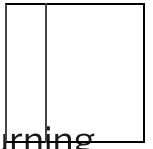
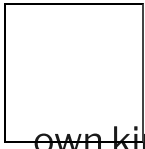


# In Ho Chi Minh City, Art Feels Urgent Again

The city's artists are finding new languages of abstraction, spirituality and digital chaos—and the exhibitions going up this holiday season pulse with the need to make meaning in turbulent times.

By [Xintian Wang](#)





own kind of clarity. Across galleries, art institutes and museums, artists are turning toward abstraction, faith and innovation to question how we see and what we believe. The result is a season of exhibitions that feels both intensely local and globally resonant, alive with color, critique and quiet acts of resistance.

To understand this moment, it helps to look back. After the war, between 1975 and 1986, Vietnam's Ministry of Culture restricted international influence and strictly regulated artistic production, banning abstraction and nudity until 1991. Yet even in those years of constraint, many artists refused to join state-sponsored unions, asserting the simple right to create freely. That lineage of defiance still reverberates today.

On my trip to Ho Chi Minh City, I found artists continuing that tradition, transforming uncertainty into intuition and history into play. At a moment when the world feels fractured, their work insists that beauty and belief remain acts of courage.

## Must-see exhibitions in Ho Chi Minh City

**“Christ, Buddha, and the Jigsaw” by Bùi Thanh Tâm**

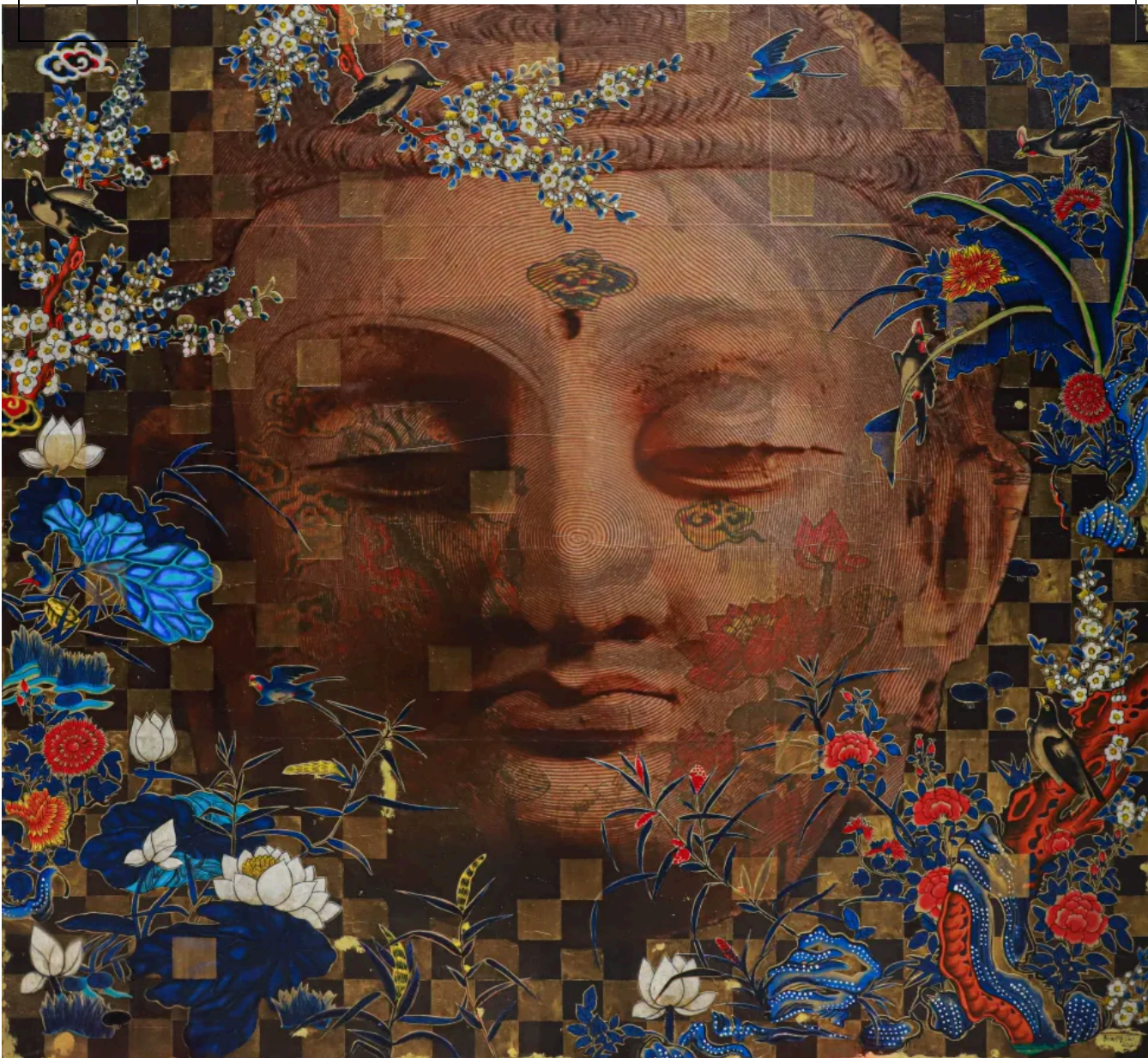
**“New Moon” by Trần Văn Thảo**

**“From Roots That Keep Reaching” featuring Mai Trung Thứ**

**“Peripheral Node” by Sơn Đặng**

**“Perpetual Flows” by Phan Linh**

**“Phụ Lục Project”**



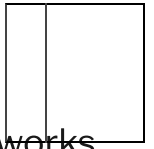
*Bui Thanh Tam, Buddha - God in the mind of Freedom No. 0, 2020. Dong Ho, Hang Trong, Kim Hoang, gold emulsion folk paintings, ink on canvas, 169 cm. x 169 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Gate Gate Gallery*

## “Christ, Buddha, and the Jigsaw” by Bùi Thanh Tâm



**Gate Gate Gallery | 230/18 Pasteur, Phường 6, Quận 3**

Presented by Gate Gate Gallery at the art space Chillala House of Art, Hanoi-based artist Bùi Thanh Tâm pushes his long-standing fascination with global hybridity to



America, is both exuberant and meditative, uniting nearly 50 post-pandemic works that fuse religious iconography, folk traditions and Pop media.

Christ, Buddha, the Statue of Liberty and eyeballs orbit one another across paintings and sculptures, surrounded by fragments of Đông Hồ, Kim Hoàng and Hàng Trống woodblock motifs. These images, cut into puzzle-like grids and digitally reprinted as multiples, form a kaleidoscopic cosmology of belief and reproduction. The result is an art of transformation—of faith into image, of originality into iteration—reflecting how, in the digital age, even divinity circulates as content.

Installed across two floors, the exhibition guides viewers through a deliberate ascension: the first floor's dense, image-saturated field of "multiples" gives way upstairs to the "originals." In *Buddha-God in the Mind of Freedom No. 0* (2020), a monumental Buddha head emerges from a dense field of gold-and-black checkerboard squares, its tranquil expression repeatedly disrupted by deliberate gaps that resemble digital glitches. Beneath the Buddha's surface, faint yet unmistakable, an image of Jesus appears. This subtle merging of two central religious figures destabilizes the notion of singular devotion, suggesting a shared spiritual architecture beneath seemingly disparate traditions. Surrounding the central face, Tâm overlays luxuriant blossoms, birds and serpentine forms drawn from Đông Hồ and Hàng Trống folk imagery, creating a cascading frame of vivid blues and reds. These organic motifs appear to bloom over the Buddha's visage even as the grid threatens to dismantle it. The work holds a productive tension between serenity and rupture, proposing enlightenment not as a fixed ideal but as an image repeatedly tested by history, hybridity and the fragmentation of faith in the digital age.

In Tâm's cosmology, faith doesn't disappear but rather mutates. By allowing Buddha and Christ to coexist with pop icons and digital glitches, he reframes salvation itself as an act of composition, one puzzle piece at a time.



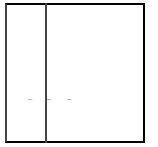
*Tran Van Thao, trăng non #18, 2025. Acrylic, oil, oil pastel, charcoal on canvas, 100 x 150 cm. (39 3/8 x 59 in.). Courtesy Galerie Quynh Contemporary Art and the artist*

## “New Moon” by Trần Văn Thảo [↗](#)

**Galerie Quynh Contemporary Art | 18 Nguyễn Văn Thủ, Đa Kao, Quận 1**

At Galerie Quynh, veteran abstractionist Trần Văn Thảo unveils “New Moon,” a series that reimagines darkness not as void but as potential. The title invokes the lunar phase when light disappears, yet in Thảo’s work the absence of illumination becomes a site of gestation. These paintings, contemplative and ecstatic, move in a language of gesture and intuition. The exhibition reads as a meditation on becoming, the instant before something stirs into being, when shadow and luminosity quietly negotiate their balance.

Up close, the works thrum with chromatic energy. *Trăng Non #21* (2025) anchors the show with an indigo field streaked by ember-red and black gestures, its vast surface



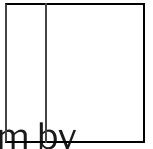
shifts between interior and exterior, containment and release, chart Thảo’s fascination with movement. Because his studio confines force him to work with the canvases laid flat on the floor, he paints while circling them, bending and stretching so the marks register the motion of his own body. Stray numerals and plus-signs recur like breath marks in this choreography. In “New Moon,” darkness doesn’t swallow light, it incubates it, transforming the act of painting into an act of faith in what cannot yet be seen.



Mai Trung Thứ (1906-1980)'s *Mona Lisa* (1974). Courtesy Quang San Art Museum

# “From Roots That Keep Reaching” featuring Mai Trung Thứ

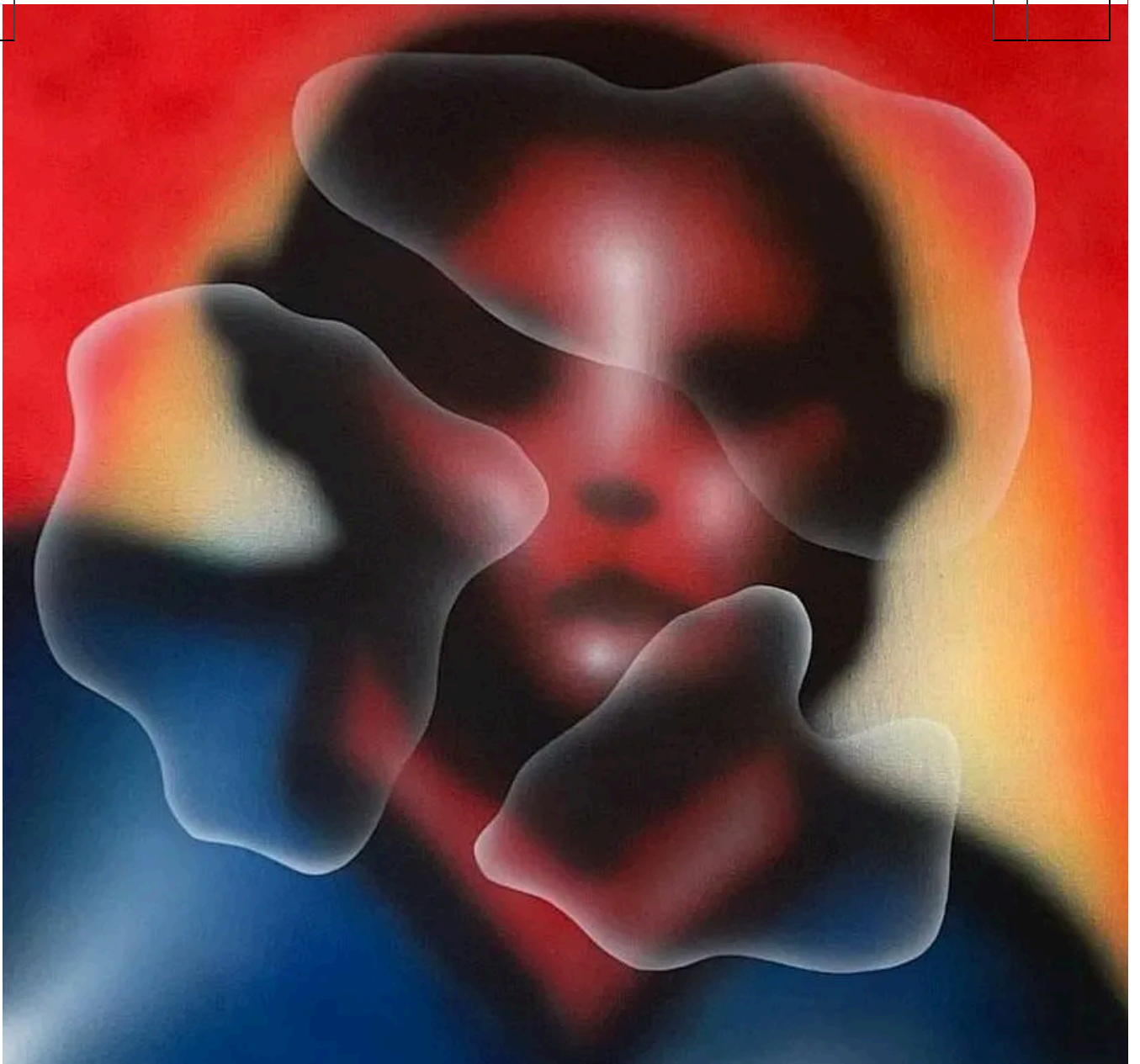
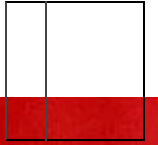
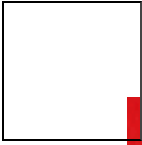




“*From Roots That Keep Reaching*” honors a century of Vietnamese modernism by tracing its origins to the founding of the École des Beaux-Arts de l’Indochine (Indochina College of Fine Arts), now known as the Vietnam University of Fine Arts, in 1925. The exhibition, timed to celebrate the school’s 100th anniversary, transports viewers back to the fertile Indochine period (1925-1945), when French academicism encountered Eastern sensibility to forge a new visual language. Far from imitation, the works on view reveal a dynamic exchange between tradition and modernity, craft and concept. Teachers and students alike experimented with lacquer, silk and woodblock techniques, discovering in these materials a uniquely Vietnamese form of expression.

The highlight of the exhibition is Vietnamese painter Mai Trung Thứ (1906-1980)’s *Mona Lisa* (1974), completed when the artist was 68. While referencing Leonardo da Vinci’s original, the painting transforms the Renaissance icon into something unmistakably Vietnamese: the subject wears the traditional áo dài, her jet-black hair veiled in sheer blue silk, seated before the misty backdrop of Hạ Long Bay. Known for his gouache-on-silk technique, he often depicted women, children and everyday life, blending tenderness with technical restraint. Painted on silk, a material that turns oil’s density into breath, his *Mona Lisa* glows with quiet defiance, transforming imitation into cultural translation.

Many viewers describe the painting as portraying Mona Lisa’s “smile through a new lens,” reframing European portraiture through the lens of Vietnamese femininity. Surrounded by contemporaries who shared his pursuit of harmony between East and West, Thứ’s work feels newly resonant, a reminder that the roots of modern Vietnamese art have always reached beyond borders while remaining grounded in the textures of home.

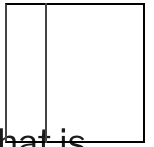
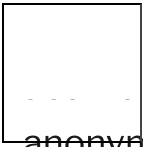


*Son Dang, Early nostalgia, 3rd person (Artifact #8), (2023). Acrylic, ink on canvas, 50 cm. x 50 cm. Courtesy the artist and Vin Gallery*

## “Peripheral Node” by Sơn Đặng [🔗](#)

**Vin Gallery | 35/8 Nguyen Van Dau, Binh Loi Trung, Ho Chi Minh City**

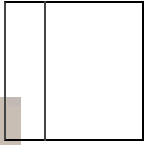
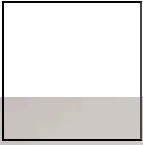
At Vin Gallery, Vietnamese artist Son Đặng presents “Peripheral Node,” a debut solo exhibition that translates the visual logic of the internet into paint. Living between Porto and Hanoi, Đặng belongs to a generation for whom the digital world is not a



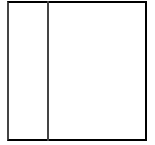
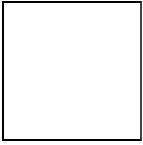
anonymous creators who exist at the network's margins, generating culture that is fleeting yet profoundly influential.

Curated around this concept, Đặng's paintings visualize how digital-native aesthetics—glitches, infinite scrolls and vibe shifts—have reshaped perception itself. His work asks what it means to create in an era when images disappear as quickly as they appear, when the feed has replaced the monument.

The canvases pulse with that ephemerality. Using thick impasto, neon chroma and fragmented compositions, Đặng renders the “poor image,” as defined by theorist *Hito Steyerl*, in material form. Paintings such as *Self-Portrait* (2023) and *Milky Dog* (2024) look as though they are buffering, glitched or compressed. Each brushstroke mimics a pixel grid, each blur a trace of digital decay. Rather than mourn the loss of permanence, Đặng embraces it, transforming compression into care and impermanence into presence. His canvases, vibrating between visibility and erasure, become visual metaphors for what he calls “a life shaped across screens, cities and timelines.”



Flows. 02  
Acrylic, embroidery  
on canvas  
w 113 x 4146.

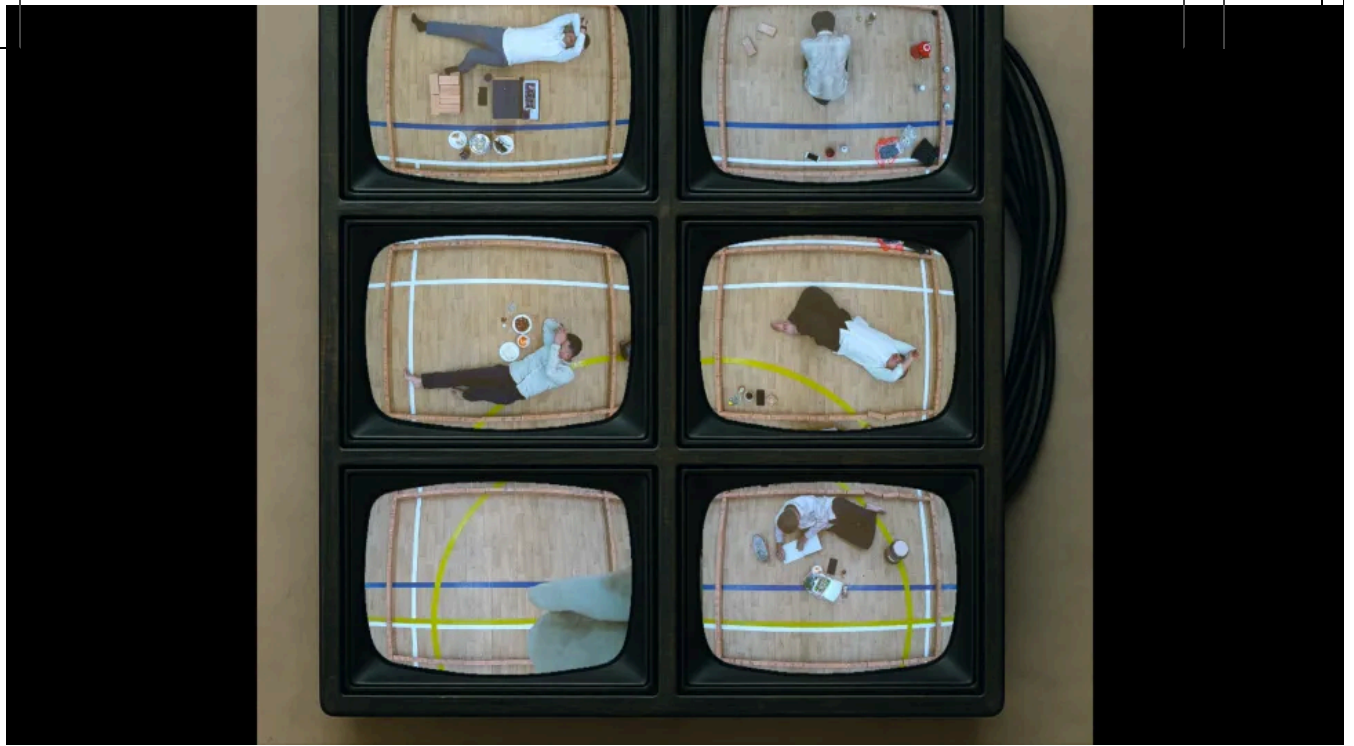


## “Perpetual Flows” by Phan Linh

**Gallery Medium | 240B Pasteur, Phường 6, Quận 3**

At Gallery Medium, “*Perpetual Flows*” marks the homecoming of *Phan Linh* (b. 1983, Hải Phòng) after years working and living in Norway, a return that feels both intimate and expansive. Her first solo exhibition in Vietnam, the show transforms nostalgia into a visual language that merges graphic design, craft and abstraction. Linh’s compositions are built from illustration-collage techniques and archival imagery, where women rendered with delicate gazes, bound hair and silk headscarves emerge like apparitions from memory. The circular bands of color threading through each canvas evoke the shape of the uterus, a form of protection, continuity and rebirth. “A vague whisper like smoke, lingering in the space,” Linh writes of these figures. They are not portraits so much as emotional echoes, whispers of homeland flowing between silence and return.

Most of her works shimmer with saturated reds, greens and cobalt blues that pulse against grayscale visages. These color bands slice through and around the faces, suggesting both concealment and connection, the simultaneity of rupture and repair. The embroidery threads catch light like veins of memory, grounding the digital flatness of collage in the tactility of craft. A former art director and window designer for Hermès, Linh carries an instinct for elegance and precision into painting, bridging commercial polish with emotional sincerity. “Perpetual Flows” becomes not only a meditation on womanhood and displacement but a gesture of return, where every curve, color and stitch circles back to the artist’s enduring question: how does one paint the feeling of going home?

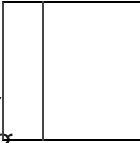



*Phụng Lược, Sáu Múi, 2025. Courtesy of Đặng Thuỳ Anh and Phụng Lược*

## “Phụng Lược Project”

**Nguyen Art Foundation | 147 Street No.8, Nam Long Residential Area, Quận 7**

At the Nguyen Art Foundation, the “*Phụng Lược Project*” unfolds not as a retrospective but as a living archive, an evolving attempt to understand how performance is remembered, translated and carried forward. Spanning two venues and six months, the initiative traces the fifteen-year practice of Phụng Lược, the Hanoi-born collective founded in 2010 by six artists whose work has long hovered at the edges of Vietnam’s contemporary scene. Known for their use of everyday, allegorical objects —ropes, bowls, wooden stools, dust, metal scraps—and for performances rooted in minimal, durational gestures, the group has spent more than a decade experimenting with abstraction, social allegory and chance. “Phụng Lược Project” positions its archive within the wider history of performance in Vietnam and Southeast Asia while acknowledging how many of the collective’s gestures exist only as residue: traces, ruptures and gaps that resist easy narration.



machines and sonic fragments are reassembled into new installations, turning curation itself into an act of restaging and reinvention. If performance disappears the moment it ends, here it reappears in the afterlife, falsetto, fragmented yet insistently alive. The second chapter, “Phụ Lục, How Are You?”, created by the collective for NAF’s Nam Long venue, shifts from history to self-interrogation. New works for 2025 respond to the deceptively simple question “how are you?”, a phrase that hovers between sincerity, formality and emptiness, echoing the group’s approach to doubt, self-reflection and the threshold of middle age. Together with “Index 2010-2025,” a chronological archive of thirty-seven performances and contextual material, the project creates a porous, open-access memory field. In this unfolding exhibition, performance becomes not a fixed event but an ongoing conversation, layering, overwriting and continually performing itself into the present.