



## ART AND SPACE IN THE REGION: A BRIEF GUIDE

Artists or curators interested in developing a project in Vietnam have a number of options available. Internet searches will reveal a dizzying list of galleries but the bulk of these are commercial enterprises aimed at the tourist market or the decoration needs of local banks, offices and hotels. Neither the artists on these sites, nor the galleries themselves are an active part of the local contemporary art world. At worst, these internet galleries trade in fakes. The listings in this catalog represent a spectrum of spaces, organizations or initiatives that regularly work with contemporary artists. While the intentions were to provide a thorough coverage, some omissions might have occurred.

Vietnam's art world is split geographically into three cities, and grew up around the art universities in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Hanoi, and Hue. Somewhat ironically, Phnom Penh, the capital of neighboring Cambodia, is geographically the closest and most accessible city from Saigon. Its climate, and the urban lifestyle that has developed around it, are also very similar. In contrast to the situation that exists for artists under Vietnam's socialist system, Cambodia is relatively open and unrestricted, although similar frustrations are shared in terms of the quality of art education and limited access to information about contemporary art internationally.

The most spacious exhibition venues in Vietnam are government-run spaces, namely those in the museums, universities and art associations. Generally, these are set up only to hang paintings, and can be limited in terms how they will allow walls to be used, their lighting infrastructure, and the professionalism of installation and management staff. Such institutions may be less receptive to sophisticated, subtle and sometimes quirky requirements for the presentation of contemporary artworks. Instead, major concerns tend to be income-generation through relatively high space rental fees, and a cautious approach towards censorship requirements. As such, these spaces tend to be utilized mostly by rich local artists and touring diplomatic exhibitions.

As no art market existed in Vietnam until the early 1990s, the gallery scene is still in its infancy. The private galleries that fill google's search listings are sales-motivated, and do not represent artists in the manner that is familiar in more developed economies. The independent artist-run spaces and commercial galleries (which represent artists) listed in this guide are the region's venues for contemporary art.

The independent gallery scene is in a constant state of flux. Over the years, many galleries have been set up by art lovers, artists or photographers who do not have a background in art management but who wish to support the art scene. Gallery infrastructure, methods for dealing with artists, scope of the program and general professionalism can, again, be quite limited in these situations. The realities of economic survival soon become the highest priority, and after a few years, many such galleries close. Therefore, many of the art spaces in the region tend to be quite young, with the average life-span limited to 2–3 years. With no official support or funding for the gallery infrastructure beyond the institutional spaces mentioned above, this means that there is a shortage of art spaces relative to the size of these cities, particularly in Vietnam.

In socialist Vietnam, all exhibitions, public performances etc. must go through a censorship process, which the gallery will organize on the artist's behalf. For foreign artists, the administrative process takes a minimum of 4 weeks. Paperwork includes: translation of the artist's CV, title of the exhibition and statement about the works, the translation of all text-based content, translation of all titles, photocopy of passport and a letter of support from the relevant consulate or embassy. For large group exhibitions, this applies to all participating artists, and can be quite a demanding administrative task.

This system makes it difficult, indeed prohibitive, to present experimental, impromptu or process-based work in Vietnam, or to show work that has been very recently developed, such as of that of the artists in SUPER STRUCTURES, who were in HCM City for just two weeks, developing their projects up to the last day. Artists sometimes choose to present work in 'private' showings that are generally held in alternative spaces as these are more under the radar, or occasionally directly in public space. Naturally, this involves a level of risk.

For a more detailed discussion on the art infrastructure in Vietnam, please see the essay by Việt Lê in this catalog.

artists' initiative & open-access archive/reading room  
director: Sue Hajdu  
<http://albbsaigon.blogspot.com>  
[albbsaigon@gmail.com](mailto:albbsaigon@gmail.com)

## a little blah blah: a brief history

Since the launch of our activities in January 2005 a little blah blah (albb) has operated as a platform for contemporary art through a wide range of channels including projects, exhibitions & events, video art screenings, talks, a residency program, internships, a reading-room program and an open-access archive of art books & catalogs.

albb was established in 2004 by three visual artists based in HMC City and is the first artists' initiative of its kind in Vietnam. The impetus arose from long nights of passionate talks about the needs and desires of visual artists working in this urban environment and art context at this point in the course of its development. We developed a mission to be a dynamic, stimulating and professionally-run platform for artistic and intellectual dialog and reflection, and for an appreciation of the role of visual art and creative practices in contemporary life.

a little blah blah operates out of an office, as an engine rather than an art space. We locate ourselves as an alternative to the existing gallery and institutional structure in Vietnam. Regarding the 'alternative' as very much the arena in which an impact can be made, albb has sought to remain constantly responsive to the changing landscape of opportunities and possibilities available in HCM City or that can be attracted to this city. Working in a challenging environment with scarce funding, our core program has been entirely self-funded, while projects and exhibitions are funded through grants or sponsorship on an individual basis.

Our program has evolved in a pioneering spirit, in response to the gaps and needs of the Saigon art scene. In the first year, our key focus was to expand art activities beyond gallery exhibitions and to create information flow in and out of the country. With this in mind, between 2005 and 2008, albb presented 38 talks by locally and overseas-based artists and curators. While high-level artistic and curatorial traffic had already been moving in and out of Vietnam, very little contact was being made with the majority of artists living here. albb therefore made a conscious effort to form connections and crossroads in this area.

Since 2006, projects, art events and exhibitions have been regularly curated by albb co-directors or by guest curators. These are generally presented out of the white cube in alternative venues, the most exciting of which have been nightclubs, functioning industrial spaces, sailing riverboats, or directly in public space.

Other areas of focus have been to produce catalogs, bilingual where possible, as this was still an un-established practice in Vietnam. The need for capacity-building with young Vietnamese artists and students, working towards building arts management skills in Vietnam led to the development of our internship program. Our open-access archive of 1000 art books and catalogs was introduced to the community through a year-long reading room program, and is now viewable by appointment. Please see our weblog for a detailed history of our activities.

After three years, such art activities became established and familiar in the Saigon art scene. The introduction of talks or reading rooms by other art spaces in Saigon was a signal that albb's period of pioneering had matured and it was now time to re-focus the program. a little blah blah currently presents one major project each year, with a focus on work in the public space and community-based projects.

Curators interested in co-developing a project in these fields should contact albb directly via email.

## Blue Space Contemporary Arts Center

est. 1997

non-profit gallery space  
director: Tran Thi Huynh Nga  
<http://www.bluespacearts.com>  
[blu.space@hcm.vnn.vn](mailto:blu.space@hcm.vnn.vn)



Blue Space was created to meet the needs of local artists and also international artists, particularly by providing opportunities for co-operation with Vietnamese artists. On average, six formal exhibitions are organized annually, each running 2–4 weeks. Blue Space generally showcases Vietnamese artists, especially younger artists who have less exposure or opportunities to enter the established art circuit, and also to expose audiences to artists from other parts of Vietnam. A permanent exhibition of works for sale is on show when artists are not exhibiting.

Blue Space also runs an active program of workshops that are held in various parts of Vietnam. These workshops provide an environment where artists can focus on their work without the distractions of daily life. The workshops deliberately aim to mix disciplines and nationalities.

## Galerie Quynh

est. 2000

commercial art gallery  
director: Quynh Pham  
[www.galeriequynh.com](http://www.galeriequynh.com)  
[info@galeriequynh.com](mailto:info@galeriequynh.com)



Galerie Quynh was initially founded as an online resource highlighting the Vietnamese art scene and a physical space was later established in December 2003. In order to realize more ambitious programming, the gallery moved in October 2007 from its previous 40 square-meter space to its current premises—a 200 square-meter former factory near a bustling market close to downtown HCM City.

Initially promoting several of Vietnam's pioneering abstract painters, the gallery has since embraced a more international, contemporary program. As well as promoting a select group of artists working in Vietnam, Galerie Quynh also exhibits the work of international artists, allowing the local community greater access to a diverse range of contemporary art practice. The gallery also promotes education through artist talks and published texts in both Vietnamese and English.

Galerie Quynh maintains a strict selection process. It does not accept unsolicited portfolios through email or post. Individuals or institutions that are interested in collaboration should email with a detailed proposal of the project.

## Himiko Visual Cafe

est. 2005

artist-run exhibition space & café  
director : Nguyễn Kim Hoàng (Himiko Nguyễn)  
www.himikokoro.com  
himiko.nguyen@gmail.com



Himiko Visual Café was established in order to create a playground for young artists to exhibit and express themselves without the barriers of the commercial pressures or more strict selection criteria that exist in other galleries.

Himiko blends a coffee shop and an exhibition space into a comfortable, open and friendly ambience. In this way, Himiko aims to make visual art more approachable to all interested audiences.

Since November 2005, 28 art exhibitions in a variety of media ranging from painting and sculpture, installation and performance through to interactive fashion, have been presented by both local and overseas artists. 11 workshops and talks have also been held at the space. Please also see the weblog for further information. <http://himikocafe.blogspot.com>

Artists or curators interested in collaboration should contact the gallery directly via email.

## IDECAF

est. 1982

French Cultural Center, gallery space, photography library, full cultural program  
vice director: Mr Dau Nhat Quang  
[www.idecaf.gov.vn](http://www.idecaf.gov.vn)  
[idecaf@idecaf.gov.vn](mailto:idecaf@idecaf.gov.vn)



The primary role of IDECAF (Institute of Cultural Exchange with France) is French language teaching and the presentation of activities which will reinforce the development of co-operation in the cultural field. To this end, IDECAF runs a full cultural program which includes visual art, performing arts, cinema and animation.

The 80m2 exhibition space is a meeting point for artists from Vietnam, France and other Francophone countries. The surrounding garden area is also used for outdoor exhibitions, and young artists are encouraged to present their first works or experimental work to the public. In addition, the institute encompasses Pole Image, a specialized resource center for lens-based work, which includes up to 600 books on cinematography and photography, 400 movies and 700 documentaries and short films and facilities for their viewing.

Prior to 1982, IDECAF was known as the Institute of French Culture of Ho Chi Minh City, and belonged to the French Embassy of Vietnam. Since 1982, it has been under the supervision of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam and the direct management of the Service of Foreign Relations, HCM City.

## San Art

est. 2007

artist-run gallery space & reading room  
Director: Dinh Q. Le  
www.san-art.org  
art@san-art.org



photo courtesy of Dinh Q. Le

San Art was established in response to the significant lack of display and dialog opportunities concerning contemporary experimental artistic practice in HCM City. San Art's goal is to create an essential platform for the cultural development of artistic ideas in Vietnam.

San Art supports the country's thriving artist community through programs that provide exhibition space; funding for completion of projects; and a lecture and exchange program that invites international artists and curators to give talks and organize exhibitions and promotes Vietnamese contemporary art and arts education, in co-presentation with local artistic organizations and universities.

San Art is sponsored in part by Vietnam Foundation for the Arts—a Los-Angeles based non-profit organization founded in 2005.

Artists or curators interested in collaboration should contact the gallery directly via email.

## Van Art Gallery

est. 2008

gallery space  
director: Vu Khanh Van  
www.khanhvangallery.com  
khanhvangallery@gmail.com

VAN ART Gallery seeks to invest in the future and development of Vietnamese art by providing an environment for artists and art lovers to meet, to exchange ideas and to cross cultures and artistic media. The program includes regular monthly exhibitions in a variety of media, performances and art seminars, in a 60-square meter space divided into two floors.

VAN ART Gallery aims to support the Vietnamese art community by identifying emerging young talent and fostering the development and promotion of their potential, rather than through showing established artists. The gallery fully supports the projects of 1–2 artists per year, and partially supports exhibitions by a number of young artists each year. This applies to both international and local artists. The space is also available on a rental basis, subject to approval of proposals.



Artists or curators interested in collaboration should contact the gallery directly via email.

## OTHERS

### Ho Chi Minh City Fine Art Association

government-run association, exhibition space  
hmthphcm@hcm.fpt.vn  
minhloan3011@yahoo.com.vn

### Ho Chi Minh City Museum of Fine Art

museum, exhibition space  
www.baotangmythuattphcm.vn  
btmt@baotangmythuattphcm.vn  
btmthcm@hotmail.com

### Ho Chi Minh City Fine Art University

university, exhibition space  
http://www.hcmufa.edu.vn  
info@hcmufa.edu.vn

## Bophana Audio Visual Resource Center

est. 2006

Audio visual archive of historical material relating to Cambodia, exhibition space  
[www.bophana.org](http://www.bophana.org)  
[arpaa@bophana.org](mailto:arpaa@bophana.org)

## Centre Culturel Francais

est. 1990

French cultural center, gallery spaces, full cultural program  
[www.ccf-cambodge.org](http://www.ccf-cambodge.org)  
[info@ccf-cambodge.org](mailto:info@ccf-cambodge.org)

## Chinese House

est. 2009

lounge bar & occasional exhibition space  
[www.chinesehouse.asia](http://www.chinesehouse.asia)  
[info@chinesehouse.asia](mailto:info@chinesehouse.asia)

## FCC (Foreign Correspondents Club)

est. 1993

restaurant, bar & occasional exhibition space  
[http://www.fcccambodia.com/phnom\\_penh/](http://www.fcccambodia.com/phnom_penh/)  
[phnompenh@fcccambodia.com](mailto:phnompenh@fcccambodia.com)

## Java

est. 2000

artist-run café & exhibition spaces  
[info@javaarts.org](mailto:info@javaarts.org)  
[www.javaarts.org](http://www.javaarts.org)

## Meta House

est. 2007

exhibition space, residency, film & video screening program  
[mesterharm@gmx.ne](mailto:mesterharm@gmx.ne)  
[www.meta-house.com](http://www.meta-house.com)

## Reyum Institute of Arts and Culture

est. 1998

Research center for Cambodian arts and culture, gallery space  
<http://www.reyum.org>  
[reyum@camnet.com.kh](mailto:reyum@camnet.com.kh)

## Sa Sa Art Gallery

est. 2008

artist-run exhibition spaces, with a focus on photography  
[www.sasaart.info](http://www.sasaart.info)  
[info@sasaart.info](mailto:info@sasaart.info)

## OTHERS

### On Photography Cambodia

est. 2008  
initiative & forum  
[www.onphotographycambodia.com](http://www.onphotographycambodia.com)  
[info@onphotographycambodia.com](mailto:info@onphotographycambodia.com)

### Royal Fine Arts University

<http://www.rufa.edu.kh>  
[rufa@camnet.com.kh](mailto:rufa@camnet.com.kh)

### The Ragamuffin Project: Creative Arts Therapy

est. 2001  
art therapy training & services  
[www.ragamuffinproject.org](http://www.ragamuffinproject.org)  
[ragamuffinproject@hotmail.com](mailto:ragamuffinproject@hotmail.com)

## Art Vietnam Gallery

**est. 2003**

commercial art gallery  
<http://www.artvietnamgallery.com>  
[info@artvietnamgallery.com](mailto:info@artvietnamgallery.com)

## Bui Gallery

**est. 2009**

commercial art gallery  
<http://www.thebuigallery.com>  
[contact@thebuigallery.com](mailto:contact@thebuigallery.com)

## Goethe Institut

**est. 1997**

cultural institute, exhibition space  
<http://www.goethe.de/ins/vn/han/enindex.htm>  
[info@saigon.goethe.org](mailto:info@saigon.goethe.org)

## L'Espace

**est. 1991**

French cultural center, exhibition spaces, full cultural program  
[http://www.ambafrance-vn.org/rubrique.php?id\\_rubrique=265](http://www.ambafrance-vn.org/rubrique.php?id_rubrique=265)  
[ambafrance.hanoi@diplomatie.gouv.fr](mailto:ambafrance.hanoi@diplomatie.gouv.fr)

## Maison des Artes

**est. 2007**

exhibition space  
<http://maisondesartshanoi.com>  
[maisondesartshanoi@gmail.com](mailto:maisondesartshanoi@gmail.com)

## Nhà Sàn Đức

**est. 1998**

exhibition space and artists' gathering point  
<http://nhasanduc.multiply.com>  
[nhasananhdudc@gmail.com](mailto:nhasananhdudc@gmail.com)

## Studio Tho

**est. 2007**

commercial art gallery  
<http://www.studiotho.com>  
[info@studiotho.com](mailto:info@studiotho.com)

## Suffusive Gallery

**est. 2005**

commercial art gallery  
<http://www.suffusiveart.com>  
[info@suffusiveart.com](mailto:info@suffusiveart.com)

## The Wall @ The Bookworm

**est. 2006**

exhibition wall  
[bookworm@fpt.vn](mailto:bookworm@fpt.vn)

## Việt Art Centre

**est. 2006**

exhibition space  
[www.vietartcentre.vn](http://www.vietartcentre.vn)  
[contact@vietartcentre.vn](mailto:contact@vietartcentre.vn)

## OTHERS

### British Council

est. 1993  
supports touring exhibitions, workshops,  
seminars, and conferences  
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/vietnam>  
[bchanoi@britishcouncil.org.vn](mailto:bchanoi@britishcouncil.org.vn)

### ensemble creative training and development

est. 2003  
arts, culture & creativity programs for the  
development sector  
[www.ensemblecreative.org](http://www.ensemblecreative.org)  
[paul.ensemblecreative.org](mailto:paul.ensemblecreative.org)

### Vietnam Fine Arts Museum

museum, exhibition space  
[www.vnfineartsmuseum.org.vn](http://www.vnfineartsmuseum.org.vn)  
[binhtruong451@hn.vnn.vn](mailto:binhtruong451@hn.vnn.vn)

### Hanoi Grapevine

daily listings of cultural events in Hanoi and  
Vietnam  
<http://hanoigrapevine.com>

### Vietnam Fine Arts University

university, exhibition space  
[dhmtvn@yahoo.com](mailto:dhmtvn@yahoo.com)

## Artinno Galleria

est. 2008

residency, exhibition space, publishing  
www.artinnogalleria.com  
office@artinogalleria.com

## New Space Arts Foundation

est. 2008

residency, exhibition spaces  
www.newspacearts.com  
thanhhaiart@gmail.com  
thanhhaiart@dng.vnn.vn

## OTHERS

### Hue Festival

est.2000  
bi-annual international festival of visual &  
performing arts  
www.huefestival.com  
info@huefestival.com

### College of Fine Arts, Hue University

university, exhibition space  
<http://www.hufa.edu.vn>  
hue-dhnt@dng.vnn.vn

### Le Ba Dang Art Center & Le Ba Dang Foundation

Collection of the work of Le Ba Dang, exhibition  
space  
<http://www.lebadang.org>  
lebadang1@aol.com

### Literature & Arts Associa- tion, Hue City, Thua Thien Province

government-run association, exhibition space  
www.vanhocnghethuat-tthue.org.vn  
hlhvnhthuat.hue@vnn.vn  
vannghehue@yahoo.com.vn