

Joanna Kitto

After the Final Act

Death, they say, is the great equaliser. Life's only certainty. And yet, irrespective of time, place and culture, we have demonstrated a shared desire to shroud death and dying in layers of narrative and ritual. The stories we tell and the customs we perform may vary, but our reckoning with mortality is universal. In philosophical terms, death is not always about finality, but a shift in form—an exit from one realm met with the possibility of renewal in another. It is here, on the knife's edge between grief and beauty that Adelaide-based artist Truc Truong is operating with her latest body of work, *The Closing of Opening Ceremony*. Across four sculptural forms, ceremonial objects are re-imagined using alternative materials and methods of production. The death honoured here is not one of the body and mind, but of ways of thinking, working and being—death of the status quo.

The exhibition centres around a canopy draped in counterfeit Louis Vuitton black satin fabric. The monumental figure sits perched atop tall sugarcane haunches made of steel. Titled *Mourning Call II*, its form is based on a communal coffin from Truong's ancestral temple in Long Son, Vietnam (Nha Lon Long Son). The temple was founded by the artist's great-great-grandfather, Lê Văn Muru, who resisted French colonisers and began what is now considered the cult-like religion of đạo Ông Trần which brings together Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and ancestor worship. The philosophy behind the communal coffin is that all people—regardless of wealth or status—would share the same resting place in death.

Mourning Call II appears creature-like, raised on metallic sugarcane haunches ready to carry its occupant from the realm of the living to the realm of the dead. An anthropomorphised figure known as the 'psychopomp' recurs in Western theologies surrounding death, often depicted as a stag, a raven, even the howling wind. A version of the psychopomp exists in Vietnamese theology as well, in the form of a rooster. The Mở cửa mả ritual is a Vietnamese funerary custom performed after death

where sugarcane is tied to a rooster's leg, and walked around the gravesite to guide the spirit home. Following the death of her grandfather, Truong's family performed the ritual in Vietnam in 2024 and from this experience, welded steel sugarcane and black rooster feathers reverberate throughout *The Closing of Opening Ceremony*. In *Mourning Call II*, feathers have been hand-sewn into the lining of the silk fabric that forms the funerary housing, in an act of ritual and spiritual labour.

Elsewhere, the rooster is replaced by a worn pair of Margiela Tabi boots—a cult fashion item, in this instance used to interrogate the fashion world's (and by extension, the art world's) ability to make outsiders of anyone who does not understand what particular cuts, forms, fabrics tell us about the taste, or vocabulary, of their wearer. As Truong says, items like the Tabi boots are only legible as a symbol of taste and wealth to those 'in the know', effectively excluding anyone outside of these systems and contributing to uphold deeply colonial, capitalist power dynamics. Truong plays on this by overriding traditional forms with a new series of coded symbols, obfuscated for those who do not speak their particular visual language.

In recent years, Truong's practice has been defined by playful, dazzling and brightly coloured plush toy installations—familiar faces sitting side by side on large-scale crosses, fountains, and shrines, jostling for space, eyes popping with glee. For anyone not paying close attention, the subversive humour in these works belies their depth. Truong speaks about the use of Sesame Street characters in particular, as a tool with which to consider who has access to language, understanding and knowledge. *The Closing of Opening Ceremony* shrugs off this aesthetic in favour of a quieter, darker, more viscerally uncomfortable series of material choices drawn from Vietnamese funerary customs and the world of fashion. Take the counterfeit Louis Vuitton fabric for example. As Truong tells it, Vietnam has a thriving market for fake luxury, and LV is a favourite. Truong has observed that this is less about deception

(trying to play items off as real) and more about creating a 'cultural remix'—a pithy way to upend the West's global stronghold over value, aesthetics and legitimacy. The ubiquity of the counterfeit, reframed as an item to covet in itself, reflects a deeper tension between imperial power and cultural autonomy. *Mourning Call II* (both this iteration and its predecessor cloaked in a tapestry of multi-coloured knock-offs) highlight this contradiction, becoming an object of both reverence and rebellion, that calls us to consider the ways authenticity can become aestheticised, performed and policed within an (art) world obsessed with capital, productivity and achievement.

The Closing of Opening Ceremony, in title and form, gestures at a performance or a recurrent action coming to an end. The three objects that surround the central form appear to have been hung up to rest after their use in a ritualistic practice of some kind. A funerary procession for what must be shed. In this way, *The Closing of Opening Ceremony* interrupts — and re-routes—dominant ways of being, to clear the way for something new to emerge from the ashes.

List of Works

Mourning Call II, 2025
Mild Steel, fabric, feathers
160cm x 110cm x 220cm
POA

The Knowing Split, 2025
Stainless steel chain, mild steel, worn Tabi boots
300cm x 20cm x 20cm
POA

False Tool, 2025
Vietnamese broom (chổi), fabric, feathers
100cm x 30cm x 5cm
POA

As If It Were an Honour (2025)
Used pink rubber gloves, fabric
30cm x 30cm x 30cm
POA