



My-Lan Hoang-Thuy

Time Well Spent

"Recent advances in biology also provide us with an important key: robustness is built first and foremost on heterogeneity, redundancy, randomness, waste, slowness, incoherence... in short, robustness is the antithesis of performance."

Olivier Hamant, *Antidote to the Cult of Performance*.
Robustesse from Nature, Tracts № 50, Gallimard, 2023

Sitting in front of a stack of pancakes covered in blueberries and maple syrup (a particularly pleasing combination), My-Lan Hoang-Thuy tells me about the works she plans to exhibit at her solo exhibition at Project Native Informant. We are both comfortably seated in a café on a winter's Sunday, chatting about her work and other things. There is nothing particularly remarkable about our exchange in itself—we have known each other for several years and have built a relationship through shared moments like these, where discussions about our work are interwoven with personal anecdotes. I share this anecdote to illustrate that, between our regular conversations and our past collaboration, I have developed a fairly comprehensive understanding of My-Lan's artistic practice up to this point.

We met several years ago at a group exhibition in which she was participating. At the time, I was struck by her works — objects, as she calls them, due to their singular status—whose form and content are made of the same material: acrylic paint. These modestly sized pieces were already imbued with My-Lan's curiosity and her interest in artistic practices that are typically considered independent of one another. Early on in her practice, she developed a typology of elements that she has since remained faithful to in her compositions. From her studies — first in graphic arts at the École Duperré and then at the Beaux-Arts de Paris — she retained a strong interest in graphic design and, more broadly, in publishing. Her work freely combines painting, drawing, photography and even writing, using these mediums to create compositions in which precision and spontaneity, meticulous gestures and accidents, are constantly in tension, much like musical scales composed of a range of sounds. My-Lan herself recognises this connection with the world of music, comparing her processes to those of an orchestra conductor. She coordinates the discordant elements that make up her works, yet manages to impart a cohesive rhythm.

Yet my certainty about understanding her work—as is the case with all certainties—was inevitably shaken on that Sunday afternoon when My-Lan described her new pieces with the phrase: "I've cut into the colour." Notably, she did not say 'cut into the material', but rather into the colour. When I returned home, I reopened the PDF she had sent me a few days earlier, containing images of the works she was considering for the exhibition. In this context, 'cutting into the colour', means intervening directly with the works — scissoring them, fragmenting them, and ultimately reassembling them. Paradoxically, this act of cutting becomes an act of unification.

Since 2018, My-Lan has preserved all of her multiform productions, along with her failed attempts — trials, paint excrescences and scattered pieces that she could never bring herself to discard. These residual fragments have become the driving force of her practice. Some materials remain untouched for years before being reactivated as artworks. Constraints, whether spatial or economic, and necessities such as ecological and ethical concerns, are integral to her practice. They lead to both format (often modest) and forms. In her new works, fragments, both material and immaterial, date back several years and are recomposed into new configurations. Even the works titles (Jaurès, Faidherbe), are taken from different studios My-Lan has previously occupied. For My-Lan, each move — which invariably entails shifting storage space (a source of anxiety for any artist) — become an opportunity for reinvention. Rather than discarding material, she prefers the twists, turns and wanderings that form the basis of her collage technique. What initially seemed like failures are transformed and elevated: old motifs rub shoulders with new ones, unexpected compositions emerge from these encounters, and flat expanses of colour fuse with irregularities into sublime discoveries. Debris is transmuted into creation.

Unseen gestures also appear in some of her latest works with the exposure of what might be called the “hidden face”. The front and back are at times reversed — the back of the piece becomes a compositional space, incorporating the fibres of the underlying fabric. My-Lan’s work here can be seen as a reversal of the hierarchical order between the ‘noble’ front of the artwork, and its supposedly trivial back. *Reversos*, an exhibition at the Prado Museum, Madrid, (2023), offered the public a unique opportunity to see the backs of works. Works by Goya and Rembrandt were on show, as well as more recent paintings by Magritte. In that case, the unveiling was orchestrated by a curator; in My-Lan’s case, however, the decision is her own — an intentional act of questioning what makes a work of art and the notions of the sacred and the profane.

This desire for revelation is not just a game, I believe it runs deeper than that. Rather, it is a question of continuing to obstruct the pervasive tendency to categorise, whether along aesthetic, moral, or financial lines. With this in mind, My-Lan has taken the opportunity to present photographs shot in recent years. These are presented as counterpoints to her paintings and provide a glimpse into her daily life. In these images, which chronicle her day-to-day, there is a formal play and the combination and collision of different registers. Recorded by a camera and installed in space, photographs include a meal of Vietnamese delicacies prepared by her mother, the face of someone close to her, old drawings, various studios she has worked in, or montages of her exhibitions. These images follow one another to become precious moments associated by gesture. In each case a reversal of front and back occurs once again, exposing what lies behind the scenes. My-Lan’s work is driven by a impulse to remain open to what surrounds her and a belief that, now more than ever, we must cultivate a deeper awareness of our environment. The gaze is an act of care.

When she spoke to me about her exhibition and its title, she reflected on the idea of ‘time well spent’, a phrase theorised by Mark Zuckerberg as time that is lucrative, measurable, and productively spent on social networks. In short, ‘time well spent’, is time that generates capital, optimised efficiency and fuels consumption. By contrast, My-Lan advocates for a kind of time that is disordered, unregulated, and, above all, without direct utility — a space of freedom. It is the time spent revisiting archives, preserving fragments of paintings, photographing an arrangement of fruit, spent chatting to a friend in a café on a Sunday afternoon, sharing a stack of pancakes. My-Lan does not merely ‘cut into colour’, she cuts into life itself, making her works as the result of a continuous gesture that draws on the ‘already there’. Drawing attention from incidental modest subject, she transmutes her materials to redirect the economy of attention towards the objects, spaces and people who surround her.

Text by Clothilde Morette

List of Works

Clockwise From Entrance

Jaurès 10, 2024

Oil paint, spray paint, acrylic paint and acrylic medium
32 x 25 x 1.5 cm (12 5/8 x 9 7/8 x 5/8 in)

Jaurès 24, 2024

Oil pastel, oil paint, acrylic paint and acrylic medium
26 x 18.5 x 1 cm (10 1/4 x 7 1/4 x 3/8 in)

Jaurès 21, 2025

Watercolour, spray paint and acrylic paint
33 x 27 x 1 cm (13 x 10 5/8 x 3/8 in)

Qui Aime l'Hiver (1), 2021

Inkjet printing, pigments and acrylic binder
35.5 x 23.5 x 0.5 cm (14 x 9 1/4 x 1/4 in)

Jaurès 17, 2024

Oil paint, acrylic paint, gesso and acrylic medium
39.5 x 32.5 x 1 cm (15 1/2 x 12 3/4 x 3/8 in)

Jaurès 15, 2024

Oil pastel, spray paint, oil paint, acrylic paint, gesso and acrylic medium
37 x 25.5 x 1 cm (14 5/8 x 10 x 3/8 in)

Jaurès 13, 2024

Oil pastel, acrylic paint, gesso and acrylic medium
32.5 x 26 x 1.5 cm (12 3/4 x 10 1/4 x 5/8 in)

Jaurès 19, 2024

Oil pastel, oil paint, acrylic paint and acrylic medium
19 x 13.5 x 1.7 cm (7 1/2 x 5 1/4 x 5/8 in)

Jaurès 2, 2024

Oil pastel, oil paint, acrylic paint and acrylic medium
31 x 26 x 1.5 cm (12 1/4 x 10 1/4 x 5/8 in)

Jaurès 28, 2025

Oil pastel, oil paint, acrylic paint, pigments, acrylic binder and acrylic medium
34.5 x 26.5 x 1 cm (13 5/8 x 10 3/8 x 3/8 in)

Jaurès 8, 2024

Oil pastel, oil paint, spray paint, acrylic paint, pigments, acrylic binder and acrylic medium
48.5 x 36.5 x 1 cm (19 1/8 x 14 3/8 x 3/8 in)

Jaurès 20, 2024

Oil paint, spray paint, acrylic medium and book binding cloth
34 x 27.5 x 1 cm (13 3/8 x 10 7/8 x 3/8 in)

Jaurès 9, 2025

Oil pastel, spray paint, oil paint and acrylic binder
31 x 27 x 1 cm (12 1/4 x 10 5/8 x 3/8 in)

Jaurès 3, 2024

Oil paint, acrylic paint, pigments, acrylic binder and acrylic medium
24.5 x 17 x 1 cm (9 5/8 x 6 3/4 x 3/8 in)

My-Lan Hoang-Thuy (b. 1990) works through processes of accumulation and collage, constructing layered, sculptural compositions that hover between memory and abstraction. Her practice embraces fragmentation and reconstitution, where pigment is both medium and matter. Installations create visual timelines, mapping the sedimentary remnants of perpetual becoming. Recent exhibitions include *Vestige (Group Show)*, Project Native Informant, London (2024); *Notes*, Galerie Mitterrand, Paris (2024); *I Hit You With a Flower*, Stedelijk Museum, Schiedam (2024); *Femme Actuelle*, Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris (2023); *Boys Band*, Christie's, Paris (2023). Her work has been shown at Centre Pompidou, Paris; FRAC Grand Large Hauts-de-France, Dunkerque; Musée d'Art Moderne de Saint-Étienne, among others, and is held in the collections of FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, FRAC Auvergne, and FRAC Nouvelle-Aquitaine. Hoang-Thuy lives and works in Paris.