

PRESS RELEASE



Trương Công Tùng, still from the video *Journey of a piece of soil*, 2013-ongoing, 33'35s.

A duo exhibition by

NGUYỄN Duy Mạnh

TRƯƠNG Công Tùng

Untamed Souls

Curator: Lê Thiên-Bảo

In collaboration with Sàn Art

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Duration: **14 May - 19 June 2024**

Opening reception at 18h, 16 May

at **Galerie BAQ**, 15 rue Beaubreillis, 75004 Paris

Location: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/Gtg9V7DWywJ1YU8L8>

Public hours: 11-19h, Tuesday - Saturday

Free admission, no reservations required

Galerie BAQ and **Sàn Art** are pleased to present *Untamed Souls*, featuring artists **Trương Công Tùng** and **Nguyễn Duy Mạnh**, to the Parisian public. This exhibition brings together two contrasting practices, becoming a sumptuous feast in a wild garden, and calls into question "earth" in all its physical, historical, and cultural implications.

In the center of the gallery, a dramatic banquet of symbols is set to feed six people. These cups, bowls, and platters are part of a larger series of 54 place settings (created between 2017 and 2023) that represent the 54 ethnic minorities coexisting in the Vietnamese territory. Nguyễn Duy Mạnh named this series *Hồn Xiêu - Phách Lạc* (Wandering Souls - Lost Spirits): "hồn" (spirit) refers to the ceramic "skins" hanging on the wall; "phách" (spirit's envelope) refers to the weightier, sophisticated dishes on the table, prepared from shards with ancient patterns. The artist's sharing and distribution of the meal invites spectators to participate in its ritual, in a gesture that is both generous and intimate. Part of this meal was exhibited in [Becoming Alice: through the metal tunnel](#) at The Outpost Contemporary Art Center (Hanoi) earlier in 2024.



Nguyễn Duy Mạnh, *Phách Lạc (Lost Spirits)*, 2017-2023, exhibition view at The Outpost Hanoi.
Photo : Chimnon Studio. Courtesy of The Outpost

Drawing primarily from the Chu Đậu style, the artist elevates the history of Vietnamese ceramics by using motifs from the Lý-Trần (11th-14th century) and the Initial Lê (15th century) dynasties. He dissects, peels, and reconstructs them into irresistible dishes themselves awaiting consumption. According to researcher Philippe Trương: *“The perceptible stigmata on the ceramics are as much marks of [the artist’s] suffering as the infamies that his contemporaries inflict on their rich cultural heritage that is threatened with extinction.”*¹

According to Nguyễn Duy Mạnh, in this era of digital imperialism, ceramic work is a way to pay homage to ancestral knowledge and to cherish the traditions of his homeland. The presence of bullet holes and traces of violence in the series is also a meticulous archiving of his family history as peasant soldiers through warfare. The subversion of the noble patterns of Lý and Trần dynasties into the Chu Đậu-style commodities mass-produced in the Hải Dương of the past serves as a violent critique of consumerism. If soil is a metaphor for the transient existence of men, its transformation into ceramics materializes the artist’s obsession with the rupture between generations.



On the other side of the gallery, and in a more abstract manner, the artwork *As time passes through shadows...* (2023-present) by Trương Công Tùng quietly reveals the dynamics of childhood. Born and raised in Gia Lai, in the highlands, Trương Công Tùng’s childhood is inhabited by long moonlit nights among the coffee trees, where the sounds of insects lull him to sleep. Thus, the lacquer technique leads him to erase the superficial to find figures buried in deeper layers, as in an archaeological dig. Each lacquer painting on terracotta is a stele of memory.

Trương Công Tùng, *As time passes through shadows...*, (2023-présent), exhibition view at Sàn Art.
Photo: Sàn Art.

¹ Original version in French *“Les stigmates perceptibles sur ses céramiques sont autant des marques de sa souffrance que les infamies que ses contemporains infligent à leur identité nationale et à leur riche héritage culturel menacé d’extinction.”* Philippe Trương, essay “Nguyễn Duy Mạnh and the critical banquet”, Paris, April, 2024.

Trương Công Tùng approaches art like gardening, creating an environment where seeds are sown and their growth is observed. Almost all of his works are "in progress," allowing the artist to revisit them at any time and plant new seeds. Thus, the artist's creative periods coexist harmoniously, intertwining and interacting as in an ecosystem. From his solo exhibition *The Disoriented Garden...A Breath of Dream...* (2023-ongoing) at Sàn Art (Ho Chi Minh City) in early 2024, to *A State of Absence... Words Out There...*² (2020-ongoing) at the 60th Venice Biennale, viewers can directly witness this synchronization. Everything breathes and revolves around the soul of the highlands.



Trương Công Tùng, *A State of Absence... Words Out There...* (2020-ongoing), exhibition view, the 60th Venice Biennale, Italy.
Photo: Lê Thiên Bảo

² The installation is part of the exhibition [The Spirit of Maritime Crossing](#), organized by the Bangkok Art Biennial Foundation, in the collateral events of the 60th Venice Biennale, Italy, 2024.

Barely any gap is perceptible between the video work *Journey Of A Piece Of Soil*, which began over a decade ago in 2013, and the works created recently. In the *Untamed Souls* exhibition at Galerie BAQ, the video, screened in the gallery's lower level, demands that viewers descend into a cramped space in a brief escape into the past. The space dedicated to Trương Công Tùng recalls two sedimentary layers, wherein images, movements, poetry, and the chaos of a community intertwine.

In the artist's words, "*The stories deal with the epic of Rđh Ma Dzđ, a man of the Jrai ethnicity in a small village in Gia Lai, in the Central Highlands. The epic begins with him searching for and digging up a piece of land (a termite mound), and with that, he wanders from East to West, from South to North, from the jungle to the city, through the traces of life and death, through the spaces...*"

On this planet, each patch of land holds the echoes of civilizations past and yet to come. Earth transcends mere territory or habitat; it is the sediment of time, at once a genesis and a finale. *Untamed Souls* seeks to illuminate this cycle, underscoring the finite nature of human progress while nature cradles the myriad of existence, remaining the sole entity capable of reverting to primordial origins and attaining eternity.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Trương Công Tùng (b. 1986) grew up in Dak Lak among various ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands, Vietnam. He graduated from the Ho Chi Minh Fine Arts University in 2010, majoring in lacquer painting. With research interests in science, cosmology and philosophy and the environment, he works with a range of media, including video, installation, painting and found objects, which reflect personal contemplations on the cultural and geopolitical shifts of modernization, as embodied in the morphing ecology, belief or mythology of a land. He is also a member of Art Labor (founded in 2012), a collective working between visual art and social/life sciences to produce alternative non-formal knowledge via artistic and cultural activities in various public contexts and locales.

Trương Công Tùng has extensively exhibited both in Vietnam and abroad as a solo artist and as a member of the Art Labor collective. His works have been showcased in numerous prestigious museums and art institutions worldwide, including the 60th



Venice Biennale, Italy (2024), the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, USA (2023), Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany (2023), Para Site, Hong Kong (2023), 58th Carnegie International, Pittsburgh, USA (2022), San Art, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (2019); Bangkok Art Biennale, Bangkok, Thailand (2018); Dhaka Art Summit, Dhaka, Bangladesh (2018); Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (2017); Kadist, San Francisco, USA (2016), and more.

[Download Artist's CV](#)

Nguyễn Duy Mạnh (b. 1984) was born in Vinh Phuc, Vietnam. He graduated from the College of Education in 2007 with a major in Fine Arts Education. He is a member of the Vietnam Fine Arts Association and currently lives and works in Hanoi. Since 2006, Duy Mạnh has successively worked with media and materials such as painting, fiber, objects, and ceramics. He strives to reveal the spiritual life within the objects and matter incorporated into his work through manipulation, action, and the arrangement of the exhibition space. Throughout his practice, Duy Mạnh is concerned with highlighting the vulnerability and disintegration of values and culture. He represents the trauma that disrupts an individual's spiritual life in the face of ongoing reality.

Some of his selected exhibitions include: *Becoming Alice: Through The Metal Tunnel*, The Outpost, Hanoi, 2024; *The Inner Space*, Vietnam Fine Arts Museum, Hanoi, (2016); "Yin and Yang in Contemporary Sculpture", The Muse Art Space, Hanoi, (2023); *Vietnam National Fine Arts Exhibition*, Hoa Lư, Hanoi, Vietnam, (2020); *Bị mắt bắt dê*, Ngo Quyen Art Center, Hanoi, Vietnam, (2019), etc.

[Download Artist's CV](#)

ABOUT THE ORGANIZERS

Galerie BAQ opened in 2023, under the direction of Lê Thiên-Bảo and Quinnie SG Tan. Situated in the heart of Paris, Galerie BAQ champions and amplifies contemporary art from the world's emerging centers of creativity, working directly and in collaboration with artists who have ties to Southeast Asia and their diasporic communities everywhere. In addition to artists whose work creates dialogue with Southeast Asia, Galerie BAQ is curious about forms of cultural production and creative expression that engage with complex histories and identities, reimagine traditions, and challenge dominant ideologies.



Using the geoculture of Southeast Asia as a method, Galerie BAQ emphasizes the development of collaborations and programs with various organizations and collectives, like metaphoric islands of an archipelago: geographically separate yet closely linked. Partners include The Outpost Art Organization (Hanoi), The Factory Contemporary Arts Center (Ho Chi Minh City), POUISH (Aubervilliers), A2Z Art Gallery (Paris), Sa Sa Art Project (Phnom Penh), RUBANAH-Underground Hub (Jakarta) et ATTA Gallery (Bangkok). galeriebaq.com

Sàn Art

Founded in 2007 in Ho Chi Minh City as an artist-led platform, Sàn Art has since grown into a leading independent arts organization in Vietnam and the region.

Maintaining a commitment to grassroots support for local and international artists and cultural work, Sàn Art is also a site for critical discourse with regular educational initiatives.

Aside from its exhibition programmes (more than 110 since 2007), Sàn Art's past projects include the artist-residency Sàn Art Laboratory (2012-2015) and Conscious Realities (2013-2016), a series of publications and events, inviting writers, artists, thinkers and cultural workers with a focus on the Global South.

In 2018, Sàn Art launched Uncommon Pursuits, a curatorial training school, and a new gallery with a focus on dialogues between modern and contemporary art in Vietnam and the region. That same year it also launched A. Farm (2018-2020), an international artist residency programme co-founded with MoT+++ and the Nguyen Art Foundation. Opening a new chapter in the organisation's history, Sàn Art is expanding as a community hub to support and foster innovative and experimental practices and perspectives.

san-art.org

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