Memorial Project Nha Trang, Vietnam
Towards the Complex—For the Courageous, the Curious and the Cowards

Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba
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Organized by the MIT List Visual Arts Center
Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba

Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba was born in Japan and educated in Illinois, Maryland, and Texas; he now lives and works in Vietnam. His early installation works dealt with the life of the Vietnamese people, and in 1995 as an artist-in-residence at Art Pace in San Antonio, Texas, he created an installation that dealt with the AIDS epidemic. In 2000, Nguyen-Hatsushiba created Xich Lo 2001-The Making of Alternative History, an exhibition for Mizuma Gallery in Tokyo that was concerned with cyclos, human-powered rickshaws that are used to transport goods and people in Vietnam. This cheap means of transportation has provided a source of income for many of those unemployed as a result of the country’s reunification. Modernization, however, has made these vehicles, which are good for the environment, but slow moving and old-fashioned, unwelcome on Vietnamese city streets, and the government has banned further production of cyclos. For the Mizuma exhibition, Nguyen-Hatsushiba designed and produced several new cyclo models, and he designed an advertising campaign for them that included portraits of many cyclo drivers. The slick graphics of the ads provided a startling contrast to texts they featured which outlined the youthful dreams of the drivers as well as the current reality of their lives.

In a work commissioned for the 2001 Yokohama Triennale of Contemporary Art (and also presented at the São Paolo and Sydney Biennals), Nguyen-Hatsushiba again focused on cyclo drivers in his new video project, Memorial Project Nha Trang, Vietnam Towards the Complex - For the Courageous, the Curious and the Cowards (2001). Filmed on location in Vietnam’s IndoChina Sea, this remarkable 13-minute video depicts a number of young men struggling to propel cyclos across the rock-strewn, sandy, ocean bottom. Working in teams, they pull, push, and pedal the passengerless vehicles; periodically they must rush up to the surface for air or risk drowning. The water grows deeper, the boulders get larger, the trip to the surface takes longer, and the task is increasingly arduous. Finally, the drivers abandon their cyclos, and swim together toward an underwater “city” composed of tents made from white netting strung between boulders, a metaphorical memorial for the many Vietnamese boat people drowned in the aftermath of the war. The clear blue water, sunlight dappling the ocean floor, and gentle flute music composed by Quoc Bao and Nguyen-Hatsushiba, again provide stark contrast in this all-too-real metaphor for this endangered way of life.

Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba was born in Japan in 1968. He now lives and works in Vietnam. He was educated in the United States at Brookhaven College, Dallas, TX; The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL; and the Maryland Institute, and College of Art, Mount Royal School of Art, Baltimore, MD. He has received numerous awards including a Japanese Artist Living Abroad Award from the Shiseido Corporate Culture Department in Tokyo and the Fondation Cartier in Paris, France; New Forms Regional Initiative Grant, from Mexic-Arte Museum and Diverse Works, Houston, TX; an Art Matters Grant; and an International Artist in Residence Grant from ArtPace, San Antonio, TX.

Solo Exhibitions
2003
Austin Museum of Art, Austin, TX
Matrix Program 2003, Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, University of California, Berkeley, CA
MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, MA
Museo d’arte contemporanea, Rome, Italy
The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, NY
NKV Extra, Nassauischer Kunstverein, Wiesbaden, Germany

2002
Galeria Animal, Santiago, Chile
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand
Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
Towards the Complex, De Appel, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

2000
Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

1998
Blue Space Gallery, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
Individuals-Collections, Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
In Between, Shiseido Ginza Art Space, Tokyo, Japan