

## 逆勢而行：越南胡志明市的當代藝術景觀

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越南長期以來一直處於全球整合過程之中；位於東南亞並且擁有八千萬人口的越南，最近成功獲得世界貿易組織會員資格，同時於今年擔任聯合國安全理事會非常任理事國。從這些舉動可以看出，越南有意大力參與國際事務。藉由擴展國際視野和加入國際社會組織，越南以及越南藝術家成功開闢了與當代文化進行對話的管道。

在奉行共產主義的越南，最早期文化管制鬆綁政策可上溯至一九八〇年代末期的「革新開放」（譯按：或譯「改革開放」）。這一波致力改革和批判反省的政策調整，在多方面被視為越南版的蘇聯式新思維改革行動；該次政策調整雖然短命，但卻讓藝術家和新聞媒體獲得一次前所未有的表達自由。一九八九年的天安門事件爆發，越南政府從事件中目睹了表達自由可能造成的最壞情況，當局隨即廢除若干在革新期間引進的新自由措施。越南藝術家再次被迫在個人表達自由和反映民族處境使命之間的狹縫中周旋。

由於藝術家必須解釋自己的作品在民族認同方面的意義，故此他們必須至少在表面上重新詮釋作品的意義，改口說自己的作品是關於集體懷舊、傳統價值等當局能接受的思想路線，並且旗幟鮮明地表示支持官方政策。

像是「人民藝術家」這類官方頭銜，則成為發展藝術事業的重要因素。在不久之前，胡志明藝術大學畢業生原本可以自動加入成為胡志明藝術協會會員。該協會和其他東南亞許多同類型機構一樣，表面是同業公會，但實際上是藝術家和文化管理部門之間的橋樑。該協會本身為政府機構，其工作為代表藝術家申請許可，讓藝術家得以在該協會位於巴斯德街的場地裡舉辦個展及聯展。藝術家要是成為該協會會員，嚴格來說，就表示藝術家本人及其創作哲學成功通過該協會（即政府）審查。而且，協會提供藝術家一個同仁交流社群。不過，與協會意見相左的藝術家卻往往面臨困難的抉擇，到底應該妥協加入協會，還是選擇遠離體制，但作品難以獲得公開展出的機會。文化政策及文化創作之間的關係，在很大程度上是受到該國文化創作的發表管道——特別是國家控制的新聞媒體——所形塑。這樣的內／外及提供／接受的互動模式一直持續到今天。新聞媒體通常僅止於實地報導，文化批評向來付之闕如。於是，並無任何發表藝術批評論述的出版機構，而這方面的重要作品均以地下形式發表。塔拉瓦斯網路論壇(Talawas)就是其中之一；該論壇最近被選入德國第十二屆卡塞爾文獻展，卻仍然無法通過越南的網路防火牆。

所有藝術展覽都必須獲得文化資訊部的批准，任何相片、概念解說和翻譯文字都必須在數週之前事先送交當局審查。要是申請被否決，當局鮮少會給予畫廊和藝術家任何解釋。「否決」的批示意味著藝術工作者和官方之間沒有任何對話的可能，雙方完全沒有成長空間。

有很多展覽因含有「意識不良」作品，要不被要求撤銷作品，要不就必須遮擋、塗抹掉部分作品，方能獲准展出。於是，藝術家往往從一開始就妥協，久而久之只創作一些不痛不癢的作品，以便迎合媒體和大眾的接受範圍。因此，諸如「河內街道」此類的展覽，或者關於童年記憶、季節色彩、中國生肖形象，又或者，老套地歌頌女性之美貌或奮鬥等作品，就源源不絕地出現。至於觸及當代議題的藝術作品，往往被化約為簡單的符碼辯證模式，例如：以可口可樂代表現代性腐敗的東、西方典範對峙、富裕／貧窮、古老／創新、本地／外來、昂貴／廉價。當中鮮少能夠超越非黑即白的邏輯，能夠針對時代變遷的代價／效益進行檢視者寥寥無幾。

雖然面對這些限制，越南藝術家持續找尋各種出路，既為了維持他們的原創構想信念，同時探索各種與官方文化控制單位周旋的方式。其中一項策略，是持續教育媒體和政府，讓這些機構明白創作表達的價值。隨著經濟情況好轉，不論是藝術家還是政府，資訊流通的情況亦得以改善。在二〇〇六年西貢開放城市活動中，政府一方面實施言論審查並且拒絕核發藝術公文，同時活動主辦單位所做的溝通工作也並不足夠；如果越南要跨越擺脫各種不當干預，民間及政府的藝術部門必須通力合作。其中一個成功的例子，是每兩年舉行一次的順化節；雖然該節慶主要以娛樂和觀光為主，但也曾經規劃供藝術活動——包括雕塑、特定場所裝置作品和塗鴉——使用的展覽場地和空間，成功地將活動的觸角伸展至當代藝術社群。對照西貢開放城市和順化節，無可否認的是：要舉辦大規模的公共展覽和活動，必須要以互信為基礎進行溝通方才有可能成功——至少是在代價／效益的層面上獲得成功。雖然這些活動幾乎將所有激烈和具爭議性作品排除在外，但活動最終獲得舉辦的機會；於是，公眾因此有可能明白到藝術和創意表達方式對生活的重要性。

規模較小的機構、藝術家團體以及高瞻遠矚的畫廊往往是創新的搖籃。為了讓經濟產品和思想觀念得以在面對世界市場時具有競爭力，越南一直持續開放吸納外來觀念，這必然促使該國作出各種改革開放措施。為了從內部改善國家競爭力，該國民眾需要擁有旅行的權利；因此，越南國民較過往更容易取得護照和簽

證，同時外來觀念和進口產品也較過往受到更少限制。過去共產黨拒絕容忍任何直接批評，但後來卻放棄多項過往被視為禁忌的「社會罪行」——即和性及宗教有關的禁忌。其他發展，包括該國致力與其他東南亞國協會員國保持同一陣線；越南作為其中一個會員國，透過爭取與其他會員國達成共識，從而彰顯該國為在維持地區穩定所扮演的角色。除了部份國家（例如緬甸）以及柬埔寨和越南之間不得往返以外，越南民眾可以免簽證自由前往其他鄰近國家旅行。故此，多所藝術大學得以藉由舉辦聯展和藝術研討會著手締結姊妹校。所有這些舉動均以敦親睦鄰的名義進行，但更重要的是，越南人得以明白其他國家——特別是泰國——的當代藝術優缺點以及發展狀況。而藝術家與藝術家之間的切磋，也必然會相互交流各國的文化政策。由於許多合作是由大學（即政府）主導或至少許可，合作的結果對於政策制定多少帶來了正面影響。而且，每一個國家以「從內到外，再從外到內」模式進行改革的現象，傳統文化和藝術得以對外交流，同時各國仍得以保持具有自身特色的和穩定的國族身份；如是者，當代藝術引進的外來觀念，也因此而較不具有威脅力。資訊交流如同旋轉門一般，有出就有進，來往之間無論力度和量均相當。

#### 海外越僑歸國

有趣的是，越南當代藝術發展的主要力量來自那些大半生居住於外國的越南人。今天眾多曾經離散海外的「越僑」藝術家返國從事創作，這些來自海外的創作力量包括經營畫廊的范瓊(Quynh Pham)、策展人黎庭(Viet Le)、藝術家阮初枝純(Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba)、黎庭(Dinh Q. Le)、山德林·盧克(Sandrine Llouquet)、張芬妮(Tiffany Chung)、阮俊(Andrew Tuan Nguyen)，以及筆者本人。回流越南的越僑只有少部分人為藝術家，大部分越僑要不是為了做生意，要不就是為了養老。很多在越南短暫停留的越僑，有些是為了與家人團聚、有些是為了學越南文、觀光等，只有少部分越僑有意回越南長期居留。大部分越僑藝術家選擇於胡志明市——而非該國首都河內——從事創作。大部分當初離散海外的越南難民均來自南部，故此，越僑藝術家這樣做似乎是理所當然；不過，很多回流的越僑藝術家是在越南以外的國家出生長大，在成長過程中並無接受多少南越文化的影響。還有一些更是被領養長大的。阮初枝純和黎庭是最早回到胡志明市定居並且從事創作的越僑藝術家。他們也計算是最受到國際認可的越南藝術家。大約在五、六年後——即二〇〇二至二〇〇五年間——我會稱之為第二波越僑藝術家回流潮，除了這兩名藝術家之外，上述提及的其他藝術工作者都是在這階段回流越南。第二波越僑藝術家回流潮的特徵，是集體創作模式的興起。這或許是因

為胡志明市比過往出現更多越僑藝術家的緣故；但我同時認為這是由於他們的藝術創作形式使然——他們的創作形式具有美術設計、電影和音樂等元素，本來就較為傾向團體創作模式。

越僑藝術家和越南本地藝術家進行緊密合作，成立多間畫廊、另類藝術空間，以及推行多項藝術計劃。范瓊畫廊(Galerie Quynh)為胡志明市具有領導地位以及最著名的商業當代藝廊，另外甫成立的非營利參藝術空間(San Art)則藉由安排演講、提供獎學金和舉辦展覽促進本地及海外藝術家的發展和合作。不過，本地藝術家和越僑藝術家之間，也曾經發生誤解和衝突。甚至在五年前，越南藝術家還不知道該如何看待越僑藝術家。例如，或許由於越僑藝術家的國際人脈較廣，故此經常入選大型展覽和各國雙年展，但也因此犧牲了越南本地藝術家的展出機會。不過，隨著越僑藝術家持續推行多項重大計劃，胡志明市本地藝術家與外國的交流連結管道日益順暢，於是雙方之間的分水嶺越來越不明顯。

我在這次展覽中挑選的一系列彩色攝影作品名為《拾穗人與偽裝者》。在該系列作品中，米勒的畫作《拾穗》(*The Gleaners*, Jean Francois Millet, 1857)是一個檢視法國前殖民地中南半島現代藝術以及當代生活起源的切入點。在這一輯由三幅相片組成的系列作品中，舊時代的法國農村拾穗人被替換成為今日的越南工人，而原本堆放的穀物則被替換成偽裝者——即利用偽裝隱藏在環境中執行狙擊任務的軍人。但是，這些畫面看起來卻恰恰好讓偽裝達到相反效果——他們正是因為其偽裝而導致曝露了位置，並且顯得無可遁形、被注視——他們原本要隱身於環境的意圖反而造成他們被孤立於環境之外。米勒畫作本來擁有嚴肅的主題，但在這裡經過重新演繹後變得妙不可言——偽裝者看起來反而更像《星際大戰》中毛絨絨咕咕叫的可愛外星生物特伯族(Tribbles)，而非嚴肅的軍人。

曾經出走但又再度回流的越僑藝術家，持續以不同方式與本地藝術家聚合，並且發展藝術社群；雖然前景總是不盡明朗，但還是試著逆勢而行。

<sup>1</sup> \*搖滾樂團齊柏林飛船樂團在一九七〇年代的第八張（也是該年代的最後一張）專輯，原文 In Through the Out Door。

## In Through the Out Door: Contemporary Art in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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Richard Streitmatter-Tran

Vietnam continues its transition towards global integration. The Southeast Asian nation of 80 million people recently finalized its World Trade Organization membership and currently occupies a rotating seat on the UN Security Council. These events have confirmed the country's desire to be seen as an important international player in its own right. By looking outside of itself and its role as engaged in a larger community, Vietnam and its artists see a way into a conversation with the contemporary.

A relaxing of cultural control in the communist nation occurred as early as the late 80s during what is referred to as "Doi Moi." This policy of renewal and critical introspection, in many ways a counterpart of the Soviet Union's perestroika, gave artists and the press new freedoms for expression, though it was short-lived. The events of 1989 in Tiananmen Square gave the Vietnamese government the opportunity to visualize what freedom of expression could lead to in a worst-case scenario and several of the new liberties introduced during the renewal period were promptly revoked. Vietnamese artists were once again compelled to toe a fine line between personal expression and national representation.

Obligated to explain their work in terms of national identity, artists reconfigured their messages, at least on the surface, to address acceptable lines of thinking related to collective nostalgia, traditional values, and unequivocal support for official policy. State-endowed titles such as "People's Artist" became highlights of careers. At one time not so long ago, it was assumed that graduates of the Ho Chi Minh Fine Arts University would automatically join the Ho Chi Minh Fine Arts Association. The association, like many of its counterparts in Southeast Asia, functions as a guild and in fact an intermediary between the artist and the cultural bureaucracy. The association, as a government agency itself, would apply for exhibitions on behalf of the artist for solo and group shows at their space on Pasteur Street. By becoming a member of the association, one could technically consider themselves approved and philosophically in-line with that of the association (read government) itself. Furthermore, the association provided a community for its artists. However, artists whose opinions differed from the association would have to make the difficult decision to become a member or ostracize themselves from the establishment with the knowledge that public exhibition of their work would remain difficult. The dynamic flux between cultural policy and cultural production was most importantly enforced by the distribution channels for cultural discourse in the country, particularly the state controlled press. This interplay of in/out and give/take continues to this day. Journalism is often little more than reportage and cultural criticism is conspicuously absent. As a result there is no institutional vehicle in print for arts criticism and much of the leading work done in this area has been done underground. Talawas, one such online forum, was recently selected to participate in Documenta 12, yet it remains inaccessible through Vietnam's firewalls.

All arts exhibitions require a permit from the Ministry of Culture and Information, and photographs, concepts and translations must be sent weeks in advance of receiving authorization. In cases where exhibition permissions are denied, galleries and artists are rarely given the reasons for denial. The "flat denial" in effect closes down all dialogue between the art producers and the bureaucracy, leaving no room for growth by either party. There are many cases where exhibitions have been allowed to run with "offensive" work either being removed or parts of the work being covered or obscured. As a result, artists often compromise their work from the start and in the end reduce the motivations of their work into safe sound bites that the press and public can digest. This explains why there is no shortage of exhibitions with titles as "The Streets of Hanoi" or art works about childhood memories, colors of seasons, representations of the animals of the Chinese zodiac, or clichéd tributes to either the beauty or struggles of women. Art addressing contemporary issues often default to dialectics with the obvious signs: the East versus West paradigm with Coca-Cola representing the corruption of modernity: Rich/Poor, Old/New, Local/Foreign, Expensive/Cheap. Rarely does an examination of issues rise above black/white to a level of cost/benefit.

Despite these limitations, Vietnamese artists have continued to find ways to remain faithful to their original ideas while navigating the bureaucracy of cultural control. One strategy is to remain persistent in educating the press and the government on the value of expression. As the economy improves, access to information has improved—both for artists and bureaucrats. If Vietnam is to move past the crippling interventions that occurred during the 2006 Saigon Open City event that saw the censorship and refusal of arts licensing by the government on one hand and poor communication by the event managers on the other, both the private and government cultural sectors need to work hand-in-hand. One example of successful cooperation is the Festival Hue, which occurs every two years. While it may be true that this festival is an event largely based on entertainment and tourism, it has in the past extended itself to the contemporary arts community by providing venues and spaces for art that include sculpture, site-specific installations and graffiti. By looking at both Saigon Open City and Festival Hue together, it cannot be denied that for more ambitious public exhibitions and events, negotiations through mutual trust can succeed, even if only at the level of an attractive cost/benefit. And while the final realizations of these events almost certainly exclude provoking, interrogative work, it might provide the pre-conditioning of the public to see art and creative expression as important in their lives.

Innovation has often come from smaller organizations, from artist-run collectives and spaces to forward-thinking galleries. As Vietnam has continued to open itself to ideas from the outside in order to remain competitive in the world marketplace (both in economic production and ideas), it has had to reform many of its old practices of control. In order to improve the country from the inside, its people needed the mobility to travel. Passports

and visas became more obtainable for citizens. Ideas and imports from abroad received less resistance. Beyond the zero-tolerance policy for direct criticism of the Communist Party itself, many of the enforcements against tabooed “social evils” relaxed, notably for sex and religion. Also keeping in line with other developments within ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) of which Vietnam is a member, Vietnam has sought to portray itself as a regional player offering its voice to the overall objective of stability through consensus. Barring certain cases, such as Myanmar, and travel between Cambodia and Vietnam, Vietnamese citizens could freely travel to neighboring nations without the need for visas. As a result, the arts universities soon embarked upon sister school relationships through joint exhibitions and art forums. All in the name of neighborly love, but more importantly it allowed the Vietnamese to see the strengths and weakness and the state of development of the contemporary art scene in other countries, notably Thailand. Interpersonal questions among artists would inevitably lead to the sharing of each nation’s cultural policies. As many of these collaborations were headed, or at least rubber-stamped, by the university directors (read government), positive outcomes could only result in a move toward better policies. Furthermore, the “in-out-in” phenomenon enabled each country to share its traditional cultures and art, allowing them to still maintain a recognizable and inalienable identity which made the import of foreign ideas in contemporary art less threatening. The exchange of information could be seen as a revolving door. As one exits, a part of equal force and volume would be drawn in from the outside.

#### The return of the viet kieu

Interestingly enough, a major contribution to the development of the contemporary art scene in Vietnam is from those who have spent most of their lives outside of the country. Artists belonging to Vietnam’s diaspora (known locally as “viet kieu”) have returned to Vietnam to continue their arts practice. Among this category of creatives from abroad include gallerist Quynh Pham, curator Viet Le, and artists Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, Dinh Q. Le, Sandrine Llouquet, Tiffany Chung, Andrew Tuan Nguyen and myself.

Artists constitute only a fraction of the viet kieu living in Vietnam. Most have come either for opportunities in business, or to settle in their old age. Many come for short periods of time to either reconnect with families, learn the Vietnamese language, or tourism. Only a small portion of these returnees intend to stay in Vietnam for the long term. Most of the viet kieu artists have chosen to work in Ho Chi Minh City rather than the nation’s capital, Hanoi. In many cases, most of the refugees in the Vietnamese diaspora came from the south, so this might seem natural, yet many arrived having been born outside of Vietnam and raised without a strong foundation in its culture. Several were adoptees. Among the viet kieu artists in Ho Chi Minh City, Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba and Dinh Q. Le, were among the earliest to arrive, settle and establish their arts practice. They are also arguably the most internationally recognized among Vietnamese artists. Around five or six years later, a second wave, if I can call it that, of viet kieu artists arrived in a period between 2002 and 2005, which include the other artists mentioned

above. A characteristic of this second wave is the development of collaborations. This is perhaps because there were more viet kieu artists in the city than before, but I also think that their artistic practices, which were often linked to backgrounds in design, filmmaking and music, were more attuned to group efforts.

Working closely with local Vietnamese artists, the viet kieu have established galleries, alternative art spaces, and initiatives. Galerie Quynh is among Ho Chi Minh City’s foremost and widely known commercial contemporary art galleries while the newly established non-profit space San Art has contributed to the development and cooperation between local and foreign artists through lectures, scholarships and exhibitions. The relationship between local and viet kieu artists has not always been without misunderstandings and tensions however. Even as of five years ago, Vietnamese artists weren’t entirely sure what to make of the viet kieu. For example, viet kieu artists were often chosen for inclusion in major exhibitions and biennales at the expense of local Vietnamese artists, presumably as they were better connected internationally. Yet as viet kieu artists have continued to develop meaningful commitments and connections to the city and the sophistication and access of local artists to the wider world has improved, the divide between the two groups becomes less pronounced.

I’ve chosen for this exhibition a series of color prints titled *The Gleaners and the Ghillies*. Jean Francois Millet’s painting *The Gleaners* (1857) becomes a point from which to interrogate the origins of modern art, as well as contemporary life, in the former French colony of Indochina. In this series of three photographs, French peasant gleaners of the past have been replaced by the Vietnamese workers of the present; and in lieu of the grain stacks are the ghillies, military snipers in specialized camouflage uniforms designed to blend into their environment. However, the effect becomes a radical departure from this intent, and the inverse is achieved: attempts by those to integrate have in turn become created positions of exposure, of being pointed out, isolated. The gravity of Millet’s painting has been restaged as a fantastical farce, with the ghillies coming off looking more like *Star Trek* tribbles than imposing soldiers.

Vietnam’s viet kieu artists, having left and returned, continue to develop an art community alongside local artists under their own terms, and when the signs are not always clearly defined, one option is simply to walk in through the out door .

**Richard Streitmatter-Tran** is an artist based in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. He is also one of the artists in the exhibition.

<sup>1</sup> The eighth and final studio album from the 1970s rock band, Led Zeppelin.