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A Place for Leaving and Returning

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Foreword:
Artist statement

My artistic expression has been deeply influenced by the experience of living between different cultures. Immersed in this intercultural context, my personal identity has also been continuously transformed. I have traversed both the garden of euphoria, enchantment and fascination and the desert of confusion, insecurity and isolation. This journey has caused me to return to my starting point – my original cultural background in Vietnam – with new reflections and emotions. I have learned to appreciate traditional values and customs which were once so entangled in my worldview that I could not see them. At the same time, my awareness of the speedy change that is eroding those precious qualities of my home culture leaves me with much confusion. I feel the disorientation that Haruki Murakami describes in his novel 1Q84 about the fate of human beings who shift back and forth between two worlds: "Forgotten promises. Unrealized hopes. Frustrated longings."

My work explores my current position between cultures. Drawing references from psychological theories of culture shock and the philosophical concept of the obligated self, I am interested in how identity is fused into its context and to what extent it is attached to or isolated from its surroundings. I am looking at my identity in terms of space and time: the homogeneous home culture of my childhood and the new intercultural context of the present. I observe and examine how my identity switches between and intertwines those two separate conditions.

I create an imaginary space with objects that are deeply connected to my memories from childhood and my home culture: the door of my childhood home, canvas shoes, conical hats, and red net. In my installation, these objects are transported through space and time and combined in a new context of the present in the United States. They are the beginning point of my journey to cross cultures and construct my identity. They represent my sentimental feelings of a lost childhood and my uncertainty of where I belong. They also express my desire to reattach myself to my home culture no matter how challenging it would be. Through my installation, I attempt to not only connect my ideas and feelings with the audience but also to discover unrealized parts of my betweenness.

Một cõi đi về

Bao nhiêu năm rồi còn mãi ra đi
Đi đâu loanh quanh cho đời mỏi mệt
Trên hai vai ta đôi vầng nhật nguyệt
Rọi suốt trăm năm một cõi đi về

Lời nào của cây lời nào cỏ lạ
Một chiều ngồi say một đời thật nhẹ ngày qua
Vừa tàn mùa xuân rồi tàn mùa hạ
Một ngày đầu thu nghe chân ngựa về chốn xa

Mây che trên đầu và nắng trên vai
Đôi chân ta đi sông còn ở lại
Con tinh yêu thương vô tình chợt gọi
Lại thấy trong ta hiện bóng con người

Nghe mưa nơi này lại nhớ mưa xa
Mưa bay trong ta bay từng hạt nhỏ
Trăm năm vô biên chưa từng hội ngộ
Chẳng biết nơi nao là chốn quê nhà

Đường chạy vòng quanh một vòng tiều tụy
Một bờ cỏ non một bờ mộng mị ngày xưa
Từng lời tà dương là lời mộ địa
Từng lời bể sông nghe ra từ độ suối khe

Trong khi ta về lại nhớ ta đi
Đi lên non cao đi về biển rộng
Đôi tay nhân gian chưa từng độ lượng
Ngọn gió hoang vu thổi suốt xuân thì.

Hôm nay ta say ôm đời ngủ muộn
Để sớm mai đây lại tiếc xuân thì.

A place for leaving and returning

(A song by Trinh Cong Son
Translation by Cao Thi Nhu Quynh and John C. Schafer)

Many years I've wandered
Going in circles, growing tired
On my shoulders the sun and the moon
Lighting a lifetime, a place for leaving and returning

What word from the trees, what word from the grass
An afternoon of pleasure, a life that is light a day passes
First spring is gone, then summer as well
In early fall one hears horses returning to a place far away

Clouds overhead and sun on the shoulders
I walk away, the river stays
From the spirit of love comes an unbidden call
And within myself a human shadow appears

This rain reminds me of rain long ago
It falls within me, drop by small drop
Years without end and never a meeting
One doesn't know which place is home

The road goes in circles miserable and sad
On one side new grass, on the other dreams of the past
Each sunset's call is also the grave's
In the stream one hears the call of the sea

When I return I remember leaving
I climb the high mountain, go down to the wide sea
My arms have not yet covered the world
In the spring of life a desolate wind blows

Today I drink and wake up late
Tomorrow I regret the springtime I've lost.
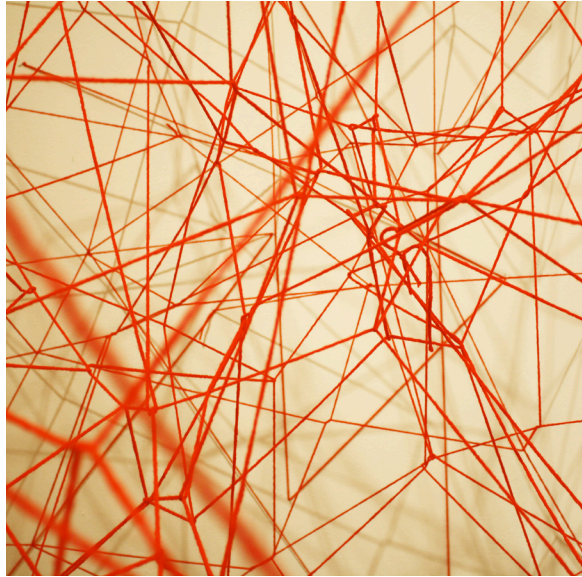
Personal identity in a closed society

A Place for Leaving and Returning is a famous song by Vietnamese composer, musician, painter and songwriter Trinh Cong Son. Widely considered as one of the most influential figures of modern Vietnamese music, he has attracted generations of Vietnamese with his anti-war and love songs and created a whole genre called Trinh Music. His songs seem to be composed by sinking gracious melody into beautiful poetry. Trinh wrote many songs about his love for life and his feelings about the ephemeral human fate in his vast span of life. In the song *Sand and Dust*, Trinh said that we are all born grains of dust to begin our journey of human beings until one day we circle back to our beginning.

Cát bụi

Hạt bụi nào hóa kiếp thân tôi
Để một mai vươn hình hài lớn dậy
Ôi cát bụi tuyệt vời
Mặt trời soi một kiếp rong chơi

Hạt bụi nào hóa kiếp thân tôi
Để một mai tôi về làm cát bụi
Ôi cát bụi mệt nhoài
Tiếng động nào gõ nhịp không nguôi

Bao nhiêu năm làm kiếp con người
Chợt một chiều tóc trắng như vôi
Lá úa trên cao rụng đầy
Cho trăm năm vào chết một ngày

Sand and dust
(Translation by Van Mai)

Grain of dust, morphed into me
Let my being one day rise and blossom
Oh wonders, sand and dust!
Let the sun shine through a rambling life

Grain of dust, morphed into me
Let me one day return unto
So worn out sand and dust
As the beat goes on, infinite

Years into a human life, in the blink
Of an afternoon, the hair turn white
High above, fading leaves fall out
As hundred years enter death, in a single day.

Two years ago, during a conversation, a Vietnamese American friend of mine asked me if I ever woke up and asked myself "What do I wake up every day for?" After a moment of hesitation, I answered that I did not know and I asked him if he did. He replied that he woke up every day because he wanted to make something beautiful. The implications of what he said lingered long after our conversation. "Who am I? Where do I belong? And why do I wake up every day?" When I listened to Trinh Music back in my childhood, I was fond of its beauty but never quite understood the meaning behind his lyrics. If I am just a grain of dust following the wind of life, do I have any control over my identity? – Can I choose my own journey?

My life in Vietnam was a picture with high resolution and clear focus, created and arranged with absolute accuracy. There was no space for any blur; there was only harmony and certitude. I was an obedient child at home and a studious student at school. There were absolute norms and sets of value telling me how to become a good daughter and a good student. Identity self-awareness had yet to enter my realm of conciousness. In her book *The Fabric of Self: A Theory of Ethnics and Emotions*, Diane Rothbard Margolis argues that the way we see ourselves is transformed as the environment around us changes. When the environment remains the same, the self tends to stay consistent because it is not challenged. My surroundings emphasized conformity and I was fit in well enough to not question my identity. As Collen Ward, Stephen Bochner and Adrian Furnham explain in *Psychology of Culture Shock*, we see the social system as inputs (what start the process), throughputs (how inputs are transformed) and outputs (outcome results in individuals). As more inputs are strictly imposed, fewer outputs will appear. In other words, when a society demands more from its people, they will need to conform more to maintain their membership. Their social context has certain expectations for

their behavior, feelings, beliefs, perceptions, attitudes and self-reference.

The book goes on to discuss that a collectivist society such as Vietnam demands its people to consider themselves as a part of the bigger picture. Individuals in a collectivist society describe themselves in relation to other people. They do not separate their personal traits from the situations or relationships that make these characteristics salient. To them, relationships are an end in themselves and should be maintained even at a high cost. collectivist societies value harmony and avoids direct confrontation. When I lived in Vietnam, a good student was measured not only by her academic performance, but also by how well she got along with others in the class. We had two important criteria at the end of the year to judge a student: academic grades and moral/social grades. These two criteria were then combined to decide the quality of that student: Excellent, Good, Average or Below Average. In that environment, I wanted to be good enough but not to standout in order to avoid unnecessary tension. Self-worth of individuals in a collectivist society is measured by acceptance and appreciation among group members. If there was disagreement, I was always eager to explain myself since I was afraid people would misunderstand me. Sometimes it was tiring but it was more important to feel like a part of something bigger than myself, which brought me security and harmony.

This concept of the "collectivist self" is comparable to the notion of an obligated self in philosophy. Diane Rothbard Margolis notes that in Western society the idea of the self as an individualistic exchanger who is rational, self-interested, and competitive has been the predominant criteria for identity formation. However, she also emphasizes that "like the sun that makes all life possible even when concealed by clouds, the obligated self continues to be

essential" Anthropologist A. R. Radcliffe-Brown said that "Every human being is two things: he is an individual and he is also a person. As an individual he is a biological organism… as a person [he] is a complex of social relationships." A society is more than the sum of its individuals (Margolis, 1998, pg. 9)

The fact that I have come to be aware of my collectivist self marks a clear beginning of my self-identification journey. Since I have grown out of that identity, my perceptions have been given a new len and I have realized many values and ideas that used to escape my conciousness. I remember two lines in the 1960 poem *Tiếng hát con tàu* (The train's melody) by the Vietnamese poet Chế Lan Viên:

> *When I am here, the soil is just dirt*
> *When I leave, it becomes my soul*

Like a fish in the sea, I was never aware of the water. Things that used to be so lucid and trivial to me now serve as an essential base from which I construct my artistic perception while continuing my self-identification journey.

Personal journey: Crossing cultures

In August 2008, I boarded my very first international flight to New York City, having no idea what would be awaiting me at the other end of the globe. Four years have passed and in a few months, I will receive my Bachelor's Degree from Connecticut College. Reflecting on my college years, I realize that I have encountered two cultural barriers: a general experience of adjusting to American culture and a more specific experience of adapting to American college life. However, as an old saying states "he that knows nothing doubts nothing" - I came here not equipped to cope with these two challenges. I knew I crossed the ocean to come to America but I did not immediately appreciate an event of much more significance: I had crossed cultures.

Crossing cultures to me has been an exciting adventure. Coming from a very different socioeconomic background, I consider myself lucky to have had this experience. My mother who worked various kinds of jobs from street food vendor to secondary school teacher, stayed home after having my younger sister. My father is a policeman who works ten hours on a good day and frequently sleeps in his office on busy days. From a little girl who followed her mother to sell flowers on special days like Valentine's Day or Women's Day to make some extra cash for the family, I have grown up to be who I am today: a modern woman with a first-class education and wonderful opportunities to see the world. For that, I am grateful with all my heart.

At the same time, crossing cultures has also been a stressful and challenging experience. The transition from Vietnam to the United States has not always been an easy journey. Its downside is the psychological stress and self-identity challenge. My identity self-awareness has been sharply heightened and tested given the vast cultural gulf between my new land and my home land. In *Psychology of Culture Shock*, the authors discuss some major theoretical principles that explain the difficulties of cross-cultural contacts. The first one is the similarity-attraction hypothesis which declares that cross-cultural interactions happen easier between individuals who share salient characteristics in interests, values, religions, group affiliation, skills, physical attributes, age, and language. Therefore, I would find it easier to cross cultures if the host culture held similar characteristics to Vietnamese culture. The United States is not the best place for me to find such similarities. Language is the first barrier, followed by religion, ethnicity, values and other elements that are gradually unfolding as I am going deeper into American culture. The second theory states that the distance between where societies are physically located will determine the cultural gap between them. Therefore,

Vietnam would be culturally closer to Japan or China than to the United States. Another theory implies that cross-cultural contact is inherently difficult because of the process of social categorization. This refers to the tendency for individuals to classify themselves and others as members of a group. Specifically, when an individual meets others, he identifies if they belong to his own group (in-group) or some other ones (out-group). Coming from a quite homogeneous culture, I was not used to the diversity in the United States. Here there are many different ethnic groups and among each group there are sub-groups according to factors like age, gender, professions, regions, etc. The picture became more complicated as I encountered deeply rooted cultural references in everyday life. Even though there are many social groups in this culture, I did not find a single group with which I can identify myself. Across all these theoretical principles about cross-cultural difficulties, Vietnam and the United States sit on opposite ends of the cultural spectrum.

Cultural syndromes which refer to patterns of attitudes, beliefs, norms and behaviors that can be used to contrast groups of cultures have also been discussed as cross-cultural difficulties (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). Among different cultural syndromes that are related to the analysis of ethnocentrism, my own experience has been closely associated with the individualism-collectivism cultural contrast. As I described in section 2, Vietnam is a collectivist society that trained me to be a collectivist individual. The United States, however, is a society that emphasizes individualism. In Hofstede's nationality ranking which studied the individualism-collectivism in 50 countries, the United States ranked first with a score of 91 (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). Vietnam was not in this studies but I predict it would be between South Korea (18) and Indonesia (14). Individualists tend to define themselves in terms of internal characteristics or traits which

make them unique from others. They belong to many groups but their attachments with those groups are casual. To collectivists, relationships are considered an end in themselves. However, to individualists, they are only means to an end (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). I remember when I was in high school, each time my teacher asked the class a question, there was usually no one who would raise their hand. The teachers would just randomly pick someone. Students hesitated to talk. If they were not sure about the answer, they were afraid the teacher would scold them or other students would laugh at them. If they knew the answer, they were afraid that other students would think they were pretentious. In college classrooms in the United States, students comfortably engage in discussions with their professors and their peers. If a student does not say anything in class, people might think he or she is unprepared.

Vietnamese culture is deeply rooted in implicit messages: social interactions are usually based on non-verbal aspects. When I first arrived at Connecticut College, I was surprised by how friendly people were on campus. Peers whom I did not know would ask me "Hey, how are you?" In Vietnam, nobody asks a stranger such a question. Later I figured out that that question does not really need an answer. In other words, it does not imply that the person who asks me is interested in how I am feeling. Here people say "Thank you!", "Sorry" or "I love you!" so frequently. In contrast, I rarely say those things to my parents and my peers at home. Vietnamese people reluctantly give each other compliments, being afraid that they would not sound genuine. Many things are implied and taken by common understanding between me and other people in my culture. Since I live in both cultures, sometimes I find it difficult to comfortably switch between two different ways of social communication.

As a college student, most of my cross-cultural experiences mentioned above happens in the context of the college community. Studies of international students show that they seem to belong to three distinct social networks to maintain their friendship patterns (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). The primary network is relationship with fellow compatriots with the purpose to practice and confirm the original culture. The second one consists of connections with people of the host culture such as local students and professors. These links help international students adapt better to the new environment and achieve their academic and professional goals. The third network includes bonds with international students from other cultures, which mainly create more social support based on a shared foreignness. (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). I have my three social networks here in Connecticut College but they certainly do not hold the same level of practice and importance to me. Many characteristics of my friends from the second network of American culture fascinate and attract me: I appreciate their independence, adventurousness, and competitiveness. I have also learned to adapt better towards those characteristics in order to perform well in school and enjoy my college social life. However, it is still not easy to maintain astrong bond with people who do not share the same experience as mine.

In this multicultural context, my self-identification has been challenged to adapt to my new environment. From my initial unfamiliar cross-cultural encounters, I have managed the process of learning culture. Even though this learning process will keep extending without a visible end, I have reached a point of general comfort with conducting social interaction in an academic environment and building up a cultural foundation. I am unafraid to move on to a new challenging environment.
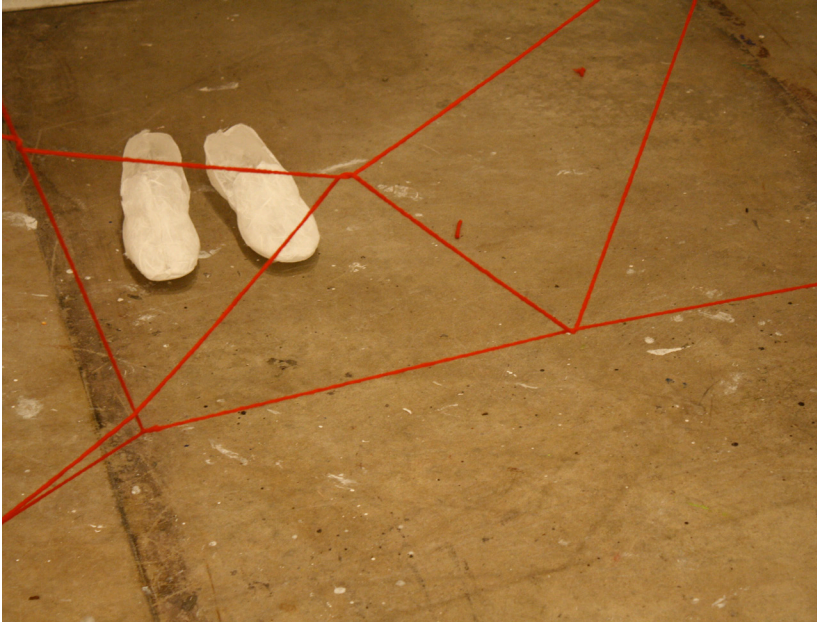
Re-entry

The psychology of individuals in cultural contact includes variables that would produce different outcomes. Time-span, purpose, type of involvement, and summary concept are four contact variables that at an individual level can produce four types of outcomes: passing, chauvinistic, marginal, and mediating (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). "Passing" refers to the response of rejecting one's culture of origin and embracing a second culture. "Chauvinistic" is the opposite of passing, referring to how an individual rejects a second culture and exaggerates a first culture. "Marginal" points to the action of vacillating between the two cultures. Lastly, "mediating" means synthesizing both cultures (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). Sometimes, it seems like I have reached the "mediating" state. However, what I have experienced so far mainly in the college context has limited my culture learning and caused me much confusion and certain disorientation regarding my future. I am not certain about how my identity would be transformed once I leave the college environment.

At the edge of making my transition to post-graduate life, I face a critical question: Where does my self-identification fit in? There are two perspectives in viewing my identity. The first one acknowledges my ability to adapt to new environments and learn new cultures, which promises the possibility that my identity can flexibly fit in any new surroundings it comes to encounter. The second one is concerned with how my self-identification has grown out of my original cultural point but has not quite developed fully into the new multicultural context. In other words, I might be vacillating between my origin and my present.

At some point, I am going to travel back in time: making my re-entry to my original culture. On the surface, it may seem easy to return to something that used to be a part of me. However, psychology researchers have shown a significant amount of interpersonal difficulties, especially in peer and professional contacts, when people who live in a second culture try to return to their first culture. Returning to a "tight" society is also more difficult than to a "loose" society (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). "Tight" societies emphasize how to maintain harmonious relationships among individuals so making a re-entry to those societies requires more effort to develop successful social contacts. Vietnam, in many aspects, is a more conservative culture than the United States. There are certain stereotypes for foreign students returning home from America, for example, being "Americanized". For women, being "Americanized" usually has a negative connotation of dressing more provocatively, being more out-spoken, or being more sexually open. However, in recent years this perception primaruly comes from olde r generations. As the world is becoming smaller because of advanced technologies and social media movements, the youth in Vietnam is rapidly immersing themselves in foreign cultures in a digital realm. Many "Americanized" cultural modes are experienced by non-travelers.

Any teenager with an internet connected computer can have access to American culture by reading news, watching videos, listening to music and especially participating in online social networks. The Vietnamese generation who was born in the 1990s is growing up amid unprecedented changes in the society.This dynamic leaves a big gap between them and the preceding generations.

Even though young Vietnamese are more familiar with American culture due to the popularity of American music, Hollywood movies and social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter, they can only catch what is floating on the surface. In other words, young Vietnamese only has access to what the American media wants to promote. Their experience of American culture significantly lacks real social immersion which cannot be portrayed in the media. They can understand some aspects of American culture but would never be able to relate to my cross-culture difficulties.

My connection to my original culture is vastly influenced by the bond between my family and me. Because of their support, I have overcome the cross-cultural difficulties. They have become a place of leaving and returning in my journey:

I leave to see and learn new things then return to appreciate my original starting point even more. Without being detached from the water, the fish would never have come to realize how precious the ocean was.

Artistic perceptions

When I was in kindergarten, my family lived close to an afterschool center where they provided arts classes for children. My mother took me there when I was four and asked if I wanted to joined the music class and promised she would use her next month salary to buy me a small Yamaha keyboard. The keyboard sounded fascinating but I was more attracted to the studio art class where I saw some older children painting some vases with colorful crayons. I told my mother that a crayon box was much cheaper than a Yamaha keyboard and I would like to join the studio art class. We came to register with the instructor but he rejected me because I was not old enough. I had to be at least six years old and had to already been in elementary school. My mother convinced him to let me stay in the class for that day and try some drawing. The instructor looked at the pitiful five year old girl and nodded after a little hesitation. I was happy, running to grab a seat and started drawing with excitement. The instructor accepted me at the end of the class and told me I had to work hard because I was the youngest kid in the class.

Since then, I started attending the class twice a week. Every Thursday and Saturday, I would carry my art supply bag on my back and walk to the center. The drawing board was so big nobody could see me from behind. I stopped going there when I was twelve years old. By then, I was already enrolled in a secondary school Literature specialized class. There was so much difficult schoolwork including Mathematics and Writing that I could no longer spare three hours a week for the art class. However, I still took drawing at school once a week which I very much enjoyed. My high school did not offer any Art classes. I focused more on writing and entered many contests. A second prize in the national contest earned me a free ticket to college when I was high school junior. So I decided to spend time studying for the Toefl and SAT exams in order to go to the United States and study writing.

During my freshman year, I took ART 101: *Concepts in Two Dimensions* for general requirements. I fell in love with the class. The class rekindled the deep joy I had fifteen years ago when I first came to the afterschool center. I was exposed to many new artistic concepts and mediums. Art, I discovered, was much more than a hobby. It was a passion, a decision, a path – like any other academic field. Nobody had treated my artistic pursuits seriously when I was in Vietnam. My teachers were mad because I doodled on all my textbooks: I added wings for the pigs in agricultural engineering book and I drew mustaches for all portraits of poets and novelists in literature book. I dropped the intention of majoring in English and declared my Art major my freshman year. I have come a long round way to find what I am truly passionate about. In Eastern philosophy terms, I guess it was fate that has guided me to art again.

Over the past four years, my artistic perceptions have greatly broaden and strengthened. I have been introduced to modern artistic concepts and given the chance to study them and develop

my own art. The turning point in my process of developing my artistic perception is when I realized how much I love traditional values, customs, and imagery of my own original culture. They become the materials I want to use in my art. Thanks to the artistic foundation that Connecticut College has given me, I have learned to not only sharpen and improve my skills but also to appreciate aesthetic qualities in many things around me. When I turn back and look at what I used to regard as ordinary in Vietnam , I discovered hidden beauty. My self-identification somehow has been a bridge between the two cultures. I want to create my art with that perception in mind: how to express that self awareness in my art. Art becomes a way for me to express myself to other people. At the same time, it has helped me to appreciate my traditional cultural values, and to build on to construct my identity.

Concepts and inspirations

I started my honors thesis with the idea of using traditional imagery, stories and materials from Vietnam in order to portray my identity in between two cultures. Throughout my senior year's studies, I narrowed down my interests and focused on a few objects that hold meanings attached to my cultural identity.

I combine canvas shoes and conical hats as one unit to represent Vietnamese identity. To me, among all personal belongings, a pair of shoes is the most personal item. The shoes connect our bodies to the earth. They leave our traces as we walk, indicating what paths we take. They are closely linked to one's identity. Everyone who grew up in Vietnam is familiar with a folktale called *The Story of Tam and Cam*. The character Tam lived a hard life with her stepmother and her stepsister. With the fairy guardian's help, she had the chance to attend a royal festival and met the King. On her way back, she dropped one of her embroidered golden canvas slippers. Later, she became the Queen as the King found her slipper. Similar to Cinderella in Western culture, Tam claims back her lost identity with her slipper. Like the shoes, the conical hats

are also associated with the idea of identity but in an opposite way. They hide their identities. When I think about the conical hats, the image of Vietnamese farmers wearing these hats to work under the sun comes to my mind. As they bow their heads to transplant seedlings in the paddy field, their faces are not visible. From afar, we see countless conical shapes moving in harmony. The shoes and the hats imply both the visible and invisible aspects of identity. A pair of shoes at the bottom and the hat at the top indicate the presence of a person through his or her void.

Another familiar concept in Vietnamese culture that I am interested in is the metaphor of the red string and its representation of fate. Chance help people meet each other. However, it is fate that keeps them stay. Fate is usually referred to as the read string (tơ hồng) in Vietnamese culture. Invisible red strings connect us all. Everything we do will reverbarate through the net of life around us regardkess of our awareness. After all, one's identity is dependent on others' identities. In the vast span of life, delicate strings of fate link our ephemeral identities. In his song *Đóa hoa vô thường (Evanescent Bloom)*, Trinh Cong Son wrote:

> *Since then, the flower that is you,*
> *Of a deep rose at dawn,*
> *Blossoms wholly at dusk to*
> *Await the evanescent wind*
> *Since then, you are the mist*
> *That drizzles, fresh at sunrise,*
> *Since then, I am the night*
> *That flourishes into the evanescent bloom.*

When I think about my life in Vietnam, the most vivid scenes come from my childhood memories. The world to me was a place full of wonder and fear at the same time. There was an overwhelming

sense of uncertainty and curiosity as a kid was brough into and discovered the world. During those times, my house's entrance door was a key facilitator of my discoveries that define my childhood. My family moved seven times before we built our present house in 1993, when I was four years old. Ever since my first memories, the door had always been there. My father made a hole on the door so that my parents could lock the door from outside when they went to work. I spent much time staying home by myself and this hole became a window for the little me to look out to the world outside. I stood on my tiptoe through the hole to see street vendors passing by or to hear the noise from the neighbor kids playing. In my installation, I re-created this door to reverse the experience of looking out the world. This door has transported through time to the present. I would like to invite the audience to glimpse through the hole to explore my world inside my house. I recorded a video of my family and had it projected on myself while I was making a net. In the video that the audience sees through the hole, there is no longer a little girl. There is now a young woman who is trying to reattach herself to her broken net and also fabricating more strings in her mesh.

In my installation, the room is full of objects that are inter-connected and create complex relationships. There are connections between past and present, the bridge between my home culture and my new culture, the link between tangible objects and intangible memories. There are quiet transitions in space and time as nothing stays still and nothing remains the same.

My body is here but my identity can extend beyond any physical boundaries. No matter how my identity is attached to its surroundings, I will keep my original culture and my family engraved in my soul. My journey of crossing cultures continues but I know that there is a place where my identity can leave then return.

Clouds overhead and sun on the shoulders
I walk away, the river stays
From the spirit of love comes an unbidden call
And within myself a human shadow appears

(*A place for leaving and returning*
- Trinh Cong Son)
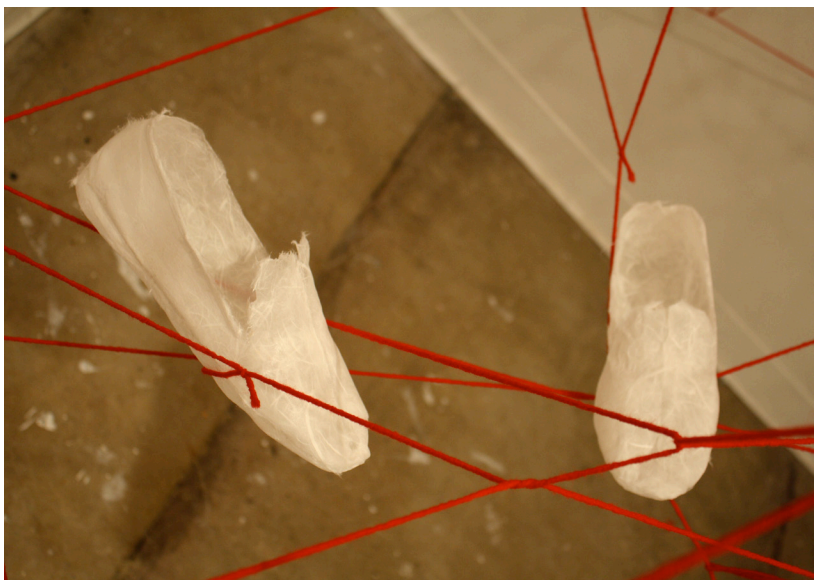
Exhibited work

A place for leaving and returning
Video Installation and mixed media

Exhibited in the White Box, Cummings Arts Center,
Connecticut College from May 4 to May 20, 2012

View from entrance

View from entrance
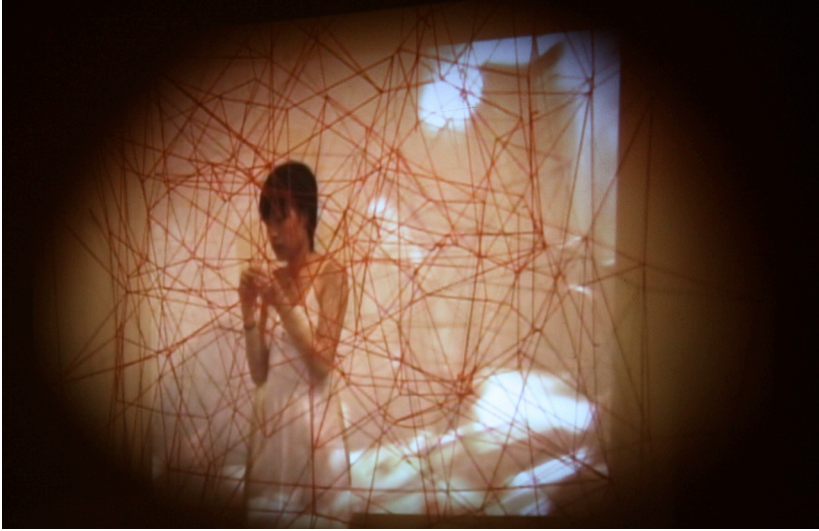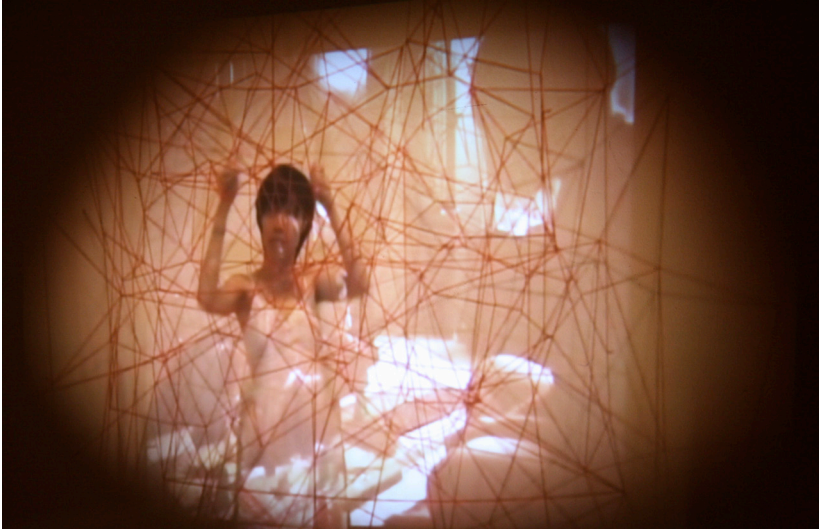
Views of the video as seen from the door hole

Corner view

Corner view
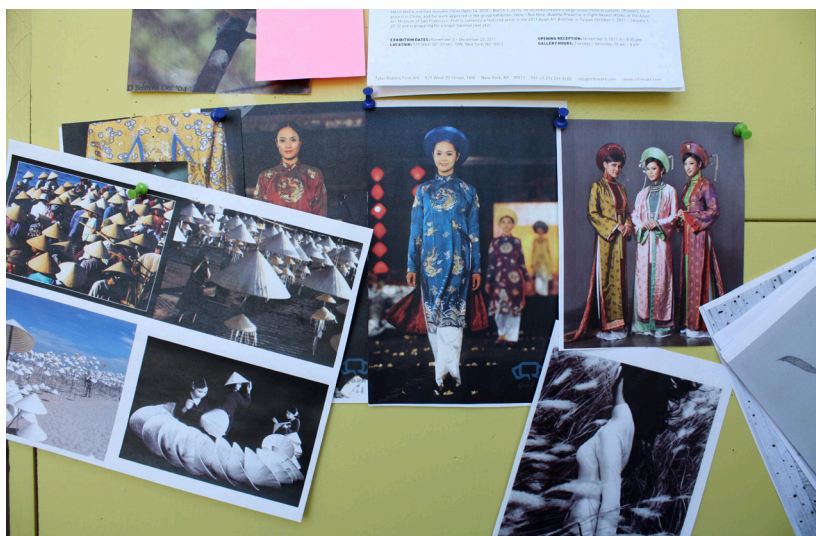
Door hole

Door knob
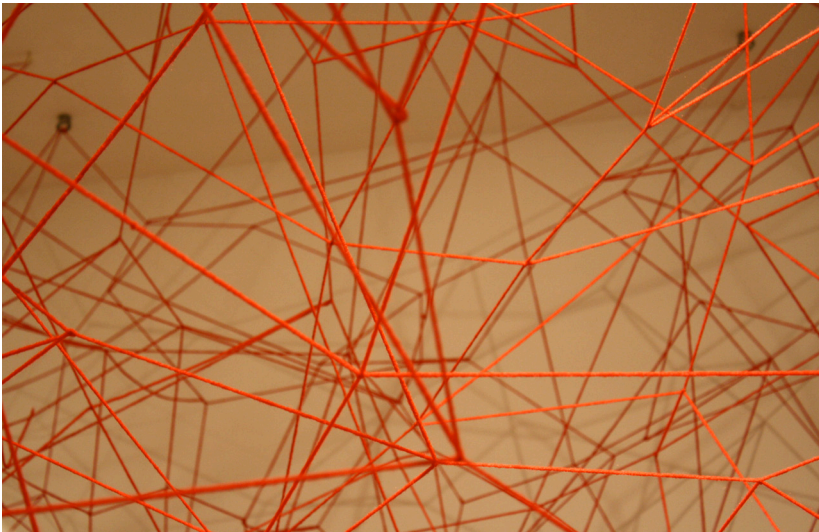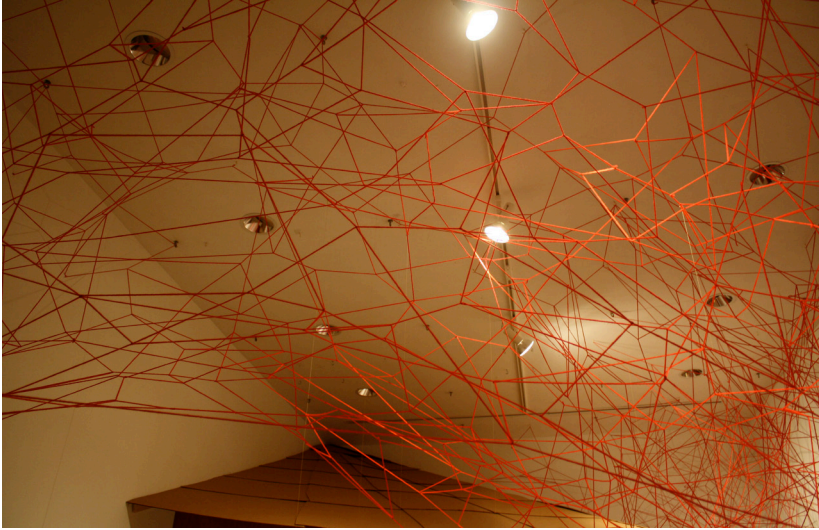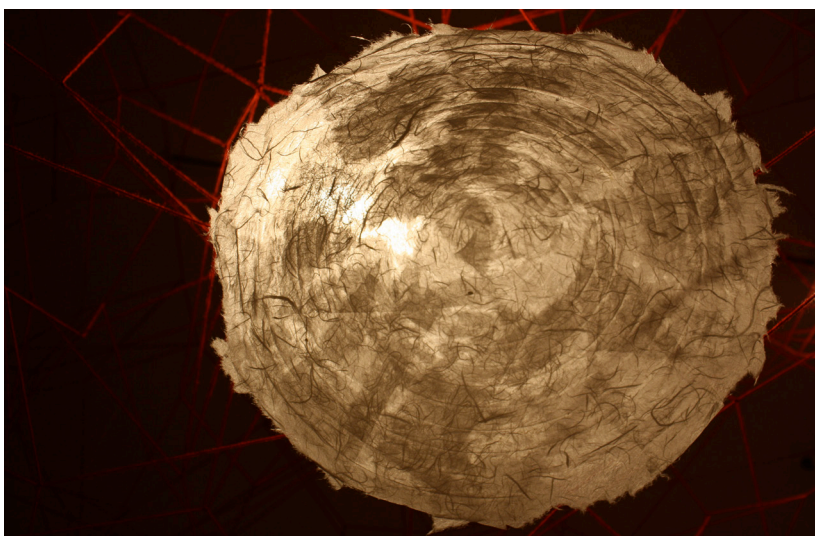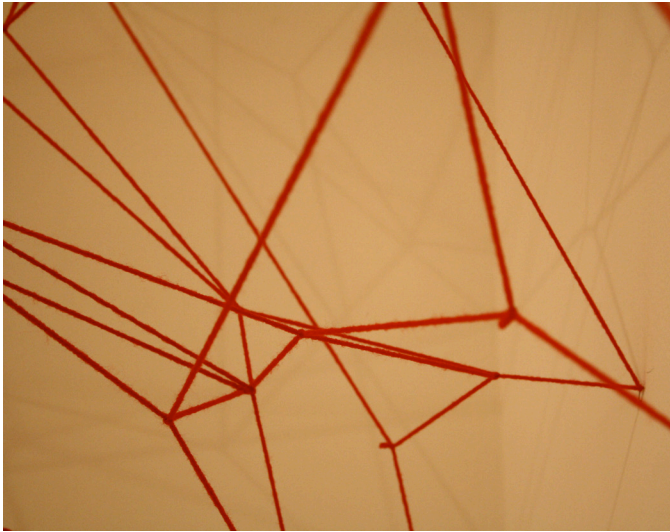
Working process

Experiments and preparation
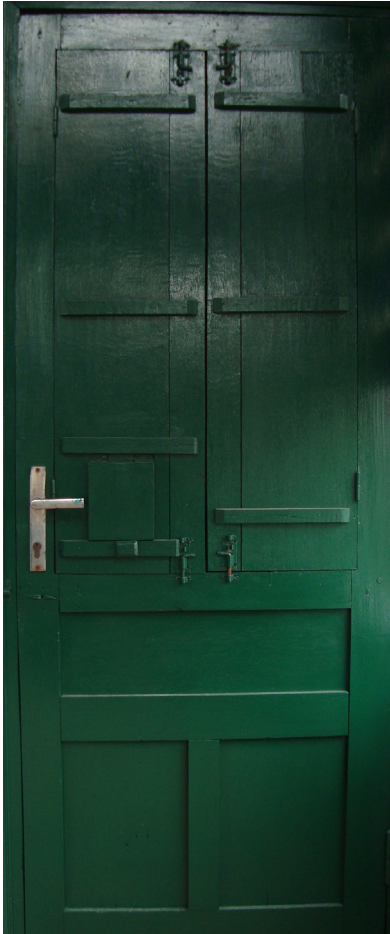
My home's door

My home's door

Pictures for references

Mock-up installtion, Fall 2011

Mock-up installtion, Fall 2011
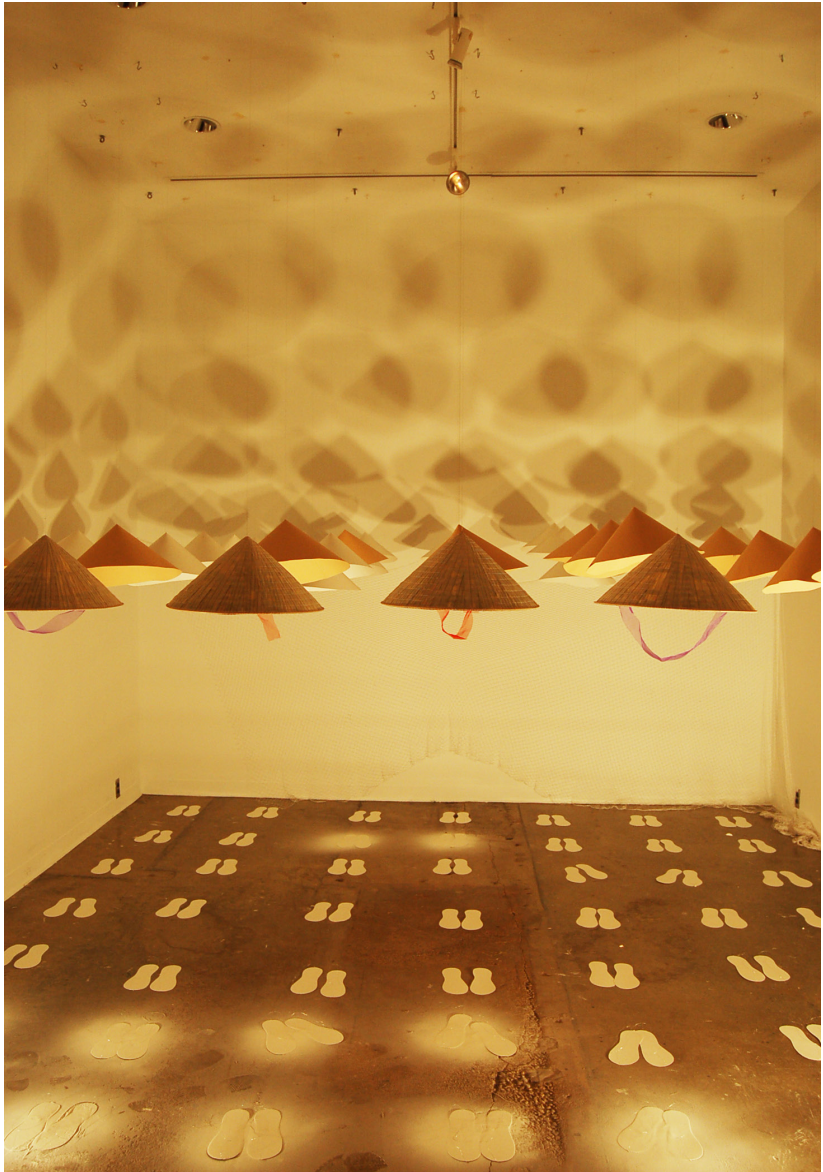
Mock-up installtion, Fall 2011

Methyl cellulose used to make hats
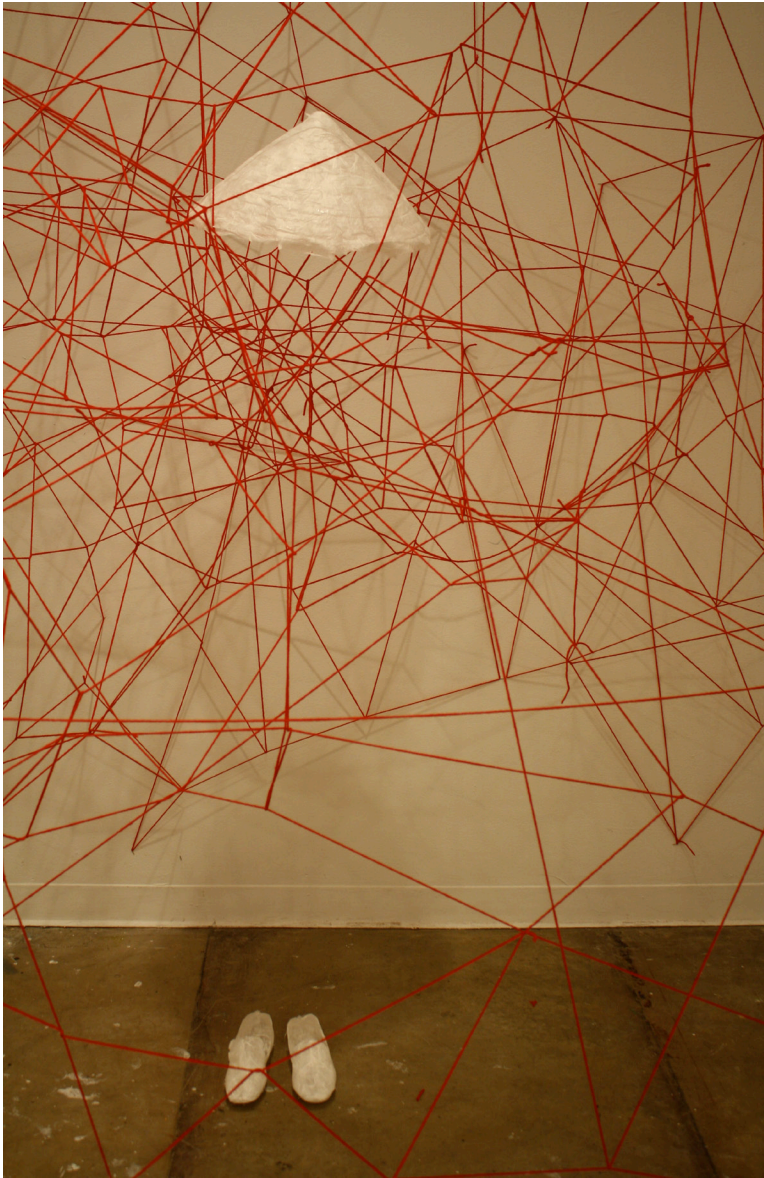

Mulberry paper used for hats and shoes

Shoes molds casted from plaster

Set up to record video

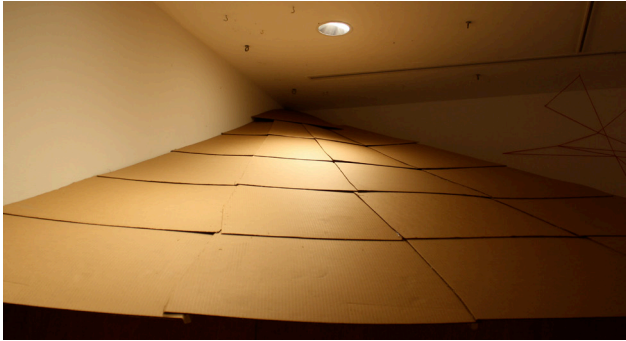Scene from the video

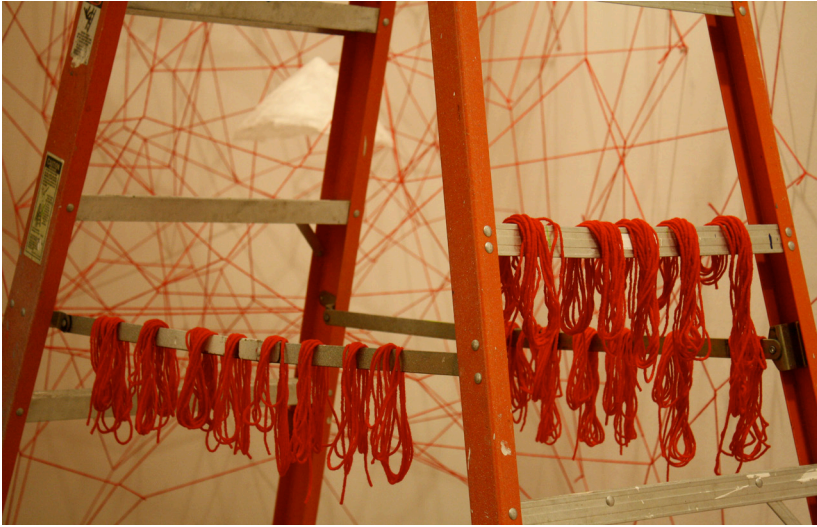Installation test

Installation process

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All translations of Trinh Cong Son's songs are from website http://www.tcs-home.org/

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To live one's life
One needs a heart
To what end, do you know, my love?
To cast into the wind
To cast into the wind *