

Phở Dog Blackout

Note on gallery wall:

Due to the sensitivities of the organisation 'Vietnamese Community in Western Australia', the Phở Dog installation has been covered.

Background Explanation:

Phở Dog is an installation of 12 mythical mongrels named Phở Dog. Part of my artist statement printed in the I love Phở catalogue (p. 44) explains Phở Dog as a '*character that contemplates difference and tries to understand it in the broader context of human nature and complex political histories – a tribute to the idea that things will never fit into neat little boxes*' ... and also... '*Eating Phở in Australia as an Australian reminds (me) of the unhealed wounds of the Vietnamese diaspora*' ... in addition ... '*This work embodies my wish for a healing, and a search for hope and humour*'.

Cuong Phu Le, curator of I Love Pho, informed me of a sensitive response to the Phở Dog 'Keala' at the opening night of the exhibition. Keala, a dog interweaving a number of flags and symbols from parts of flags from various countries, was seen to be problematic by the Vietnamese community, due to the five pointed yellow star on red background and the three red stripes on yellow background.

Over the past weeks, increasingly steady pressure regarding the problematic work - threatening 'boycott' / requesting 'removal, or 'covering the work' - and negative media generated nationally throughout the Vietnamese community has taken it's toll. It has been the personal criticisms directed at the curator that have been particularly damaging. Following many in-depth conversations with Cuong Phu Le, I made the decision to cover the entire Phở Dog installation. During our discussions, the curator had also expressed concern over my personal safety as I am scheduled to arrive in Perth 23rd May to run a weekend workshop.

It is with great sadness that I have decided to cover the entire installation of Phở Dogs with a black sheet, as if a shrouding, a mourning, a death-ness, a frustrated silence with mysterious and alien bumps. This is a gesture to acknowledge the suffering of the Vietnamese Community concerned, and at the same time the suffering of all peoples who cannot speak out in the world, and who are censored in their own societies.

I considered just removing or covering Keala, but to censor one would be to treat that mongrel differently to the next, which in essence goes against the grain of the entire concept of the installation. The mongrels need to be seen in context as well as individually. Individually and as a group they illustrate and talk to the whole idea of complexity and the problem of us all progressing equally together, as a healthy cohesive society.



*Phở Dog Keala by Mai Long
Casula Powerhouse Collection*

I Love Phở is a Kultour event and Casula Powerhouse project supported by the Australia Council for the Arts, the City of Perth and the Office of Multicultural Interests; Curated by Cuong Phu Le. Mai Long facilitated a Phở Dog Workshop alongside this event, which as supported by KULCHA and the City of Wannero.



Phở Dog installation – by Mai Long 2006 –Casula Powerhouse Collection

Phở Dog tries to look at complex issues in a humorous light, with a main inspiration being self-mockery as I slot myself into a supposedly derogatory mongrel label (as a half-breed). Self-mockery is a mechanism I have used previously in my art to alleviate the weight of pain and seriousness I have placed on issues that seem so unfair and irreconcilable that you just don't know where to turn or who or how to communicate them with. In this sense, sadly and ironically, this "blackout" of the Phở Dog installation seems eerily natural. However, I will need some more time to better digest what has occurred here.



Phở Dog Blackout – 21 May 2008 – Breadbox Gallery, Perth

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