

silent intimacy

solo exhibition by
Đặng Thùy Anh

08.11.2019
19.01.2020



AS PART OF:

materialize

ORGANIZED & SPONSORED BY:

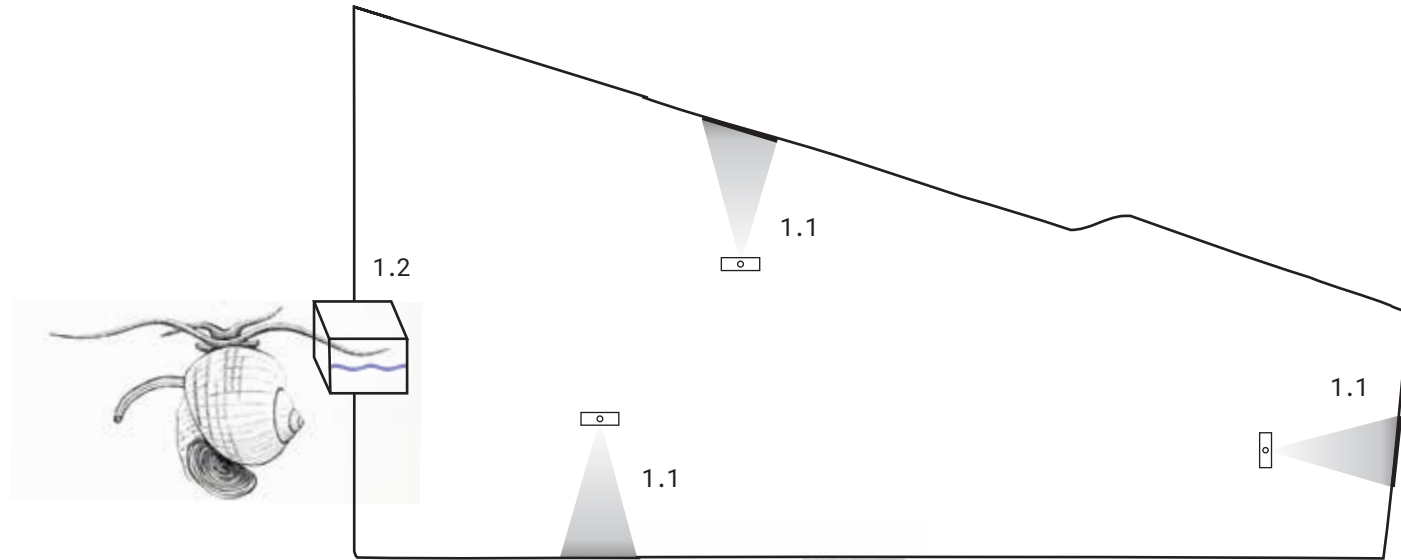
THE FACTORY
CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTRE

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1. All that is solid
Dimensions variable

1.1. Vertical Day
(from All that is solid)
2019
Sculptural 3-channel
video installation,
color, sound; perspex
Video duration:
00:41, 01:57, 3:26
5 Ed. + 1 AP

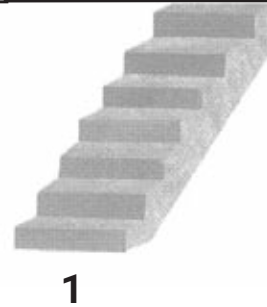
1.2. Drifting
(from All that is solid)
2019
Glass tank, snails,
cassette tape, gravel,
chess piece, wood-
en-framed peeler,
lightbulb, perspex cube
tree trunk
Various sizes
Unique

2. Melts into air
Dimensions variable

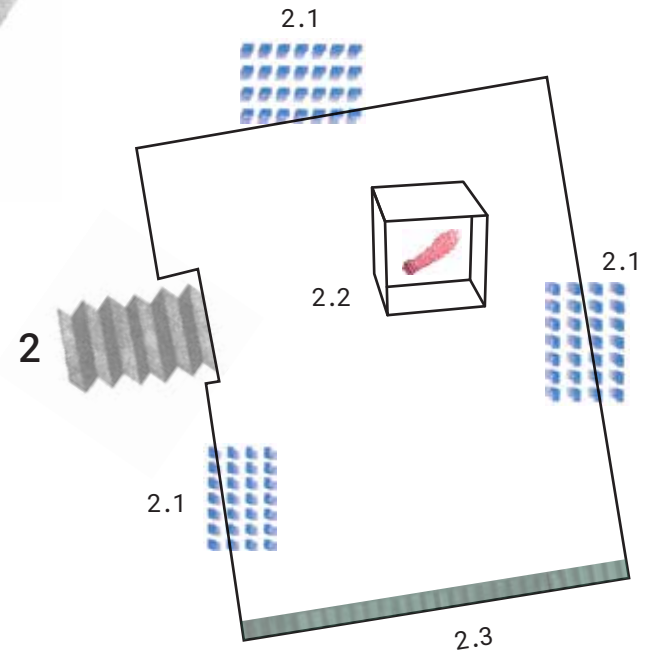
2.1. Waiting
(from Melts into air)
2019
Installation, cube
sculpture (snail
eggs, epoxy resin)
36 cubes
6,5 x 6,5 x 6,5cm/cube
Unique

2.2. Never again
(from Melts into air)
2018
Installation, color
photograph on print
2970 photographs,
4x6 cm/photo
5 Ed. + 1 AP

2.3. Out of sight
(from Melts into air)
Corrugated iron sheet
Dimensions variable



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'Silent Intimacy' is Đặng Thùy Anh's first solo exhibition with her artistic endeavor working with apple snails, contemplatively laced with the impact of urbanization on human life. In contrast with the expectations of an art object, one that is often static and pleasant-looking, this exhibition is characterized by mischievous apple snails, a creature in a state of flux, as its body morphs beneath its shell each day. Apple snails were introduced to Vietnamese farmers in the 1980s to increase nutrition in feed for domestic animals; however, due to their rapid growth, these mollusks eventually became a threat to Vietnamese agriculture, damaging crops and jeopardizing the life of native snails and farmers' crops. Intrigued by the reckless evolution and also the absurd yet lyrical presence of these snails, Thùy Anh finds them a perfect mirror for human beings in their voracious drive to growth - but also to death. In this exhibition, consisting of site-specific installations, sculptures, photographs and video, each artwork not only references images of these snails in human-like built environments, but also embeds the actual snails within the actual exhibition - a show that thus changes with time, made visible by their growth.

Whilst also a designer, Thùy Anh visually and structurally transforms the upper mezzanine galleries of The Factory so that it corresponds to the motifs and materiality of architectural forms that dominate the design of urban city space. This transformation of the gallery space gives shape to two site-specific installations named 'All that is solid' and 'Melts into air' (inspired by Marshall Berman's book written about the experience of modernity of the same title). Moving through these works is akin to moving across an anonymous metropolis, where, in all directions, we as audience, conceived as urban dwellers, are besieged by the repetition of unnatural parallel lines and perpendiculars made out of steel, iron, glass and concrete. In the space conceived as 'Melts into air', thousands of pocket-sized images of baby snails ('Never Again') take over the walls, while on the floor, cube-like sculptures containing snail eggs ('Waiting') queue in lines. It seems as if a younger generation of snails is in place, like a marching military band, dancing to the rhythm of discipline. The architectural tendencies behind Thuy Anh's artistic thinking resonate with the international spirit of modern architecture at its emergence in the late 19th century. Early modern architecture - characterized by technological advancements, a radical simplification of form, the use of lightweight, mass-produced, industrial materials, and the rejection of ornament - was first prompted by avant-garde architects (Bauhaus School of Design, De Stijl, Frank Lloyd Wright, Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, to name a few) in aesthetic defiance of classical architecture (that dominated European and American architecture particularly). Later on architects took on the task of the time, reconstructing

buildings and cities devastated by World Wars. Nowadays, choices of material and form seem irrelevant, returning to ash (in the sense that structures are quickly built and torn down again), especially in rapidly developing countries in the wake of capitalism (like Vietnam today), resorting to seemingly pragmatic, cost-effective (short-sighted), mass-produced formula for affordable housing with less interest in aesthetic and humanistic aims.

Entering the other space of the exhibition is like leaving gravity behind and leaping into a sci-fi typography. With the walls and floor all replaced by a material of the same quality as glass, the whole structure thus referencing the glass facade utilized particularly in high-rise buildings. Glass became an architectural material in c.1851, owing to the industrial revolution that increased its availability on a large scale, alongside iron and steel framing, which consequently resulted in massive building facades of glass. Skyscrapers with this reflective material (and thus character) has become a signature for metropolis around the world, their height becoming a competitive global accomplishment (think the Landmark 81 in Saigon or the Burj Khalifa in Dubai). Despite the celebrated transparency and authority that glass exudes, architecture critic Justin Davidson accuses glass of lacking '... the ability to absorb infusions of history and memory and project it into the present...'. Indeed, in 'All that is solid', Thùy Anh translates her own puzzlement experienced at the foot of such glass skyscrapers, a complete opposite of her long-standing collective home (nhà tập thể) that has sheltered four generations of the artist's extended family since the 1960s. While the former reach towards the sky, claiming its position and conquest in height; the latter, originally belonging to the state-subsidized collective zone, stretches itself laterally into its surroundings. For Thùy Anh, her family home is layered with memory etched in its architectural ad hoc additions, where the present is layered upon its past. However, this home is soon to be demolished and buried, returning as a high-rise complex (and alienated from her family's memory of site, as they must all relocate). To give contrast to this speed of change and alienation, the artist plays with moving images - not of working machines, flickering neon lights or stock indexes, but bits and pieces of everyday poetry in motion - laced with domestic items she collected in construction sites near her house, all swirling in various state of decay. It is in this dusted assemblage of memories and things that the apple snails dwell and roam.

Gone are the days of Charles Baudelaire's *flâneur*, or folk

poet Nguyễn Bảo Sinh's *bát phố* (street passers-by), today we lose ourselves not only to the speed of industrial, modern busyness, but also to the spatial organization of the city, which prioritizes commercial labour over leisure; uniformity and order over character and identity. Such narratives lend themselves to the materialization of Silent Intimacy, a cynically playful, and blind manifestation of humanity's social masterplan. Perhaps the more we contemplate this exhibition, the more it reveals a labyrinth of the mind, constantly wandering between a post-human fiction and a stark reflection of the reality we live in, slightly tinged with a hue of black humor.

Essay: Vân Đỗ

Currently living and working in Ho Chi Minh City, **Đặng Thuỳ Anh** (b. 1996, Hanoi) graduated from Vietnam University of Fine Arts in 2019, majoring in Graphic Design. Since 2017, Thuỳ Anh has engaged more frequently in experimental artistic practice through various performance art events and exploring different mediums such as installation, photography and conceptual approaches to art making. Her interest revolves around the connection between human and nature, visual motifs that are stereotypically understood and the impact of social prejudice towards the conceptualization of gender. Thuỳ Anh often uses living organisms, her own body and her personal archives as materials in her art. Selected exhibitions include: Month of Art Practice (Heritage Space, Hanoi, 2018); Open Studio I, II & III (Á Space, Hanoi, 2018); Emerging Artists 6 (Nhà Sàn Collective, Hanoi, 2018); NIPAF Festival/IN:ACT (Nhà Sàn Collective, Hanoi, 2017 and 2019).

Materialize is an ongoing exhibition program, initiated by The Factory in 2017, in response to the great lack of space and opportunity for Vietnamese artists to experiment and display their art in Vietnam. This program seeks artists willing to be challenged to extend their experimentation with concept and media beyond their official training and general assumptions about art, who understand that to exhibit their work demands consideration of their audience and how their art is received and understood by a visiting general public.

The Factory The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre is the first purpose-built space for contemporary art in Vietnam. As an independent organization, we are a 'factory' of critical ideas; a site of constant physical transformation; a network of people who strive to speak about tangible and intangible cultural memories that matter and are indelibly unique. We understand the social system that we operate, but we want to challenge its limits, acknowledging artists today as interdisciplinary thinkers who reveal unique ways of conceiving our journey into the 21st Century – their ideas we thus nurture and celebrate as constructive observations of our social world.

¹For example, one of the most influential postwar projects by Le Corbusier (the forward-thinking, controversial Swiss architect who championed urban planning and architecture that raised the life quality of the lower working class), was the first of the Unité d'Habitation (Housing Unit) projects called Cité radieuse (The Radiant City), in the heavily war-torn Marseille, France, comprised of 327 buildings able to house up to 1,600 inhabitants.