

CONDITION 01: SUNG TIEU
MOVING TARGET
SHADOW DETECTION

DECEMBER 10, 2022 - JANUARY 14, 2023

FITZPATRICK GALLERY
123 RUE DE TURENNE
75003 PARIS

F I T Z P A T R I C K

TEXT (ENG)

A nano drone, deployed as an observer, wanders through the corridors of the Hotel Nacional de Cuba. The images are juxtaposed with views from surveillance cameras placed at various corners of the hallway, forming distant instances targeting each other. The hotel, in its Spanish eclectic style, with its emerald checkerboard tiled floor and 1930s-style furniture, is deserted. The drone takes the viewer into an occupied suite: camera equipment, a phone and computer devices, an open suitcase with personal belongings, and classified documents from the U.S. government are left scattered across two rooms. The television, still on, shows a news report in which Kamala Harris evades reporters' questions about the potential threat of a sonic attack called 'Havana Syndrome'. Through ventilation shafts, smoke gradually fills the hotel causing a dizzying effect.

Built in 1930 and initially run by American entrepreneurs, the hotel, located in Vedado, Havana, is emblematic of the city's tumultuous political history. In 2017, U.S. intelligence officers staying at the Hotel Nacional reported feeling sick from a mysterious illness, reinforcing suspicions of a targeted attack. Symptoms, potentially caused by buzzing sound, ranging from a sense of pressure in the skull to feeling dizzy, and having difficulty breathing. By late September 2017, U.S. embassy staff in Havana was reduced by more than 60 percent, effectively closing the U.S. Consulate. Considered by the U.S. government to be a foreign political attack, research into Havana Syndrome has never reached a definite verdict until today.

With her latest film *Moving Target Shadow Detection* (2022), Sung Tieu continues her research into systems of psychological warfare and the political agency of information. Departing from her investigations into PSYOPS (Psychological Operations of the U.S. army) and more specifically Ghost Tape No. 10, the sonic weapon produced by U.S. officials and deployed during the war in Vietnam, the new video work draws parallels between that eponymous ghost tape and Havana Syndrome.

For her series *Exposure to Havana Syndrome*, the Berlin-based Vietnamese artist conducted experiments with the reconstruction of the alleged sonic attack, which the U.S. government released as evidence in order to analyze its supposed repercussions. The results of the MRI scans of her brain showed that the parts responsible for image creation were particularly active, implying the potential of its imaginative abilities. By drawing parallels between the experiences reported by U.S. officials and her own, Tieu forms a counter-narrative questioning the impact of news readings and the way we consume information; its lack of neutrality, and its subjective potentialities. For if indeed this presupposed Havana Syndrome had been widely presented as a tactic of invisible war by the media groups of North America, it had also participated in the skepticism of the U.S. population towards external authorities, at the same time that Donald Trump was entering the White House.

- Hugo Bausch Belbachir

CONDITION 01: SUNG TIEU. MOVING TARGET SHADOW DETECTION

TEXT (ENG)

Condition is a series of video exhibitions presented at Fitzpatrick Gallery (Paris) intermittently, curated by Hugo Bausch Belbachir, focusing on moving image works that examine situational responses to a given environment or circumstance. The opening chapter of the ongoing program will commence with Sung Tieu's *Moving Target Shadow Detection*.

Sung Tieu (b. 1987, Hai Duong, Vietnam) lives and works in Berlin, Germany. Her solo exhibition *Civic Floor*, curated by Michelle Cotton, is currently on view at MUDAM, Luxembourg, until February 5, 2023. Previous solo exhibitions include Kunstverein Gartenhaus (Vienna); Kunstmuseum Bonn (Bonn); Nottingham Contemporary (Nottingham); Stedelijk Commission (Amsterdam); Haus der Kunst (Munich); Fragile (Berlin); Royal Academy of Arts (London) and group exhibitions at Kunsthalle Basel (Basel), Kunst Museum Winterthur (Winterthur); Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art (Oslo); Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam); Hamburger Bahnhof (Berlin); Kyiv Biennial 2021 (Kyiv); Kunstverein Hannover (Hannover); Taipei Fine Arts Museum (Taipei); 34th Biennial de São Paulo (São Paulo); Kunsthalle Basel (Basel); Kunsthau Hamburg (Hamburg) amongst others.

Moving Target Shadow Detection was commissioned for the Frieze Artist Award 2021 by Forma and Frieze.

Special thanks to Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg/Beirut and Emalin, London.

TEXT (FR)

Un nano-drone, déployé en éclaireur, déambule dans les couloirs de l’Hôtel Nacional de Cuba. Les images sont juxtaposées avec les vues de caméras de surveillance placées à chaque coin des pièces, formant des instances qui se cible. L’hôtel, dans son style éclectique Espagnol, avec son carrelage en damier émeraude et son mobilier de style 1930, est désert. Le drone se dirige vers une suite occupée : du matériel photographique, un téléphone, des appareils informatiques, une valise ouverte avec des effets personnels, et des documents classés du gouvernement Etats-Unien sont éparpillés dans les deux pièces. La télévision, toujours allumée, retranscrit un journal télévisé dans lequel Kamala Harris contourne les questions des journalistes quand à la menace potentielle d’une attaque sonore, appelée «Havana Syndrome». Par les conduits d’aération, une fumée envahit progressivement l’hôtel, empêchant le drone de s’y disperser.

Construit en 1930 et géré par des entrepreneurs américains, l’hôtel, situé dans le quartier de Vedado à La Havane, est emblématique de l’histoire politique de la ville. En 2017, des officiers du renseignement Etats-Unien séjournant à l’hôtel Nacional ont déclaré s’être sentis atteint d’une maladie mystérieuse, renforçant les soupçons d’une attaque ciblée. Les symptômes, causés par un bourdonnement, variaient d’une sensation de pression dans le crâne à des vertiges, en passant par des difficultés à respirer. En Septembre 2017, les effectifs de l’ambassade des États-Unis à activité à La Havane ont été réduits de plus de 60 %, entraînant la fermeture du Consulat. Considérée par le

Gouvernement Etats-Unis comme une attaque politique étrangère, la recherche autour du Havana Syndrome n’a, jusque’à aujourd’hui, jamais abouti à un verdict définitif.

Avec *Moving Target Shadow Detection* (2022), Sung Tieu poursuit ses recherches sur les systèmes de guerre psychologique et l’agencement politique de l’information, s’inspirant de ses recherches sur les PSYOPS (Psychological Operations of the U.S. army) et plus particulièrement Ghost Tape No. 10, l’arme sonore produite par les Américains et déployée pendant la guerre du Vietnam. Son nouveau projet vidéo établit des parallèles entre cette bande fantôme éponyme et le syndrome de La Havane.

Pour sa série de travaux *Exposure to Havana Syndrome*, l’artiste Vietnamiennne basée à Berlin a mené des expériences à partir des reconstitutions de la prétendue attaque sonore utilisées par le Gouvernement Etats-Uniens comme preuves tangibles, et afin d’analyser, sur elle-même, ses répercussions supposées. Les résultats des examens IRM de son cerveau ont montré que les parties responsables de la création d’images étaient particulièrement actives, ce qui implique le potentiel de ses capacités imaginatives. En établissant des parallèles entre les expériences rapportées par les socialistes américains et les siennes, Tieu forme un contre-récit qui remet en question l’impact de la lecture des nouvelles et la façon dont nous consommons l’information, son manque de neutralité et ses potentialités subjectives. Car si effectivement ce présumé Syndrome de La Havane

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a été largement présenté comme une tactique de guerre invisible par les groupes médiatiques d’Amérique du Nord, il a également participé au scepticisme de la population américaine envers les autorités extérieures, au moment même où Donald Trump entrait à la Maison Blanche. d’Amérique du Nord, il a également participé au scepticisme de la population américaine envers les autorités extérieures, au moment même où Donald Trump entrait à la Maison Blanche.

- Hugo Bausch Belbachir

Sung Tieu (née en 1987 à Hai Duong, Vietnam) vit et travaille à Berlin, en Allemagne. Son exposition personnelle *Civic Floor*, organisée par Michelle Cotton, est actuellement présentée au MUDAM (Luxembourg) jusqu’au 5 février 2023. Parmi ses précédentes expositions personnelles, citons le Kunstverein Gartenhaus (Vienne), Kunstmuseum Bonn (Bonn), Nottingham Contemporary (Nottingham), la Commission Stedelijk (Amsterdam), Haus der Kunst (Munich), Fragile (Berlin), la Royal Academy of Arts (Londres) et des expositions collectives à la Kunsthalle Basel (Bâle), Kunst Museum Winterthur (Winterthur) ; Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art (Oslo) ; Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam) ; Hamburger Bahnhof (Berlin) ; Kyiv Biennial 2021 (Kyiv) ; Kunstverein Hannover (Hanovre) ; Taipei Fine Arts Museum (Taipei) ; 34th Biennial de São Paulo (São Paulo) ; Kunsthalle Basel (Basel) ; Kunsthaus Hamburg (Hamburg) entre autres.

Condition est une série d’expositions pensées autour de pratiques vidéos et présentée à la Fitzpatrick Gallery (Paris) de manière intermittente, organisée par Hugo Bausch Belbachir.

Moving Target Shadow Detection a été commandée pour le Frieze Artist Award 2021 par Forma et Frieze.

Nous remercions particulièrement à la galerie Sfeir-Semler, Hambourg et Emalin, Londres.

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Sung Tieu
Moving Target Shadow Detection
HD video Installation (18:56min)
Fitzpatrick Gallery
Dec 10, 2022 - Jan 14, 2023
Courtesy of the artist and Fitzpatrick Gallery, Paris

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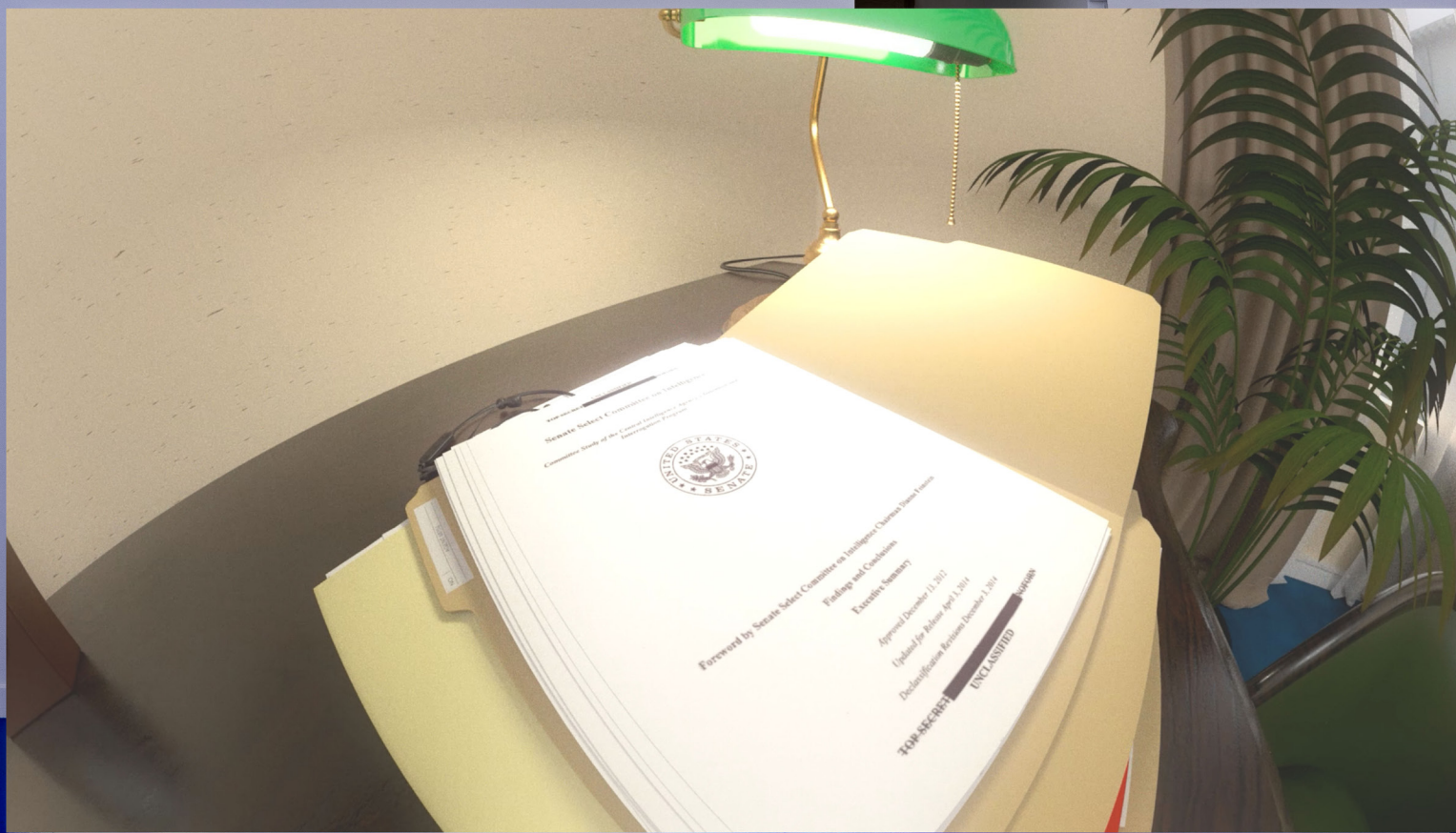
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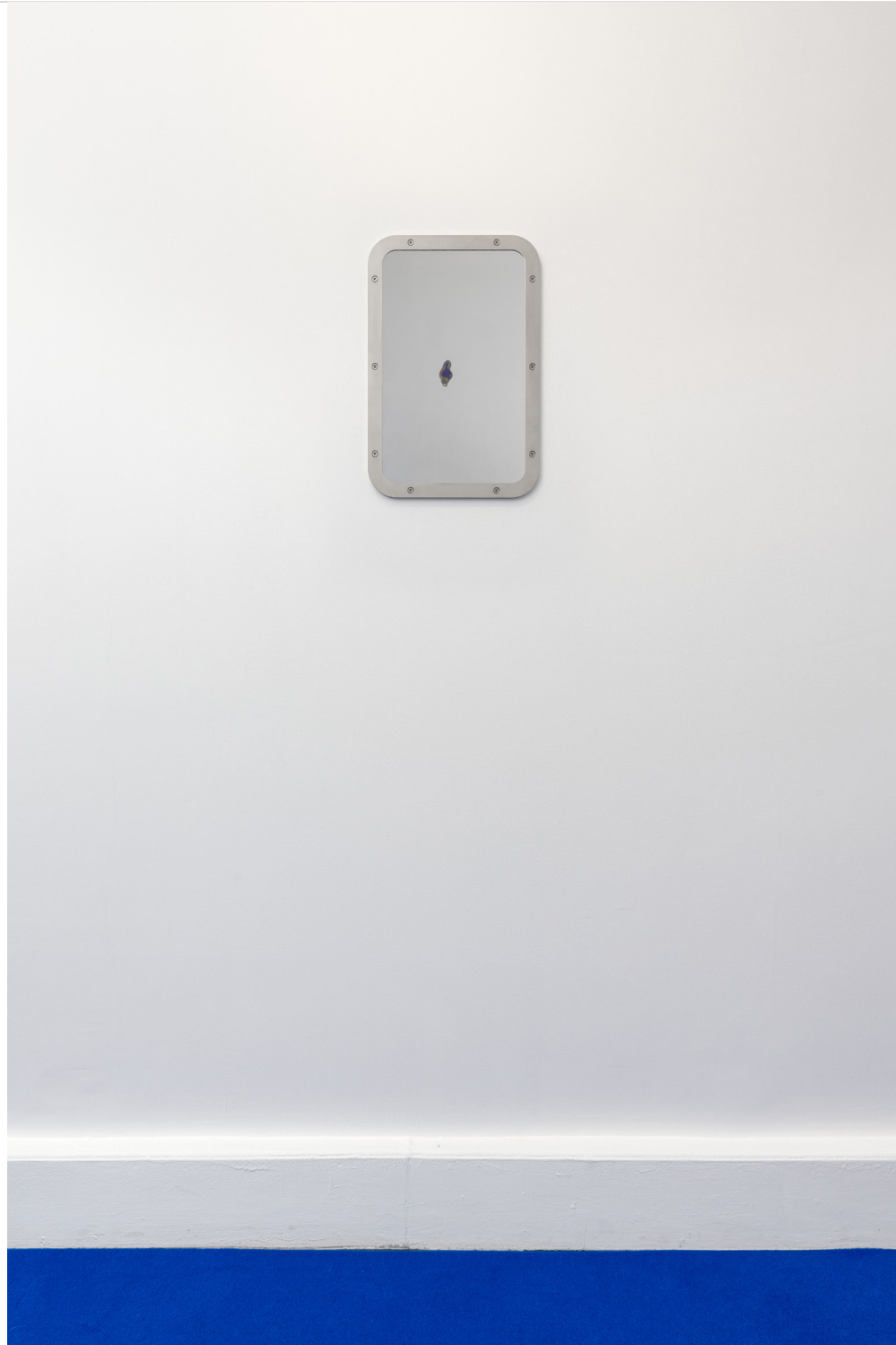
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*Exposure To Havana Syndrome, Brain Anatomy, Sagittal Plane
(Sample 1), 2022*
Laser engraving on stainless steel prison mirror
45 x 30cm
17 3/4 x 11 3/4 in.
Edition of 1 plus 1AP
Dec 10, 2022 - Jan 14, 2023
Courtesy of the artist and Fitzpatrick Gallery, Paris

CONDITION 01: SUNG TIEU. MOVING TARGET SHADOW DETECTION



Exposure To Havana Syndrome, Brain Anatomy, Sagittal Plane (Sample 2), 2022
Laser engraving on stainless steel prison mirror
45 x 30cm
17 3/4 x 11 3/4 in.
Edition of 1 plus 1AP
Dec 10, 2022 - Jan 14, 2023
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SUNG TIEU - CV

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2022 *CONDITION 01 : SUNG TIEU – Moving Target Sadow Detection*, Fitzpatrick Gallery, Paris, France
Everything Or Nothing, Sfeir Semler, Hamburg, Germany
Sung Tieu Hotel Nacional de Cuba, Kunstverein Gartenhaus, Vienna, Austria
- 2021 *Solo Presentation Frieze London*, Emalin, London, England
Sung Tieu – Fall, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Bonn, Germany
Sung Tieu, Stedelijk Museum Commission, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Multiboy, Stiftung Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany
- 2020 *What is your |x|?*, Emalin, London, England
In Cold Print, Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham, England
Zugzwang, Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany
- 2019 *Park Piece*, Fragile, Berlin, Germany
Formative Years on Dearth, Parrhesiades, The Yard & Flat Time House, London, England
Loveless, Piper Keys, London, UK
- 2018 *Song for Unattended Items*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, England
- 2017 *Remote Viewing*, Nha San Collective, Hanoi, Vietnam

Coral Sea as Rolling Thunder, Art Basel Statements, Basel, Switzerland
Memory Dispute, Sfeir-Semler Galerie, Hamburg, Germany

- 2015 *Emotion Refuge*, Micky Schubert, Berlin, Germany
Alien Refuge, FIAC Art Fair, Paris, France
Subnational Enterprise, Dong Xuan Center & Kinderhook & Caracas, Berlin, Germany
- 2014 *TROI OI*, in various Vietnamese flower shops in Berlin's subway stations, Berlin, Germany

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2022 *Mostly Sunny*, FRAGILE, Berlin, Germany
Capc - Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux, France
Prolog: Revolutionary Romances, Albertinum Dresden, Dresden, Germany
World out of Joint, Kunst Museum Winterthur, Winterthur, Switzerland
INFORMATION (Today), Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, Norway
Tomorrow is a Different Day, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Hand to your ear, Part 2 (noise/silence), Emalin, London, England
- 2021 *Nation, Narration, Narcosis: Collecting Entanglements and Embodied Histories*, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, Germany

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SUNG TIEU - CV

Allied, Kyiv Biennial 2021, Kyiv, Ukraine
Endless Garment 2, X Museum, Beijing, China
Stars Down to Earth, Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin, Germany
Ars Viva 2021, Kunstverein Hannover, Hannover, Germany
Histories Of A Forever War, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, Taiwan
Atonal Festival, Berlin, Germany
Though It's Dark, I Still Sing, 34th Bienal de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil
Preis der Nationalgalerie, Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin, Germany
TECHNO, Museion, Bolzano, Italy
INFORMATION (Today), Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, Switzerland
Studio Berlin, Berghain, Berlin, Germany
Pop Up: Artist Running #3 by soda, Void+, Tokyo, Japan
A Sculpture in Search of an Author, LAYR, Vienna, Austria
Last Year, Your Palm Trees, Antenna Space, Shanghai, China
Collecting Dissonance, Auto Italia, London, England
HI-STORYTELLING, Sfeir Semler, Hamburg, Germany
For Refusal, Transmediale, Berlin, Germany
Benefit of the Doubt, Deborah Schamoni, Munich, Germany

2020 *Listening: Resonant Worlds*, Arts Maebashi, Tokyo, Japan
Ars Viva 2021, Museum Angewandte Kunst, Frankfurt, Germany
In the Forest, Even the Air Breathes, GAMeC Museum,

Bergamo, Italy
Paranoia TV, steirischer herbst '20, Kleine Zeitung, Graz and Klagenfurt, Austria
Magical Soup, Hamburger Bahnhof Museum for Gegenwart, Berlin, Germany
Touch, Peles Empire, Berlin, Germany
Recession Grimace, Klosterruine, Berlin, Germany
Come closer, Biennale Matter of Art Prague, Prague, Czech Republic
Nameless. echoes, spectres, hisses, A.I. Gallery, London, England
REALITY, Tropez, Berlin, Germany
Real Time, Seventeen, London, England
Platform: London, David Zwirner Online, London, England

2019 *We shall survive in the memory of others*, Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin, Germany
The Season of Cartesian Weeping, East London Cable, David Roberts Foundation, London, England
back there, Kunstverein Tiergarten, Berlin, Germany
The Ghost War, WTF Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand
Mercury, Tallinn Art Hall, Tallinn, Estonia
While I Kiss The Sky, Gabriele Senn Galerie, Vienna, Austria
Empty Vase, Vacancy Gallery, Shanghai, China
Open Studios, Villa Romana, Florence, Italy
Hybrid, Kunsthau Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany
Deep Sounding - History as multiple narratives, DAAD Galerie, Berlin, Germany
S/F Photography, or a Monolith after 200 years, Kayoko Yuki Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
Artists Use Photography, Praz Delavallade Gallery, Los Angeles, USA

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VIDEO



<https://www.frieze.com/artistaward-2021>

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PRESS SELECTION

FRIEZE - SUNG TIEU ON HAVANA SYNDROME

FRIEZE

FEATURES & INTERVIEWS EXHIBITION REVIEWS OPINION WATCH & LISTEN FAIRS & EVENTS SHOP



Sung Tieu On Havana Syndrome

Tieu's film *Moving Target Shadow Detection* (2021), commissioned for this year's Frieze Artist Award, investigates a mysterious condition



BY CHLOE STEAD IN FRIEZE LONDON, FRIEZE WEEK MAGAZINE, PROFILES | 14 OCT 21

Perched on a sofa in her crowded Berlin studio, Sung Tieu clicks through photographs of a generic-looking hotel on her laptop. With its dark wood furniture, satin bedsheets and heavy curtains in muted colours, there's little to distinguish the government-owned Hotel Nacional from any number of five-star establishments in Havana: let alone to suggest this was allegedly the location, in 2017, of a 'sonic attack' on US embassy staff staying there.

'Havana Syndrome', the mysterious condition which purportedly resulted from attacks such as this one, is the topic of Tieu's upcoming film, *Moving Target Shadow Detection* (2021), commissioned for this year's **Frieze Artist Award**, having fascinated the artist since she first heard about it in 2017. Earlier this year, she reached out to veteran journalist Jon Lee Anderson, whose 2018 article for *The New Yorker*, 'The Mystery of the Havana syndrome', is one of the most detailed accounts of what might – or might not – have happened in Cuba. 'There are so many unanswered questions,' Tieu reflects. 'How can such a weapon only penetrate certain rooms without affecting the other guests? And how can no one have seen it? One of the things that I really enjoy about this research is that even an expert like Anderson can't fully tell me how it works.'



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FRIEZE - SUNG TIEU ON HAVANA SYNDROME



Sung Tieu, *Exposure To Havana Syndrome, Brain Anatomy, Coronal Plane, (Sample 5)*, 2021. Courtesy: the artist, Emalin, London; Photography: Hans-Georg Gaul

Here is what we do know: in December 2016, CIA officers in Havana started reporting symptoms – including nausea, headaches, ear pain, fatigue, insomnia and sluggishness – which they associated with loud sounds heard in their homes. Aided by what Jack Hitt, writing in 2019 for *Vanity Fair*, termed ‘a side helping of Cold War envy’, the idea was quickly developed in the media that this was an act of war by an enemy state, leading the Pentagon, FBI and CIA to launch their own investigations. Over the subsequent five years, reports of US diplomats, intelligence officers and other government officials experiencing Havana syndrome-related symptoms have spread to other cities, including Guangzhou, London and Moscow. In June, Vienna reportedly became the latest target of these stealth ‘attacks’.

Interested in how an otherwise apparently innocuous location became a place of such political significance, Tieu had originally planned to film in the Hotel Nacional, until COVID-19 restrictions and the resulting uprisings in Cuba made it impossible for her to travel. Instead, she is currently working with a motion designer to re-create the hotel in 3D from available online images. ‘We’re really trying to understand the infrastructure of the building – the piping, the ventilation system, the air conditioning,’ she says. ‘The question is not necessarily: did it happen, but how could it have happened?’



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FRIEZE - SUNG TIEU ON HAVANA SYNDROME



Sung Tieu, *No Gods, No Masters*, 2017, video still. Courtesy: the artist, Emalin, London and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut/Hamburg

Following reports that the sound of the weapon resembles chirping crickets, Tieu's narrative unfurls from the perspective of an insect, enabling her to translate the confusion surrounding the Havana syndrome into the visual language of the film itself. 'Insects see and move so differently from humans,' Tieu explains. 'I want to create something where the wall of the hotel room becomes a landscape, since most insects fly in such a way that the wall is equally the floor.' As in earlier films such as *No Gods, No Masters* (2017), which explores the CIA's use of sound recordings of 'ghosts' to intimidate superstitious Viet Cong soldiers during the Vietnam War (1955–75), Tieu is planning on appropriating surveillance techniques like thermal imaging and drone footage, with the aim, she says, of turning the tools of the military and intelligence services against themselves. 'As I argued in *No Gods, No Masters*, the inventors of these devices are as haunted by their creations as the people they're supposed to affect.'

It's not the first time that the artist's practice has explored the Havana syndrome. For 'In Cold Print', her 2020 solo exhibition at Nottingham Contemporary, Tieu exposed herself to a reconstruction of the supposed audio attack and then scanned her brain with the help of scientists at a local university. The results were inconclusive. 'Parts of my brain were really active,' she says, 'but you could explain that by saying that my fear of the Havana syndrome could have caused potentially as much distress as the sound itself.'

Then, as now, Tieu refuses to be drawn on whether she believes the enigmatic ailment is the result of a genuine attack or geopolitical paranoia. She does admit, however, that not being able to film in Cuba – until now, her attempts to get a licence for Hotel Nacional have been in vain – has only increased her interest in the phenomenon. 'It just makes it more mysterious,' she says. 'I had hoped that, if I could just get into the room, I might find some answers. But maybe now I'll never know.'

THE ART NEWSPAPER - SOUND WARFARE: SUNG TIEU EXPLORES THE MYSTERIOUS HAVANA SYNDROME AFFECTING US OFFICIALS



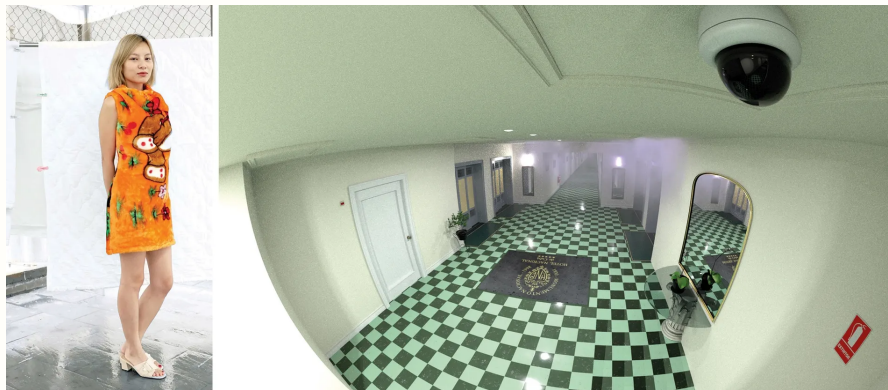
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Frieze London 2021 // Interview

Sound warfare: Sung Tieu explores the mysterious Havana Syndrome affecting US officials

The Frieze Artist Award winner discusses her new video premiering this month



In *Moving Target Shadow Detection* (2021), Sung Tieu (left) recreates the hotel where the first cases of Havana Syndrome were recorded
Still: courtesy of the artist, portrait: CFGNY

An invisible disease that is spreading throughout the world has become an obsession for the Berlin- and London-based artist Sung Tieu, the winner of this year's Frieze Artist Award in London. No, it is not Covid-19. The strange

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THE ART NEWSPAPER - SOUND WARFARE: SUNG TIEU EXPLORES THE MYSTERIOUS HAVANA SYNDROME AFFECTING US OFFICIALS

sickness called Havana Syndrome has been baffling doctors, scientists and intelligence officers since it first appeared in the Cuban capital in 2016. The victims have all been US officials and intelligence staff, and much of the information about the illness has been kept secret.

The first cases emerged when CIA agents staying at a Havana hotel reported hearing a piercing noise or a feeling of pressure in their heads followed by severe symptoms of nausea and vertigo and, later, persistent memory loss, dizziness and fatigue. Today, “attacks” on more than 200 US victims have been reported in countries from China and Vietnam to Germany and Serbia, and still no one knows the cause. (Theories include microwave devices and crickets native to Cuba.)

For her Frieze Artist Award commission, Tieu is building on her 2020 Nottingham Contemporary exhibition about the syndrome, In Cold Print, in which she exposed herself to a reconstruction of the acoustic attack. Her new video, Moving Target Shadow Detection (2021), reconstructs the interior of the Hotel Nacional de Cuba where the first known cases occurred. Here, she tells us about her research and how she is making secret sound weapons visible.

The Art Newspaper: How did you become interested in the topic of warfare?

Sung Tieu: I think that it is something that is maybe not straightforwardly visible as “war”. My research started with Ghost Tape #10, which was a sonic weapon developed in the 1960s by the US Army’s Psyops [psychological operations] to be used in the war in Vietnam. [It was designed to intimidate and demoralise Vietnamese soldiers.] Through that research, I encountered the Havana Syndrome in around 2018 and I just kept it in the back of my mind as something weird but really interesting. Then, when I was working

THE ART NEWSPAPER - SOUND WARFARE: SUNG TIEU EXPLORES THE MYSTERIOUS HAVANA SYNDROME AFFECTING US OFFICIALS

on the exhibition at Nottingham Contemporary, it resurfaced. I was thinking about the psychological impact of sound, especially when our world is so saturated with images. I feel like sound has become much more impactful because of this visual overload; it is so hard for an image to penetrate us, whereas I think that sound can do it in more subtle and more subconscious ways.



Sung Tieu's exhibition *In Cold Print* at Nottingham Contemporary, (8 February-31 August 2020)
© Sung Tieu. Courtesy of the artist, Emalin, London and Sfeir-Semler, Hamburg & Beirut. Photo: Lewis Ronald (Plastiques)

How do you go about researching a disease as mysterious as Havana Syndrome?

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I spoke to many scientists and journalists such as Jon Lee Anderson, who co-wrote the first big feature on the Havana Syndrome, for the New Yorker. He has interviewed US officials and has great insights, but he doesn't have a conclusive answer. That was also key for me working on it—I didn't have all the information and artistically I think that is interesting. If I knew exactly how the Havana Syndrome was made up, maybe there wouldn't be a need to creatively, sonically and visually investigate it.

I'm also interested in how the illness is portrayed in reportage because you can't remove it from certain global political agendas. The cause and effect are difficult to track, but it has certainly affected political affairs. Many argue that the whole intention is to disrupt political affairs. I'm fascinated by how the story is told: how it is being pictured, how the viewpoints are being laid out, and which political arguments are being used to justify certain sanctions or political decisions.

How did you present your research in the Nottingham Contemporary exhibition?

The show was split into two iterations, with the first one changing unannounced. A few weeks in, I changed the configuration of the steel fences I was using as walls, and changed the information on screens, while the sound work remained the same. The first half lasted for around six weeks and showed scans of my brain's reaction to listening to a reconstruction of the sound weapon, a multi-channel sound installation, and articles that I had written based on my research. These articles were quite affirmative towards the Havana Syndrome and the American perspective. Then, in the second iteration, I tried to show more critical views—that perhaps the Havana Syndrome can't exist in the way it is described. There are scientists who claim there is no frequency in this world that you can't hear that can cause severe brain concussions.

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Who and what do you think is causing the syndrome?

There are multiple theories, but I wouldn’t claim to have the answer. Many US officials suggest it might come from Russian intelligence, since there are political motivations for developing such a weapon. Russia also has a history of experimenting with microwave weapons. But I am not really interested in what is true or false. I am more concerned with how sounds penetrate our bodies and brains, and activate our psychic imaginary.

Are you ever worried about your own safety while investigating this?

Yes, I am in a way. When you dive into a topic that is so current and has such strong political impact and has caused real illnesses, you have to be aware of the material you are dealing with. I wanted to shoot the film in the specific hotel room in Cuba where the first attacks supposedly occurred. Of course, I had to consider the risks that such an operation would involve for me and my team.

Did you go to Cuba?

No, we didn’t receive the filming permission from the Cuban culture ministry, for several reasons, one being the pandemic. That only adds to the mystery. So I worked with a team to create 3D renderings of the hotel in Havana.

How does the video play out?

The video follows a mosquito-type animal flying through the hotel corridor, slowly leading us into the hotel room where supposedly a CIA member was attacked by these mysterious frequencies. Through this perspective, and the switch between cameras, from CCTV camera views to ones resembling drone footage, I’m trying to draw out links between various sites of war and show

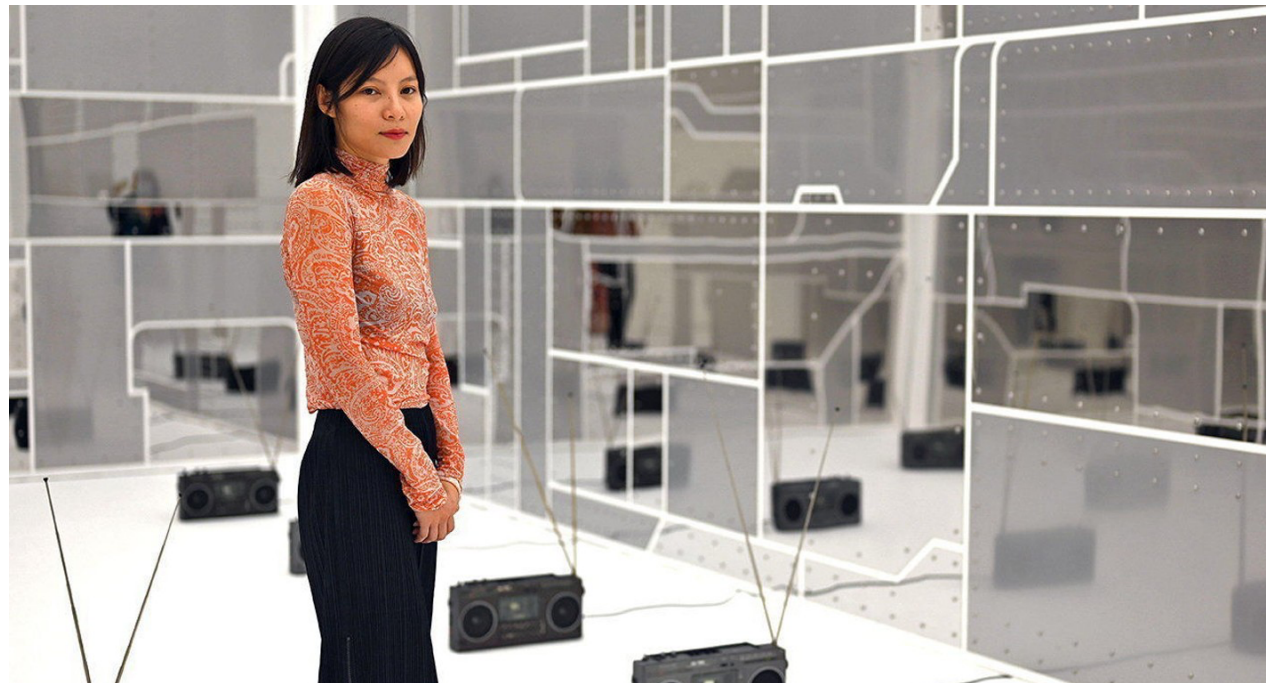
THE ECONOMIST - SUNG TIEU UNPACKS 'HAVANA SYNDROME' IN HER LATEST WORK

The
Economist

Culture | Prisoners of sound

Sung Tieu unpacks “Havana syndrome” in her latest work

The artist explores how sound can be weaponised and perception manipulated



THE ECONOMIST - SUNG TIEU UNPACKS 'HAVANA SYNDROME' IN HER LATEST WORK

FROM A HOTEL room in Brazil come the shrieks of children at play and the clangs of construction work. Sung Tieu tussles with her noise-cancelling headphones before a calm silence sets in over Zoom. The Vietnamese-born, Berlin-based artist touched down for the 2021 Bienal de São Paulo the previous night, accompanied by an entourage of her students from Städelschule, a fine-art academy in Germany where she is a guest professor. She has had a busy year jet-setting towards recognition. In October her film, "Moving Target Shadow Detection", premiered at the Frieze London festival, one of the biggest events in the art calendar, where it won a coveted award. It is easy to see why the jury was captivated.

Rendered as nano-drone camera footage, the film reconstructs the strange events of 2016 surrounding the first reported cases of Havana syndrome, a mysterious malady afflicting Western diplomats; more than 200 cases have since been reported around the world. Viewers

ARTNET NEWS - MEET ARTIST SUNG TIEU, WHOSE STIRRING INSTALLATIONS ABOUT KAFKAESQUE BUREAUCRACY HAVE CAPTIVATED THE ART WORLD

artnet news

Meet Artist Sung Tieu, Whose Stirring Installations About Kafkaesque Bureaucracy Have Captivated the Art World

The rising German art star was nominated for a national art prize and has a string of institutional shows.

Kate Brown, November 1, 2021



CONDITION 01: SUNG TIEU. MOVING TARGET SHADOW DETECTION

ARTNET NEWS - MEET ARTIST SUNG TIEU, WHOSE STIRRING INSTALLATIONS ABOUT KAFKAESQUE BUREAUCRACY HAVE CAPTIVATED THE ART WORLD



Sung Tieu. Photo: Diana Pfammatter

At least a few times during her life, artist Sung Tieu has applied with state offices in Berlin to get her name changed—or to put it more aptly, corrected. In Vietnam, where she was born, her first name starts with a non-Latin letter pronounced more or less as “ts,” and it should rightly be written as *Đung*.

In Germany, where she has lived for most of her life, she started the paperwork and process, but never ended up going through with it. “They would have allowed me to change my name, but I would have had to choose something like Julia or Brigitte. It had to be gender

We sat over mugs of tea in her studio in Berlin, which is filled to the brim with raw materials, pieces from installations, sculptures in boxes, and books. The autumnal light hit a whiteboard charting out her busy months: she’s finalizing a video commissioned as part of the Frieze Artist Award she won last month and is in the midst of a string of institutional shows, opening in Bonn, Munich, Nottingham, and Basel. Looking forward, she’s set to have a solo show at MUDAM in Luxembourg.

Sung’s family immigrated to Berlin when she was young, and she became a German citizen in 2007. Like so many residents who ended up in the city—be it from birth, naturalization, or a visa sticker on their passport, like

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naturalization, or a visa sticker on their passport, like me—we can all relate on some level to the varying traumas inflicted by German bureaucracy.

A friend visiting the artist from abroad once noted how common it is for German residents to exchange animated stories with details like 5 a.m. lineups outside state offices and the Kafka-esque forms and procedures needed to get appointments with “street-level bureaucrats,” as Tieu called them.



Installation view, Sung Tieu, *Song for VEB Stern-Radio Berlin* (2021) for the Preis der Nationalgalerie at Hamburger Bahnhof—Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin. © Sung Tieu. Courtesy of the artist, Emalin, London and Galerie Sfeir-Semler, Hamburg/Beirut. Photography: Hans-Georg Gaul.

For Tieu, the interest in these kinds of systems is conceptual, and it runs deep and wide. Bureaucracy, its facelessness and brutality, as well as social systems of control in general, are ongoing subjects in her art practice. “It is, on the surface, a boring topic, but in that way it is interesting. *Das Kleingedruckte*—the small

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print—matters,” she said.

Her works often reference spaces of control, be it border walls, jail cells, waiting rooms, or a boss’s office. Often, they are tense installations pervaded by cold surfaces and readymades—everything is hyper-detailed and obsessively researched. Official documents are often included and, sometimes, reworded so the language gets to their true intent, and how “macabre” these forms really are. “When you are asked about your income, what they really want to check is whether you are worthy,” Tieu said.

Each of her recent projects is rooted in particular historical interests that range from the military-industrial complex, the soft or hard wars waged by state institutions, as well as immigration and prisons. In all of them, the disappearing individual is set against these systems.



Installation view, Sung Tieu, *What is your X?* at Emalin, London.

© Sung Tieu. Courtesy of the artist and Emalin, London.

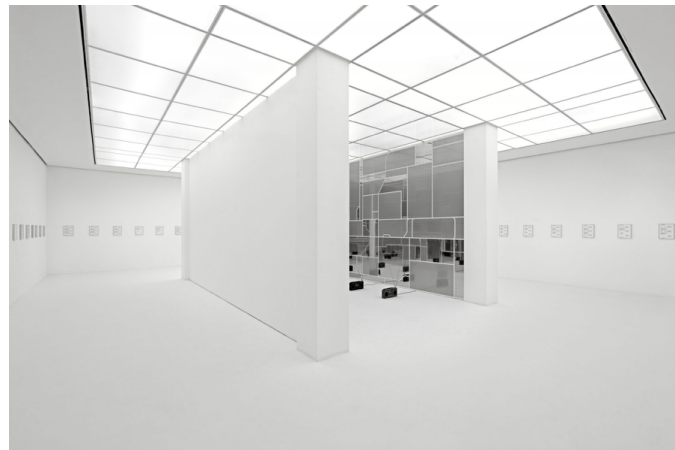
Photography: Lewis Ronald (Plastiques).

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The Fine Print

I've known Tieu for some years but we met again this fall after I visited her presentation as part of the shortlist for the Preis der Nationalgalerie, Germany's prestigious prize for artists under 40. (In a testament to the international character of Berlin, Tieu was the only German nominated.)

In her piece *Song for VEB Stern-Radio Berlin*, she focuses on a lesser known aspect of German history: the arrival of Northern Vietnamese foreign laborers in East Germany (often called the GDR), a migration phenomenon that surged throughout the 1980s. There are transcribed lists charting Vietnamese migrants' flight paths and work destinations, which Tieu culled from an archive. A room of mirrors cut out to resemble airplane parts frames GDR-era radios placed on the floor, which she painstakingly collected through online classified ads. The radios echo and feedback on one another, emitting a ghostly soundtrack.



CONDITION 01: SUNG TIEU. MOVING TARGET SHADOW DETECTION

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Installation view, Sung Tieu, *Song for VEB Stern-Radio Berlin* for the Preis der Nationalgalerie at Hamburger Bahnhof—Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin. © Sung Tieu. Courtesy of the artist, Emalin, London and Galerie Sfeir-Semler, Hamburg/Beirut. Photography: Hans-Georg Gaul.

Visitors are required to remove their shoes before entering the installation and stow them on a little metal shelf, which is a bit disarming. That the work overall is missing any thread of overt individual experience is the point.

“Bureaucracy does that with each one of us,” Tieu said. “You zoom out from the personal and you become a number, an address. In this case, I am looking at the GDR in the 1980s, but it says so much about our current times and the way we are surveilled.”

When Tieu became a German citizen, she had to revoke her Vietnamese passport because of Germany’s stringent laws on dual citizenship. She left Northern Vietnam when she was five with her mother to reunite with her father, who had been working as a foreign laborer in the GDR steel industry since she had been born. One could assume Tieu’s father is represented by a number on a flight list that sits in an archive somewhere. “It was not an easy path to follow in Germany, especially in those years,” the artist said.



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Installation view, Sung Tieu, *Zugzwang*, at Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2020. © Sung Tieu. Courtesy of the artist, Emalin, London and Sfeir-Semler, Hamburg/Beirut. Photography: Maximilian Geuter.

As such, the work is personal on some level, but Tieu struggles against being viewed solely by her cultural background. “As an artist who is Vietnamese-German, it is not easy to speak from a personal place, because you can get cornered into an identity,” she said. “I am always trying to navigate that.”



Installation view, Sung Tieu, *In Cold Print*, Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham. © Sung Tieu. Courtesy of the artist, Emalin, London and Sfeir-Semler, Hamburg; Beirut Photography: Lewis Ronald (Plastiques).

Between Worlds

With parents formed by their experiences in East

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Germany, but growing up in a newly unified Berlin herself, Tieu has a uniquely hybridized understanding of East-West political tensions. She’s part of a generation of millennial artists in the country who are unearthing critical new perspectives on East German culture.

“Sometimes I wonder if it was a daydream, those memories, as happens when you think about something from when you are young,” she said.

Often in our conversation, she mentioned the stories her mother shared as a tool for reconstructing it herself. At Hamburger Bahnhof and at a recent solo exhibition in Munich at Haus der Kunst, little chocolates in ladybug foil dot the installation; these little German sweets are given as gifts for good luck around holidays but they also adorn her mother’s apartment.

Her work-in-progress for the Frieze Artist Award also pans the East-West axis, looking at the Havana Syndrome, a mysterious ailment that Tieu has become somewhat obsessed with after learning about via news reports. Her upcoming film, called *Moving Target Shadow Detection*, meticulously recreates the hotel room in Havana where CIA officials believe they were first attacked by sonic weapons. She hopes that by doing so, by documenting and noting the air vents, the doors and other exits, and every corner of the rooms, she might understand what caused the apparent brain trauma. (The true origin of or motive behind the phenomenon remains unproven, but it cropped up again in August when US Vice President Kamala Harris cancelled a trip to Vietnam over a scare about the suspected sonic warfare.)

For a work that was on view until October 10 in a group show at Kunsthalle Basel, Tieu played a soundtrack of

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her brainwaves that she had recorded when listening to a reconstruction of the Havana Syndrome. In a related work that was on view at the 2020 exhibition “In Cold Print” at Nottingham Contemporary, she presented her brain scans from the event. “I did have to sign off a disclaimer with an awareness of risk... It definitely caused headaches but I don’t think—or, at least, I hope—that I have longterm damage,” she says.

How much she actually desires an answer about the mystery illness is unclear. I suspect her interest it more about the way something unproven and unknown can have a large real-life impact in the political and social sphere—and how fears can be manifested or institutionalized, as walls, borders, or new bureaucratic policies.

“Systems of control only grow. Once we set them in place, it is very rare that they get reduced again,” says Tieu. “To gain back these spaces of freedom is so much harder than just implementing them and enforcing them.”

ARTFORUM, BY ABHIJAN TOTO

HAMBURG

Sung Tieu

SFEIR-SEMLER GALLERY

The first thing you noticed on entering Sung Tieu's solo exhibition "Everything or Nothing" was the sound. It occupied the space like something physical, growing louder and louder, both drawing you in and repelling you. It was a speculative reconstruction of the sonic weapon that allegedly causes the unexplained symptoms known as Havana syndrome, reproduced for Tieu's *Moving Target Shadow Detection*, 2022, a Frieze Artist Award commission. The video takes us through a meticulous 3D rendering of the Hotel Nacional de Cuba, where Havana syndrome was first recorded. We hover and float through its strange palatial architecture from the perspective of a drone on an exploratory mission. We pass through lobbies, take an elevator up a few floors, and find ourselves in a deserted hotel room where clothes and personal items lie strewn about and a TV is on. It is tuned to an American news channel report on US vice president Kamala Harris's 2021 visit to Southeast Asia and a concurrent alleged incident of Havana syndrome experienced by American officials in Hanoi. Gradually, the room begins to fill with smoke rushing in from the vents, and slowly the drone's vision—our vision—begins to be obscured. Finally, as the screen grows white, the drone makes its escape from the hotel and out toward the sea.

Sung Tieu, *Moving Target Shadow Detection*, 2022, HD animation, color and black-and-white, sound, 18 minutes 56 seconds.



of counterintelligence. In the Sfeir-Semler show, prints continuing a series first shown in that exhibition, made from brain scans taken from the artist while exposing herself to the sound that's supposed to cause Havana syndrome, accompanied *Moving Target Shadow Detection*, bringing together multiple strands of Tieu's research into the continuing legacies of the Cold War.

Upstairs, we were confronted with a feeling of silence and solemnity: Here, the artist used the history of East German recruitment of North Vietnamese laborers to think about questions of labor (and its invisibility), of movement, and of aspiration. *Fall*, 2021, a collapsed dome made of Styrofoam sections, dominated the space, evoking an imploded church. In a different orientation, this sculpture was part of Tieu's exhibition "Multiboy" at the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst in Leipzig in 2021, which dwelled on the tension between the aspirations of the North Vietnamese guest workers and the conditions of labor and life they endured in the former German Democratic Republic. Employment contracts and bureaucratic documents pertaining to their arrival and presence in Germany lined the walls in silver frames, making these quietly violent pieces of paper seem like votive icons. All around the dome were examples of products the workers had been engaged in manufacturing, from industrial equipment to children's shoes. Tieu comments on the history of the readymade, drawing attention to the labor that is obscured in such acts of appropriation.

While her own family history intersects with this narrative, Tieu gestures away from any reading of her work as purely personal or identity-driven. One might instead call her position identity-informed: a site of orientation from which one investigates. The show as a whole, especially in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine shortly after it opened, provided a cerebral yet chilling reminder that the Cold War never really ended, and indeed has never been cold.

—Abhijan Toto