



## PRESS RELEASE

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October 28, 2009

*Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam* – Galerie Quynh is pleased to present *Half of the Sky* – an exhibition curated by Mai Ardia of work by Sandrine Llouquet, Nguyen Kim To Lan, Nguyen Phuong Linh and Genevieve Erin O'Brien. All four female artists are based in Vietnam.

That these artists share a common gender is relevant primarily to underscore the lack of serious exhibitions featuring women artists. The four artists, in fact, possess diverse practices, disparate concerns, aesthetics and sensibilities. Communicated through drawing, sculpture, video and animation, the works range from the personal and poetic to the detached and visceral.

Suspended near the entrance to the gallery and visible from the street, Nguyen Phuong Linh's *Allergy* hangs like women's lingerie in a boutique. Comprising over six kilograms of shiny nails, the work glistens seductively through the glass. The outward facing heads of the nails create an armor-like effect suggesting a fighting warrior while simultaneously, the sharp, inner facing points suggest the burden and torment of the wearer. Consistent with much of her past work, *Allergy* celebrates the beauty of the feminine form as well as its strength and frailty.

Juxtaposed with Nguyen Phuong Linh's sensual armor as if decorating a boudoir, Nguyen Kim To Lan's Chinese ink on 'do' paper drawings entitled *six pieces (pornography)* depict a very unusual composition in this traditional medium. Her delicate, crumpled, black lacy underwear appears to float in the air. Splatters of jarring gold paint suggest a defacement or violation of the subject. It is unclear whether these ravages are caused by male or female intervention. Power and protection seem to play shifting roles with the private and the confessional.

The photos of Genevieve Erin O'Brien negotiate the nebulous territory between public and private spaces, creating a voyeuristic experience for viewers. Having recently returned to Vietnam, O'Brien is acutely aware of her foreign gaze on her mother's homeland. What appear as innocuous images to the local Vietnamese are charged with profound meaning to the artist and other 'outsiders' to the local landscape. History, memory, power and objectification are layered in these ubiquitous images in Vietnam. O'Brien's mixed cultural background also informs the video *Capsized* in which "a Queer narrative of US-Vietnamese relations" is imagined. A Vietnamese woman, clad in the traditional *ao dai*, lands at China Beach in a small boat with an American Naval woman officer, bringing to mind a time of war and a return to one's homeland. The two women, representing their respective countries,



transform the geo-political relationship between the two nations into the context of human engagement. The ocean becomes a liminal space where aspects of gender, class, race and nationality are explored through the subtle treatment of human relationships.

Less personal in subject matter, Sandrine Llouquet's work is also more ambiguous. In a darkened corner of the gallery illuminated by small tubes of neon lights, Llouquet has installed a suite of drawings behind plexiglass that are oddly evocative of bathroom mirrors found in public toilets. The artist captures the cold, aseptic feeling these environments possess – an almost supernatural atmosphere is suggested. We stare into these 'mirrors' and meditate on both the negative space of the dull off-white and light hospital green paper and the peculiar images that appear to comprise a disjointed narrative. Llouquet leads us into a realm of strange and distressing scenes and then withdraws quietly, leaving us looking into our minds and imagination for a conclusion to her tales. Loneliness, danger and threat pervade – we are abandoned into a void and staring at ourselves. The artist's animations, too, are unsettling but on a more visceral level – sound is used both to disrupt and soothe. More graphic and economical in execution than the drawings on display, they are gentle and violent as well as perversely humorous.

This exhibition offers a glimpse at the practice of four women who represent a cross section of female artists active in Vietnam. Curiously, the majority of serious contemporary art galleries in Vietnam are run by women, yet there are scant exhibitions featuring work by female artists. While certainly in this day and age it is common knowledge that women do indeed hold up half the sky, this exhibition is a small attempt to clear away some of the clouds obscuring the female half.

Exhibition Dates: 7 November – 5 December 2009  
Opening Reception: Saturday, the 7th of November from 6 – 8 PM  
Gallery Hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 10 AM – 6 PM  
Closed on Sundays and Mondays  
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