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# INTRODUCTION

Conceived as a long-term research and curatorial project initiated by Van Do, with the support of Phụ Lục and Nguyễn Art Foundation, *Phụ Lục Project* traces the group's fifteen-year practice from 2010 to 2025 alongside new commissions, mapping their idiosyncratic artistic language alongside the shifting contexts and infrastructures of performance art in Vietnam and across the broader region.

Founded in Hanoi in 2010 by six artists—Nguyen Huy An, Vu Duc Toan, Ngo Thanh Bac, Nguyen Van Song, Hoang Minh Duc, and Nguyen Duong Hai Dang—Phụ Lục is often known for their use of allegorical everyday objects as props in durational performances, abstract staging, and minimal yet potent gestures that both evoke social issues and explore personal concerns. From their early, tightly structured works, Phụ Lục has gradually expanded into more situational, chance-based practices, constituting a vital yet under-recognized contribution to contemporary art in Vietnam.

Through an open-access living archive, a two-chapter exhibition opening in November 2025 across Nguyễn Art Foundation's two venues, a series of public programs, newly

commissioned essays and artistic responses, the project not only positions Phụ Lục within the history of performance art in Vietnam and Southeast Asia but also opens a critical, reflective space to consider how performance can be remembered, reimagined, and carried forward.

This project is not a retrospective as the group remains active. The archive thus serves as both research and proposition, a point of departure rather than a conclusion. The project will unfold gradually during the exhibition and beyond. All updates and materials will be made publicly available at [phulucproject.com](http://phulucproject.com).

With deep gratitude to: Quynh Nguyen, Bill Nguyen, Nhat Q. Vo, Dang Thuy Anh, Le Dinh Chung, Can Van An, ARTiculate Studio, Gabby Miller, Lem TragNguyen, Flinh, Zoe Butt, Nguyen Thi Hong Anh, Nguyen Hong Quan.

## chapter I: Phụ Lục through whose eyes?

Nguyễn Art Foundation  
EMASI Van Phuc  
November 2025 – May 2026

Curated by Van Do, *Phụ Lục through whose eyes?* dreams the collective's resonant archive into being. Structured in three light-acts, the exhibition imagines a stage after the artists have departed, where objects, machines and residues carry the performance forward.

Dismantling the collective's past works, the exhibition translates Phụ Lục's props, sounds, compositions, and gestures into new assemblages, drawing on archival study, adaptation, and reproduction. Curating becomes an act of tracing, reinscription, and restaging, turning the impossibility of exhibiting performance art into a deliberate imaginative choice.

Performance exists in a moment, and dies when that moment ends. The exhibition takes place after death, remembering itself: full of gaps and ruptures, faltering in recollection, yet persistently alive. It is an effort to make visible what remains alive in the afterlife, dwelling in the generative void between original and revisit, and to reflect on performance in its historiographical force that is continuously layering, overwriting, and performing into the present.

## chapter II: Phụ Lục, how are you?

Nguyễn Art Foundation  
EMASI Nam Long  
November 2025 – May 2026

Self-curated by Phụ Lục, *Phụ Lục, How Are You?* introduces new works created in 2025 specifically for Phụ Lục Project.

"How are you?" belongs to the present, yet it also carries the potential to become hyper-present. The present may reveal traces of a past still unfolding through "self-reflection," or it may project glimpses of the future through suggestion—even if only a near or very near future.

In everyday conversation, "how are you?" can be nothing more than a reflex, something blurted out when meeting, or even an empty formality when there is nothing left to say—at least we still offer each other a "how are you." This sense of "nothing left to say" resonates closely with the colloquial understanding of the phrase *Tứ Thập Bất Hoặc* (meaning at forty, no longer in doubt): the threshold of one's forties, when doubts have grown few and even fewer things remain that can still beguile or mislead them.

## appendix: Index 2010–2025

Presented in chronological order, *Index 2010–2025* gathers an extensive body of images, videos, and texts documenting thirty-five performances by Phụ Lục across the past fifteen years. Alongside these, it includes supplementary materials that situate the works within their broader artistic, social, and historical contexts—tracing not only the shifting landscape of performance art in Vietnam, Southeast Asia, and beyond, but also the wider movements and discourses that have shaped the medium.

*Index 2010–2025* is made accessible in two formats: a physical display that accompanies the exhibitions at the two venues of the Nguyễn Art Foundation during their public run, and an online platform at [phulucproject.com](http://phulucproject.com), designed as a continuously updated resource for consultation, annotation, and research.

# PHỤ LỤC PROJECT: THOSE 15 YEARS

Van Do

## Archival turn in performance art

Since the late 2010s, performance art in Southeast Asia has entered what may be described as an archival turn. Rather than romanticizing performance as an art form that lives only in the fleeting moment, artists, curators, and institutions across the region are reconsidering how performance might be archived, remembered, transmitted, or reactivated. This shift has unfolded alongside an increasing number of exhibitions, research initiatives, and archival experiments that aim not simply to preserve performance's past, but to rethink its continuities: how performance can remain active, resonant, or generative in altered forms.

In Southeast Asia, where infrastructures for public memory and historiography in contemporary art remain uneven, this turn carries particular urgency. Museums and academic institutions have yet to fully account for the histories of performance art, and much of what exists today endures through artists' own self-archiving practices. The preservation of performance is therefore not only a matter of collecting documents, but of situated knowledge, care, and ongoing interpretation or how communities themselves maintain, circulate, and reactivate shared histories. This drive is seen in the archives of Lee Wen and Ray Langenbach for Singapore—both now housed at Asia Art Archive and publicly accessible—and through a number of recent artist- or curator-initiated and institutional, curated programs that seem to resonate in themes and methodologies.

In September 2025, the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) opened the exhibition *Living Room*, exploring how museums collect, care for, and re-present performance practices by exhibiting their 'remains.' Almost at around the same time, the Bangkok Art & Culture Centre (BACC), together with curator Kasamaponn Saengsuratham, presented *Live Art and Lifeworlds of Chumpon Apisuk*, a research and archival exhibition dedicated to the Thai performance pioneer. The long-running *Black Kit* performance archive, initiated by Boris Nieslony and Black Market International in 1981 is a comprehensive multimedia collection of film documents and photographs, project sketches, scripts, artists' correspondence, and rare gallery catalogues as well as artefacts and performance relics, today extending over some 450 linear

meters of shelving. In 2025, it was officially integrated into documenta archiv (Kassel), underscoring its transition into sustained institutional care and expanded public access.

From 2010 to the present, two discursive efforts have been particularly significant. The first is *Action Script: Symposium on Performance Art Practice and Documentation in Asia* (Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong, 2010), a five-day gathering of artists, curators, and researchers from across the region. Through presentations, live actions, and workshops, the symposium addressed the practical and conceptual challenges of documenting and historicizing performance art, while also imagining how performance practices in Asia might evolve over the following decade. The second is the special issue of *Southeast of Now* (2022), which examines 'performativity' as a critical framework for understanding artistic practices within and beyond Southeast Asia. This special edition continues the discussion initiated at the symposium *Pathways of Performativity in Contemporary Southeast Asian Art* (Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2019), expanding on the examination of performance as an artistic method, as a form of social encounter, and as an analytical lens through which to write the contemporary art history of the region. While *Action Script* addressed issues more intimately related to performance practitioners and was forward-looking in its anticipation of the next ten years, *Pathways of Performativity in Contemporary Southeast Asian Art* approached performativity as a theoretical framework to investigate artistic practices beyond the conventional boundaries of performance itself.

Vietnam’s performance history and archival gaps

The longevity and positioning of performance art in Vietnam is notable, despite its limited commercial viability, its inherently fleeting nature, the gradual erosion of platforms and resources for cultural exchange, and the ease with which performance can be censored in Vietnam due to its often provocative and confrontational qualities. The first wave of performance art in the late 1990s introduced a language of resistance within constrained conditions, witnessing many strong performances marked by bodily expression and socio-polical commentary. This foundational period has been increasingly brought into historical visibility through publications such as *Don’t Call It Art: Contemporary Art in Vietnam 1993–1999*<sup>1</sup> and *Tran Luong: Soaked in the Long Rain*<sup>2</sup>, as well as through recent archival initiatives<sup>3</sup> by APD (Center for Support and Development of the Arts).

From the mid-2000s, a younger generation born in the 1980s expanded the field through durational, contemplative, and materially subtle approaches. In recent years, a further wave of emerging artists has continued to sustain performance practice, even as opportunities for cross-regional exchange have diminished and earlier practitioners have stepped back. The field has persisted quietly through the dedication of independent spaces and artist-led initiatives working with limited resources. These include Nhà Sàn Collective, most notably through its long-running IN:ACT performance art festival series initiated in 2010; Á Space, which since 2022 has committed to expanding performance art and its afterlives through curated programs; MoT+++<sup>4</sup>, which presented a number of performance-focused programs between 2017 and 2019; the performance workshops and exchange programs run by APD for emerging artists; and Hay Là, an online platform founded in 2021 for discussion and research on performance art.

Despite the efforts of independent organizations to sustain momentum and professional dialogue, there has been no comprehensive research or critical study since 2005 addressing the aesthetic shifts, experimental practices, curatorial methods, or changing reception of performance art in Vietnam. Acknowledging this gap risks sounding predictable, even clichéd, yet it nevertheless points to a deeper structural

reality: the persistent absence of supporting infrastructure (in large part due to the state’s neglect and inactivity), the limited diversity of contributors within the art ecosystem, the scarcity of systematic documentation, and the ongoing lack of rigorous critical discourse. These absences are not unique to performance art, though its ephemeral nature makes it particularly fragile; they apply to the broader context of contemporary art practice in Vietnam. Rather than framing these as obstacles (although they do exhaust practitioners who must constantly navigate the same issues without much systemic improvement), I wanted to see them as conditions that have, paradoxically, fostered alternative ways of ‘doing’ art, often driven by personal needs and sustained by the limited resources artists, curators, and independent organizations have at hand.

When it comes to archiving or documenting the history of contemporary art in Vietnam, it is important to acknowledge the individuals and organizations who, through their own efforts, have documented or safeguarded archival materials: Tran Thi Huynh Nga (Blue Space), artist Ly Hoang Ly, artist Richard Streitmatter-Tran, Salon Natasha, artist/curator Tran Luong, Veronika Radulovic, artist Nguyen Manh Hung, curator Le Thuan Uyen<sup>4</sup>, to name a few. More specifically to performance art, *LIM DIM Open Archive*<sup>5</sup>, held in 2022 at APD, revisited what is considered the first international performance art festival in the country through a display of video, photo documentation and promotional materials of the festival, alongside a curated series of public programs. Meanwhile, artists have further experimented with different ways to revisit past performance works. Artist-curator Vu Duc Toan has developed a proposal for reenactment and “cover” in performance contexts since 2022 through programs such as *Morning - Noon - Afternoon - Evening* (Á Space, 2022) or *Tái Nạm* (Mo Art Space, 2022), while artist Lai Dieu Ha has since 2017 been self-archiving her own performance histories through a series of oil collage paintings. Since 2021, private collectors, alongside the public-facing collection of Nguyễn Art Foundation, have also begun acquiring performance works, marking a shift in how the medium is valued and remembered.

It is daunting to look into history and find nothing—like a family with no album, or a country with no memory. But the mere thought of documenting history already carries hesitation: its overwhelming scale, its inevitable imperfections, and the vulnerability of doing it alone, by one’s own will. If we do not yet have a textbook that captures the past thirty years of contemporary and performance art in Vietnam, we do have many individuals holding different memories of it<sup>6</sup>. These fragments, at some point, may serve future generations<sup>7</sup>; they may reveal only parts or variations of history, but perhaps that is an even better kind of textbook for those who seek to learn about contemporary art in Vietnam. Looking into these partial histories has given me intimate versions of the past, and a deeper sense of the conditions under which art in Vietnam has taken shape.

1                *Don’t Call It Art! Contemporary Art in Vietnam 1993–1999*, edited by Annette Bhagwati and Veronika Radulovic (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2009).

2                *Tran Luong: Soaked in the Long Rain*. Edited by Biljana Ciric. Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2022. Co-published with Art Jameel, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Western Australia, and the Art Museum of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. Texts by Iola Lenzi, Phoebe Scott, Le Thuan Uyen, Vu Duc Toan, Linh Le, and Biljana Ciric.

3                For further information, please visit: <https://apd.org.vn/thu-vien/chuong-trinh-2/>

4                With thanks to Bill Nguyen for a private exchange on November 11, 2025. Specifically for the *Phụ Lục Project*, my deepest gratitude goes to Gabby Miller and Hay Là (Lem TragNguyen and Flinh), as well as to independent, open-source platforms such as Nhà Sàn Studio, Nhà Sàn Collective, MoT+++<sup>4</sup>, Á Space, and Future of Imagination. It is through their generosity in sharing materials—and in making their documentations publicly accessible—that I was able to learn what came before me, and from that groundwork, this project takes shape.

5                For more information, refer to: <https://apd.org.vn/thu-vien/chuong-trinh-2/>

6                Read more on this line of thought in *Artistic Research: The Acts of Seeking and Telling within the Exhibition Form* by Le Thuan Uyen, featured in the *Proceedings of the First Conference on Curating in Vietnam* (Á Space and VNU-SIS, Hanoi, 2024), forthcoming as an independent publication with the support of Nguyễn Art Foundation and Dogma Collection.

7                I still return regularly to Nhà Sàn Studio’s Flickr and Blogspot pages, even though these sites are now almost inactive.

## ***Phụ Lục Project: An homage***

Joining forces with the individuals who came before me, *Phụ Lục Project* is a long-term research and curatorial initiative that I initiated and curate—within my own efforts, limits, and positionality—and is supported by Phụ Lục and the Nguyễn Art Foundation. The project traces the group’s distinctive artistic language over fifteen years of practice, situating their work within shifting artistic and cultural landscapes in Vietnam, and rethinking how performance might be exhibited, reimaged, and made to persist.

The *Phụ Lục Project* began from a genuine affection for a group of artists whose aesthetic language and social-cultural concerns have often been deemed ‘eccentric,’ ‘provincial,’ ‘distinctly Northern,’ and inaccessible to those outside their cultural milieu. I do not entirely refute these assessments; however, in their defense, the anchors of Phụ Lục’s practice also form an earnest attempt to record particular cultural terrains and vernacular knowledges of Vietnam—folk narratives, legends, oral histories, material cultures—that are gradually being forgotten and resist being easily framed into existing categories of contemporary art. And regardless, their practice has deeply shaped my own. I believe, more objectively, that Phụ Lục’s aesthetic language constitutes a significant and vital contribution to contemporary art in Vietnam—one that has yet to receive the recognition it deserves. Their practice is one that is both sincere and stubborn, one that has withstood external pressures in a rapidly shifting art landscape. This project is an attempt to shed light on the practice of Phụ Lục—though not in any way to fix their work in the past or canonize it, but to make their practice more visible; to allow it to be carried further, to resonate elsewhere, and to participate in broader conversations without losing its rootedness.

When I first told Phụ Lục that I would like to work with their past performances, they asked me why I was interested in ‘such a corpse.’ I think working with incomplete archives, especially archives of something that has passed and I could never see them live as they are, ever again, gives me a lot of freedom and imagination. Especially when artists themselves have always felt a reluctance to ever re-perform. In the case of Phụ Lục, I am grateful for their experimental spirit that has shaped my practice. I am also grateful for their generosity for giving

me access to their full practice and allowed me to do whatever with the recalling of it. I think it’s an act of trust but it’s also an act of liberation. By giving me that access, they are telling me, and all of us, that their history is open for reinterpretation, re-imagination, re-examination. They don’t keep anything for themselves and they don’t try to frame or shape it in ways that fit their perceptions of themselves.

This dynamic between Phụ Lục and myself also gave rise to the structure of the project as it stands: the archive *Index 2010–2025* is open for everyone to access; the exhibition *Phụ Lục through whose eyes?* that revisits their history is entrusted to me, and they won’t intervene unless I seek their input; and the exhibition *Phụ Lục, how are you?* with new commissioned works is their own act of looking critically at themselves in the present—where my role is simply to support, produce, or observe. In other words: Phụ Lục being looked at by me, and Phụ Lục looking at themselves.

This structure also seems to offer a workable framework for an archival project grounded in performance practice. The project asks: How can one record the past while still creating space for the present to continue unfolding—and without prematurely fixing it into history? How can one build an archive while also allowing others to look at it, read it anew, reinterpret it, and without relinquishing control over how history will ultimately be registered?

# GROUP FORMATION AND AESTHETICS OF PHỤ LỤC

Van Do

In the 1980s, during the late Cold War, cultural exchange between Eastern and Western Europe expanded, supported by various programs aimed at rebuilding conditions for peace. At the same time, performance art festivals began proliferating across Europe and gradually extending into West Asia with similar objectives. In European contexts, one of the most important networks for performance art is Black Market, an international performance art network formed in 1985, first becoming visible during Documenta 8 (Kassel, 1987). The name 'Black Market' is used as an analogy for free, informal, non-institutional exchange among artists, outside commercial systems of the mainstream art world. Black Market is not a fixed group but an open situation. Over nearly four decades, it has brought together figures such as Boris Nieslony, Jürgen Fritz, Alastair MacLennan, Roi Vaara, Norbert Klassen, Monika Günther & Ruedi Schill, Nigel Rolfe, Lee Wen, Elvira Santamaría Torres, among many others across Europe, Asia, and the Americas.

In Asia, the Nippon International Performance Art Festival (NIPAF), founded in 1993 by Japanese artist Seiji Shimoda, became the longest-running international performance art festival in the region. Initially held annually across multiple Japanese cities (Tokyo, Nagano, Osaka), NIPAF soon developed into a traveling festival, inviting artists from Europe, the United States, and Southeast Asia. For many Southeast Asian artists, NIPAF served as a first encounter with performance art as a transnational field, laying the groundwork for subsequent festivals in Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia. The participation and exchange fostered by artists such as Lee Wen, Chumpon Apisuk, and Seiji Shimoda played a key role in bringing the Black Market network into Southeast Asia, making the region one of its vital nodes.

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, this momentum expanded across Southeast Asia through the establishment of international and regional festivals initiated by artists-as-organizers: the Bangkok Performance Conference (1997), ASIATOPIA (1998–present), Philippine International Performance Art Festival (1999), and Jakarta Performance Art Festival (2000). While efforts before 2000 were largely artist-initiated and loosely organized, the following decade witnessed an accelerated surge of activity: ASIATOPIA grew

significantly in scale; Future of Imagination (Singapore, 2003–2015) was launched shortly after the lifting of Singapore's ten-year ban on performance art; followed by Tupada Action & Media (Philippines, 2002–), Perfurbance (Yogyakarta, 2005–), Undisclosed Territory (Solo, 2007–), and Beyond Pressure (Myanmar, 2008–). In Hanoi, the international performance art festival LIM DIM (2004), initiated by artist-curator Tran Luong, marked a pioneering event, bringing together the earliest generation of Vietnamese performance artists<sup>1</sup>.

Critical to the formation of Phụ Lục—and deserving of its own dedicated research and archival work—is the 14th International Performance Art Conference<sup>2</sup>, held 2–8 October 2006 in Dalat and Ho Chi Minh City. Co-organized by Blue Space (Vietnam), Concrete House (Thailand), ASA-European (Germany), and Global Affairs (Austria), the conference gathered over 30 artists from 19 countries, alongside workshops at the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts Association<sup>3</sup>. Originating from a roundtable held on 18 November 1995 during APIC '95 in Cologne—initiated by ASA-European and German performance pioneer Boris Nieslony (Black Market)—the conference sought to connect local performance practices with international networks, build a coordinating hub that functioned as both laboratory and discursive platform, while developing shared tools, databases, and publications.

To clarify the performative ethos of Black Market: works come into being only in the moment of performance, without predetermined scripts or formal staging, relying instead on improvisation, bodily awareness, spatial-temporal responsiveness, and energetic resonance among artists<sup>4</sup>. In contrast, the sensibility Phụ Lục developed after encountering Black Market was distinct. Phụ Lục operates in a space between performance and theatre, allowing for a 'loose script.' Within this structure, the position of each member in a shared spatial composition cannot be disrupted spontaneously; each action must be carried out within a rigorously prearranged framework. Whereas Black Market's dialogue unfolds unpredictably through bodily interaction, Phụ Lục's dialogue is indirect, mediated through materials and imagery, more static and less physically confrontational.

Both Vu Duc Toan and Nguyen Huy An, who participated in the 14th International Performance Art Conference, later described it as a formative inspiration for the founding of Phũ Lũc or even referred to the artists they encountered in the conference as their ‘teachers’<sup>5</sup>. It was also thanks to the participation in the same conference that also informed the birth of Sneaky Week<sup>6</sup> (2007), a multi-regional performance festival in public spaces initiated by artist Pham Duc Tung that took place in Hanoi, Hue, and Ho Chi Minh City. The six founding members of Phũ Lũc—Hoang Minh Duc, Nguyen Van Song, Nguyen Huy An, Ngo Thanh Bac, Nguyen Duong Hai Dang, and Vu Duc Toan—were all students at the Vietnam University of Fine Arts, sharing years of study, training, and friendship. Prior to formally declaring themselves as a collective, Phũ Lũc engaged in a series of formative group experiments that laid the groundwork for their shared visual and performative language. Intentionally withdrawing from the noise of exhibitions and public art events, they chose to work quietly, privately, and in isolation—building the foundation of their practice away from public view<sup>7</sup>.

Their collaborative language emerged through experiments prior to the group’s formal establishment, particularly around Almaz Studio and 25studio in Hanoi. 25studio—initiated by artist Do Cuong in early 2009 as one of the rare informal environments that welcomed young artists at the time—quickly became a hub before eventually closing due to increased attention from cultural authorities monitoring independent artistic activity<sup>8</sup>.

In this atmosphere, one day, while resting in Minh Duc’s 12 m<sup>2</sup> apartment on Minh Khai Street (Hanoi), Huy An recalled telling Duc, ‘Why don’t we form a group?’ The next day, he and Duc Toan began discussing the group’s name and shared artistic foundations. Later that year, their dear friend—the French filmmaker Vincent Baumont, then based in Hanoi—opened his Almaz Studio on To Ngoc Van Street to the group for one intensive working week<sup>9</sup> in 2009, where Phũ Lũc developed sketches that became the basis of subsequent performance works. The group also experimented in an improvised performance in an old classroom in Uoc Le Village<sup>10</sup>, while going on a trip to the hometown of artist Nguyen Duc Phuong in Thanh Oai,

Hanoi. From the beginning, it was Phũ Lũc’s intention was to focus on quiet, unpublicized art practice and experiments without a public audience, except for some friends who were present to help document their works that made a huge impact on shaping their aesthetics and language, one that resembles a group’s internal dialogue based on shared time, materiality, and image.

On the second floor of the original Nhà Sàn Studio in 2010, Phũ Lũc made their first public debut in a performance titled *Three Perimeters* with three artists Nguyen Huy An, Vu Duc Toan, Hoang Minh Duc dressed in black pants and white shirts that from then on became their signature group uniform. In a densely theatrical space that was already blacked out, with two openings on both sides of the room, Huy An enters through one door and exits through the other, carrying two buckets of water, Duc Toan moves around the room with an electric kettle, non-linearly, following a 100-meter electrical cable, Minh Duc inhales water from a glass of water and releases it through an intravenous tube in his mouth. The positions, rhythms, and movements are predetermined; the artists perform sequentially according to a script established in advance, within a mode of formality and rigor.

*Three Perimeters* appeared to oppose dominant performance aesthetics in Vietnam at the time, which emphasized strong bodily intensity and direct expressive force. Audiences initially criticized Phũ Lũc’s works for seeming ‘too theatrical,’ lacking improvisational spontaneity, and unfolding slowly with repetitive, restrained gestures. Yet precisely these features—once misunderstood—came to define Phũ Lũc’s distinctive aesthetic and structural principle.

1 For more information, refer to: <https://apd.org.vn/thu-vien/chuong-trinh-thu-vien/mo-kho-tu-lieu-lim-dim-2004/>

2 For more information, refer to: <https://www.asa.de/conferences/conf14/vietnam.htm>

3 Read more about the origins of the Performance Conference at: <https://www.asa.de/conferences/index.htm>

4 For more information, refer to: <https://www.documenta-archiv.de/en/aktuell/termine-veranstaltungen/4103/kasseler-museumsnacht-black-market-international>

5 In a private conversation with Vu Duc Toan about Monika Günther and Ruedi Schill—the Swiss performance-artist duo whom Phũ Lũc first met at the 14th International Performance Art Conference in Dalat and Saigon in 2006, and who founded Translocal Performance Art Giswil in 1998, where Phũ Lũc later participated as artists in 2025, nineteen years after their first encounter—only Monika Günther was present, as artist Ruedi Schill had already passed away.

6 For more information, refer to: <https://artsnetworkasia.org/content/gallery/sneaky.html>

7 See also the Future of Imagination 8 catalogue in the PL.CM09 documentation on [phulucproject.com](http://phulucproject.com)

8 Thanks to a private conversation with artist Nguyen Huy An.

9 See documentation in PL00.1.

10 See documentation in PL00.2.

# PHASES IN PHỤ LỤC'S PRACTICE

Hay Là & Van Do

One of the earliest efforts to contextualize Phụ Lục's practice is an article by Hay Là—a platform dedicated to performance art in Vietnam founded by Lem TragNguyen and co-directed with Flinh, both among the country's emerging performance artists. The article was produced in preparation for the *Hay Là Live Talk with Phụ Lục* which took place on Instagram in June 2021. As part of this effort, Hay Là created a chronological timeline of Phụ Lục's works (image above), using a color-coded system to distinguish the different stages of the collective's development.

When reflecting on Phụ Lục's practice, Hay Là and the members of Phụ Lục (through

conversations with Nguyen Huy An, Vu Duc Toan, and Ngo Thanh Bac) reached a provisional agreement to divide the collective's more than ten-year trajectory (2010–2021) into three main phases: Phase 1—Theatrical Stage; Phase 2—Four Directions; and Phase 3—Transitions and Experimentations. From the vantage point of 2025, however, it may be more productive to view these phases not as linear developmental stages but as key methods or strategies that may resurface in later works. This writing draws on Hay Là's initial framework, but expands it with additional perspectives—particularly those shaped by observations and personal engagements with Phụ Lục's practice over the past four years.

## hay là | PHỤ LỤC TIMELINE THỰC HÀNH

CHÚ THÍCH

●

Giai đoạn 1 | "Sân khấu"

●

Giai đoạn 2 | " Bốn phương tám hướng"

●

Bước chuyển tiếp và các thử nghiệm hiện tại



## Theatrical Stage

According to conversations between Hay Là and Phụ Lục, Phase 1—Theatrical Stage—includes seminal works such as *Three Perimeters* (2010), *Frozen Winter* (2010), *A Six-Meter Table* (2011), and the *Somniloquy* series (2011–ongoing). These early performances appeared in tightly composed arrangements, with movement, direction, and lighting meticulously calculated according to principles of classical pictorial composition. Some works, upon closer look, reference canonical Western compositions ingrained through academic training at the Vietnam University of Fine Arts (formerly the École des Beaux-Arts established in the French colonial era, colloquially known as the Yet Kieu art school), a school that six artists received formal training. For instance, *Six-Meter Table* echoes the composition of *The Last Supper* (1495–1498) by Leonardo da Vinci, while *Anatomy of an assembly line with an error* (2011) recalls *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* (1632) by Rembrandt.

Within these theatrical and somewhat dramatic scenographies—typically dense, enclosed, and dim spaces such as Nhà Sàn Studio, or settings confined within the symbolic boundary of a straw mat—slow movements set the rhythm of the space. In such configurations, dialogues between members were relatively limited; communication unfolded primarily through imagery or shared materials. For example, in *Three-Person Dialogue* (2010), each artist silently held something in their mouth; or in *Three Perimeters* (2010), water served as the connective material among their seemingly separate actions.

Dialogue also took the form of imagined scenarios that did not necessarily materialize in the physical space, yet shaped the performance's conceptual narrative and could be appreciated through associations and aftertaste. These include “three dreams of a silent intersection” or “a meeting between a fisherman, a coal-barge laborer, and the son of a tofu-factory owner (now deceased in debt) at a riverbank during the dry season” (excerpt from the statement of *Frozen Winter* in IN:ACT 2010). To experience Phụ Lục's performances from this period is to immerse oneself in a moving painting—a kind of “liquid stage,” where time and space unfold slowly, almost stretched across the theatrical atmosphere.

From 2011, Phụ Lục entered what they described as a mode of ‘dreamspeaking.’ By 2018, *Somniloquy 11* appeared as though only a blink away from *Somniloquy 7* (2013). Before *Nhà Sàn Studio 15+*—the anniversary program marking fifteen years of Nhà Sàn Studio—was abruptly shut down by cultural police, *Somniloquy 7* unfolded in a scene that seemed to dilute time: Vu Duc Toan laying down 100 straw mats face-down on the floor; Nguyen Huy An using tweezers to deconstruct and extract fine strands of betel residue; Nguyen Van Song kicking a small ceramic jar; and Ngo Thanh Bac walking behind a lacquered turtle carrying a crane on its back, with a string tied to the crane's neck. Time seemed to suspend. Under the same scenography, *Somniloquy 11* (2018), again at Nhà Sàn Studio, began with a flash of light—and Phụ Lục—now reduced to three members—suddenly appeared on a wooden daybed, with long beards and silver hair. The light vanished just as abruptly. The dream ended.



Photo documentation of Somniloquy 11 (Nhà Sàn Studio, 2018)

Although works from this period may be understood as a forms of silent dialogue among Phụ Lục's members, others operate more as solitary monologues situated within the shared scenography of the performance. Take *Somniloquy 1* (2011) in Kunming, China: three solitary actions unfolded across the bare floor of 943 Studio—Duc blowing dry moss into indefinite directions; An, with pebbles held in his mouth, moving aimlessly; and Toan dripping water onto minnieroot seeds one by one, producing a straight line that cleaved through the space. Each artist moved towards different directions, forming a sparse, desolate three-person composition.

A notable development in more recent works—still aligned with the aesthetics of Theatrical Stage—is Phụ Lục's shift towards sequential actions: rather than appearing simultaneously, the members perform chains of sequential actions, one following the other. This approach is characteristic of works such as *Upstream Water* (2022) and *Tobelgrabä* (2025). In *Upstream Water*—presented at the Städel Schule (Germany)—each artist took turns performing a sequence of actions on a table: Toan poured tea until the cup overflowed; Bac blinked into the cup; An dipped his finger into the water and tasted it; Toan cut off a shirt button and dropped it in; Bac let a yellow leaf float on the surface; An used a needle to sink a piece of gold leaf; Toan added an effervescent tablet; Song removed a SIM card and dropped it into the cup; An dipped a lit match into the water; and finally, Toan removed the cup from the table—marking the end of the performance.

## Journey into All Four Directions

Phase 2 marks a notable shift in Phụ Lục's performance practice, particularly through the *Journey* (Lữ trình) series and the work *We replant the flowers* (Chúng ta ươm lại hoa) (2016). Whereas the works in Phase 1 were often extensively discussed, sketched, and bound to agreed-upon principles, Phase 2—though still influenced by compositional rules—became more fluid and intuitive, open to accidents and chance. If the performance spaces of Phase 1 were often clearly defined and tightly constrained—articulated through spatial relationships such as above/below, inside/outside, length/width, horizontal/vertical—then in Phase 2, the very notion of space began to expand, both geographically and conceptually.

In 2012, Phụ Lục was invited to participate in the project *Skylines with Flying People 2*, where each artist was allocated a studio space within the courtyard of the Japan Foundation in Hanoi and asked to ‘open their studio’ to the public for a month. Transforming their assigned space into a *Phụ Lục Room*—as part of their performance *Agricultural Lesson: Water First, Fertilizer Second, Diligence Third, Seeds Fourth*—the group quickly found the enclosed setting oppressive and creatively stifling. In response, the four members initiated a new work, *Journey in All Directions* (Bốn phương tám hướng), as a way to leave not only

that physical confinement but also, symbolically, their own tightly controlled structures—to let works respond to unfolding social contingencies. After gathering all their items at the Japan Foundation, the artists (Vu Duc Toan, Nguyen Huy Anh, Ngo Thanh Bac, Nguyen Van Song) drew lots to divide the objects among themselves, then drew lots again to determine their directions: East, West, South, and North. Each artist was to walk in their assigned direction until nightfall—without money, phones, or ID cards—carrying only the allocated objects, and moving into the world.

Building on the logic of *Bốn phương tám hướng*, Phụ Lục's subsequent work *Journey TN1* (Lữ trình TN1) (2015) traversed the country's “historical/geographical/biological axis of North–South,” placing greater emphasis on the assemblage of objects carried along the train route from Hanoi to Saigon. In their statement, Phụ Lục wrote, *Journey TN1* feels like a migration—laden with burdensome objects. These objects drift, unsettled by context, origin, and their own obsolescence. They cling to history, or are abandoned by it. A discarded object—deemed useless or dead—will often reappear silently in a museum vitrine, or lie exposed at a dumpsite.’

In *We replant the flowers* (2016), the four members of Phụ Lục occupied the former four city gates of Hanoi—performing at crossroads, overpasses, and roundabouts at dawn on October 10th, Liberation Day. The title of the work is drawn from a line in *Tiến về Hà Nội* (Marching towards Hanoi), a song by Van Cao composed to celebrate the city's liberation from French colonial rule on October 10th, 1954. At each historic gate site, one artist enacted a distinct gesture: Huy An sipping French red wine at *Ô Chợ Dừa* (Cho Dua Gate); Bac casting a plumb line along the overpass at *Ô Cầu Dền* (Cau Den Gate); Song flinging ink-dyed grains of rice into the air toward *Ô Đống Mác* (Dong Mac Gate); and Toan inflating balloons with an oxygen tank at *Ô Thanh Bào* (Thanh Bao Gate). Among the five historic gates, only *Ô Quan Chưởng* (Quan Chuong Gate) still stands in its original physical form; the others survive only as place names, their structures long vanished.

**A mischievous anecdote in the making**

In Phase 3, several ‘signature’ works may have surfaced, giving more shape than in Hay Là’s 2021 survey—yet still not enough to condense into a definitive form.

In 2020, Phụ Lục ‘shed their skin’ once more, moving beyond their earlier collective image and assumed a new one—this time donning GrabBike driver uniforms. At the opening of *Nổ Cái Bùm* (Hue, 2020), three members flashed briefly into sight on a passing motorbike ride, transporting a cheap foam slogan that states ‘Le Métier Du Roi Est Un Métier Disparu En Indochine’ (The profession of being king is an extinct occupation in Indochina). This phrase was spoken by Emperor Duy Tan to a Vietnamese friend living in France, shortly before he was to return to Vietnam to ascend the throne for a second time—a political scenario engineered by French colonial interests. He would die days later in a mysterious plane crash, en route from France to Réunion Island to bid farewell to his family before returning as king. The performance happened so quickly—so performative in its fleetingness—that before viewers could fully grasp it, the GrabBike had already disappeared from view.

This humor-laden strategy is not entirely foreign in Phụ Lục’s practice and often bore shades of self-mockery. In 2016, during NIPAF IN:ACT at Nhà Sàn Collective, their performance *Two parts pebbles, one part sand, half part cement*—the standard construction ratio for pouring a concrete ceiling—took place in an elevator at Hanoi Creative City. Toan stood carrying a basket of gravel on his head, An with a basket of sand, and Bac with half a sack of cement. Each time the elevator doors opened on the 15th floor—where Nhà Sàn Collective was located—Song would mark ‘one unit’ of labour. And so, the elevator continued its repetitive ascent and descent, the performance carrying on amid the audience’s bewilderment at the presence of the three bare-chested, porter-like figures inside the elevator.

In 2023, an undocumented performance took place outside any art event: an anonymous collector, via Manzi Art Space, acquired the work *Journey TN1*, which consisted of a sprawling and unruly assemblage of objects. Since the collector could not appear publicly, the group agreed to pack the works and transport them to Manzi for dispatch. Phụ Lục ‘booked’ around ten GrabBike

drivers to carry the various-sized cardboard boxes—each filled with ‘artworks’ of *Journey TN1*—to Manzi’s doorstep. What emerged was a bustling morning tableau: a cluster of GrabBike riders arriving with a seemingly unremarkable cargo, unaware that they were delivering a package of poetic disarray. In this case, the artwork is also a commodity—an accumulation of formerly personal belongings that have been reassigned value and elevated into art objects. With both the artists and the collector absent, the sole physical exchange in this transaction is delegated entirely to the Grab drivers, whose labor becomes the final gesture of the performance.

This phase remains difficult to summarize, as it is still unfolding—shaped by Phụ Lục’s ongoing responsiveness to context, circumstance, and time. For now, it may be said that this phase is characterized by humor and responsiveness—to specific situations, to audience experience, to incidents and accidents—and is informed by Phụ Lục’s interest in the notion of *project art*<sup>2</sup>. These are elements that Phụ Lục relies on in shaping their current works, rather than strictly adhering to a predefined composition from the outset.

1 Hay Là is a platform dedicated to performance art in Vietnam, founded in 2021 by artist Lem TragNguyen and currently co-coordinated with artist Flinh. Performance art—and contemporary art more broadly—often possesses a fleeting nature with porous boundaries, yet it still holds its own distinctive language. Hay Là was established with the aim of making this particular language accessible to those interested in performance art. Grounded in the theoretical foundation of Performance Studies, Hay Là approaches performance art not as a singular act of presentation, but as a process of thinking, critical reflection, and collective knowledge-making intimately tied to local cultural contexts. From there, the platform seeks to cultivate an intermediary space where practitioners, researchers, and those interested in performance can meet, exchange perspectives, share skills and personal materials—in order not only to nurture artistic practices, but also to foster multidimensional forms of dialogue imbued with constructive criticality, within a supportive and open environment. Hay Là currently operates through three main trajectories: Hay Là Live Talk (dialogue), Hay Là Archive (archiving), and Hay Là Workshop (practice).

2 For reference, refer to Reed Island (Red River) Talk Series No.3, IN:ACT 2022 on Project Art, a discussion with Nguyen Huy An and Tran Hau Yen The, with moderator Vu Duc Toan, supported by Nguyễn Art Foundation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73gkfmFWyD8&t=2s>

## chapter I

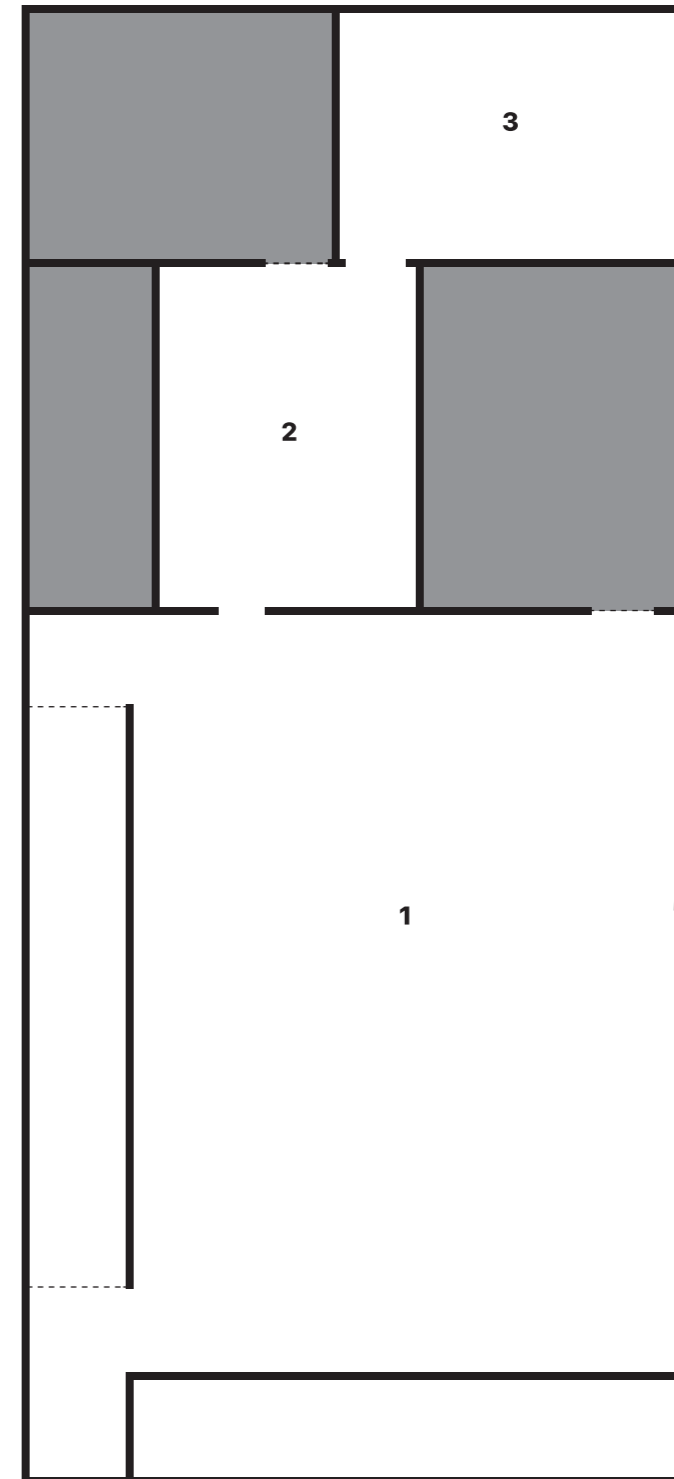
# PHỤ LỤC THROUGH WHOSE EYES ?

Nguyễn Art Foundation  
EMASI Van Phuc  
November 2025 – May 2026

Curated by Van Do, *Phụ Lục through whose eyes?* dreams the collective's resonant archive into being. Structured in three light-acts, the exhibition imagines a stage after the artists have departed, where objects, machines and residues carry the performance forward.

Dismantling the collective's past works, the exhibition translates Phụ Lục's props, sounds, compositions, and gestures into new assemblages, drawing on archival study, adaptation, and appropriation. Curating becomes an act of tracing, reinscription, and restaging, turning the impossibility of exhibiting performance art into a deliberate imaginative choice.

Performance exists in a moment, and dies when that moment ends. The exhibition takes place after death, remembering itself: full of gaps and ruptures, faltering in recollection, yet persistently alive. It is an effort to make visible what remains alive in the afterlife, dwelling in the generative void between original and revisit, and to reflect on performance in its historiographical force that is continuously layering, overwriting, and performing into the present.



Exhibition map in EMASI Van Phuc

LIST OF WORK

Still Life Study No. 1  
2025

Six-foot table<sup>1</sup>, eleven-foot curtain<sup>2</sup>, lacquered tortoise-carrying-crane on clouds<sup>3</sup>, photocopy machine spitting out black A4 sheets<sup>4</sup>, old school drum without mallet<sup>5</sup>, woven sedge mat cut into fragments<sup>6</sup>, 600W indoor light<sup>7</sup>, 4 military compasses<sup>8</sup>, glass tank of tofu residue<sup>9</sup>, TN1 train shelf<sup>10</sup>, 5 shirts of Grab drivers<sup>11</sup>, 2 confetti poppers<sup>12</sup>, 1 glass of red wine<sup>13</sup>, 1 right shoe<sup>14</sup>

Room dimensions variable

The objects move slowly under a harsh artificial yellow light that imitates the sun. In this world without humans, the objects instruct one another to keep working. They try their best to maintain the loose arrangement of the original composition based on data stored in the system, though errors are inevitable. Humans had once instructed them to move only within a given radius; even when direction is lost, the overall layout must remain fixed, with no spontaneous improvisation.

They do not fully grasp what humans call ‘sensitivity,’ the perceptual ground from which such compositions are formed. Everything here follows the foundational rules of academic drawing—proportion, composition, form, axis and directional movement, light—a legacy that dates back to the École des Beaux-Arts<sup>15</sup> during the French colonial period, where those humans once received their formal artistic training. The objects simply replicate what was done before, mechanically, without intuition.

1 Adapted from *Six-Meter Table* (2011) by Phụng Lực. ‘At artist Le Quang Ha’s Factory on Bao Khanh Street. Every month, a new event opens. On May 1, International Workers’ Day. Song eats *bánh chưng*, stuffs screws and bolts, and spits nails into a stainless steel tray. Bac hammers nails into a cow’s tail laid on a chopping board. Toan plunges his face into a basin of split morning glory stems. An presses his face against a round-bottomed pot. Dang lies under the table, his legs sticking out.’ See documentation in PL04.  
2 Adapted from *Six-Meter Table* (2011) by Phụng Lực. See documentation in PL04. Ibid.  
3 Adapted with contributions from artist Ngo Thanh Bac from the work *Somniloquy 7* (2014), recounted orally with no existing documentation. ‘At Nhà Sàn 15+. Toan spreads out 100 mats face-down, hiding their patterns, forming a layer up to knee height. Trieu Minh Hai counts 35 of them. An has a long table with areca residue, using tweezers to pull out each fiber (a deconstruction of betel residue). Song kicks a small jar. Bac brings a live turtle, attaches it to a fake crane with a string, and follows the crane’s movement. While they are performing, the police arrive and the action must stop.’

4 Adapted from *Anatomy of An Assembly Line with An Error* (2011) by Phụng Lực. See documentation in PL04. ‘When a group performs together, there is always a crucial person that sets the rhythm: Dang photocopies sheets that turn completely black. The copier spits out blackened pages. An takes the papers and draws grid lines across the floor. Toan climbs a ladder to change a light bulb. Song, like a diacritical mark, lies diagonally across the stage, head pressed against a pillar. Bac positions himself at the threshold between audience and stage, holding a plumb line. The copier flashes a green laser beam across the room. An declares the work finished.’  
5 Adapted from *Somniloquy 4* (2012) by Phụng Lực. See documentation in PL09. ‘Dang sits near the audience, marking attendance on a mat. Each person stands on a separate fragment. An drips black ink. Toan brews tea, pot after pot. Song observes a drum as if to strike it, but never does. Bac walks into the cracked seam of the mat. Duc is present only through his shirt, lying on the mat.’  
6 Adapted from *Somniloquy 4* (2012) by Phụng Lực. See documentation in PL09. Ibid.  
7 Borrowed from *Muffled Water* (2019) by artist Hoang Minh Duc, presented in the duo exhibition *Domestic Bliss* (ILHAM Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia) with artist Izat Arif, curated by Le Thuan Uyen and Khatiraj Rahmat. See documentation in PL.CM15. ‘Duc sits under an intense yellow light that soaks the entire room in a golden hue. The lamp dyes his skin a deep umber, making him appear like a sculpted figure. Beneath the light, he sits unraveling a ball of yarn—yet the more he untangles, the more it knots. Only later, through Bill, did I learn what kind of lamp it actually was.’  
8 Adapted from *Journey in All Directions* (2012) by Phụng Lực. See documentation in PL12. ‘Bac, Toan, Song, and An gather their belongings to wander out from Phụng Lực’s room. They pile their objects at the Japan Foundation, then set off. Four compasses, drawing lots, each choosing a direction. At the end of the day, they return to the starting point.’  
9 Adapted from *Frozen Rain* (2010) by Phụng Lực. See documentation in PL03. ‘Duc stands in a basin filled with tofu. An stands amid a pile of charcoal, his hands blackened with it. Toan, his body soaked, has a fish tied to his wrist with the sleeve of his shirt.’  
10 Borrowed from *Reunification 1 Journey* (2015) by Phụng Lực, realized within the framework of *Skylines With Flying People 3* by Nhà Sàn Collective. See documentation in PL16.  
11 Adapted from *Le Métier Du Roi Est Un Métier Disparu En Indochine* (2020) and *Untitled* (2022) by Phụng Lực. See documentation in PL28 and PL34.  
12 Borrowed from the work *Untitled* (2024) in the Đơ Đạc Project (Thủ Thiêm, Hồ Chí Minh City). See documentation in PL36, in which Vu Duc Toan shoots one firework directly at his face, while holding two unused ones in his arms.  
13 Borrowed from the works *We Replant the Flowers* (2016) and *Untitled* (2024). See documentation in PL18 and PL36, in which Nguyen Huy An brought a glass and a bottle of French red wine into the performances.  
14 Borrowed from *Độc ẩm* (2025), created by Phụng Lực specifically for the *Phụng Lực Project*, exhibited at *Phụng Lực, how are you?* (EMASI Nam Long). See footnote 1 of A Report on Độc Ẩm, written by Văn Đỗ.  
15 It is difficult to annotate in short the École des Beaux-Arts de l’Indochine (now Vietnam Fine Art University), a contested site within Vietnamese art history, deeply entangled with the French colonial period. In 2025, marking the centennial of its founding, numerous events have been organized to redefine its legacy and even to reclaim the ownership of this institution. Revered for its classical Western painting tradition and considered the cradle of modern Vietnamese art, the school brought together local traditions and material sensibilities, standing as both a symbol of artistic pride and a site of enduring historical tension. Figure drawing remains a foundational skill that nearly every fine art student in Vietnam must master before advancing into any particular medium. It is also regarded as a discipline of competition among students, where the ability to capture form and proportion becomes a measure of artistic excellence.

Sound Exercise No. 2  
2025

Mini Kingkho—simulated storage system<sup>16</sup> consisting of 27 units, each 85 × 85 × 85 cm; 27 sound units extracted from the Phụng Lực archive<sup>17</sup>; timekeeping board<sup>18</sup>; counting voice from 1–27<sup>19</sup>; white LED tube lights; key ring from *Skylines 4* storage<sup>20</sup>

Room dimensions variable

Sound cannot hide itself. It insists on leaving its score, leaving the images once attached to it. It wants to speak, even when no one may hear. It works diligently, determined to exist independent of the visual.

Here, 27 sound units are stored neatly within 27 storage units, housed in the cold blue of corrugated metal. Working hours: 6 hours/day, 3 days/week, over the course of 5 months.

16 Adapted from *Skylines With Flying People 4* (2019), curated by Phụng Lực. See documentation in PL29. Skylines With Flying People 4 is the fourth iteration of a long-term, multidisciplinary art project initiated by artist Nguyen Phuong Linh and Nhà Sàn Collective in 2010. Ambitious in scope and scale, each edition of the project responds to the evolving needs of artists and curators within the Nhà Sàn Collective community and its invited participants, while also reflecting the shifting cultural and social contexts of Vietnam. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Phụng Lực invited artists to exhibit their works within a network of self-managed mini storage units located inside a complex of hundreds of warehouses operated by VinhHanh JSC, opposite Van PhucSilk Village in Hà Đông. Specializing in modern storage rentals, the company’s system was tightly regulated, with 24-hour security and camera surveillance. Each unit measured only one cubic meter, and the ‘exhibition’ could be viewed only through guided tours led by Phụng Lực, in compliance with the storage facility’s strict confidentiality policies and pandemic social distancing requirements.  
17 Some sounds were extracted from videos in the *Phụng Lực 2010–2025* archive; others newly recorded with artists Ngo Thanh Bac, Vu Duc Toan, and Nguyen Huy An at Hasaki Studio by Khong Van Quang. Sound mixed by Nguyen Hong Quan.  
18 Borrowed from an action in *Somniloquy 4* (2012) and *Two (Basket of) Pebbles, One (Basket of) Sand, Half a Bag of Cement* (2016). See documentation in PL10 and PL17.  
19 Voice: Pham Thi Xuyen, recorded on October 17 2025.  
20 Adapted from *Skylines With Flying People 4* (2019), curated by Phụng Lực. See documentation in PL29. Ibid. The project sparked intense debate about the role of the curator. In reality, it was Phụng Lực who determined which works to include, how they would be displayed, and in what quantity, leaving the artist only to consent or decline. There was little room for negotiation. This bold curatorial gesture profoundly influenced my own practice. Within curatorial discourse, there exists a notion called the ‘curatorial frame.’ I presented that very frame—the sea-blue storage system—as an artwork in itself, as a gesture of homage to them.

EMPLOYEE TIME SHEET  
Time in: 10:00 Time out: 16:00

*Inside four cold blue metal walls*

Section I. One count each.  
1 — a count of closing the storage door  
2 — a count of water coming to a boil  
3 — a count of dragging a water bucket  
4 — a count of the shirt being deeply soaked  
5 — a count of rinsing the mouth with honey  
6 — a count of blinking into a glass of water  
7 — a count of ink dripping  
8 — a count of à ý a  
9 — a count of blowing moss (directionless)

Rest 5 minutes

Section II. One count each.  
10 — a scream  
11 — a count of holding a toy bird in the mouth  
12 — a count of walking through Thủ Thiêm Tunnel  
13 — a count of a seed bursting  
14 — a count of closing eyes to strike a drum (but not striking)  
15 — a count of rice touching the wall  
16 — a count of tearing fabric  
17 — a count of hammer hitting nail  
18 — a count of jumping rope on the railway

Rest 5 minutes

Section III. One count each.  
19 — a count of the North–South night train (00:02–end)  
20 — a count of meeting again after 15 years  
21 — a count of sharpening a sickle (23:03–23:08)  
22 — a count of the photocopier spitting out black papers  
23 — a count of wandering (with plumb line)  
24 — a count of whipping the stone dog (with an electric cable)  
25 — a count of holding a votive cake in the mouth  
26 — a count of light lasting 30 seconds — dark, extreme brightness, fading into dark  
27 — a count of a sigh

END.

Light Exercise No. 3

2025

Corrugated metal sheets<sup>21</sup>; 5 solar-powered lights<sup>22</sup>; placement of solar panels determined by Phụ Lục

Room dimensions variable

In the mini-storage system, a strangely spacious unit suddenly appeared—only now do they have enough room to keep each other company. But once given space to gather in numbers, they no longer have anything to say. They exist only as flickering light. The orchestra returns once more, after its first debut in Thanh Đa (Ho Chi Minh City), now in a male baritone register, resonating with the timbre of middle age.

Light returns as matter. This time, it arranges itself into rhythm: fallow yellow, cold white, daylight.

Operating principle of solar-powered lights: Solar-powered lights function based on the photovoltaic effect, converting sunlight into electrical energy to charge a battery and illuminate during the night. During the day, the solar panel absorbs light and converts it into electricity, which is stored in the battery. When night falls, a light sensor triggers the lamp to switch on using the stored energy, and it automatically switches off again when daylight returns.

Read more on the artwork and the project via [phulucproject.com](http://phulucproject.com) and *Index 2010–2025*

21 Adapted from *Skylines With Flying People 4* (2019), curated by Phụ Lục. See documentation in PL29. Ibid.  
22 Adapted from *Light Symphony* (2018) by artist Ngo Thanh Bac, created during the open studio of his residency at MoT+++ (Ho Chi Minh City). In this work, Bac invites the members of Phụ Lục to perform with a solar panel on the banks of the Thanh Đa River, producing flickering points of light on the table in the exhibition space, shaped by materials and gestures, resembling the keys of a piano. In this symphony, Bac is the conductor. See documentation PL.CM14.

*Skylines with flying people 4 –*

ZOE  
BUTT  
IN  
CONVERSATION  
WITH  
PHỤ  
LỘC

<Conversation began 29 December 2020  
and ended 4 October 2025>

It was the 13 December 2020 and I'd been invited to a stereotypical commercial storage unit, in the outer suburbs of Hanoi. Aisles of blue doors in various sizes, shelves at times three rows deep. A two-floor aluminum warehouse. These are storage units with no lights within each unit, with padlocks for individual security. The air smelt stale in the chill of Hanoi winter. Random units were being accessed by their owners. I noted one was being used as a personal office; another for housing

merchandise of some myriad plastic packaging; a lady was sorting through an assortment of beauty products. I was there as part of a special 'tour', conducted by artists Huy An and Mai Le and Nguyen Dinh Phuong. There were two other guests with me, one Vietnamese artist and her English boyfriend.

This 'tour' granted secret access to a visual art exhibition taking place in numerous storage units of differing size. Nguyen Dinh Phuong held

a massive set of keys. It is he that guided us on a particularly mapped sequence of metal cubes. There was no piece of paper provided that explained what this 'exhibition' was about, or precisely where each 'exhibit' was to be found. We were entirely reliant on Nguyen Dinh Phuong and his silent opening and closing of doors. Huy An did the talking. Mai La translated. Huy An gave an introduction to each work, the artist's name and what each work was about (of which there were 30 in total).

Amongst these I found an imperial warrior of Khai Dinh's tomb cast in cement on the floor, yet this form appeared as if it possessed the weight of a deflated balloon (artist Tran Duc Quy); the reproduced oil on canvas paintings of Ham Nghi in miniature offer stacked skylines of clouds hovering above impressionistic ocean shores (artist Le Dinh Chung); a bronze statue head of a once prominent woman sits encased in wooden armature, as if ready for shipment (artist Ngoc Nau); a chess game, unfinished, sits poised for further maneuver, as bottles of Bia Hanoi and Chinese beer guard their heads (bottle tops) on the chess board (artist Nguyen Van Song); an overflowing unit full of discarded, flood-endured, flip flops near spills out a door (artist Nguyen Thi Thanh Mai) and many more.

What struck me was the precise order with which we were being guided; the use of light from our smartphones to see each 'gallery'; the patient locking and unlocking of each unit—itself a kind of performative act (and I was eventually to realize that that is exactly what it was). One particularly poignant moment was the only unit to be opened that did not have a lock. This unit held several audio cassette tapes, hand printed with the word 'Sneaky Week' on its bind. Huy An explained that this was a performance project realized in 2007 and that it was little documented. So his artist collective Phụ Lục decided to record people's re-collections of this event on these audio cassette tapes. Ironically such technology is already out of date, the machines required to play its audio increasingly difficult to find. I laughed at their deliberate quip on the impossibility of the archive—of the tenuous nature of its motivation, identification, categorization and preservation. Most critically, I found the whole experience a clever third finger rebuke to not only the museological

system of categorization and control, but also the ideological control of the Communist government in Vietnam and its surveilling of cultural activity. Within this commercial property, whose purpose is to store and secure, we find a contemporary art exhibit nestled willingly within a different set of regulations.

Curated by invited artist collective Phụ Lục (Nguyen Huy An, Vu Duc Toan, Ngo Thanh Bac), this exhibition is the fourth instalment of a series of shows titled *Skylines with Flying People*, an initiative of Nha San Collective (a recurring project since 2010). The following is an online conversation, in English and Vietnamese, between Zoe Butt and Huy An and Vu Duc Toan, concerning this insightful and provocative performative exhibition.

**Zoe Butt:**

I was very emotionally affected by your project in this storage unit. As someone who grew up in firstly scientific and then art museum 'archives', I felt as if someone had transported me to the future and I was looking back on an era not my own. The lack of written material provided on what I was looking at; the lack of lighting and dare I say cleanliness of these units; the seeming that only one human carried the full knowledge of what was within and that I was hearing this verbally through a translator—all of this left huge imprint on me. For what is the role of an archive if there is no physical record or systematized way of finding what is within? It left even more imprint on me for the very next day when I visited the Museum of Biology in Hanoi. There I was also struck by how the specimens of Vietnam's native flora and fauna were stacked to the ceiling on paper discolouring with age, with hand-printed text naming species and geographical location. The elderly professor assured me that the 'barcode' offers a means of 'catalog' (this 'barcode' is a mere handwritten number on the right top corner of each page). How a researcher would endeavour to pull out a specimen record without the entire pile tumbling down, and thus falling utterly out of any order! I found myself asking, despite my personal suspicion of the 'catalog' and its power to control (and thus destroy, the history of imperialism and colonialism has well demonstrated this), how do we locate our

immense history without a means to identify and understand? My first question to you (or perhaps you have questions for me): What inspired you to house your exhibition in this storage unit? Did this ‘venue’ have an impact on your selection of artworks and artists? What is your own attitude to the ‘archive’? Do you believe in them?

<What is your own attitude to the ‘archive’? Do you believe in them? What I mean is, archives are Western creations. They arose with the rise of mercantilism and the eventual creation of ‘colonialism’. To identify, collect, categorize, define was to give a value. This value—of goods, people, objects, plants, animals—all followed Western understandings of order and housed in buildings in such a way that made sense for the Westerner. Today, the definition of the ‘archive’ as a museum or a library is under re-assessment globally. Many cultures across the world have different ways of ‘recording’ their past—through the passing on of song, dance, travel routes for example. I hope this makes more sense now>

**Phụ Lục:**

There are a number of reasons that led to our decision to carry out this project in the storage facility. Actually, we can hardly separate one reason from the other because it seems like they were already intertwined at the moment we came up with the decision. However, theoretically speaking, we can put it separately so that you can understand it better.

Firstly let’s talk about the specificity of the space. When we saw the advertisement of the rental of the storage, we were so impressed and drawn to it because the space appeared to be very systematic, rigid, concise, cold, both collective and private. All of that provoked in us quite a number of indescribable feelings. It revealed some restrictions of the physical space ranging from 2 metres square to 3 metres square, and in a way, it also reflects the restrictions of existence in human terms, which is also so much bound by conventions and regulations. At that moment we already knew that this was something we definitely wanted to do and it was feasible. It immediately dawned on us that this was it, this was definitely the only option and it had already ruled out all

other alternative, backup options that we had previously had in mind.

This decision of using the storage, of course, greatly influenced our choice of artists and artworks participating in this project. It is the specificity of the space itself—the conditions and regulations of operation of the storage—that defined the structure of the project, which rendered something possible and others not. So the process took place very organically because, by default, the space already informed the project. Taking a few steps back to look at it, we see how obvious everything is. The project was given shape and form, had already structured itself and how it would operate. We needed to accept and follow its rules without intervening too much if we wanted the project to work.

Also another element that led us to the decision of space is because there is beauty in the act of putting something away, considering both the thing(s) being put away and the act of putting it/ them away. It is this act that gives the objects more reasons to exist. Putting something away also means that it shall be lost from view, either permanently or temporarily, but it still provokes curiosity and questions. In other words, even though something is lost from view, it doesn’t mean that we see it no longer; in contrast, we continue to see it in a different way. It’s similar to how we can still ‘see’ something in many different ways even when it’s hidden in a drawer. We don’t just see something physically by having our retinas register the presence of the object once the door of the drawer/storage unit is opened.

Whether we believe in ‘archive’ or not—it is not easy to answer this question. In Vietnam you would often hear people say ‘You live off of belief?’ or ‘Are you doing this with nothing but belief?’ This mere question at its core reveals a sense of finiteness of humans against something infinite, unknown, uncontrollable—something that humans have to accept and come to terms with in order to take action. It also speaks about the doubt that we have no ability to overcome apart from living with it and making particular choices in such circumstances. On a larger scale, so to speak, we don’t believe in laws, institutions, and we don’t believe in

so many other existing systems of value. We don’t believe in the fact that we can believe in something to be permanent, sacred, or absolute. Thus we don’t think too much and we don’t really care so much about the credibility of the storage system—it can potentially be something not trustworthy at all. But the more important question is whether we can still do something with that untrustworthiness.

Here’s a funny story, but also a true one: The storage owner told us of the utmost privacy and safety of their storage, we don’t quite believe in it. They told us there is 24/7 security and CCTV, we don’t quite believe in it. They told us of their standard humidity of their space, we don’t quite believe in it. They told us to go over their list of forbidden goods and promised not to commit any wrongdoings, but we promise you, they didn’t quite believe in us. Actually there exists a lot of disbeliefs between us all, but still many things continue to happen between us. And if we are lucky enough, everything shall go smoothly, in case nothing goes wrong. And the most important thing is that we see the storage as a projection/reflection of many other things happening in life, on either large or small scale.

**Zoe Butt:**

I really appreciate your reference to how we are somewhat unconsciously present with what we cannot ‘see’; that we can and do live in knowing many ‘things’ of value remain deliberately hidden away from view. Our domestic homes are all organized similarly (at least mine is, wink), but when it comes to the curating of art objects, particularly within an ‘exhibition’, it is rarely a permanent arrangement (though Senegalese artist Isse Samb would beg to differ, having created exhibitions that he would leave ‘on view’, gathering dust, for decades). Your selection of objects will live together for only a short time. Your ‘exhibition’—its memory, its temporality—is further marked by the absence of any material to explain the project (there is little story within the promotional material, which is often the only archival material for so many art events in Vietnam). However, what you do offer is the ‘tour’, and a rather performative one at that. As a group of artists who curate performatively—and I say that in meaning it feels like you have curated the selection of artists

and the placement of their work in this storage unit as a kind of performative script, with deliberate cues and paths—can you share more on your own definition of an ‘exhibition’ and your preference to leave it undocumented/unwritten?

I am also keen to hear more about this element of ‘distrust’ between guest and host. Through your experience in hiring space at this storage unit, it would appear that such distrust has become normalized—that to request usage of space, for a short span of time, in a commercial environment where both guest and host are intrinsically aware of the other’s unspoken potential fallibility—that it has become the default position of human interaction in contemporary life today (thus ‘cooperation agreements’ by law are now agonizingly long with their listing of liabilities). In the case of your show, can we explain this distrust as a consequence of the storage-unit industry (which gets pretty clandestine when you think of the tax-free havens many storage facilities offer across the world which often hold incredibly dubious material)? Or would you surmise that such ‘distrust’ goes deeper than that and is a reflection of the political climate in which our media-prone lives are subjected? I find myself thinking of what Michael Taussig once wrote ‘That is why my subject is not the truth of being but the social being of truth, not whether facts are real but what the politics of their interpretation and representation are’.<sup>1</sup>

**Phụ Lục:**

As for distrust, perhaps you are right—it was present in all the ways you mentioned. We experienced the distrust of the storage company with both tension and excitement. But once it passed and we looked back, the feeling was, ‘Phew, that was wonderful.’ They required us to submit a list of any visitors we brought in, including their full names, phone numbers, email addresses, and ID cards. They kept an eye on us every time a tour took place, even though they already had security cameras everywhere. Sometimes their guards would wander idly, hovering around us whenever we brought guests in. At times, as if by chance, they would open the storage unit right next to the one where we were presenting, close enough to overhear a bit of what we were saying and doing with these

groups of visitors, and to check what was really inside those storerooms.

This proximity made us anxious, and whenever a tour ended, we felt unsure: would the project continue, or be cut short? Yet the tours kept running, and soon we had completed one-third of the project. By that point, the storage company seemed to conclude that this harmless bunch was not worth worrying about. All they ever saw were one group of guests after another, doors being opened and closed, and us chattering away. Perhaps their temporary conclusion was simply that we were harmless. From then on, the project ran smoothly for the remaining two-thirds. We even grew more relaxed, sometimes skipping the requirement to provide them with visitors' personal information. In truth, many of our guests felt uncomfortable with that request.

It wasn't until the last few weeks, when one of our guests showed up with a large professional camera and there happened to be some foreigners among them, speaking in another language, that the company seemed to jolt awake. They realized they had been lax for too long. They immediately intervened at that moment and reinstated the strict original rule requiring full visitor lists and information. We nearly paid a heavy price for our complacency, but luckily there were only a few tours left by then. And so, in the end, everything passed!

Were we sure we had an 'exhibition' (by definition)? Not really. What we did have was a strong sense that, once you committed to something, you would always find a way to solve the problem if it haunted you enough—one way or another. Even at a dead end, there are always two options: to do it the only way possible, or to not do it at all (laugh). We thought that, with the daunting challenge of living up to the highly ambitious previous editions of *Skylines with Flying People*, trying to work in warehouses with the resources we had at the time, under the strict conditions of the Covid pandemic, the difficulty actually turned into simplicity. We saw that the only way forward was to do it in this manner, so there was no need to agonize over choices. Perhaps the most important thing was that you could feel you were dealing with issues of site-specificity as matters of survival. We

believed the site-specific quality was present in many aspects and corners—creating effects of rhythm, pauses, physical scale, and fleeting moments.

We are not sure if we misunderstood you when you mentioned our 'preference' of not documenting/writing about the project. We did not control that; things could happen quite naturally. Or perhaps you meant another preference which we did have: how to initiate and run the project, how to inform audiences, and how to design tours so they could take place. In that respect, yes—it is true that we provided no information on any platform or media outlet. There were no leaflets, brochures, posters, banners, or catalogues. Everything spread only by word of mouth, in the hope that it would ripple outward from small circles. We thought this was no different from a site-specific strategy, given the specificity of the social and spatial context. In the atmosphere of the pandemic, it was almost impossible to expect support for staging public events or exhibitions of any form or scale. So to be silent and guerrilla-like—to have no publicity at all—fit perfectly with the situation. And in fact, the very harshness of the circumstances added new layers of meaning to the project's presence.

And the word-of-mouth strategy turned out to be unexpectedly effective. That time was also our chance to test this age-old method. Word of mouth felt intimate and charming—the distance between people seemed to shrink when things were whispered, suggested, and shared in passing. It also carried the quality of deliberate leaks, or playful gossip. Yet the effect of its spread was surprisingly broad. Many of our visitors naturally became 'ambassadors', promoting the project for us, multiplying the network exponentially. Their impressions and emotions carried forward. There may have been distortions along the way, but overall it didn't matter. Borrowing the wind of rumor, the project flew far.

**Zoe Butt** is a curator, writer, and educator with over two decades of experience working across public and private art institutions globally. Her curatorial practice centres on building and mentoring critically thinking and historically conscious artistic communities, fostering dialogue across cultures of the globalizing Souths. She earned her PhD by Published Works from the Centre for Research and Education on Art and Media (CREAM), University of Westminster, London. She is currently Artistic Director of deCentral, a forthcoming social enterprise for the arts in Thailand founded by Central Group and opening in early 2027. She also serves as Lead Advisor for the Kadist Art Foundation, and since April 2025, holds the role of Director at Large of in-tangible institute, which she founded in 2022.

Zoe previously served as Artistic Director of The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (2017–2021); Executive Director and Curator at Sàn Art, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (2009–2016); Director of International Programs at Long March Project, Beijing (2007–2009); and Assistant Curator of Contemporary Asian Art at the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane (2001–2007), where she contributed extensively to the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT).

Notable curatorial endeavours include *Pollination* (2018–ongoing), linking curators, artists, and private patronage across Southeast Asia; *Sharjah Biennial 14: Leaving the Echo Chamber – Journey Beyond the Arrow* (2019), organized by the Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE; and the educational and interdisciplinary initiatives *Conscious Realities* (2013–2016) and *Sàn Art Laboratory* (2012–2015). She has curated an extensive range of exhibitions and public programs that champion under-recognized artistic practices and the complex histories they bring to light. Her writing has been published by Hatje Cantz, JRP-Ringier, Routledge, and Sternberg Press, among others. She is a MoMA International Curatorial Fellow (New York), a member of Asia Society's 'Asia 21' initiative (New York), and a member of the Asian Art Council at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York).

## chapter II

# PHỤ LỤC, HOW ARE YOU ?

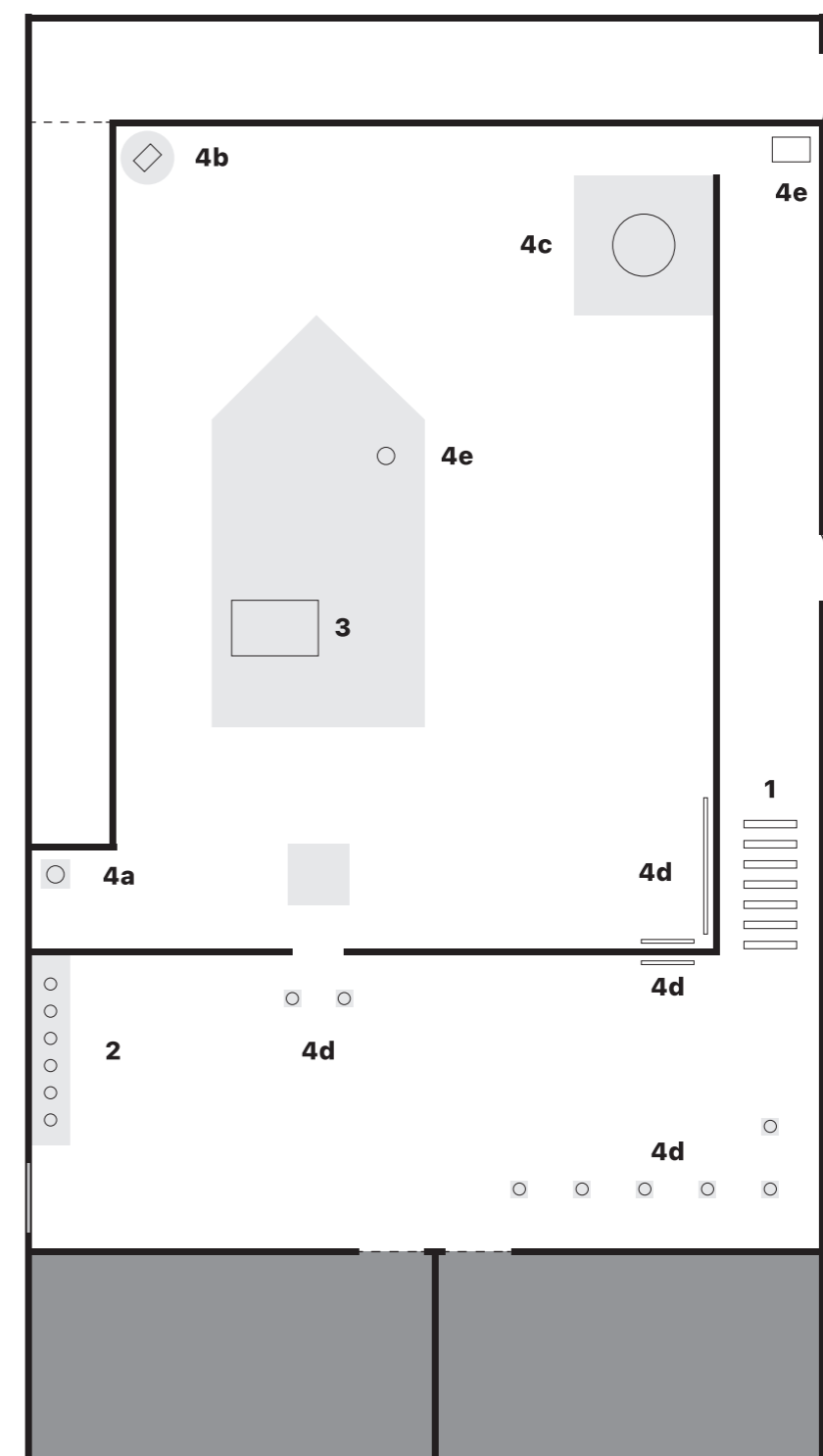
Nguyễn Art Foundation  
EMASI Nam Long  
November 2025 – May 2026

Self-curated by Phụ Lục, *Phụ Lục, How Are You?* introduces new works created in 2025 specifically for *Phụ Lục Project*.

'How are you?' belongs to the present, yet it also carries the potential to become hyper-present. The present may reveal traces of a past still unfolding through 'self-reflection,' or it may project glimpses of the future through suggestion—even if only a near or very near future.

In everyday conversation, 'how are you?' can be nothing more than a reflex, something blurted out when meeting, or even an empty formality when there is nothing left to say—at least we still offer each other a 'how are you.' This sense of nothing-left-to-say resonates closely with the colloquial understanding of the phrase *Tứ Thập Bất Hoặc* (meaning at forty, no longer in doubt): the threshold of one's forties, when doubts have grown few and even fewer things remain that can still beguile or mislead them.

Read more on the artwork and the project via [phulucproject.com](http://phulucproject.com) and *Index 2010–2025*



Exhibition map in EMASI Nam Long

## LIST OF WORK

WORK #1A:

Phụ Lục

## White Shirts

2025

Six white shirts of Phụ Lục dyed respectively in green tea, mud from Australia, reflective spray, and French red wine.

### Dimensions variable

From now on, the familiar white shirts of Phụ Lục will no longer be entirely white as before, and yet they remain white shirts. The color of the present does not alter the fundamental perception attached to them.

WORK #1B:

This time, the shirts will be hung collectively on the beam at the threshold of the exhibition space.

## WORK #2:

Ngo Thanh Bac

## Submerge Deeply

2025

Six *Phụ Lục* puppets produced with puppet artisan Ngo Doan Minh Truong and sculptor Dinh Van Trong, submerged in water, site-specifically installed in the sink of the exhibition space beneath duckweed

### Dimensions variable

Six familiar puppets modeled after the members of *Phụ Lục*, originally from the work *Do I Need to Introduce Myself Here?* (2017) by artist Ngo Thanh Bac. These figures have appeared in different contexts over the years. Here, they are submerged beneath water in basin-like vessels, veiled under a surface layer of floating green algae.

WORK #3A:

Phụ Lục

## Độc Âm

2025

A live performance at the EMASI Nam Long gymnasium between 11.30PM on 19 July 2025 and 07.30AM on 20 July 2025, in which each member of Phụ Lục drinks alone within their own designated space for the duration Six equal units of space are marked by provisional borders of brick lines, similar to EMASI Nam Long's fence wall

Video documentation produced by Dang Thuy Anh, filmed by Minh Anh, with support from Son Phung, Benjamin Sunarjo and Christopher Vinh-An Luu

The familiar image characterizing *Phụ Lục* will recall *Quần Ấm* (the act of drinking together), in which several people gather around shared drinks. Yet this is not about festivity. *Quần Ấm* gestures toward a collective inwardness shared quietly over tea or alcohol. *Đối Ấm* (the act of paired drinking) refers to the intimate exchange between two confidants. *Độc Ấm* (the act of drinking alone) turns inward: to drink alone is to speak to oneself, to question oneself.

In a composition that might be considered somewhat ironic, the work *Độc Ẩm* unfolds within a constrained and shared framework of space and time, separated only by provisional boundaries. This presents a challenge. Here, drinking alone takes on the character of a self-imposed discipline that exists purely as an inner resolve: a matter of internal boundaries, of space, of duration, of sound, of taste. Precisely because the separation is so provisional, and the simultaneity so present, a question arises:

Is *Độc Ẩm*—drinking alone, then, the same as *Quần Ẩm*—drinking together?

From a certain vantage point, it does indeed resemble *Quần Áo*. The crucial difference lies in belief: one must believe, or be in the state of believing that they are drinking alone. This is a central, necessary question that must always unfold within the artist. It is also the very threshold upon which others may believe in the work or not. This is why one often hears, 'I cannot quite explain this work in words; it is

something inside me.' What is inside is difficult to see, yet it can be perceived when belief takes place. That kind of belief is a luxury, and sometimes a statement becomes unnecessary.

WORK #3B:

Phụ Lục

## Six Abs

2025

Installation of six 14-inch old televisions mounted on custom-built frames, designed and fabricated with support from artist Le Dinh Chung

84 x 110 x 60 cm

In this work, presented within the exhibition space, the documentation of the performance *Độc Âm* is arranged in a bird's-eye configuration, comprising six up-facing televisions that echo the spatial division of the original performance, which took place in EMASI Nam Long gymnasium.

WORK #4:  
**Phụ Lục Garden**

WORK #4A:  
Nguyen Huy An  
**Waiting for a Passing Visitor**  
2025

Dimensions variable

In this installation by Nguyen Huy An, a specially made bowl containing a soil compound is placed in a dim hallway lit only by a single 30 x 30 cm wall opening. The bowl awaits the spontaneous sprouting of wild vegetation.

WORK #4B:  
Ngo Thanh Bac  
**Ngô Văn Nhân**  
2025

Dimensions variable

At the artist Ngo Thanh Bac’s former lacquer workshop, there was a single species of plant that grew thickly around the space, gradually spreading, enveloping, and covering every object inside. *Cây vẩy ốc*—a tenacious creeping fig—worked quietly, its roots penetrating the earth to astonishing depths. This only became fully visible when the artist dismantled and rebuilt the workshop last year. *Ngô Văn Nhân* is a project in which the artist attempts to cultivate, discipline, and train the creeping fig into a regulated form: the Literati upright form, in the terminology of bonsai practice.

The *Văn Nhân* (文人, *Literati*) form is characterized by a slender, modest trunk, yet one that conveys nobility, resilience, and independence. The trunk bends lightly, like the stroke of ink on old paper; its foliage is sparse and deliberate, akin to a reclusive companion living quietly at the margins of worldly noise. Each twist in the form is not ornamental but the record of time—of weathering wind, rain, and hardship without breaking.

According to bonsai artist Colin Lewis, the term *Văn Nhân* is inspired by the image of the *literati*—scholars and poets who lived simply, uninterested in competition or prestige, maintaining integrity even in adversity.

WORK #4C:  
Vu Duc Toan  
**Meal No. 1** from the series **Intimate Meals**, inspired by a chapter from the novel *Trân Trân*<sup>1</sup>  
2025

Dimensions variable

Presented atop a wooden platform, this work appears as a living still life or miniature garden arranged like a traditional meal set, with herbs such as scallions, dill, coriander, chilies, ginger, and more planted into the surface. The tableau evokes taste through form and scent: sour, spicy, salty, bitter, astringent, pungent, sharp, earthy.

Written by Tr. A I since 2023, the novel *Trân Trân* currently spans 6 chapters and 32 episodes. Its plot follows the turbulent cycles of the sorcerer circles of Hanoi in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The protagonist is Phuong Tran Tran, known as the foremost sorcerer of her time. As a child, she was regarded as a prodigy of divination by court masters in Hue. They secretly sent her to Hanoi to study under the legendary sorcerer Lang Seo. From that point onwards, the calamity started looming over the city. Only a short time later, Lang Seo and many of his associates were captured and beheaded by the French colonial authorities. From that moment on, Phuong Tran Tran wandered—becoming a figure of origins and consequences. She generates events, setting into motion historical cycles of coincidence and destiny. Blurring the notion of time and employing intertextual references, the author sketches multiple scenes and narratives, as if proposing answers to the lingering shadows of myth and rumor.

In previous descriptions, *Trân Trân* has sometimes been introduced as a form of alternative historical fiction; others have said that reading it feels like encountering contemporary wuxia. Some have even classified it as parafiction—a genre in which narrative, characters, and setting are prefixed with ‘para-’ to describe their existence between reality and imagination, inhabiting the diffuse space where the fictive and the actual bleed into one another.

WORK #4D:  
Nguyen Duong Hai Dang  
**Office Plants**  
2025

Dimensions variable

Office plants have become increasingly popular, aligned with the contemporary demand for ‘green living’ in workspaces, and with them comes the need to assign meaning to these plants: Some are believed to attract prosperity, some to bring wealth, some to ensure longevity, some to foster blessings and fortune, some to offer peace and protection, ... This work is inspired by an act of delegation. The artist did not directly select, purchase, or arrange any of the plants. These feng shui office plants were ordered by someone else through the most commonplace method of online shopping: reading reviews, choosing what looks ‘nice’ or ‘suitable,’ and having them shipped directly to the exhibition space to be displayed as artworks. The artist simply stands at a distance, observing the process as though it were a self-operating logistics chain of consumer society.

When objects originally meant to decorate offices—believed to attract fortune or generate ‘positive energy’—are placed inside an art space, they appear out of place. Aestheticization in the exhibition context renders them both familiar and estranged, like symbols of belief stripped of their functional purpose, now becoming the center of attention, exposed under the gallery lights.

WORK #4E:  
Hoang Minh Duc  
**From the Three-Thousand-Hectare Field to the Vast Desert**  
2025

Dimensions variable

The work centers on the construction of identity within the context of migration. Coming from an agricultural village in Northern Vietnam, the artist chose to build a new life in a foreign country, enduring the hardships of living ‘on another’s land’ in order to become a citizen there, for a better life.

The work is composed of three objects tied to markers of identity: a basket of ancestral rice seeds from a smallholder farming economy; a glass of water drawn from the pond at the artist’s family home in Hung Yen province; and a suitcase containing sprigs of golden wattle, the national flower of Australia.

The artist’s migration to Australia is also a process of renegotiating notions of homeland, family, and the future. The multiple citizenship tests he had to take became mechanisms for measuring identity. When he was finally granted citizenship, he received a branch of golden wattle, symbol of his second homeland—but also a species historically tied to settlement and colonization. Here, ‘home’ is not a place to return to, but a point of departure—continuously contested and redefined.

<sup>1</sup> Under the pen name Tr. A I, since 2021, Vu Duc Toan has been quietly experimenting with fiction and theatre. This sustained creative effort culminated in the novel *Trân Trân*, composed from careful observation and material drawn from both lived experience and literature. His experimental theatre works include: *A Lưu* (Hanoi Children’s Palace, 2024), *Mr. Phó Hà San – A Floating Cricket Carcass* (The Outpost Art Organisation, 2023), and *An Encounter at Minh Dĩ Ký* 明以記 (Á Space, 2022), inspired by a real incident recorded in Volume II, Chapter 34 of the memoirs of Tran Ang, a writer of the Agriculture Desk.

SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM  
Independence – Freedom – Happiness



Ho Chi Minh City, 20 July 2025

REPORT  
Regarding the work *Độc Âm* by Phụ Lục

To: Nguyễn Art Foundation and the audiences of the exhibition *Phụ Lục, How Are You?*

My name is Van Do, born on February 28, 1995. My position in the Phụ Lục Project is initiator and curator, and my role in the work *Độc Âm* was executive producer, together with line producer Dang Thuy Anh.

On the night of the incident, I was present at the site and observed almost the entire time. Today, I write this report to clearly present what happened during:

Time: 11.30 on the night of July 19, 2025 to 07.30 in the morning of July 20, 2025  
Location: EMASI Nam Long Gymnasium, District 7, Ho Chi Minh City

1. Summary of the event

- Number of participating artists: 5 (five)
- Names of participating artists:
  1. Hoang Minh Duc (b. 1978, Hung Yen province)
  2. Nguyen Huy An (b. 1982, Thanh Tri, Hanoi)
  3. Vu Duc Toan (b. 1982, Thai Binh province)
  4. Ngo Thanh Bac (b. 1983, Bac Giang province)
  5. Nguyen Duong Hai Dang (b. 1982, Bac Ninh province)

The artists were allocated six (06) individual squares on the-floor delineated by bricks. Each artist remained within their designated square for the duration of eight (08) continuous hours, only exiting temporarily for restroom use. Objects and materials were brought individually by each artist for the purpose of the performance.

Dimension of each square: 12 bricks × 9 bricks. Brick type: *Bá Lộc* Tuynel brick, measuring 4 × 8 × 18 cm per piece — the same type used as the signature material in the architecture of EMASI Nam Long.

2. Detailed observation

During the aforementioned time, five artists of the Phụ Lục group—Hoang Minh Duc, Nguyen Huy An, Vu Duc Toan, Ngo Thanh Basc, and Nguyen Duong Hai Dang—performned the act of solo drinking (*độc âm*) within six squares in the EMASI Nam Long Gymnasium, District 7, Ho Chi Minh City.

To perform this act, each artist brought into their own square a number of tools and objects and remained inside their individual space for the entire eight-hour duration, only leaving to use the restroom. Specifically, as follows:

CCTV 1: Vu Duc Toan

In Vu Duc Toan’s square from the beginning, two bricks were placed slightly askew facing each other, as if someone were about to step in and squat down. He brought quite a lot of bulky belongings: a bag of jicama with chili salt, a bag of dried beef, a thermos of hot water for tea, several cans of 333 beer, and Russian vodka. Each time he finished a beer, he would stack the empty cans onto the brick wall.

Sleepiness came to him quite early, but he did not sleep continuously. After dozing for a moment, he stubbornly sat up to continue drinking beer, resisting the collapsing sleepiness with his whole body. Around 2AM to 3AM, he slept deeply. From 3AM to 4AM,

he woke, ate some jicama, and sat in a kneeling position. He alternated one hour sleeping and one hour sitting in this manner until morning. I counted that he drank five out of six cans of beer. He rested his head on a small denim bag, candies scattered around.

CCTV 2: Ngo Thanh Bac

Ngo Thanh Bac brought one liter of white rice liquor, one plum, one box of guilinggao herbal jelly, and some Mai Ha rice liquor (from Hoa Binh province). After a while sitting with his knees up, he moved to a lying position, crossing his legs, sometimes thinking, sometimes scrolling his phone. He had to use glasses to read clearly. He moved from one corner of the square to another. Around 2.30AM, seemingly unable to bear the sleepiness, he put his phone aside (still playing sound) and began snoring. He woke briefly to step outside and then returned, continuing to snore even louder. He slept like that until nearly 6AM, in a curled-up posture resembling a tilde (~).

In the sounds of nearby music coming from his neighbouring square—from rock to classical—Bac checked the news a bit, then fell back to sleep for another 30 minutes, still snoring audibly in that short time before the performance concluded.

CCTV 3: Nguyen Huy An

Nguyen Huy An brought a portion of boiled pork offal with dipping sauce, an infused liquor bottle, one shoe (the other remaining somewhere on Thach Ban Mountain)<sup>1</sup>, and a notebook. He lay listening to music from Ho Ngoc Ha to classical music, then a bit of news, then *Diem Xua* by Trinh Cong Son, followed by a Chinese song (?), *I Will Always Love You* by Whitney Houston, *Bong hong Thuy tinh* by Buc Tuong, etc. Opening the notebook, beside a dried leaf attached to a blank page, he filled two pages with writing. Around 2.30AM., listening to *Chapter 12 – Kieu meets Thuc Sinh*, he gradually fell asleep, with his head resting against the tile border between two squares. After a while, he woke up, pushed away the single shoe resting on the brick, placed it under his head, and continued sleeping.

At around 6AM, the music became more intense, starting with *Purple Haze* by Jimi Hendrix, followed by increasingly harsh electric guitar solos, sometimes instrumental only. He gently swayed and hummed along to *What a Wonderful World* by Louis Armstrong:

“I see skies of blue  
And clouds of white  
The bright blessed day  
The dark sacred night  
And I think to myself  
What a wonderful world”

Then he shifted abruptly to chamber classical music, also mimicking high-pitched vocal tones.

CCTV 4: Nguyen Duong Hai Dang

In a setting resembling a table, chair, and snack shelf, Nguyen Duong Hai Dang brought a personal laptop, a plate of American black grapes, a plate of cashews, a bottle of whisky, and an inflatable pillow tucked under the laptop. He spent most of the initial time on the computer reading news, browsing, and watching videos. Around 1AM, he began to show signs of back fatigue. After doing some exercises, he started confiding in ChatGPT about the notion of ‘letting be’ in contemporary art, which gradually extended to ‘letting be’ in family relationships. Deeply impressed by the response, he continued inviting ChatGPT to ‘drink’ with him. He addressed ChatGPT as ‘em,’ calling himself ‘anh.’ He appeared to have many concerns regarding behavior and family life. He sought advice on how to communicate with his capable but controlling wife.

At 1.32AM, to the dance track *Tham Thia*, he stood up to stretch, walk around, and extend his limbs within the boundaries of his square. At 2.09AM, he began opening up to ChatGPT about his desire to maintain creative fire at age 43 while remaining a pillar for his family. At 2.12AM, scratching his head in distress, he spoke further about loneliness; ChatGPT advised him to find himself through art. At 2.16AM, he admitted he had become dull, uninspired, and drained across all three

aspects of his life—work, family, and art; the advice, somewhat contradictory yet endearing, was to use the phone less, but also to use it to record small sparks of inspiration. At 2.22AM, the atmosphere became warm and friendly, ‘Cheers! Bottoms up Let me pour you another!’—like two kindred spirits in the night. At 2.30AM, he asked, ‘I want a lover now, but my wife wouldn’t allow it—what should I do?’ He was told, ‘Perhaps start by becoming your wife’s lover—then become your own. Smile a little, it eases life’s tension!’ At 2.44AM, he lay down again, played the song *Giac mo trua* by Thuy Chi, after spending some time wiping up spilled whisky.

At 3.13AM, he asked ChatGPT to write—on his behalf—an opening speech for the 15th anniversary of Phụ Lục. The speech recalled how Phụ Lục had never intended to become anything official, how they were grateful each time an exhibition managed to materialize, how close friends still trusted them even when an empty box was declared an artwork, how members had been arguing since the beginning, and how they once taped walls together to make a gallery. After hearing the draft, he seemed unsatisfied and asked for a more serious version. Shortly after, he returned to his concerns about staying creative and innovative in his role as an educator. At 3.37AM, he lay down for one hour of sleep, and upon waking, he continued confiding in ChatGPT about methods of art education. He would nap briefly, then return to ChatGPT, this time about the role of contemporary artists in society, and preserving locality in an international context. Perhaps the next question was which Vietnamese performance artists were currently known—ChatGPT provided several names. At 6AM, ChatGPT warned that there was not much time left, his body was showing signs of exhaustion, and he needed to confront his vulnerability and limitations. He acknowledged, ‘This part you said is harsh, indeed!’

At 6AM, in dramatic rock music faintly echoing from a neighbouring square, he continued pouring out tangled thoughts about weakness, regret, and loneliness, along with the

burdens of family, career, and passion. Around 7AM, he watched football until the end of the performance.

**CCTV 5: Hoang Minh Duc**

Hoang Minh Duc brought a bottle of Van Village liquor (from Bac Giang province), a plate of boiled tofu, and a plate of roasted peanuts. He had flown from Melbourne, Australia to carry out this action. The atmosphere in his square was particularly calm and tranquil. He was the only one who did not bring any electronic device. He frequently moved between lying down with one arm propped on the floor, and lying flat on his back looking straight up at the ceiling, his facial expression seemingly lost in distant thoughts. Sleepiness likely arrived at some unknown moment in the early dawn.

Around 4AM, he began to stand up and walk slowly around his square, with a leisurely demeanor. When awake, he only quietly sat and ate a few peanuts. Around 6AM, he stood up and walked a few more gentle rounds within the tile square, for about five minutes. He closed his eyes and tilted his head toward the ceiling. He remained sitting like that until it was time to leave.

**CCTV 6:**

The sixth square was empty. A green–tea–dyed shirt hung suspended there for the entire 8 hours, witnessing everything. The shirt merely swayed back and forth, without any reaction. One contextual factor that significantly influenced the artists’ behaviors was that the air-conditioning system at the sports hall could not be adjusted that night. Past midnight, the atmosphere turned freezing cold. This was unforeseeable, as Saigon’s weather is normally warm, so no one had brought warm clothing. When their physical bodies could no longer withstand the cold and sleepiness, all five of them eventually curled up to sleep.

I take full responsibility for the accuracy of the above information and am willing to clarify further when requested.

Respectfully,  
**Van Do**  
Reporter

1 On the early morning of the opening day of Nguyen Huy An’s solo exhibition *The Four Subjects* at Manzi Art Space (Hanoi, 2022), he traveled to the Thach Ban Mountain range and left behind one of the shoes he was wearing. In the exhibition, only the right shoe appeared, accompanied by a postcard showing the distant peak of Thach Ban Mountain, with a handwritten note on the back ‘The left shoe (somewhere on Thach Ban Mountain).’ The shoe he brought with him that night to the gymnasium was the remaining one.

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# BIOGRAPHIES

## PHỤ LỤC

Phụ Lục was founded in 2010 in Hanoi by six artists—Nguyen Huy An, Vu Duc Toan, Nguyen Song, Ngo Thanh Bac, Hoang Minh Duc, and Nguyen Duong Hai Dang—and remains one of the few active performance art collectives in Vietnam today. Known for their durational, repetitive, and sometimes absurd group performances, Phụ Lục often employs everyday objects as allegorical props and stages their works in abstract settings. Their practice evokes social issues while addressing personal concerns through a language of minimal yet affective gestures. The group has participated in numerous performance art events in Vietnam and abroad, with its composition varying from project to project. Notable recent presentations include Translocal Performance Art Giswil (Giswil, Switzerland, 2025), Documenta 15 (Kassel, Germany, 2022), Asia Live! Vietnam Performance (Białystok, Bielsko-Biala, Poland, 2018), Future of Imagination (Singapore, 2012), *Skylines with Flying People 2 & 3* (Hanoi, Vietnam, 2012, 2015), NIPAF IN:ACT (Hanoi, Vietnam, 2017, 2019), and *Sounds of Dust* (Kunming, China, 2011). In 2018, they undertook a six-month performance residency at MoT+++ (HCMC, Vietnam), and in 2020, Phụ Lục curated *Skylines with Flying People 4* at Mini KingKho (Hanoi, Vietnam).

## VAN DO

Van Do is a curator and writer from Hanoi, Vietnam whose practice explores how sites, in their physical, socio-political, and affective dimensions, can serve as both artistic and curatorial material. Through architectural interventions and site-responsive commissions, she activates and examines these spaces across institutional, alternative, and independent contexts. Her ongoing research focuses on the re-enactment of performance as a method for speculative historiography, developed in close collaboration with Hanoi-based performance artists. Upcoming texts will appear in post-moma, NUS Press, Art & Market, and Movement Research Performance Journal.

She received her artistic training from Hanoi DOCLAB, an independent space for experimental filmmaking and video art. From 2019 to 2021, she began her curatorial career at The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre (HCMC, Vietnam). From 2022 to 2024, she served as Artistic Director of Á Space, an independent, non-profit art space dedicated to experimental practices in Hanoi, she spearheaded numerous exhibitions, cultivated a platform for emerging artists and curators, co-convened the first national curatorial conference in collaboration with Vietnam National University, Hanoi (2024–ongoing), and served as one of the chief curators of the Hanoi Creative Design Festival (2023–2024). In 2025, Van joined the founding curatorial team of deCentral—an art initiative set to open in Bangkok and Chiang Mai in 2027—to deepen her engagement with Southeast Asia, while continuing to serve on Á Space’s Curatorial Board.

Selected projects include: *Nostalgia for the future* (Hanoi Children’s Palace, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2024); *Vy Trinh: Overvoltage* (Gia Lam Train Factory, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2023); *White Noise* (Nguyễn Art Foundation, HCMC, Vietnam, 2023); *Tương tương ngộ ngộ cá kho tộ, ngộ ngộ tương tương đậu kho tương* (Á Space, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2023); *IN:ACT 2022* (Nhà Sàn Collective & Á Space, Hanoi, Vietnam & Kassel, Germany 2022); *Hà Ninh Pham: Recursive Fables* (A+ WORKS of ART, Kuala Lumpur, 2022); *Within / Between / Beneath / Upon* (The Factory, HCMC, Vietnam, 2021); *An ode to the microscopic* (Dcine, HCMC, Vietnam, 2020).

## NAF

Established in 2018 by Quynh Nguyen, Nguyễn Art Foundation (NAF) was born from a desire to better serve the artistic community of Vietnam. Acting as a branching support structure, NAF expands the possibilities for contemporary art in Vietnam by facilitating artistic and intellectual exchange through our Collection, Exhibitions, Education and Public Programs, and Development Projects, in the hope that such initiatives will not only enrich individual practices but also promote the overall growth of our local art scene.

Our Collection focuses on artists connected in any way to Vietnam and refuses to limit artists by a definition of identity that is restricted to nationality, instead prioritizing their practice, experimentation, and criticality as defining factors. The Collection thus features work from both Vietnamese and foreign artists, enlarging the definition of what can be considered “art from Vietnam”.

With education at the core of our values, NAF partners with the EMASI Schools and Renaissance International School Saigon, embedding artworks into the students’ daily life by featuring its Collection and hosting thematic exhibitions, both across different campuses and in dedicated art spaces. NAF aspires to connect with and offer students, as well as our local audience, a chance to engage with groundbreaking forms of artistic production from Vietnam and beyond.