place. Similarly storytellers, since the dawn of consciousness, continue to be socially and culturally valued as educators and seers, their words craftily juxtaposing various human action and inaction, revealing human fallibility and prowess. Such stories (think Ovid, Shakespeare, Confucius, Rumi, Ferdowsi) continue to be of critical relevance to contemporary life, though often sadly instrumentalized by individuals and corporations who corrupt the representation of their

ethical and moral compass. Between map and story, such tools are intimately connected to the experience of reality, daring to record and analyze its occurrence.

Hà Ninh Phạm's painting series *My Land* (2017 - on-going) is both a project in progress, and a world in formation, where numerous visual narratives surrounding an imagined universe are continually given birth - growing, maturing, pollinating - into something yet to be brought into full existence. With its own systems of logic, metrology and history, expressed through its narratives, maps and visual codes, *My Land* invites us into the private territory of the artist, on a dream voyage across sea, castles, villages and farms, past otherworldly terrains that resemble lands out of fairytales, scenes from sci-fi films, or places of futuristic planets. Here, we'll find that the ending of one story may mark the beginning of another, and that looking at one minute visual detail can transport us into an entirely different space-time dimension, another world. Like archeologists, we are invited to excavate this terrain, looking for buried remnants and clues, in order to perhaps understand a (fictional) history. Like dreamers, we are asked to strip away all pre-existing experience and understanding of the real world, to immerse ourselves fully into the make-believe, perhaps so that the journey to explore another world - where we *hope* to live - could begin.

Across the painterly vivid, illustrative landscapes, still life tableau and rotating sculptures of Tammy Nguyễn, repeat motifs unfurl - eye-balls blink, roll, peek from leaves crying for air; where human skin mirrors the ochre of land, the plight of both species under interrogation for their color. Here flora is under duress, not only from environmental neglect, but from a great tide of human imagination that has failed to understand the symbolic narratives of this habitat. Desire runs rampant as masks masquerade decay, as the search for the sublime sees the plunder of far distant lands, as presumption of power bleeds with the violence of conquest - in Tammy's images the aftermath of such human greed commands. An oscillating metaphorical conversation between faith, science and Capital; referencing textual insights from Ovid, to Blake, to Swift, to mythical legacies of Nusantara: what is ultimately gleaned in her images is humanity has learnt naught from such seers, instead walking blindly from generation to generation in a ceaseless love affair with its own image.

In as much as maps and myths respond to historical and social architectures, the influence of such art forms relies on their ability to impress conscience inward, to paint human production as both physical and imagined structures, as *necessary fictions*. The creations of Tammy Nguyễn and Hà Ninh Phạm in turn remind (and warn) us of the significant strengths (and dangers) of the human imagination, a miraculous potential that can store and transmit information across time and culture, which in the particular minds and hands could repair, destroy, or transform the reality in which we live.

'Necessary Fictions' is curated by Zoe Butt and Bill Nguyen, and remains on view until 27 October, 2019.

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*[*Please see further below for sample imagery of artworks in this exhibition](#)*

Notes for the editor:

Tammy Nguyễn (b. 1984, San Francisco) is a multimedia artist whose work spans painting, drawing, silkscreen and book making. Intersecting geopolitical realities with fiction, her practice addresses lesser-known histories through a blend of myth and visual narrative. She is the founder of 'Passenger Pigeon Press', an independent press that joins the work of scientists, journalists, creative writers, and artists to create politically nuanced and cross-disciplinary projects. Born in San Francisco, Nguyen received a BFA from Cooper Union, NYC, in 2007. The year following, she received a Fulbright scholarship to study lacquer painting in Vietnam, where she remained and worked with a ceramics company for three years thereafter. Nguyen received an MFA from Yale

University in 2013 and was awarded the Van Lier Fellowship at Wave Hill, USA, in 2014. She has exhibited at the Rubin Museum, NYC; The Fine Arts Museum of Ho Chi Minh City and the Bronx Museum, NYC, among others. Her work is included in the collections of Yale University, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, MIT Library, the Seattle Art Museum, the Walker Art Center Library, and the Museum of Modern Art Library, USA. She currently lives and works in New York.

Hà Ninh Phạm (b. 1991, Hanoi) works primarily in drawing and sculpture. His work explores the way in which we construct an understanding of a territory from afar. Hà Ninh earned his MFA from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, USA and his BA from the Vietnam University of Fine Arts, Hanoi, Vietnam. He was in residence at the Corporation of Yaddo (New York), Wassaia Project (New York), and Marble House Project (Vermont). Hà Ninh received the Silver Medal for Young Talents of Vietnamese Fine Arts Universities in 2015 and the Murray Dessner Travel Award in 2018. His work has been shown in New York, Philadelphia, USA; Hanoi, Vietnam, and will be included in the journal, 'New American Paintings issue 141'. He has just returned to Vietnam to live and work.

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 contemporary art and cultural trends, both past and present, in Vietnam. As a social enterprise, The Factory also offers a publicly accessible reading room of art-educational resource; workshop and co-working space; replete with café, bar and restaurant. All profit from the sale of art and business on-site supports the running costs of its Arts Centre. www.factoryartscentre.com

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Below are 4 works from over 35 works to be included in the duo show 'Necessary Fictions'. For image requests, please contact art@factoryartscentre.com.



Tammy Nguyen | *Ai Ai Ai Ai Ai Ai Ai* 2019 | Watercolor on paper stretched over wood panels | 183 x 152cm



Tammy Nguyen | *He is Flower, Flower* 2019 | Watercolor on paper stretched over wood panels | 183 x 152cm



Hà Ninh Phạm | *B5 [Wax Fortress]* 2018 | Graphite, oil pastel and acrylic on paper | 220 x 228cm



Hà Ninh Phạm | [*Institute of Distance*] 2019 | Graphite, watercolor, pastel on paper | 125 x 183cm