REPORT - ‘INTO THIN AIR’ ART IN PUBLIC PROJECT 2nd EDITION

INTO THIN AIR

“Into Thin Air” is a long term art-in-public project initiated and curated by Manzi Art Space with a view to building awareness and appreciation for art, particularly contemporary arts among the public, to helping artists develop their independent practices whilst encouraging their involvements in social development within the current context of Vietnam.

1. Concept and content

“Into thin air” - The word ‘air’, as a noun, means: the invisible gaseous substance surrounding the earth; sky; atmosphere; a breeze or light wind. As a verb, it means: to express, to voice, to make public, to declare.

As a one-party state, the Vietnamese “cultural policy” is designed by the Communist party, and managed by the government apparatus. The Open door policy in place for more than 30 years has led to a certain relaxation of control in many areas, particularly in the fields of economics, but it is in the fields of art and culture that the control remains very much in evident.

With a view to building awareness and appreciation for contemporary arts among the public, to helping artists develop their independent practices whilst encouraging their involvements in social/political development within the current context of Vietnam, and to promoting dialogue between artists, audiences and authorities, Manzi curates and organizes a long term visual art program called “Into thin air” under the theme ‘Creating art to inspire and challenge the public, to foster and nurture dialogue with the authorities, to encourage artists to engage and explore local historical/political/social contexts and spaces.’

In a country that has suffered decades of cultural declines and strict censorships, where both the art scene and its audiences are desperately struggling to voice and to be heard, “Into thin air” aspires to be a light breeze, striving to open up this restrictive atmosphere and bring with it a space for free artistic creations and cultural expressions.

2. Into Thin Air Edition 1:

The first edition of Into Thin Air took place successfully from 09 to 19 April 2016 in Hanoi. 10 artworks and projects in forms of site-specific/context-responsive installations, interactive video arts, sound installations were installed around Hanoi, and 1 application for smartphone was created, functioning as a “treasure map” to the audience “hunt” and follow the works.

Participating in the project were 10 artists and their groups and 60 volunteers who helped guide audiences and take care of the artworks. The project attracted more than 20,000 visitors from different backgrounds, young students, normal housewives, intellectuals, workers and artists of Hanoi.

A Facebook Fan page for Into Thin Air was created and reached 2,500 likes within 10 days of the project. Each post of the page reached 2,000 to 4,000 Facebook users. Number of page shares/post shares on Facebook/Instagram (social media) was remarkable – For instance, some FB posts on Into Thin Air page were shared by nearly 100 Facebook users.

A documentary film was made and shared on youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSH5HmbkCfY

Into Thin Air 1st edition has successfully achieved the following objectives:

1. To build awareness and appreciation for contemporary arts among local audiences via interactive and participatory art projects in public spaces
2. To contribute to the development of a free and open art scene via the promotion of freedom of artistic creation
and cultural expression
3. To stimulate social changes via the encouragement of social and political responsibility among local artists

Please take a look at the following links to get more info about the Into Thin Air edition 1:

- Into Thin Air - official Facebook page
  https://www.facebook.com/intothinairhanoi/

- Info, sketches and ideas behind the 10 participating artworks
  https://www.facebook.com/intothinairhanoi/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1582974072020604

- Biographies and interviews with the 10 participating artists
  https://www.facebook.com/intothinairhanoi/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1582997045351640

- Preparing and installing for the project
  https://www.facebook.com/intothinairhanoi/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1582528925398452

- Images of finished and installed works; interaction and discussions with the public (please scroll down to view)
  https://www.facebook.com/events/475588965974332/?active_tab=posts

3. Into Thin Air 2nd Edition - ENHANCING ACCESS TO DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS THROUGH AN INTERDISCIPLINARY ARTS OUTREACH PROGRAM WITH A FOCUS ON DIGITAL FORMAT

Taking artwork out of the galleries and onto a virtual world
Turning viewers into co-creators

Following the success of Into Thin Air edition 1, Into Thin Air - edition 2 continues to follow the core format of the project’s first edition: to take art and creativity outside of its conventional comfort zones (i.e. the museum, gallery, art space etc.) and onto public spaces. For us, a public space is a space that does not belong to anyone, but at the same time, to all. It is a site that doesn’t just hold its inhabitants’ history and memory, but also reflects their personal and collective identity. It is a place that is often neglected or forgotten, but has the potential to become a zone of creativity and freedom.

With this thought in mind, in 2016, Manzi Art Space asked all the participating artists to reconsider their everyday urban spaces, or places in Hanoi that are significant to them and their community; and encouraged them to create artistic interventions in the context of the city, and trust them to turn it into an open creative laboratory. We also asked the participating artists to take into consideration the city’s historical, political and social characteristics, to become more open and socially-engaging, and to make works which encourage the public to participate or interact with.

However, with the second edition, we decided to further and broaden the scope of the project by tackling a different type of public space: the internet. Into Thin Air 2nd edition, therefore includes a series of virtual artworks (virtual installations, performances, sound walk, video art…) for public spaces and a free online application using augmented reality technology.

In two years 2016 and 2017, Manzi worked closely with participating artists to create virtual artworks, we also worked with IT experts to create a free online application that enables viewers to view/ interact with those artworks on their phone screens when they’re standing at a particular site, even though the artworks don’t physically exist there.

With more than 50 million internet users in Vietnam (as of 2016) – 50% of the population of Vietnam, the internet/digital platform proves to be the natural next step and an ideal platform for us to experiment with. Moreover, with the current political situation of Vietnam today and strict censorship in culture and art from the government, using internet as a public space, this 2nd edition of Into Thin Air could open up a
way for the art, particularly contemporary art to be seen and accessed by local public and could help promote artistic freedom and cultural expression in the country.

This new format of Into Thin Air also reflects the visibility/invisibility of art in particular and culture in general in Vietnam.

**Into Thin Air 2nd - Detailed Progress Report**

**Phase 1:**

**Activities**
- Identification and confirmation of participating artists/group and IT professionals to put forward specific ideas for the activity
- Setting up of Advisory board for the project - Inviting social, culture & history experts to be on advisory board.
- Preparation among Artists & Curators in term of concepts, art-forms/interactive format & locations

For “Into thin air” Edition 2, we asked the participating artists to not just reimagine and rework the city as a possible site of creativity and freedom, but also to take into consideration its historical, political and social characteristics. Last but not less important, we asked them to be more open and socially-engaging, and make works which encourage the public to participate or interact with. The main criteria for artworks/projects are: (1) site-specific; (2) context-responsive; and (3) interactive intellectually.

In early 2017, of 15 artists who were asked to send their proposals to curators of Manzi Art Space, 11 were selected. The selected ones worked with Manzi curators, advisory board of the project and IT professionals to realise their ideas and concepts, whilst researching, exploring digital formats for their works.

**Stage 2:**

**Activities**
- Confirmation of locations and interactive/participatory digital format and proposal for each work
- Implementation/production of artwork- Artists working with local 3D designer groups and IT experts
- Experimentation of the app and all technical aspects

By March 2017, participating artists started to create artworks (virtual form ie virtual installations, music/soundwalk, performance or moving images) in compliance with chosen locations/ contexts/ communities and in collaboration with the IT team.

Apart from artists making virtual artworks, at the same time, a free application for smart phones has been created to enable viewers to view/ interact with artwork on their smart phone screens/ipads when they’re standing at a particular site, even though the artwork doesn’t physically exist there. IT experts worked together with the artists and manzi to integrate and embed the works onto the app.

**Stage 3:**

**Activities**
- Final test on all virtual artwork and application
- Finalisation of communication and promotion campaign
- Launching the programme to the public

By September 2017, 5 artworks by local and international artists have been created successfully for 5 public spaces and all have been embedded onto the Into Thin Air application. The works include: 2 contemporary dance pieces, 1 soundwalk, 1 virtual installation and 1 video art piece.
5 other artworks are under development with support from the local app team and 3D designers.

During this period of time, Manzi is also successful in securing more funding for the 2nd edition. The Goethe Institut and the Dutch Embassy have confirmed their support to the project.

Into Thin Air – 2nd edition is planned to be launched in Hanoi in early 2018 with 10 artworks in form of context-responsive/participatory digital installations/ virtual reality artworks, video arts, soundwalk/sound piece/ dance performances plus the free application functioning as a tool to help audience find and see the works.

Expected objectives:

Acting as an interdisciplinary art outreach programme which allows public access to and appreciation of contemporary arts, preferably through digital platform, Into Thin Air 2nd Edition is expected to achieve the following objectives:

- To build awareness and appreciation for contemporary arts among a local audience via interactive and participatory art projects, preferably in a digital format
- To promote diversity of cultural expression by engaging the civil society in community development through arts creation and appreciation
- To enable access to art for the local public, with a focus on the digital environment.
- To stimulate social and political responsibility among local artists

This 2nd Edition hopes to promote the diversity of cultural expressions which reiterates the importance of creating an enabling environment that encourages individuals and socials to get access to and enjoy a wide range of cultural activities.

‘Into thin air’ 2nd Edition expects to attract an audience of around 100,000 people and will be available online for at least 5 years.
Into Thin Air 2- Participating artists and Artwork:

1. Calm Realities by Nhung Nguyen
   Location: Ba Dinh Square

   “Calm realities” is a soundwalk by sound artist Nhung Nguyen, under the theme: *Creating a sound work to explore the relationship between calm sounds and state of mind*. “Calm realities” aims to build interest in interactive sound work in public space among local audience.

   “Calm realities” contains 6 sound pieces (also known as ‘zones’) with planned duration of 25-30 minutes taking place at Ba Dinh square, Hanoi.

   Ba Dinh square is a rare green, unoccupied public space in Ha Noi. It is GPS-friendly, easy to map in the app and convenient for walking. Although the square is a tourist attraction located in the city central, it is not as noisy as other public locations in Hanoi. Therefore, it matches the personal definition of a peaceful space in the city from Nhung Nguyen. In spite of the fact that Ba Dinh square is a historical and cultural site, the artist brings a different approach for this soundwalk by not representing its historical and political background. This is how the two artists consider a public space, solely for its sonic aspect and treat it as a personal, private inspiration for creativity and expression.

   Calm Realities” reflects the artist’s approach to connect human emotions and imagination to tranquil sonic realities. By combining 3D audio effects with relaxing ambient tones, this work create parallel, contrastable sonic realities to the constantly busy, noisy urban environment in Hanoi. “Calm realities” provide an immersive yet delicate sonic experience to relax and escape one’s worries, stress and anxiety. This soundwalk encourages the audience to find their own calm sonic realities by walking, listening and interacting with the physical landscape and the sonic space created by binaural recording from the app.

2. Shadows/or a way to preserve – a virtual installation by Nguyen Huy An
   Location: Lenin park, Dien Bien Phu street

   Lenin park (known as Chi Lang park) is a popular public space of Hanoi (18,000m2). In 1985, the government put a 5.2 m high bronze statue of Lenin in the park, facing Dien Bien Phu street.

   For Huy An, Lenin statue is part of Hanoi scene and history like other Indochine architectures, Long bien Bridge (constructed by the French), Chinese temples...

   In the last 2 years, An has researched on the shadow changes following the sun and time of a day at the park. His work for Into Thin Air is a virtual installation of 20 shadows of Lenin floating all over the space. Viewers can see the work at the park via the Into Thin Air application using GPS.

   Since the statue of Lenin is under the danger of removal due to political change, through the augmented reality technology, the artist wants to preserve this historical icon by visualizing, digitalizing its shadows and keeping it in the cloud (the app).

3. Gate to the past – Contemporary dance piece by Vu Ngoc Khai
   Location: Quan Chuong gate

   Inspired by Quan Chuong Gate – the most ancient gate of Hanoi, Khải created a 7 minute dance piece for the space.

   Living in Germany for more than 10 years, Khai always finds himself a stranger in his hometown. Hanoi is changing fast, so is he? The gate to the past has closed? What happened behind the gate? Anything left? Or just the childhood memories?
   Questioning himself about identity, Khai’s work also explores the meaning of ‘here and now’ and ‘being in the moment’.
Viewers will be able to see the dance piece at the site using Into Thin Air augmented reality application. The dance piece can also be viewed by day mode and night mode with GPS timelines.

4. **In a green island by Jamie Maxtone Graham**  
   **Location: Botanical Garden of Hanoi**

In 2017, just to the east of Bach Thao, the botanic garden in Hanoi, an old government office building was torn down and a new, larger and more modern one constructed in its place. This is a seemingly endless phenomenon all across the capitol, throughout the country, around all of Asia’s cities – the large scale tearing down and rebuilding, expanding the city’s footprint outward and upward. This requires an enormous labour pool.

During days when the weather allows, construction workers from the building site often come to the botanic garden during their lunch break and rest. The workers are nearly entirely from other provinces in Vietnam who have left wives, children, families and come to where there exists opportunity for a small monthly wage.

Observing the workers sleeping in the semi-tranquility of the garden, the artist doesn't propose to investigate anything so overt as migration, urban development, or labor issues. He presents the viewer with the scene as I found it – the natural sounds, the trees, grass and water, the workers asleep in this public space for a short time in the noontime heat.

5. **Remember the times – Contemporary dance piece by Huy Tran and Vu Ngoc Khai**  
   **Location: Bà Kïeu Temple**

This 6min duo dance piece called ‘Remember the times’ takes place at Ba Kieu temple. The 500 years old temple has witnessed all changes of Hanoi but people rarely pay attention to this space. In the piece, the artists wonder whether the new and the old can co-exist in harmony? Or whether the ‘today’ is just a repeat of the ‘yesterday’?

6. **D4 ‘A MEMOIR OF SHADOWS’ by Tri Minh**  
   **Location: Nam Dong living quarter area**

D4 ‘A MEMOIR OF SHADOWS is a sound scape which brings memories of a boy from 1980s to a virtual world of the 21 century. Tri Minh transformed/de-oriented old propaganda songs to abstract, noise, sounds, chill out, atmospheric and romantic songs, turning them into a play of love and hate, of right or wrong.

The work D4 “A memoir of shadows’ is a story of the past, present and future – is a never-ending story of real life and illusion.

7. **After clean-up, slight return by Cao Thanh Lan and Gregor Siedl**  
   **Location: Mai Dich area**

Mai Dich is a fast-changing neighbourhood and has, unlike many other neighbourhoods in Hanoi, has an unusual high concentration of artists from different genres – ranging from traditional music to military music, from folk art to stage drama to circus.

It used to be a green suburb of Hanoi, where paddle field and flower field and lots of tree were rampant. With the urbanization, all the sounds of birds, insects, of trees are gone or submerged by traffic noise.

With the “clean-up” organized by state-run institutes located in the neighborhood, street-shops and street-hairdressers had to disappear. Their work and workplace were taken away from them, after having spent 30 years of their life in this corner and being an indispensable part of the neighborhood’s life.

The artwork is a homage to the street hairdresser, street vendors, the long lost nature. It’s a whimsical audio collage with dispersed superimposition of these elements: sounds of people practicing and performing “tuồng”, “nhạc đỏ”, “xiếc”, “chèo”, etc. and the usual traffic noise.
- the long forgotten sound of nature.

9 Lacquer on the sky by Oanh Phi Phi  
Location: tbc  
The artist is looking for a public space which can inspire her to do a virtual lacquer painting.  
To be updated

10. Legend retold by Maritta Nurmi  
Location: Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc Square  
By researching on the site, Maritta would tell audience of Hanoi a different legend of the square  
More updates will be provided
Into Thin Air – Participating artists

Nhung Nguyen

The experimental musician and sound artist behind the alias Sound Awakener has been composing and playing experimental music since she was 13. Still in her teens she has been creating sonic weaves in Hanoi’s underground music scene for the last couple of years. With an extraordinary understanding of tones and tunes and an ear for everyday sounds she can turn into music she works both on solo projects and has teamed up with artists working across various media and from around the world to add audio elements to visual experiences.

Nguyen Huy An

Born in 1982 in Hanoi and graduated from the Fine Art University in 2008, Nguyen Huy An is considered the most dynamic and innovative artists of his generation. Huy An’s work has been a process of trying to dig into the darkness of psychology. Most of these projects have been underlaid with an obsession with memory, with the complexities of a pessimistic perspective. From installations, performance art to paintings and sculptures, Huy An’s works are highly acclaimed by international art critics and curators for their introspective, simple and strong concepts.

Huy An has participated in a number of exhibitions and performance art festivals including 78 rhythms, Galerie Quynh, Vietnam (2014); Disrupted Choreographies, Carré d’Art – Musée d’Art Contemporain, Nimes, France (2014); If The World Changed, Singapore Biennale (2013); Sounds of dust (somniloquy), 943 Studio Kunming, China (2011) ...

Vu Ngoc Khai

Khai is a professional dancer and choreographer who has been studying and working in Vietnam and Europe. Khai studied at the dance school of Hanoi and in 2006, he gained a full scholarship from Holland
General Consulate General to study in Rotterdam Dance Academy-Holland. One year later, he gained a scholarship from this company for a special course focusing on training dancers and choreographers.

Khai has joined many training courses as well as worked with many dance companies namely Cross Connection Ballet – Denmark, The Netherland Dance Theater – Netherlands, Nacho Duato/National Dance Company of Spain and other companies, theaters. He has been performing in many countries around the world: Festival in Rumania, Festival in Russia, Festival in Slovenia, Festival in Japan, Festival in Indonesia, Festival in Korea, International AIDS Gala in Regensburg, Munich – Germany and a tour around Holland, Switzerland, Germany, Italy and USA.
Khai now lives and works in Germany.

Jamie Maxtone-Graham

Jamie Maxtone-Graham is a photographer and filmmaker formerly working in NY and LA. He is a Fulbright Fellow and has lived in Hanoi since 2007 with his wife and daughter working in a diverse practice of image making and running workshops occasionally.

Huy Trần

Born in an artistic family, Huy Tran decided to pursue a professional dance career at a very young age. Graduated from Vietnam Dance College in 2006, he worked for Vietnam National Opera and Ballet (VNOB) and eventually received a scholarship from Cinevox Junior Company in Switzerland until 2011, when he started to perform at Ballet Hagen Theater, the National Mannheim Theater - Germany and he is currently working for Pfalztheater Kaiserslautern as a dancer and choreographer.

Tri Minh
Tri Minh started his career as a performing artist in the early 1990s, when he co-initiated Hanoi’s first jazz band, which performed for years in various venues across Vietnam’s capital. In the late 1990s, Tri Minh started experimenting with electronic music through collaborations with international artists performing as a solo artist and in various forms of collaborations in Vietnam and Europe. The international artists and groups include: Mouse on Mars, and Robert Henke (GE), Dfuse (UK), Robin Scanner (UK), Sweet Suzie and Manni Montana (AUS) etc. In the mid and late 2000s, Tri Minh started sampling his own recordings and sounds and started mixing in and performing with various constellations of traditional and later also classical Vietnamese artists. An example of his newer works is his ongoing collaboration with Michael Møller (DK) a two Vietnamese traditional music artists on the project ‘Hanoi recitals’. In recent years, Tri Minh has also started performing live with modern and performance dance groups and composing for documentary and short films. His performances span from small intimate sit-down concerts to large DJ dance performances for thousands of people in his own productions and for festivals and private companies.

Cao Thanh Lan & Gregor Siedl

Cao Lan is a versatile musician, she was trained as a classical contemporary music pianist (with Pierre-Laurent Aimard) in Cologne and in Brussels Conservatories, but finds her main interest in sound. She has been experimenting with analogue synthesizer, amplified objects, prepared marxophone, daxophone, low-tech electronics, etc. As a guest pianist of Kammerensemble Neue Musik Berlin (KNM Ensemble), she has performed at Ultraschall Festival, Musica Electronica Nova Wroclaw, Galeriewanderung Berlin, etc. She has also earned a wide range of ensemble experience in festivals namely Klangspuren with Ensemble Modern Frankfurt, Darmstadt Festival for new music, Festival Ircam Paris@Manifest, Impuls Festival, International Kamermuziek Festival Schiermonnikoog, etc. Also active as an experimental sound artist, composer in many different projects, notably the electro-acoustic Duo (Parallel Asteroid and Zicla projects) – in collaboration with Gregor Siedl, she has been touring and giving workshops for contemporary music and improvisation in Europe, Japan, Brasil, China, Taiwan, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Finland, Australia and Vietnam. Other groups in which she is founding member, amongst others, are Junk Orbit, Swiss Army Wife, Cao-Keller-Siedl, etc

Gregor Siedl

Gregor Siedl was born in Vienna, Austria. He is deeply engaged in the field of experimental and improvised music. Through his explorations of extended techniques, preparations on the saxophone, clarinet and the use of extra-musical instruments such as game-calls and water, he has developed a unique voice in music. Gregor won first prizes as best improviser at international music competitions XL-Jazz and Gent Jazz festival competition. He has been involved in experimental music, jazz, multi-disciplinary projects with performers, visual artists and artificial intelligence. He is a band-member of Junk Orbit, Duo Siedl/Cao with 2 projects, Zicla, Parallel Asteroid, DOKO, Auralisation Ensemble, Osmosis Project and critically acclaimed European-Saxophone-Ensemble. He has performed all over Europe, Asia and South-America at international music festivals and concert venues, such as: Festival Ankunft Neue Musik Berlin, Festival Internacional de Musica Experimental Sao Paulo, Jazz D’Or Strasbourg, HdKW Berlin, Belgrade Jazz Festival, Vilnius Jazz Festival, Gent Jazzfestival, Follow the sound Festival Antwerpen, Storm!-Festival, LeXGiornate Milan, Gaume Jazz, Porgy&Bess Vienna, Ftarri Tokyo, LE Osaki Tokyo, Koko Club Helsinki, Hot Club Lisboa, Estonian Academy of music, Improvised Music Co. Dublin.
Nguyen Oanh Phi Phi

Born in Houston in 1979, Phi Phi Oanh received her BFA at Parsons School of Design (2002) and a Masters in Art and Investigation at the University of Madrid Complutense (2012). In 2004, she received a Fulbright Grant to study lacquer painting in Hanoi. Since then, Vietnamese lacquer has become central to her work, which focuses on its potential as a painting medium to convey memory or reflection, examine current theories of the image and expand into more experimental methods and scale. Her works has been shown at Palimpsest, FOST Gallery, Gillman Barracks, Singapore, 2014, Specula, Hanoi City Exhibition Hall, 2009, Black Box, Vietnam National Arts Museum, Hanoi, 2007, A Woman’s View, Goethe Institute, Hanoi, 2014, If the World Changed, Singapore Biennale 2013, Singapore Art Museum, 2014

Maritta Nurmi

In her art Maritta Nurmi is constantly meddling the border between abstract and non–abstract. Her use of ornaments and patterns adds layers for a sense of ritual, time and history. Nurmi likes to experiment different mediums; painting on canvas, wooden or metallic objects; ceramic, oxidation of metal, wearable painting and fashion design, progressing from 2 dimensional to 3 dimensional format. Her shuttling between different realms builds up for new ways of expression and it generates vigour. Maritta is a European, based in Finland and Vietnam which adds up for a distinct multicultural flair in her work. Regardless of the medium or the imagery, the contents in her art mostly stirs upon energy and motion. Nurmi is trained both in art and science and she has been exhibiting widely in Asia, Europe and North America.
In A Green Island - By Jamie Maxtone-Graham

Công Viên Bách Thảo - 3 Hoàng Hoa Thám, Ngọc Hà, Ba Đình, Hà Nội
Calm Realities - By Nhúng Nguyễn
Quảng Trường Ba Đình, Hùng Vương, Điện Biên, Ba Đình, Hà Nội
Shadows - By Nguyen Huy An

Công Viên Lênin - 28A Điện Biên Phủ, Điện Biên, Ba Đình, Hà Nội
Gate To The Past - By Vũ Ngọc Khải

Ọ Quan Chưởng
Remember The Time - By Vu Ngoc Khai & Huy Tran

Đền Bà Kiệu - 59 Đình Tiến Hoàng, Hàng Trống, Hoàn Kiếm, Hà Nội