



*Bearded Male 5*, 2011, charcoal & pastel on Hahnemuhle paper, 107.5 x 78.5cm  
Ho Chi Minh prison poem 'Autumn Night' translated by Kenneth Rexroth  
Courtesy NG Art Gallery, Sydney NSW

## MAI NGUYEN-LONG

**Drift.** A spirit net breaks. All things float. Then it happens again, again, and again. Through dungeons of self-loathing one grapples for a bridge: between the magical and the brutal, guardian angels and demi-demons. Bubbles of joy are random dots in an ethereal space populated by snips of wandering souls. Values form goals that direct the living: children, family, friends, communities. 'drift' is a home, an other-worldliness searching for empathy and acceptance beyond life's inevitable rifts and ripples. Within these colours, lines, and forms, I am mapping a space for playing, loving, sharing, living, forgiving, and perhaps happiness.

Obscure and merging entities float in and out: a gecko-dog, a koi carp-dog appear, reappear. Small dogs sport mimicry team colours. Multiple identities, confused selves: dog-human duos, mask-like faces. A bearded male 'of Asian appearance' hosts poetry, distorts, and contorts. Totemic cylinders - hiding laundry baskets and rubbish bins - surrender haloed and circus-like linga-yonic life ledgers, embodying the indivisible two-in-oneness of oppositional principles. Each holds secrets within, some obvious, others less widely celebrated. All things borrowed nothing new. There is never one version of anything (or is there?). The inner cog could turn in any direction. Yet it craves anchorage.

In a dream for an all-connecting universe the heart embraces the oceans, the land and sky, the blood of all others, blackness. In a plea edit out but betray not yourself, move in and out of confronting spaces - unscathed. Transform a disabling drift into an enabling shift. Nothing is whole. Signs and symbols acquire double meanings: a crying out to decipher and order personal, political and historical fragments. An unstoppable will to be functionally connected: to fill the empty spaces, to compound more and more bubbles of joy...to stay drift.