

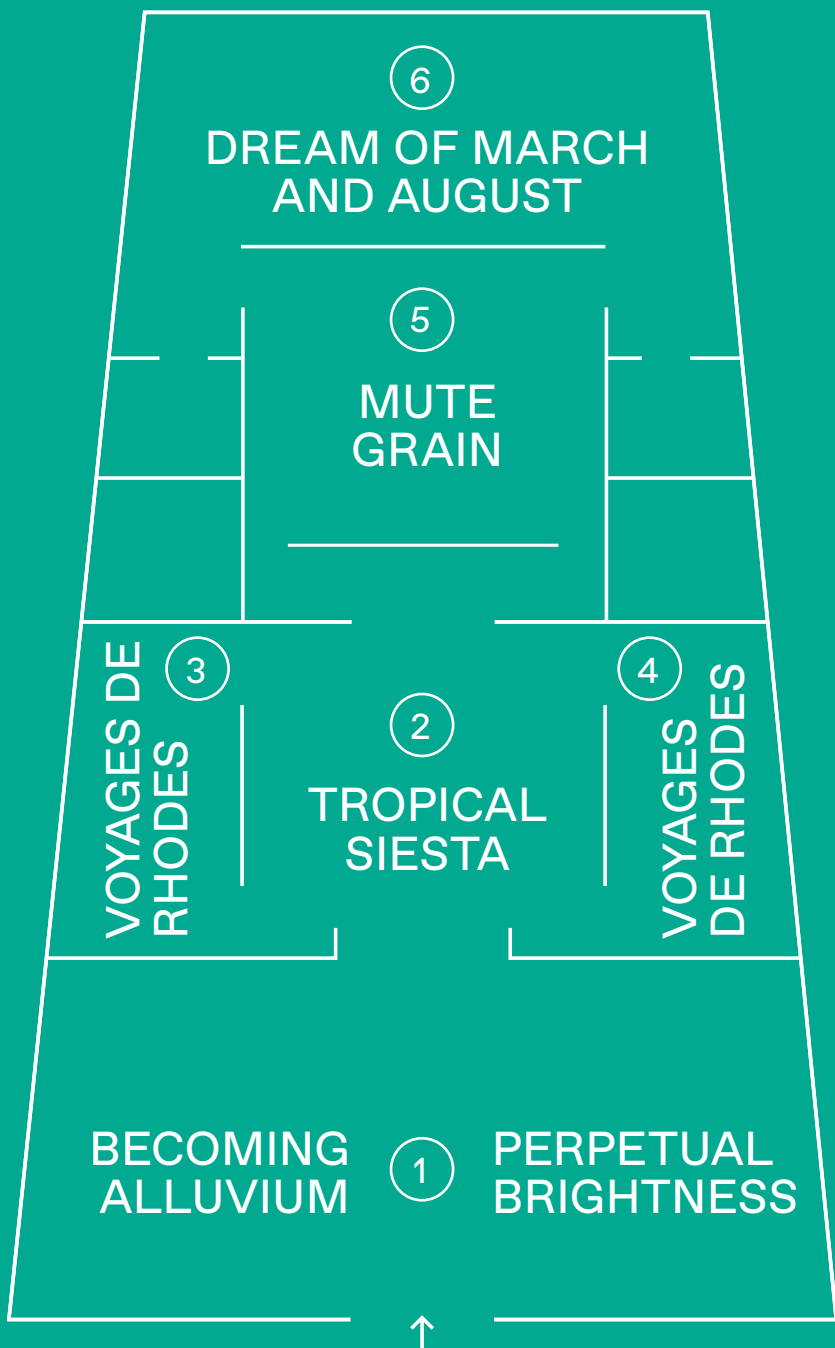
WIELS

THAO
NGUYEN
PHAN

MONSOON
MELODY

01.02 – 16.08.2020

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INTRODUCTION

Monsoon Melody features a trilogy of video installations by Thao Nguyen Phan – *Tropical Siesta* (2017), *Mute Grain* (2019) and *Becoming Alluvium* (2019) – which take a poetic approach to pressing questions such as food security and our ecological responsibilities. Each film is accompanied by a series of paintings whose dreamlike imagery evoking folk- or fairy-tales is undercut by the suggestion of violence.

Phan draws from the rich and turbulent history of her native country, Vietnam. Her work transgresses a purely historical point of view to incorporate an interest in literature and language. Through storytelling, mixing official and unofficial history, it challenges what she describes as political amnesia. She reveals the forgotten while proposing an alternative present-day reality infused with beauty.

Phan's key protagonists are often children and much of her filmed material is improvised. For *Tropical Siesta*, she cast her cousins and their neighbours. "They guided me to many of their play spots and I developed the script following their daily activities. Sometimes I just followed them and that was when the magic occurred." Like her mentor Joan Jonas, Phan allows herself a great freedom to play and embraces a visual language that could risk being seen as naïve or sentimental. Phan, however, embraces sentimentality in its original meaning: as the reliance on feelings as a guide to truth.

She has spoken of how working with these rural children has changed her approach to making work and seeing the world: "Vietnam is developing rapidly economically. That creates great environmental damage and a huge gap between rich and poor (even if we are officially socialists). This social injustice must anger anyone with a soul. I am sad for the kind of education offered to these children, and admire their ability to be pure and happy in any situation. I am sad that in the development of the country, people forget the people in the countryside, and for me the beautiful landscape of the Vietnamese countryside is a landscape of hidden trauma. The children taught me to respect the poetics of everyday, the preciousness of life. I cannot help but be thankful for that."

CURATORS: ZOË GRAY (WIELS)
& HILDE TEERLINCK (HAN NEFKENS FOUNDATION)

Text by Zoë Gray. All quotations of the artist taken from the accompanying book *Monsoon Melody*.