



Tuan Andrew Nguyen, *The Unburied Sounds of a Troubled Horizon*, 2022, single-channel video installation (still)

52 WALKER ST | APR 12 – MAY 7, 2022

FILM SCREENINGS: HOURLY BEGINNING AT 10 AM

Tuan Andrew Nguyen *Unburied Sounds*

James Cohan is pleased to present *Unburied Sounds*, an exhibition of new work by Tuan Andrew Nguyen, on view from April 12 through May 7 at the gallery's 52 Walker Street location. This is Nguyen's second solo exhibition at James Cohan.

Tuan Andrew Nguyen's work explores the power of narrative through video and sculpture. His projects are based on extensive research and community engagement, creating imaginative realities that draw deeply from inherited histories and counter-memory. In *Unburied Sounds*, Nguyen explores the ways in which material contains memory and holds potential for transformation, reincarnation, and healing.

The centerpiece of the exhibition is *The Unburied Sounds of a Troubled Horizon*, 2022, a single-channel video installation exhibited alongside related sculptural objects crafted from fragments of unexploded ordnances. The project is inspired by the people of Quang Tri, on the North Central Coast of Vietnam, which was one of the most heavily bombed areas in the history of modern warfare. For multiple generations, its residents have lived with the physical residue and lingering trauma of war. Since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, thousands of farmers have died from UXO (unexploded ordnances) and approximately 80 percent of Quang Tri is still contaminated by undetonated mines and explosives. In the face of this grim reality, the ongoing recovery and creative repurposing of these ordnances is a testament to the perseverance of the local community, which Nguyen observed firsthand during his time spent in the region. They have used these remnants of destruction as raw materials with which to build and rebuild their lives, for uses as varied as building materials, tools, craft, and currency.

The Unburied Sounds of a Troubled Horizon centers around a woman named Nguyet and her mother, who run a small junkyard on the outskirts of Quang Tri. For the artist, Nguyet is both a fully fleshed character and a narrative vehicle for his own physical exploration of material memory. Nguyet, like many real-life residents of the area, earns her living scavenging and selling pieces of UXO. She grew up in post-war Vietnam, constructing memories and abstract images in her head of metal falling from the sky as she listened to stories told by her parents and other survivors of bombings and air raids. Nguyet compulsively crafts delicate hanging mobiles from the bomb scraps she salvages.

Her mother, who suffers from PTSD, believes that her daughter is haunted and that the mobiles she makes are indicative of ghostly possession. However, Nguyet soon discovers that these sculptures drawn from her own mind hold a remarkable resemblance to the works of Alexander Calder. She embarks on a journey to uncover the source of this uncanny likeness—consulting along her way a spirit-medium and a monk—before arriving at the realization that she is, in fact, the reincarnation of the famous American artist. On her search, as Nguyet opens herself up to the possibility of reincarnation, she also learns about sounds and vibrational healing, helping her mother through her trauma.

Giving physical form to the inherited and intuited memories propelling his protagonist's journey, Nguyen's hand-made sculptures and mobiles appear as props throughout the film. These works are filtered through the artist's own relationship to the region and to the work of Alexander Calder. The sculptures on view in the gallery, all built from UXO fragments, are shaped by Nguyen's belief in the possibility of material reincarnation: of reconfiguring objects of war into spiritual objects capable of healing. Just as Nguyet does in the film, and the residents of Quang Tri do in their daily life—Nguyen transforms what was once destructive into tools that open up new paths toward understanding.

The hanging mobile *A Rumble Across the Sky*, 2022, whose composition is based upon a pivotal work by Calder, juxtaposes an elegance of form with the brutal origins of the material used to craft it. This work moves with the flow of air and vibrations of sound in the gallery space, creating a naturally shifting play of abstract spatial relationships, and suggesting a state of perpetual change. Nguyen worked with a sound healer who tuned each work so that once activated, it vibrates at a precisely calibrated healing frequency. Several of the sculptural works can be activated by visitors—a series of five hammered brass singing bowls invite the viewer to create a curative soundscape.

Nguyen writes, "*I find it absolutely crucial at this moment to make these connections between spaces, people, times, and stories, as well as to reevaluate the relationship between object and maker, victim and agent. Reconsidering and imagining these connections are stepping stones towards empathy, healing, and creating new futures.*" For Nguyen, material animism and reincarnation are a generative space, one that holds the potential to construct futures built upon deeply embodied notions of building and rebuilding. The video and sculptural works in this exhibition are both an exploration of these transformative possibilities and a testament to the resilience of communities who find ways to work through trauma.

The run time of *The Unburied Sounds of a Troubled Horizon* is 58 minutes. The film will screen hourly each day, beginning at 10 AM.

Tuan Andrew Nguyen received his BFA from the University of California, Irvine in 1999 and an MFA from The California Institute of the Arts in 2004. In 2006, Nguyen co-founded The Propeller Group, a platform for collectivity that situates itself between an art collective and an advertising company. Besides a major traveling retrospective that began at the MCA Chicago, the collective has participated in international exhibitions including The Ungovernables [2012 New Museum Triennial], 2012 LA Biennial, Prospect3 [2014 New Orleans Triennial], and the Venice Biennale 2015. As a solo artist, Nguyen's work has been included in major international festivals, biennials, and exhibitions including the upcoming Manifesta 14, Prishtina, Kosovo (2022); Aichi Triennale, Aichi Prefecture, Japan (2022); Biennale de Dakar, Dakar, Senegal (2022); Asian Art Biennial, National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taipei, Taiwan (2021); Manifesta 13, Marseilles, France (2020); Sharjah Architecture Triennial, Sharjah, UAE (2019); SOFT POWER, SFMoMA, San Francisco, CA (2019); the 2019 Sharjah Biennial, Sharjah, UAE (2019); 2017 Whitney Biennial, New York, NY (2017); the 55th International Short Film Festival, Oberhausen, Germany (2009); 8th NHK Asian Film Festival, Tokyo, Japan (2007); 18th Singapore International Film Festival (2005) and 4th Bangkok Experimental Film Festival, Bangkok, Thailand (2005). Nguyen is the recipient of numerous awards and prizes, most recently a Production | Acquisition Grant from the VIA Art Fund in 2020 for the MoMA's acquisition of his Manifesta 13 commission, Crimes of Solidarity. His work is included in the permanent collections of institutions including Carré d'Art, Nîmes, France; Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane; SFMoMA, San Francisco, CA; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY.

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