

Press Release

Make Shift

Phi Phi Oanh

Exhibition Period: 24 June – 27 July 2017



Phi Phi Oanh
Cadastre
2009
Son ta on iron, 75 tiles
L300 x W100 x D0.8cm



Exhibition view at Japan Foundation, Hanoi

Events

Opening Reception
Saturday, 24 June 2017, 3 – 6 pm

Artist's Walk-Through
Sunday, 16 July 2017, 3 – 4 pm

About the Exhibition FOST Gallery is pleased to present *Make Shift* (24 June – 27 August 2017).

Make Shift reflects on the provisional and temporal nature of life while biding our time for the construction of something more enduring. It explores the intimate and often sub-conscious relationship with our living spaces, particularly in the changing urban landscape, and the ways we exercise our will over them. It also contemplates the possibility of how something that is constructed for expediency can later remain and become permanent.

This pictorial installation represents commonplace articles found at many Vietnamese construction sites such as stacks of bricks, a straw mat and aged patterned ceramic tiles. In this show the artist uses the unique and rich visual qualities of the lacquer medium to bring symbolic meaning to the ordinary and banal.

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The process of making a lacquer painting is labourious and deeply tied to the local environment. Natural lacquer (*son ta*) is a sap from a tree indigenous to North Vietnam. In order to achieve the deep metallic effect, the artist applies gold, silver or aluminum leaf or powder between layers of colored lacquer. Each layer of lacquer has to dry at a certain level of humidity before the next layer can be applied making the natural local climate essential. The resultant image is revealed once the artist sands down the layers of lacquer.

Phi Phi Oanh applies the traditional lacquer technique sourcing materials and tools from local craft villages. However she also approaches this medium experimentally, treating the medium as an area of artistic research to explore the critical possibilities of lacquer as painting – using unconventional substrates for lacquer like glass, metal and fiberglass or kevlar composite, allowing her to work with different formats and widening the conceptual approach. In *Make Shift*, lacquer was heat-cured onto iron sheets and bricks, adapting an old Japanese lacquer technique to emphasise the materiality and weight of the subject matter of construction materials. Her representational paintings of mundane items belie the conceptual nature of her practice.

The underlying theme of urbanisation in *Make Shift* is a universal one, experienced by emerging and established cities alike. But it is one especially relevant in Southeast Asia today as new economies such as Myanmar open up and metropolises like Singapore cope with increasing demands on land use. The process of making a lacquer painting is a poignant metaphor for the built environment. A city or a civilisation is built stratum by stratum over a long period of time, akin to the layering technique in lacquer painting. *Cadastre* (2009), a floor sculpture measuring exactly three square metres, visually plots the domestic space per capita allotted for one individual in Hanoi before current urban development. The tile patterns are referenced from the mass-produced ceramic floor tiles, purposely aged to resemble those time worn ones, ubiquitous in old Hanoi buildings. A painting of a straw mat hints at the multiple uses of space in small living compartments; light and portable, it allows the occupants to easily unfurl for use and rolled up to put away.

Perhaps the most impressive piece that is part of the same body of work but not physically in the gallery is *Obelus**, the stacks of bricks at rest, the very basic of building materials, is a nascent totem to the skyscraper, *de rigueur* in any city.

On her brick paintings, Oanh explains

In terms of medium, I also use bricks to explore and reiterate the specificity of Vietnamese lacquer and its capacity for mimesis of surface essences. By painting bricks, I am reminded that the possibilities of the medium of lacquer as painting is not about how it represents matter like an optical trick but rather how it performs a becoming of matter.

* *Obelus* is part of *Lock Route* at Gillman Barracks. It is #8 on the map showing all the public art installations.

About the Artist

Phi Phi Oanh (b.1979) is a Vietnamese American artist who has exhibited internationally in Vietnam, Singapore, United States, China and Japan. Some of her notable exhibitions in Singapore include her monumental installation *Specula* in the Singapore Biennale (2013), and a new body of work (*Pro Se*) commissioned by the National Gallery Singapore for the exhibition *Radiant Material: A Dialogue in Vietnamese Lacquer Painting* (2017), currently being exhibited.

She received her M.A. in Art and Research from the Universidad de Madrid Complutense in Spain and her BFA from Parsons School of Design in New York. She was awarded a Fulbright grant to research lacquer in Hanoi in 2005.

She lives and works in Hanoi, Vietnam.

About Gillman Barracks

Gillman Barracks is a new contemporary art destination in Singapore. Nestled amid lush greenery, this former colonial barracks is now home to local and international art galleries, dining, and creative businesses, as well as the Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA) that opened in late 2013. The CCA enhances the region's contemporary art landscape through its international artist residency, research and exhibition programmes.

For more information, visit please www.gillmanbarracks.com

GILLMAN BARRACKS

Location

FOST Gallery
1 Lock Road
#01-02, Gillman Barracks
Singapore 108932

MRT

Labrador Park

Bus

Opposite Alexandra Point: 51, 57, 61, 93, 97, 97e, 100, 166, 175, 963 or 963e

Gallery Hours

Tue–Sat: 11am–7pm
Sun: 11am–6pm
Mon/Pub Hol: Open by appointment

Admission

Free

Enquiries

Call 6694 3080 or e-mail info@fostgallery.com
