



Education Folio  
Nguyen Trinh Thi  
Vietnam

**How to use this folio**

This education folio contains information about the featured artists in the Asia Pacific Breweries Foundation Signature Art Prize 2014, their artworks as well as artistic processes, giving visitors a better understanding and appreciation of the artworks displayed.

Questions and activities found at the back of the folio are meant for visitors to have a deeper engagement with each of the finalist artworks. The questions can be used for discussions when looking at the particular artwork, while the suggested activities are designed for educators or parents to explore with their students or children for further engagement beyond the museum visit.

The suggested reading and viewing lists also provide more information about the artist's practice, artwork themes and related ideas or issues, which are aimed at helping educators and readers make interesting and relevant connections to matters in their daily life.

## Introduction

The Asia Pacific Breweries (APB) Foundation Signature Art Prize is a premier juried prize inaugurated by the Asia Pacific Breweries Foundation and the Singapore Art Museum in 2008. It is a hallmark of distinction awarded to artists whose artworks represent a significant development in contemporary visual art in the Asia Pacific region.

A triennial competition, the APB Foundation Signature Art Prize seeks to highlight new developments in the visual arts, stimulate lively public discussion and critical debate, and provide a cross-cultural exhibition platform for established practitioners and significant emerging artists alike. Aimed at recognising the single most outstanding contemporary visual artwork produced in the preceding three years, the competition is open to all visual artworks, regardless of medium, subject matter and size.

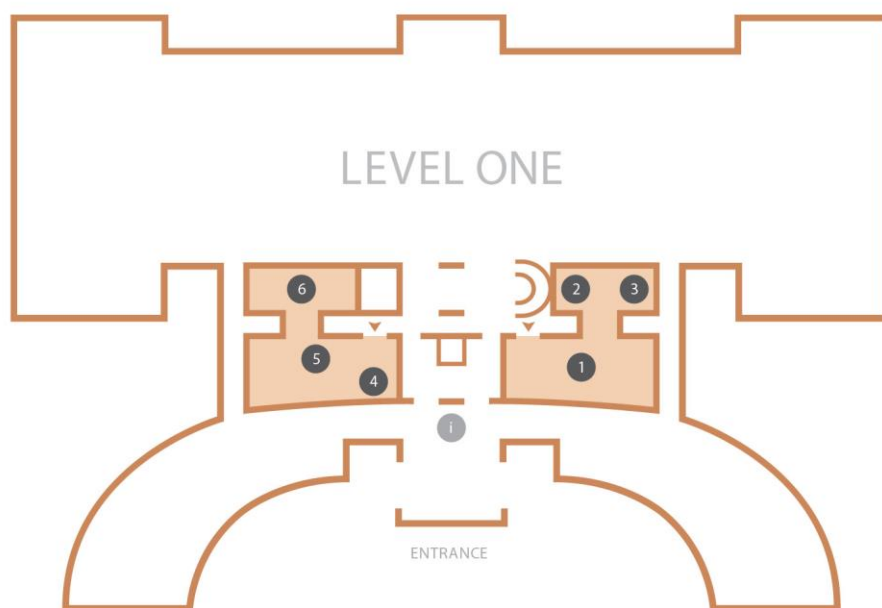
The inaugural edition in 2008 focused only on 12 countries: Cambodia, China, India, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam, and received a total of 34 nominations. The APB Foundation Signature Art Prize soon expanded its focus in 2011 to reach the entire Asia Pacific region, including 130 artworks from 23 Asia Pacific countries and territories. Nominations were received from new countries and territories including Indonesia, Philippines, Myanmar, Brunei, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Australia and other Oceania and Pacific islands. The 2014 edition includes nominations from all previous countries and territories, including a nomination from new entrant, Hong Kong.

Nominators from across the region with a wide range of specialties and backgrounds are specially invited to nominate specific artworks – instead of artists – that had been aesthetically, culturally and socially significant in their particular artscenes in the past three years. A diverse panel of distinguished judges, who mostly hail from the Asia-Pacific region, are also selected specially to evaluate the nominations, shortlist the finalists, and decide on the key award-winning works in the APB Foundation Signature Art Prize exhibition

All nominated works are assessed on a set of criteria: the strength of the idea and concept; creative and interesting use of medium and material; technique, expression and form; artistic insight and interpretation, and imagination and originality. The Grand Prize and two Juror's Choice Awards are chosen by the international jury of art experts, critics and curators, while the People's Choice Award will go to the artist whose work garners the most number of public votes.

The APB Foundation Signature Art Prize is a recognition of distinction and significance in artistic practice, presenting the best of contemporary art in the Asia-Pacific region.

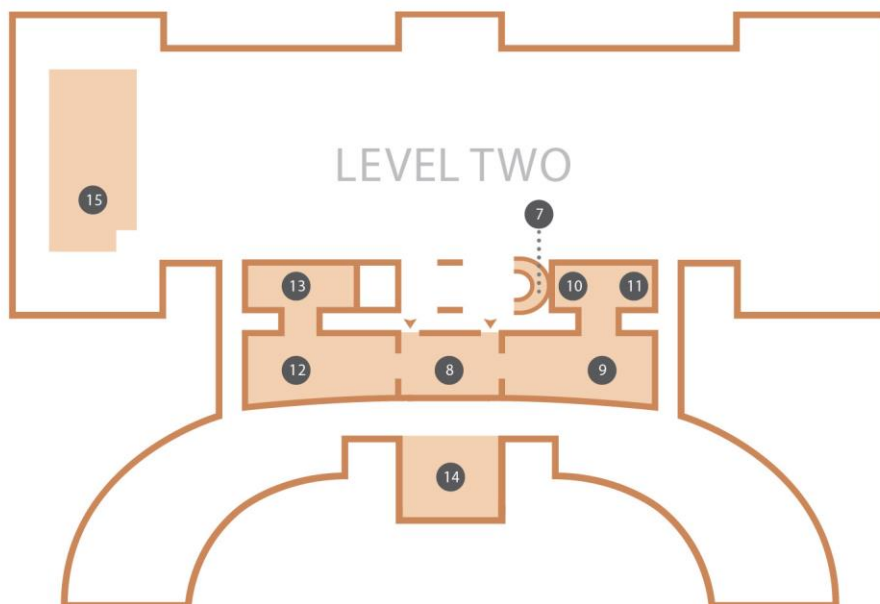
## Exhibition map



### LEVEL ONE

- 1 Nguyen Trinh Thi
- 2 Robert Zhao Renhui
- 3 Owen Leong
- 4 Farida Batool
- 5 Peng Wei
- 6 Yao Jui-Chung  
+ Lost Society  
Document (LSD)

## Exhibition map



### LEVEL TWO

- 7 Liu Jianhua
- 8 Choe U-Ram
- 9 Go Watanabe
- 10 Lisa Reihana
- 11 Naeem Mohaiemen
- 12 Arin Rungjang
- 13 Ranbir Kaleka
- 14 Melati Suryodarmo
- 15 Ho Tzu Nven

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**Artwork*****Unsubtitled***

Nguyen Trinh Thi

2013

Video projection on wood cut-outs

Dimensions variable

Collection of the Singapore Art Museum

*Image courtesy of the Artist*

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## About the artwork and artistic process

In Nguyen Trinh Thi's work *Unsubtitled*, visitors enter a room filled with 19 large wooden cut-outs with standing figures projected upon them. The figures are all members of the local art scene in Hanoi, Vietnam. Viewers are greeted by the figures eating a variety of foods accompanied by sounds of chewing and swallowing. *Unsubtitled* offers a unique twist on this regular act of eating, as the figures state their name and identify what they had just eaten.

The figures' **ambiguous** facial expressions hints of their awareness of being watched, creating an **ominous** atmosphere. Such behaviour suggests that the basic human right of eating is being infringed upon, and speaks of a community under **surveillance**. Nguyen uses her work to communicate a message about the struggle between oppression and defiance. While the individuals are free to choose what they want to eat, the **terse** and **tentative** manner in the consumption of food here highlights the artificiality of the act. Here, the act of watching one eat serves as a metaphor to interrogate an artist's right to freedom of expression and peaceful existence.

Nguyen offers the simple and concise **artist statement** that "Eating needs no explanations". The artist rightfully and simply asserts that this primal human need does not require further elaboration. Yet, her statement also suggests that even simple basic rights cannot be taken for granted, and behind the seemingly simple **façades of the work**, a much deeper side of Vietnam is revealed.

The figures in *Unsubtitled* can be seen as acting in solidarity against the threats of  **censorship**. In 2010, local artist La Thi Dieu Ha performed a work in the nude for Nha San Studio in Hanoi. The moment the cultural police saw photographic evidence of the performance, they ordered the art space to shut down temporarily for breaking the laws restricting the media and arts. *Unsubtitled* was the first work shown in the studio after its forced temporary shutdown.

### **About the artist**

Nguyen Trinh Thi (B. 1973, Hanoi, Vietnam) is an independent filmmaker and video artist based in Hanoi, Vietnam. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Russian and English from the Hanoi Foreign Studies College and a Master of Arts in Professional Journalism from the University of Iowa in the United States. She continued her studies at the University of California, San Diego where she graduated with a Master of Pacific International Affairs.

During her time at the University of California, San Diego, Nguyen was exposed to the study of ethnographic film and media methods. This is reflected in her works, which reveal the culture of her local Vietnamese community and highlight the current issues faced by Vietnam today. Nguyen also founded the Hanoi Centre for the Moving Image (Hanoi DOCLAB) in 2009, an independent space for documentary film and video art that remains an important centre for art and moving images in Vietnam.

In 2010, Nguyen exhibited her work at the Kuandu Biennale in Taipei and the Tate Modern in London. Her works have also been shown extensively in Japan, at the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum (2012), Okinawa Prefectural Museum & Art Museum (2012), Tochigi Prefecture Art Museum of Fine Arts (2012) and the Mie Prefectural Art Museum (2012).



## Discussion and suggested activities

### Questions for discussion

- The 19 individuals are eating a food item of their choice. Can you identify what they are eating? [traditional Vietnamese snacks, cucumbers, carrots, bread, sweet cakes, smoking cigarettes, etc.]
- Look at the facial expressions and body postures of the 19 individuals. What might they be thinking about? Could you guess?
- Pay attention to the sounds of the video work as you move among the 19 individuals. What do you hear? Where do you think the figures are at?
- How does the placement of the 19 individuals and use of sound in this installation affect your experience of this artwork? What if the individuals were all projections on a wall?
- The artist uses a deceptively simple statement to summarise her artwork, "Eating needs no explanations". Can you think of any other way to phrase and succinctly depict the artwork? [FOOD FOR THOUGHT] What is surveillance? What is the common technology used to do this? [CCTV, etc.] Why would surveillance be necessary, and when would it be undesirable and an infringement on privacy? Consider the positive and negative impact of surveillance in a particular context.

### Suggested activities

- How would you feel if someone were to stare at you while you were eating? Take turns to conduct this experiment with your friends or family. Share your feelings with them after the experiment.
- Use a projector as part of your art making. Collaborate with friends or family to develop an installation or performance using a projector. How does the projector enhance your artwork?
- Find out which cities in the world most widely use CCTVs and evaluate how it affects people's behaviors and actions in these countries.

**Glossary****Ambiguous**

Open to more than one interpretation; not having one obvious meaning.

**Surveillance**

Close observation or supervision maintained over a person, group, etc, esp one in custody or under suspicion.

**Terse**

Severely brief and concise.

**Tentative**

Not certain or fixed; provisional.

**Artist statement**

An artist's brief description of their work.

**Façade**

A front or outer appearance, especially a deceptive one.

**Censorship**

The practice of officially examining books, movies, etc., and suppressing unacceptable parts.

## Further reading and viewing

### Nguyen Trinh Thi's website

<http://nguyentrinhthi.wordpress.com/>

### Information on Hanoi DOCLAB, founded by Nguyen Trinh Thi

Available [here](#).

### Book introducing Vietnamese culture for children

*Vietnam A to Z: Discover the colourful culture of Vietnam! (Volume 1)* by Ms. Elka K. Ray. Available [here](#).

### A photographic collection exploring what the world eats

*What the World Eats* by Peter Menzel and Faith D'Aluisio. Available [here](#).

### Interview with artist Gabby Quynh-Anh Miller on art and censorship in Vietnam

Available [here](#).