



NAM PHI DANG
SOMEWHERE ELSE

MARCH 2 – APRIL 16, 2017

AGM
ART GALLERY OF MISSISSAUGA



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The AGM is proud to present *Somewhere Else* in the gallery's XIT-RM Project Space. Mississauga-based emerging artist Nam Phi Dang's photo essay invites viewers to see Vietnam through both a personal and journalistic lens. We are pleased to showcase his work alongside Ken Lum's concurrently running exhibition *A Matter of Life and Death*.

Thank you to RBC Foundation for their continuing generous support of this program, to Kendra Ainsworth for curating this exhibition, and for the collaborative support of AGM staff members Sadaf Zuberi, Laura Carusi, Melanie Lowe, Sharada Eswar, Rhéanne Chartrand, and Jessica Palada, and our incredible roster of volunteers.

ARTIST BIO

Nam Phi Dang is a photographer based in Mississauga. His work was selected for Magenta's Flash Forward 2016, a competition for emerging photographers in Canada, the UK and the US, and his photojournalism has been featured in Toronto Life, Vice and the Globe and Mail.

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

Nam Phi Dang is a close observer of his own life and the lives of others through the lens of a camera, capturing quiet, fleeting moments that might at first appear superficially mundane, but which have an uncanny, otherworldly dream-like quality to them. While this duality and contrast is played out in the visual language of the works themselves, which straddles the realms of iPhone and Instagram photography and traditional photojournalism, it also evidences the complexities inherent in the diasporic consciousness.

The work in this exhibition is part of a larger photo essay that grew from a 2015 trip that the artist took to Vietnam, the country his parents left before he was born. Dang went hoping to find a sense of connection with his heritage, but also hoping to experience something of that mix of wonder and bewilderment that is often produced when exploring a place that is less than familiar. However, the reality of the experience was surprising. Instead of finding the place documented in family photographs, Dang found a Vietnam that was neither familiar in the way that he was expecting, nor as different from his experiences growing up in Canada as he had anticipated.

The title of the series, *Somewhere Else*, is itself an equivocal one. It is suggestive of a desire for escape—to anywhere else but here—but also of a search for belonging and connection. Dang speaks of his experience of being born and raised in a country other than that of his parents and feeling a sense of disconnect between ideas of home and heritage. While there is an impulse to seek out a connection with a place that one may never have seen, the reality of “somewhere else” that is at the same time “home” is often quite different than what cultural nostalgia will dictate.

This duality is addressed in recent scholarship in visual culture on the practices of artists from diasporic communities, in particular through the concept of the multiple viewpoint: a place of in-betweenness that emerges when negotiating through both, and yet neither the frames of a dominant Western viewpoint nor that of a subject whose cultural background has been on the receiving end of objectification by colonial ideology.¹ In the case of Dang’s work, this multivocality is played out in the use of the figure in his work, as he turns a similarly dispassionate, ethnographic eye to the eerie statue of the Monkey King emerging from fog-shrouded vegetation, as to a group of young people taking selfies in front of a public monument.

This play and negotiation between the familiar and the unknown, the expected and the unusual, creates a space for contemplation; one which invites questions of how we understand and frame where we are from and how it influences our perspectives of the world around us.

¹ This concept is well articulated by Kate McFarlane in her article, “Diaspora, Cultural Practice and Syncretic Visuality,” in *Journal of Intercultural Studies* Vol. 25, 2, 2004.

IMAGE CREDIT

Cover

Nam Phi Dang, *Flower Village in Hanoi*, 2015, C-print

Inside

Nam Phi Dang, *Royal City in Hanoi*, 2015, C-print

ARTIST TALK

Sunday, March 12, 1 pm

XIT-RM

The XIT-RM is a project space dedicated to showcasing the work of emerging artists in the GTA and Mississauga region. Artists are selected annually by the gallery's curatorial team to exhibit work that honours the mission and mandate of the AGM, with an emphasis on contemporary art and critical engagement.

The XIT-RM is generously sponsored by the RBC Foundation.



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First. New. Next. The AGM provides platforms for exhibitions, collections and experimentation in contemporary culture with a recent focus on artists and cultural producers from Indigenous, newcomer and youth communities. Through a broad range of educational programs, artist projects and other forms of critical dialogue, the AGM seeks to transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries, foster community, and provide spaces where alternative modes of thought are supported and activated in tangible ways.

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