

Programme

'Words never die. Once said, they roll on like pebbles thrown in the water, they are the ties that bind'

– Trinh T Minh-ha, **Shoot for the Contents**

Trinh T Minh-ha

2–9 December 2017

www.ica.art/trinh-t-minh-ha

THE PROGRAMME IS HELD IN CINEMA 1

Saturday 2 Dec, 6pm

Trinh T Minh-ha lecture on 'The Politics of Form and Forces', followed by a screening of **Reassemblage** (1982)

Saturday 2 Dec, 8:30pm

Screening: **A Tale of Love** (1995)

Sunday 3 Dec, 2pm

Symposium

Sunday 3 Dec, 6:30pm

Screening: **Night Passage** (2004)

Wednesday 6 Dec, 6.15pm

Screening: **The Fourth Dimension** (2001), followed by a conversation with Trinh T Minh-ha

Thursday 7 Dec, 6.15pm

Screening: **Shoot for the Contents** (1991), followed by a conversation with Trinh T Minh-ha

Friday 8 Dec, 6pm

Screening: **Naked Spaces – Living is Round** (1985)

Saturday 9 Dec, 4pm

Screening: **Surname Viet Given Name Nam** (1989)

Saturday 9 Dec, 6:45pm

Screening: **Forgetting Vietnam** (2015)

Born in Vietnam, Trinh T Minh-ha is a filmmaker, writer, composer and Professor of Rhetoric and of Gender & Women's Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Her work includes eight feature-length films honoured in numerous retrospectives around the world; several large-scale collaborative installations including **L'Autre marche** (Musée du Quai Branly, Paris 2006–2009), and **Old Land New Waters** (3rd Guangzhou Triennale, China 2008); and numerous publications, including **Lovecidal. Walking with The Disappeared** (2016), **D-Passage. The Digital Way** (2013), **Elsewhere, Within Here** (2011), and **Cinema Interval** (1999). She has been the recipient of many awards, including the Wild Dreamer Lifetime Achievement Award at the Subversive Festival, Zagreb, Croatia, 2014; the Lifetime Achievement Award from Women's Caucus for Art, 2012; and the Trailblazers Award, MIPDOC, Cannes Documentary Film, France, 2006.



'Reality is more fabulous, more maddening, more strangely manipulative than fiction'

– Trinh T Minh-ha, **Documentary Is/Not a Name**

Vietnamese born and U.S. based writer, theorist, composer and filmmaker Trinh T Minh-ha has been producing films for over thirty years, exerting a profound influence on artists, directors and thinkers over several generations. This full retrospective of Trinh's films, screened in 16mm, 35mm and digital formats, offers insight into the breadth of her experimentation with film as a medium, her engagement with the politics of representation, and with the moving image as a space of resistance.

Intertwined with her work in the moving image, Trinh has made significant contributions to the fields of feminist and postcolonial studies through her writing and teaching. The retrospective programme includes a talk by the filmmaker, public conversations and a symposium, connecting with her commitment across theory and practice to challenging the role of the 'Other', to questioning modes of categorisation, and to the creativity of the nonlinear. Resisting the term 'documentary', Trinh's films have worked towards dissolving disciplinary boundaries and the conventions of knowledge production.

Born in Hanoi, Trinh T Minh-ha grew up during the Vietnam War and studied piano and music composition at the National Conservatory of Music and Theater in Saigon. She moved to the United States in 1970 to study music composition, ethnomusicology, and French literature at the University of Illinois. After graduate school, Trinh studied cinema and cultural theory in Senegal and Dakar. Her first two films, **Reassemblage** (1982) and **Naked Spaces – Living is Round** (1985) are set in West African countries, and are seminal works in the critique of ethnographic film practice.

In **Reassemblage**, Trinh challenges the claim within ethnographic documentary of finding or revealing an objective truth. The film centres on images of life in rural Senegal, but 'the habit of imposing a meaning to every single sign' is

undermined through formal disconnections between sound and what is depicted, and within the speculative nature of Trinh's voiceover. Building on the methodology implied within its title, the film's rhythmically repeating images and music, and fragments of local stories told and retold, formally reflecting Trinh's stated intention not to 'speak about, just speak nearby'.

Building on these concerns, **Naked Spaces – Living is Round** travels between six countries in West Africa (Senegal, Mauritania, Togo, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Benin) but resists serving as an exercise in cartography or classification. The film celebrates the intimate cultural expressions in modes of dwelling, stretching the dichotomies of ritual and work, home and world. Emphasising the impossibility of complete translation, the work announces its intentions in its opening statement: 'Not descriptive, not informative, not interesting'. Not without humour, Trinh's works are reflexively critical both of the structures of filmmaking and of her own gaze.

Surname Viet Given Name Nam (1989) is a deeply personal work, composed of archival footage, poetry, art, printed text and footage of Vietnamese refugee camps in the United States in the late 1970s. Interwoven with these images are staged and 'real' interviews with contemporary Vietnamese women. Composing a reflection on the role of women in Vietnamese society, the history of women's resistance and the experiences of dislocation and exile for immigrants in the U.S., the work touches on the expectations of national identity and the multiple expressions of subjectivity that resist this.

The title of **Shoot for the Contents** (1991) refers to a Chinese guessing game that combines allegory and storytelling. The film revolves around interviews with filmmakers, artists, philosophers and activists, and seeks to explore the political and cultural shifts in China marked by the protests and massacre at Tiananmen Square in 1989 without directly depicting these events, instead layering the interviews with popular songs and images of traditional Chinese culture. The multiplicity of voices mirrors both the act of questioning oppressive and totalising systems of knowledge, and a quote from Mao featured in the film: 'Let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend'.

Not only eluding the term 'documentary', but also resisting the labels of fiction and experimental film, Trinh's work inhabits the spaces between these designations. **A Tale of Love** (1995) begins as a re-telling of the Vietnamese epic poem **The Tale of Kieu** (1820). Already an allegory for Vietnam's struggles with internal turbulences and foreign domination, the film follows a modern-day Kieu, a Vietnamese immigrant and writer attempting to balance the expectations of American society, the family she left behind and her own ambitions. Breaking with traditional scripted narrative, the work sets up what Trinh describes as a denaturalised space of acting, the characters themselves questioning the role of the gaze and the photographic image in relation to women.

Set in Japan, **The Fourth Dimension** (2001) is Trinh's first film shot in digital format, and uses the nascent medium to explore the role of rituals as 'the structure of everyday life, but also the dynamic agents in the world of meaning'. A portrait of a country and a meditation on the nature of time, the film takes the form of a journey, framed through bullet-train windows

and sliding doors, and the shifting aspect and repetitions of the digital screen. Considering the mediation between ancestral voices and new possibilities, Trinh conjures up a fourth dimension featuring sculpture, performance art, dance, and personal cosmologies.

Co-directed by Jean-Paul Bourdier, **Night Passage** (2004) is inspired by Miyazawa Kenji's 1927 novel **Milky Way Railroad**. In the book, a young boy boards an intergalactic train on an allegorical journey exploring life and death. In Trinh and Bourdier's version of the story, the main character is a young female immigrant, who travels into a world of increasingly dream-like scenarios, accompanied by her best friend and a young boy. Functioning less as a narrative than a sensual experience, the film comprises a series of ruminations on friendship and loss.

In her 2016 publication **Lovecidal: Walking with the Disappeared**, Trinh discusses the global state of endless war and new forms of citizen resistance to militarism and surveillance, connecting particularly with the experience of the immigrant and the refugee. In her 2015 film **Forgetting Vietnam**, produced in parallel with the writing of **Lovecidal**, Trinh returns to addressing the sites of violence marked by the Vietnam War.

Forty years after the end of the war, the film's poetic consideration of memory and landscape, and its foregrounding of a feminist approach to storytelling, holds all the more urgency in the face of contemporary nuclear threats and environmental crisis. Re-imagining the mythology of Vietnam's creation as a landmass born from a battle between two mythical creatures, the film touches on the trauma of violence as well as issues of ecology and environmentalism. Between the elements of land and water run the daily activities of Vietnam's women, working towards rebuilding society and sustaining the landscape.

The film implicates the viewer in the processes of preserving and effacing the history of Vietnam, constituting acts of remembering and forgetting in the documentation of the landscape and its inhabitants. Avoiding the spectacle of violence, the artist continues to challenge her audiences to reflect on the images, sounds and narratives presented to them, and to take an expanded view of history and humanity.