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đến

# DEN

*A solo show by Việt Lê*

*30.08.2024 - 31.10.2024*

*In loving memory/ celebration:*

*AB, Douglas Crimp, Yong Soon Min, Dinh Q. Lê, Moira Roth*

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I can't remember exactly when I died.

I only remember that it was an early spring Friday afternoon, and the icy lake behind the house started to crack and release waves of cold steam, the trees were still sobbing from the late winter's remaining freezing air. The room stood still with my faded sick bed, occasionally a gust of wind carried some tree branches away and dropped them on the edge of the window causing a gentle sound. They wrapped my body in a piece of linen and carried me away. Somewhere, a china dropped to the ground making an obnoxiously harsh sound, causing the lingering soul to startle and fly away.

I can't remember what I used to look like. I only remember I had a lima bean-shaped scar in the middle of my chest, which was a trade-off for my mischief that led to a near-death experience when I was a kid. Even gods and ghosts have a childhood, whether happy or miserable. Happiness passes gently, yet pain is often deeply engraved on the body as scars. So deep that I kept the bloody nail with me until the day I died. When cleaning up after my death, they collected a few worn-out clothes, a torn picture of my mother and me, a silver necklace with a marble cross, and a rusty nail, carefully wrapped in a wine-coloured velvet bag. All were thrown in with my body for cremation.

I begin my journey after death in a lima bean-shaped form. At first, when I started becoming a ghost, I had no direction at all. The time right after death is my happiest with all the freedom I suddenly attain. I travel from the peak of the furthest mountain to the bottom of the icy lake behind my house. In the morning, I visit places I've been to, then fly to estranged towns and the countryside, at night, I lie down and watch the stars from the vast desert. I attend Sunday masses and visit magnificent cathedrals and humble temples. Freedom allows me to satisfy my curiosity that the limits of my ordinary body can never reach. Thanks to that, I have overcome the carnal emotions, and I have no more joy, sadness, or fears. When fear is no longer there, I am emancipated from the extremes of emotions, I no longer have the pleasure from love and hatred.

When I'm bored travelling around, I live in the form of animals: cows have sorrowful yet beautiful eyes, an elephant that can remember everything, and a turtle with a slow but steady manner, after a few decades I live again in the life of an ancient tree in a young city, becoming a testament to civilisations that rose and collapsed with invasions. I realised that the deep motivation that helps humans expand their long march, the desire to conquer the entire universe also comes from fear.

I can't remember how long I've been drifting. In a vacuum, time does not matter anymore. When alive, the concept of time is associated with one's existence. When becoming a ghost, that existence can only be remembered by memories. But over time, the memories are no longer real, perhaps they are just fragments of colour that occasionally resurface like anecdotes I hear from other people, they are no longer mine. No more past, the present is condensed, I begin to fear my deadlock, and that's when I start to look forward to the end of these aimless wanderings

The first time I notice a hole inside a human, I am inexplicably attracted by it. The boy is around 6-7 years old with a stubborn face, and he's standing at the gate of an orphanage. He is waiting for the social worker to finish the paperwork to take him to a new home. This is the fifth adoption after other families returned him. In front of the orphanage is an old temple hidden behind a row of trees, it is windy, and I am lying down on top of the temple gate, looking aimlessly. The boy absentmindedly looks in my direction and that is the first time I see the hole. It is as small as a marble but seems very deep, it's looking directly at me, challenging and inviting. The sky begins to get dark and the wind blows stronger, I feel a strange suction that makes me dizzy. They take the boy away and after a split second, things get out of my control and I lose all awareness.

The place the boy is taken to is a small and cozy former orphan house next to the mountain, it is run by two sisters in their late 70s. The older sister has a slim figure, with long hair neatly tied up. Her eyes are gentle but sorrowful, she never talks to anyone. Every day, she does household chores such as cooking, washing, and cleaning. The younger one is more agile, she takes on tasks that require more communication such as fetching the children to school, going to the market, or maintaining the house and garden. They keep their interaction with other people to a minimum. The children without a place to stay will be taken in, and cared for until they reach adulthood, they will be sent to the city for further education. Years passed by, and the last child finally left, the women also became frail, they thought they finally could rest and live the remaining days for themselves, then on one late autumn afternoon, the boy arrived.

The first nights after his arrival, he's too scared to close his eyes. The boy is too young to understand but he's aware of the hole within and even starts to feel my existence in there. To me, inside the hole is a completely different world. Out there, almost all conflicts and miseries are rendered through disasters, wars, diseases, and death. The pit deep in people's gut is much more complicated. The boy has a belief that he is living an abandoned life, that he already died the moment the last loved one left him. This time living with the two women gives him stability for the first time, a so-called normal life that every child should have. Yet, the more they love him, the more afraid he is. He repays them with his disobedience and cruelty. The old ladies still love him very much. When no school is willing to accept him, they patiently buy books to teach him at home. He spends most of his time reading and roaming around the stream near the forest.

Not sure when he has the habit of catching small animals, putting them in the box to be friends with them, and then burning them. Seeing the poor animals helplessly being burned to death makes the boy quiver in pleasure, a guilty satisfaction. When he reaches puberty and starts to have sexual curiosity, he tries to sneak out at night and return before dawn. Moonlit nights obscured his face amidst the gasping sound, the sound of flowing water, and lonely bullfrogs. The boy is so beautiful, the beauty of self-destruction, both so wild yet innocent.

The boy lives in the house until he turns 15. The two women are getting weaker and no longer can take care of him. A few nights before his birthday, he falls into the hole and looks for me. I'm surprised because this is the first time someone intentionally seeks me out like that. The boy is fazed by the darkness down here. Although it's perfectly round, the hole is deep and filled with a lot of burdens, making it difficult to navigate. He fumbles for a while and sees me sitting in the corner.

- *Who is there?* - he asks.

He comes closer to me. I'm still stunned because even though people sometimes can vaguely feel my presence, no one has ever looked and talked directly to me like that.

- *Mum? Is that you?* - he asks aggressively - *That's really you, mummy. Where have you been? What takes you so long to visit me?*

I am still confused and stand silent. I'm not his mother. Why can he see me? Why is he talking to me, what does he want from me? The boy reaches out, his thin fingers piercing through me, and then he starts crying. The boy appears in front of me in a state of loneliness and desperation.

Is it true that when people are too desperate, they have to find comfort in other presences? Am I being sucked in by him to appear in the human form that the boy is longing for? After hundreds of years of wandering around, having heard and seen the transcendence, is my next purpose, as a lost soul, to take care of human despair?

Just right after the clock turns midnight on his birthday, the boy quietly leaves without saying goodbyes to the two people who raised him. He believes that tomorrow after the initial shock, they will no longer wait for him, they will eventually let him go like other children they once raised. He understands that his departure is something that must happen, like streams that meet at an intersection, then they must separate to continue with their flow. I know that, if the boy doesn't leave to look for his purpose, sooner or later he will be swallowed by the hole within. When the boy leaves, I'm also freed from the hole. When I get out, my figure is no longer that of the perfect lima bean. Perhaps a part of me has followed the boy on the journey where only he can determine its fate.

Saying goodbyes to the boy and being excited about my self-proclaimed mission, I actively explore different fates with holes of different shapes and depths. Everyone is born with a hole in their heart but not everyone accepts me in. I also realise why it took me so long to wander around as if I have reached the transcendence, only for me to return to humans and the mess they create. Every time I make them fuller, I feel emptier, my hole widens even more like a cavemouth. I wonder if, at some point, it will swallow me and end my seemingly forever journey. Even gods and demons face deadlocks of their existence in this vast realm. Gods are born from human helplessness and nurtured through their miseries.

I don't know how long I've been doing this, I just know that I'm waiting for the day my hole will swallow me and put an end to this existence that has been dragging tiringly. I look forward to nothingness after so much human suffering that I have brought upon myself.

One Friday I feel like I'm about to explode, the hole is expanding by the minute, I close my eyes and wait for the end to come. Very close. Just a second more.

The mouth of the hole expands to its fullest size and explodes. My body disintegrates, and then the pieces come together to form lima beans as tiny as dust.

Then they fly away with the wind.

No nothingness awaits.

*Vicky*

VIỆT LÊ

Striding material grrrls and metaphysical worlds, spiritualities and sexualities: dios, Đởr, noir-divas and divination–Mother Goddess and Father Time, artist Việt Lê presents a den, post-Eden. Performance-based power objects: figurative sculptural fragments (yet ensouled), video installations, flag-paintings, virtual portals— oh my, *dios mio*, Đổi Mới. (đến and đền means arrive, and temple, respectively: pay your respects.) In the meantime, Greenwich Mean Time. Shirley Temple cocktail cockblockchainmailchimp? My body is a temple; sashay away, as they say.

Say my name, say my name. Việt Namaste. Call me ~~by your name~~, ~~by my true names~~ baby, maybe. Queers query, *Is illness an initiation? Is pathology a power?* 7/11, 9/11, the eleventh hour; elven Elvis has left the building.

You have arrived.

Việt Lê's creative and critical practice as a queer, disabled artist focuses on sexualities, spiritualities—the physical and the metaphysical. Their hybrid projects encompass experimental film, ritual performance, pain-tings, power objects/ installations and text towards a healing. Expanding definitions of “trans,” “trance,” and “medium,” their work explores various corporeal aspects—sight, sound, touch, smell, taste—as modalities of embodied knowing. Focused on global south indigenous shamanisms and knowledge traditions, Lê's non-profit foundation seeks to share resources and wisdom among artists, researchers and healers. Rooted in Southeast Asian cosmologies, Lê continues their training and practice as a Vietnamese indigenous shaman-monk through various mediums.





Installation view from solo show "đến đên đên", 2024, Sàn Art, HCMC  
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## Life-Sized Sculptures



***untitled (ADP)***

from the Biên Hòa | biển, hoa | biến hoá | biên (soạn) | hoạ (sỹ) | series

white-glazed ceramic

2020-24, 169cm



***untitled (CB, LH, QA)***  
white-glazed ceramic  
2020-24, 169 cm



***untitled (THD)***  
white-glazed ceramic  
2020-24, 169 cm



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**3 flags (XXL) | ba hồn**





***A-di-đà | A di das***  
Artist's clothing  
2024, 480 x 88 cm

***untitled self-portrait (Saint  
Barthes | The Last Judgment |  
Saint Michel)***  
Artist's clothing  
2024, 480 x 88 cm

***Việt Namaste***  
Artist's clothing  
2024, 480 x 88 cm





7 flags (medium) | bảy vía





**yellow fag (mộc 木 | wood)**

artist's clothing

2017-2024, 88 cm2

**green fag (thổ 土 | earth)**

artist's clothing

2017-2024, 88 cm2

**số đỏ | sử đỏ | red fag (hoả 火 | fire)**

artist's clothing

2017-2024, 88 cm2

**số đen | black fag (kim 金 | metal)**

artist's clothing, fabric

2017-2024, 88 cm2

**blue fag (thuỷ 水 | water)**

artist's clothing

2017-2024, 88 cm2











***Mio Dio | Cucci Tunnel Vision (silver fox edit)***  
readymades, Vietnamese lacquer fa kê  
2024, 76 cm2







*cha lên | chủ lên | challen | channel | chanel | miếu miếu | miu miu*  
found materials, Vietnamese lacquer fa kê  
2024, 76 cm2



Installation view from solo show "đến đến đến", 2024, Sàn Art, HCMC  
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***đi ở (go live) & dio (god)***

laser-cut mica mirror & inox, laser-cut stainless steel

2024, 76 cm2

edition of 3 + AP



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***đĩ ơ (heigh ho)***

Inox, laser-cut stainless steel

2024, 76 cm<sup>2</sup>

edition of 3 + AP



***Fendi | Fendace***

2024

custom decals

dimensions variable

edition: limitless

***vạn tự | chữ vạn / châu văn | chauvanist***

2024

custom decals

dimensions variable

edition: limitless



***the memory of sky is enough***  
digital video installation w/ original composition  
TRT: 34:56  
2014-2024  
edition 1 of 3





***Passion (Tri-)Cycle***  
2024

stigmata by Lộc Nguyễn; readymades  
(styrofoam packing box [60 x 45 x 38 cm],  
fractured Virgin Mary statues); custom steel  
structure  
88 cm X 88 cm x 138.988 cm

*(This series will be sold as a bundle with the  
fire and water rituals)*



***Bridge Over Troubled Waters (thuỷ 水 | water) + Trial by Fire (hoả 火 | fire)***

**2024**

stainless steel custom well and burn box

*(This series will be sold as a bundle with the “**Passion (Tri-)Cycle**” series)*



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