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Pipo Nguyen-Duy interview

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Interviewer: Emily Flanagan

Artist: Pipo Nguyen-Duy

Location: in person- Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio

Date: May 9, 2013

Note: The following interview was conducted by a DePaul University undergraduate student enrolled in AAS 203: Art and Artists in Contemporary Culture during the 2013 Spring Quarter as part of the Asian American Art Oral History Research Project conducted by Laura Kina, Associate Professor Art, Media, & Design.

Bio:

Pipo Nguyen-duy was born in Hue, Vietnam. Growing up within thirty kilometers of the demilitarized zone of the 18th Parallel, he describes hearing gunfire every day of his early life. He immigrated to the United States as a political refugee.

Pipo has taken on many things in life in pursuit of his diverse interests. As a teenager in Vietnam, he competed as a national athlete in table tennis. He also spent some time living as a Buddhist monk in Northern India. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in economics at Carleton College. He then moved to New York City, where he worked as a bartender and later as a nightclub manager. While living in the East Village and meeting people such as musician Don Cherry and artist Keith Haring, Pipo's interests turned to art. He earned a Master of Arts in Photography, followed by a Master of Fine Arts in Photography, both from the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque.

Pipo has received many awards and grants including a Guggenheim Fellowship in Photography, a National Endowment for the Arts, an En Foco Grant; a Professional Development Grant from the College Arts Association; an American Photography Institute's National Graduate Fellowship, NYC; a fellowship from the Oregon Arts Commission in Salem, Oregon; a B. Wade and Jane B. White Fellowship in the Humanities at Oberlin College; and two Individual Artists Fellowship from the Ohio Arts Council in Columbus, Ohio. He participated as an artist-in-residence at Monet's Garden through The Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Artists at Giverny Fellowship, at the Headlands Center for the Arts in Sausalito, California, in Light Work's Artist-in-Residence program.

He has lectured widely and his work has been exhibited and is in public collections in the United States, Europe and Asia. He is represented by Sam Lee Gallery in Los Angeles, California.

Pipo is a Professor teaching photography at Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio.

Photo:



(photo taken from: www.artltdmag.com)

Interview Transcript:

Emily Flanagan: Do you just want to start with your name, birthday, where you grew up, and where you went to school?

Pipo Nguyen-Duy: Ok so just biographical. I was born in 1962. I'm from this small little tiny town on the border of North and South Vietnam and I'm from the south and it's this town called Hue. I was there until 1968 when there was a Tet offensive. Afterwards I moved to Saigon and I lived in Saigon what is now Ho Chi Minh City from 1968 until 1975 and came to the U.S. as a Vietnamese refugee and have lived in various countries and cities in the U.S. until now. In terms of education I was an economics major I studied at a small liberal arts school in Minnesota called Carlton College. After that I moved to New York where I worked, I became a bartender, ran night clubs and then I went and lived in India for 2 years studying Buddhism living at the monastery up in the northern part of India with Tibetans and then I went to graduate school at the university of New Mexico where I studied sculpture and photography and everything else, printmaking, from there I went onward to teach in Oregon and then now I've been here for the last 15 years at Oberlin college, Ohio. And that's where I teach photography. You know I think my earlier work was considered performance/photography and now it's different, now it's become just like staged photography and it always has been sort of autobiographical I don't think it's about an Asian American experience, I don't claim to be that, but I guess it's another slice of this whole cultural um, approach to deal with race, culture and gender maybe and of late I think instead of being very specific about identity I think the work I have been doing during the last 10 years addresses home in more of a metaphorical way rather than very specific way. So right now my research takes place in Vietnam, especially in the Mekong Delta so you know for instance I go back in the summer, I do work, I spent last year living and working in Vietnam as part of my Guggenheim fellowship. So you know that's where I'm at... ok?

EF: So you said your work used to be more performance art, what do you think made you transition?

PND: I think the transition is just like September 11, I think that was a mark of when I start thinking about the potential for changes and like thinking about whether or not the work I was doing would be something I was interested in or being valid for what I was doing at the time. I think the first 10 years of my work the focus has always been about my sort of narrative you know where is it in the context of the grand narrative of European art history or where is my story and how does it fit in to the whole U.S. History, for example the renaissance work which is earlier is called "Assimilation" and then when I start doing the cowboy work which is like "AnOther Western", everything has to do with my specific dialogue and where I see myself in terms of my own assimilation and my cultural position within the culture that I find myself in but after September 11th I began to think about the similarities between the narrative I experienced, witnessing what's going on in this particular landscape and trying to compare it to the landscape and the history that I have experienced and I thought you know here's an opportunity for me to stage or kind of retell my stories either fiction or non-fiction fantasy or reality in a way using my subjects over here so that . . . you know I want to deal with this kind of more universal concern of the fear and the anxiety rather than the specificity of my own so the experience of becoming

an individual and trying to assimilate to a new culture. So yea it's not so much about a didactic experience, I guess it's more like a universal kind of concerns.

I think the changes has to do with comparing my upbringing in Vietnam and constantly being bombarded by fear and by anxiety . . . as well as beauty of course and then growing up in the war and thinking about being safe being in this garden of Eden you know it's awesome, you know its plentiful, never hearing a gunshot and then after September 11 and thinking about what landscape awaits my children would be like now. You know it's always gonna be, of course something is about to happen. You know we don't know it's this beautiful place, but there's just something you know of course the Boston thing, it does happen. You know so that's why I made the change. So you know at first I was working using the subjects I found in the U.S. and kind of restage kind of experience and the history that I have witnessed in the war in Vietnam and gradually I begin to move away from the U.S. and begin to work with people who I feel I have shared the same history with. Initially with people who have been really scarred and marked physically, you know physically maimed from the war and now I'm just kind of working with the idea of regeneration of that particular landscape and then what happened now I'm working with school children in the Mekong Delta doing this project now. So that's just kind of what I have been doing for the last 10 years.

EF: Do you only do photography or do you use other media?

PND: I do other media as well I think it just comes to, it depends on the idea and then whatever idea needs the proper medium and then I follow through with that medium. So for instance I feel like I have done printmaking, I've done sculpture, I did installation, and you know I've done performances before, the work I'm doing now kind of demands photography. I have been teaching photography for a while now too. I just kind of feel like, you know the research and what I do in my life kind of coincide. At any given time, you know I keep thinking about... I may not be... you know, photography or the visual media may not be the only thing that I do, at some point I may think about writing and not doing any of this anymore and that's ok. For me it's the idea of the materials and the ideas and the medium is not really important to me. It's about what's going to be the most efficient and the most logical choice to be the vehicle for the idea.

EF: When you are doing photography do you prefer film or digital?

PND: Well, I would love to do digital just because that would be great, that would be awesome you know because I think I could work more fluidly, I could do a lot of things that are easier. Logistically, would be great in terms of working in the tropic and the heat and transfer and like you know it would be less pain, but you know I don't have a choice really. I work strictly in film; I work with 4 by 5. Large format. You know because a lot of the work that I do takes time and it needs to be the detail. In many ways for me I'm constructing more like movie stills rather than anything. That's what I think about my set, you know working with actors, working with communities and working with assistants and production. You know they take a little bit of time to set up and you know just giving the optics and giving the mindfulness of that one particular still just kind of demands for me to slow down and just to work in that manner. You know I use digital maybe but it would be more for testing before I do the real shoot.

EF: Something that you could get rid of if it doesn't work.

PND: yeah, yeah, yeah, still I like to work with film because beyond everything else there is that sense of magic a lot of times it doesn't work out and that's fine but it's the sense of waiting . . . anxious to wait to see what it looks like when I finally get back to my base.

EF: Do you think it's kind of a dying art form?

PND: Oh I'm not so sure. It's not as popular but it's still being used not to the extent that it was 10 years ago but certainly it's still there. I'm not sure where it's going to go. I mean sure it's hard to find certain things but there is also this backlash against this whole convenience of digital photography too, so people start using film. So I guess when the technology allow me to do what I do- *easier*, I would do it, but at this point the technology hasn't been able to match up to what I expect for what I need.

EF: Ok... so if you were to have a showing of your work, what would be the message you would want people to leave with after viewing your work?

PND: I guess it really just depends on the project. You know I think with my earlier work like say with "East of Eden" like the first four or five years you know I like for people to see you know the landscape that is beautiful but there is definitely some sort of anxiety. You know where beauty and anxiety can actually coexist in the same space. And then at some point and in some image it's just plain depressing, and in some image what I want for people to see is like that possibility for rejuvenation and regeneration so I think as a show as a whole I don't want to go for a specific idea of what I want my audience to get. You know each piece has its own personality and each has its own sort of voice and I think they are relatively ambiguous enough that everyone gets a different story of out of each one of them and then I think that each individual voice then put together is what they come away with. So I just want to see the complexity of the story and the narrative and how a single subject can have different perspective. Like when you are looking at war, which I guess is what my work has been dealing with, like there is death that is associated with it, but there is other stuff like love. Then there is the trivial things like people still go buy food during the war, they bike, and they can still go on dates with each other. I want to be able to show the dynamic and the richness of a time. It's not all necessarily like all bad I think that like beauty and ugliness, fear and celebration can all exist in the same space. Which is how I experienced the war you know Vietnam as I was growing up, so you know I guess it's the complexity. But most of all I want people to think about... you know beauty; how do you make something, create something that's really beautiful out of something that is really anxious. I guess I want people to think about the ideas that I have and the forms that it takes and the images that I make, so I guess it really just depends.

EF: On your website in the comments about “East of Eden”, it says it was a project that was an attempt to come to terms with your past, do you feel that it helped?

PND: For me when I talk about that kind of thing I don’t mean it like the work would heal something. It’s not therapeutic to *me*. I think it’s like for me to access the kind of personal stories and experience that I have and to use the vocabulary that I have now with the medium I’m working with and trying... not to illustrate, but maybe to, just to be able to tell the stories that I have experienced, not to feel better but just to share that story and that’s about it. For instance my sons who have not grown up during that time, it’s my chance to tell kind of tell the stories that I have but using the visual language for him. Whether it’s really direct or just like these kinds of visual metaphors that I have... So yes that’s what I do, and I think that what the work has allowed me to do of late, I would say within the last 5 or 6 years, is it allows me to reconnect with the landscape that I grew up in which is really wonderful and to get to know the people and the country again and to get to know this landscape in the absence of a war and to examine to see is it possible for something to regenerate after something that’s really apocalyptic. So when you go through there during the war, everything get destroyed but what’s really beautiful for me is like as I was searching for these places where the landscape was decimated by like Agent Orange or you know it’s been marked by bombs so these craters are formed. Now to find these craters they may access duck ponds and fish ponds and kids running around this kind of really thick grown forests that was once de-foliage. So that’s what I’m really interested in right now. So yeah

EF: Do you specifically address Asian American identity or themes in your work?

PND: Oh that was like my first 10 years of my work, which is like very much an Asian American identity. I’m talking about “Assimilation” maybe “AnOther Western” and this project called “2 Million Steps”. The first project I ever dealt with called “Assimilation” is where you know this kind of stuff where they seem like renaissance or like classical western paintings where the museum tag designates the myth or painting that I’m trying to mimic and you know kind of putting myself in these role within these classical myths and paintings to see where I’m at in terms of culture you know my cultural adjustment and how does that deal with like my gender and where would I see my gender in this kind of western classical painting.

So you know that has to deal with the whole western... the grand narrative... you know the whole European culture and then with the... in terms of the U.S. context, “AnOther Western” came into play when I was living in Oregon and just thinking about the whole immigration process during the 19th century and as I was looking through the archive and seeing representations of Asians as no more that railroad coolies and prostitutes and opium addicts and all these... maybe true, I don’t know, but I think about how we shape and form our behavior and our culture and our position within the culture has to be in form with these kind of images that kind of tell you where you’re supposed to be. So instead of doing these self-portraits that deal

with recreating those kind of representations, I want to subvert that representation by making the Asian figure into the general, the doctor, you know... the gun-slingers the kind of thing that you don't often associate a stereotype of the Asian to be in the 19th century.

Then the third project that I did is called "2 Million Steps" that's when if you're going away and if you're dealing with like say the Homer Odyssey idea can you ever go home again after your long journey so you know taking that process from like going to like the west and then specifically the U.S. and then to return back to Vietnam and the idea of home and how do you define yourself as where is home and who are you. Are you like an American or are like a Vietnamese? So with that project it's kind of for me it's just like dealing with being a citizen of that space in between which is like this liminal space that is neither eastern nor western you know you are trying to figure out as you try to navigate. So the project ended up to be going back to Vietnam but really kind of only exist and experience the country as a traveler and not as a native.

So that's my first 10 years and the work now deals with the idea of home, I think just by nature the work I'm doing now, working with, just with Vietnamese subjects you know so in some ways it already address that I'm an Asian American artist maybe or whatever but it doesn't deal specifically with that whole identity issues. Although it is really autobiographical and it takes my experience of what it was like to grow up during that time and I talk about that experience in the context of what is going on now in the west. It's like the work I am doing is really to re-investigate the idea of the Garden of Eden and how that has existed in our mind in the U.S. specifically- we talk about manifest destiny, we talk about all those 19th century landscape paintings from the Hudson River Valley of painting, you know school, where in the painting you see God emanating from the landscape you know we are just living in this beautiful Eden. So I always think about September 11, so if I was to take this Garden of Eden and place it there, now maybe in this garden there is a little snipers running around, and you know it becomes a really anxious idea... and like you know I photograph wounded veterans in Vietnam... so it's interesting... I guess I'm becoming more of a Vietnamese person more rather than like an Asian American experience, but at the same time as the work I'm doing is addressing the kind of issues I'm concerned with is directly or indirectly I talk about the Vietnam war and without a doubt then it brings up the whole notion of identity and culture for instance for me you know the idea of claiming ownership over these kind of images that were made by western photographers, of Vietnam, is like having somebody extend the gaze over my culture and what was happening I want to recreate this and kind of take back the ownership of the landscape and of the people so yea. It's kind of hard to get separated right? Even by me talking the work that I'm doing can be . . . like that [points to photograph on the wall- photo at end] there's no reference but I am still like this Asian American artist. . . well I mean I'm not like an *artist* right? You know what I mean? So I don't know how we would define that, do we define by the work or do we define by my race as I'm making the work. So that's an interesting idea for you to think about.

EF: That's kind of part of what we talk about in class and we also talk about if there is an Asian American aesthetic. . .

PND: Well I think this is very important when you talk about you know um. . . a signature or whatever, I think that's a really important thing to talk about because at some point we have this expectation of what an African American artist should do, he or she should be addressing these kinds of issues that deal with maybe slavery or identity blah, blah, blah. . . right? So the same thing we would expect, say, a gay or lesbian artist to do, we don't expect them to go and do abstract paintings you know, in some way we like to see them photograph things that has to with gender, identity blah, blah, blah. . . you know. I think that we all have to struggle with that, what does it mean to be an artist, what does it mean to be true to your culture, what does it mean to be responsible? You know like say when you are a black person and you go steal some eggs or when I'm an Asian and I go steal some eggs, I'm responsible for my whole race because they are going to say like the Vietnamese guy who stole the eggs, you know they aren't going to say like the person who stole the eggs so you know. . . you do feel at some point there is an expectation of like. . . a certain kind of work is expected. So you know I did that kind of work, I don't know. . . I thought it was very important for me to like do it. . . I don't know how much of it was external pressure but at the same time at the time I was in school. . . It was *suggested* you know because then it certainly seems authentic, it seems you can be more successful or whatever. So you know I did that work but at the same time I don't want to be pigeonholed. . . you know I want to be able to move fluidly through different. . . like mainstream or Asian American artist or whatever I do that's fine. So I've done the work that I'm supposed to be doing as an Asian American artist that deals with our politics of what is like, tell our own experience, how do we engage blah, blah, blah, but you know I feel like I also have a responsibility for my own like creativity, so if I can see an image that I want to make that's just really beautiful of the landscape in Ohio, I would like to have that freedom to do it, you know. . . even at the threat of having my career and my voice being discredited because I am not being true to my "Asian American self".

So that is something that you have to kind of juggle. . .um. . . I feel like I'm in a good place right now because I deviate, I just kind of do something completely different, I just piss everybody off, I did this kind of work that nobody. . . people were like "Pipo why don't you do that kind of work. . . the other kind of work that you have spent so long doing and we expected you to do this and we were supporting you do this and don't you think it's kind of a silly thing to do is like you are destroying your career" so. . . I mean the truth of it is I actually enjoy it much better, I think I get more success as I'm trying to grow as an artist, but then at the same time I feel like you know, the kind of cultural and political issues that I engaged with during the time I did my earlier work, that was a way for me to find the kind of grounding and the support you know during my career when I was younger. You know it's funny people still contact me wanting to show the work I did earlier too without knowing that I'm doing this work as well and there are a lot of people who can't make that bridge but like right now because I'm doing this

narrow work that doesn't deal with myself as a self but I'm doing it in the Vietnamese landscape I just found it to be like the perfect bridge you know and. . . as an artist, for me, it's more than anything else, I mean, my identity of the person as having a cross-cultural experience is really important right now because as I'm reengaging with the Vietnamese culture and as I'm trying to stage these new works with subjects who grew up in Vietnam, these little kids or like the landscape. I feel constantly this constant negotiation between what's available to me, what is coming up for me in terms of issues that deal with Vietnam and then in the background. . . in the back of my head is my experience of being educated here, my experience of like growing up over in this country and then how those two things on the exterior and Vietnam on my interior of like growing up in another culture in America and how that kind of friction and how those things are being negotiated through my thought processes. . . is a constant reminder that I'm threading between two cultures all the time because you know when I work and go to Vietnam of course I'm like the foreign guy, but when I'm working over here I'm also that *Asian* American artist guy so it's never. . . you know it's like ok where am I the regular guy? Cuz you know when I go to Vietnam they don't call me a Vietnamese guy, photographer. . . they call me the American photographer. So it's interesting, there is always that reminder of like that friction and where I find myself occupying.

EF: Have you ever put anything out into the world that you were completely happy with because of the pressure?

PND: Um . . . you know . . . no, I mean I feel good, I feel lucky like you know up until now I feel the kind of work I have done like even though I have done a lot of projects, sometimes you look and you're like well there is a thread, I mean you can definitely understand why a person . . . why I do a certain thing and how do I grow . . . Yeah, I do something completely random and it has no association . . . um . . . but so far I feel like I am really proud, well I'm not proud . . . I feel really strongly about each one of these projects that I'm doing, I haven't felt that I put something out there that I don't strongly identify with. I don't feel like oh that works not really important but I have to put it out there because I have to put it out there right now. I have been fortunate, I feel like I work on these really epic projects anyways you know all my projects, you know 8 years, 10 years you know this project I have been working on now is like going on like 10 years, the last project was like 8 years. You know so when you work with that kind of scale, you know, I mean if I don't believe in the project, if I don't feel strongly, I wouldn't be able to pursue it. And there are many projects that I have started and felt like it wasn't where I wanted to be so I dropped you know. If I am committed I just keep going and so far it's been great, critically people have been really supportive of all the different projects I have gone through. You know I have been doing this for 20 years which is not really that long, really, I mean in comparison to other people, but um . . . you know I started late, I didn't start until I was 30 years old and so far I feel like I have been lucky to be able to have my audience to be forgiving enough and to support me enough through my changes and like my different phases of my career.

EF: Do you ever feel like your projects are finished or do you just transition into another one?

PND: You know some I feel like I can close and . . . you know . . . no, no . . . even with the earlier projects you know I still want to do “Assimilation” like the renaissance thing but then the urgency of like another project comes so it has to be put, but then at the same time it feel resolved so I focus on another but then another urgency comes up you know. So, no, I mean like I said I think it’s about urgency for me, for me it’s not about formula, it’s not about something I’ve set out to do, it’s a product and then I keep doing the same thing, that’s not what I feel . . . to me that’s not important, it’s not about finding that formula. For me it’s like finding what is really urgent about the time I’m in, what is the idea then to find the way to express it. You know that’s what I do. For instance I was photographing amputees when I first came to Vietnam but then after a month of that I transitioned to photographing school children so that’s what I’m going to be doing for a while. So even within the “East of Eden” project there’s already like definitely like 3 different chapters so that’s how I work you know seeing things and how things move and change, still retain the same idea, but that idea, you know, getting the chance to go through its evolution, for instance my project which is really similar to “East of Eden” called “The Garden” which is like these decay, abandoned greenhouses, but I want to photograph them through the different days, different years, and see how they change. And I guess that’s what my work is about.

EF: Where are the greenhouses?

PND: Yeah, you know the greenhouses are located about 45 miles from here [45 miles from Oberlin, Ohio].

EF: Ok so they aren’t Vietnam?

PND: No, no, no, not at all . . . and this is like the same idea as looking at the Garden of Eden. To see what happens when that’s abandoned and then death, decay, regeneration. I stop that project officially because I could just never stop because you know it would just keep going. I did that for like 7 years . . . 7 years of like being really diligent about making these things, almost like twice a week through 7 years . . . so, yeah.

EF: So through all of your work you kind of have this undercurrent of life cycle...

PND: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

EF: How things are constantly transitioning...

PND: Yeah that feels correct . . . I mean, people are always thinking oh God its terrible, something die . . . which is true, you know, but then you have to look at a larger picture too where you know things do need to live and then die and then you know go into a process of rebirth and you know it becomes a cycle. It's like winter we get so depressed because it's the end, oh my God, but we forget that spring comes you know. So I think that work it's just like a reminder for me. I'm forced to look for those patterns as a way to just say . . . like . . . changes are a normal part; I think it's more for me, but anyways, so yeah.

EF: Do you keep track of . . . do you like Google yourself?

PND: I do, I do . . . of course. Sometimes you know you are just trying to figure out where you're at and where people are keeping you, and what's going on and who are these people sometimes . . . because sometimes it's like why do these people have this kind of information on me or you know umm . . . what is being visible right now and how do I want to make other things more visible or sometimes it's like people put videos that I don't approve or without permission or like haven't talked . . . like I'll see somebody's doing a paper on me but they never talked to me about it or something like that. It's kind of like a curiosity and also it's like this is the age of Google and weird things so anyways.

EF: Have you ever had a situation where someone critiqued your work and it was just... wrong?

PND: There is nothing *wrong* you know I mean I just feel like ok, fine, whatever, and I have to tell you, people have always been really kind about my work. Whether it's like students just doing a little blog or . . . you know . . . but somehow people, get it. For me it's like talk about . . . I mean they may be off on something but it's just another way for me to say oh God I didn't see it you know, and it's kind of interesting. I just feel like it's richer. I think as you do this longer you kind of learn to know what to avoid and know what to take in. It becomes a curiosity and then you know if there is enough information of you out there and there's good and bad they all combine become like good, it's kind of interesting.

EF: Have you heard of ratemyprofessor.com?

PND: Yeah, my students are great; they have always been so supportive.

EF: You had some of the best comments that I have seen for a professor.

PND: They are really kind I am really close with the people that I work with. I keep in touch with everybody, you know I have made all my friends, they are all students. I am talking about all the 35, 40 . . . whatever you know . . . and so many of them are going into teaching now so

it's just interesting for me to keep in touch with them. You know for me to it's like a pressure, you know think about it, you know we have 2 jobs, for me it's like my own kind of artwork dealing with a whole bunch of other issues, paperwork, curators, and galleries and whatever, the other side is that I have to be a teacher to so how do you balance that. I feel like I can't sit around and relax when I'm teaching because that would show a pretty bad example, I still have to work and then you know my work feeds my teaching. Gives... my students are really smart. I mean they are really incredible people. I find them to be my peers they give me my feedback and I do the same, if anything I feel like a more experienced student, so you want to approach it . . . I still have so much to learn and I think the best way to learn . . . when you don't know anything is become a teacher, like your teacher sending you out to do this interview, its great!

EF: What do you think is the best advice you give you students?

PND: Oh God. For me the best is . . . there is so much talent so it comes down to work ethic, it comes down to like having your community support you. My thing I always tell my students is that I don't want them to become me you know, that's the last thing I want. I mean I want them to be a lot better than me. You know I'm doing like the foundation . . . I'm doing the best for them not to catch up with me but at the same time ultimately you want your students take what they get from you so they go on and do better things than you. So that's my usual thing.

EF: So why did you choose Oberlin? Such a small town . . .

PND: I mean it's interesting. I've always live in big places I live in New York . . . and you know Oberlin just like suit my mentality . . . you know . . . this place may be too small for me but it's really easy for me to travel you know I can go to Chicago, I can go to New York really quickly I can jump a plane and you know right now basically I live between like what . . . New York, here, my kids live in Oregon, and of course I live in Saigon too, so you know it's certainly a great place. You know my studio, what I do in my production, everything is here, my teaching, and you know with the academic calendar I have the freedom to design what I do when I'm off. So it's just kind of great. So why Oberlin? . . . because they are really incredibly supportive, I'm allowed the freedom to do whatever research that I want and I have the freedom to like teach whatever I want. I mean it's awesome I can just be like OK I'm bored with this let's just do something else . . . I can just do it at the last minute and that's fine you know there's no problem with that.

EF: So "East of Eden" is what you are currently working on?

PND: Yeah.

EF: And that's what you are going to be working on this summer?

PND: Well you know I'm always work on multiple projects, so I'm also working on this project called "Tragic Love Songs" as well and this is just like a series of images that I have been making for what like the last 5 – 8 years of just like picturing Vietnam through this lens of mine you know just how I look at Vietnam and the weirdness in that particular landscape that seems normal to everybody that live there you know, so yea I'm working on that project as well. So right now I'm looking forward to doing 2 projects when I get back so . . . I'm going to go work with "East of Eden" and with this . . . I think this "East of Eden" kind of chapter is called "My Eden" you know kind of address my . . . the idea of this is my landscape and trying to get connected back to it and then . . . and then . . . oh and then last year I took my oldest son back, so this year I'm taking my second youngest back you know . . . and they are mixed race. It's just kind of a great idea to introduce them to part of the culture and stuff like that, so yeah.

EF: Do they kind of have a hard time navigating between . . .

PND: Oh yeah, I'm sure. I mean they are fine, they are American but at the same time I know there are those issues like when they find themselves in Vietnam and everybody is like "What, you don't speak Vietnamese? What's wrong with you?" or whatever, it's like yes, they are American for sure but they are very well aware of their kind of transcultural kind of experience.

EF: Do you think they will appreciate that?

PND: I don't know. I tell them too, you know I tell them it's great you can see life from both sides but then sometimes they tell me "you are too hard dad, you're being like an Asian dad it's like relax" so yeah . . . there is definitely an awareness of like "oh you don't do things like normal dads do because of your culture or the way you grow up".

EF: I think we have gone through all the questions... do you have anything that you want to talk about?

PND: No, I am fine; I can just take you through my facility.

EF: Ok

Pipo then took me to his classroom and we looked through some of his work as well as some of his students work.

END.



**Photo referenced- taken from (<http://www.cepagallery.org/exhibitions/auction7/pipo.html>)*