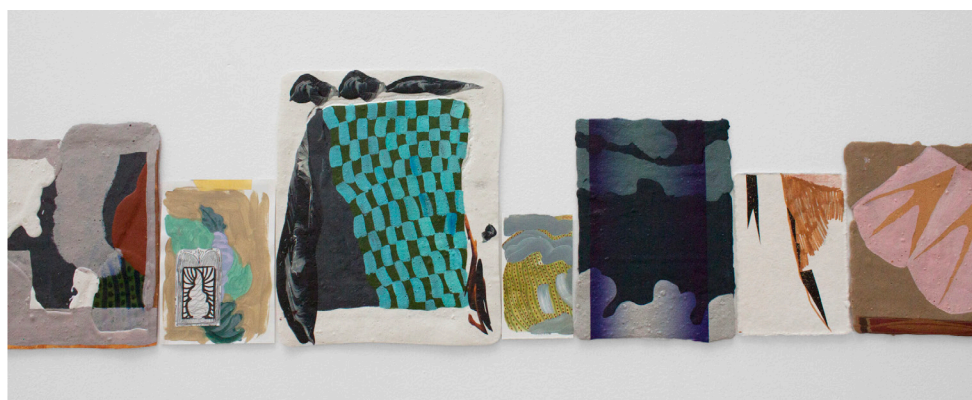


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My-Lan Hoang-Thuy questions beauty standards by channelling the female form

by PHILIPPA KELLY



Making Worlds Exist,
Asia Now Art Fair 2021
Exhibition view. All
images © My-Lan
Hoang-Thuy. Courtesy the
artist and Galerie
Mitterrand

The **One to Watch** discusses her early influences, perceptions of the nude, and her transition from graphic designer to image-maker

Books were scarce in the home My-Lan Hoang-Thuy grew up in with her mother. Instead there were “really shitty” women’s magazines, she says, mostly made up of adverts and advice on fashion, beauty, cooking and raising a family. The bright colours and beaming faces of these titles became the artist’s earliest introduction to visual culture. “It was not perfection that I was seduced by,” she recalls. “It was the fakeness of it, and the fact that the image was so constructed.”

Among the many glossy titles that influenced Hoang-Thuy, one followed her into adulthood: *Femme Actuelle* (‘Current Woman’), a weekly French magazine read largely by older women. She has borrowed its title for her latest work, the name serving as a reference to her past, and as a nod to the experiences of womanhood explored in her images. Created using non-traditional techniques, *Femme Actuelle* employs photographs more as a material than as a final form. Images of Hoang-Thuy’s naked body are distorted and spread across canvases; in a method more akin to hieroglyphics than traditional conceptions of the nude, her body language becomes a mode of communication.



Papiers, Feuilles et Ampersands 52, 2020



L'entrée Espagnole, 2021



Sperls, 2023

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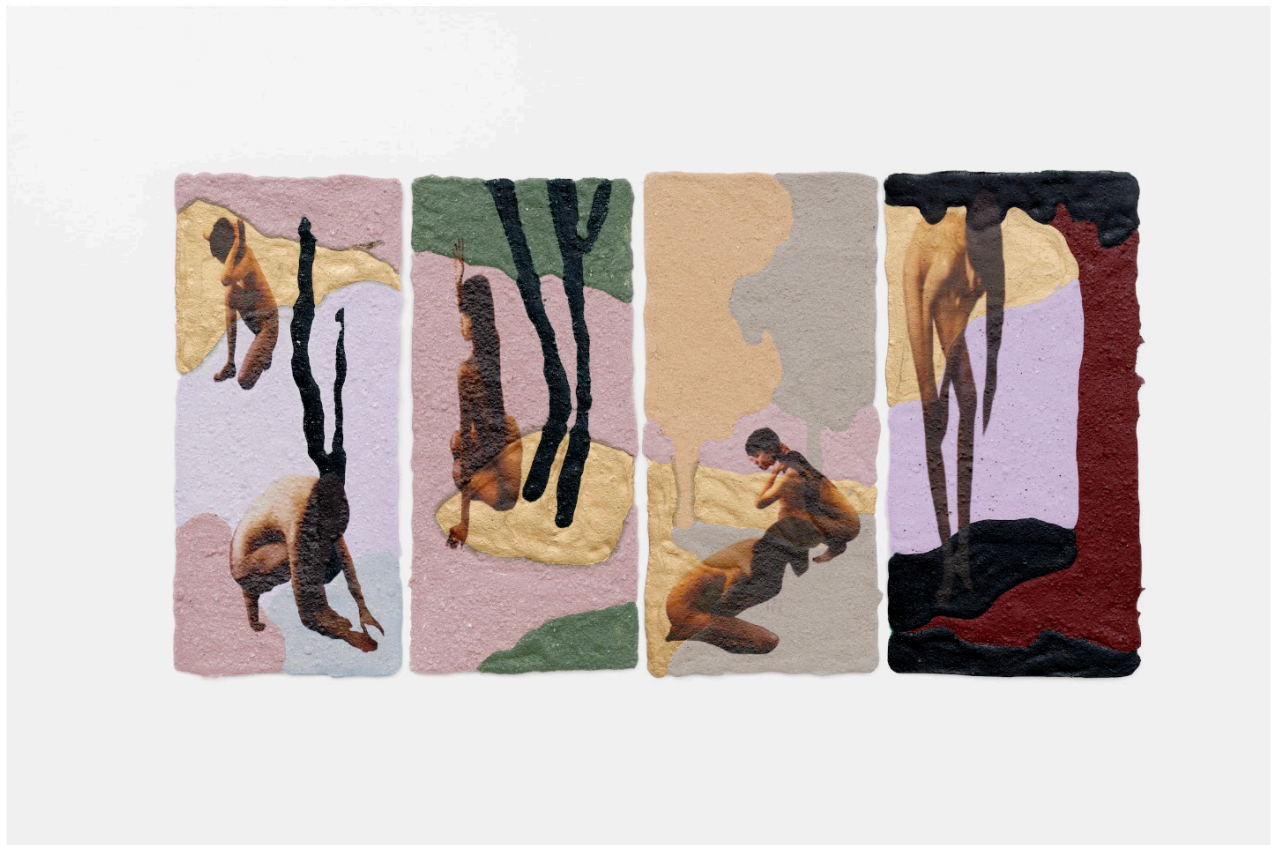
It is an approach informed by her previous schooling; Hoang-Thuy studied graphic design for five years, developing a particular interest in editorial design before completing her studies at Beaux-Arts

de Paris. "I started to realise what I was really interested in," Hoang-Thuy explains of her move towards fine art. "When you are a designer, you have clients and have a specific purpose, but I was really interested in the poetry of form and language, and also aesthetic subjects."

In *Femme Actuelle*, these subjects are explored in ways that combine her academic and childhood experiences. Her naked body – stretched, squashed and otherwise digitally manipulated into unnatural shapes and proportions – evokes and perhaps satirises the unattainable beauty standards so often presented in women's magazines. And the work's presentation, with large column-like blocks of colour filling A4 pages, is similarly reminiscent of the early stages of magazine design.

Femme Actuelle was exhibited at Maison Européenne de la Photographie in late 2023, and Hoang-Thuy found it resonated most with female visitors. But it was never her intention to speak only to women. Instead she hopes that her work will open a softer, more gentle dialogue with anyone willing to listen. "We live in a society in which judgement is so hard," she reflects. "But I'm hoping that we can look at women with different perspectives. I was trying to offer another perspective, and that is my own."

"My-Lan Hoang-Thuy uses and controls her own body to repeat, across the layout of successive artworks, a kind of iterative grammar of form and pose," says Simon Baker, director of the MEP, who nominated the artist for Ones to Watch. "She presents photographs of a naked female form in a way that both evokes, and yet somehow falls short of both life-room poses (the traditional 'intellectual' study of the nude) and eroticism (its associated ever-present 'bad' twin). As a woman artist, using her own body, there is none of the 'nudge-and-wink' complicity associated with pose books, but by choosing to present herself within a sensuous painterly context, Hoang-Thuy frames her own body within a different register of visual pleasure."



Violets, 2020