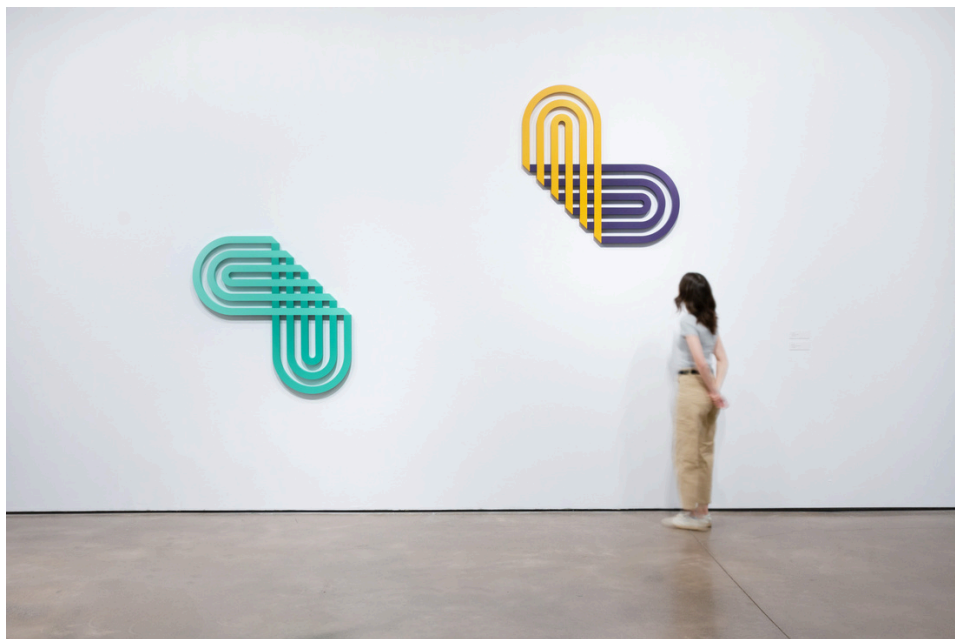


YIELD

HUY LAM



Exhibition installation. Images courtesy of Jordyn Stewart.

August 24 - November 16, 2024

GPAG
GRIMSBY PUBLIC ART GALLERY

Marking Huy Lam's first major solo exhibition in a public art gallery, Yield, explores material-based practice, wellness culture, and photographic theory.

Primarily utilizing collage and sculpture, 2d and 3d forms oscillate and intertwine, developing a narrative framework informed by the artist's photography background, material resourcefulness, malleability, and meditation practice. Those acquainted with meditation or Buddhist theory may be familiar with the term equanimity, which can be defined as a balanced mental state that is not necessarily easily achieved and typically requires mindful practice. Though there are several definitions, it can refer to an openness and acceptance; a calmness or equilibrium; and is generally understood to embody a balanced reaction or emotional stability. This equanimical methodology can be found throughout Lam's practice as he strives to imbue and approach works with softness and responsiveness as opposed to rigid preconceptions, letting the materials guide him. The title of the exhibition calls on Lam's childhood memories and a phrase often repeated by his mother in Chinese to exercise restraint and humility in various contextual situations of emotional valence. The closest English translation, 'Yield,' embodies this sentiment, and can likewise be applied to Lam's practice as a temporal instinct when pursuing new lines of aesthetic inquiry – satiating creative curiosity.

Mesmerizing kinetic mobile sculptures evoke a spiritual calm, while their delicate physical balance and asymmetric forms are purposefully reminiscent of traditional Chinese medicinal scales. Connotations of emotional and physical wellbeing become further engrained when paired with other works in the exhibition. The "Beacon" series with its striated steeples and lanterns, and the "Pills" series vibrant yet calming infinite loops and portals. Utilizing mass produced, brightly coloured

photomontages, collages are rendered unrecognizable from their source, except for vague callouts through lines of text culled from the original such as extend your stay; a classic refresher; please enjoy responsibly.

Lam's professional photography practice permeates each work as evidenced through his unique use of light, repetition, and balance. Moreover, the transmutation of these free mass-produced advertisements when viewed through a lens of photographic theory, begin to cultivate interpretation as a sleek counter narrative to the hegemonic stereotypes proliferated in consumerist culture, including the recent permeation of the wellness industry and its cultural appropriation.

With expert precision, Lam's polished repetitive gestures and material resourcefulness utilize readily available source materials with apparent ease, obfuscating the time and labour behind each meticulous artwork. Practicing acceptance, fluidity, and patience, Lam balances the end-product while relinquishing control by exercising humility and restraint. Be it through the rigidity or size of the materials at hand; Lam patiently works in unison with them, yielding to these constraints while still bending them to his will, striking a balance that ultimately yields something beautiful.

Curated by Caitlin Sutherland





Yielding to Art: Huy Lam's Journey of Reflection and Balance

The artistic creations of Huy Lam have a profound healing quality. The Toronto-based artist approaches image-making and object creation as a way of understanding life and reflecting the human experience. This perspective originates from his extensive photography background, where he captured and conveyed messages through composition, light, and focus. His trained eye for visual media and sharp intuition in communication proved invaluable when Lam expanded his practice into contemporary art. In his first public gallery solo exhibition, *Yield*, Lam showcases a series of photcollages and sculptures that are poignant yet simple in form, offering a meditative outlook on life. They reflect Lam's journey of coming to terms with hardship and understanding the crises plaguing the modern world.

Some elements in Lam's work recall the tenets of Buddhism. Central to this belief system is the Four Noble Truths, which focus on the study of suffering: accepting its existence, investigating its cause, understanding its nature, and learning how to stop it. The religion emphasizes self-improvement and acquiring wisdom about the challenges and difficulties surrounding an individual. For Lam, art is part of this self-improvement journey. Having spent time in a refugee camp after his family fled Vietnam in the 1970s, he grappled with managing his emotions and reactions to the world's provocations. For this reason, Lam aspires to create aesthetically pleasing art—he believes in the healing power of beauty.

While Buddhism may not be the direct subject of Lam's work, the practice of meditation is an apparent influence. This is evident in his thoughtful compositions of forms, shapes, materials, and images.

For example, in his 2024 collage series *Take Your Pills*, Lam carefully extracts images from advertisements found in wine and spirits catalogues. These images, surgically removed from their capitalist context, are then assembled into a Möbius band—a symbol of infinity. The titles of the works, such as *Satisfying Your Hunger* and *Comfort Zone*, borrow the language of pharmaceutical advertising and the self-care industry, presenting the duality of seeking the truth of human suffering. Much like remedies, Lam's work symbolizes the “medication” that everyone, including himself, takes daily to calm our frantic and anxious minds. The circular motion in these works marks a departure from Lam's earlier, more linear style. He even customized his radius cutter to create the sharp oval cut-outs, highlighting his resourcefulness and inventiveness as a self-taught artist.

Similar to how he discovered his passion for photography, Lam acquired wood and metalworking skills through the necessity of creative curiosity. He finds meditation in negotiating with and yielding to the needs and characteristics of hard materials. In recent years, he has created several floor and wall sculptures using wood, brass, stainless steel, and, most recently, gravity. Lam emphasizes materiality and process through this body of work, illustrating a personal practice that fosters a deep awareness of self, actions, and consequences.

When discussing the creation of two dynamic hanging sculptures, *She Awaited Her Fate with Equanimity* and *Seeking Grace*, Lam recalls the labour-intensive process of operating industrial tools and machines to bend and cut metal bars, steel components, and aluminum wafers into aesthetically pleasing and balanced nuclei. His experimentation with new techniques reflects his ongoing practice of humility and restraint, softening his approach as part of a broader self-improvement process.

As a result, Lam often allows the materials themselves to dictate the final size and scale of the artwork. The meditative quality of Lam's new sculptures stems from his ability to relinquish control and let the materials take on the forms they desire. The geometric forms in the sculptures act as counterbalances, enhancing the sense of equilibrium.

Lam's artistic journey is deeply intertwined with his personal history and philosophy. His work, influenced by meditative practices, serves as both a reflection of and a response to the challenges of the modern world. Through his thoughtful compositions and material choices, Lam seeks to create a sense of balance and healing for himself and his audience. His ability to relinquish control and let materials guide his creative process showcases his technical skills and underscores his commitment to self-improvement and emotional understanding. Lam's art, whether through sculptural pieces or photocollages, resonates with a profound awareness of human suffering and offers a meditative space for reflection and contemplation.

Tak Pham

Tak Pham is a Vietnamese contemporary art curator and writer. He is curator at the Illingworth Kerr Gallery at the Alberta University of the Arts in Calgary, Alberta, Treaty 7 territory. Pham holds an M.F.A. in Criticism and Curatorial Practice from OCAD University and a B.A. Hons. from Carleton University. He has curated exhibitions and organized curatorial projects for the MacKenzie Art Gallery, Contemporary Calgary, Confederation Centre Art Gallery, Varley Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Ontario, and Nuit Blanche Toronto, among others. His writings and reviews have appeared in Canadian Art, C Magazine, ESPACE art actuel, esse arts + opinions, GalleriesWest, The Brooklyn Rail, ArtAsiaPacific and Hyperallergic. In 2023, Pham was awarded the Hnatyshyn Foundation-Fogo Island Arts Young Curator Residency.



Huy Lam

Huy Lam is a multi-disciplinary artist whose current practice is obsessively focussed on sculpture. Ethnically Chinese, born in Vietnam, Lam is part of the group of refugees referred to as boat people. Arriving in the Niagara region of Canada at age 8, he used art as a way to communicate in this new foreign environment, and eventually went on to study photography at Humber College. After graduating, Lam worked as a professional and sought after agency photographer for over a decade. This field allowed him to travel extensively, while developing personal projects in a variety of media. Lam is a self-taught sculptor and woodworker, and has had work exhibited in Canada, Japan and the US. The artist's sculptural work includes custom furniture, lighting, stand alone and wall sculptures, and has work placed in various private and corporate collections including the Scotiabank Art Collection, Telus, Earl's Restaurant and Canopy Hotel collections. Huy is represented by United Contemporary, 2Gallery (PEC, Ontario) and Gallery Ether (Tokyo, Japan).

Related Programming

Artist Reception and Free Artist Talk:

October 5, 2:00-4:00pm

Free Drop-in Collage Workshop:

October 5, 11:00am-1:00pm

Mobile Sculpture Workshop:

October 19, 1:00-3:00pm

Grimsby Public Art Gallery was founded in 1975 as a committee of the Grimsby Public Library Board, creating an active and accessible community art gallery in the lower level of the Grimsby Public Library. In 1999 the Gallery became a separate sub-department of the Town of Grimsby, although we still shared a building with the Library. In 2004 both Gallery and Library moved into a new purpose-built facility that has significantly enhanced our ability to fulfill all aspects of our mandate.

Forging and maintaining connections with our community is of primary importance and we do this through our careful selection and presentation of exhibitions and programs. We preserve art by our responsible care of the permanent collection. We encourage visual art by maintaining a gallery that is open and welcoming to all visitors and by offering a range of thought provoking art and related programs. Grimsby Public Art Gallery is wheelchair accessible.

GALLERY HOURS:

Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday: 10 am - 5 pm

Thursday: 10 am - 9 pm

Saturday: 12 pm - 5 pm



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