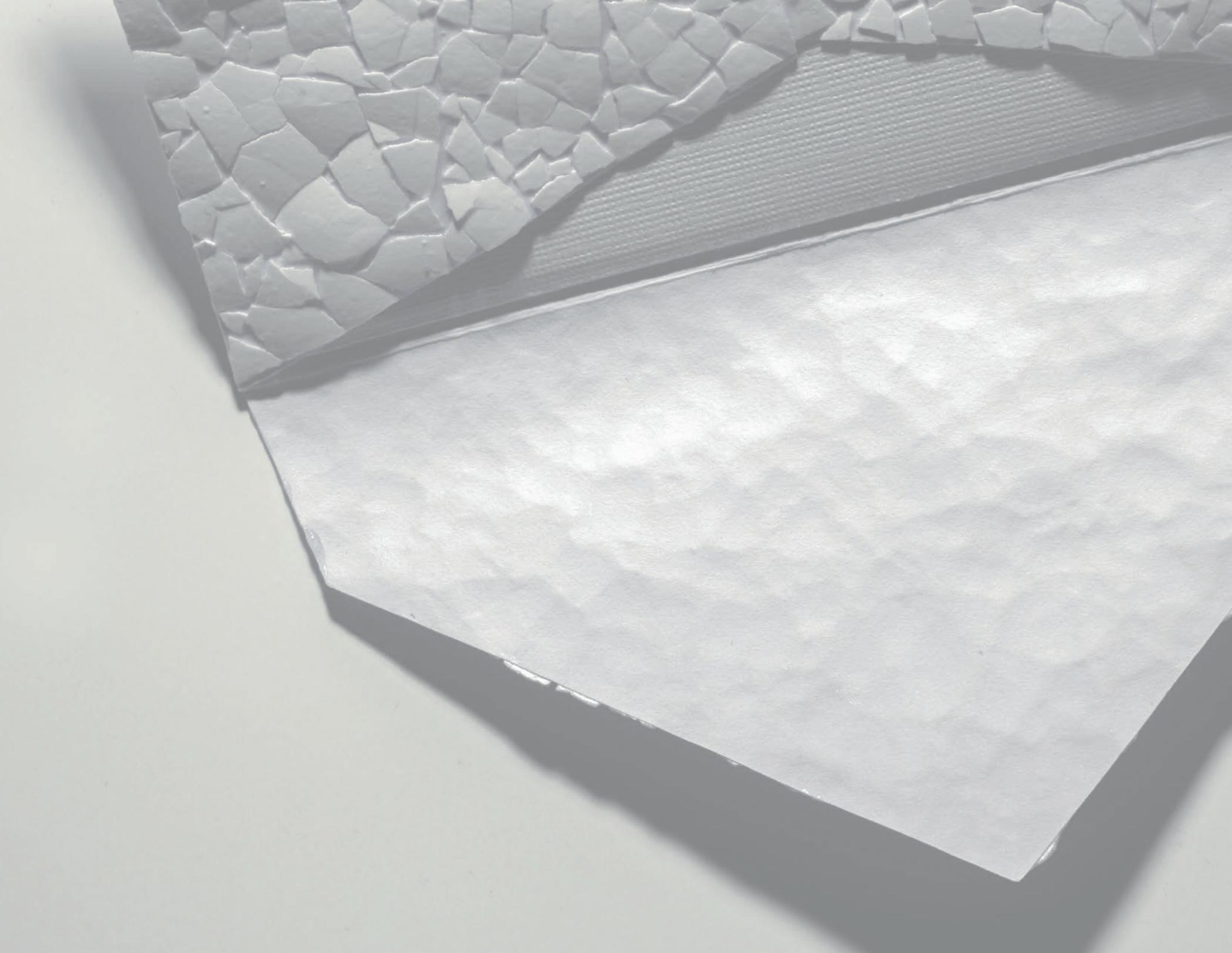




**EN ROUTE**

MyLoan Dinh



# **EN ROUTE**

MyLoan Dinh

selected works 2015 - 2020



*Untitled*, 2019. Paper envelope, eggshells, acrylic, 3.5 x 5.25 in.

All this time I told myself we were born from war – but I was wrong, Ma. We were born from beauty.

Let no one mistake us for the fruit of violence – but that violence, having passed through the fruit, failed to spoil it.

Dr. Jen Sudul Edwards  
Chief Curator & Curator of Contemporary Art,  
Mint Museum of Art

**For Whom is Where**  
Jen Sudul Edwards, Ph.D.

*America is a country of possibilities.*

Kamala Harris<sup>1</sup>

*Your colleague, Senator Kamala Harris is going to be the next Vice President of the United States. As an Asian-American Senator in particular, but as a human being, what does this mean to you?*

*It means that the American Dream is alive and well.*

Senator Tammy Duckworth in conversation with Farai Chideya<sup>2</sup>

*Where is nirvana?*

*Nirvana is here, nine times out of ten.*

Hồ Xuân Hương<sup>3</sup>

*We all evolved from the same stardust.*

Dick Gregory<sup>4</sup>

How do you locate yourself in the world, in time? Is it by knowledge? Memory? Emotion? Did your family place you here or did you choose? Do you feel your ancestors beside you or do you come upon them suddenly, each of you surprised, confused? It takes a while to see the resemblance. “Why do I like this?” you wonder. “How did I know to do that?” you consider, while a Cheshire cat grin spreads behind your shoulder.

MyLoan Dinh moved to the United States in 1975, pulled from the Pacific Ocean with her mother, father, and brother, as Saigon fell and they escaped Vietnam. This early memory infuses her sculptures built of life preservers with a civic ethos. *Handling with Care* (2016), *Heaven* (2017), and *One Nation... for ALL* (2017) contain this message: the fragility of responsibility, the messiness of hope.

On April 30, 1975, Dinh’s family were some of the last to leave Vietnam, as the United States military abandoned a colonial cause and the many Vietnamese conscripted to help. In those final days, officers instructed her father, a member of the South Vietnamese Navy, to destroy his uniform and any record of his career. “In a split second,” Dinh recalled, “his identity was erased.”<sup>5</sup> The Republic of Vietnam, a colonial entity created by the

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<sup>1</sup>Biden-Harris acceptance speech, November 7, 2020.

<sup>2</sup>*Our Body Politic*, November 13, 2020.

<sup>3</sup>Ho Xuan Huong, “Spring-Watching Pavilion” (1800). *Spring Essence: The Poetry of Hồ Xuân Hương*, translated by John Balaban (Copper Canyon Press 2000).

<sup>4</sup>Dick Gregory, *Defining Moments in Black History - Reading Between the Lines* (Amistad Press, 2017). <http://subwayreads.org/book/defining-moments-in-black-history%E2%BB%BF/>

<sup>5</sup>MyLoan Dinh, “Inclusive: We See Heaven Upside-Down,” Creative Mornings CLT talk, April 18, 2019. <https://creativemornings.com/talks/myloan-dinh>

French in 1952 and sustained by the United States when the French retreated from the region in 1955, disappeared. Simultaneously, Dinh's father lost an identity that the United States had built out of paper pulp and uniform threads. Dinh's nationality, it turned out, had always been defined by another's country's constructed narrative.

"Packed like sardines," in Dinh's words, she and a thousand other former South Vietnamese citizens boarded Ship 402, one of the last RVN Navy ships to leave.<sup>6</sup> When it broke down, nearby boats in the refugee armada rescued them, but they continued to sail aimlessly, unwelcome as an unrecognized nation. "Now," Dinh recalled, "we were stateless."<sup>7</sup> After six days of floating at sea, the USS Kirk "followed their moral compass," in Dinh's words, and absorbed the refugee fleet into their own, allowing them to lower the South Vietnamese flag of red bars on a yellow field and raise the stars and stripes. And so, too, the Dinh family became absorbed into the United States.<sup>8</sup> However, the memory of that dismissal-and-denial-after-service by the United States government foreshadowed her experience in her new country, as hinted in her *Memories of a White Christmas (a souvenir)* (2016).

After a series of refugee camps (*Tent #8* refers to her time in those tent cities), the Dinh family settled in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Boone, North Carolina, sponsored by Pastor David Keck and the Lutheran Church of Boone. For the next 15 years, Dinh would move around the state—first Charlotte, then to Chapel Hill for college—experiencing various degrees of racism and exclusion while developing her own language as an artist.

She didn't realize it then, but this instance would lead to Dinh's primary project: "My work explores the porous boundary between personal and collective, and the relationship between part and whole. Often, I examine the individual and the communal othering."<sup>9</sup> This reflected her position: no matter her physical proximity and legal citizenship, Dinh would remain a single within a whole; a figure within a group; present, but not absorbed, as explored in her unsettling *report Suspicious activity* (2015) performances.

The universality of this position is what makes Dinh's work so relatable. Some wear their otherness visibly—race, ethnicity, height, weight, physical capabilities. Others carry internal markers—sexual abuse, class, gender identity, divorce, abandonment, sexuality. Dinh's work layers political messaging and personal perspectives with the same care as her fingers piecing back together the eggshell mosaics on her envelopes, and her gentle managing of such fragility resonates with anyone who has experienced vulnerability or confusion in a crowd.

For as long as she can remember, Dinh has used art to negotiate with the world. As a child, it brokered her separation anxiety from her mother. UNC Chapel Hill set her on her own and she began to explore museums for the first time. Art also got her out of the United States when she received a scholarship to study at Wollongong University in New South Wales, Australia. Whereas her classes in Chapel Hill had been homogenous and hierarchical, Wollongong exposed her to an entirely different approach to creativity. Australia was confronting its own atrocities towards the

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<sup>6</sup> MyLoan Dinh, "Inclusive: We See Heaven Upside-Down," Creative Mornings CLT talk, April 18, 2019. <https://creativemornings.com/talks/myloan-dinh>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

continent's First Peoples and her classes were a mix of Caucasian, Indigenous, Asian, and other marginalized populations, as well as all ages. These diverse experiences collided in the classroom and in the work, with students taking the lead. She returned to the United States, but stayed in Charlotte to reconsider how she was learning and making.

Shortly after, in 1994, she met Till Schmidt-Rimpler, a dancer with North Carolina Dance Theater, which had just relocated from Winston Salem. Wollongong taught Dinh that she could weave experience and history into an image, but Schmidt-Rimpler took the work into real space and Dinh discovered performance. At first, she sewed costumes, a skill she learned from her mother, which led to an exploration of space. Illusion and lighting became an active part of the work. "It was okay to be bizarre and experiment," Dinh remembered.<sup>10</sup>

In 1997, after Dinh and Schmidt-Rimpler married, they formed an international band of collaborators called Moving Poets. The lessons she learned with multidisciplinary work taught her that "nothing is sacred, just use the tools that are available to you. Whatever you need to create the work, use."<sup>11</sup> They continue to make work in Charlotte and Berlin, their two homes; yet Dinh does not consider herself a performance artist, but a maker.

Since 2015, the work marries these explorations in performance with training as a painter, but there are also techniques specific to handicraft. Combined with themes of social and political engagement, Dinh's work now blurs the boundaries between generations, introducing a commitment to civic engagement and protest, proclaimed as United States values, to her mother's needlework and her ancestors' native vernacular of *son mai*, a lacquer technique native to Vietnam.

In a broader sense, Dinh celebrates their shared traditions. Quilting and cut paper practices can be traced back millennia in the East and West, although in the southern United States, where Dinh lives and works, they are primarily associated with a European heritage. *Courage* (2019) presents the stitched silhouettes of a fleeing family encased in the protective frame of the *Flying Geese* pattern. *Mama Says* (2019) insulates a mother cocooning her children in the *Broken Dishes* pattern, a title full of narrative. These works were done in the years human rights watchers—both average citizens and professionals—demanded that the United States government reverse the practice of separating migrant children from their parents. These assemblage works remind us of the immigrant story shared by any American who is not indigenous—at some point, our people arrived, bringing our traditions to build the nation we now claim as exclusively ours.

This narrative is conveyed even more densely in *Collective History* (2019). Assembled scraps of evidence from anonymous sources hint at biographies. Quilt patterns like *Double Wedding Rings* suggests a wedding trousseau of someone from Germanic descent, while *Endless Summer* evokes the laborious work of making a quilt, a task reserved for women relegated to the home. Quilting signifies a sense of resilience, resourcefulness, the ability to resuscitate the exhausted—and the inherent history carried within objects.

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<sup>10</sup> Conversation with author, October 25, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

In the silhouettes, the children's profiles are rounded and uneven, a departure from the usual generic perfection relayed in such cut portraits. They could be any children, but their unusual profiles feel singular. Dinh employs this technique with poignant effect in her *Return to Sender* (2020) wall piece, which reminds us of how many individual children make up the mass incarceration centers along our Southern border.

Dinh is increasingly focusing on her Vietnamese heritage. The eggshell mosaics that form the veneer of *Handling with Care* (2016), the boxing gloves in 2018-19, *Truth's* (2020) speedbag, and the envelopes of *Presorted, second class* (2020) come from *son mai*, highly lacquered surfaces that are sometimes detailed with eggshell, gold foil, or silver foil. Dinh remembers being obsessed with this technique as a child. As part of her chores, she would meticulously dust the delicately cracked surfaces of the *son mai* pieces her parents would collect on their trips back to see family in Vietnam, trips Dinh was never invited to join.

These works require painstaking labor. Dinh's astute eye must be alert to slight color differences in the shells; her steady fingers must precisely lift the thin, slight shards on the tip of a needle and secure them gently into place on the support, which often curves and folds inhospitably.

Dinh's supports are significant. The paper envelopes (with secret messages enclosed) relay the fragility of communication between people and the difficulty in bridging distance, be it physical or ideological. The boxing gloves and speed bag are particularly powerful. The violence of boxing and its complicated history with racism and sexual violence offers one layer of meaning, as referenced in *Gem, Off-White, Grandma's Hands*, and the Muhammed Ali-reference of *Boom Boom Butterfly*. But they also have the inspiring message to fight the power, emboldened by the embroidered messages emblazoned on the sculptures—*Civic Duty, Freedom Fighter*, and *Truth*. Resplendent in their egg casings, the hanging gloves transform into clasping hands, swollen and cracked, spent from the fight, but this message of resistance still uneliminated. The fight will resume again.

During a studio visit, after Dinh had been working on *son mai* for hours, she showed me her swollen, discolored hands, which seemed to be frozen in mid-grasp. She said that even as the pain increased, each movement of picking up a fragment and putting it in place felt like a gesture of humanity, of remembrance, of honor, and it propelled her through the physical strain.

Although Dinh creates her *son mai* works in her studio behind her Charlotte home, the actual technique has extremely specific geographical origins. *Son mai* lacquer comes from a Japanese wax tree, which grows in Northern Vietnam. The traditional form—lacquered wood that is then painted with scenes and sometimes decorated with eggshells, gold leaf, or silver leaf—needs the region's humid climate because the wet air allows layers of lacquer to harden without warping the wood. Dinh practices her own variation in Charlotte, but she recognizes that to achieve the true practice, she must not only study with the masters in Vietnam, but the work must be made there, as well. She has found a process that makes her entirely dependent upon a homeland that she has not seen since she fled it 45 years ago. Dinh understands this too: "I am yearning to hone in on a craft that I deeply respect and is linked to my ancestry and maybe romantically, hope that it will fill some void that I'm seeking to fill."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Conversation with author, October 25, 2020.

i've  
memorized  
every  
promise  
that was  
gave  
on that  
night  
we were  
told  
we'd have  
to go &  
had better  
learn  
to  
travel  
light  
across  
a sea  
that would  
disappear  
once  
we'd reached  
its  
other  
shore  
  
&  
  
there  
we'd  
wear  
our hearts  
inside  
no longer  
easy  
for us  
to find



*Handling with Care*, 2016. Life vest, eggshells, acrylic paint, 22 x 12 x 3 in.  
Santo Foundation 10th Anniversary exhibition 2019, St. Louis, MO. Installation view.





*Presorted, second class, 2020. Paper envelopes, eggshells, acrylic, 3.25 x 5.5 in.*



HQ-6 Tran Quoc Toan rescuing refugees from HQ-402, 1975, photo courtesy of Jim Bongaard,  
*How to Steal a Navy and Save 30000 refugees in the process* (<https://www.historynet.com>).



I'm dreaming of a white Christmas  
Just like the ones I used to know  
Where the tree tops glisten  
And children listen  
To hear sleigh bells in the snow, oh, the snow  
I said, I'm dreaming of a white Christmas

With every Christmas card I write  
May your days be merry and bright  
And may all your Christmas' be white

*White Christmas* by Irving Berlin  
(Decca Records, 1942)

On April 29, 1975, during the final days of the Fall of Saigon, the order for final evacuation of American personnel arrived. A coded message went out on American Forces Radio: "The temperature in Saigon is 105 degrees and rising," followed by Irving Berlin's song "White Christmas." My father, who worked with the Americans, was unaware of the secret. We were not evacuated.

So we escaped

on the last South Vietnamese Navy ship out

HQ 402

it broke down at sea.



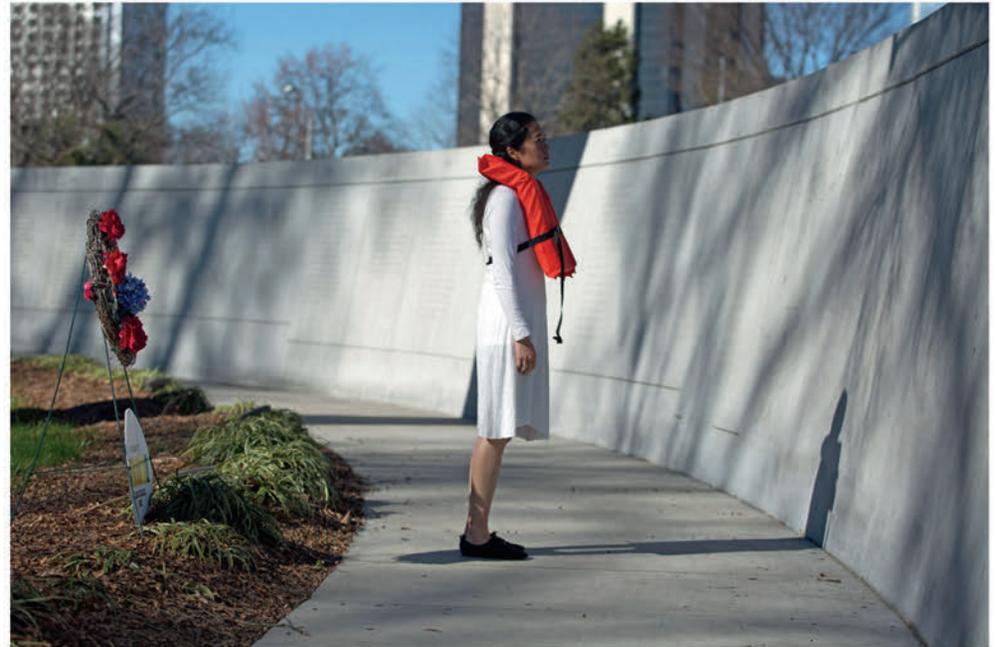


Camp Pendleton Refugee Camp (Tent City), CA, 1975. Courtesy of the artist.



*Tent #8*, 2019. Elder Gallery of Contemporary Art, installation detail.

once upon a time  
there was  
an  
American War





*HEAVEN*, 2017. Life vests on bamboo frame, 5 x 18 ft.

### Đài khán xuân

Êm ái, chiều xuân tới khán đài  
Lâng lâng chẳng bợn chút trần ai.  
Ba hồi chiêu mộ chuông gầm sóng.  
Một vũng tang thương nước lộn trời.  
Bể ái ngàn trùng khôn tát cạn.  
Nguồn ân muôn trượng dễ khơi vơi.  
Nào nào cực lạc là đâu tá?  
Cực lạc là đây, chín rở mười.

### Spring Watching pavilion

A gentle spring evening arrives  
Airily, unclouded by worldly dust.  
Three times the bell tolls echoes like a wave.  
We see heaven upside-down in sad puddles.  
Love's vast sea cannot be emptied.  
And springs of grace flow easily everywhere.  
Where is nirvana?  
Nirvana is here, nine times out of ten.

## **gentil**

we live in a world,  
you and me -  
abnormal

where kids, just kids  
(wanting for) maggie and milly and molly and may  
- to be normal. and

just, normal, kids,  
blowing bubbles in the air.

drop. tuck. roll - we work it.  
she smiles. \*smiled.

bite. my neck

(- she did).

these kids just want to  
once again find joy in blowing  
bubbles in the sand pit.

normal kinds of kids, like a you, or a me,  
all want to feel kind and  
gentil.  
and sway in the sea



*Return to Sender*, 2020. Embossed linoleum print on paper, 12 x 18 in.



*Return to Sender*, 2020. Oil and acrylic on canvas, embossed linoleum prints on paper,  
*Tarmac* exhibition 2020, McColl Center for Art + Innovation, installation view and details.

## FALLEN MOON FALLEN STARS

*"Who if I cried out would hear me among the angelic orders?" Rilke*

Once upon a time there is

a little girl  
who lives in a little corner  
of her own little world  
with other little boys and girls  
just a little north of the border

in a big big cage

where high hopes have gone south  
falling like orphaned arrows from the sky  
into the heart of Mother Earth

Outside the cage  
the demon badges burn  
as they patrol bruited their control  
in the harsh, relentless imperial fluorescence  
of her chain-linked home

away from home

where children are held close  
and lied to closer  
and sworn to closest

that farthest from the truth  
they  
have been deserted  
and that no matter how hard their naked eyes  
would look  
there is no "...lamp beside the golden door..."

And yet  
the little girl's power  
is a light  
she daydreams  
at night  
reclaiming her name Maria Elena

Maria Elena  
Maria Elena

there are no windows here  
only the rude blank intimacy  
of a Wall

In a corner of this world  
She draws and colors

The Wall, like a cave painting  
is the screen  
upon which she streams her dreams  
of making the unseen seen

this is where a square of light  
softens rounds and fans  
to that patch of meadow  
in the moonlight  
beside the white house  
she left

such a deft saving and necessary landscape

then  
in the jailed heart of things she prays to The Virgin  
"Santa Maria Madre de Dios..."  
"Santa Maria Madre de Dios..."  
"Santa Maria Madre de Dios..."

she grows strong angel wings  
and rises  
"Santa Maria Madre de Dios..."  
to hover above the sleeping silver Mylar huddle  
of her blanketed brothers and sisters of other mothers  
"Santa Maria Madre de Dios..."  
"Santa Maria Madre de Dios..."

but then  
for all she is allowed to know beyond the cage  
the sun rises

in the West  
and sets in the East

the moon and all the stars  
have fallen to the ground

waking to the whim of strangers  
her momma lost for now  
"Santa Maria Madre de Dios..."  
she sees Heaven  
upside down

– Chuck Sullivan



*Mama Says*, 2019. Quilted fabric, hand embroidery, acrylic and oil on canvas, 20 x 20 in.



*Courage*, 2019. Quilted fabric, hand embroidery, acrylic and oil on canvas, 20 x 20 in. Private collection.

## Anguish Longer than Sorrow

If destroying all the maps known  
would erase all the boundaries  
from the face of this earth  
I would say let us  
make a bonfire  
to reclaim and sing  
the human person

Refugee is an ominous load  
even for a child to carry  
for some children  
words like home  
could not carry any possible meaning  
but  
displaced  
border  
refugee  
must carry dimensions of brutality and terror  
past the most hideous nightmare  
anyone could experience or imagine

Empty their young eyes  
deprived of a vision of any future  
they should have been entitled to  
since they did not choose to be born  
where and when they were  
Empty their young bellies  
extended and rounded by malnutrition  
and growling like the well-fed dogs of some  
with pretensions to concerns about human rights  
violations

Can you see them now  
stumble from nowhere  
to no  
where  
between  
nothing  
and  
nothing

Consider  
the premature daily death of their young dreams  
what staggering memories frighten and abort  
the hope that should have been  
an indelible inscription in their young eyes

Perhaps  
I should just borrow  
the rememberer's voice again  
while I can and say:  
to have a home is not a favour

– Keorapetse Kgositsile



*Collective History*, 2019. Quilted fabric, hand embroidery, mesh, paper, acrylic and oil on canvas, 66 x 47 in.

The New Colossus  
by Emma Lazarus, 1849-1887

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,  
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand  
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame  
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name  
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand  
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command  
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.  
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she  
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

handwritten by KSRD  
child of immigrants  
age 11, 2019





*Shadow Boxer*, 2019. Quilted fabric, hand embroidery, eggshells, child's boxing glove, wood shadow box, 20 x 15 x 2 in.



*report Suspicious activity*, 2015. Performance and photo series, live documentation by Jeff Cravotta





In recent years, my focus has been mixed media. Currently, I use eggshell mosaics in much of my work. Covering objects in eggshells requires time-consuming labor, care, and intentionality. My eggshell-based work has arisen from formal experimentation and latent exposure to Son Mai lacquer ware, an often overlooked traditional craft related to my cultural heritage, garnered from my upbringing in a Vietnamese household in the United States.

The work explores questions of gender and race through objects and images that carry evocative associations. I glue eggshells on boxing gloves, life jackets, envelopes and passports, and present these pieces with politically-resonant embroideries. Such objects normally serve practical purposes, and are handled roughly—associations which I throw into tension by aestheticizing the objects with eggshell veneers. Eggshells can evoke shelter, nourishment and, in a basic physical sense, fertility. At the same time, they are fragile, and must be broken to enable life. Boxing gloves, though physically soft, traditionally bear connotations of force, violence and masculinity. Needlework, by contrast, is traditionally associated with femininity and delicateness, though its main tool is sharp and piercing.

Through such tensions, the series probes complex social, cultural and political questions that face our contemporary United States. The interplay of materials and objects creates a dialogue between collective and individual, independence and interdependence. What is revealed between the cracks of the shells is as important as what is reassembled on the surface.

*Killing Me Softly*, 2017.

Boxing gloves, eggshells, acrylic, 14 x 13 x 4.5 in. Private collection.

*Woke-oxygen Tank*, 2018. Detail from mixed media installation, 30 x 40 in.





*Off White*, 2019. Boxing gloves, eggshells, acrylic, 18 x 13 x 5 in.



*bướm bướm* means butterfly in Vietnamese



*Boom Boom Butterfly*, 2019. Boxing gloves, eggshells, acrylic, 18 x 13 x 5 in.

right: *We See Heaven Upside Down* exhibition 2019. Elder Gallery of Contemporary Art, installation view.

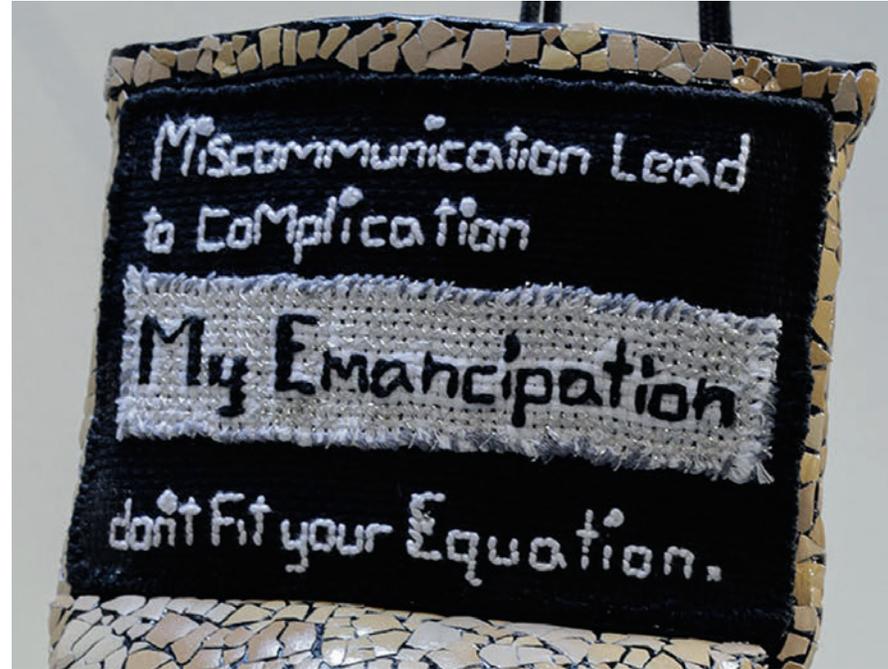




*Skin*, 2018. *Feindbild* exhibition 2018. Installation detail. NOVILLA - Center for Arts, Creativity & Exchange, Berlin, Germany.



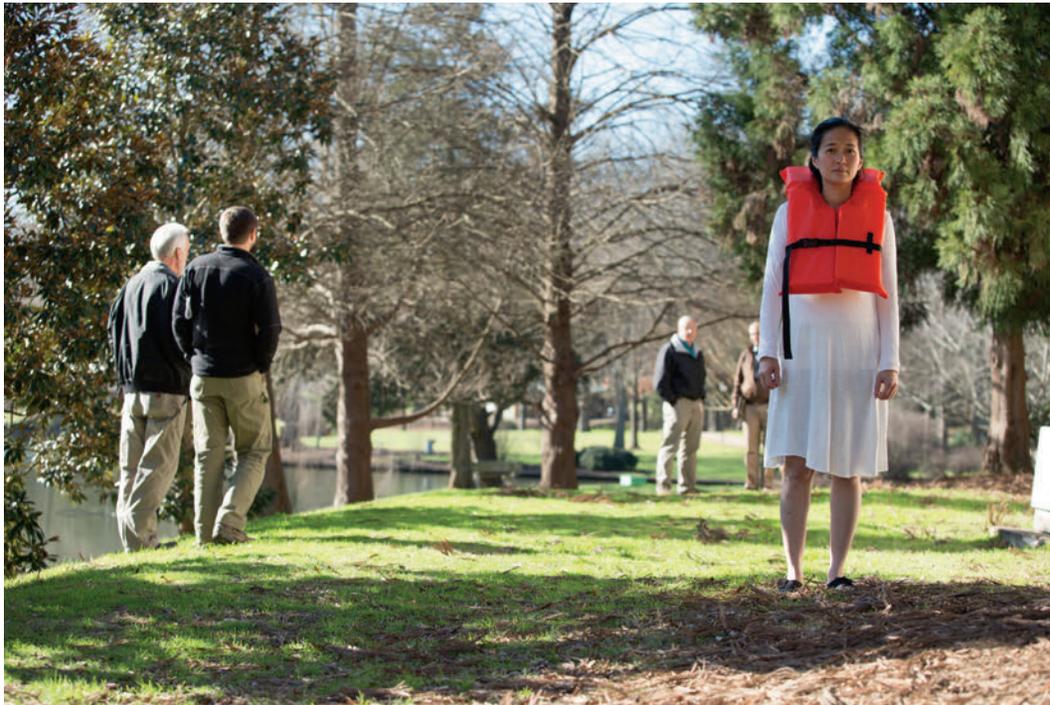
*Grandma's Hands*, 2019. Boxing gloves, bark, acrylic, 13 x 16 x 5 in.



*Freedom Fighter*, 2018. Detail, boxing gloves, hand embroidery, eggshells, acrylic,  
18 x 13 x 5 in. Lyrics from *Lost Ones* by Lauryn Hill, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*  
(Ruffhouse Records and Columbia Records, 1998). Private collection.



Ma is an avid gardener.  
She told me, we women should protect our blossoms.







*I am here today not because I want to be.*

*I am terrified.*

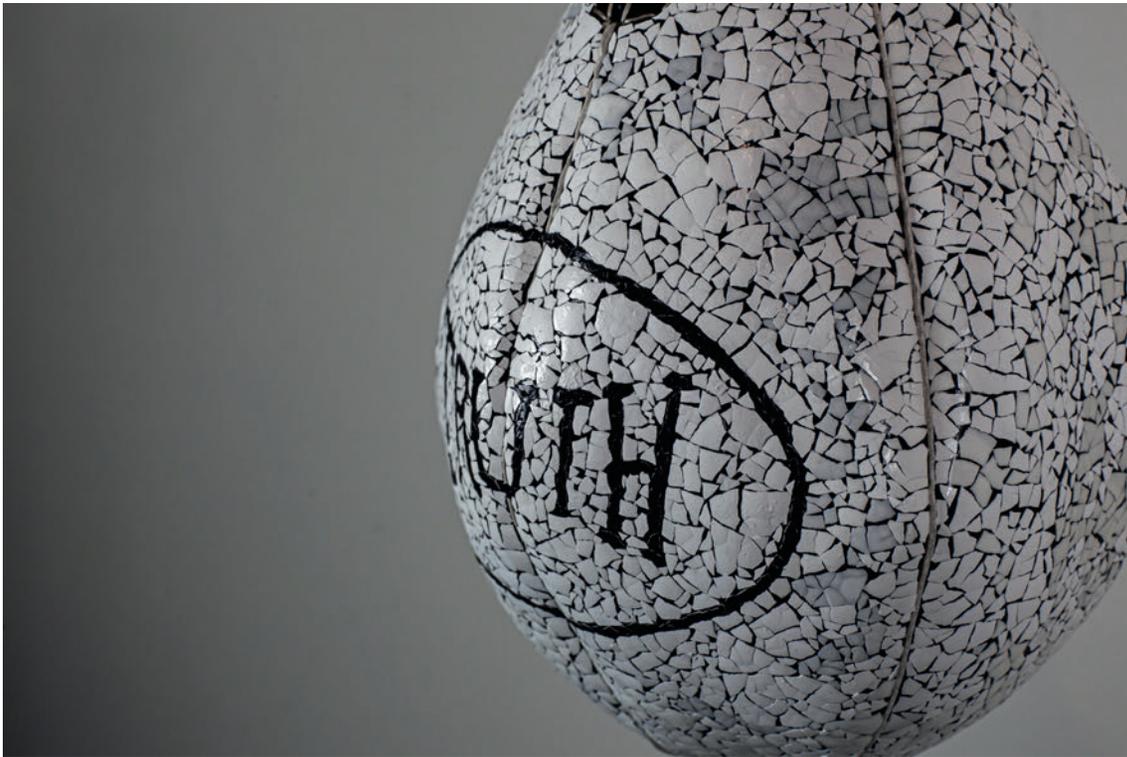
*I am here because I believe it is my civic duty  
to tell you what happened to me...*

Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, 2018

This work was created in response to the Ford/Kavanaugh Senate Judiciary Committee hearings  
and finished on mid term election day 2018.

*Civic Duty*, 2018. Boxing gloves, hand embroidery, eggshells, acrylic, 13 x 16 x 5 in. Private collection.





The hits and blows that truth has endured, that facts have endured, are countless.

This work – a speed ball emblazoned with the word “Truth,” represents that abuse. But the ball returns again and again, just like the truth.

Just like facts.

We must endure like the speed ball. We must not let this wave of outrage ebb.

We must embrace our collective responsibility to care for one another and stay true and steady in this fight for the elimination of injustice.

No matter the hits. No matter the blows.

*Truth*, 2020. Speedball, eggshells, acrylic, 11 x 8 x 7.5 in.  
Muhammad Ali Museum permanent collection.





*One Nation...for ALL*, 2017. Life vests, whistles, paint, wood, 57 x 39 x 9 in.

**One Nation... Under Construction:  
Reflections on *One Nation...for ALL***

Janelle Dunlap

The work of MyLoan Dinh centers on the visceral nature of identity within the cultural context of American value systems that often go unchecked and unnoticed. These value systems are propagated through the indoctrination of consumerism; a practice that is embedded in the way society responds to the notion of excess. The function of these value systems within Dinh's practice is expressed through the contemporary subjective use of physical objects that call into question social responsibility. I have had the honor of showing Dinh's work twice this year, first at the Emc Arts funded Resident Residency at McColl Center for Arts + Innovation, and most recently, in a group at Alchemy Gallery in the South End neighborhood of Charlotte, NC. What draws me to Dinh's work is the thoughtful and meticulous nature of her practice that sets intentions for making what is known also seen. Her identity as a Vietnamese refugee, mother, and woman of color informs the contextual nature of her practice, creating a tone that speaks of urgency and introspective reflection of what society deems as "normal."

The idiomatic expressions of American identity through mixed media commands our attention to our relationships with each other, inanimate objects and the dynamics of western culture that complicate these connections. Through the arrangement of painted life vests and silver whistles fixed onto a board frame, the United States flag is reimagined as a beacon of hope. This focal point of reckoning, with the duality of social and political systems is especially embodied in *One Nation...for ALL*, a visual representation of Dinh's entry into the United States; a tribute to the forgotten American dream; a fading memory of refuge in a present xenophobic era.

Dinh's lived experiences inform her work, which addresses everyday manifestations of cultural identity, memory, and displacement. At the Tarmac group show at McColl Center for Art + Innovation, Dinh provides the context of her practice : "Reflecting on my experiences as a former refugee and woman of color, my work addresses everyday manifestations of cultural identity, memory, and displacement. I explore, through diverse media, the porous boundary between personal and collective history. My observations are at times serious, at others ironic, or even satirical. Formally, I experiment with the physical deconstruction of materials, images, objects, and texts to (re)construct personal experiences and narratives within the greater cultural context of which I am a part" (Dunlap 2019).



The use of found material within Dinh's work suggests a value of discarded items and the lost narratives of the items. I believe this value of repurposing material is informed by a desire to shift the subconscious prejudices fueling oppressive tides of immigration policy that easily disregard the value of foreign-born human life. Like the items she repurposes, Dinh envisions the potential of new life by reimagining the purpose of once discarded items. Visually expressive of the plight one must endure while seeking sanctuary in another land, her illustrations of escape from tyranny are depicted throughout her works. *One Nation...for All* stands out to me as one of Dinh's most emotionally charging works.

As a US Citizen and descendant of American slaves, upon my first engagement with *One Nation...for All* I was reminded of the jarring difference in perspective that our histories have towards the symbol that this work represents. For any individual entering the United States from a foreign background, the possession of US identity represents a life-saving device keeping one afloat towards new opportunities and a new life. I recognized upon my first viewing of this work that I could never see this flag with the same sanctity, given the crimes committed against generations of people like me. For me, *One Nation...for All* represents the distance between the conflicting identity of nationhood and the false promises presented in every declaration of freedom the United States proclaims. Dinh's work creates critical dialogue between the viewer's own socio-political perspective and the present moment of American identity crisis.

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Dunlap, Janelle. "McColl Center Studio Visit." 30 Oct. 2019, pp. 1-5.



*Identity*, 2016. USA passport, eggshells, 5 x 3.5 x .25 in.









*Fuck It.*, 2020. Boxing gloves, handmade clay conversation hearts, foam beads, acrylic, 18 x 13 x 5 in.



*Hard Candy*, 2020. Handmade clay conversation hearts, Cloisonné trinket dishes, 3.5 x .5 in. Private collection.





*Thanks. No Thanks.*, 2020. Speedball, handmade clay conversation hearts, foam beads, acrylic, 11 x 8 x 7.5 in.



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Text:

p.5: Excerpt from *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong (Penguin Press, 2019), p.231

pp. 6-9: *For Whom is Where* by Jen Sudul Edwards, Ph.D.(2020)

p.10: Excerpt from *Traveler's Ode* by Dao Strom (Fonograf Editions/Antiquated Future Records, 2020)

p.15: Excerpt from *White Christmas* by Irving Berlin (Decca Records, 1942)

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p.19: *Spring Watching Pavilion, Spring Essence: The Poetry of Hồ Xuân Hương*, translated by John Balaban (Copper Canyon Press, 2000)

p.20: *gentil* by Calvin Schmidt-Rimpler Dinh, *Mays Anthology XXIV*, University of Cambridge and Oxford University (Varsity Publications, 2016)

p.23: *Fallen Moon, Fallen Stars* by Chuck Sullivan (HEAVEN, world premiere stage production performed by Moving Poets, 2020)

p.26: *Anguish Longer than Sorrow* by Keorapetse Kgositsile, South Africa's National Poet Laureate, 2006

p.28: *The New Colossus*, a sonnet by Emma Lazarus (New York World, 1885)

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p.42: Excerpt from *Doo Wop* by Lauryn Hill, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* (Ruffhouse Records and Columbia Records, 1998)

p.44: Excerpt from *Full transcript: Christine Blasey Ford's opening statement to the Senate Judiciary Committee*, By POLITICO staff 09/26/2018

p.46: Artist notes

pp. 49-50: *One Nation... Under Construction: Reflections on One Nation...For ALL* by Janelle Dunlap (2020)

## MyLoan Dinh

Born in Saigon, Vietnam

School of Arts and Design, Wollongong University, New South Wales, Australia, 1993 - 94

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA, 1990 - 93

Lives in Charlotte, NC; works in Charlotte and Berlin, Germany

MyLoan has exhibited internationally and her work can be found in private and public collections in the United States, Germany and Switzerland, including the Muhammad Ali Museum (Louisville, Kentucky) permanent collection. Notable recent awards and accomplishments include: The Arts & Science Council Creative Renewal Fellowship (2020); Monroe Road Corridor – MoRA public art commission (2020/21); Charlotte Magazine BOB Best Local Artist (2020); Arts & Science Council Individual Artists Project Grant (2020, 2016); Knight Foundation Celebrate Charlotte Grant (2019); McColl Center for Art + Innovation Residency (2019/20); Playing For Others Change Makers Honoree (2019); Community Impact Grant from the Partnership for Democracy, Berlin (2016); Department of Arts and Culture of Berlin Individual Artists Grant (2013, 2012). MyLoan is the founder of an award-winning international multidisciplinary arts outreach and migration project, We See Heaven Upside Down. She is a member of the Asian American Women Artists Association (AAWAA) and the BBK, Professional Association of Visual Artists, Berlin. MyLoan is a mother of two. She works on creative projects with her husband Till Schmidt-Rimpler, founder and artistic director of Moving Poets, in the United States and Germany.



*Color Play* live painting performance, 2018. Moving Poets Charlotte, Hart Witzten Gallery.

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