

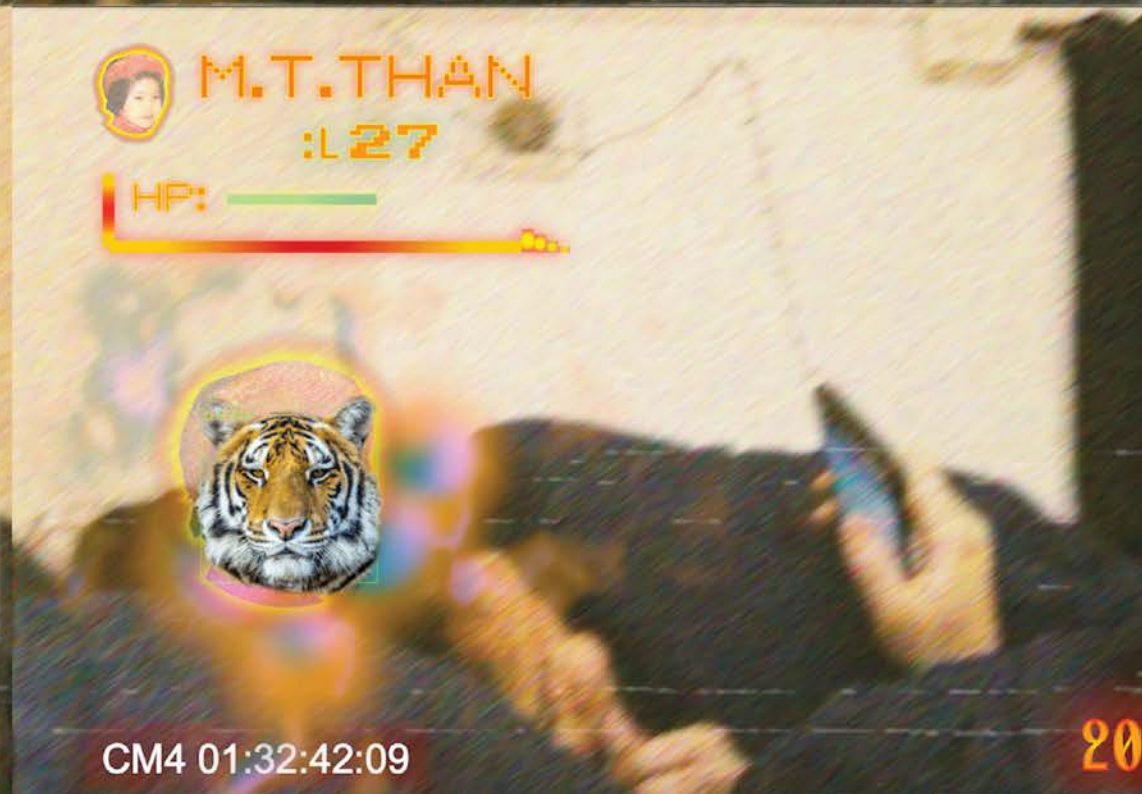
MARIA THAN

29.03.2024 — 19.05.2024

HOMAGE TO QUAN ÂM

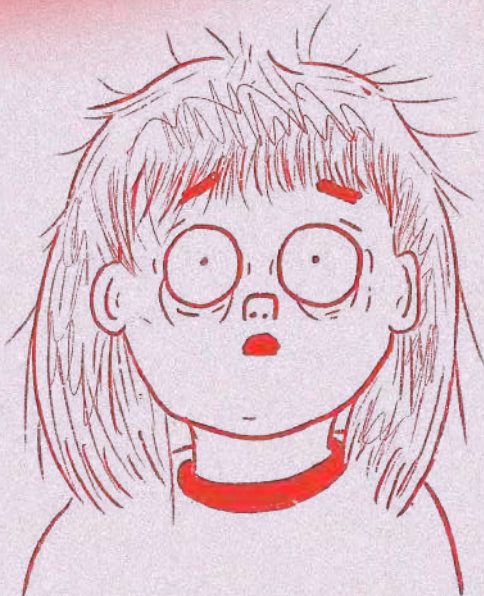


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credits

Creative Director: Nimrod Vardi
Managing Director: Claudel Goy
Curator: Rebecca Edwards
Production Manager: Aanchal Saxena
Press and Marketing: Giulia Ponzano
Digital Producer: Marc Blazel, Ellinor Paik
Installation/Technicians: George Browne, Peter McNelis, Bertie Simpson, Debbie Spink, Dmitry Timofeev
Exhibition graphics and booklet: Camilla Does



You Wouldn't Steal a TV

- Development, concept, production: Maria Than
- Dataset assistance for *The Simpsons*: Caleb Sharpe
- Sound: Maria Than

HOME AGE

- Development, concept, production: Maria Than
- Interactive live projection development: Jasan Waldura

Troi oi!

- Development, concept, production: Maria Than
- Hand-drawn animations: Maria Than

Bulle Personnelle

- Development, concept, production: Maria Than
- Booklets and illustrations: Maria Than
- VR development and 3D modelling: Petter Schölander
- Voiceover: Maria Than
- Sound: Sound design by Ariel Karsh, remix of Beethoven's *Sonata Pathétique No. 8 Op. 13, II. Adagio cantabile*

Un de perdus, dix de retrouvés

- AI-Illustration, production and concept: Maria Than
- Interactive Kinect projection: Jasan Waldura
- Mosaic production: Mathilde Rougier and Maria Than

Ainsi sonne le glas

- Bracelet production: Rebecca Edwards, Maria Than
- Lotus flower, gemstone and buddha soaps: Maria Than

HOME AGE TO AVALOKITESVARA

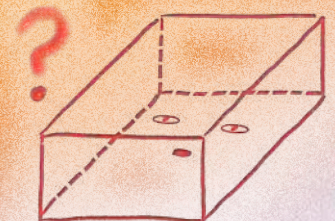
- Development, concept, production: Maria Than
- Voiceover: Maria Than
- Sound: Ben Ibbotson (SpiderPlant)

Buddha wall images

- Sourced by my mom, Tam Than

Soundscape

- Sound by Ben Ibbotson and Maria Than



HOMAGE TO QUAN ÂM

Homage To Quan Âm, a solo show by London based artist Maria Than, delves deep into the intricate layers of personal identity, cultural assimilation, and the evolution of self-discovery.

Drawing inspiration from Than's upbringing in a Vietnamese-British-French Buddhist family, the exhibition is titled after Quan Âm, the Vietnamese name for the Bodhisattva (Buddhist deity) associated with Compassion, Mercy and Medicine.

Incorporating animation, interactive digital works, virtual reality, AI and computer-generated imagery, the exhibition traverses the artist's childhood memories marked by the dichotomy between familial and religious traditions, and the desire to fit into more mainstream cultural environments, those that felt more like her non-religious peers.

Homage To Quan Âm serves as a visual diary, narrating Maria's personal journey of growing up - an account of staying with the trouble of becoming. Facing external racism and discrimination, she denied her Vietnamese roots for a time, leading to a fractured sense of self. The body of work unfolds a narrative that mirrors the fragmented nature of identity formation through three states: refusal, doused in red lighting symbolises the fear of isolation from early childhood; understanding, in orange lighting, signifies the compassionate appreciation of family; and acceptance, in yellow, represents the embracing of heritage.

Homage To Quan Âm forms part of arebyte's artistic focus for 2023/26 themed *The Body, The Mind, The Soul*, an exploration of the complex nature of humanity in the realm of technological progress. The exhibition is the culmination of *hotel generation*, an yearly artist development programme mentoring the next generation of UK digital artists and whose 2023 edition was awarded to Maria Than.

Growing up, Maria's childhood was marked by the dichotomy between familial and religious traditions, and a desire to conform with more mainstream cultural environments, those that felt more like her non-religious peers. Facing external racism and discrimination, Maria "*denied her Vietnamese roots, leading to a fractured sense of self*". In recognition of this complex journey, *Homage To Quan Âm* unfolds a narrative that mirrors the fragmented nature of identity formation and carries the viewer through the three states mentioned above: Refusal which marks the fear of isolation from early childhood; Understanding which denotes the compassionate appreciation of family; and Acceptance which signifies the embracing of heritage and the meshing together of identities.

Although the exhibition centres on childhood experiences and the fragments of memory that mark a transition into adulthood, the plight for discovering one's identity is universal and can go through many stages over a lifetime. Life changing formation of friendships, the loss of loved ones, regret and shame over decisions and banal, new or frightening experiences can trigger different versions of identity to appear, shapeshifting us as we age and grow. For Maria, adding diasporic experiences feeds into this change further. Within the boundaries and leaky edges of relationships, kinships, careers and encounters, the sense of finding one's identity can

be fraught with tensions, a sense of unease, and a lack of confidence. *Homage To Quan Âm* proposes self discovery in the restaging of nostalgia through oral storytelling and generative technologies which provide plasticity for a non-linear approach to philosophical questioning.

Beginning Maria's journey in early childhood, the exhibition opens with two works referencing refusal, *You Wouldn't Steal A TV* and *Home Age*, the area tinted red referencing bravery and the idea of prohibition or forbiddenness generally associated with teenage rebellion. Red in Buddhism is part of the Buddhist flag symbolising The Blessings of Practice – achievement, wisdom, virtue, fortune and dignity. In these two works, digital tools are used as remixers of nostalgia and childhood memories during this period of Maria's early life.

In *You Wouldn't Steal A TV*, AI manipulated versions of scenes from *The Simpsons*, *South Park*, and *Malcolm in the Middle* oscillate on top of wavy footage of a Karaoke rendition of *Nam Mô A Di Đà Phật* designed on Pureland Mahayana Buddhism images.¹ This marks the constant omnipresence of prayer even at times of trivial entertainment. Presented on square LED panels, these works pay homage to the boxy 90's screens in many homes at that time, and forefront the sentimentality of old media often afforded when looking back. In the background, sounds of prayer are remixed with parental arguments and general Viet shouting that is relatable to all Viet households during TV watching.

Behind the LED panels is *Home Age*, a live-generated webcam feed of the audience watching the work, unfolding pixel by pixel. Each pixel bears tiny AI-generated images of gods and goddesses from a variety of cultures and religions, together forming the colours of the entire live feed. There's a sense of surveillance offered in the feedback loop of the watcher becoming the watched. This is also true of artificial intelligence; data is mined and harvested from us to be used in datasets that assist large-language-models, facial recognition software, or biometric passwords. However, in this, it's not necessarily our physical bodies being surveilled but our behaviours, language and bodily proportions that are compiled.

In some Buddhist philosophies, the act of watching or being watched is considered an act of devotion - *live your life as if Lord Buddha is always watching over you and your actions of body, speech and mind* - but it can also instil a sense of shame of doing wrong. In the same way algorithms collect data, in some religions this collection of "doing good" is also thought to be compiled, and fed into a currency of karma and purity.

In *Trời ơi! (Oh My God!)* this act of observation is revisited, this time under the premise of understanding, the area tinted orange referencing a moment of questioning, or fragmentation. Also seen in the Buddhist flag, orange provides The Wisdom of the Buddha's teachings, but for Maria orange here means warning, asking *what if?* or *what could be?*

Figuratively translating to *Oh my god!* in Viet, the work is composed of self-recorded webcam feeds of the artist's life over an eight hour period. Spread across 8 screens, we watch Maria seamlessly transition from room to room, sometimes even as a ghostly child haunting in the background. Gamified reincarnation animals and a "health bar" animate each frame and provide insights into the artist's potential in an afterlife, as well as interspersed hand-drawn animations that flow between the 8 screens. These reincarnations are based on the fluctuating measurements of "good" and "bad" karma given to different actions such as exercise and healthy eating, or indulging in screen time and destructive habits. The emphasis on reincarnation here provides an

¹ Pure Land is the concept of a celestial realm of a buddha or bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism where many Buddhists aspire to be reborn.

addition to the circularity of life and death, birth and rebirth, often associated with Buddhism; this cycle is known as “samsāra” with the ultimate aim of Buddhist practice to break free from the samsāra, and therefore live eternally in nirvāna, a place that represents the ultimate state of salvation, release, and liberation from suffering.

Bulle Personnelle (Personal Bubble), a virtual reality work and accompanying stories, begins the transition into acceptance. Tinted yellow, the area feels more hopeful and references enlightenment and releasing. In the Buddhist flag, yellow stands for restraint and nourishment, but for Maria it is also seen as an acceptance of being Asian, albeit through reclaiming the oppressive slang humorously as part of her own lingo.

Central to Buddhism is the profound realisation of mortality and the transient nature of existence. Every facet of life, from birth to death, embodies an endless cycle of impermanence, shown in *Bulle Personnelle* by the looping soundtrack and small animations that follow this inexorable pattern of flux. Memories, in their elusive and ever-changing form, epitomise this fundamental concept; they emerge as fleeting images, capturing moments of emotion only to evolve and transform with the passage of time.

Recounting corrupted and fleeting memories from the shrine room in the artist’s childhood home, the work becomes a reconstruction of a specific place in time that feels decidedly dreamlike and meditative. Much like in the shrine room offered a space for recollection, virtual reality offers an alternate space within the gallery, a remaking of something which existed in a certain time and place, where a sense of tranquillity and transcendence are forefronted. Amidst the haze of uncertainty in the accuracy and truth of the objects within the VR and the accompanying stories, there lies an opportunity for reconciliation and understanding, finding solace in the act of remembrance.

At the centre of the space, surrounded by a colourful remake of the traditional Dharma Wheel, is *Un de perdu, dix de retrouvés (Plenty of Fish in the Sea)*, an interactive sand installation. Flanking this are other smaller works that form part of shrines offering takeaways in the form of handmade bracelets.

Inspired by the Tibetan sand mandalas, a medium which embodies the impermanence of life and all physical things, the work reveals itself in layers as the sand is moved around. The projected image layers present AI-generated paintings of the *Three Saints of the West*², important figures in Pure Land Buddhism called Amitabha Buddha, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva and Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva, who are regarded as objects of devotion and adoration.

Allowing for machinic vision’s reinterpretations of deities could be seen as blasphemous. However, remixing, modifying and transforming imagery sits somewhere else. In her essay “*In Defense of the Poor Image*” Hito Steyerl explores the concept of poor images and their role in circulation, militarisation, surveillance, and globalisation in late capitalism. Steyerl’s concept of the poor image revolves around the idea of images losing their aura, becoming degraded, and spreading rapidly through digital networks. These images, often copied, shared, and

² Amitabha Buddha is the principal figure of Pure Land Buddhism, who is venerated as the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life. Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva (also known as Guanyin Bodhisattva) is the Bodhisattva of Compassion who is venerated for their role in helping sentient beings. And Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva is the Bodhisattva of Great Strength, who represents the power of wisdom and strength on the path to enlightenment.

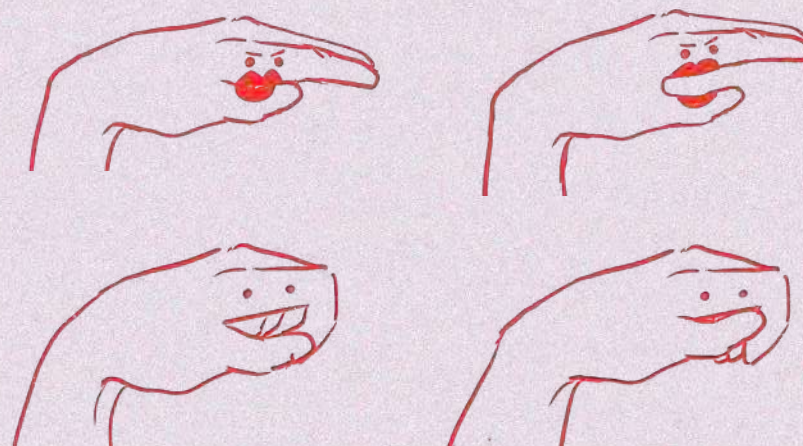
manipulated, challenge traditional notions of authenticity. In contrast, Buddha’s teachings emphasise principles such as impermanence, interconnectedness, and the nature of suffering.

While there may not be a direct application of Steyerl’s theory, in Buddhism there is an understanding that all phenomena are transient and devoid of inherent existence. From this perspective, images, whether rich or poor, are ultimately empty of intrinsic meaning; they are manifestations of the mind, subject to interpretation. In addition, Buddhist teachings on mindfulness encourage awareness of the present moment, including their thoughts, perceptions, and sensory experiences. In this context, the proliferation of digital images, whether copied or otherwise, can serve as objects of contemplation, reflecting the impermanent and interconnected nature of reality. Through the lens of Buddhist philosophy, the transient nature of images mirrors the impermanence of existence and the interconnected web of causality that defines our experience of reality.

A central node in this narrative is the *Khanh Anh pagode* in Évry, Paris, an eighteen-story construction attached to the Unified Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation in Europe, serving within an important Buddhist cultural centre which includes meeting rooms, a museum, a library, and a training centre.

During Maria’s childhood in Paris, the pagode played a central role in familial religious outings and commitments. However for Maria, it also symbolised the isolation, deconstruction, and confusion she felt. Around this time in 1996 the pagode was under construction, a backdrop which added to feelings of unease and instability, but was masked by vibrant coverings of LEDs, plastic flowers, and gold Buddha statues—symbols of the resilience and determination of the Vietnamese Buddhist community. This juxtaposition of construction and embellishment mirrors the inner turmoil of a young mind torn between cultural heritage and the desire to conform.

The near-completion of the Khanh Anh pagode in 2008 marked a pivotal moment of realisation for Maria. The monks and volunteers, acknowledging the impermanence of their surroundings, transformed the desolate building into a symbol of love, guidance, and faith. This challenged Maria’s predefined perceptions, prompting a reevaluation of her past naivety and unjust denial, spurring a commitment to understanding her cultural identity, even if the journey remained incomplete.



glossary of terms

NAM MÔ A DI ĐÀ PHẬT

(prayer sung in the exhibition soundtrack)

"I pray homage to Buddha Amitābha", Amitābha is the principal Buddha of Pure Land Buddhism. For more context: its like the basic OG prayer mantra that we all say its like the most common one, aka the one I say if shit goes down and im panicking and in need of a buddha to protect me, incidentally the one i chanted over and over again when I was 9 years old and accidentally swore for the first time (I said 'Merde', 'Fuck' in English, outloud in the school playground). Incidentally the one that my mom would pray to everytime she came across a dead pigeon on the pavement in Paris lol everyone thought she was a crazy pigeon lady.

AKA

As known as.

KARMA

The concept in Hinduism and Buddhism that the actions of a person, good or bad, will determine their future experiences, often interpreted as cause and effect. Also the thing that parents hold over their kids heads in order to make sure they do good things and don't turn into little thugs.

MALCOLM IN THE MIDDLE

Amazing early 2000's American TV show about a dysfunctional lower-middle class family in the US. The middle son, Malcolm, is a foul-mouthed, hooligan genius. The mom Lois is absolutely iconic and reminds us of our mom, and Hal is played by Breaking Bad's Walter White, AKA Bryan Cranston.

THE SIMPSONS

Iconic yellow family from Springfield. American cartoon TV show broadcasting since the late 1990's. Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa, and Maggie. Anything after Season 13 is a bit shit.

SOUTH PARK

Infamous, foul, vulgar, yet brilliantly absurd and socially critical adult-humour cartoon made in the US by Trey Parker and Matt Stone. Incidentally the same guys who created the *Book of Mormon*. Probably the reason why I swear so much.

BODHISATTVA

A being who seeks enlightenment not only for themselves but also for all beings. In Mahayana Buddhism, a bodhisattva is someone who has taken a vow to remain in the cycle of rebirth (samsāra) on Earth or in the Pure Land to help all sentient beings achieve liberation (nirvāṇa). Like holy shepherds for the sheep. Similar to Jesus I guess. They're one step away from being a Buddha.

QUAN THE AM / QUAN AM / AVALOKITESVARA

In Pure Land Buddhism, Avalokiteśvara AKA Quán Thế Âm or Quán Âm is the Bodhisattva of Compassion, assisting Amitabha Buddha in guiding humans to the Pure Land for enlightenment before and after death. Before death, they inspire and aid practitioners in

their spiritual practice and devotion. After death, they assist beings in being reborn in the Pure Land, where they can continue their path to enlightenment in an ideal environment. My favourite Bodhisattva, technically non-binary.

THREE SAINTS OF THE WEST IN PURE LAND BUDDHISM

Amitābha Buddha, the central figure, and his two attendants, Avalokiteśvara AKA Quán Thế Âm or Quán Âm, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, and Mahāsthāmaprāpta AKA Đại Thế Chí Bồ tát, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom. They represent faith, compassion, and wisdom, guiding followers to the Pure Land for enlightenment. The three buddhas that you pretty much see everywhere on those vaporwave collages.

PURE LAND

Also known as Sukhavati in Sanskrit of 'Tịnh Độ' in Vietnamese, a celestial paradise and the place before you achieve the Nirvāṇa, presided over by Amitabha Buddha. As you chant the name of Amitābha Buddha with faith and devotion (*Nam Mô A Di Đà Phật*), you ensure rebirth of your soul in the Pure Land, a realm free from the suffering and difficulties of the cycle of rebirth and redeath (**samsāra**). It is the perfect environment for spiritual practice towards enlightenment. The Pure Land is envisioned as a place of immense beauty and peace, offering ideal conditions for attaining spiritual insight and ultimate liberation. Basically the training ground before you get into the Nirvāṇa. Always represented as some vaporwave 90's internet world.

NIRVĀṆA

Sanskrit term that refers to the ultimate state of liberation from suffering and the cycle of rebirth and redeath (samsāra) in Buddhism. Nirvāṇa is achieved through the realization of the truth of reality, leading to inner peace and liberation from the karmic forces that bind beings to samsāra. It is the ultimate form of enlightenment. Also a lit 90's grunge band.

SAMSĀRA

Refers to the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. It embodies the concept of reincarnation and the ongoing cycle of life, suffering, death, and rebirth that is driven by karma. One must understand the 'Four Noble Truths' in order to break the cycle.

DHARMA

Refers to the teachings of the Buddha, encompassing the path to liberation from suffering. It includes ethical guidelines, practices, and the philosophical teachings that describe the nature of reality and how to live in harmony with it. This is the what.

DUKKAH (SUFFERING)

A fundamental concept in Buddhism that refers to the inherent condition of suffering, dissatisfaction, or unease present in life. It is central to the *Four Noble Truths*, which are foundational teachings in Buddhism. The recognition of dukkha is the starting point for the Buddhist path towards liberation, leading to the cessation of suffering through the practice of the teachings of Buddhism. This is the why.

FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The core of Buddha's teachings that outline the insights into the nature of suffering (Dukkha), its origin, its cessation, and the path leading to its cessation, which is the *Eightfold Path*. The *Four Noble Truths* serve as a framework for understanding human existence and the way out of suffering. This is the how.

THE EIGHTFOLD PATH

Consists of eight steps divided into wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline: Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. This path is the practical application of the Buddha's teachings (Dharma) to overcome suffering and achieve enlightenment. This is the how of the *Fourth Noble Truth*, aka the path.

DHARMA WHEEL

The Buddhist icon, looks like a boat wheel. It's a symbol representing the teachings of the Buddha. It typically consists of eight spokes, symbolising the Eightfold Path. The wheel itself represents the turning of the wheel of Dharma, or the spread of Buddha's teachings through the world.

MANTRA

A sacred phrase used for meditation and ritual, believed to have spiritual power. Mantras focus on spiritual practice through sound. Equivalent to prayers I guess. My mom still recites those 24/7, even when walking in public streets. Sometimes with her eyes closed. We used to fall asleep listening to mantras, either at night or during the day time temple visits.

SUTRA

A text containing the Buddha's teachings. Sutras provide philosophical guidance and teachings on enlightenment. Like sermons, parables and shit that you get in the bible. Fun fact, the word 'periods' in Vietnamese is roughly translated as 'onion sutra'.

NĪLAKAṆṬHA DHĀRAṆĪ (between 1 and 5th century BCE)

Also known as the *Great Compassion Dhāraṇī* / Mantra in English or *Chú đại bi* or *Đại bi tâm đà la ni* in Viet, is a Mahayana Buddhist prayer / sutra that invokes the compassion and protective power of Avalokitesvara AKA Quan Thế Âm AKA Guanyin AKA Quan Âm, my favourite bodhisattva. It's supposed to be a cleansing prayer, offering protection, healing, and purification of negative karma for those who recite it. My mom made us pray this like 28 times in the shrine room, over a span of a couple of hours and along other sutras, during the summer holidays. Rather than making us read the Viet version, we had to read the Sanskrit version. It has cool rhymes.

LOTUS SUTRA (between 1 and 2 century BCE)

One of the most important and influential general Mahayana Buddhist texts along with the Heart Sutra, known for its profound teachings on the universality of the Buddha-nature and the potential for all beings to achieve enlightenment. Anyone can become a Buddha. Like Ratatouille but instead of cooking, it's achieving a state of godhood.

HEART SUTRA

A more concise and precise text that presents the essence of Buddhist wisdom, focusing on the concept of emptiness (*sūnyatā* in Sanskrit) and the emptiness of all worldly phenomenons. The core message is: "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form." The Heart Sutra teaches that understanding the emptiness of all things is key to transcending suffering and attaining enlightenment, and reflects the impermanent nature of all things, as it highlights the constant state of flux and the interdependent origination of phenomena.

MAHAYANA BUDDHISM

A major branch of Buddhism that emphasises the bodhisattva path, aiming for the enlightenment of all beings. It introduces a vast array of philosophical texts, practices, and concepts such as emptiness and compassion, and includes various schools like Zen, Pure Land, and Tibetan Buddhism. My mom said its better than the other main branch of Buddhism 'Theravada' because it is 'harder' to believe in Mahayana because of how 'magical' and superstitious it is. She believes that Mahayana Buddhists are inherently stronger in their faith lol.

TIBETAN BUDDHISM

Integrates Mahayana practices and the tantric teachings of Vajrayana Buddhism, along with local Tibetan influences. It is known for its rich ritual practices, advanced meditation techniques, and the significant role of lamas or spiritual teachers. My mom decided to switch to Tibetan Buddhism when I was around 7 years old, and made us all practice it too.

PURE LAND BUDDHISM

Focuses on devotion to Amitābha Buddha, with the goal of being reborn in his Pure Land, a realm free from suffering where one can more easily attain enlightenment. Practices center on chanting the name of Amitābha Buddha (*Nam Mô A Di Đà Phật*) and cultivating faith in his vow to welcome all beings into this land of bliss.

REINCARNATION

Reincarnation is the belief that after death, a person's soul is reborn into a new body. This cycle continues until the soul achieves enlightenment or liberation. A monk once told me I used to be a Nāga snake in my previous reincarnation and would become a rich, wealthy, intelligent white boy in my next one if I keep a good karma.

NĀGA

A mythical serpent or dragon in Buddhism, often depicted as a large snake with a human head or torso. Nāgas are considered powerful and benevolent beings, associated with water bodies like rivers and lakes, and believed to control rainfall and water resources. They also act as Shakyamuni Buddha's umbrella during the rain when he meditates under a tree.

MANDALA

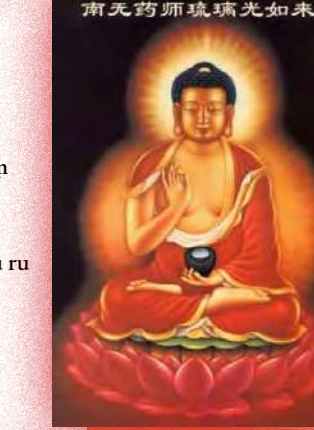
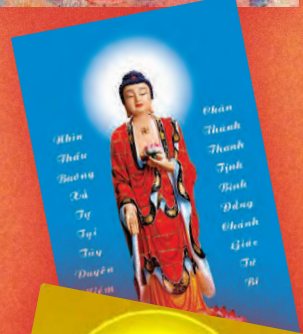
In Tibetan Buddhism, a spiritual and ritual symbol representing the universe. It is a complex, intricate design that symbolizes the cosmos metaphysically or symbolically, a microcosm of the universe from the human perspective. Mandalas are used in meditation and initiation rites, serving as tools for enlightenment. The process of creating and then dismantling a sand mandala symbolises the impermanent nature of reality. Mandalas often feature a square with four gates containing a circle with a central point, embodying the idea of sacred space and the journey towards the inner aspects of the self and the divine. Also hipster boho designs that are often tattooed on people's backs.



nīlakant̥ha dhāraṇī

Great Compassion Mantra aka the prayer I had to recite 30 times as a child
 | Chú đại bi (Vietnamese) | Original Sanskrit text (circa 1-5 BC)

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 śva rā ya bo dhi sa ttvā ya ma hā sa ttvā ya ma hā
 ka ru ṇi kā ya oṃ sa rva bha ye śo dha nā ya ta
 sya na ma skṛ ta i mu ā ryā va lo ki te śva ra ta
 va na mo nī la ka ṅṭha. ḥṛ da yaṃ va rta yi śyā mo sa
 rvā tha sā dha naṃ ṣu bhaṃ a je ya m sa rva bhū tā nāṃ
 bha va ma rge vi śo dha kam ta dya thā oṃ ā lo kā dhi
 pa ti lo kā ti krā nta e hya hā bo dhi sa ttva sa rpa
 sa rpa sma ra sma ra ḥṛ da yaṃ ku ru ku ru ka rma dhu ru
 dhu ru vi ja ya te ma hā vi ja ya te dha ra dha ra dhā
 ra ṇī rā ja ca la ca la ma ma vi ma la mū rtte
 e hi e hi chi nda chi nda a rṣa pra c ali vi
 ṣaṃ vi ṣaṃ pra ṇā śa ya hu lu hu lu sma ra hu lu
 hu lu sa ra sa ra si ri si ri su ru su ru bo
 dhi ya bo dhi ya bo dha ta bo dha ya mai tri ya nī la
 ka ṅṭha de hi me da rśa naṃ pra ha rā ya mā ṇā ya
 svā hā si ddhā ya svā hā ma hā si ddhā ya svā
 hā si ddha yo gī śva rā ya svā hā nī la ka ṅṭhā ya
 svā hā va rā ra mu khā ya svā hā na ra si mha
 mu khā ya svā hā ga dā ha stā ya svā hā ca
 kra ha stā ya svā hā pa dma ha thā ya svā hā nī
 la ka ṅṭha pā ṇḍa rā ya svā hā ma hā ta li śa
 ṅka rā ya svā hā na mo ra tna tra yā ya na ma ā ryā
 va lo ki te śva rā ya bo dhi sa ttvā ya svā hā

YOU WOULDN'T STEAL A TV

AI-generated videos, LED panels. Dataset creation and assistance: Caleb Sharpe, 2023

You wouldn't steal a TV is made up of three LED panels mimicking the square format of the 90's television sets of Maria's childhood. The audience are invited to sit on cushions to watch AI-generated manipulations of *The Simpsons*, *South Park* and *Malcolm in the Middle*, all interspersed with flashing images of a Karaoke lyric screen. The nod to nostalgia here is strongly referenced in the chosen TV programmes as well as the childlike set-up of sitting too close to the TV.

The remaking of nostalgia by an AI feeding from collected datasets provides an interesting insight into the way memories are formed and retained; although reminiscent of their originals, the manipulated scenes feel uncanny as if they are hallucinations of the past, or an effigy to a childhood forgotten.

Low rumbling audio provides the backdrop for the fluid imagery in the work, referencing shouting and disagreement. The sonic landscape of Maria's childhood home is played out here in a conflation of the pleasure of watching TV and the chore she felt of praying.

"...everytime we were done praying and finally got to watch TV, we had this looming feeling that the prayer never really stopped as we knew we would have to do it again and again the next few days."

"Caleb Sharpe's involvement as the dataset is the capture of the images that we remember most from these shows in our past, and Caleb was invited to contribute in developing the dataset for the Simpsons, based on our shared nostalgia and childhood surrounding the show."

HOME AGE

Interactive live AV installation, Touch Designer, webcam, AI-generated images. TouchDesigner set up: Jasan Waldura, 2023

Inspired by the parental saying "Don't sit too close to the TVs, it will hurt your eyes!", the audience is invited to sit and watch on prayer cushions which are placed a bit too close to the screens. The nostalgia continues here with square LED panels referencing the square and bulky tv-sets of the era, brought into the modern day with their thinner appearance but still holding onto the pixelation quality.



While watching the first artwork, *You wouldn't steal a TV*, the LED panels stare back at the audience through a live webcam feed. The feed is then projected back to the audience, with every single pixel replaced by AI-generated images of gods and goddesses from a variety of cultures and religions. The audience's body movements are engulfed by maximalist religious iconography, a juxtaposition found in Buddhism reminiscent of the contrast between singular moments of quiet focus and the disorganised world in which we live.

A sense of surveillance is offered in the feedback loop of the watcher becoming the watched. Certain Buddhist philosophies view being watched or watching as acts of devotion, urging individuals to live as if under the constant gaze of Buddha, fostering both accountability and a sense of shame for wrongdoing. Similarly, in some religious beliefs, the aggregation of virtuous actions contributes to a metaphysical currency of karma and purity.



TRỜI ƠI!

Livestream recording, hand-drawn animations, AI-generated videos, photographs, 2024

Trời ơi! / Oh My God! is an 8-screen installation referencing the circularity of karma within religion. In the web of religious beliefs and cultural symbolism, the surveillance aspect of karma feels akin to a CCTV system. Presented within a circular framework, the work shows Maria from different webcams during the space of 8 hours. Interspersed with animations, gamified sigils and sped-up moments, the work also nods to the inescapability of being watched, both by technology but by Buddhas. The notion that Buddhas have eyes everywhere, overseeing every action, mirrors the omnipresence of modern surveillance technologies, as if one's deeds are constantly being recorded and scrutinised within the parameters of this cosmic justice system, perpetuating the idea of a social credit system often embedded within religion.

The concept of karma, though deeply ingrained in spiritual philosophies, defies quantification. Like trying to measure the immeasurable, karma remains an enigmatic force, transcending the grasp of human metrics. Yet, the idea of karma as a video game introduces a curious analogy, reminiscent of childhood memories playing *Pokémon*. The notion that one could potentially 'restart' the game by amending their karma, similar to beginning anew with a clean slate, adds layers of complexity to this age-old doctrine.

The portrayal of daily life as a livestream, observed not only by Buddha but also by the spectres of familial influence, lends an eerie voyeuristic quality to the narrative. The constant surveillance from both divine and earthly figures, including one's mother, accentuates the suffocating weight of accountability. Inspired by the visible life span concept in the Japanese manga series *Death Note*, the animations overlaying the stream convey a sense of ambivalence towards the promises of reincarnation and the diverse narratives of spiritual teachings.



BULLE PERSONNELLE

VR Short Film, 3D modelling and VR development: Petter Schölander, handmade illustrated booklets, printed fabric, video loop, soundtrack: Ariel Karsh, 2023

At the age of 15, Maria's family underwent a move to a new apartment in the heart of Paris, marking a significant shift that brought an end to the familial prayer rituals of her childhood.

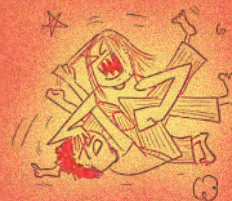
In this exploration of memory and impermanence, *Bulle Personnelle / personal bubble* delves into the intricate details of the familial former shrine room, frozen in time for 15 years. Guided by Maria's storytelling and recollections, 3D designer Petter Schölander virtually reconstructs memories and positions them within a sun-setting landscape. Interpreting emotion via oral storytelling into the VR, the work attempts to bridge the gaps and decipher the complexities that corrupt impressions of the past.

Much like the core tenets of Buddhism, the exhibition underscores the transitory nature of existence—where life and death form an unending cycle, and emotions, from happiness to pain, mirror this constant ebb and flow. Within the realm of *Bulle Personnelle*, memories become a living embodiment of Buddhist philosophy, morphing and evolving as impermanent images of joy, sorrow, comfort, and trauma. The VR experience serves as a metaphorical exploration of the ceaseless cycle inherent in all aspects of life. As participants navigate through the reconstructed shrine room, objects toppling on top of each other, they are reminded of their own fleeting recollections and the transient nature of human experiences.

Each object in the VR represents 6 different stories from the shrine room. In the accompanying pamphlet, these stories are written in a French-style font, mimicking Maria's schooling in Paris and accessing core memories reflective of childlike energy:

- My sister broke the window with her ass
- He made me ask dad for a Wii for my birthday because he wanted one
- I just couldn't look at that picture anymore, I was too scared
- Avoiding my piano teacher became like a game
- I had 3 maths tutors, one yelled, one fell asleep, one gave up
- He fucking threw Dummy out of the window

The sound for the work is a reinterpretation of Beethoven's *Sonate Pathétique* by Ariel Karsh, the piano piece Maria's sister used to play in the shrine room references a cosiness that is fraught with nostalgia and bittersweetness. By intertwining personal narratives with the universal truths of impermanence, *Bulle Personnelle* engages with the dissonance between memory and time, fostering a deeper understanding of the profound Buddhist teachings on the transient nature of existence. Through this unique fusion of storytelling and technology, the work prompts contemplation on the essence of our shared human journey—one that echoes the fleeting beauty and complexity of our collective memories.



I had 3 math
tutors, one yelled
one fell asleep
one gave up

UN DE PERDU, DIX DE RETROUVÉS

Interactive sand projection, live webcam, TouchDesigner, AI-generated collage, diamonds. Technical assistance and TouchDesigner production: Jasan Waldura, 2023

"Mom said to pray to Amithāba so that we could find each other after we die, that our souls could find each other again during reincarnation in the next afterlife"

Un de perdu, dix de retrouvés / plenty of fish in the sea serves as a profound meditation on impermanence, echoing the play between creation and dissolution. Inspired by Tibetan sand mandala practices, this immersive experience allows participant contribution to the ever-evolving artwork, but also glean insights into the profound wisdom embedded in the impermanence of existence. The process of creating and then dismantling a sand mandala symbolises the impermanent nature of reality. As such, *Un de perdu, dix de retrouvés* becomes a testament to these perpetual cycles of creation and transformation found in Tibetan and Vietnamese Buddhist practices and teachings.

The sand-projected AI-generated paintings of the 'Three Saints of the West' become entangled and warped through different levels of sand being displaced and moved by the audience's hands. Movements are captured by a live webcam feed connected to TouchDesigner set up by creative technologist Jasan Waldura, which in turn manipulates the projected image, blurring the boundaries between creator and creation.

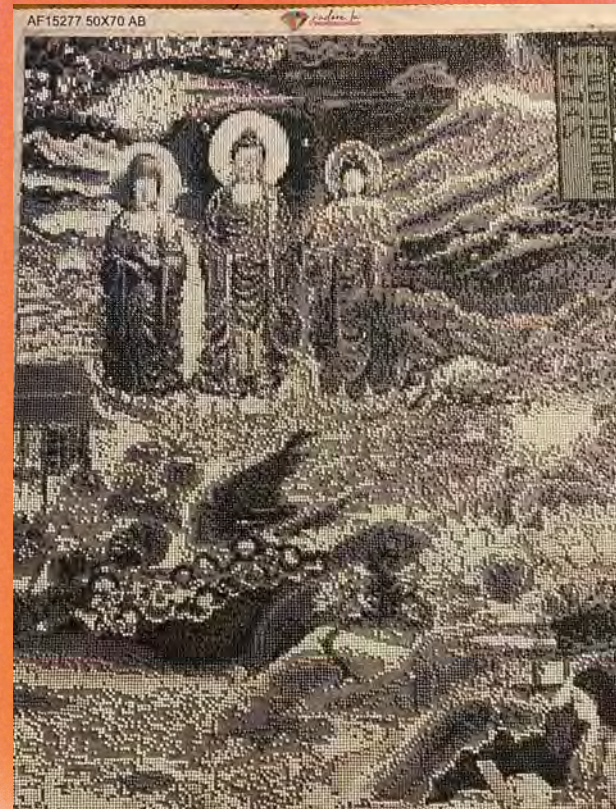
The Saints are depicted in Pure Land, the Mahayana Buddhist equivalent to the step after death prior to nirvāna. Pure Land is a celestial paradise where human souls can advance toward becoming bodhisattvas, enlightened beings who have put off entering paradise in order to help others attain enlightenment.

Each grain of sand becomes a metaphorical vessel for the soul. Engagement with the sand and its unwieldy nature allows for an acknowledgment of the inevitability of change and a celebration of the inherent beauty found in letting go.

pure land

AI-generated collage, Diamond painting production on fabric: Mathilde Rougier, 2023

The mosaic called 'Pure Land' works in parallel and tandem, a reflection of the sandpit but as each grain is blown up and rather than flow with the rest of the sand. Mirroring the intricate methods of sand drawing, each 'grain' or 'diamond' is individually fixed onto the canvas in a particular point, almost like each soul destined for reincarnation back into the world is placed onto their next life.



AINSI SONNE LE GLAS

Interactive installation, Vietnamese Têt red envelopes, handmade bracelets: Rebecca Edwards, Tibetan bowl and hitter, 2023

"*Ainsi sonne le glas*" is a French phrase that translates to "and thus the bell tolls", in English. The expression is often used metaphorically to signify the end or demise of something, signalling a decisive or irreversible moment, much like the tolling of a funeral bell. But it can also refer to a literal, conceptual, social or political death. It conveys a sense of finality or closure, often associated with the conclusion of an era, the end of a project, or a significant change that marks the conclusion of a particular period.

In the exhibition, this work signifies the final goodbye before the audience's souls find peace in their next lifetime. They are invited to take one of the red Têt envelopes in the Tibetan bowl which contain handmade bracelets, their colours denoting each of the three themes within the exhibition of Refusal, Understanding and Acceptance. The bracelets are also blessed by Maria providing good luck and prosperity, as well as fulfilling a wish for those who wear them until they break or fall off.

Before they leave, the audience are also invited to hit the Tibetan bowl with the hitter replicating the concluding gestures found in diverse spiritual practices. This work invites participants to connect with the universal thread that binds humanity in shared rituals of closure and reflection, serving as a symbolic punctuation mark. This performative finale extends an opportunity for each individual to physically and audibly partake in the exhibition's thematic resonance, fostering a sense of personal closure and connection with the broader spiritual themes explored throughout their immersive experience.

This is goodbye.

buddha's pinkie toe is the size of the earth's sky

Soap base, colourant, fragrance, LED lights, 2023

Buddha's pinkie toe is the size of the Earth's sky is a set of hand-cast soaps in the shape of gemstones, lotus flowers and Buddhas. It takes inspiration from the famous Buddha Wash ritual that is often performed in pagodes, temples and at home on Buddha's (Siddhartha Gautama's) birthday.

"My mom once had the opportunity to cast her own set of Three Saints Buddha statues and would proudly give them a wash every year. She tried teaching me how to wash the Buddha but I never actually paid any attention."



The soaps are fragranced with floral scents of jasmine and rose. These key fragrances, purposefully dispersed Maria's mother around the house and within the shrine area, serve as a core memory for Maria, intertwining tactility and the nuance of these familiar smells.

In the narrative of Refusal, Understanding and Acceptance, the soaps are lit and provide a path for the audience to traverse each stage of the exhibition. The calming influence of the fragrances, and the process of making the soaps, mirror the laborious process of repetition and devotion observed during summer holiday prayers. The aromas become a subtle yet powerful thread connecting the tangible and the intangible, making the journey towards spiritual contemplation a sensory and evocative experience.



Realities:

Augmented | Alternative | Afterlife

Cường Minh Bá Phạm

The late Nguyễn Quí Đức, writer of ‘*Where the Ashes Are*’, one of the earliest memoirs of the diasporic Vietnamese experience in English, expressed the seductive influence of the past on immigrants. He wrote: “*All immigrants and refugees, whether for a short moment or for the rest of our lives, will be obsessed and possessed by their past. It defines and perhaps nurtures us, giving us our identity, even when we struggle to develop a new self in a new home, a new land...*”¹

In his essay, ‘*Memory*’, Đức further explores this theme, stating:

*“The language of exiles is spoken
In the past tense – quá khứ.
We became nomads; modern cities
are the desert we cross, not so much
for salvation, nor for subsistence:
We cross our endless deserts, looking
For ourselves.”*²

Maria’s devout Buddhist mother was also curious about lives lived before this one. At the tender age of eight, her mother went to see a Tibetan Buddhist monk, who communicated that in her past life, Maria was Mucalinda Nāga, the revered snake king that appears in Buddhist literary and artistic portrayals, generally depicted as guarding the Buddha as the Lord sought enlightenment. Nāgas, derived from the Sanskrit word nāgá (नाग) (Na-gia in Vietnamese), refers to a shape-shifting, sometimes multi-headed, and, peculiarly, milk-thirsty serpent deity depicted across Buddhist and Hindu mythology.^{3,4}

Within Buddhism, there exists the concept of Duyên, translated as conditional causation by Trần Nghĩa Phương.⁵ It is often equated with destiny or fate by Vietnamese speakers. However, such translations can be reductive; etymologically speaking, fate or destiny implies a set of predetermined events that life unfolds for us, beyond human control or power. It is true that we have little agency over the series of conditions we are born into, it is equally true we have great responsibilities for the life we now live, one in which we did not ask for. It is the second part of conditional causality, a Buddhist philosophical pillar which we, the diaspora, tend to neglect, that being causality. Things influence other things. What we do today, now, in the present, affects us tomorrow, later, in our afterlives.

Delving deeper into the story of the snake king we can draw out interesting thoughts on assimilation. The Buddha sat crossed-legged for seven days, experiencing the bliss of enlightenment. Out of nowhere, out of season, a great storm, and for a further seven days there was rain, clouds, cold winds, and unsettled weather. The naga-king, Mucalinda, left his dwelling

¹ Pelaud, Isabelle Thuy. “Remembering Nguyễn Quí Đức.” *diaCRITICS* (blog), January 3, 2024. <https://dvan.org/2024/01/remembering-nguyen-quui-duc/>.

² Ibid

³ Lange, Gerrit. 2019. “Cobra Deities and Divine Cobras: The Ambiguous Animality of Nāgas” *Religions* 10, no. 8: 454. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10080454>

⁴ McGregor, R. S. “नाग.” In *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*, n.d.

⁵ Lê, Thị Thanh Tâm. “Chữ Duyên Trong Truyện Kiều,” July 1, 2020. <https://vsl.ussh.vnu.edu.vn/vi/ngghien-cuu-khoa-hoc/cong-trinh-bai-bao/chu-duyen-trong-truyen-kiem-16363.html>.

place and circled the Lord’s body seven times with his coils. He stood with his great hood spread over the Buddha’s head to protect the Buddha from the elements, from gadflies, mosquitoes, and the great storm.⁶ Despite the noble connotations of her past life as Mucalinda, on occasions throughout her childhood, especially when she misbehaved, Maria was reminded she was a snake, albeit a revered deity. She had a set of causalities she still had autonomy over. Instead of looking back, she also needed to acquiesce to the religious duties placed upon her by her mother.

The fateful encounter with the Tibetan Buddhist Monk also yielded a prophecy about her unknown future, contingent upon the accumulation of good karma, Maria would be reincarnated as a wealthy, intelligent, and handsome white boy. As a result Maria had to dedicate much of her childhood in servitude to the Lord to ensure that in the next life she would inherit privilege from birth. A non-divine white boy, epitomising self-centred virtues is perceived by her mother and the monk as a superior being compared to a mythological creature engaged in a selfless and august act. For me, this says a lot about how immigrants view resettlement in a foreign land, that we need to fully buy into the promise of assimilation, one can’t just strive to learn the adopted language(s), to be successful at school or to have a respected career, but we need to morph into one of them.

Maria’s solo exhibition ‘*Homage To Quan Âm*’ is divided into three different encounters: refusal > understanding > acceptance. As viewers begin their journey with Maria’s world-building, they will first encounter refusal. One of the pieces, ‘*You Wouldn’t Steal a TV*’, is a nostalgic reflection on when her mother compelled Maria and her siblings to recite Buddhist mantras for hours before being able to watch TV. Yes, piety duties were complete, and yes, the reward was given, but there is a looming inevitable dread as it meant that this obligation had to be repeated in the coming days. In Maxine Hong Kingston’s book ‘*Woman Warrior*’, she has a line about not knowing what part of a parent’s immigrant past is craziness and what part is culture.⁷ To me this highlights the unruly interplay between identity, cultural heritage, and personal agency.

In the second encounter, understanding, one will find ‘*Trời ơi! / Oh My God!*’, which questions how surveillance affects one’s current life choices, in turn, how that could alter the crossroads of your existence, how today’s choices greatly affect tomorrow’s path. A sprawling CCTV system, the all seeing Buddha, or an overbearing mother, would the things we do now, still be the same if we didn’t have so many eyes on us? Unlikely, but the key question here is, when does the imposition of firm control and accountability cross over into the infringement of personal liberties and autonomy?

In the final encounter, acceptance, viewers are invited to reconcile with an essential aspect of Buddhism which is to accept our mortality. In this philosophy, everything is transient; life and death form an unending cycle, as do happiness, pain, sadness, and suffering. Memories exemplify this notion, serving as fleeting snapshots of joy, sorrow, comfort, and trauma that perpetually morph, change, and fade away. For the piece ‘*Bulle Personnelle / Personal Bubble*’, Maria collaborates with 3D designer Petter Schölander to recreate the room in which the family shrine was placed. This piece raises questions about memory and impermanence, as Daniel Kahneman and Jason Ris write about memory: “*They are lost forever. Our memory collects certain parts of*

⁶ Johns, Jason, and Jyotsna Rani Nag. “Mucalinda Buddha: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Reinterpret the Depiction of the Buddha with Mucalinda Naga.” *The Journal of Archaeological Studies in India* 1, no. 1 (August 2021): 140–57.

⁷ Kingston, Maxine Hong. *The Woman Warrior*. New York: Vintage Books, 1976.

what happened to us and processes them into a story. We make most of our decisions based on the story told by our memory.”⁸ If the decisions we make today or tomorrow are linked to the past, and if we subscribe to the idea that our recollections of the past are corrupted, transitory, or evolving, what does it say about the choices we make in life if reliant on the fallibility of memory?

Whilst ‘*Homage To Quan Âm*’ invites viewers into a rendering of Maria’s intimate family space, I also think it is seeking to disrupt the private/public space dichotomy. In Anh Khoi’s article for *The Conversation*, writing about ‘*No Place Like Home (A Vietnamese Exhibition) Part II*’, a group show held at the Museum of the Home, which I partook in, he raised the concept of diasporic placemaking. He elaborates, “[I]t is often a story of connect, but it is also a complicated story about who owns public spaces and decides who gets to use them.”⁹ By taking renderings of her memory of her childhood into a semi-public space, the gallery, Maria becomes an active agent within a different environment, not the homeland, not the intimate confines of home, and not augmented reality.

The aforementioned passages by Đức centre on past occurrences, which is commonplace among diasporas, to blend that with the present and future through cutting-edge technologies, as Maria seeks to do, questions our relation to time and place. Through the use of AR, AI, VR and other modern tools, Maria embarks on an experiment to recreate the lived experience of her journey through refusal > understanding > acceptance of the bridges between her mother and her younger self and what her memory has preserved. Aforementioned digital tools materialise as an apt method for this approach as it intertwines the real world with computer-generated content, sometimes making it difficult to know where the real/digital, imagined/authentic, craziness/culture begins and ends.

Cường Minh Bá Phạm (b. 1988, London, UK) works between / in / nearby / at the intersections of sound, community, and archives. He is interested in learning (and unlearning) our understandings of history, community, movement, family, sound, language, memory, and how they can inform, challenge, or be influenced by power, knowledge, and / or subjectivity. As a child / teenager he spent a lot of time at Linh Sơn Buddhist Association in Crystal Palace in part because he was forced by his mum but also because he wanted to see his crush.

Cường’s projects have been involved with radio, DJing, writing, and translation. He works with vulnerable communities in London by assisting people with accessing medical or public services and sitting on various boards. Cường is the co-founder of An Việt Archives Steering Committee, which oversees the largest known collection of documents, photos, and other objects relating to the British-Vietnamese community experience currently held at Hackney Archives.

⁸ Kahneman, D. & Riis, J. (2005). *Living, and Thinking about It: Two Perspectives on Life*. In Huppert, F.A., Baylis, N., & Keverne, B. (Eds.), *The Science of Well-Being*, 285-304. Oxford University Press.

⁹ Nguyen, Anh Khoi. “What an Exhibition by Artists of the Vietnamese Diaspora Says about Home and Belonging.” *The Conversation* (blog), May 16, 2023. <https://theconversation.com/what-an-exhibition-by-artists-of-the-vietnamese-diaspora-says-about-home-and-belonging-204471>

arebyte

arebyte advances new experimentation in digital cultures

Meeting the growing demand for immersive experiences and digital content creation, arebyte pioneers new forms of engagement with creative technologies, to critically explore the impact of technology in contemporary society.

From exhibitions, live performances to educational initiatives, our programme supports artists working within virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), motion capture, computer-generated imagery (CGI), artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain technologies and other digital mediums and practices.

arebyte is committed to further supporting London’s creatives by providing affordable workspaces in the capital city. In partnership with private landlords and Councils, arebyte strives to preserve a vibrant community of 350 artists, makers and designers in East and South London.

HOTEL GENERATION

Homage To Quan Âm is the culmination of *hotel generation*, a yearly artist development programme mentoring the next generation of UK digital artists, and whose 2023 edition was awarded to Maria Than.

The programme aims to equip participants during the critical early stages of establishing a career in the arts with the confidence to approach galleries with exhibition proposals, the ability to create artworks within specified timelines and budgets, and the proficiency to generate interest in their work through effective promotion efforts.

Each year, *hotel generation* pairs young digital artists from Scotland, Wales, North England, Midlands, South West and South East England with a mentoring organisation to receive curatorial guidance as they work on an exhibition proposal for arebyte’s exhibition space. A panel of industry experts assesses their proposals and selects one for further development into a solo exhibition at arebyte Gallery.

2023 Mentors

arebyte
QUAD
FACT
NEoN

2023 Judges

Jamie Sutcliffe - Writer, Curator and Publisher, Strange Attractor Press
Gabrielle Jenks - Digital Director, Manchester International Festival
Seema Mattu - Artist
Nora O Murchu - Artistic Director, transmediale
Magdalena Sawon - Co-Director, Postmasters Gallery

2023 Participating Artists

Maria Than (London) - winner
David Matunda (Brockweir)
Issy Robertson (Leatherhead)
Kinnari Saraiya (Gateshead)
Ryan Heath (Nottingham)
Shae Myles (Glasgow)

bio

Maria Than (b.1996) is a Viet-British-French creative technologist, educator, activist & co-founder of design practice Ricebox Studio.

Her work is playful, interactive, & narrative-based with a strong focus on social good. She experiments mainly with Augmented Reality, illustration and AI-generated images & is currently working on a series of AI x AR artworks that explores her identity as a chronically online Asian woman who looks at themes of buddhism, over-productivity, anxiety, internalised racism, burn-outs & escapism. She graduated from UAL BA Graphic Design in 2019.

Her work has been showcased in London (Truman Brewery, Copeland Gallery, Tate Modern), in Paris (CADAF), in New York (Superchief Gallery NFT, Web3 Gallery) and in Toronto, Canada (BIA Junction), South Korea (CICA Museum). In 2021, she became a Fellow at the Royal Society of Arts, an award based on her recent work on period education and augmented reality. She lectures in graphic design, ethics of AI, emerging technologies and social activism at various UAL campuses mainly at Central Saint Martins and Camberwell College of Arts and University of Greenwich and works part-time at Child Rights International Network as a Digital Designer.

Instagram: @blurbnation | Website: <https://www.mariathan.cargo.site>

thank you

Big thank you to everyone at arebyte Gallery for bringing this show to life, especially Nimrod Vardi for mentoring me with his 'taches' style for 3 months, Rebecca Edwards and Aanchal Saxena for curating, producing and trusting me with this beast of a show and the entire marketing and technical team for their incredible efforts for bringing my vision to life.

Thank you to Hoa Dung Clerget for her expertise, insights and mentoring.

Thank you to my mom and dad for providing so much for the show, from the artefacts to their knowledge, to my sister and brother and our shared experiences growing up.

Thank you to my partner, my friends (y'all know who you are!) and collaborators for being so kind and patient during this experience and for bringing their unique creativity into this world. Thank you for sticking by my side during stressful moments, for bouncing ideas off with me, helping me with workloads and for being honest when providing all of their needed feedback for over a year.

Shout out to all the girls at Ricebox Studio for being my pan-Asian rock and help me understand who I am as a person and practitioner: Anna Tsuda, Bristy Azmi, Safiya Ahmed, Aliya Akram and Sophia Luu <3

The Body, The Mind, The Soul

2023 - 2026 Programme

For its 10th anniversary, arebyte embarks on a three-year artistic programme that surveys the complex nature of humanity in the realm of technological progression. Entitled *The Body, The Mind, The Soul*, the programme explores the human condition, reflecting on the nuance of individual and collective existence within the changing world that now shapes us. Delving into the depths of these three aspects of being, exploring their convergence with digital technology and the myriad ways they shape our experiences, the programme hopes to shed light on artistic practices influenced by bodily and disembodied thinking.

Taking a contemplative and philosophical approach spanning the broad sweep of human existence, the body, the mind and the soul hold the key to enriching our lives and fostering a path for deeper connections with ourselves and everything in the world around us. Each term, whether explored individually or in conjunction with another, has been discussed extensively in Western and Eastern philosophy and concerning technology and art contexts. The terms can be addressed in different ways depending on perspective, privilege, cultural meaning and experience. By questioning the intricate dynamics between our bodies, minds, and souls,

we not only gain insight into the human condition but also broaden our horizons, embracing and harnessing the positive and limitless potential of the digital realm.

Through exhibitions, events, and educational initiatives, *The Body, The Mind, The Soul* examines how technological advancements – particularly in the digital realm – influence our understanding of human and non-human bodies in the present age. Investigating the far reaches and limitations of our intelligence, the programme considers the significance of the mind, the body and the soul in the context of a digital existence beyond our physical lives, through the works of visionaries who challenge conventional wisdom and probe the deepest recesses of our beings. Artists and contributors to the programme draw inspiration from the transformative power of digital technology to create space for reflection and dialogue into our existence in a rapidly changing digital landscape. Our collective journey through these artistic explorations invites us to reevaluate our relationship with technology, its impact on our understanding of ourselves, and our place in the world.

read more on
arebyte.com/2023-24-programme

2023 - 2024

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