

PHORS

Art as Visual Poetry

MARVELOUS METAPHORS

Presented by VAALA (Vietnamese American Arts & Letters Association)

MARVELOU

August 26 - November 5, 2011

ETAPHORS

Marvelous Metaphors: Art as Visual Poetry (Ăn Dụ Nhiệm Mầu: Mỹ Thuật Như Thi Ca) encourages audiences to read visual art in the same way as poetry—through the contemplation of visual metaphors that play with interpretive possibilities. In the first century B.C.E., the Roman poet Horace ruminated on the relationship between poetry and art, “ut pictura poesis,” or “as is painting, so is poetry.” His observation on this kinship is shared in Asian artistic traditions, including Vietnam, in which poetry, painting and calligraphy constitute the three perfections of scholarly virtues. An important figure in Vietnam’s New Poetry Movement, poet Thế Lữ (b 1907, d 1989) also brought this connection together with music in the following lines from “Cây Đàn Muôn Điệu” (“The Versatile Instrument”):

With my muse I have a versatile lute
With my muse I have a multicolored brush.
I want to be a magical artist
Wielding colors and sounds as my medium.

These mediums have bonded artists and writers for centuries, many of whom take up the activity of the other to find new perspectives and inspirations. Art and poetry both use metaphors to convey abstract ideas and emotions—things that ordinary language cannot fully express. *Marvelous Metaphors: Art as Visual Poetry* is inspired by the metaphor as a versatile instrument that can play with words and images interchangeably. Featuring new faces to VAALA, this exhibition offers a wide array of artistic media including photo-works, paintings on canvas, fiber arts, ceramics, inks on paper, drawings, book-art, sculptures and other mixed media. The six artists selected for this exhibition are very diverse in subjectivity and technical approach; however, what they all have in common are works that invite viewers to delve into the many overlays of meaning.

TRINH MAI

TRINH PONCE

DAO STROM

TAMMY NGUYEN

CHRISTINE NGUYEN

VAN TRAN

Cây Đàn Muôn Điệu

by Thế Lữ

Tôi là người bộ hành phiêu lãng
Đường trần gian xuôi ngược để vui chơi
Tìm cảm giác hay trong tiếng khóc, câu cười,
Trong lúc gian lao, trong giờ sung sướng,
Khí phấn đấu cũng như hồi mơ tưởng.
Tôi yêu đời cùng với cảnh lâm than,
Cảnh thương tâm, ghê gớm hay dịu dàng.
Cảnh rực rỡ, ái ân hay dữ dội.
Anh dù bảo: tình tình tôi thay đổi,
Không chuyên tâm, không chủ nghĩa: nhưng cần chi?
Tôi chỉ là một khách tình si
Ham vẻ đẹp có muôn hình muôn thể.
Mượn giấy bút nàng Ly-Tao tôi vẽ,
Mượn cây đàn ngàn phím, tôi ca
Và đẹp u trầm, đắm đuối, hay ngây thơ,
Cũng như vẻ Đẹp cao siêu, hùng tráng
Của non nước, của thi văn tự tưởng.
Đáng yêu kiều tha thướt khách giai nhân;
Ánh trăng bùng linh hoạt nắng trời xuân;
Vẻ sâu muộn âm thầm ngày mưa gió;
Cảnh vĩ đại, sóng nghiêng trời, thác ngàn đổ;
Nét mong manh, thấp thoáng cánh hoa bay;
Cảnh cơ hàn nơi nước đọng bùn lầy;
Thú sáng lạn mơ hồ trong ảo mộng;
Chí hăng hái đua ganh đời náo động:
Tôi đều yêu, đều kiếm đều say mê.
Tôi sẵn lòng đau vì tiếng ai bi,
Và cảm khái bởi những lời hăng hái.
Tôi ngợi ca với tiếng lòng phấn khởi,
Tôi thờ than cùng thiếu nữ băng khuâng,
Tôi véo von theo tiếng sáo lung chùng,
Tôi yên ỏi với tiếng chuông huyền diệu,
Với Nàng Thơ, tôi có đàn muôn điệu;
Với Nàng Thơ, tôi có bút muôn màu;
Tôi muốn làm nhà nghệ sĩ nhiệm màu:
Lấy thanh sắc trần gian làm tài liệu.

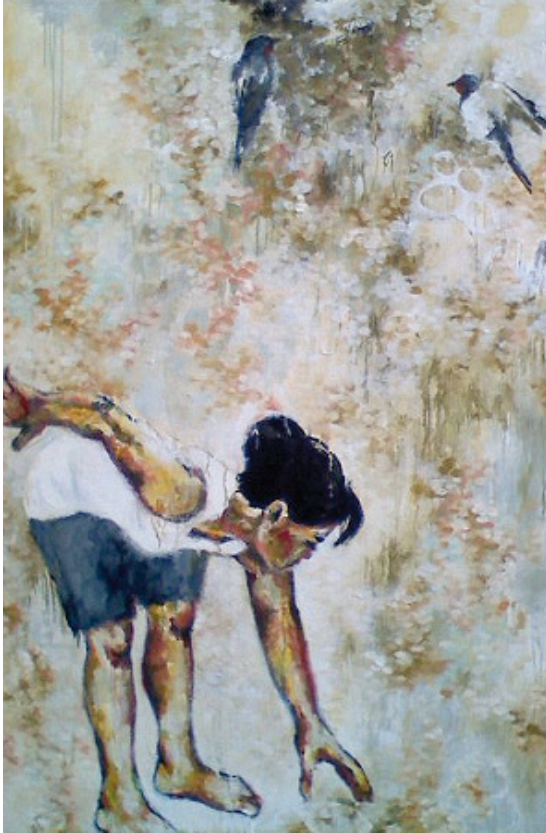
The Versatile Instrument

*To the whole wide world I set out on foot
Straight up and down the road of life for fun
In search of sensations in tears or in laughters
In times of distress or in the hours of bliss,
Whether stirred to action or during daydreams.
I love life along with its pains
In heart-rending, abhorrent, or heart-warming situations,
In scenes of glory, affection or violence.
You said my personality is changeable
Without focus or conviction: What should I care?
I am but a love-stricken man
In love with beauty in its myriad faces.
With the brush borrowed from Lady Ly Tao I paint,
To the tune of the thousand-fretted instrument I sing
Of beauty quiet and profound, passionate, or innocent
As of beauty majestic and heroic
Of nature, of literature or of thought.
The graceful lissome young beauty,
The resplendent lively spring sunshine,
The quiet melancholy of a stormy day,
Majestic scenes, towering waves, thundering falls,
Nét the flight of a delicate petal,
Grinding poverty in stagnant water,
Delightful pleasure of living a dream,
The ardent struggle of a spirited life,
I love them all, seek them all with a passion.
I'll readily suffer at heart-rending cries
And act with fervor on words of zeal.
I'll rejoice with happy voices from within
And lament at a female heart's agony.
I'll sing to the lingering tune of a flute
And feel calm at the soothing sound of bells.
With my muse I have a versatile lute
With my muse I have a multi-colored brush.
I want to be a magical artist
Wielding colors and sounds as my medium.*

Thế Lữ was the pen name of Nguyễn Thứ Lễ (b 1907, d 1989). After the 10th grade, he left school to join the Tự Lực Văn Đoàn (The Self-Reliant Literary Group) as well as the editorial boards of the *Phong Hóa* (Culture), *Ngày Nay* (Modern Times), and *Tinh Hoa* (Quintessence) magazines. He was instrumental in establishing the Phong Trào Thơ Mới (New Poetry Movement), which began in Hanoi in 1932. The movement sought to forge a new literary direction free from the strict rules of Chinese poetry. Thế Lữ himself later devoted his life entirely to drama, but his work laid the groundwork for a whole new generation of poets who demanded freedom both in form and in content.

His published works include *Mấy Vần Thơ* (Miscellaneous Poems), *Vàng và Máu* (Gold and Blood), *Bên Đường Thiên Lôi* (On the Thunderbolt Road), *Trăng Gió Ngàn* (The Moon in the Windy Woods), *Trại Bỏ Tùng Linh* (Bo Tung Linh Camp), *Ba Hồi Kinh Dị* (The Triple Horror), *Lê Phong Phóng Viên* (Inspector Le Phong) and *Gói Thuốc Lá* (The Cigarette Pack).

Source and English translation (2004) by Thomas Le, editor of *Firmament* and co-founder of Thế Hữu Văn Đoàn (www.thehuuvandan.org).



One Stone at a Time, mixed-media, 72" x 47"

Trinh Mai's current work investigates her heritage by exploring traditional imagery and symbolism. Through painting, she has been able to gain a deeper understanding of the joys and hardships experienced by her family and the Vietnamese American community. Painting is also a means for her to connect with the subconscious and the spiritual to make the intangible tangible and the unseen visible; and, perhaps most importantly, to find comfort.

Born in Harrisburg, Penn., and raised by an artistic and supportive family of musicians, composers, architects, designers and poets, Trinh currently resides in San Jose, Calif.. She holds a BFA from San Jose State University and has spent time at the University of California, Los Angeles.

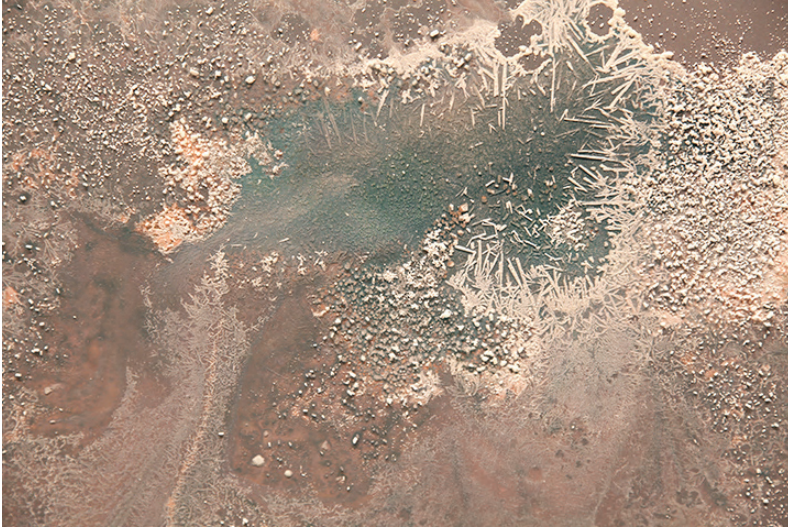


Ma Cured in Vietnam, mixed-media, 22" x 30"



Study of a Young Girl (detail), mixed-media, 24" x 24"

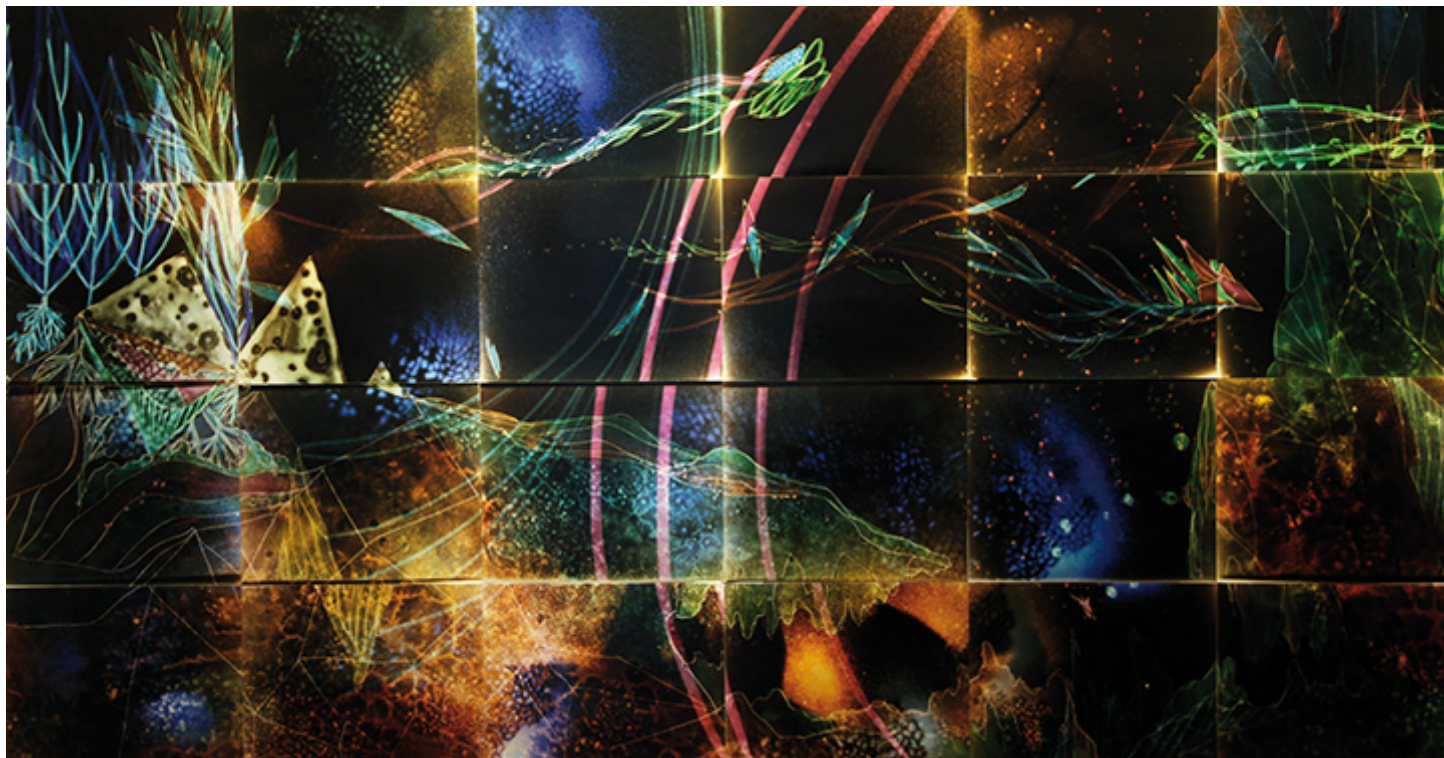
CHRISTINE NGUYEN



Untitled (Cosmos), borax, epsom salt, salt on unprocessed photographic color paper, 140" x 264"

Christine Nguyen's work draws upon the imagery of science but is not limited to technologies of the present. It imagines that the depths of the ocean reach into outer space, that through an organic prism, vision can fluctuate between the micro- and macroscopic. Christine has been developing a personal cosmology in which commonalities among species, forms, and environment become visible and expressive, suggesting past narratives and possible futures. The forms and environs in her work sometimes migrate into new pieces, establishing new systems. There are no waste materials in these worlds: vision is a renewable resource.

Currently residing in Los Angeles, Christine received her BFA from California State University, Long Beach and MFA from the University of California, Irvine. Her work has been featured at the Armand Hammer Museum (Project), Michael Kohn Gallery, Andrewshire Gallery, and Sam Lee Gallery in Los Angeles, and been included in group exhibitions at the Kunsthalle zu Kiel, Kiel, Germany; Laguna Beach Art Museum, Laguna Beach, Calif.; 4-F Gallery, Los Angeles, PH Gallery, New York; San Art, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; Sprueth Magers Projekte, Munich, Germany; and 10 Chancery Lane Gallery, Hong Kong.



Powers of the Cosmic Dusty Seas, c-prints, 60" x 504"

TAMMY NGUYEN



Untitled, ink on paper, 43" x 30"

Tammy Nguyen explores a variety of mediums in her practice—oil painting, drawing, bookmaking, embroidery, etc. She is intrigued with ideas of traditionalism in contemporary culture, inspired by calligraphy in the Middle East and Asia, and humored by absurdity. Recently, Tammy has been investigating ideas of power through endurance combined with combat as a moment of decision making. As such, many of her forms are taken from different “still shots” in martial arts and traditional portraits of pastime royalty. The exploration, and arguably moment of sheer excitement, is when she takes these themes and puts them through different material processes. It is from the process of working with many materials that her subject matter evolves—drawings informing sculptures, and sculptures informing paintings.

Tammy Nguyen was born in San Francisco and received her BFA from the Cooper Union School of Art in New York City. In 2007, she moved to Vietnam on a Fulbright grant to study lacquer painting. She currently resides in New Haven, Conn. where she is an MFA candidate at the Yale School of Art.



Untitled, ink on paper, 43" x 30"



Untitled, ink on paper, 43" x 30"

TRINH PONCE

Sometimes abstract and fluid in form, Trinh Ponce's meticulously hand-woven pieces can also be structural and literal. Using natural materials, she creates metaphorical shapes that force viewers to make their own interpretations, and in this process they form an emotional connection with the artwork.

Born in Vietnam, Trinh and her family relocated to the United States in 1987. While studying graphic design at California State University, Long Beach, she developed an interest in fiber arts. In 2003 she graduated with a BFA degree in fiber arts and 3D design. Trinh currently lives and practices in Southern California.



Untitled, natural fiber, 4.5" x 23.5"



Untitled (detail), natural fiber, 4" x 18"



Untitled, natural fiber, 12" x 12"

DAO STROM

Dao Strom is a writer of books and songs. She was born in Saigon, Vietnam and grew up in the Sierra Nevada foothills of Northern California. She has lived in New York City, San Francisco, Iowa City, Austin, Juneau, and now calls Portland, Oregon home. She holds an MFA from the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop and a BA in Film Production from San Francisco State University.



my given name is tiêu-dao....

i was born in Viet Nam, in the wake of a war.

i am the daughter of writers,

*i am also the daughter of a political prisoner. but i followed
my mother -*

*we crossed oceans & slept under tents & wore clothing given us
by strangers.*

i grew up in a land i was led to believe had rescued us.

yrs later i begin to ask

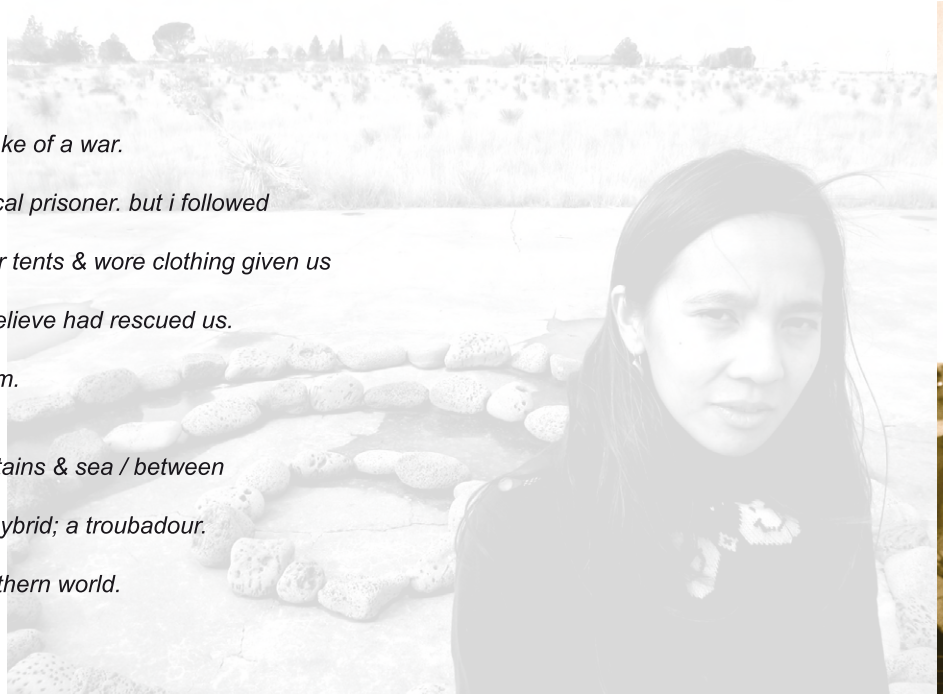
what it was we were rescued from.

i am one of the children divided

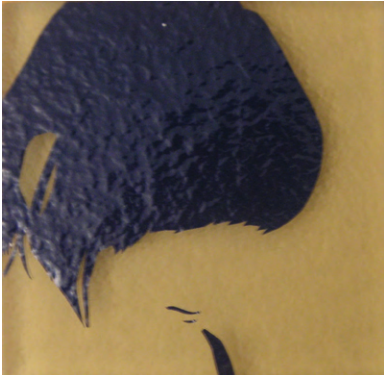
*between mother & father / mountains & sea / between
geographies.*

i am part of the middle world; a hybrid; a troubadour.

these are my notes from the southern world.



VAN TRAN



In Fragments (detail), collaboration with Eric Baskauskas, vinyl paper, ink, glass tiles, each tile 4" x 4"

Van Tran believes that the arts have the capacity to embed itself within a broader social realm as current social conditions render a new kind of creative practice: research. Her relationship with the arts, often treated with reflection and exploration, is one that she envisions to be an intersecting vehicle between the informal and the contemporary. There is something to be said about the connections we make – both socially and spatially – as we move in our day-to-day activity. Van's disparate attempts at finding these connections form the bulk of her recent experiential research. The results have been displayed in various iterations of mapping, diagramming, cataloguing, and informal interventions that are often performative and participatory.

Van received her BA in visual art – Studio with Honors at the University of California, San Diego. Besides artmaking, she has also worked as a writer and teaching artist for various non-profit arts organizations. She is currently pursuing her MFA in public and social practice at the University of California, Santa Barbara, California.

www.thinkcollectedisseminate.weebly.com



Bench, digital image, variable dimensions



Indoor/Outdoor, site-specific installation with sod, orange cord, weather balloon, video, posters, variable dimensions

MARVELOUS META

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Gallery hours: Saturday & Sunday
12:00 pm - 5:00 pm
(and by appointment)

US METAPHORS

Vietnamese American Arts & Letters Association (VAALA) is a community-based, 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. Established in 1991, VAALA has organized numerous cultural events such as art exhibitions, book fairs, book signings, recitals, plays, lectures, the biennial Vietnamese International Film Festival (VIFF), the biennial Cinema Symposium, the annual Children's Moon Festival Art Contest and year-long art and music classes.



PHORS

This exhibition was curated for VAALA by Thuy N. D. Tran, doctoral candidate in the Department of History of Art and Architecture at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her research interests include politics of identity in contemporary visual culture. She received her MA in art history from Arizona State University and her BA in art history from the University of California, Los Angeles with dual minors in cultural anthropology and museum studies.

Graphics by www.studiodinh.com

MARVELOUS M