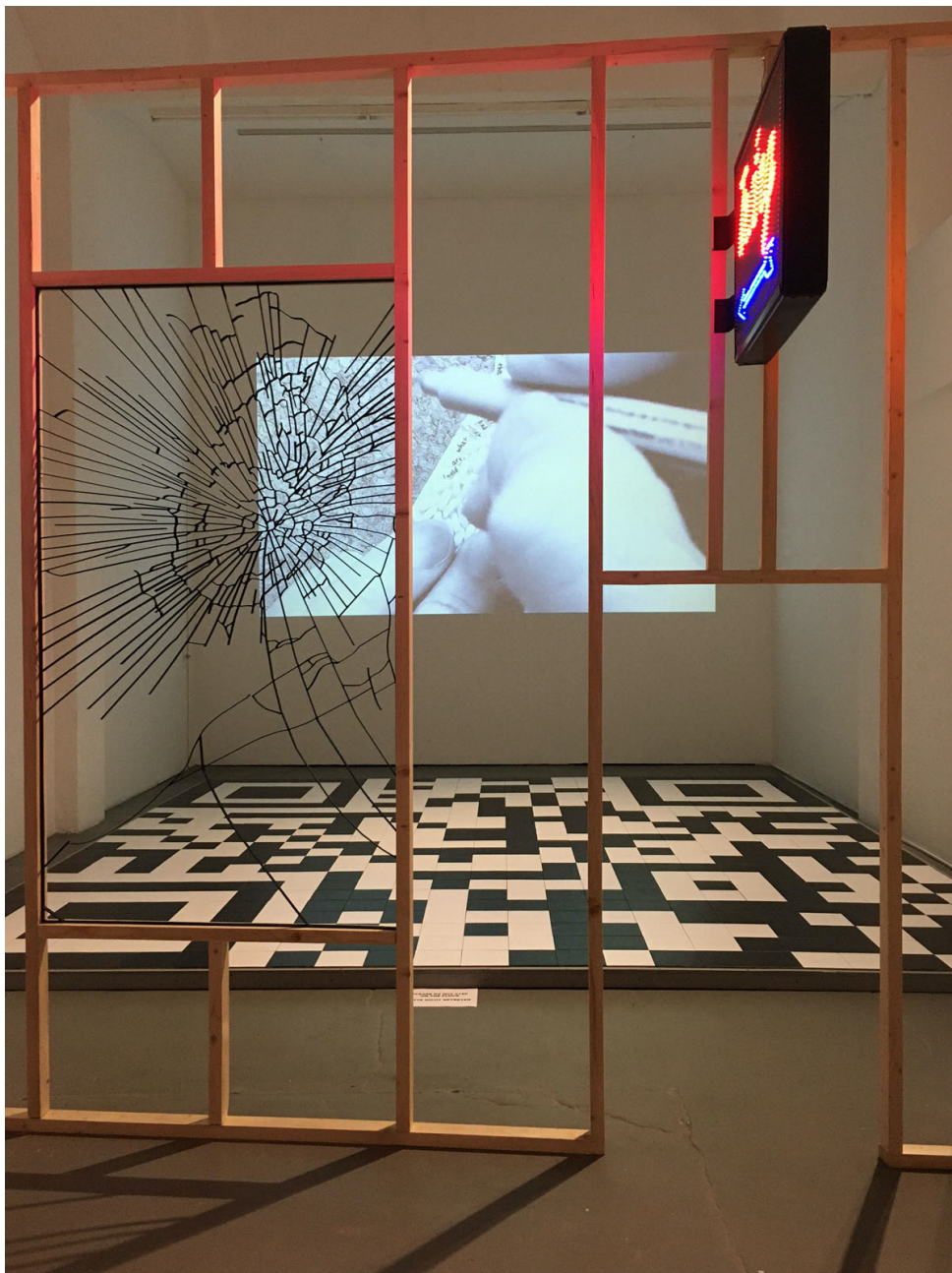


TRONG GIA NGUYEN: FOIBLES OF A RECONSTRUCTION

Curated by Phuong Phan

4.-26.9.2021

Hours: Thursday-Sunday, 14h-19h



Installation view

Cracked Mobile #11; 07/05/2021 – 11:15 (Pfizer, 2nd Shot); The Tyger; Chuoi/Trang



(LEFT) **11/06/2021 – 10:42 (Pfizer, 1st Shot)**, 2021, wood, sheetrock, 250 x 330 x 10 cm
 (RIGHT) **We Don't Need No Education**, 2021, canvas, chalk, chalkboard paint, 146 x 150 x 20 cm



Installation views
 (BOTTOM): **07/05/2021 – 11:15 (Pfizer, 2nd Shot)**, 2021, ceramic tiles, 500 x 500 cm



Installation view: **11/06/2021 – 10:42 (Pfizer, 1st Shot)**, 2021, wood, sheetrock, 270 x 330 x 10 cm

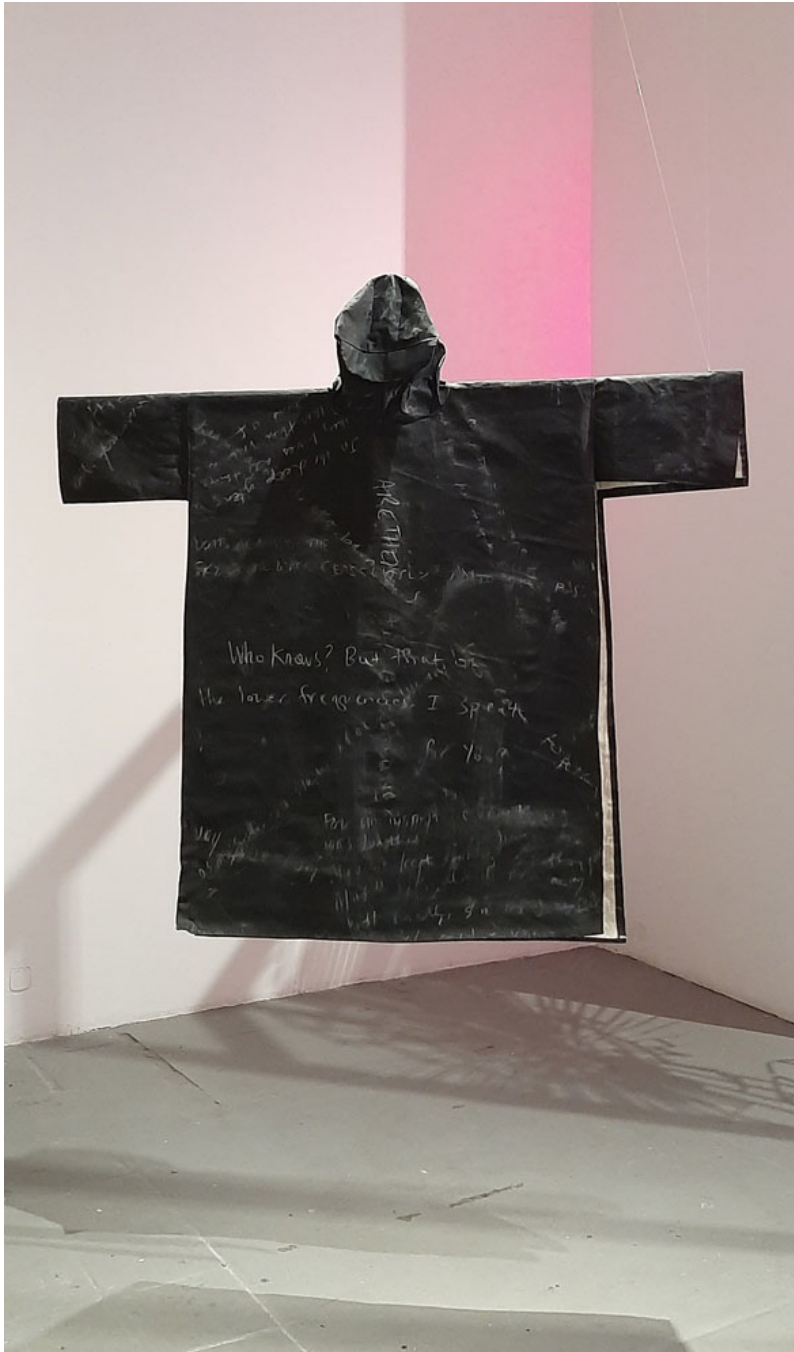


(LEFT) **Executive Orders** 2017-18, HD video with audio loop composed by Adam Aaronson
 (RIGHT) **GGGuns**, 2018-2021, 3D-printed gun components, fabric upholstery, etched plexi, custom wood frame, dimensions variable



GGGuns

2018-21, 3D printed firearm parts from plan found on the Internet,
PLA plastic, metal, fabric upholstery, etched plexi, painted wood frame Unique
Variable dimensions



We Don't Need No Education

2021, canvas, chalk, chalkboard paint, 146 x 150 x 20 cm

LIST OF WORKS



- 1.**
07/05/2021 – 11:15 (Pfizer, 2nd Shot)
2021, ceramic tiles, 500 x 500 cm



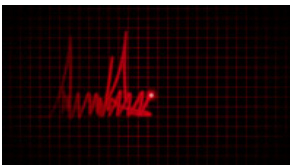
- 2.**
11/06/2021 – 10:42 (Pfizer, 1st Shot)
2021, wood, sheetrock, 250 x 330 x 10 cm



- 3.**
We Don't Need No Education
2021, canvas, chalk, chalkboard paint, 146 x 150 x 20 cm



- 4.**
Cracked Mobile #11
2018, welded iron, acrylic paint, 239 x 165 x 15 cm



- 5.**
Executive Orders
2017-18, HD video with audio (snare drum, cymbals, synthesizer, keys)
composed by Adam Aaronson, loop



6.
Chuối Trắng (Bananas/Whites)
2019, LED light box, 53.5 x 0 x 9 cm



7.
The Tyger
2021, HD Video, 22:20 minutes



8.
In Case Of Flying Saucer Attack
2018, PLA plastic, fabric upholstery, etched plexi, painted wood frame, 27.9 x 66 x 9 cm



9.
In Case Of Nativist Hypocrisy
2021, PLA plastic, fabric upholstery, etched plexi, painted wood frame, 27.3 x 45 x 9 cm



10.
In Case Of Genius Destabilizing
2018, PLA plastic, metal, fabric upholstery, etched plexi, painted wood frame, 31.1 x 40.6 x 9 cm



11.
In Case Of The Abstract
2021, PLA plastic, metal, fabric upholstery, etched plexi, painted wood frame, 30 x 32 x 9 cm



12.
In Case Of The Blue Pill
2021, PLA plastic, metal, fabric upholstery, etched plexi, painted wood frame, 39 x 36 x 9 cm



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FOIBLES OF A RECONSTRUCTION

“We choose to build. We choose to destroy. Whether starting from populist nativism or poetic verse, what cannot be understood leads to alienation and fear, and even a disconnection with empathy and humanity, ultimately resulting in the extremities of cultural polarization and brute violence”

At the heart of his artistic practice, Trong Gia Nguyen unravels the connection between structural power and its representations, through layered language, symbolism, and miscommunication. *Foibles of a Reconstruction* addresses the audience as an “implied reader” and asks them to labor through the many twists and turns that Nguyen encodes within the work, not unlike a novel by Calvino. The power play between artist and viewer is confrontational, an experiment in miscommunication that values fragmentation – an inherent trait of language. Lest there be too much pessimism, his installational works employ various architecture to not only create confusion and alienation, but ultimately to bridge the abysses of failed speech.

With the introduction this summer of Covid travel passports, the debate of private choice versus public health safety, versus government overreach gets called into question in two large installational works by the artist. Utilizing the two electronic codes – one a QR code and the other a UPC or bar code – issued to him for his two Pfizer vaccination appointments, Nguyen transforms the digital stamps into architectural structures that evoke the present ubiquity and universality of such language, but also the opaque nature of their unreadability to the human mind.

The QR code, titled **07/05/2021 – 11:15**, is a 5x5m floor-sized pattern formed by black and white ceramic tiles placed on a raised floor. The unwieldy scale of the pattern makes it impossible to be scanned within the NON space. By virtue of walking across this floor, one’s tracks physically disrupt the tracking code.

Operating as a companion piece and bookend to the floor tiles is **11/06/2021 – 10:42**, a line of vertical wood planks cut to variable widths that is partially sheathed in gypsum panels, revealing a wall that allows entry on the sides while blockading part of the NON space. The gypsum panels have been diagonally cut away, leaving a landscape-like panorama of incompleteness to the visible studs that form the barcode.

As physical impediments in the space, they confront the viewer in a way that is relatable to the domestic sphere. As with most of Nguyen’s works, there is comfort in a certain familiarity and recognition.

The artist constructs a second wall of just wooden studs, incorporating an uncomfortably low doorway and a large window that frames **Cracked Mobile #11**, an architectural security grate that one might find in old colonial homes in Vietnam, and Europe. Rather than depicting traditional geometric patterns, these mimic the common shattered glass cracks of mobile



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phones. Just as cell phones open their black mirrors into our mediated lives, these likewise operate as a portal into how data is consumed, mined, re-coded and weaponized. Physically, the work reflects upon senseless architectural destruction (in the name of economic progress) and hint at a decline of empire.

Fostering this destabilization, Nguyen literally builds a version of our accelerated contemporary culture which is shaped by hidden matrices and the encoding / encryption of language / data. With the texts employed in these works, Nguyen caters to incitement, confusion, and purposefully thwarting the written word's central role as a communication tool. The texts of the series *GGGuns* mock the insecurity of gun owners, for example, while in the video *The Tyger*, the act of writing texts word for word on grains of rice is at once performative, poetic and absurdist. The serenity of transcribing William Blake acts in strong contrast to the asinine mediocrity of clueless cowboys.

In *Chuối/Trắng (Banana/Whites)*, the work mimics the ubiquitous LED store signages in Vietnam, while simultaneously referencing the old "Jim Crow" laws – a law that enforced racial segregation in the USA from 1877 until the beginning of the civil rights movement in the 1950s, and which continues to rear its ugly head in other forms of institutional racism. The title refers to the pejorative term "banana", as used to call an Asian person who grew up in Western cultures and has lost touch with the cultural identity of his or her parents. So like a banana, "yellow on the outside and white on the inside", *Chuối/Trắng (Banana/Whites)* implies the long-lasting consequences of colonialism. Equally important to the artist, the work looks at the notion of what the artist calls "recolonialism", whereby those societies that fought so hard to vanquish their oppressors blandly assume the imperialist's mentality, not only as can be seen in the consolidation of power, as is the case with Vietnam, but also in its aspirations to consumerism and possessing the look of the elite exploiter, from Gucci handbags to Rolex watches. As anti-Asian violence increases across the United States, the work also calls into question the internalized racism that runs deep within the psyche of Vietnamese Americans.

At the entryway, *Executive Orders* depicts a single channel video of a cardiograph mimicking Donald Trump's cartoonish signature. The title refers to the president's easy ability to sign orders that have the full force of law. Instead of the traditional beep, the crests of Trump's cardio-autograph is synced with audio of gunshots, alluding to the swift action and deadly abuse of power with which the president can inflict on vulnerable populations with one stroke of a pen. Magnifying the absurdity of American inaction to gun violence, Nguyen commissioned musician Adam Aaronson to recreate the sound of gunshots using the layering of traditional and non-studio instruments, anything except a firearm. As with all cardiographs, they eventually end with a flat line.

By extension, the artist's series *GGGuns* looks at gun violence through the lens of 3D printed firearms. Since 2013, when Texas law student Cody Wilson made the first "Liberator" handgun available as a printable file, the court battle continues to oscillate between legality and criminality. In the meantime, Wilson's company Defense Distributed has made over 15,000 files available for download. Nguyen alludes to the mootness of such regulations, and instead bluntly calls out the cowardice of many a gun owners. During a residency in California in 2018, he downloaded a number of files available at that time and had them printed. The parts of each firearm are displayed piecemeal in a shadowbox frame with goofy texts etched onto the



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protective glass, such as “In Case of Insecure Patriarchal Masculinity” and “In Case of Genius Destabilizing”.

Lastly, ***We Don't Need No Education*** is a rain poncho sewn from canvas that has been primed with chalkboard paint. With traces of bygone “instructions” from The Book of the Dead and the final words of various novels smeared all over its surfaces, the cloak is a haunted spectre of sorts, written over and erased, for all eternity. It is a remnant of the failed lessons we all live, and die, with.

BIOS

Trong Gia Nguyen (b. 1971 Saigon, Vietnam) is a Vietnamese-American artist based in Brussels, Belgium. His wide array of works examines structures of power in their myriad forms. Regularly employing humor while at other times engaging sober reflection, Nguyen’s work elevates the condition of doubt as it reveals and disrupts the undercarriage of our most trusted spaces – domestic, cultural, political, and economical. He has exhibited internationally in numerous solo and group exhibitions including: *Anthology for Beginners*, La Patinoire Royale / Galerie Valerie Bach (Brussels, Belgium, 2021); *My Myopia*, Cornell Fine Arts Museum (Florida, USA, 2018); *California Pacific Triennial*, Orange County Museum of Art (California, USA, 2018); *The Foliage*, Vincom Center for Contemporary Art (Hanoi, Vietnam, 2017); *The Others*, Piazzale Valdo Fusi (Torino, Italy, 2015); *Eye on the Storm*, Housatonic Museum of Art (Connecticut, USA, 2013); *Satellites in the Night*, Freies Museum, (Berlin, Germany, 2010), *The Sixth Borough* (New York, USA, 2010); *Sequences*, (Reykjavik, Iceland, 2008); and *Performa 05*, Artists Space (New York, USA, 2005). Trong has received grants and residencies from the Museum of Arts & Design (NY), Artist in Residence in the Everglades (FL), Gate 27 (Istanbul, Turkey), LegalArt Miami (FL), LMCC (NY), FabLab (CA), Harvestworks Digital Media Center (NY), Bronx Museum of the Arts (NY), Puffin Foundation (NJ), among others.

Phuong Phan is a Vietnamese-German independent researcher and curator based in Berlin, Germany. She uses exhibition as her research method to analyse the nature of power, the foundation of its legitimacy and the relationship between arts and politics. Currently, she works as a researcher assistant at Gropius Bau and pursues her PhD in Social-Anthropology at University Bielefeld. In her research project, she deals with the social life and transformation of Propaganda Posters in the Socialist Republic Vietnam from the Cold War to current days.

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NON BERLIN, ASIA CONTEMPORARY ART PLATFORM

NON Berlin aims to build an international network among artists, directors and alternative project spaces who work in the Asian art scene in Berlin, a city which holds a strong reputation for its rich infrastructure in the contemporary art scene. Furthermore, NON Berlin pursues an aim to become the hub for culture and arts exchange in Asia and Europe through organizing sustainable projects, mapping networks, creating archives and providing up-to-date information.