

FFOTO

Olivia Marty: 727 Project

In 'recOLlectiOn', my work took as a starting point childhood memories, family photographs from the 1950s, whereupon I reconstructed and re-enacted scenes from the past in the present-day Ho Chi Minh City. Here in my new photographic project named '727', the scene also takes place in the economic heart of Vietnam but the present is taking over the past by capturing the 'haunted' 727 Tran Hung Dao historic building threatened by the wrecking ball. In both projects, I alternate between different modes of artistic expression - projection, photography, moving objects - and the relationship between then and now is ubiquitous.

FROM RICHES TO RUIN

Built as military housing for U.S. soldiers during the American War, '727' is one of the many old apartment buildings built in Saigon before 1975 that doesn't hold significant historical value.

Commissioned by millionaire Nguyen Tan Doi, the 530-room building was nevertheless a massive undertaking when it was completed in 1960 and was divided into 6 blocks and 13 floors. 13 was an unlucky number to begin with and the building's French architect warned Doi about this inauspicious figure. It was not until they finished the 13th floor that many deadly accidents began to happen, frightening workers. As the story goes, to sooth their fears, Doi had had a shaman address the structure's spiritual deficiencies, secretly buying from a hospital the dead bodies of four virgins, buried them at four corners of the building, which, according to Feng Shui, would protect it unsavoury spiritual guests.

The President Building was finally finished and good luck prevailed; Doi was delighted when the US Army chose to rent the entire building to house its soldiers.

This building, which once teemed with life, now stands nearly vacant. At the height of its occupancy, in the 80s and 90s, some 600 families (2,500 inhabitants) made it their home. Today, however, the building is a rapidly decaying shadow of its former self. While most of the living souls have left, there are many stories of supernatural activities within its walls.

Their walls tell the stories of those who have come and gone – each room similar but unique in the way those who have gone before have left their mark – and the ravages of time and neglect slowly transforming and erasing their trace. No longer valued, the building and its residents – along with their wealth of memories – are an inconvenience to be removed to make way for clean, shiny progress.

Flaunting raw urban decay, for years, photographers and urban explorers have accessed the building's abandoned apartments, rusting stairwells and damp corridors.. There is a ghostly atmosphere to the place : stairwells and corridors are filled with discreet shadows who survive while waiting until they have to let the demolition teams take over. In the staircase this graffiti is found on several floors. « Ma » which means ghost. The building is thought to be haunted and the inhabitants willingly believe in the ghosts that haunt many Vietnamese legends.

'Haunted' 727 Tran Hung Dao To Be Demolished, 7 April 2015, saigoneer.com

ARTIST STATEMENT

The monocular vision through these photographs is an allegory of the departure revolving around a subtle complexity of layers which are indistinctly in search of nuance, gravity and radiance. These photographs have evolved through a process of intuition, improvisation as well as experimentation.

My photographs are atmospheric abstractions of recollection, memory -these are meant as standstill places, transcendent escapes from our chaotic and complex world. These photographs are entry points to the rhythms and the quiet mysteries of our lives, reflecting our unfathomable search for human connection.

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

-T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding", Four Quartets

This project is driven by the need to retain the memory of lost murals with photographs but not only.

The discarded materials I choose to work with have a transcendent, almost dark beauty. While the original function of the fragments is at first unfamiliar, closer inspection reveals bits of gray-blue beadboard and shiny gameboard, alongside frames, metal springs, and what appear to be drawer fronts and other furniture parts with dowels still protruding. In this respect, this raw energy stimulates the imagination as the viewer's eye searches for familiar forms among the fragments, which requires one to seek new meanings and interpretations.

Through anonymous, abandoned materials such as old doors, scrap plywood panels and other detritus of daily life, we can sense people's traces, the motions of time and the eternal cycle of life and death in them which reveals the existence of a world beyond the 'material'.

Just as nature, communities, and humanity go through cycles of growth, decay, and rebirth, materials once activated by use and then discarded find new life here as art. As we contemplate what is absent from what is present, that which was abandoned is found again, without evoking those daunting feelings of loss and loneliness. Humanity's spirit can be discovered in its refuse, as we can see renewal in ruin. We begin to look at the remnants around us from the outside in.

These photographs reflect its subject faithfully, but upon closer investigation they reveal more than meets the eye. In a sense, they become transparent under scrutiny and reveal a hidden narrative, a memory etched into its paper surface and perhaps, show that our world is not hopelessly lost in the anarchy of the universe and its violent wilderness.

French version

Chinatown, le quartier chinois à Saïgon : au numéro 727 du boulevard Tran Hung Dao, se trouve un bâtiment colossal constitué de six blocs de treize étages. Il a été achevé en 1960 et a servi d'« hôtel » aux GI's américains jusqu'en 1975. Après la victoire du Vietminh, le Vietnam communiste y logeait ses apparatchiks et autres gradés de l'Armée populaire et, ensuite, ses petits fonctionnaires dans les années 1980-90. Ce bâtiment, jadis plein de vie, est maintenant vide et on le dit hanté : ordre a été donné, il y a trois ans, d'exproprier ses habitants pour faire place à l'arrivée des grues et engins de démolition de promoteurs immobiliers asiatiques, spéculation foncière oblige –le nouveau Vietnam, moderne et converti au chantre du capitalisme. capitaliste.

La vision monoculaire que permet le grand miroir, à travers ces photographies, est une allégorie de la disparition. Je mets ici en scène une complexité subtile de différentes couches, à la recherche d'un résultat indéfinissable mélangeant solennité et rayonnement. Ce projet est le fruit d'un processus d'intuition, d'improvisation et d'expérimentation.

Ces photographies constituent des abstractions atmosphériques de la mémoire –elles sont conçues comme des espaces immuables, des échappées qui transcendent notre monde chaotique et complexe. Les photographies de « 727 » constituent des points d'entrée aux mystères silencieux de nos vies, reflétant notre recherche insondable du rapport à autrui.

Nous n'aurons de cesse d'explorer,
Et la fin de toutes nos explorations
Sera de revenir à l'endroit d'où nous sommes partis
Et de connaître le lieu pour la première fois.
T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding", Quatre Quatuors (trad. C. Vigée)

Il ne s'agit pas seulement de capturer la mémoire des vieux murs. Les objets et matériaux mis au rebut dans cet immeuble « fantôme », avec lesquels je choisis de travailler, ont cette beauté transcendante, presque sombre. Nous parvenons à sentir dans ces images les traces de ces hommes et femmes –anciens habitants, les mouvements du temps et le cycle éternel de la vie et de la mort qui révèle l'existence d'un monde au-delà du physique, du matériel.

Tout comme la nature et nos communautés humaines traversent des cycles de croissance, de décomposition et de renaissance, les objets épars et abandonnés dans « 727 » trouvent une nouvelle vie ici en tant qu'éléments d'expression artistique. L'esprit de cette diaspora –désormais économique– peut être découvert dans ces déchets, le renouvellement dans les ruines. Ces photographies reflètent fidèlement leurs sujets et révèlent un récit de vie (certes, caché), une mémoire gravée sur une surface éphémère, pour nous démontrer que notre monde n'est peut-être pas perdu dans l'anarchie violente et dépouillée de notre univers.