

TUAN ANDREW NGUYEN

Fire Sermon

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Esther Schipper, Berlin

Esther Schipper



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Esther Schipper Berlin is pleased to present *Fire Sermon*, Tuan Andrew Nguyen's first solo exhibition with the gallery. On view will be five new sculptures from the artist's series of mobiles.

Tuan Andrew Nguyen's practice explores the critical impact of storytelling across media including video, sculpture, and installation. Grounded in sustained community engagement and extensive research, his work engages with oral narration, material history, genealogies that span continents, and the lingering impact of colonial politics. Nguyen's cinematic works feature tales of biographical, geographical and temporal entanglements that meld fact and fiction. The artist's sculptural works are intertwined with his cinematic oeuvre.

The five mobiles on view in *Fire Sermon* are made from artillery shells salvaged in Vietnam. They take direct inspiration from Nguyen's 2022 film *The Unburied Sounds of a Troubled Horizon*, in which a young metal scavenger is ostracized by her mother, who believes that her daughter is possessed because of her strange obsession with making kinetic sculptures out of bomb material.

In the film, which is fictional but interweaves true stories from people affected by UXO (Unexploded Ordnance), it becomes clear that the character's biographical and historical context evokes specific associations: "Aren't they like the bombings you used to tell me about?" she asks her mother. This story sets her on a journey to turn bombs into bells of healing power.

Nguyen's mobiles play on the viewer's familiarity with Calder's work to draw us in, then allow us to experience their alienness: At first impression similar—colorful abstract elements, animated by slight movements as they balance gracefully—the centrally positioned artillery shell casings make their otherness immediately clear. The objects' material history carries a legacy of trauma that reanimates the past and assumes a new life. Nguyen's use of Calder's playful visual language also points to the limits of form as an autonomous means of communication. As a leading figure of modernism, Calder's work came to be associated with US Cold War values and the political neutrality attributed to postwar modernism. Yet, Calder was in fact an active opponent of the Vietnam War, producing

anti-war materials and in 1977 turning down the US Presidential Medal of Freedom in protest.

For Nguyen, then, the notion of repurposing materials from the Vietnam War has wider meanings, both historical and spiritual. Unexploded ordnance from the extensive US bombing campaign, which dropped millions of tons of munitions on Vietnam during the war, remains embedded across the country, endangering communities and restricting the safe use of land. Drawing on the tradition of repurposing UXOs in Vietnam into objects for daily use, his transformation into artworks is an act of remembrance and healing. Nguyen's practice builds on, as he put it, "the power to take something that was meant for destruction, harm, and change it to something that has the possibility to heal." The artist takes this idea literally, as the central artillery shell casings of each work function as bells, tuned to a frequency associated with healing qualities.

The exhibition's title, *Fire Sermon*, refers to the Buddhist Ādittapariyāya Sutta, which describes sensory experience as "burning" with passion, aversion, delusion, and suffering. Liberation is attained through detachment or non-attachment.

Tuan Andrew Nguyen was born in 1976 in Saigon, Vietnam. In 1999, Nguyen graduated from the Fine Arts program at the University of California, Irvine, and completed a Master of Fine Arts in 2004 at the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia. The artist lives and works in Ho Chi Minh City. Nguyen has received numerous awards, including the 2025 MacArthur Fellowship, the 2025 Trellis Art Fund Milestone Grant, and the 2023 Joan Miró Prize.

Nguyen's major solo presentations include: *Tuan Andrew Nguyen: We Were Lost in Our Country*, Art Institute Chicago (2025); *When Water Embraces Empty Space*, Edith Russ Haus, Oldenburg (2024); *The Other Side of Now*, Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa, Cape Town (2024); *The Island*, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington (2024); *Our Ghosts Live in the Future*, Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona (2024); *Tuan Andrew Nguyen: Radiant Remembrance*, The New Museum, New York (2023); *All That We Are Is What We Hold In Our Outstretched Hands*, Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow (2023); *Tuan Andrew Nguyen: The Boat People*, Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University (2023), The Contemporary Dayton (2021), and Chrysler Museum, Richmond (2021).

The artist's videos and films have been included in major international festivals, biennials, and exhibitions, including the 61st Venice Biennale (2026); *Tirailleurs: Trials and Tribulations*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2026); the 25th Biennale of Sydney (2026); the 36th São Paulo Biennial (2025); Prospect.6, New Orleans, LA (2024); the 12th Berlin Biennale (2022).

Nguyen unveiled two major commissions in late October 2025: *Temple*, at the National Gallery Singapore as part of the 2025 Singapore Biennale, and *Naga*, at the Princeton University Art Museum, coinciding with the opening of the museum's new building. Since spring 2026, Nguyen's High Line Commission *The Light that Shines Through the Universe* is on view in New York.

Among institutions that hold his works are: Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn; Carré d'Art - Musée d'art contemporain de Nîmes, Nîmes; Centre national des arts plastiques, Paris; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas; Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi; Kadist Art Foundation, San Francisco; Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, St. Louis; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Museum MACAN, Jakarta; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; Singapore Art Museum, Singapore; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

