

3 August 2023

hyperallergic

“Trương Công Tung Sees History in a Gourd”

Link: <https://hyperallergic.com/835047/truong-cong-tung-sees-history-in-a-gourd-ica-la/>

HYPERALLERGIC

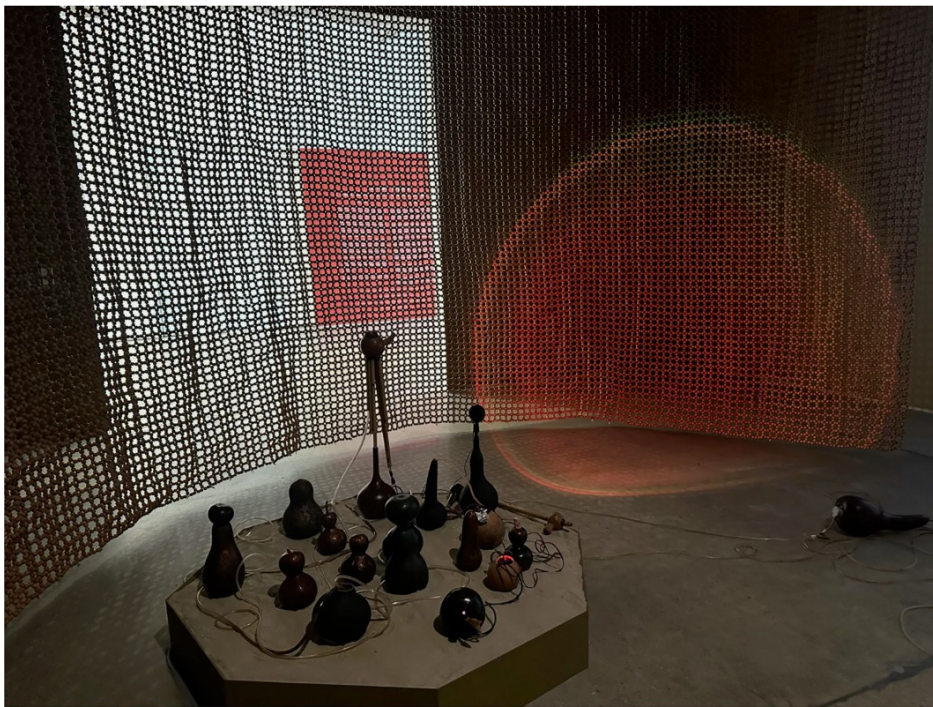
Art

Trương Công Tung Sees History in a Gourd

Trương Công Tung’s art is a meditation on the complex interdependent variables that constitute a diasporic experience, one that offers no easy or concrete answers.



Alex Paik August 3, 2023



Installation view of *Trương Công Tung* at the ICA LA (all photos Alex Paik/Hyperallergic)

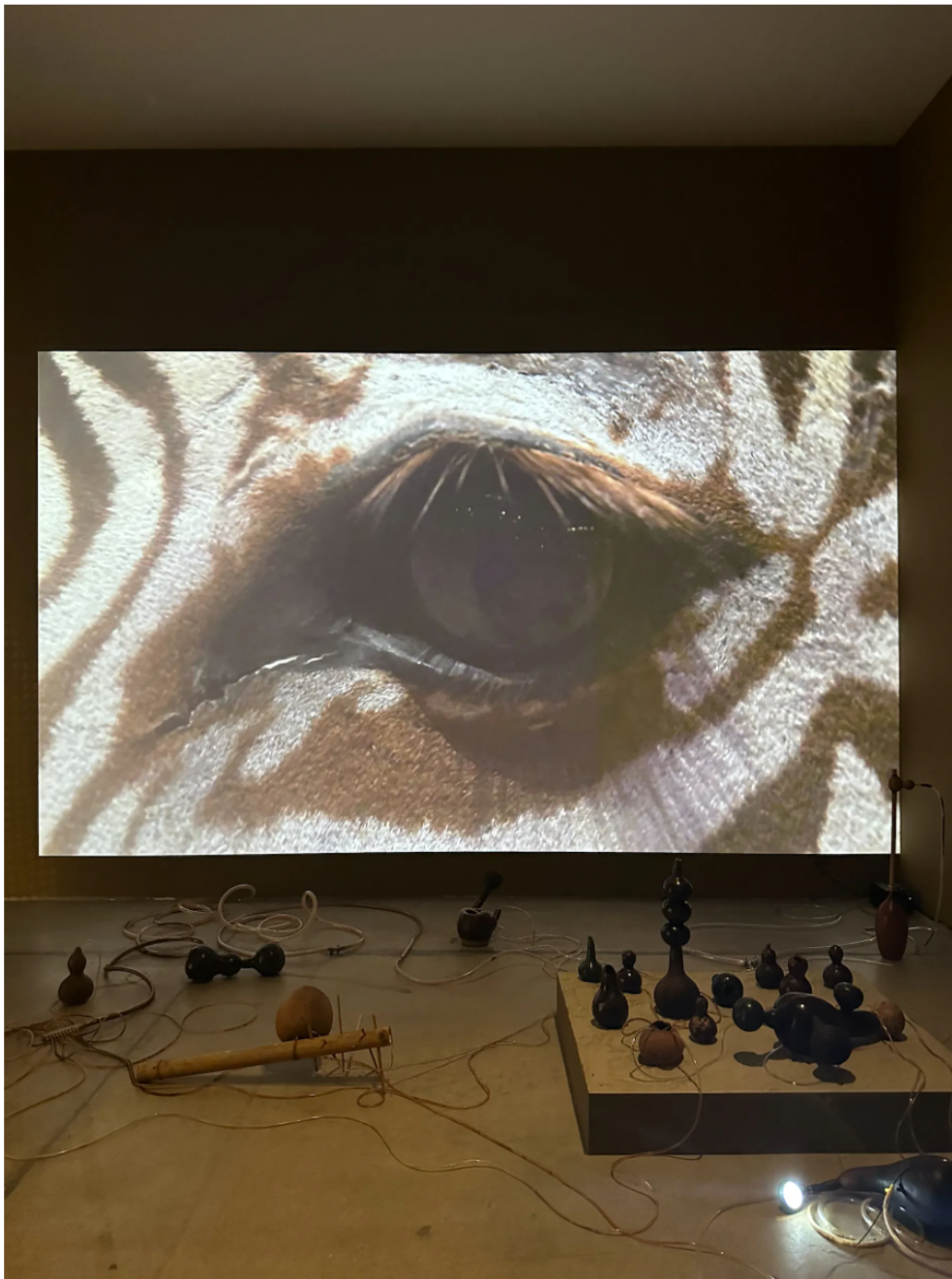
LOS ANGELES — The small project room that houses Vietnamese artist [Trương Công Tùng](#)’s exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (ICA LA) — his first solo museum show — is dark save for a few lights that are embedded within an installation and two videos: “Dance of the insects” (2020), which is suspended from the ceiling, where insects crawl across a recording of an evening newscast, and “The lost landscape” (2021), a series of close-up shots of the eyes of taxidermied animals from various natural history museums. The taxidermied animals are frozen between states of death and life, stuck between being living creatures and objects of display.

Displayed throughout the room is “the state of absence – voices from outside” (2020–ongoing), an installation of gourds that have been connected through a series of plastic tubes, which pass water, dirt, and seeds among the gourds, and visibly entangle with each other. Some of the gourds contain bubbling water, which needs to be refilled periodically, while others have mechanical parts attached to them that make them hum, wiggle, or ring at various intervals. The gourds are sealed in lacquer, which both protects them and enhances the contrast of the surface after it has been polished.

At the entrance of the project room hangs “Long Long Legacies” (2021–ongoing), a curtain made of wooden beads sewn together into a net-like form. These beads are created from rubber, coffee, cashew, and forest tree wood from the central highlands of Vietnam, resources that have been exploited due to war and industrialization. Like individuals, each bead carries its own unique relationship to this history. The piece reflects the harmful effects of colonization, war, and rapid industrialization but also the community and belonging that weave a group together as a result. Is the beaded net — and its embedded histories — a protective casing, like the lacquer surfaces of the gourds, or is it a prison that traps and ossifies collective trauma into a national identity?

As I spent time with the exhibition, I found myself asking questions about the diasporic experience. Does the shared trauma of a nation extend to its citizens and its diaspora across the globe and even across generations in the same way that the dirt, seed, and water travel freely throughout the installation? How do national and individual identities change as the diaspora is influenced more and more by a different context, as multiple entangled layers of individual and collective material migrate and intermingle with each other?

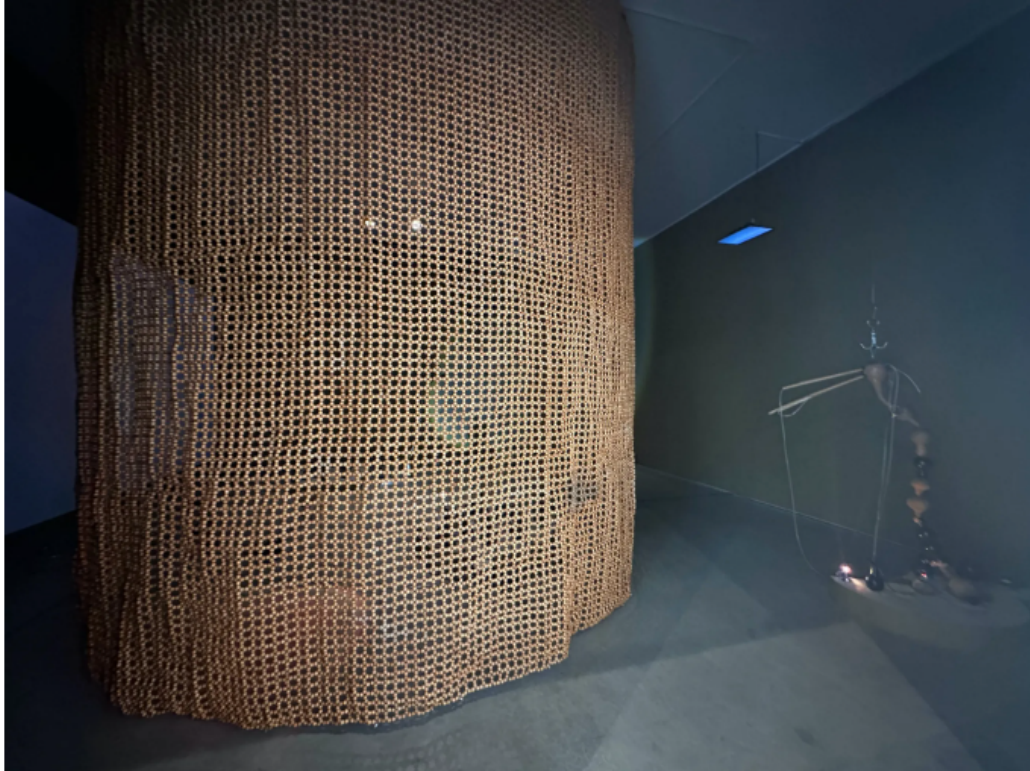
Truong's exhibition is a meditation on the complex interdependent variables that constitute a diasporic experience, one that offers no easy or concrete answers. It examines what is shared, lost, and changed as communities migrate across the globe and metamorphose. The artist's work is skeptical of finality and is instead interested in the ways in which history and geography shape identity formation. For Truong, the boundaries between living and non-living, between the past and the present, between individual and collective identity, are porous and constantly shifting, passing material back and forth through a multilayered series of interconnected paths.



Trương Công Tùng, "The lost landscape #1" (2021), single-channel video, color, sound, 5 min.



Trương Công Tùng, "The state of absence – voices from outside," detail (2020–ongoing), gourds, water, soil, seeds, machinery, time, and temperature



Installation view of *Trương Công Tùng* at the ICA LA

Trương Công Tùng continues at the Institute of Contemporary Art (1717 East 7th Street, Arts District, Los Angeles) through September 10. The exhibition was organized by Amanda Sroka, senior curator, with Caroline Ellen Liou, curatorial assistant.