By Adam Carr

VIEWS FROM THE 10*

Sung Tieu

I walked through the forest Dresden, Germany, when I was between the Czech Republic and a village called Freital, near Germany to cross the German border in 1983, demanding all immigrants without legal papers to leave the country within fourteen days. I was captivated by how the simple naming of the “Ghana Must Go” bag exposes us to a history of dislocation, of fractured and sudden enforced exile, but also to an underlying economic force. By one of the most prestigious fashion brands in the world putting its trademark on top of that history, the bag immediately comes to mind.

The issue of counterfeiting, and economic forces. By one of the most prestigious fashion brands in the world putting its trademark on top of that history, the bag immediately comes to mind.

Sung Tieu was born in Vietnam and raised in Germany. Her work addresses the discourse surrounding topics such as cultural hegemony, class, and the gendered or racialized aspects to how we respond to cultural references—either in actively lived or passively learned experiences—are explored through Tieu’s commentary on the effects of cultural collisions and struggle. My work is informed by these experiences of alienation and non-belonging, and the search for defining one’s identity elsewhere. I would like to perceive my own subjectivity as in a state of constant flux, which acts as a destabilizing mechanism my work. The cultural collisions and struggle of displacement is very much a part of the discourse in my practice.

Curator Adam Carr on the sociopolitical conditions of her work, the migrant experience, and the regressive meaning inherent within appropriation and counterfeit objects.

ADAM CARR: Your upbringing, cultural background, and history seem to play out at the forefront of your work regularly. I thought it would make sense to start this conversation in asking about that...

SUNG TIEU: I emigrated from Hanoi in Vietnam to a small village called Freital, near Dresden, Germany, when I was 5 years old. My mother and I walked through the forest between the Czech Republic and Germany to cross the German border in 1982, and sought asylum. We moved to the Berlin two years later, where we lived in an asylum home in Hohenschönhausen, in East Berlin. My work is informed by these experiences of alienation and non-belonging, and the search for defining one’s identity elsewhere. I would like to perceive my own subjectivity as in a state of constant flux, which acts as a destabilizing mechanism my work. The cultural collisions and struggle of displacement is very much a part of the discourse in my practice.

My work is informed by these experiences of alienation and non-belonging, and the search for defining one’s identity elsewhere.

Curator Adam Carr on the sociopolitical conditions of her work, the migrant experience, and the regressive meaning inherent within appropriation and counterfeit objects.

ADAM CARR: Your upbringing, cultural background, and history seem to play out at the forefront of your work regularly. I thought it would make sense to start this conversation in asking about that...

SUNG TIEU: I emigrated from Hanoi in Vietnam to a small village called Freital, near Dresden, Germany, when I was 5 years old. My mother and I walked through the forest between the Czech Republic and Germany to cross the German border in 1982, and sought asylum. We moved to the Berlin two years later, where we lived in an asylum home in Hohenschönhausen, in East Berlin. My work is informed by these experiences of alienation and non-belonging, and the search for defining one’s identity elsewhere. I would like to perceive my own subjectivity as in a state of constant flux, which acts as a destabilizing mechanism my work. The cultural collisions and struggle of displacement is very much a part of the discourse in my practice.

Curator Adam Carr on the sociopolitical conditions of her work, the migrant experience, and the regressive meaning inherent within appropriation and counterfeit objects.

ADAM CARR: Your upbringing, cultural background, and history seem to play out at the forefront of your work regularly. I thought it would make sense to start this conversation in asking about that...

SUNG TIEU: I emigrated from Hanoi in Vietnam to a small village called Freital, near Dresden, Germany, when I was 5 years old. My mother and I walked through the forest between the Czech Republic and Germany to cross the German border in 1982, and sought asylum. We moved to the Berlin two years later, where we lived in an asylum home in Hohenschönhausen, in East Berlin. My work is informed by these experiences of alienation and non-belonging, and the search for defining one’s identity elsewhere. I would like to perceive my own subjectivity as in a state of constant flux, which acts as a destabilizing mechanism my work. The cultural collisions and struggle of displacement is very much a part of the discourse in my practice.

Curator Adam Carr on the sociopolitical conditions of her work, the migrant experience, and the regressive meaning inherent within appropriation and counterfeit objects.

ADAM CARR: Your upbringing, cultural background, and history seem to play out at the forefront of your work regularly. I thought it would make sense to start this conversation in asking about that...

SUNG TIEU: I emigrated from Hanoi in Vietnam to a small village called Freital, near Dresden, Germany, when I was 5 years old. My mother and I walked through the forest between the Czech Republic and Germany to cross the German border in 1982, and sought asylum. We moved to the Berlin two years later, where we lived in an asylum home in Hohenschönhausen, in East Berlin. My work is informed by these experiences of alienation and non-belonging, and the search for defining one’s identity elsewhere. I would like to perceive my own subjectivity as in a state of constant flux, which acts as a destabilizing mechanism my work. The cultural collisions and struggle of displacement is very much a part of the discourse in my practice.

Curator Adam Carr on the sociopolitical conditions of her work, the migrant experience, and the regressive meaning inherent within appropriation and counterfeit objects.

ADAM CARR: Your upbringing, cultural background, and history seem to play out at the forefront of your work regularly. I thought it would make sense to start this conversation in asking about that...

SUNG TIEU: I emigrated from Hanoi in Vietnam to a small village called Freital, near Dresden, Germany, when I was 5 years old. My mother and I walked through the forest between the Czech Republic and Germany to cross the German border in 1982, and sought asylum. We moved to the Berlin two years later, where we lived in an asylum home in Hohenschönhausen, in East Berlin. My work is informed by these experiences of alienation and non-belonging, and the search for defining one’s identity elsewhere. I would like to perceive my own subjectivity as in a state of constant flux, which acts as a destabilizing mechanism my work. The cultural collisions and struggle of displacement is very much a part of the discourse in my practice.

Curator Adam Carr on the sociopolitical conditions of her work, the migrant experience, and the regressive meaning inherent within appropriation and counterfeit objects.

ADAM CARR: Your upbringing, cultural background, and history seem to play out at the forefront of your work regularly. I thought it would make sense to start this conversation in asking about that...

SUNG TIEU: I emigrated from Hanoi in Vietnam to a small village called Freital, near Dresden, Germany, when I was 5 years old. My mother and I walked through the forest between the Czech Republic and Germany to cross the German border in 1982, and sought asylum. We moved to the Berlin two years later, where we lived in an asylum home in Hohenschönhausen, in East Berlin. My work is informed by these experiences of alienation and non-belonging, and the search for defining one’s identity elsewhere. I would like to perceive my own subjectivity as in a state of constant flux, which acts as a destabilizing mechanism my work. The cultural collisions and struggle of displacement is very much a part of the discourse in my practice.
in the suburbs of Berlin. The MP3 player itself is an appropriated iPod shuffle I discovered in Boish & Hoo’s shop during my research. Elements of the design—the casing, typography, layout—were inspired by Apple’s aesthetic. I worked with graphic designer Per Törnberg on redressing the entire player? and all its elements with a new logo, packaging, and typography for the MP3 player’s casing that would resonate the sound work I was creating for it. The idea for the project was to re-contextualize this second-hand item, and play with the idea of adding another layer of artistic value onto it. The object provided a great way to emphasize—and to literally resonate—the already existing creative labor invested in the second-hand product itself. For the sound work, I used records of a traditional Vietnamese instrument called đàn hú à, a simple, but very particular sounding moonshiner zither. Together with music producer Villa Haima, we worked on generating electronically manipulated new textures for that instrument. I took field recordings at KaDeWe (Berlin’s most well-known luxury shopping mall) and we decided to sounds alongside product-placement sequences from movies. The intention was to compose an alien and fragmented sound scape that would investigate different audible values of product space, which could afterwards infiltrate the system of the busy Dong Xuan center sales market and would instantly get incorporated into their commercial structure.

ST: I felt very lucky to be able to study under Andreas Slominski in Hamburg. As a professor, he laid emphasis on a strong class dynamic, establishing a tight group of students, which would facilitate us getting to know each other very well. I am still in continuous dialogue with many of them. For my own practice, the one aspect I feel influenced by is his amazing sensibility for sound and music, and how to create a narrative by placing art works in a certain order within a given environment. Subnational MP3 infiltrates not only the artworld, but also (and perhaps more so) the “everyday” world, in a way that could be seen to be reminiscent of Slominski’s own interventions. Could you speak more about this project?

AC: As he is one of my all time favorite artists, I wonder if you could speak about your experiences studying under Andreas Slominski in Hamburg. Your recent work Subnational MP3 infiltrates not only the artworld, but also (and perhaps more so) the “everyday” world, in a way that could be seen to be reminiscent of Slominski’s own interventions. Could you speak more about this project?

ST: Yes—in one of the halls of the center, there is a bright glowing LED shop named CEO LED. The owner, named To, imports the LED parts from China, but produces these LED signs in his shop himself. Normally, the signs in his shop either have a kind of template text of an imagined dry cleaner service, or just letter compositions such as AAA. For my show, I re-programmed all the LED signs in his store—in total twelve signs—and equipped each of them with significant dates and countries related to international recruitment agreements and alien laws. One sign, a relevant one for emergence of the Dong Xuan Centre in particular, displayed: “1918 German Democratic Republic & Social Republic Of Vietnam – Recruitment Agreement On The Importation Of Contract Labor.” Another LED sign read: “1913 Alien Land Law California,” pointing toward limiting rights for certain “aliens ineligible for citizenship.” The shop inadvertently became an exhibition site within an already existing apparatus. It was great to have this altered experience of the shop and to incorporate how the reception of events, objects, and people, and objects is dependent on context and placement.

ST: What is this sense of trading, which has to ties to your biography, also has to ties to your other pieces, in which you have people from nail parlors participate. Can you elaborate on these works?

AC: I know that this process of infiltration at Dong Xuan Centre went even further—could you tell me about the LED pieces that you did there?

ST: The first time I asked a nail studio to participate in my exhibition, I was invited to show at a project space in Brandenburg an der Havel. The project space was located on the town’s busiest shopping street, and right across from the exhibition space was a Vietnamese-run nail studio. Relating to the shop environment of the project space, I knew that I wanted to do something with perforated metal plates, the same ones that hang in hardware or utility stores to display shop items. I decided to ask the nail studio ladies from next door if they could paint them with designs they liked. What came out where very particular, colorful, individual looking nail designs composed across the surface of the metal, which showed the painting style of each nail artist. To me, these nail studio works are an opportunity for conversation. The work titles share the name of the nail studio, and include its exact address, so anyone can go in and speak to the workers—but they also lay open the visual represtation of a social group that barely has any voice on the cultural or democratic landscape. As most of these works do not have the right to vote since they are not German citizens. To me, this work became a chance to enter a dialogue with these individuals about craft, work environment, and the ways they sustained a living for themselves.

AC: What are you currently working on?

ST: The main project I am working towards at the moment is a show that I was invited to show at a project space in Brandenburg an der Havel. The project space was located on the town’s busiest shopping street, and right across from the exhibition space was a Vietnamese-run nail studio. Relating to the shop environment of the project space, I knew that I wanted to do something with perforated metal plates, the same ones that hang in hardware or utility stores to display shop items. I decided to ask the nail studio ladies from next door if they could paint them with designs they liked. What came out where very particular, colorful, individual looking nail designs composed across the surface of the metal, which showed the painting style of each nail artist. To me, these nail studio works are an opportunity for conversation. The work titles share the name of the nail studio, and include its exact address, so anyone can go in and speak to the workers—but they also lay open the visual represtation of a social group that barely has any voice on the cultural or democratic landscape. As most of these works do not have the right to vote since they are not German citizens. To me, this work became a chance to enter a dialogue with these individuals about craft, work environment, and the ways they sustained a living for themselves.

AC: What are you currently working on?

ST: I am working towards a project that I was invited to show at a project space in Brandenburg an der Havel. The project space was located on the town’s busiest shopping street, and right across from the exhibition space was a Vietnamese-run nail studio. Relating to the shop environment of the project space, I knew that I wanted to do something with perforated metal plates, the same ones that hang in hardware or utility stores to display shop items. I decided to ask the nail studio ladies from next door if they could paint them with designs they liked. What came out where very particular, colorful, individual looking nail designs composed across the surface of the metal, which showed the painting style of each nail artist. To me, these nail studio works are an opportunity for conversation. The work titles share the name of the nail studio, and include its exact address, so anyone can go in and speak to the workers—but they also lay open the visual represtation of a social group that barely has any voice on the cultural or democratic landscape. As most of these works do not have the right to vote since they are not German citizens. To me, this work became a chance to enter a dialogue with these individuals about craft, work environment, and the ways they sustained a living for themselves.

AC: What are you currently working on?

ST: The main project I am working towards at the moment is a show that I was invited to show at a project space in Brandenburg an der Havel. The project space was located on the town’s busiest shopping street, and right across from the exhibition space was a Vietnamese-run nail studio. Relating to the shop environment of the project space, I knew that I wanted to do something with perforated metal plates, the same ones that hang in hardware or utility stores to display shop items. I decided to ask the nail studio ladies from next door if they could paint them with designs they liked. What came out where very particular, colorful, individual looking nail designs composed across the surface of the metal, which showed the painting style of each nail artist. To me, these nail studio works are an opportunity for conversation. The work titles share the name of the nail studio, and include its exact address, so anyone can go in and speak to the workers—but they also lay open the visual represtation of a social group that barely has any voice on the cultural or democratic landscape. As most of these works do not have the right to vote since they are not German citizens. To me, this work became a chance to enter a dialogue with these individuals about craft, work environment, and the ways they sustained a living for themselves.

AC: What are you currently working on?