



# Tiffany Chung: Passage of Time

*An artist in touch with the traumas of recent political history, Tiffany Chung gives her full attention to matters that are frightening or mind-numbing to the rest of us. She wakes us up to the troubles in the world and explains why we find ourselves in the state we are in. Barbara Pollack takes a close look at her recent solo exhibition with in New York.*

TEXT: Barbara Pollack

IMAGES: Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art



Installation view of Tiffany Chung's exhibition "passage of time" at Tyler Rollins Fine Art. Image courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art.

One of the leading artists emerging from Vietnam, Tiffany Chung was born in [Da Nang](#) in 1969, and subsequently moved with her family to the U.S. after 1975. In 2000, Chung returned to Vietnam, where she lives and works in Ho Chi Minh City. From this first-hand experience of migration, Chung has built a body of work focused on the lives of refugees, immigrants, political upheavals and globalization. Yet her artworks go well beyond autobiography. Steeped in research, Chung immerses herself in data, archival

material, news accounts and video interviews to address political trauma, buried history and untold stories not only from Vietnam, but also more recently in Guatemala and Syria.

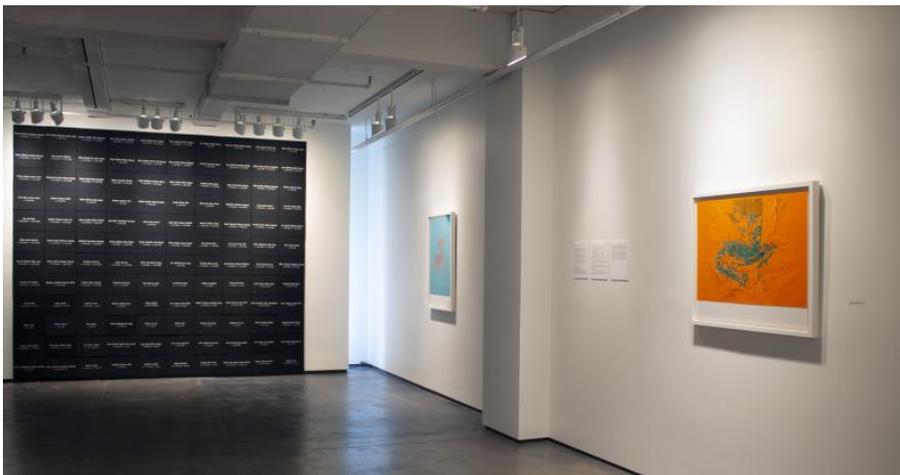
This current exhibition at Tyler Rollins Fine Art in New York is something of a retrospective, reviving works made earlier in her career as well as her most recent endeavors. The first half of the show is titled “The Vietnam Exodus Project.” Its centerpiece is a recreation of a 2008 sculpture of a massive pink megaphone laying on a floor covered in text depicting post-war reforms & regimentation of daily living interspersed between Communist propaganda slogans that the artist recalls from her childhood in Vietnam. Others works referring to Viet Nam come straight from the artist’s recent tour de force at the Smithsonian American Art Museum for which she created first hand video interviews with refugees from South Vietnam to the United States, recounting stories that fill in the blanks in official accounts and counterbalance Hollywood versions of the Vietnam war experience. But this presentation is not purely documentary or didactic. Two series of 38 painted handkerchiefs: *Destination Songkhla: pirate attacks in the Gulf of Thailand, Oct–Dec 1985* and *Destination Pulau Bidong: pirate attacks in the Gulf of Thailand, Dec 1985–June 1986*, each decorated with fabric, thread, glitter and acrylic paint making an abstract homage to those who were lost.



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The second half of the show, “The Guatemala Project,” is Chung’s 2019 version of a political history lesson, looking at how imperialist CIA policies, transnational corporations and civil war have impacted the

topography of this Central American country. Fittingly, she starts her investigation with a collage tracing the route of a banana from a Guatemala plantation to an American supermarket, laid out as straightforward as evidence in a criminal case. In a beautifully embroidered map, Chung demonstrates how the once-powerful United Fruit Company, an American firm now known as Chiquita, has taken over land and properties throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. She uses maps repeatedly, demonstrating both the strengths and limitations of cartography to convey truths, such as in her haunting pair of drawings, documenting the magnitude and location of massacres taking place during the country's civil war and later during protests against transnational corporations. One is presented against a bright turquoise background, the other against an even brighter shade of orange, these works are skillfully made with acrylic, oil and ink on vellum, their beauty underscoring tragedy. On an adjacent wall, the "Guatemala Memorial Project" presents a wall of white embroidery on black cloths showing 120 names culled from Diario Militar and the Guatemala Human Rights Commission of individuals who were either killed, captured, abducted or disappeared due to these eruptions of violence.



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This show is not a quick read and requires close attention on the part of viewers to understand all the comprehensive information packed into each piece. But because the works are so skillfully created and so unabashedly beautiful, this process of reading the artworks never becomes tedious. Chung's knowledge of her material is impressive and the way she is able to digest extensive information into a single map or image is intimidating. But she is definitely an artist in touch with the traumas of recent political history, giving her full attention to matters that are frightening or mind-numbing to the rest of us. She wakes us up to the troubles in the world and explains why we find ourselves in the state we are in.

For this alone, Chung deserves all the attention she has recently received and hopefully, will gain even more prominence in the future.

*Tiffany Chung: Passage of Time*

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**About the artist**

One of Vietnam's most respected and internationally active contemporary artists, Tiffany Chung is noted for her cartographic drawings, sculptures, videos, photographs, and theater performances that examine conflict, migration, displacement, urban progress and transformation in relation to history and cultural memory. Chung's interest in imposed political borders and their traumatic impacts on different groups of human populations has underpinned her commitment to conducting an ongoing comparative study of forced migration—through both the current Syrian humanitarian crisis and the post-1975 mass exodus of Vietnamese refugees, of which she herself was a part.