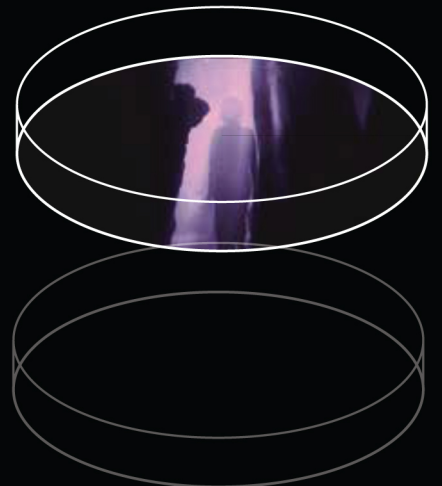
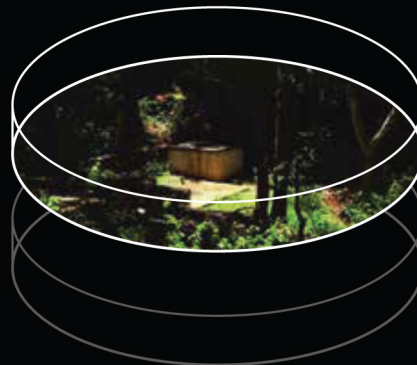
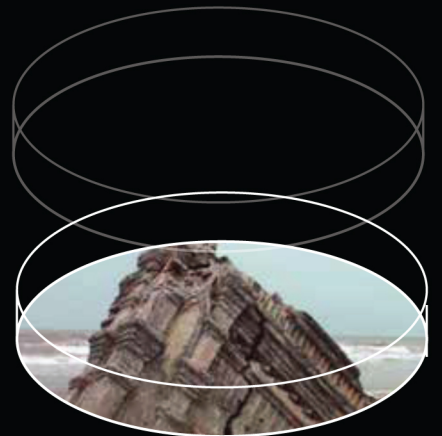
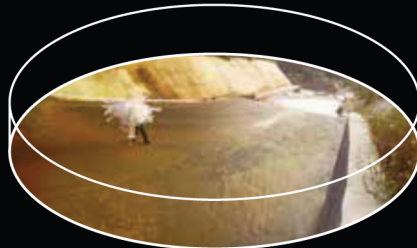


A moving image screening and discussion:

an ode to the microscopic

*Nguyễn Đình Phương
Phạm Thu Hằng
Trần Thanh Hiền
Xuân Hạ
Tạ Minh Đức
Ostin Fam*



*8.00 - 10.00PM,
Saturday, 28 November 2020
Dcine, 6 Mạc Đĩnh Chi, District 1, Sài Gòn*

foreword

**This program is an independent curatorial response from Vân Đỗ to 'Re-Aligning the Cosmos', a 12-month Fellowship providing one artist each year curatorial mentoring and funded field work/community liaison, in the exploration of Vietnam's cultural traditions of respect for the five elements – wood, fire, earth, metal and water. More information about 'Re-Aligning the Cosmos' can be found here: <https://factoryartscentre.com/en/programs/re-aligning-the-cosmos/>*

***Warm thanks to all those who have opened up my horizons of thinking and imagination (as mentioned in the text respectively): Dr. Nguyễn Nam (Fulbright University), filmmaker Trương Minh Quý, researcher Phan Khắc Huy, researcher Huỳnh Ngọc Trảng, and Vàng A Giồng.*

****Last but not least, most heartfelt thanks especially to all the filmmakers and artists who have generously given me a chance to show their works within the scope of the program.*

'An Ode to the Microscopic', featuring 5 moving image works by 6 artists Nguyễn Đình Phương, Phạm Thu Hằng, Trần Thanh Hiên, Xuân Hạ, Tạ Minh Đức and Östin Fam, is specifically curated in response to 'Re-Aligning the Cosmos', a 12-month fellowship initiated by The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre. This selection of works in 'An Ode to the Microscopic' echoes a range of questions that I have stumbled upon along the process of working on this Fellowship, and also raises some other questions at the potentiality of the moving image as an artistic medium.

Our ears are overly saturated with commands, our eyes alarmingly brimming with news of the world on fire, with storms, shaking with earthquakes, drowning in floods. The artists in 'An Ode to the Microscopic' have synchronically given us pause to think about our own existence within time and space, to question what the world is made of – not just the formation and interaction of physical materials but also the presence and running forces of the small, unseen living beings that travel within. Set in different areas across Vietnam (from Mộc Châu, Hà Nội, Hà Nam, Nam Định, Đắk Lắk, Đà Nẵng), the works here present themselves in diverse genres ranging from documentary films, video art, to video documentation of a performance. Altogether they coalesce as microscope through which we are given proposals to contemplate the interconnection of site, belief and materiality. Utilizing panorama shots and panning out to expand our view to larger landscapes, the works draw specific attention to the microscopic – be it ecological or material – fractures that are key to larger natural processes and crucial to the construction of the human's minds.

When the curatorial team at The Factory conceived 'Re-Aligning the Cosmos', we came up with the idea of examining the phenomenon of Ngũ Hành (the Five Elements - the philosophical backbone of Vietnam's cultural traditions) in relation to how these elements are consumed or neglected, wanting to learn why our respect for the meaning of the elements was so detached from our actions. As we ventured further into the project, however, our initial hypotheses has been consistently challenged or, to say the least, the scope of those premises have been expanded and problematized**. We have been reminded that tradition is always a site of constant negotiation and renewal, such reassessment and re-writing of tradition occurring in response to the ideological, cultural and social realities of the time. We realized that 'Vietnam's cultural traditions', as stated in the open call, were addressing the dominant Kinh people's understanding of this custom, while there are different cultural communities possessing differing relations and belief systems, coexisting within the territory of Vietnam. Tellingly, our first Fellow artist, Lê Giang, whose proposal focuses on the 'earth' element (examining the relationship between feng shui belief in precious stones and its extraction/consumption) has revealed how the commercialization of belief (the supply chain) has destroyed any respect of its limited material existence.

Vân Đỗ

program schedule

- + 7.30-8.00PM: Check-in
- + 8.00-9.00PM: Screening of 5 moving image works
- + 9.00-10.00PM: Discussion with filmmakers/artists Xuân Hạ, Ostin Fam, Phạm Thu Hằng and film critic Cậu Ấm Ngây Thơ
- ++ Q&A with the audience

*To reserve a spot, please register with Vân at
fb.com/dothuvan | @vandoboke | van@factoryartscentre.com
by November 25, 2020.

**Tickets are sold at door on the date: 60,000 dong/person.

Situated on the fringe of one of the longest streets in District 1 (centre of Saigon), DCINE (in Vietnamese D sounds like Đi which means “to go”), is a cinema built inside an architecture of an old theatre separated from the usual bustling and bustling settings of other cinemas in the city. There in the daytime, it goes to show the same sequence of movies that CGV is screening. When the sun goes out, it is transformed into an underground art venue where all kinds of films that steer away from the mainstream offerings, in which independent feature films, non-fictions, documentaries, video art and experimental films, are introduced via word-of-mouth to a much smaller group of dedicated film aficionados, artists and filmmakers.

nguyễn đình phương
blowing on the go

video performance | 7:48 mins | 2016-2017



Nguyễn Đình Phương, known more as 'Phương tent', is a performance artist based in Hanoi. Central to this work of his, and also to his practice in general, is the mere act of blowing the nylon balloon while setting out on a walk across different landscapes in Northern Vietnam. Carrying this simple gesture across different sceneries, he shifts our attention to the way the surroundings and the people where he passed by react to him - sometimes intrigued, sometimes curious, but most of the time, nonchalant. He thus blends into the mountains, the highways, the dam, the tea hills, the markets. All of these surroundings are changed in terms of perspective, moving forward from the background to foreground, neutralizing the position of humans no more as the centre of the universe. Nylon, the material of the 'balloon' which he carries along, is normally used as a statement of anti-pollution environmental campaigns, but here in this work, is repurposed into different usage of daily needs — a hanger for the sellers in the market to hang their veggies; a soccer ball for the children; a billboard on the highway. In a way, the nylon balloon turned into a way for a stranger like the artist himself to connect easily to the people he met on his way. Through a simple on-the-go happening created by the artist, as viewers we are asked to attentively move across the materiality of all his chance encounters in the performance, be it the ecological matters or the human interactions, to be reminded that each individual human being is also part of the ecosystem of matter that make up this planet.

Nguyễn Đình Phương graduated from the Faculty of Painting of the Vietnam University of Fine Arts. During his time as a student of painting (2012 – 2013), Phương lived in a camping tent and continuously moved between cities and countryside, even to mountainous barren lands. This experimental process led him to fascinating encounters with local people, from which he recorded materials and used them for his work in video. After graduation, Phương often commuted between Hanoi and Mộc Châu, continuing to experiment with different spaces and even his own body. His series of performances in the countryside in 2017 questioned the body's movement in relation to changes in awareness and understanding of space, as well as the formation of the world. Phương has been active in the national and world-wide art scene, participating in exhibitions with Heritage Space, A Space, the IN:ACT Performing Arts Festival at the Nhà Sàn Collective (Hanoi, 2018) and the NIPAF Performing Arts Festival (Japan).

phạm thu hằng, trần thanh hiên

hải lý

documentary film | 6 mins | 2010



Against the climate crisis of the drastically rising levels of the sea and, as a consequence, the gradual collapse of the church, life goes on for the fishermen. The 'Hải Lý Collapsing Church' is known as a unique architecture built on the coast of Hai Hau, Nam Dinh Province, in 1946, now more known as a site for tourist attraction. What is it that attracts tourists to this place? Is it the scene of loss, of destruction, a kind of moral warning for other keepers of collective memory which are also being 'eroded'? Ironically, a fisherman shows distrust for science, which is always called upon as a saviour for human troubles - but isn't science also the catalyst of all dilemmas we are faced with now?

Phạm Thu Hằng is an independent filmmaker currently living and teaching in Saigon. She had once worked for the Vietnam Institute of Culture and Art for 7 years before joining Hanoi Doclab, a centre for documentary film and video art in Hanoi, to study documentary filmmaking in 2009. She later obtained her Master's Degree in Documentary Directing in a consortium of three universities in Europe under the DocNomads Joint Masters program in Lisbon, Budapest and Brussels. Her concern in filmmaking opens to many themes but mainly draws attention to rediscovering Vietnamese culture and the connection between the internal world in Vietnam and the world outside, especially in the context of contemporary globalization. Her feature-length documentary 'Future Cries Beneath Our Soil (2017)' won Best Director Award at Singapore International Film Festival.

After graduating from the University of Industrial Fine Art, **Trần Thanh Hiên** joined the first batch of Hanoi Doclab's documentary filmmaking course. From then on, he completed several short experimental documentaries, such as 'Train Journal (2010)', 'The Medium (2010)', 'Hard Rails Across A Gentle River (2010)', 'Which Way to the Sea (2011)', 'Hải Lý (2011)'... His films were screened widely in various international film festivals, including: Yebisu Festival Alternative Art and Images (Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, 2013); Southeast Asian Film Festival (Singapore Art Museum-2013); MediaCity Biennale (Seoul, 2014); Shooting left Asia & Taipei Media Art Festival (Taipei-2014); News of the World Art Space (London, 2015); South to South Film Festival (Jakarta, 2014). He won several prizes at Yamagata International Film Festival (2011) and Yxineff (2012).

xuân hạ
the milk of human kindness
two channel video | 15 mins | 2020



This video belongs to Xuân Hạ's artistic project called 'A sand in exile', which investigates the artist's relationship to her hometown, Quảng Nam and Đà Nẵng, compelled by the issue of sand mining which became all the more apparent after she returned to her hometown after 8 years of living in Saigon. In her hometown, white sand is present in all facets of everyday life, a non-innocent material that has been witness to the life cycle of a grand scheme of things and people.

After all of her years spent away from home, while the endlessly long coast lined by white sand still bore the same look, each of the artist's grandfathers breathed their last, to which the endless whiteness of the seashore provided a kind of solace. One day as the artist took a walk with her father on the beach, much to their surprise, glass bottles appeared at their feet. The two video screens rhythmically reveal the fragility of the life cycle of the glass bottles alongside that of the artist's beloved family members.

***Xuân Hạ** (b. 1993, Đà Nẵng), is a visual and multimedia artist. She has been an active practitioner in the local art community since 2015, when she co-founded the art collective 'Chaosdowntown Cháo' in Saigon. Since September 2019, she has been living in Da Nang, where she co-founded 'a sông' collective in the hope of learning and understanding more about her homeland. Her recent solo exhibitions include: There's an ant inside my glass of water (Chaosdowntown Cháo, 2018), How I miss the taste of tangerine (Sàn Art, 2019), The White Sand in Exile (Á Space, 2020).*

In her most recent works, Xuân Hạ shares her thoughts on the direct/indirect impact that civilization has on the millennial generation and their behaviors, especially those in Vietnam. Through methods of experimenting with space, everyday-life objects and moving pictures, she proposes fictional plays made of clashing pieces, gradually forming themselves into stories. Her work is a documentative collection that mostly embark on her relationship between herself and the transformation of the environment.

tạ minh đức
the 'reservoir' of Tring village
documentary film | 16 mins | 2020



In Tring village (Dak Lak province), the 'reservoir', a simple architectural structure that is used as a social and cultural site, is where people in the village would gather water to fetch home. It is also where different rituals take place. At such events, the whole community gathers to pray for a year of good harvest or good health for their family. Recently, the local government decided to build a new, modern reservoir (based on the model of Kinh people). The villagers thus didn't know whom they would pray to and what they would hope for. In the village unwanted death and inexplicable misfortune occurred as the old reservoir was left abandoned. This film documents collective efforts of the villagers to renovate the reservoir that they hold dear in their spiritual lives.

Placed akin with other more known works by Tạ Minh Đức, 'The reservoir of Tring village' is both strange and familiar: strange because it is commissioned towards a specific expectation of a community; familiar because the filmmaker's signature style of blending documentary and fiction, observation and magical realism, can still be recognized.

*Born and raised in Hanoi, **Tạ Minh Đức** is an independent filmmaker currently based in Saigon. His work responds to his personal observations of everyday life, myths, fragmented histories and folklore. He is currently working on the post-production of his first feature film. His works have been featured in notable exhibitions, including: Landscape Untitled (Asian Artist Moving Image Platform, 2020), The Foliage 2, VCCA, Hanoi (2018), Look for the Divines Being, Crafting Home project, Nhà Sàn Collective, Hanoi (2017); Skylines With Flying People 3, Japan Foundation, Hanoi (2016), Film no. 1, Doclab, Goethe Institute, Hanoi (2016), DocFest, Goethe Institute, Hanoi (2016); Hanoi DocFest, HKICC Lee Shau Kee School of Creativity, Hong Kong (2016); Behind the Terrain, Studio Kalanhan, Yogyakarta, Indonesia (2016); Choose to Move, Sàn Art, HCMC (2015); Mini DocFest, Hanoi DocLab, Hanoi (2014); Petite and Smooth, Nhà Sàn Studio, Hanoi (2014); Autopsy of the Day, Goethe-Institut Hanoi (2013); Escape Mobile Gallery, Skylines with Flying People 2, Japan Foundation, Hanoi (2012).*

ostin fam

bình

short fiction film | 22 mins | 2020



‘An alien arrives on Earth in disguise as a young Vietnamese boy. He witnesses the construction of a giant temple and encounters different people, all of whom are also on their quest to find home.’ (quoted from the film's synopsis) The film's main location is set in Tam Chuc Pagoda (Ha Nam province), a building complex that is striving to become the largest pagoda site in the world. The film began with a crew of only 5 people and documented the real-time progress of the construction of the pagoda throughout a year.

‘Bình’ dances with colors, fusing dreams with reality, wondering between documentary and fiction. As the audience is slowly submerged in the dreamy world, they are troubled by the dialogues tinged with social-political commentary. Different layers of narratives in film are woven by chance encounters of characters, in- and out-of-frame sound mixing, through which different routes of finding solace are revealed amidst the transition of belief and materiality. Tam Chuc a specific pagoda, and Binh a specific name, are typical of how people cope with insecurity living in these uncertain days.

Ostin Fam (Phạm Quốc Dũng) is an independent filmmaker and currently a documentary film instructor at TPD Centre. His work seeks to elevate underserved narratives, but rather than attempting to capture the existential pain that comes with underrepresentation, he tries to hone in on the specificity of experience. Born and raised in Hanoi, Vietnam, Ostin Fam attended a Documentary Workshop at TPD Centre in 2012 with a graduating film ‘The Journey’, which earned the Center’s Silver Lotus Bud Award.

For undergraduate studies, Ostin received Freeman Asian Scholarship to attend Wesleyan University where he earned a BA in Film Studies and a minor in East Asian Studies. In 2017, in addition to graduating with High Honors, he was the recipient of the Steven J. Ross Prize, awarded to the best senior film thesis for his project ‘short/cut’. His most recent short film, ‘Bình’ was financially supported by CJ Cultural Foundation, Singapore International Film Festival and TPD Center and will be having its World Premiere at Busan International Film Festival in October 2020.

*Curated and organized by Vân Đỗ
Designed by Bạch Tùng*

*With support from
Dcine, Central Studio, Prince Claus Fund and The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre*

