

THE ACTORY

PRESS RELEASE



'Singing to the choir?'

A group exhibition by Phan Anh, Trần Minh Đức and Ngọc Nâu

Opening: 6PM, 8 November, 2019

Venue: The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre

'Singing to the choir?' is an adaptation of a colloquial phrase that imagines a scene where an impassioned individual seeks to convince his audience, through song, of their need to believe in his ideas, yet they already appear to do so (evidenced in their reciting of his lyrics, of their body gestures in unison with his ceremonial aplomb). However, he appears blind to their actions, and thus *continues* to sing – does *he* not believe *them*? Does habitual behavior, in the practice of a belief, reflect genuine understanding of purpose? Is it, (or perhaps *why* is it), necessary for beliefs to be collectively performed?

This exhibition, titled **'Singing to the choir?'** metaphorically ponders on this aforementioned scene, though from three distinctly different artistic perspectives - *Phan Anh, Trần Minh Đức* and *Ngọc Nâu* - each presenting their own reflections on humanity's demonstrated attachment of purpose to an intangible realm justifying the meaning and purpose of life.

Karl Marx once said 'Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people'. Marx refers here to organized religions, believing the illusions they inculcate prevent

society from examining the reality before them. In many ways, these artists examine similar sentiment, removing the opiate (social assumptions) from their study of nature, culture and spirituality, believing the religiosity surrounding their value (the stories and rituals we recite and practice) in need of re-interpretation in our 21st Century worlds. In this exhibition particular objects/symbols of knowledge are of focus – an undecipherable handbook; an arm fragment from a sculptural monument; a digitized oracle – each investigating the potential blindness of faith where the instrument of knowledge (that knowing of fact is true) possesses the weight of doubt; is accessible as dismembered memory only; or increasingly reliant on virtual transmission.

'**Singing to the choir?**' is curated by *Zoe Butt* and *Bill Nguyễn*, and remains on view until 19 January, 2020.

Image caption: Ngọc Nâu. Work in progress for 'Singing to the choir?' Photographic collage. Courtesy of the artist

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Note to the editors:

Phan Anh (b. 1990, HCMC) is a multidisciplinary artist. He graduated from the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts University and received his MFA from Utrecht School of the Arts (The Netherlands). His art refers to personal and collective memories exploring both mental and physical possibilities of human-ness in particular questioning constructs of belief and their abstraction. For him, art has always been an honest effort to make sense of himself as an individual who plays an unpredictable part in social, psychological and spiritual phenomena. Phan Anh was curatorial assistant at Zero Station Art Space (HCMC) and has previously tutored at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Saigon University. He is now a full time artist and co-curator of the Đường Chay experimental project. Recent exhibitions include: 'Museum of the mind' (solo), HCMC, 2018; 'Prospects: Before You Ask Me To Stay', Research Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale, 2015; 'Boiler Room: A Creature Called Soft Machine', IMPAKT Festival, Academie Galerie, Utrecht, 2014. In 2017 he was the winner of the Dogma Prize, HCMC. He currently lives and works in HCMC.

Trần Minh Đức (b. 1982, HCMC) is interested in the interactions between the collective and individual, the local and the foreign. His practice interrogates what it means to be Vietnamese in the complex fabric of today's conflicted world. He graduated from the painting department of the College of Culture and Arts of Ho Chi Minh City, his work spanning performance, photography, collage, print-making and installation, exploring social memory and cultural archives through an investigation of historical narrative, colonialism, imperialism and the lasting impact of war and migration. In 2015 he received Fellowship from the Asian Cultural Council, NYC; and

in 2017, an artist-in-resident at Art in General, NYC. Recent projects include: 'Two Headed Raincoat', Haenghwatang, Seoul, Korea, 2018; 'Indexmakers', Le 19 Crac, Montbeliard, France, 2018; 'Art in Flux', La Maison d'Art Private Gallery, New York, USA, 2017; 'Anywhere but Here' Betonsalon – Centre for Art and Research, Paris, France, 2016; 'Happiness lies beyond the clouds', San Art, HCMC, Vietnam, 2016.

Ngọc Nâu (b. 1989, Thai Nguyen) is a multimedia artist who graduated from the Vietnam Fine Art University, majoring in Art History and Criticism. Ngoc Nau strives to shine light on how human greed and ignorance possess a blind fascination with modernization, which has affected the way we believe, practice, and pay respect to our cultural memory, especially within the context of the digital influences on our everyday life today. Her work spans the moving image, video (experimenting with augmented reality) and photography. Select recent exhibitions include: 'South Wind Rises Asia-Pacific Contemporary Art Exhibition', Taiwan Art Education Center, Taiwan, 2018; 'Asian Diva: The Muse and the Monster', Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, 2017; 'In Search of Miss Ruthless', Parasite, Hong Kong, 2017; 'Technophobe', The Factory, HCMC, 2016.

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