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# Inside 'This Is Not A War': The Exhibition Redefining Vietnamese Art In New York

The exhibition seeks to challenge the long-standing global tendency to confine Vietnamese contemporary art within narrow narratives of war, trauma, and survival.

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Porcelain Medals (2018), Bui Cong Khanh. | Source: Eli Klein Gallery

Unbound, unpredictable, and charged with energy—these are the breadth, complexity, and vitality of Vietnamese contemporary art today. While Vietnamese artists have engaged deeply with the past fifty years of history after the War, their works have often been interpreted globally through the lens of the aftermath.



"Ceci N'est Pas Une Guerre - This Is Not A War," a group exhibition of 17 Vietnamese artists showcasing 24 works seeks to challenge the long-standing tendency to confine Vietnam's contemporary art within narrow narratives of war, trauma, and survival.

The exhibition's title is drawn from a work by Marguerite Duras—not as a denial, but as a philosophical gesture. It suggests ambiguity, allowing multiple layers of history to coexist in the same space where memories of war are not erased; it remains present, like a scar embedded in history.

Curated by Do Tuong Linh, the show brings together voices that challenge the notion of "Vietnamese art" as a singular concept, creating a layered dialogue that is poetic and political, introspective and globally engaged.

"I envision a broader, more complex portrait of Vietnamese contemporary art—one that extends beyond national borders and reflects the fusion between Vietnam and its diaspora," said Do Tuong Linh. Artists like My Lan Hoang Thuy (Vietnamese-French), Minh Dung Vu (Vietnamese-German), Oanh Phi Phi (Vietnamese-American), Xuan Lam (Vietnamese educated in the U.S.), and Arlette Quynh-Anh Tran (Vietnamese-German) represent a generation shaped by multiple cultural contexts. Within the context of Vietnam's massive economic reforms, the artists critically explore themes of identity, censorship, and queerness.



Porcelain Medals (2018), Bui Cong Khanh. | Source: Eli Klein Gallery

The exhibition opens with a series of porcelain military medals by Bui Cong Khanh—playful yet pointed works that blend historical research with conceptual art rarely taught in Vietnam's formal



education system. These medals stand as emblems of a war long past and a hard-won peace, yet they remain intrinsically linked to conflict. The work stands as a reminder that: the war is part of Vietnamese identity, something that cannot—and perhaps should not—be entirely erased.



Beneath Deep Rivers, Field Submerged No. 3 (2024), Ca Le Thang | Source: Eli Klein Gallery

Ca Le Thang's compositionally poetic painting serves as a quiet footnote to the natural and spiritual landscapes of southern Vietnam, expressing a deep emotional connection to his homeland's nature and history.



Fairy Tale Soup - Chu Dong Tu and Tien Dung (2003), Tran Luong | Source: Eli Klein Gallery

Through humor and symbolism, Tran Luong retells a traditional Vietnamese legend in a gently narrated yet subtly subversive manner, reflecting the sociopolitical tensions and transformations of early 21st-century Vietnam.





The Hand of God (2010), Truong Tan | Source: Eli Klein Gallery

Truong Tan, who was considered the first openly gay artist from Vietnam, creates work that is both emblematic and groundbreaking in its exploration of social norms and marginalized identities.

“This exhibition is an opportunity to name and honor the foundational figures of contemporary Vietnamese art,” says Do Tuong Linh. A dedicated room in the exhibition brings together key artists from across the country—Tran Luong of the Gang of Five from the North, Ca Le Thang of the Southern Group of Ten, and Bui Cong Khanh from Hội An in Central Vietnam—marking a rare moment where North, Central, and South are represented side by side in equal dialogue in an international setting.





Scry - Conceits (2025), Oanh Phi Phi | Eli Klein Gallery

Vietnamese lacquer serves as the core medium in Oanh Phi Phi's practice, through which she explores the transmission of memory, reflections on image theory, and experimental possibilities in scale and technique.





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Nothing behind I (2019), Bui Thanh Tam | Eli Klein Gallery

Bui Thanh Tam blends the delicate spirit of Vietnamese folk traditions with the bold allure of pop and consumer culture, creating works that are at once challenging, seductive, and provocative.

A younger generation of artists take the center stage reflecting on materiality, memory, and mythology, reimagining self and culture beyond the burden of historical trauma. They turned toward material experimentation, ironic language, and cross-disciplinary methods to address contemporary social issues, incisively engaging with gender, politics, and cultural memory amid Vietnam's rapid transformation.





Untitled (2019), Pham Tuan Tu | Source: Eli Klein Gallery

Pham Tuan Tu combines elements of primitivism and humor in his work, using refined craftsmanship and a diverse range of materials to delve into the complexities of contemporary society.

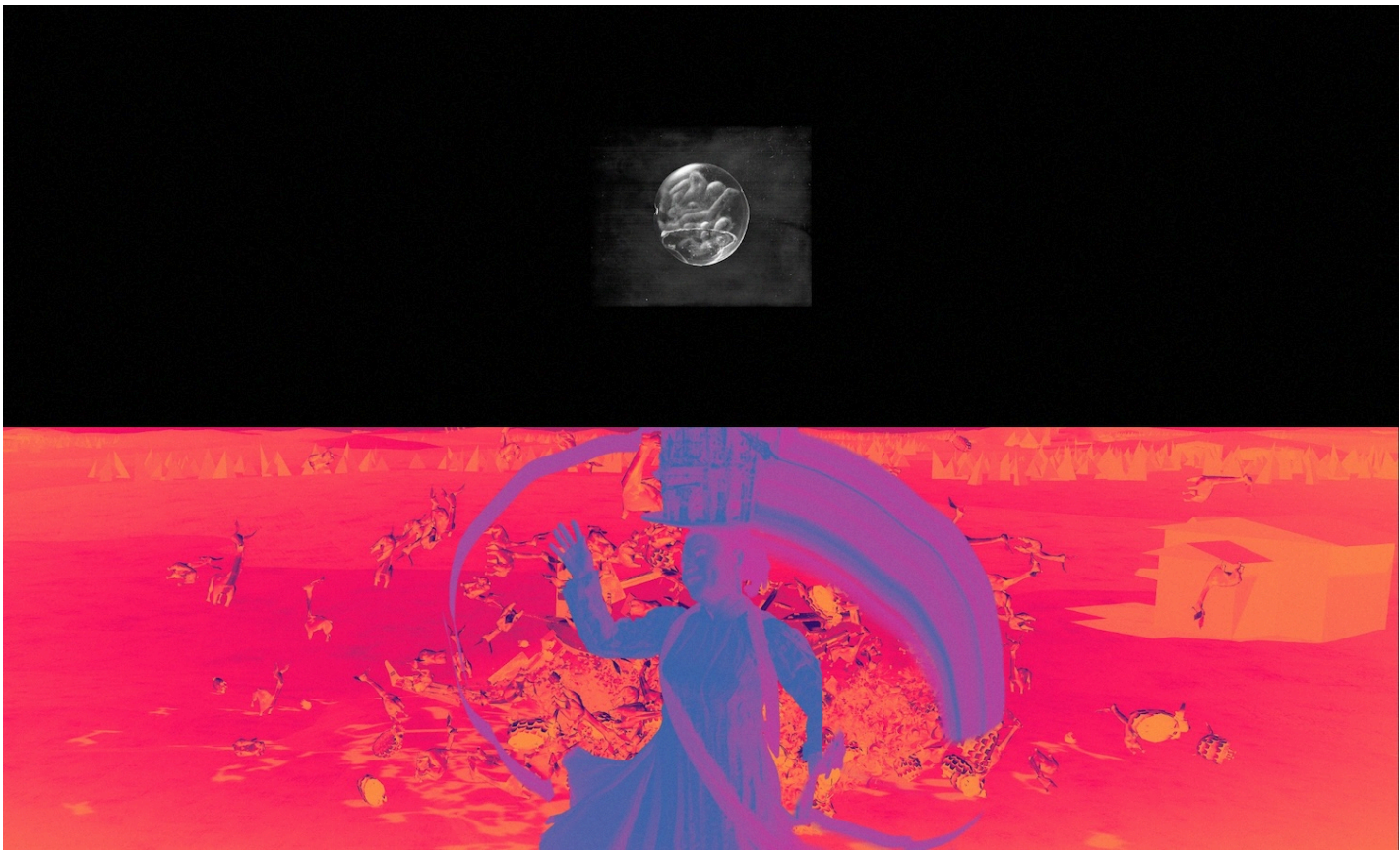




Allergy (2004), Nguyen Phuong Linh | Source: Eli Klein Gallery

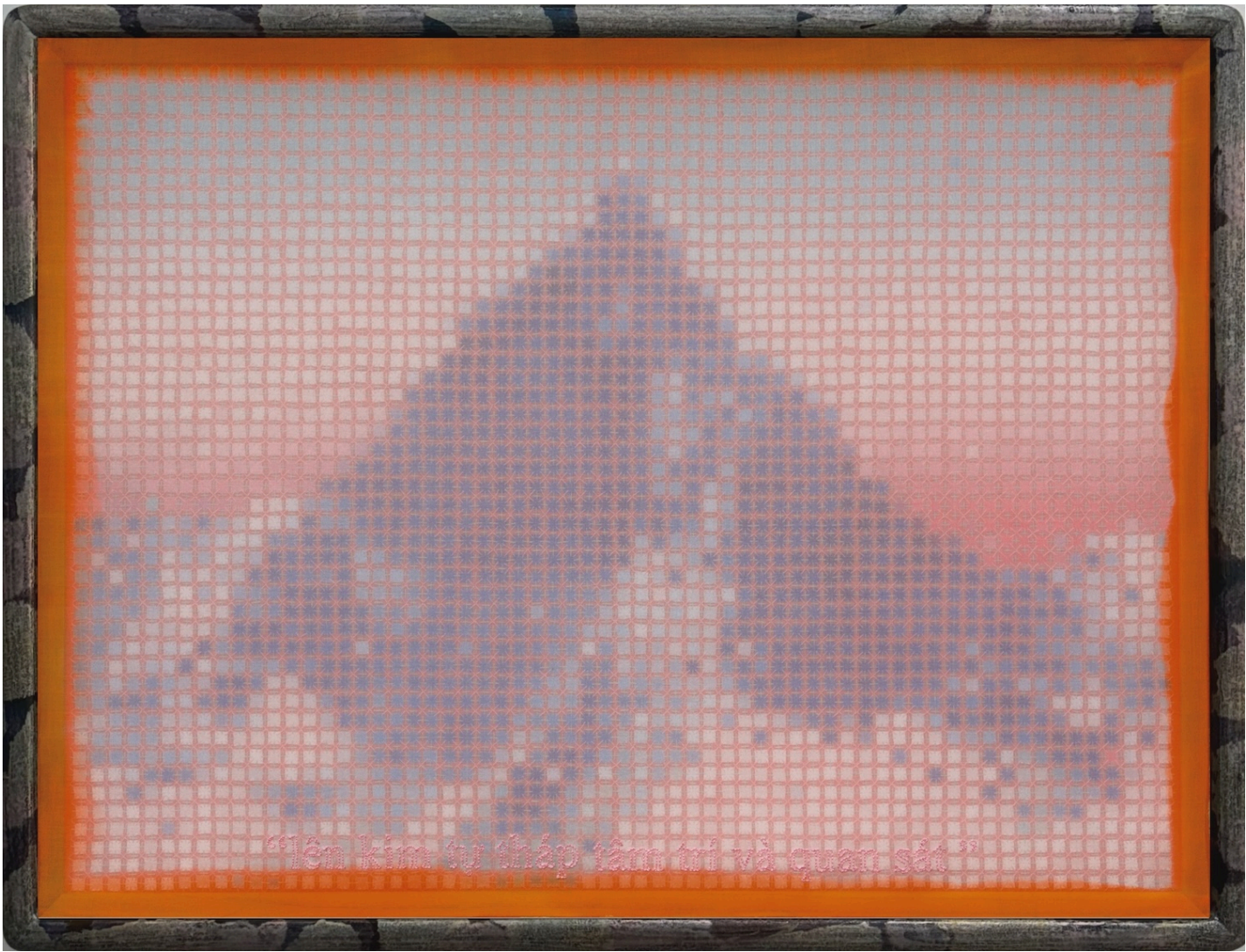
Nguyen Phuong Linh—with a piece that is considered the first Vietnamese feminist artwork—weaves personal memories into broader cultural contexts, skillfully transforming found objects and materials to reveal the vulnerability of being a woman in Vietnamese society.





Moon Dance and Her Besiege (2024), Arlette Quynh-Anh Tran | Source: Eli Klein Gallery

Merging political themes with sci-fi aesthetics, Arlette Quynh-Anh Tran constructs nonlinear and absurd narratives of modern history, challenging dominant post-Cold War frameworks surrounding the Global South.



Mediation (2024), Doan Van Toi | Source: Eli Klein Gallery





A Million Blues (2025), Le Hoang Bich Phuong | Source: Eli Klein Gallery

Doan Van Toi and Le Hoang Bich Phuong both explore the contemporary rhythms of traditional media. Toi weaves digital pixels into silk and textiles to reflect on the intricate relationship between humans and nature, while Phuong employs delicate silk to blend surrealism with quiet subversion, questioning gender, eccentricity, and societal norms.

Artistic practice continues to expand into the intersections of new media, speculative narratives, and digital processes, reimagining and reconstructing tradition and identity. Vietnamese art now charts a future-oriented sensibility, forging new dialogues and connections between personal experience and global context.



Velours (2022), My-Lan Hoang-Thuy | Source: Eli Klein Gallery

My-Lan Hoang-Thuy redefines the relationship between artist and medium, using acrylic drips as a “canvas” to merge painting with personal photography, creating a visual language where intimacy, spontaneity, and imagination intersect.



Fractional Column (2020), Ha Ninh Pham | Source: Eli Klein Gallery

Ha Ninh Pham explores the construction of territories and perception through drawing and sculpture, creating imagined worlds shaped by his unique logic and underlying sense of skepticism.



Untitled (2024), Minh Dung Vu | Source: Eli Klein Galler

By sewing dyed silk onto canvas, Minh Dung Vu initiates a dialogue between material surface and visual texture, investigating materiality, light, shadow, and perception.



Welcome to the Met (2024), Xuan-Lam Nguyen | Source: Eli Klein Gallery

Xuân-Lam Nguyen brings forgotten Vietnamese folk art into contemporary relevance, focusing on Indochinese Orientalist photography and displaced cultural artifacts, blending autobiographical elements with queer identity to construct glitchy, alternative narratives that offer a dynamic commentary on the intersections of identity and history.



Leaner II (2025), Anh Thuy Nguyen | Source: Eli Klein Gallery

Anh Thuy Nguyen’s sculptural works explore the relationship between emotional states and the human body.



Roi May/ Pixel-weaving Sample 1.2 ( 2024), Van Khanh | Source: Eli Klein Gallery

Through digitizing and transforming everyday Vietnamese domestic objects, Van Khanh creates faux-fiber replicas that exist between physical reality and digital dreamscape, reimagining traditions and mythologies within trans narratives.

Throughout the exhibition, traces of war linger—not to reenact trauma, but to offer different perspectives beyond violence. War, after all, is inseparable from Vietnam’s history—a scar etched into the land and collective consciousness. In seeking to tell a story that Vietnam is more than its wars, *This Is Not A War* does not deny the presence of conflict. Rather, it acknowledges war as part of the country’s past, while asking a deeper question: how has Vietnamese identity and culture evolved in its aftermath?

**About 'Ceci N'est Pas Une Guerre - This Is Not A War'**

- **Curated by:** Do Tuong Linh
- **Date:** May 23 – August 23, 2025
- **Location:** Eli Klein Gallery, 398 West Street, New York, NY - 10014



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