

Tra My Nguyen
Fallen Angels
GROTTO, Berlin, 18.07.-29.08.2024

A motorbike tilts back, rearing, tyre first in an elongated wheelie. Lights hum inwards, dimly lit and contained behind the building's glass facade. Draped in a patchwork of floral fabrics, an abstracted form both mysterious and futuristic, emerges from the deep red carpet, a swamp-like monster clad in materials from another world.

In Tra My Nguyen's solo exhibition, *Fallen Angels* at GROTTO, vignettes of the artist's childhood in Vietnam are distorted into a hybrid narrative where travelling through the streets of Hanoi with relatives has become a catalyst for ideas of colourism, mobility and gender politics to arise. This concept takes inspiration from the female motorists culture in Vietnam, where women cover their entire bodies in garish colour clashing garments to protect their skin from the sun's harsh rays. Their generic floral patterns and easy-to-wear style moves quickly from design to vendors, relentlessly meeting the latest trends and exaggerating notions of mass-production. The garments engage both literally and metaphorically with notions of speed: skirts clip and wrap-around at the waist. Jackets zip all the way up to the head - fast, quick, and easy.

Using these garments as a starting point, Nguyen manipulates her materials to re-imagine the body, removing the clothing from its context and repurposing its function towards a new object. In *Riders' Arc* the emphasis shifts from the physical body to that of a vehicle, its ergonomic form producing certain curvatures: the seat becoming hips; its handles, arms outstretched and strong. Stretchy viscose is draped and collaged around the vehicle's body sealed at the seams with textile silicone, forming a protective layer that entombs the structural entity beneath.

In her textile-sculpture series *Bodies (The Lovers)*, Nguyen continues to expand on notions of preservation. Produced via methods of digitization and flat-bed scanning, the original Vietnamese motorcycle garments are distorted via technological alterations and methods of printing, to form new hybrid textiles. Echoing the methodology employed in *Riders' Arc*, textiles are collaged and altered through digital distortion, forming a glitch-like pattern. The material is then printed onto a lightweight mesh fabric, coated with textile silicone and wrapped around the female form to extend ideas of the digital and physical body. The works lay to rest within an aluminium tray frame suggestive of a museum's archive box, allowing a space for Nguyen's sculptural forms to be held and preserved, proposing a hollow outline of the body that once came to inform its shapes.

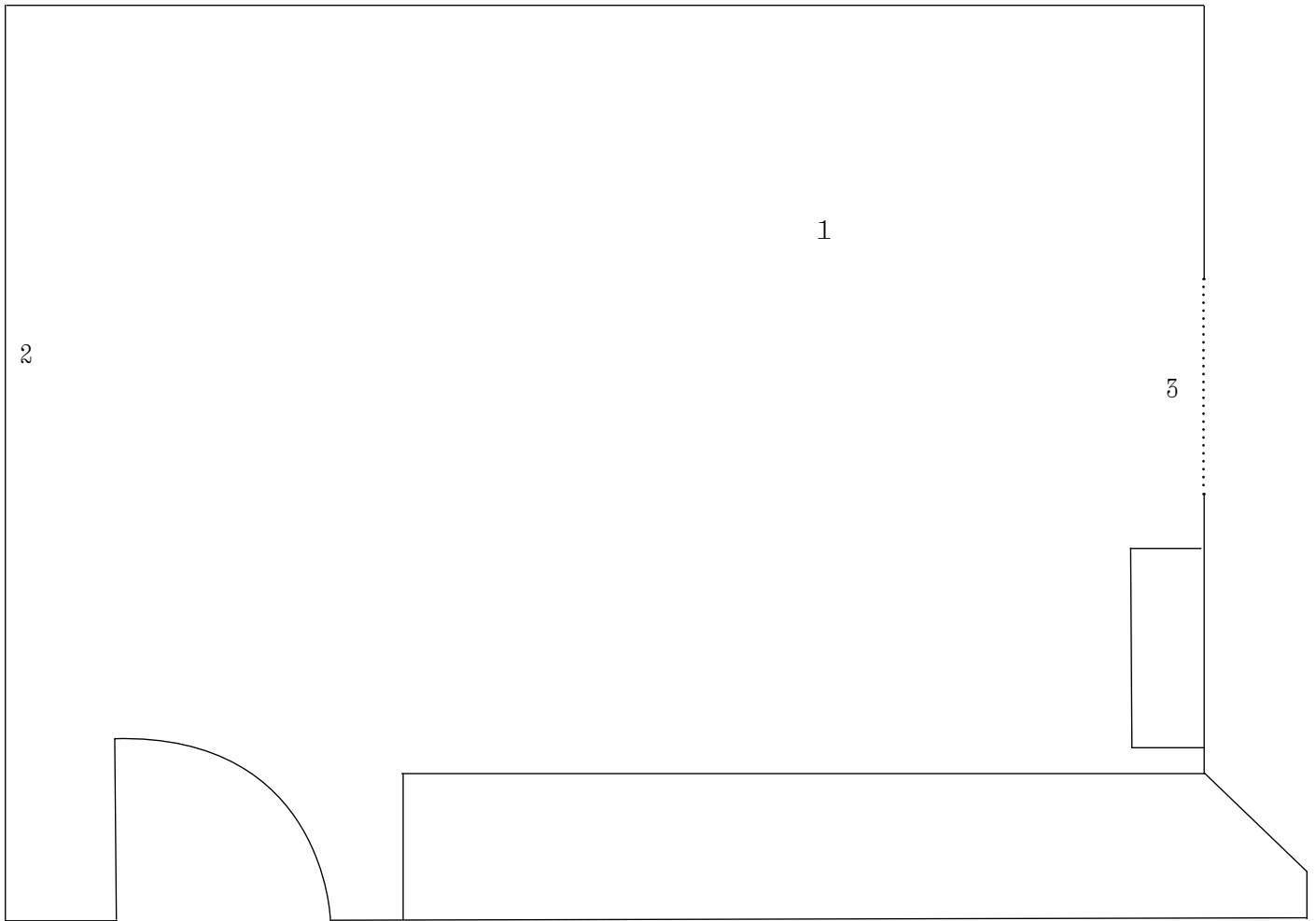
Showcasing a dreamscape montage, a video piece, entitled *Day* is projected onto a fabric curtain. Capturing a journey through the streets of Hanoi, reflections of the surrounding atmosphere cascade onto the glass shopfronts, opposite the artist, who seemingly holds the camera. Dulled by streetlights and murky windows, a screening of memories ripple across the curtain, telling a story of movement; the wind whispers through her clothes on the open road, where she's headed is unknown.

Words by Brooke Wilson

Tra My Nguyen (b. 1992 in Hanoi, Vietnam) is a Berlin-based artist whose multidisciplinary practice encompasses sculpture, moving images and textile. Drawing upon diaspora perspectives, her work re-contextualizes material culture within global modernism. Nguyen's practice engages with speculative narratives to explore the intersections of gender, labor, migration, and technology in the current neoliberal order.

Nguyen's work has been exhibited internationally, including at Bundeskunsthalle Bonn (DE), Human Resources in Los Angeles (USA), the 4th Edition of Bienal sur in La Plata (AR), the State of Fashion Biennial 2022 in Arnhem (NL), and VCCA in Hanoi (VN). Additionally, Nguyen has participated in artist residencies at Rupert Residency in 2024 and Intermix Residency in Riyadh from 2022 to 2023.

Kindly supported by Kemmler Foundation (Kemmler Kemmler GmbH) & W.T.V Bodenbeläge für Messezwecke GmbH



- 1 *Riders' Arc*, 2024, 140 x 185 x 75 cm, motorbike, sun-protective garments, textile silicone
- 2 *Bodies (The Lovers)*, 2024, 74 x 150 x 11 cm, aluminium, mesh fabric, textile silicone, foam
- 3 *Day*, 2020, 0'45", HD, colour, loop; in collaboration with Ozan Şanal