

ARTIST | VIETNAM

Tiffany Chung

Tiffany Chung is one of Vietnam's most respected and internationally active contemporary artists. Based in Saigon, Chung has received wide acclaim for her exquisite cartographic drawings and multi-media practice that explore spatial and sociopolitical transformations interwoven with the lingering resonances of historical trauma. She was awarded the 2013 Sharjah Biennial Prize and featured in 2015 Venice Biennale main exhibition *All The World's Futures*.



Tiffany Chung's *Roaming with the Dawn – Snow Drifts, Rain Falls, Desert Wind Blows* 2012.
Comprising of 4000 hand blown glass animals crafted by artisans in Ho Chi Min City.

ON GENDER AND CHOICES

I majored in photography and art as soon as I started college. My decision to choose art as a career was affirmed during graduate school, when I became more convinced of how art could influence and shape culture and society. It was also a challenge that I wanted to take on – to have my voice as a woman artist in the art world largely dominated by successful male artists.

ON SAN ART AND DEVELOPING CONTEMPORARY ART IN VIETNAM

My family migrated to the US from Vietnam as refugees after the war. One of the biggest challenges when I first came back to Vietnam in 2000 was the lack of an art infrastructure and a supporting community that would come together and actively engage in the socio-political issues of a fast changing, post-war society. So I co-founded San Art with Dinh Q. Le and two other artists in 2007. Under the leadership of Executive Director Zoe Butt and our board members, San Art has been playing an active role in promoting critical thinking concerning interdisciplinary practice and knowledge of art within our community through a series of exhibitions, a residency program and an education program called ‘Conscious Realities.’ San Art has become a key meeting point that introduces a broad array of international visitors (artists, curators, researchers, collectors and much more) to the local artistic community. San Art would not be where it is today were it not for a select handful of international foundations and private individuals who have supported us in our struggle to support artists in a country with no financial support for contemporary art.

ON MENTORING THE NEXT GENERATION OF VIETNAMESE ARTISTS

We have come a long way in the past fifteen years. Young Vietnamese artists these days are eager to learn and practice contemporary art, despite the lack of critical thinking in the education system here. With San Art programs mentioned above, we aim to continue supporting and equipping artists with knowledge beyond art; to experiment beyond their training in the plastic arts, to collaborate and

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research within other disciplines of research and innovation. In turn, a number of artists have been active in the region and even in the international art scene. I hope young Vietnamese artists understand the most important aspects of this field of work are the genuine interest in issues that matter to society, and the tenacity to keep it going; that our quest for knowledge would take us on a journey rather than just to arrive at a destination. I certainly hope they can sustain their practice by developing a critical voice that demands changes in our society and especially in the education system here, which [in the past forty years] has been deliberately promoting what I call ‘politically-driven historical amnesia.’

ON BEING AN ARTIST

I wake up everyday grateful for being able to do what I do and looking forward to materialize my research and ideas. Living in Vietnam with its current political state, I want my work to function as a protest against this ‘politically-driven historical amnesia’ that I spoke earlier. It is important to encourage the viewer to enter my work through its exciting visual, before realizing the heavy conceptual framework.

As I explore issues of urban progress and transformation, the link to history and geopolitics is inevitable. My academic and ethnographic research leads to excavating and remapping certain unrecorded or denied



histories in countries currently under dictatorship, and those with colonial or imperial legacies. Being given a platform such as the Venice Biennale 2015 has made me think more about my responsibility as an artist. How do I, a former refugee, contribute to the on-going dialogue on global refugee issues? And continuing from this platform, how do my studies of the Vietnam Exodus history inform the development of asylum policies to be applied towards the Syrian refugees and those from other countries? How does my work analyse past experiences and provoke thoughts that lead to the demand for better changes?

ON SUCCESS

If success means the satisfaction of doing the work you love and being able to contribute to society, then the two most important key factors

are having genuine interests in social issues that matter to your own as well as the global community, and the tenacity to keep working, knowing that your work can make a difference however small it is. Perhaps I have been surviving in the art industry because I pay very little attention to what people in the art are currently interested in but instead keep myself occupied with research projects that allow me to unpack and learn from history and world geopolitics. I am just happy to have art as a tool and a platform to explore and discuss things that I am deeply concerned about. It is such a luxury.

ON FUTURE CHALLENGES

There are always challenges that need to be overcome and dreams to be fulfilled. I will feel so blessed to be able to continue doing this work in the years to come. ■

Tiffany Chung participated in 'Our Land/Alien Territory', an exhibition that brings together artists from different countries and global regions whose work investigates the relation between space and politics at Central Exhibition Hall Manege, Moscow. (Sept. 16 - Oct. 4, 2015)