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“Becoming Alice: Through the metal tunnel”

The Outpost
L2 - B1 Roman Plaza, To Huu
January 30, 2024 - March 15, 2024

By **Hung Duong**
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Nguyễn Duy Mạnh, *Lost spirit*, 2017–23, ceramic. Installation view. From “Becoming Alice: Through the metal tunnel.” Photo: Chimnon Studio.

The group exhibition “Becoming Alice: Through the metal tunnel” gathers an ensemble of thirteen artists who explore unbridled metamorphosis through multifarious approaches to portraiture. With each work, the individual identities of the artists become enmeshed in a fantastical nexus of personal and sociopolitical entanglements. One can perceive a disquieting energy emitting from Lý Trầ `n Quỳnh Giang’s *I see in the garden 2*, 2018, which depicts an ephemeral violinist with a swirling body ishstrokes and engorged eyes that daringly stare back at viewers.

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female representation and romanticization through ironically kitschy visuals.

The tension between the private and political spheres is most felt in Nguyễn Duy Mạnh's *Lost spirit, 2017–23*: a constellation of twenty Chu Đậu–styled ceramic dinnerware pieces set upon a white table in a dimly lit room. Upon closer inspection, these objects become grotesquely visceral. Some plates have their surfaces scratched, carved, and peeled to expose crimson-glazed open wounds, while other vessels are chopped and maimed with ceramic blood drops pooling beneath. The centerpiece of this phantasmagorical feast is the severed head of a *qilin*—the guardian beast for prosperity in East Asian mythologies—now served half-flayed and white-eyed with disbelief. These ceramic cadavers thus transform into metaphors for his anguish at the commodification and consumption of forlorn craftsmanship and artistic creativity by neoliberal structures of capitalism.

Lining the gallery's black walls is Nguyễn's *Wandering soul, 2017–23*, an experimental series of flattened glazed pottery resembling peeled ceramic skin, with attached features and patterns that recall historical antiques from the Lý and Trần dynasties in the Vietnam National Museum of History—another subtle gesture toward the flattening of microhistories to maintain homogeneous paradigms of power that are vested in conformity and commercial mass production.

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