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Tiffany Chung's "The Galapagos Project: on the brink of our master plans" and "an archeology for future remembrance"

Remapping old Saigon in her recent exhibitions.

RUBEN LUONG





TIFFANY CHUNG, *stored in a jar: monsoon, drowning fish, color of water, and the floating world*, 2010–2011, Plexiglass, wood veneer, plastic, aluminum, paint, steel cable, foam and copper wire, 11.5 x 5.5 m. Courtesy Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City.

Adding to her portfolio of colorful, revelatory cartographic works, Da Nang-born artist Tiffany Chung remapped old Saigon maps for her recent exhibitions, “The Galapagos Project: on the brink of our master plans,” and “an archaeology for future remembrance,” at Galerie Quynh’s two locations in Ho Chi Minh City earlier this month. Illuminating what is not readily apparent in conventional maps, her meticulous drafts and installation works survey how land has been erased or dramatically altered as a result of urban progress.



TIFFANY CHUNG, *stored in a jar: monsoon, drowning fish, color of water, and the floating world*, 2010–2011, Plexiglass, wood veneer, plastic, aluminum, paint, steel cable, foam and copper wire, 11.5 x 5.5 m. Courtesy Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City.

On display at the gallery's downtown location, "an archaeology for future remembrance" looked at Thu Thiem, a 657-hectare outer district of Ho Chi Minh City that was cleared to accommodate pending real estate projects. Near the gallery entrance, three large-scale maps of the area, rendered in micro pigment ink, gel ink, and oil on vellum and paper, appeared like microscopic cultures. The first, *Đồn Cá Trê (c. 1698) in Le Brun's 1795 urban planning map of Saigon* (2013), shows Saigon in relation to Thu Thiem. Erratic bursts of tiny green topography—in the form of patterned, flower-like clusters—populate its surface amid staggering, vein-like ducts of the Saigon River. Through her extensive research with Erik Harms, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Yale University, Chung reveals a colonial view of the land as a wilderness-wasteland suitable for urban cultivation.

In her second remap, *1972 Thu Thiem Development Plan by US AID* (2013), Chung redrew Thu Thiem as a distinctly new urban area, absent of the wild flora patterns. Here, the area is transformed into a large pore of compact, gray buildings and thin green parks. Maroon, cell-like, and almost cancerous, structures filter through the land, foreshadowing an inevitable decline. They are emphasized further in six smaller maps, including *landscapes of a people yet to come - HCMC ICA plans for New Thu Thiem Urban Area* (2013). These continue Chung's polychromatic cell motif, but progress to show a dismal, deindustrialized Thu Thiem, sparsely scattered with the maroon cells. With Thu Thiem serving as her latest case study on urban development, Chung simultaneously contemplates, recaptures, and forecasts the cycle of erasure, growth and destruction of land in modern societies.



Installation view of Tiffany Chung's "an archaeology project for future remembrance" at Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, 2013. Courtesy Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City.

Chung looks at other important cases of land transformation in her ongoing series "The Galapagos Project: on the brink of our master plans," shown at Galerie Quynh's home base. Upstairs, her *snow covered paths, winter evergreens and defunct coal mines* (2012-13) featured a remap in green, white and orange cells marginalized by protruding networks of outlined coal mines in Yamaguchi, Japan. The work explores post-industrial decline due to natural disasters or climate change. *HCMC extreme flood prediction 2050 - ADB & ICEM reports* (2013), for example, is based on predictions that Ho Chi Minh City and Vietnam's lower Mekong Delta region will undergo a fatal flood in 2050 due to global warming. A chilling illustration of icy blue cells set within diverged and crackled regions of exposed raw pink, the remap parallels Chung's installation also created in response to the flood prediction titled *stored in a jar: monsoon, drowning fish, color of water, and the floating world* (2010-11), displayed throughout the back of the upstairs gallery. The installation presents a "floating town" modeled in wood veneer, plastic, aluminum, paint, and foam, suspended from steel cables on six separate islets of Plexiglas. The hanging islets form an almost three-dimensional map, with homogenized water hamlets supporting solar panels, rainwater harvesting systems, canoes for transport and vertical and rooftop gardens that eerily conceive the futuristic aftermath of the 2050 flooding.

With her research-fueled practice, Chung probes the slow degradation of cities and towns, treating them as living organisms with beautiful microbial remapping and elaborate miniature models. Her abstract cartographic artworks require close study and examination; they underscore complex civilizations rarely immune to forces of history and demographic change.

Tiffany Chung's "The Galapagos Project: on the brink of our master plans," and "an archaeology for future remembrance" were on view at Galerie Quynh from December 4, 2013-January 10, 2014.

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