

PRESS RELEASE

Thủy Nguyễn - An Everyday Dream

A fashion exhibition curated by Dolla S. Merrillees

The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, Ho Chi Minh City | Opening 7 November 2020



Curated in collaboration with Thủy Nguyễn herself, this exhibition presented by The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, spans Thủy Nguyễn's fashion career, featuring over 60 garments including her signature áo dài and ready-to-wear collections, alongside striking embroidery and brocade designs and never-before-seen objects and accessories from her own personal collection. The exhibition brings into focus Thủy's unique creative perspective presented in a series of strikingly designed mise en scène. It celebrates the creative process and the dynamic fluid designs of contemporary Vietnamese fashion both within Vietnam itself and in the global context.

Described variously as a visual artist, fashion designer, change maker, influencer, trailblazer, entrepreneur and businesswoman (1), Thủy Nguyễn's creative practice spans diverse disciplines including painting, art installations, film, fashion and design. In 2021, Thủy celebrates ten years at the helm of her eponymous label, 'THUY DESIGN HOUSE' (recognized as a leading fashion house in this fast-growing industry in Vietnam) and is thus keen to reflect on, and share her life, in fashion.

While Thủy did not formally train as a fashion designer, her creative practice is built up of layered meanings and an understanding of the symbiosis between tradition and innovation, between East and West. Thủy values new ideas and individuality, and inspiring imagination and creativity are central to her ethos - an attitude that underpins and informs her visual arts practice and by extension, her fashion. For Thủy, 'painting and fashion have the same elements – colours and shapes' (2). However, this understates her designs most important characteristics, including an emphasis on form and construction, ornamentation and exaggeration, drama and flamboyance. 'Thủy designs entirely on her own terms' says curator Dolla S. Merrillees, 'refusing to compromise, never satisfied and constantly on the lookout for new things, new goals.'

'The Vietnamese fashion landscape has undergone remarkable development in the past ten years', says Kien Nguyễn, Director of THUY DESIGN HOUSE, 'with Vietnam International Fashion Week in 2014 welcoming for the

first time, international designers to participate alongside local peers, contributing to the growth of visibility of Vietnamese talent on catwalks in New York, London, Milan, Paris and more’.

Inspired in title by ‘Ngâm Ngủ’, a famous Vietnamese song, *Thủy Nguyễn - An Everyday Dream*, is an exhibition that brings together over 100 objects, including 60 ‘looks’ that will focus on different thematic elements of ‘THUY DESIGN HOUSE’, vividly illustrating the diversity and richness of the collections and their inspirations. Her collections are often fashioned around narratives such as motherhood, home, spirituality and nature. Vietnamese idioms, folk mythology and legends and Vietnamese modern art, are recurring motifs in Thủy’s designs, reflecting her deeply rooted connection to Vietnamese culture and its traditions.

Zoe Butt, Artistic Director of The Factory shares, “In organizing this exhibition, The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre furthers its commitment to interdisciplinarity in the study and showcase of the Fine Arts, believing experimentation and innovation in creativity from across all facets of human production, is of immense value in understanding the role of contemporary art in society today – a conversation yet to be engaged in Vietnam’s Fine Art educational curricula.”

This exhibition will be accompanied by a public program of talks, film screening and workshops. A full colour exhibition catalogue will also be published with an essay by Professor Ann Marie Leshkovich, College of the Holy Cross, USA.

Thủy Nguyễn - An Everyday Dream is curated by Dolla S. Merrillees. Organized by The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, co-produced with THUY DESIGN HOUSE. It will remain on view, at The Factory, until 6 February, 2021.

Please find illustrative imagery below

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Notes for the editor:

Thủy Nguyễn graduated from the Vietnam University of Fine Art, Hanoi and gained a PhD in Fine Art from the National Academy of Fine Art and Architecture, Kiev (Ukraine). Despite not receiving formal training, Thủy boldly embarked on her fashion journey by opening up the first Thuy Design House store on Đồng Khởi, Saigon, in 2011. What contributes to her success is that her designs have imaginative quality, embracing the complexity of femininity in today’s Vietnam. Thủy is committed to exploring traditional Vietnamese cultural heritage. Her collections often take inspiration from historical textiles, artistic handicrafts and ceramics, paintings by 20th century Vietnamese masters (who graduated from The École supérieure des Beaux-Arts de l’Indochine), and especially the áo dài - a symbol of Vietnamese culture - amongst other traditional fashion accessories.

The diverse range of Thủy’s creative practice can also be seen through her role as producer of several films such as “The Tailor” (Cô Ba Sài Gòn) - a romantic comedy highlighting the old Saigon lifestyle through the evolution of the áo dài. Within the artistic community, she is known as ‘Tia-Thủy Nguyễn’, particularly in her role as the founder of ‘The Factory Contemporary Arts Center’ in Ho Chi Minh City, established in 2016 (the first purpose-built space for contemporary art in Vietnam). In 2019, Thủy was listed as one of the fifty most influential women by Forbes Vietnam for her work and contribution to design, visual arts and creative business.

THUY DESIGN HOUSE is a luxury fashion house that focuses on womenswear, headquartered in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City), Vietnam. Established in 2011, the brand is known for its extensive use of brocade and silk, with a vibrant and expressive use of colour incorporating embellished adornment, locally inspired by Vietnamese craft techniques. Its signature style features a blend of tradition and modernity - both in terms of form and in terms of the changing view of womanhood and femininity. THUY DESIGN HOUSE carries both ready to wear and specially-designed garments as well as accessories.

Dolla S. Merrillees is a curator, cultural producer, consultant and author of *The Woodcutter's Wife: A Stepmother's Tale* (2007). Merrillees is an accomplished public speaker and writer and has contributed to numerous online and print publications. Merrillees was the former Director of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS) as well as having been Director of Curatorial, Collections and Exhibitions at MAAS since the beginning of 2014. Merrillees was responsible for the establishment of the *MAAS Centre for Fashion*, the first such centre of excellence in an Australian cultural institution, as well as developing strategic partnerships with the Australian Fashion Chamber and the fashion industry. Fashion and design exhibitions developed and realised under her Directorship included amongst others *Love Is: Australian wedding fashion*; *Collette Dinnigan: Unlaced*; *Out of Hand: Materialising the Digital*; and *A Fine Possession: jewellery and identity*.

Merrillees is currently undertaking a Master of Philosophy at the University of Sydney and most recently was working as Project Leader at Western Sydney University developing their arts and culture decadal strategy, as well as consulting for the University of Tasmania and the City of Launceston. Merrillees was previously Associate Director, Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation (SCAF) where she managed over 16 projects and oversaw the production and design of 17 publications. Merrillees sat on the Curatorial Advisory Committee, City of Sydney, the Advisory Board, Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University and is a member of Chief Executive Women. Merrillees also sits on the SCCI (Sherman Centre for Culture and Ideas) Fashion Hub Advisory Committee and is one of three SCCI Global Emissaries. Merrillees is represented by Silverfox Management Group, Sydney and Grey Models, London.

The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre ('The Factory') is the first purpose-built space for showcasing contemporary art in Vietnam, established in 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 community space for hire; replete with café and restaurant. All profit from the sale of art and business on-site supports the running costs of its Arts Centre. www.factoryartscentre.com

TỔ CHỨC:
ORGANIZED BY: **THE FACTORY**
CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTRE

ĐỒNG TỔ CHỨC:
CO-PRODUCED WITH: **THUY DESIGN HOUSE**

ĐỐI TÁC TRUYỀN THÔNG:
PROMOTIONAL PARTNER: **toong**

(1) Malcolm, L 2019, 'Women Trailblazers in Vietnam', COBO, August 8, viewed 10 March 2020

<<https://www.cobosocial.com/dossiers/women-trailblazers-vietnam/>>

(2) Hoang, S 2019, 'Milestones on the Artistic Path', Culture Magazin, 31 January, viewed 10 March 2020 <

<https://www.culturemagazin.com/milestones-on-the-artistic-path/>>

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Lúng Liếng collection 2015 | Digital print on brocade
Model: Ngô Thanh Vân | Photographer: Tang Tang | Heritage Fashion Magazine, 2015



Lúng Liếng collection 2015 | Digital print on brocade
Model: Ngô Thanh Vân | Photographer: Tang Tang | Heritage Fashion Magazine, 2015



Cô Ba Sài Gòn collection 2017 | Digital print on brocade
Model: Diễm My | Photographer: Tang Tang | Heritage Fashion Magazine, 2017



Tinh Tang collection 2019 | digital print & 3D beading on brocade
Model: Thanh Hằng | Photographer: Tang Tang | Heritage Fashion Magazine, 2019