

RETURN TO ROOTS

THE WORK OF A YOUNG VIETNAMESE AMERICAN ARTIST CHALLENGES THE STATUS QUO.

WORDS DAVID LLOYD BUGLAR

Rising artist Gabby Quynh-Anh Miller is hard to pin down. Raised in a mixed American-Vietnamese family compound in Berkeley, California, growing up she was surrounded by “more deer and skunk than contemporary art”.

She first began visiting Vietnam in the early 1990s, as the single-party state began to open up to the world. In 2005, while in college, she bought a one-way ticket to Vietnam and found work in art galleries there. Later returning to school, she wrote her anthropology thesis on experimental art in Hanoi.

An important point in her artistic and personal life came when she met Nguyen Phuong Linh, one of the most important and exciting young Vietnamese artists of her generation. Since then, the pair have enjoyed a fruitful ongoing relationship – often acting as confidantes and collaborators.

She is also heavily invested in Nha San Studio in Hanoi. Established in 1998, Nha San was the first artist-led, non-profit alternative arts organisation in Vietnam. In a restrictive cultural and political environment, Nha San acts as an open space for artistic experimentation, transmission and exposure. It is positioned as an alternative to the commercial- and state-driven art realms.

With no intention of restricting herself to a signature medium (past works have been in the form of video, sculpture, painting, installation, and posters), Miller's current project sees her working with a steel shipping container. For *Logistics From Land and Sea (For Giang and Nam)*, she acquired a section of container that had been damaged at sea and painted it with oils borrowed from her friend's studio in the Vietnamese capital, Hanoi. For research, she studied the history of container cargo through field trips to Oakland Port.

The connection between the adoption of containerisation as a form of transport, and the ratcheting up of the Vietnam War by the US government are narrative arcs that are personal for the multi-ethnic Miller. Planning to transport art and artwork from Hanoi to the Bay area in the United States, the artist is reversing the route of containerhips full of supplies for the Vietnam War that started leaving from these exact ports in 1967. nhasanstudio.org



(LOGISTICS FROM LAND TO SEA) IMAGE CORINNA KARG, COURTESY OF SOMARTS CULTURAL CENTER. (DREAM OF THINGS THAT HAVE NOT BEEN BUT SOMEDAY WILL BE) IMAGE COURTESY OF NGUYEN MINH THANH. (NGUYEN PHUONG LINH AND GABBY MILLER) IMAGE LU YANG LU YANG ASIA