

Trần Lương: Tâm Tã - Soaked in the Long Rain

Artwork Labels

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Wall text:

Trần Lương: *Tầm Tã* - Soaked in the Long Rain

Tầm Tã - Soaked in the Long Rain is the first international survey exhibition of the work of Trần Lương (born 1960 Hanoi, Vietnam; lives Hanoi, Vietnam), a key figure in Vietnamese contemporary art. The exhibition traces his beginnings as a painter and his move towards conceptual and performance art, his contributions within the Vietnamese contemporary art scene, and the complex role he continues to play within Vietnam and Southeast Asia.

Tầm Tã reflects the dynamism of Trần's multifaceted practice—spanning his roles as curator, facilitator, mediator, mentor, activist, archivist and institution builder, as well as artist. These positions emerged from his deliberate efforts to foster spaces for critical dialogue in Vietnam, a context marked by limited public infrastructure for contemporary art and continued censorship.

Trần's artistic practice has been shaped by the political and social transitions in Vietnam. His early thirties were framed by Vietnam's experiments in economic reform that began in the early 1980s, which aimed to transition the country from a centrally planned economy to a market economy. Despite lifting

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many out of hunger, these reforms did not diminish corruption or inequality.

Although Vietnam has undergone significant change, it remains a complex space for art and culture in the public realm. Art communities must navigate semi-underground modes of practice when engaging with critical contemporary discourses. Trần's work continues to create spaces for artistic production and support among communities within Vietnam.

The exhibition's title, *Tầm Tã*, is a Vietnamese term that may be understood as 'soaked in the long rain', evoking an encounter or experience that is overwhelming. It is also the name of the educational program for art practitioners that Trần runs in Hanoi. The term aims to capture his steadfast approach to art, life and the long-term building of cultural infrastructures in Vietnam.

Tầm Tã - Soaked in the Long Rain is curated by Biljana Ciric and co-organised by The Art Gallery of Western Australia's Simon Lee Foundation Institute of Contemporary Asian Art, Art Jameel and the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery | Len Lye Centre.

AGWA PRINCIPAL PARTNER



PRESENTING PARTNER



Under the Water 18

1994

watercolour and gouache on dó paper

All artworks courtesy of the artist unless otherwise stated

Left to right

Under the Water 1

1993

watercolour and gouache on dó paper

Lotus 11

1990

watercolour on xuan paper

Lotus 2

1992

acrylic on cardboard

Under the Water

1992

acrylic on cardboard

Love Affair

1992

watercolour and gouache on dó paper

Collection of Mrs. Trần Yến Chi (Ho Chi Minh City)

Wall text:

Creating Worlds through Myth-Making

Trần Lương began his career as a painter in the 1980s. Today this period of his practice survives largely through a few photographs and sketches. These early works explore figuration and semi-figuration, often focusing on the human body, including the nude, which was an uncommon subject in Vietnam's public art sphere at the time.

By the late 1980s, Trần turned to Vietnamese mythology, particularly the tale of Chử Đồng Tử and Tiên Dung, as an allegory of liberation from societal constraints. The story recounts the love between a poor fisherman, Chử Đồng Tử, and a royal princess, Tiên Dung, who defied rigid hierarchies and social norms to be together.

The *Under the Water* series (1992) weaves together the artist's childhood memories of water, which were shaped by his experience of the United States bombing of North Vietnam from 1965 to 1973, and mythical storytelling. In these paintings, Tiên Dung is envisioned transforming into a water goddess who aids humanity, thereby embodying a mythical intertwining of human and more-than-human worlds.

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These paintings reflect an artistic pursuit of liberation by portraying the transition toward new possibilities and a deep yearning for freedom. The accompanying video, *Fairy Tale Soup* (2003), reimagines the same myth through the lens of early 2000s 'subsidy culture', adopting a deliberately kitsch aesthetic to place the story within a contemporary social setting.

Fairy Tale Soup (Chữ Đồng Tử and Tiên Dung)

2003

single channel colour video with sound; 14 min 39 sec
(looped)

Chủ Đồng Tử and Tiên Dung

1991

oil on canvas

Handmade straw hat

2025

Photograph of Trần Lương at the age of 7, wearing a straw hat woven by himself

1967

photo by Nguyễn Hồng Xương (Trần Lương's uncle)

The photograph depicts seven-year-old Trần Lương seated in the front yard of the building where he grew up, in the heart of Hanoi. On his head, he wears a straw hat he braided himself—the first handicraft he ever made. This skill was essential for children during the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam. The thick, durable straw served as a practical shield, offering protection against stray bomb fragments or bullets.

Fifty-eight years later, as part of this exhibition, Trần revisited this childhood craft, sitting down to braid straw hats once more. Reflecting on the process, he shared:

First, I practiced braiding with the proper technique and adjusted for my current size. I began by recreating the exact form of the hat I made as a child. Then, I experimented – creating a hat with a narrower brim, something I couldn't achieve as

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a child. Next, I designed one with a cylindrical top instead of a round one. Finally, I crafted a hat with a wider brim.

Throughout this process, I also organised a workshop for my colleagues to practice braiding. Together, we discussed and shared memories about the straw hat – its functions, historical significance, aesthetic value and even its potential future as a sustainable helmet alternative. We also explored broader themes like the tension between development and environmental sustainability, especially through the use of organic materials.

Dear visitor, this straw hat is here for you to try on. Let it inspire you to create one of your own, drawing from your own vernacular knowledge and imagination.

Please handle this hat with care and return it when you are finished.

Wall text:

I was, I am, I shall be

This archival display provides an encounter with Trần Lương's life through an assemblage of materials that trace the development of his artistic and curatorial practices across several decades. As with all archival arrangements it is fragmented and subjective.

Presented as original documents, the signs of wear and age are integral to the display itself.

The arrangement brings together images from Trần's early career with the pioneering artist group, Gang of Five; illustrations produced for local newspapers and children's books; and logo designs—commissioned works that provided both income and a means of survival—through which the evolution of his painterly language can be discerned. Interspersed among these are personal and performative objects, including an oil lamp, a dove figurine, a traditional Vietnamese teapot, the head of a wooden figure of Ngọc Nữ and a coil of rope. Some of these objects have been used during performances, while others gesture to the artist's everyday life.

The title of this display is drawn from the Polish-born German revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg's final article before she was murdered, *Order Prevails in Berlin* (1919), and functions here to poetically evoke an ongoing commitment to struggle, transformation and becoming.

The books presented here fall into two categories: a selection of projects including and curated by Trần Lương; and a group of English-language publications offering insight into contemporary artistic practice in Vietnam and the broader Southeast Asian region.

All titles are on loan from the artist's personal archive, which is currently being transferred to the Centre for Art Patronage and Development (APD) in Hanoi, where it will be made publicly accessible.

We invite you to sit and read these books. Please handle them with care and return them when finished.

Nhân Văn – Giai Phẩm

1956

archival books

Nhân Văn-Giai Phẩm was an ideological movement that erupted in North Vietnam when the nine year Anti-French Resistance War ended in 1954. The movement was initiated by artists and intellectuals, most of whom had participated in the struggle against French colonial rule led by Hồ Chí Minh. From February to December 1956, the movement published two periodicals, *Nhân Văn* (Humanities) and *Giai Phẩm* (Masterwork/Work of Beauty), which advocated for democratisation across cultural and political domains, such as philosophy, law, education, art, literature and journalism.

The movement was, however, quickly suppressed. Its members publicly tried for attempting to overthrow the people's authority, and hundreds of professors, teachers, students, writers, filmmakers, musicians, artists, architects, reporters, publishers and civil servants in several public institutions were subjected to punishment. All documents and works related to the journal were confiscated and banned from dissemination until the present time.

The archival project *Nhân Văn-Giai Phẩm* is an ongoing research project led by Trần Lương. His effort to archive the movement began in 2014 when his father, Mr. Trần Công, a prominent figure within the group, fell ill. Having grown up surrounded by his father's artist

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friends, Trần was immersed in an artistic milieu, yet he also witnessed the hardships and societal rejection they endured. These experiences motivated him to start collecting materials, conduct research and establish an archive.

For Trần, this project has involved exploring his family's history and presenting the works of *Nhân Văn-Giai Phẩm* to the public in new contexts, thereby reshaping the group's cultural significance, inviting multiple perspectives on their continuing legacy and highlighting lessons that remain relevant today.

Giai Phẩm

1956

translated 2024

printed 2026

These writings were originally published in two major series: the Nhân Văn newspaper and the Giai Phẩm magazine. The translations offered in this newspaper aim to present the broader context and ethos of the Nhân Văn - Giai Phẩm movement, encompassing the four primary genres that form the majority of movement's works: editorial, criticism, poetry and prose. All these works were created in or just prior to 1956, showcasing pivotal contributions by key figures of the movement. This marks the first time texts related to the movement have been translated into English, offering readers valuable insight into its significance within Vietnam. For the exhibition, the translated texts have been faithfully reproduced in the original size and format of the 1956 Giai Phẩm magazine, retaining its distinctive style.

Nhân Văn – Giai Phẩm:

60 years, a line of people still standing!

2016

single channel colour video with sound; 13 min 45 sec
(looped)

Nhân Văn – Giai Phẩm: 1956

2016

single channel colour video with sound; 11 min 19 sec
(looped)

Documentary film about Nhà Sàn Studio in Hanoi, Vietnam

2008

single channel colour video; 40 min 50 sec (looped)

Produced by Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng
English subtitles by Nguyễn Khánh Vân
Courtesy of the Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng

This documentary commemorates the 10th anniversary of Nhà Sàn Studio, celebrating a decade of programming since its founding in 1998. As the first artist-run contemporary art space in northern Vietnam, the studio played a foundational role in shaping the region's independent art scene. Established by Trần Lương and Nguyễn Mạnh Đức, it became a vital platform for artistic production, dialogue, and exchange—drawing artists from across Vietnam and internationally.

In 2010, government intervention led to Nhà Sàn Studio's closure. Yet its ethos persisted. In response, a younger generation of artists formed Nhà Sàn Collective in 2013, continuing the legacy of independent, artist-led practice in alternative spaces.

Buffalo

1994

lacquer painting on wooden chopping board

Old Vietnamese oil lamp

Vietnamese traditional tea pot

Coil of rope

Plastic bird from the installation

Variation for Days Past

2004

Head of Ngọc Nữ (Long Nữ)

date unknown

antique wooden sculpture

In many Vietnamese pagodas, two full-body statues stand on either side of the lower section of the shrine; one is a statue of a young man named Tiên Đồng (a name that can be translated as young fairy boy or disciple), the opposite side is the figure of Ngọc Nữ.

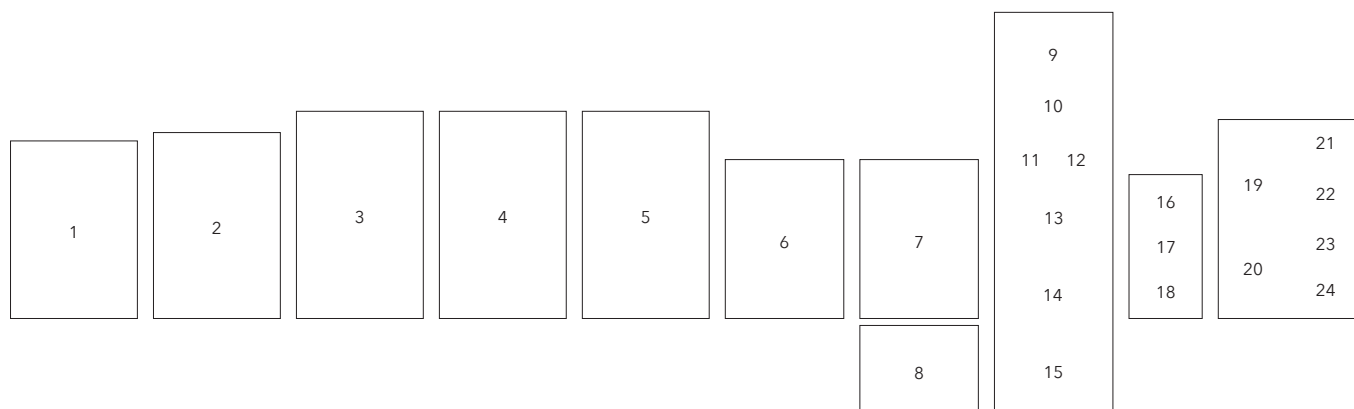
The pair of figures are often depicted together as two close disciples of Quan Âm Bodhisattva, with Tiên Đồng representing the desire to learn and bring blessings, and Ngọc Nữ acting as a symbol of beauty and kindness.

**Drawing for the short story
'Nước như nước mắt' ('Water like
tears') by Nguyễn Ngọc Tư**

published in *Văn Nghệ* Newspaper

No. 17/18, 28 April 2012, p. 5

ink on paper



Since 1986, Trần Lương has created illustrations for many newspapers and publishing houses including the weekly newspaper *Văn Nghệ* (Literature and Arts), the Almanac of Science and Technology publishing house (Nhà Xuất Bản Khoa Học Kỹ Thuật) and Kim Đồng Publishing House (Children Publishing House). He has also illustrated poetry books by various writers, designed logos and visual identities, and has been commissioned by newspaper editors to illustrate stories on a range of topics.

Trần has published under his own name or under the name of his sister Văqñ Cơ. Original illustrations were rarely returned to the artist and few original drawings have been exhibited.

Besides being a source of income, Trần's illustrations are closely connected to his painting languages, and at times have acted as experiments or tests towards larger-scale works.

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- 1 **Drawings published in *Văn Nghệ* Newspaper**
published in *Văn Nghệ* Newspaper
date unknown
ink on paper

- 2 **Drawing for the short story 'Hương Cúc Đại' ('The scent of wild daisy') by Trịnh Đình Khôi**
published in *Văn Nghệ* Newspaper
No. 47, 19 November 1994, p. 6
ink on paper

- 3 **Drawing for the story 'Hạnh Phúc Ngắn Ngủi' ('Ephemeral Happiness') by Hoàng Thiếu Ngân**
published in *Văn Nghệ* Newspaper
date unknown, p. 10
ink on paper

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4 **Drawing for the story 'Tiếng Khóc Trong Rừng Sâu' ('The Cry in the Deep Woods') by Hoàng Kính**

published in *Văn Nghệ* Newspaper

date unknown, p. 10

ink on paper

5 **Drawing for the short story 'Sàng Tuyển Úc Và Câu Chuyện Nuôi Hươu' ('Australian Ore Screening Plant And The Story Of Deer Farming') by Tạ Kim Hùng**

published in *Văn Nghệ* Newspaper

date unknown

ink on paper

6 **Drawing for the short story 'Giấc Mơng Cuối Cùng' ('The Final Dream') by Triệu Huân**

published in *Văn Nghệ* Newspaper

date unknown, p. 8

ink on paper

- 7 **Drawing for the story
'Năm Tháng Đã Qua Đi' ('The
Passing Years')**
published in *Văn Nghệ* Newspaper
date unknown, p. 8
ink on paper

- 8 **Nếu tôi là người lớn (Vietnamese
adaptation of *If I were grown-up* by
Janikovszky Éva)**
published by Kim Đồng Publishing House
1986

- 9 **Logo design for Sun Ivy
International JSC**
1994–95
print on paper

- 10 **Logo design for Kênh Gà Mineral
Water**
1984–85
print on paper

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11 **Logo design for HAPEXCO – Hanoi Trading**

1990

pencil and ink on paper

12 **Logo design for HAPEXCO – Hanoi Trading**

1990

pencil and ink on paper

13 **Logo design for the Rồng Tre (Bamboo Dragon) – Vietnam Press Caricature Contest II**

2009

pencil on paper

14 **Sketch proposal for entrance gate of Saigon Hi-tech Park (rejected)**

2018

pencil on paper

15 **Sketch proposal for entrance gate of Saigon Hi-tech Park (rejected)**

2018

pencil on paper

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16 **Photograph of Trần Lương with his painting *Love Affair* (1986) at the opening of the first Gang of Five exhibition**

1990

Gallery No. 7, Hang Khay Street, Hanoi, Vietnam

17 **Photograph of Trần Lương's apartment and studio (1986-1994)**

1993

Ngo Quyen Street, Hoan Kiem District, Hanoi, Vietnam

18 **Photograph of the Gang of Five in Hanoi**

1993

Clockwise: Trần Lương, Hà Trí Hiếu, Hồng Việt Dũng, Phạm Quang Vinh, Đặng Xuân Hòa
Photograph by Gerhard Joren

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Trần Lương is an active figure within the cultural ecology of Hanoi and across Vietnam more broadly. His contributions include co-founding the experimental art space Nhà Sàn Studio in 1998, establishing the Contemporary Art Center Hanoi in 2000, and leading the currently active APD Center for Art Patronage and Development.

19 **Invitation to opening at Nhà Sàn Studio with map**

1990

photocopy on paper

20 **Invitation for *Khởi Thủy – Initial*, Trần Lương's first solo show in Nhà Sàn Studio, Hanoi, Vietnam**

1998

screenprint on cardboard

21 **Installation view of *Khởi Thủy – Initial*, Trần Lương's first solo show in Nhà Sàn Studio, Hanoi, Vietnam**

1998

photograph

- 22 **Installation view of *An Up-to-Date Dragon* (1998), part of *Khởi Thủy – Initial*, Trần Lương's first solo show in Nhà Sàn Studio, Hanoi, Vietnam**
1998
photograph
- 23 **Installation view of *An Up-to-Date Dragon* (1998), part of *Khởi Thủy – Initial*, Trần Lương's first solo show in Nhà Sàn Studio, Hanoi, Vietnam**
1998
photograph
- 24 **Hanoi Contemporary Fine Arts Center**
2001
The banner reads: Vietnam
Fine Arts Association Contemporary Art Center
Painting exhibition 'Reaching the Free Space'.
Sponsored by the Ford Foundation, the exhibition presented works by the Open Door generation, 35 to 45 year olds who came of age after the 1986 economic reforms.

Sketch for 'Love Affair (Chữ Đồng Tử and Tiên Dung)' series

1991

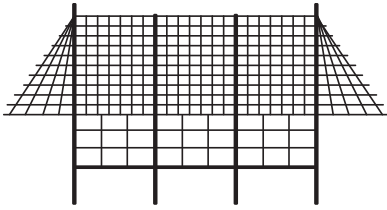
ink on paper

Untitled

2000

ink on paper

This set of 54 small drawings, created at the threshold of a new millennium, serves as a personal travel bag containing images of things dear to the artist. The drawings capture thoughts, experiences, and, as the artist says, his immature perceptions. They belong to a moment of transition, both for the artist who was beginning to travel and exhibit overseas, and for the country he grew up in, as Vietnam shifted from decades of isolation to being integrated within a quickly globalising world.



House model for the Bru-Vân Kiều people in Quảng Trị province, Vietnam

2024

bamboo

The Nhà Chống Lũ / Sống Foundation project began in the Đa Krông area of Quảng Trị province, central Vietnam in 2020, with research, surveys and design development for housing models. By 2021, two houses had been built.

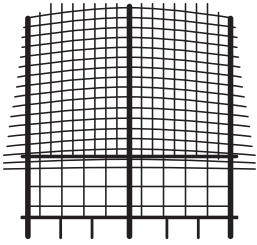
The Bru-Vân Kiều people primarily reside in the mountainous and midland regions of central Vietnam. Bru-Vân Kiều architecture has been shaped by this unique terrain and climate. Constructed from wooden frames, houses generally have 2-3 rooms, walls made of wooden planks or woven bamboo, and roofs thatched with rattan or palm leaves.

Uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources and the conversion of native forests into plantation forests have caused the disappearance of many traditional materials. This scarcity makes it challenging to maintain or rebuild old houses, forcing residents to adopt

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new materials and construction techniques that compromise traditional designs.

Through a consultative and co-designed process, The Flood Resistant Housing project aims to support the Bru-Vân Kiều community in Đa Krông by helping them construct houses resilient against the risk of natural disasters while preserving traditional architectural knowledge. The housing models incorporate wooden frames or, in some cases, reinforced concrete foundation pillars and floor beams. Floors and walls use wooden planks or cement board, while roofs are made of leaves or corrugated iron. Kitchens may be integrated into the main house or constructed as separate spaces, and interiors allow for partitioning into distinct communal or private areas.



Hiệu Quất house model for the Xơ Đăng people, Lâng Loan village in Quảng Nam province, Vietnam

2024

bamboo

The Hiệu Quất is the traditional communal house of the Xơ Đăng people, an ethnic group from Vietnam's Central Highlands. These houses serve as communal spaces for village activities, including meetings, rituals, welcoming guests, and ceremonies such as worshipping water troughs, village gates or new rice.

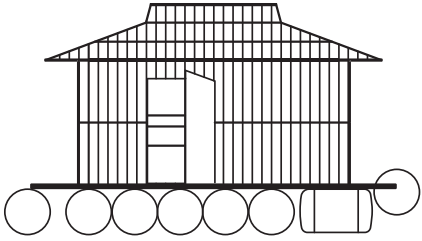
The Hiệu Quất restoration project began in 2019 with research, information collection and discussions with the Xơ Đăng community, alongside input and approval from local authorities. This led to land planning, budget allocation and the collection of materials. Construction began in August 2020 with a ceremonial pillar-raising event and the house was inaugurated in September 2020.

The restoration of the Hiệu Quất took years of meticulous research as the structure had disappeared

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from living memory. Architects created preliminary sketches based on descriptions from village elders, then refined these designs into floor plans and facades. To address challenges in representing complex structural details, scaled models were built to visualise and discuss the design.

The project serves as a foundation for the preservation and transmission of traditional cultural values among Central Highlands communities.



Float house model for flooded areas

2024

cardboard, cotton string, rice paper, steel, MDF and wood

The Float House concept originated from a field trip to Tân Hóa Commune, Minh Hóa District, Quảng Bình Province in 2014, during which staff from the Sống Foundation observed a small wooden hut floating on 12 iron barrels. Tân Hóa, a low-lying area encircled by rocky mountains, often experiences flooding, with water levels rising over 10 meters in some years.

Recognising the potential of this model, the Flood Resistant Housing initiative focused on standardising and enhancing its safety features. A critical innovation was a five-point anchoring system using cable ropes with automatic braking reels, which prevents houses from being swept away by floods while reducing damage to the surrounding environment.

Between 2014 and 2017, the Foundation constructed and supported materials for 100 houses before transferring the model to local authorities and other

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organisations. By 2020, approximately 400 floating houses had been built in the Tân Hóa Commune. To disseminate their findings, the Sống Foundation published a Handbook on Safe Houses, which includes technical designs and field research to support sustainable housing practices.

Day

1994

oil on canvas, fishing net, paper, pebbles

Night

1994

oil on canvas, fishing net, paper, pebbles

Under the Sky

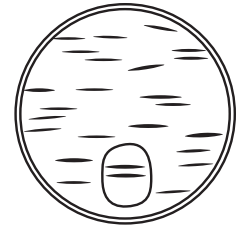
1994

oil on canvas

Self Portrait

1996

glazed ceramic



Wall text:

Flowing

During the United States bombing of North Vietnam (1965–1972), Trần Lương was separated from his family in Hanoi and sought refuge in various rural villages. Isolated and unable to attend formal school, he found solace in the imagined and remembered world beneath the water's surface. This underwater realm would become a recurring motif in his work.

Created throughout the 1990s, the *Flowing* series is dominated by interconnected stories of devastation and renewal, and the recurring abstract form of the amoeba. For Trần, this shape embodies multiple interpretations—as eyes, aircrafts, human figures or more-than-human entities. For instance, the ink-black dots that punctuate his compositions recall falling bombs and their aftermath. While expanses of water metaphorically submerge the destruction to suggest both concealment and a gradual return to calm. Executed on traditional Chinese xuan and Vietnamese dó paper, the works were often produced simultaneously in varying sizes and incorporate mixed media techniques that heighten their delicate materiality.

Trần continued the series until 1997, when he stopped painting. Confronted with the limited infrastructure and

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support for contemporary art in Vietnam at the time, he came to feel that an individual studio practice could not bring about the structural changes he sought. In response, he redirected his energy toward collective platforms such as organising events, creating local art initiatives, and facilitating regional exchanges, beginning with the establishment of Nhà Sàn Studio in 1998, Vietnam's first independent art space.

Accompanying the series is the video *Flowing* (1998), a visual diary tracing a journey along the Red River from Vietnam's countryside to its urban centres. Through this work, Trần reflects on his childhood in rural villages and Vietnam's socio-economic transformation in the wake of its transition toward an open-market society.

Left to right

Flowing 4

1996

watercolour on xuan paper

Flowing 37

1997

watercolour on xuan paper

Flowing 38

1997

watercolour on xuan paper

Flowing 33

1996

watercolour on xuan paper

Flowing 40

1997

watercolour on xuan paper

Right to left

Flowing

1999

single channel colour video; 11 min 48 sec

Flowing 27

1996

watercolour on dó paper

Flowing 31

1996

watercolour on dó paper

Flowing 25

1996

watercolour on dó paper

Camouflage

2008–ongoing

Chinese ink, acrylic and gouache on dó paper

Wall text:

Situated Practice – Working with Communities

Trần Lương has often reflected on the limited material conditions in Vietnam for supporting installation-based practices. This situation led him to shift away from working in traditional white cube spaces and instead focus on community-based projects.

Trần's work with communities runs in parallel to his artistic practice, and although it has at times intersected with formal art systems, it has not previously been articulated or recognised as central to his oeuvre until this exhibition.

Many of these initiatives are often based in remote areas of Vietnam, where they respond directly to climate disasters; the absence of basic living conditions, including access to clean water and adequate housing; and the need for structural change. Many of these areas receive minimal government support to improve living standards, and in some instances have declined even modest aid because they view it as a threat to their cultural traditions and social structures.

Trần's artistic engagement goes beyond documenting these struggles, as he works collaboratively with

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communities to develop sustained structural solutions, including the construction of resilient housing and the restoration of ecosystems such as mangroves and dry forests. Such projects are complex and multilayered, since they involve collaboration with local authorities, Indigenous elders, community members and young cultural workers. While, also requiring the expertise of architects, researchers, geologists, botanists, farmers and other knowledge holders who have a deep understanding of the land and water systems.

The works presented here offer insight into these various initiatives and the diverse communities across Vietnam that are affected by climate change. The housing projects are an initiative of the Sống Foundation, of which Trần is an active member and chairman.

Scrap fabric

2024

blanket sewn from discarded fabric

Blankets sewn from rags have long been a common feature of life during challenging times, embraced across different cultures and periods. Trần Lương offered this reflection on his relationship to scrap fabric blankets:

During my childhood in wartime, I grew up wrapped in blankets crafted from scrap fabric by my grandmother and mother. Industrially sewn blankets and pillowcases, designed for those with limited means, were also a familiar sight in my household. In peacetime, while engaging in social development projects over the past 20 years, I encountered these rag blankets once again in remote rural areas and high mountain regions inhabited by ethnic minorities. Each encounter stirred deep emotions, as I regarded these blankets as cherished objects – historical witnesses and profoundly human works of art. For me, these blankets, pieced together from scraps of fabric, represent a patchwork of memories and visual impressions gathered from various development projects. They also serve as a powerful symbol of the complex challenges of social development, reflecting the tensions and conflicts faced by an artist and social developer.

Wall text:

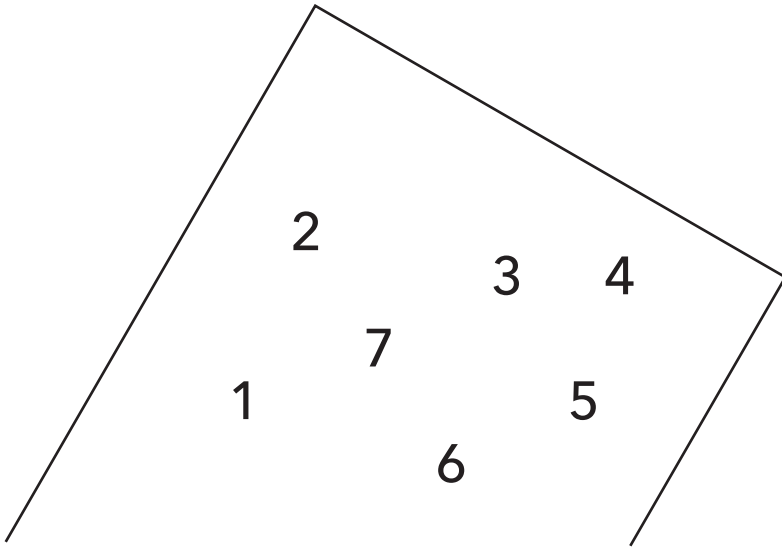
Body as a Material

Between the late 1990s and early 2000s, Trần Lương played a pivotal role in introducing performance art to Vietnam. For Trần, presence, participation and embodied experience are fundamental to his performance work. He views the body as the only material that cannot be censored.

The presentation showcases moments from a selection of his most important performances. The images are projected onto paper, referencing his 2003 performance *Sweaty*, in which Trần pressed and rubbed white sheets of paper against his body to absorb the sweat and dust. This act draws on the technique of stone-rubbing, a common practice at Hanoi University of Fine Arts for archiving and studying antiques. These sheets were later mounted on the walls and columns in Nhà Sàn Studio, where they were displayed as drawings.

As the original sheets from *Sweaty* are lost, the artist re-performed the work for this exhibition in September 2024. In this new rendition, Trần once again leaves traces of his body on the paper, establishing a relation between bodily presence and photographic documentation, emphasising multiple presences across time and space.

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1 **Eruption**

2008

GIF

Performed in Indonesia

2 **Sweaty**

2003

GIF

Performed in Hanoi, Vietnam

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3 **Groping for the Past**

2002

GIF

Performed in Umbria, Italy

4 **ERUTUF/YROTSIH**

2018

GIF

Performed in Lublin and Bialystok, Poland; and Berlin, Germany

5 **Mekong Study**

2019

GIF

Performed in Nanjing, China

6 **Moving Forwards and Backwards**

2005

GIF

Performed in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

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7 **Welts**

2007-ongoing

GIF

Performed in Beijing, China; Yangon, Myanmar; Hangzhou, China; Shanghai, China; Seoul, South Korea; Solo, Indonesia; Boston, USA; Berlin, Germany; Singapore; Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; and Chongqing, China.

Wall text:

Lập Lòe

2013

three channel colour video, sound, 5 min 2 sec
(looped)

Lập Lòe, which roughly translates as 'blink' or 'flicker' is derived from Trần Lương's performance series titled *Welts*, which began in 2007.

The red scarf that features in *Lập Lòe* was one of the few available toys in Trần's youth. Predominantly associated with boys, it was often used in a schoolyard game where participants whipped each other. Though the game required skill, it could easily turn violent. In *Welts*, Trần draws on this memory by allowing the audience to participate and potentially inflict harm on him, if they so choose. The performance thus stages an ethical encounter that demonstrates the capacity for people to enact violence when given permission to do so.

In *Lập Lòe* this gesture is further distilled and abstracted. In this video installation, the audience is no longer a direct participant. Instead, the focus shifts to the artist's body, the red scarf, and the marks left upon his skin. The video lingers on these traces and foregrounds the intimate proximity between the body and violence, while inviting reflection on the fleeting instant of action and the physical residue that endures.

Wall text:

Mạo Khê Coal Mine Project

2015

two-channel colour video, sound, 18 min 41 sec
(looped)

Commissioned by National Gallery Singapore
Courtesy of the artist

2025/E070

This project stems from Trần Lương's self-initiated field trips, which served as a way to engage with marginalised communities outside of state agendas. In 2001, Trần organised a two week field trip involving eleven artists to the Mạo Khê coal mine in Quang Ninh Province. One of the major mining areas in the Northeast region of Vietnam, Mạo Khê, holds a significant place in both the industrial and revolutionary history of Vietnam as the first branch of the Communist Party of Vietnam was established at this site on the 23 February 1930.

Mines, such as Mạo Khê coal mine, have historically served as destinations for artist field trips within Vietnam's socialist art education system. Under this system, which operated between 1954 and 1986, artists were sent to remote areas to produce artworks that emphasised Socialist Realism, and would promote the mass mobilisation of working and farming classes in revolutionary activities. As scholar Phoebe Scott notes:

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The ideological basis for these trips, known as *đi sát thực tế* (going into reality), was to immerse artists in the lives of the working class while giving them practical exposure to labour to generate representations of it in their art. In doing so, artists were re-engaging with the practice of *ba cùng* (three together): living together, eating together and working together.

Trần's invitation to the artists was not to create art but to live alongside the miners and experience their daily lives. In this video, Trần combines footage from the original 2001 trip with interviews conducted in 2015, in which the participating artists reflect on their experiences.