

LUIS DE JESUS LOS ANGELES

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

PHUNG HUYNH: *Return Home*
June 22 – August 3, 2024
Opening Reception:
Saturday, June 22, 2024, 6–8 p.m.

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Luis De Jesus Los Angeles is pleased to announce **Phung Huynh: *Return Home***, the artist's second solo exhibition with the gallery. The exhibition will run from June 22 through August 3, 2024, with an opening reception on Saturday, June 22, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. A ceremonial performance will take place during the reception and begin promptly at 6:30 p.m.

This new series brings together an installation of ornately framed graphite drawings and photographic banners that seek to ritually unite fragments of sacred Khmer Buddha statue heads that were looted from Cambodia. The artist examines Cambodian sculptures that memorialize the Golden Age of Khmer culture from the 9th to the 15th centuries, particularly the Buddha heads that are currently housed in American art museums and the remnants of the statues' bodies remaining in the temples of Cambodia. Huynh initiates critical dialogues in the pressing matters of repatriation and provenance within the collections of American institutions.

The looting of Khmer statues from sacred temple sites began when France colonized Cambodia in the late 19th century. The carpet bombing of Cambodia during President Nixon's administration and the American War in Vietnam opened the floodgates for the Khmer Rouge Genocide of the 1970s which eliminated 90% of the country's artists and shattered the cultural landscape of Cambodians. Huynh frames her project as both personal and political:

"As a daughter of a Cambodian father who survived war and genocide of the 1970s, I am well aware of how Cambodia became a vulnerable place for destruction and the theft of so many of our statues that are essentially vessels for our divine, ancestors, and cultural heritage. Considering the profound impact of war, genocide, and American imperialism, my artwork is built on the desire (for them) to return home and focuses on the repatriation of ancestral art and heritage to Cambodia."

The exhibition includes seven drawings of Khmer statue heads sourced from American museum collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Norton Simon Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, the USC Pacific Asia Museum, and the Cleveland Museum of Art. Encased in gold gilt frames, the statue heads float in the negative space of the paper, each volume and detail of the head carefully rendered and positioned with dignity, emphasizing their removal from their original context—obscuring meaning, place, and connection.

The lack of context and even knowledge about these objects is often highlighted by the way the institutions assign titles, positioning them in anonymity and erasure, with catalog numbers and generic names such as "Head of Buddha, Deity," "Head of a Deity," "Head of a Door Guardian," etc. Huynh's works also offer a critique of commercially produced appropriations of the Buddha's head—as a decorative design item, garden motif, or commodified object—finding them to be problematic in their disrespect of the Buddha and Theravada Buddhism, and in the acceptance and normalization of the illicit traffic in cultural property.

The translucent banners are printed with images of decapitated and dismembered Khmer statues that were photographed by Huynh during her visits to sacred temple sites in Cambodia. There, she found many mutilated statues of Buddha, Lakshmi, and other deities sitting in dark silent corridors and niches. For example, the statue of Lakshmi at Angkor Wat had no head but was adorned with a glittering golden dress, while the toes of a monumental statue of Vishnu were broken off and made into amulets. The banners will be activated through a ritual performed by classical Cambodian dancers during the opening of the exhibition. The dancers' blessings and interactions will make the bodies spiritually whole and give contrast to how such statues are taken out of their cultural and spiritual context when they are in museums.

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Phung Huynh (b.1977, Rạch Giá, VN) holds an MFA from New York University and a BFA from Art Center College of Design, she lives and works in Los Angeles. Recent solo exhibitions include *Don't Call Me FOB*, Luis De Jesus Los Angeles, CA and *Sobrevivir: Healing Through Art and Recognizing the History of Coerced Sterilizations*, Vincent Price Art Museum, Los Angeles, CA; *Donut W(hole)* at Pepperdine University's Payson Library, Malibu, CA and *Self Help Graphics*, Los Angeles, CA. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, including Carolyn Campagna Kleefeld Contemporary Museum at California State University, Long Beach, CA; Asia Society Texas, Houston, TX; School of Art and Design, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA; USC Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena, CA; Ronald H. Silverman Fine Arts Gallery at California State University Los Angeles, CA; Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena, CA; U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh, Cambodia; among others. Huynh has also completed public art commissions for the Metro Orange Line, Metro Silver Line, the Los Angeles Zoo, and the Los Angeles County + USC Medical Center through the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture. Her work can be found in prominent collections including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles, CA; Dallas Museum of Art, Texas; Vincent Price Art Museum, Monterey Park, CA; USC Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena, CA; Escalette Permanent Collection of Art at Chapman University, Orange, CA; and the Kaiser Permanente Bernard J. Tyson School of Medicine Art Collection, Pasadena, CA, as well as private collections. Huynh is the recipient of the 2024 Marciano Art Foundation Artadia Award, a 2023 Fellow of the Lucas Artists Program at the Montalvo Arts Center for the Arts in Saratoga, CA, and 2022 California Community Foundation Fellowship for Visual Artist Fellows, State of California, among numerous other awards.

For further information, including images and previews, please contact Gallery Director, Brianna Bakke at 213-395-0762, or gallery@luisdejesus.com. Gallery Instagram: [@luisdejesuslosangeles](https://www.instagram.com/luisdejesuslosangeles)