



# IDEAL FALL

HOANG DUONG CAM



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October 6 - November 19, 2011



GALERIE QUYNH CONTEMPORARY ART

65 De Tham Street, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam  
[www.galeriequynh.com](http://www.galeriequynh.com)



***‘How does idealism affect reality?’ Cầm asks, before questioning ‘how does idealism affect consciousness?’ savouring the negative difference between both questions.***

For his fourth solo exhibition at Galerie Quynh, Hoàng Dương Cầm addresses the roots of idealism – a topic he has been exploring for many years. He considers the ideal from two angles. On the one side the ‘ideal’ is what is inside our mind, the ideating process. From another viewpoint, the ‘ideal’ is the optimal state of being.



*Ideal Fall*, 2009, set of 11 lambda digital prints, 48 x 72 cm each



Representing the 'ideal' (ideating) world inside his mind in the form of a fragile, fragmented and mutable paper sculpture, Câm attempts to release these thoughts into the world, only to realise that such an act is a personal battle. Unlike the religious tradition, common in Vietnam, of releasing birds or fish in temples and pagodas, the process that should symbolise freedom becomes a brutal art act. Taking the lightweight sculpture to the heights over Saigon, he wrestles with his fear of the vast horizon, and the fear of destroying his thoughts, and finally succeeds in letting go of the emblem of

his ideas. It descends into the unstoppable urban reality, its fall broken by the photographs that freeze the motion into the artworks that give the title to this exhibition. The destructive act leads to a creation. Significantly, the broken and transformed shape is rescued from the city and recovered by the artist. He is able to reconcile the crash between his thoughts and his country, and assess the damage with more objectivity than before the fall, thanks to the cathartic cleanse.

The origins of this paper sculpture go back a couple of decades. During childhood visits to a passionate art lover's studio in Hanoi, Câm received weekly drawing lessons, where the love of art was fed perhaps even more than his stomach. By age 12, the young artist came to the realisation that 'art is



*Lightning in U Minh Forest no.1*  
2011  
acrylic on canvas  
150 x 120 cm



*Pray from Weirdness of the Ideal Mind*  
2009 - 2011  
mixed media installation  
dimensions variable



*Lightning in U Minh Forest no.7, 2011, acrylic on canvas, 195 x 240 cm*

looking at something and thinking'. Since discovering the link between sight and mental activity, the 'ideal' as a thought process, as a world of ideas, has fascinated him. In this case, interconnected paper shapes are a metaphor for his thinking process. Art for him is the intellectual transfer of feelings into pictures.

Simultaneously, Cầm developed an identification of art with fun. While the playfulness of Dada is a constant source of inspiration, Cầm draws from many sources. Plato's Ideal Forms are a backbone for the artist's aesthetic idealism. Platonic forms made of glass were designed to fit into Vladimir Tatlin's Monument to the Third International, an architectural plan that is given form in Cầm's studio with shreds cut from workers' jumpsuits. He hangs the structure upside down, knotting together the strips of fabric into a communist mesh. Inverted, the vertical beams and pillars of Tatlin's monument would not support the weight of the structure. They would dig into it, crushing it. In reality, the idealistic Russian monument for Communism never got built, a deflation that is represented by Cầm's two-dimensional hanging of the cloth structure. The useless cut-up uniforms are not a dead ideal, however. They now function like Tibetan prayer flags, they can send Morse-like messages of the love of work across the ether. Multi-pronged references float across the observer's mind like a paper sculpture falling from a 17th floor. The artist's joie de vivre playfully flies over dark allusions, and his insistence on the freedom to viewers to interpret the cues as they will, makes his work all the more interesting to scour for meanings.

The biggest attraction of Cầm's art process, which is a hybrid of conceptual exercise and technical exploration, is the purposeful aesthetic of it. The artist experiments with anything he can find, with a determination to find the humanity in it. 'The love of art is an aesthetic in itself' he proclaims. Whilst relishing the intellectual underpinning of conceptual art, he refuses to maintain that cold 'zero degree of the personal' aspect and seeks to imbue work with visceral humanity and passion. He achieves this by engaging fully

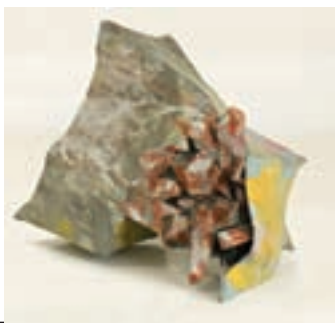




*Lightning in U Minh Forest no.5 (detail)*

in the manual aspects of creation. An instinctive painting style and mischievous manipulation of materials mix in with philosophical musings and historical anecdotes to offer a nourishing and tasty art experience.

The scrutiny of idealism in the mental and the worldly sense leads to artwork that is as ominous and foggy as the U Minh forest he paints so vibrantly. In this series of acrylic canvases, bright, colourful flat shapes dance around, building up layers of deep space. These paintings are idealistic forest views of mingling, jewel-like organic silhouettes. Working as eye-candy on first impressions, the emerging recognisable figures in the splattered jungles prolong the viewer's recreation time. The audience will invert the painting process, seeing figures and narratives where Cầm first put abstract blobs,



*Lightning in U Minh Forest no.4, 2011, acrylic on canvas, 150 x 120 cm*



the ones he later reconsidered and moulded into personages. Delving into a less playful but equally gripping thinking operation, the paint is identified first as juicy patterns and as subtle figurative scenes, then it is discovered to be a secret passageway to a mysterious land where old battles and historical intrigues haunt the present. The representation of deep space through the overlapping blots is a trip of visual alchemy, taking us from the impact of superficial pattern to an awareness of deeper realities lying underneath. The ensuing realisation – awareness of another realm – helps us make sense of the topic of the artist's inspiration: century-old battles of tribal Vietnam where warriors become heroes, kings or tyrants. As viewers, our first walk through the forest paintings makes them look like a biologist's funpark. On subsequent knowledgeable visits, we identify them as a soldier's campground. The 'ideal' end product has enhanced turbulent truths in the same way that Photoshop polishes glossy magazine pictures, by covering disturbing data. The paint then recycles its meaning and from deep space the eyes return to the surface, at which point the fallen leaders of dark bygone ages are engulfed by flourishing tropical lushness.

In the end, Ideal Fall collapses the ideal (ideation) and an ideal (perfect world) into the opening question of consciousness. Is reality inside or outside? Whichever method we choose to analyse that question of discover, its answer, in Câm's opinion, should be enjoyable. Above all, the journey should be a thoughtful one.

Cristina Nualart  
September 2011

*Lightning in U Minh Forest no.2, 2011, acrylic on canvas, 150 x 120 cm*



# biography

Born in 1974 in Hanoi, Vietnam  
BA from Hanoi Fine Arts University  
Lives and works in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

## selected solo exhibitions

- 2011 *Ideal Fall*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam  
*Lightning in U Minh Forest*, ART HK 11, Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, Hong Kong  
*Representation in the meaning of a metaphor for a forest as endoscopy / links between locations*, Project Space and Spare Room Gallery, School of Art, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia
- 2007 *Projecting into the night what has gone with the dawn*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
- 2006 *Fat-free Museum*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
- 2005 *Filename.disan*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
- 2001 *Square Eggs and Under the Covers*, Goethe-Institut, Hanoi, Vietnam
- 2000 *Speak Out/Beach Eggs*, Thanh Hoa Beach, Vietnam
- 1999 *The Wedding*, Nha San Studio, Hanoi, Vietnam

## selected group exhibitions

- 2011 *Esperanto-Polis*, former Colette International School, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
- 2010 *VideoZone 5*, the 5th International Video Art Biennial, various galleries, Israel  
*Daegu Photo Biennial*, Daegu, South Korea  
*On Each Milestone*, Japan Foundation Center for Cultural Exchange, Hanoi, Vietnam  
*Arts and Cities*, Aichi Triennale 2010, Nagoya, Japan  
*Camamoto*, Japan Foundation Exhibition Space, Hanoi, Vietnam
- 2009 *Connect: Art Scene Vietnam*, ifa-Galerie Berlin, Germany; traveled to ifa-Galerie Stuttgart in 2010  
*MAX ART FEST 2009, Manifest of Oblivion*, Zagreb, Croatia  
*Intersection Vietnam: New Works from North and South*, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur & Singapore  
*A Snapshot of Contemporary Vietnamese Art*, ifa gallery, Shanghai, China  
*Magnetic Power*, ASEAN – Korea Contemporary Photography & Media Art Exhibition, Coreana Museum of Art and Gallery Jijihyang, Seoul, Korea  
*Fluid Zone*, Jakarta Biennale, Jakarta, Indonesia
- 2008 *olio. the year end show*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam  
*Post Doi Moi: Vietnamese Art After 1990*, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore  
*Intrude: Art & Life 366*, Zentai Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai, China  
*Strategies from Within - an Exhibition of Vietnamese and Cambodian Contemporary Art Practices*, Ke Center for the Contemporary Arts, Shanghai, China  
*The Third Guangzhou Triennial*, Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, China  
*Showcase Singapore*, City Hall, Singapore
- 2007 *Migration Addicts* (a collateral event of the 52nd Venice Biennale), Rokovoko (Mogas Station), Caffè Aurora, Piazza San Marco, Venice, Italy  
*Thermocline of Art. New Asian Waves*, ZKM I Museum of Contemporary Art, Karlsruhe, Germany  
*City of Expiration and Regeneration*, 2007 Shenzhen-Hong Kong Biennale, Rokovoko (Mogas Station), Shenzhen, China
- 2006 *Liberation – 1st chapter of Saigon Open City*, Ho Chi Minh City Fine Art Museum, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam  
*Belief*, Singapore Biennale 2006, AART publication and LZ installation (Mogas Station), Singapore  
*LZ* (Mogas Station), Goethe-Institut, Hanoi, Vietnam
- 2005 *Out of Context*, Huntington Beach Art Center, Huntington Beach, California, USA  
*600 Images/60 Artists/6 Curators/6 Cities*, simultaneous exhibitions in venues in Bangkok, Berlin, Los Angeles, London, Manila and Saigon
- 2004 *Asia, Now*, Gyeonggi Arts Center, Suwon City, Korea
- 2003 *Tree – focus from both sides*, site-specific installation, Binh Quoi Village, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam



## grants / residencies

- 2010 Residency Program for Media Artists, funded by School of Art, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia  
Japan Foundation Grant to produce a collaborative video work and exhibition
- 2009 Artist Residency at Tokyo Wonder Site, Tokyo, Japan under the Programme for Creators, funded by the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund as part of JENESYS Programme

## selected bibliography

- 2011 Nguyen Nhu Huy, “Video Art in Vietnam: A Brief Report,” *Video, An Art, A History, 1965 - 2010: A selection from the Centre Pompidou and Singapore Art Museum collections*, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
- 2010 “In conversation with artist Hoang Duong Cam,” interview by Lien Truong, diaCRITICS.org, November 2010, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam  
*VideoZone 5*, the 5th International Video Art Biennial, exhibition catalogue, Israel  
*Asia Spectrum, Multicentrism, Daegu Photo Biennale 2010*, exhibition catalogue, Daegu, Korea  
Westwood, Peter, *Representation in the meaning of a metaphor for a forest as endoscopy / links between locations*, exhibition catalogue, Project Space and Spare Room Gallery, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia
- 2009 *Arena: Jakarta Biennale XIII 2009*, exhibition catalogue, Jakarta, Indonesia  
Lenzi, Iola, *Intersection Vietnam: New Works from North & South*, exhibition catalogue, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
Lenzi, Iola, “Outsider Connections: Saigon Emerges as a Dynamic New Centre of Contemporary Art,” *C-Arts Magazine*, Vol 07, 2009, Singapore & Indonesia  
Terrieux, Marie, *A Snapshot of Contemporary Vietnamese Art*, exhibition catalogue, ifa Gallery, Shanghai, China  
Yu Yeon Kim, *Magnetic Power*, exhibition catalogue, ASEAN-Korea Contemporary Photography & Media Art Exhibition, Seoul, Korea  
Kraevskaia, Natalia, “Collectivism and Individualism in Society and Art after Doi Moi,” *Essays on Modern and Contemporary Vietnamese Art*, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
- 2008 Ciric, Biljana, *Strategies from Within*, exhibition catalogue, Ke Center for the Contemporary Arts, Shanghai, China  
Kolesnikov-Jessop, Sonia, “3 Generations of Vietnamese Artists and their Memories of War,” *New York Times*, May 21, 2008, New York, New York, USA
- 2007 Fyfe, Joe, “Outside the System,” *Art in America*, October 2007, New York, New York, USA  
Rhee, Wonil, Weibel, Peter and Jansen, Gregor, *Thermocline of Art. New Asian Waves*, exhibition catalogue, ZKM I Museum of Contemporary Art, Karlsruhe, Germany  
*Think with the Senses – Feel with the Mind. Art in the Present Tense*, 52nd Venice Biennale exhibition catalogue for participating countries, collateral events, Venice, Italy  
Ciric, Biljana and Gavassa, Karin, *Migration Addicts*, exhibition catalogue, ddm warehouse, Shanghai, China
- 2006 Streitmatter-Tran, Richard, “News: Ho Chi Minh City,” *Contemporary*, Issue 88, 2006, London, England, UK  
Pham, Quynh, *Fat-free Museum*, exhibition catalogue, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam  
Llouquet Sandrine, “Fat Free Museum,” *Noi That Magazine*, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
- 2005 Kraevskaia, Natalia, “A Highway of Collectivism and Individual Paths,” *Out of Context*, exhibition catalogue, Huntington Beach Art Center, Huntington Beach, California, USA  
Vu Lien Phuong, “A Relevant Suggestion,” *NY Arts Magazine*, May – June 2005, New York, New York, USA