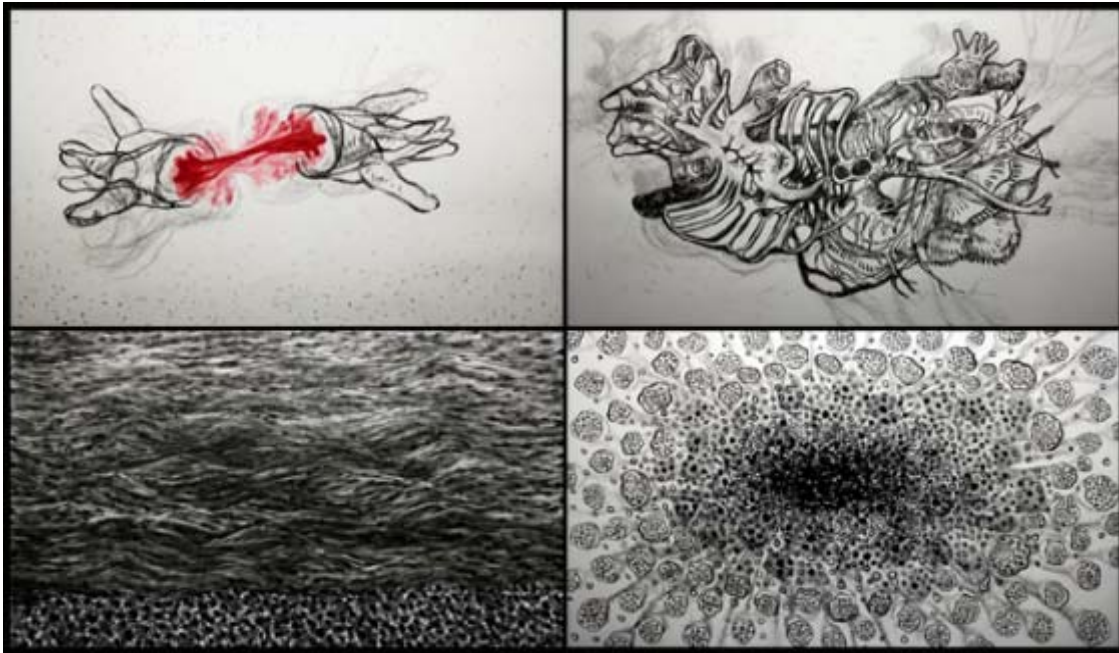


Beyogmos explorations of identity offer profound insights and beauty

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A selection of images created by Mai Nguyen-Long in a rapid sequence of charcoal drawings for *Beyogmos*, 2014, set to a soundtrack of songs her Vietnamese father has listened to for as long as she can remember. The animation and the delicacy of its imagery, continually connecting and disconnecting, and accompanied by haunting and melancholic sound, is deeply moving.

The animation is part of Mai's continuing exploration of identity, which took a dramatic and disturbing twist when *Pho Dog* (2006), her work in the Casula Powerhouse touring exhibition *I Love Pho*, attracted a bitterly hostile reception from a small group of people. When displayed at Breadbox Gallery, Perth in 2008, nationwide representatives of the organisation Vietnamese Community in Australia objected forcefully. Mai used the notion of a mongrel dog to illustrate and question the meaning of identity, particularly as it applied to her own experience of an Australian Anglo/Irish mother, a Vietnamese father and her early years spent in Papua New Guinea and the Philippines.

A series of exhibitions followed which were partly responses to this community hostility and an effort to heal their hurt and anger and to free herself from her subsequent sense of isolation and paranoia. Gradually, she was moving on. *Beyogmos* was developed with her close friend and the exhibition's curator Gina Fairley, who helped Mai select some of her earlier works from 1998 and encouraged her recognition of the spirituality and science of many of the recurring motifs in her contemporary practice.

In a public conversation between Gina and Mai, at Wollongong Art Gallery, March 5, 2014, both acknowledged the living organic nature of Mai's work – its simultaneous connectivity, flow and disconnection, and the centrality of the bejewelled, now open, mongrel dog to the whole exhibition. Elements of herself, previously segregated, were now finding connection with other elements in a process she describes as synthesis.

Mai continues to investigate ambiguities in a perpetual exploration of identity of how and what we call ourselves in Australia. When an audience member asked has she found any resolution to her own sense of identity, Mai smiled and said, "Yes, I'm an artist."

Beyogmos continues at Wollongong Art Gallery until May 25.

Image: Mai Nguyen-Long, *Beyogmos*, 2014, HDV stills, stop animation, 5 min 11 sec; animation editor: Stuart Horstman; music: "Diem Xua" by Trinh Cong Son, sung by Khanh Ly. (image courtesy the artist and NG Art Gallery.)