

các ghi chú
về giấy
notes on paper

4.10 - 27.10.2022

A vernacular material in both everyday life and art, paper has never ceased to inspire artists for its ubiquity, versatility, and incredible socio-historical weight — paper is synonymous with knowledge transmission and archiving. From a site where ideas could delve, paper is also a medium that evolves together with ideas as its varying sizes, textures, and thickness allow for surface and structural manipulation. Bringing together works by François Andes, Ha Manh Thang, Nguyen Huy An, Trong Gia Nguyen, Nguyen Manh Hung and Nguyen Tran Nam, *Notes on Paper* highlights the kaleidoscopic nature of this unassuming material, at the same examining the gestures that come along with it such as mark-making, painting, writing, and erasing.

Conjuring up the receding landscape of the countryside of Northern Vietnam, Ha Manh Thang's series *Far in the North* (2013 – ongoing) is both an archiving attempt and a philosophical reflection on the finitude of life. The paper, with its flair for resistance, now bears the significance of the identities of now-defunct temples and pagodas as Thang layers his memory of them and their original blueprints. Nguyen Huy An manages to capture the essence of the Northern Vietnamese countryside through the image of the pond and water temples — where most of the village activities take place. What at first looks like a static, non-directional round mass as the ink seeps into the pulp of the *Dó* paper, reveals itself to be a symbol laden with stories: the legacy and heritage of communal lifestyle, and the artist's personal rumination on being.

Repetition, especially that of his quirky subject matter — usually an odd juxtaposition between the feudal and contemporary periods, is consistently seen throughout Nguyen Manh Hung's practice. It is a method Hung uses to highlight the perpetual contradictory nature of everything that strikes him as inevitable. The fire truck — an emergency vehicle, now has its tyres replaced by turtles moving in different directions, which is a playful depiction of the not-so-harmonious coordination amongst individuals in a collective. Instead of sitting in his palanquin, the king now roams in what appears to be a half of a car that could not move on its own, suggesting the unique localisation of Western inventions in Vietnam. As fragments from the pictorial epic *The crossing of disaster* (2020), which is a combination of whimsical mythical characters, alluring flora, and fauna, François Andes' paintings and sketches break down the multiple influences that inform his artistic practice: Greek mythology, Yoruba culture, Vietnamese folklore, and French heritage. Also using the image of a turtle, however, Andes' paintings and drawings show his appreciation for a creature that is closely linked to Vietnamese folkloric belief and nationalism.

Nguyen Tran Nam's stop-motion video *Through the looking glass* (2022) guides us through an imaginary underground maze of thirteen tunnels. Instead of a lush magical world like in *Alice in Wonderland*, or the gruesome hell in Dante's *Inferno*, life in each tunnel is not that much different from our current reality. Featuring ten titles from the series *Library (Anthology for Beginners)* (2007 – ongoing), Trong Gia Nguyen reframes the notion of the library as a repository of knowledge, in particular how books accumulate and disseminate information and ideas. Fashioned as library cards, the rice *books* disregard all hierarchy in the collected words – articles like 'the' and 'a' and prepositions such as 'on' and 'with' carry equal weight as more charged, descriptive words subverting the writers' prose.

A continuation of his 2016 project of the same title in which Huy An explores the myths of Guan Yin in modern context, this iteration of *Thousand arms and Thousand eyes* is a distillation of the artist's poetical and comical commentary on the commercialisation of sacred symbols. Wrinkled, worn-out found receipts become the sole evidence, which justifies the value of a Guan Yin's arm — supposedly a symbol of the deity's blessings and supernatural power, while at the same time serving as a makeshift space for rethinking popular belief.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

FRANÇOIS ANDES (b. 1969)

Working across different mediums from drawing and painting, to sculpture and performance, François Andes' practice weaves together various beliefs and myths of both Western and Asian cultures creating an imaginative world of whimsical characters and alluring flora and fauna. What seems like a pictorial fairytale from afar reveals scenes of violence and tension upon closer inspection. His works are a means for him to question the relationship between man and nature, and between people and their histories.

HA MANH THANG (b. 1980)

Ha Manh Thang's expansive artistic practice has evolved from studies of Vietnam's cultural and social history, to meditative observations of existence, journeying from symbolism and spirituality to the eventual nihilism of nothingness: where nature and physical objects find their ultimate beginning. His highly methodical and precise approach to painting – the artist labours over the planning of a composition before any paint has touched the canvas – nevertheless leaves room for his brushmarks to evoke sensory experiences beyond the visual alone. His canvases, rendered in heavy impasto, almost transmute paint media into earthly materials like mud or soil, wood or stone.

NGUYEN HUY AN (b. 1982)

Known for performances that are almost meditative in the precision they are undertaken with, Nguyen Huy An measures, captures and consolidates what is intangible, formless and conceptual, using the most humble of materials: strands of hair, threads of textile, coal, ink, dust... The vividly shadowy and melancholic hue of these materials and the personal meaning Nguyen attaches to them – the hair of his mother, the textile threads of crafters from his childhood village – convey a yearning for fading times in the face of brutal modernity.

TRONG GIA NGUYEN (b. 1971)

Trong Gia Nguyen's wide array of works examines structures of power in their myriad forms. Regularly employing humor while at other times engaging sober reflection, Nguyen's work elevates the condition of doubt as it reveals and disrupts the undercarriage of our most trusted spaces – domestic, cultural, political, and economical.

NGUYEN MANH HUNG (b. 1976)

In his humorous and satirical work, Nguyen Manh Hung creates a surrealist universe that is as much an escapist's hopeful haven as a defiant look in the eye of Vietnam's urbanization reality in the 21st century. Soviet-style apartment buildings, military vehicles, soldiers, domestic animals and plastic shopping bags make frequent cameos throughout an expansive, multi-disciplinary oeuvre that includes sketches, paintings, photos, sculptures and installations. Informed by his own personal history, the images often appear on incongruous scales and in Hopper-esque situations.

NGUYEN TRAN NAM (b. 1979)

Currently based in Hanoi, Nguyen Tran Nam is a visual artist and also a member of Nhà Sàn Studio and Nhà Sàn Collective. Since graduating from the Vietnam University of Fine Art in 2003, Nam has been working with a diverse body of multimedia work. At times dark and heavy, others playful and sarcastic, his work makes visible both past and present-day social, political and historical issues of Vietnam, while highlighting the individual tales of and human relationships among people of different social groups.

