

"Treasure Troves" by Ernest Beck Worth Magazine, April/May 2008

Treasure Troves



David Raymond's collection includes the Germaine Dulac film *La coquille et le clercyman*, 1926, bordered by Sheng Qi's *Red Army Mao* (Young Mao) on one side and *My Left Hand*-N.P.C. Meeting on the other.

DAVID RAYMOND

DAVID RAYMOND, a media entrepreneur and independent film producer, shuns the oversized and commercialized art fairs. "It's an unbridled orgy," says Raymond of the Miami event and its partying, art-buying hordes. "How is it possible to go and look at art in a comprehensive and cohesive way? You need to spend time with art." Art Basel Miami Beach, he adds for emphasis, "is like the Hamptons."

Raymond, who lives across the street from MoMA in New York, began collecting about a decade ago, accumulating works by pioneering 20th-century photographers including Man Ray, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Brassai. Last year he sold 171 of his most important surrealist pieces to the Cleveland Museum of Art and donated another nine.

When it comes to traveling, his taste runs toward the specialized fairs where he can slowly browse and rub elbows with fellow enthusiasts. Paris Photo, an annual event that focuses on photography, is an important stop. "Everyone in the photography field converges there," Raymond says about the show, which featured more than 100 galleries in 2007. "It's like a big

photo love fest."

He does not necessarily come home with a trove of new work, however. Last year the offerings left him largely unmoved except for a video by the contemporary Japanese artist Noriko Yamaguchi. Raymond had seen the work—a stop-motion video called *Peppermint Mother*, featuring sticks of chewing gum covering the artist's body—earlier in the year at the Asian Contemporary Art Fair in New York. At Paris Photo he ran into the artist's dealer, MEM Gallery of Osaka, and found out there was a copy available; he bought the video for around \$1,000.

For Raymond, chance encounters—and the hunt for the art he wants—are part of the excitement of collecting. He once bought a drawing for \$100 at a now-defunct auction house in San Francisco, and after some sleuthing he confirmed that the work was by John Constable.

In 2004, Raymond saw the work of Chinese artist Sheng Qi at an Asia Society show in New York. So far he has not gone to China to buy, nor was he interested in China's much-hyped new art when it first burst upon the West, but he says the artist's work

haunted him. A few years later, Raymond tracked down the artist's gallery, Red Gate in Beijing, and after an email exchange agreed to buy two photographs, which the gallery shipped to him. The photos depict a hand with the pinky chopped off; a picture of Mao is cupped in the palm of one.

More recently, Raymond has commissioned work directly from Vietnamese artist Trong Nguyen, who lives in New York. The two met when Raymond frequented the Zabriskie Gallery in New York, where Nguyen worked. Nguyen came up with the idea of taking words from Raymond's favorite books and writing them on rice kernels. "I said to Trong, 'Would you do it for me?'" Raymond recalls. The kernels, with minute writing from the *I Ching*, Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* and Goethe's *Faust*, are encased in small plastic bags that hang on the wall of Raymond's dining room. For Raymond, the collaborative experience was so gratifying that he is considering commissioning additional works from Nguyen, and perhaps other artists. "It's great when a collector can initiate a creative process," Raymond says.

Classic Book Chapters Written On Grains Of Rice

by [Nicole Rallis](#)

Nov 10, 2011

Imagine a grain of rice — picture its width and height. Now, imagine an art installation that consists of penning book chapters word by word on the über-tiny grains. New York City-based artist Trong G. Nguyen took on this incredibly ambitious endeavor to honor literary greats in a series entitled *Library*, for which he hand-writes an inconceivable amount of words on rice using a fine-point technical pen — sans magnifying glass. Although the project took off back in 2007, Nguyen has continued to expand on it, recreating the words of writers such as Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, and Roland Barthes.

“Several years ago, I decided to write the entirety of Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* word for word on grains of rice — about 1.5 million words,” Nguyen explained in [an interview](#) with AHALife. “The intent is to house all the grains of my ‘translation’ in a single, giant hourglass, where the rice kernels replace grains of sand. This project will take at least a few more years to complete. In the meantime, I decided to do smaller versions of this project by writing singular chapters or complete texts from shorter works, usually of books in my own library. A collector friend subsequently commissioned me to do the first chapters of his seven favorite books, and that’s how the project’s evolved.”

Check out Nguyen’s artistic ode to literature below and learn more about his work over at his [website](#).



ARTES MAGAZINE

July 26, 2013

By Michelle Docimo

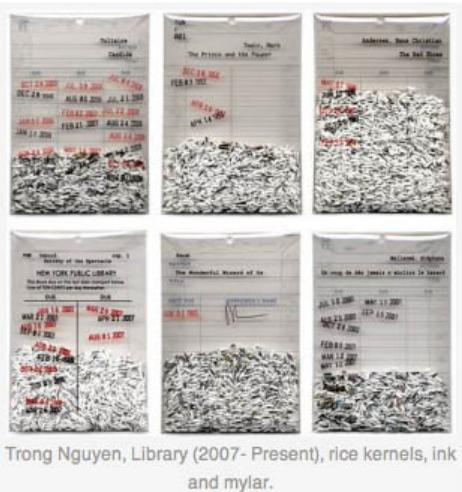
Housatonic Museum of Art Exhibits 'Eye on the Storm'

"The barrage of endless data from the most intense hard news to the silliest of social media is something we all must muddle through on some level each day. Depending on one's needs or interests only a small percentage of said information is of any use, and an even smaller amount actually leaves us with palpable, lasting effects. What is most amazing is that somehow, every bit of the images and information has some potential use to someone out there, and it's up to the individual to pick and choose what benefits, bothers or beguiles them..." D. Dominick Lombardi, Curator of *Eye on the Storm*

Ironically offering a perspective on calm, *Eye on the Storm* opens fittingly on a night destined for a summer downpour, lightning, thunder, winds, and the warning of a possible tornado. I decide to not risk life and limb on I-95 and postpone my visit. The next day, sunny skies urge me to go. I enter the gallery alone. artes fine arts magazine

Om. Om. Ommmm. The sound of this mystical chant plays in the background, eerily encouraging visitors to let go of their ego and find their center, their truth, their third eye. The mantra comes from video artist, Richard Hoglund's *Drag Yourself Along the Road / Shave Your Head / Burn Your Clothes / Bathe in the Sea*. I am pulled in various directions, distracted by artwork which makes me wonder if this is Eye on The Storm. I know it is, but at first glance, I don't understand why some of these artworks are on display.

This was my initial reaction as I spotted three sports jerseys ahead of me. An orange NBA shirt strung over a basketball hoop and two others displayed on mannequin busts are progressively unthreaded, leaving a portion of the garment intact, and then creating a spider web-like gown so that each and every fiber becomes visible. There is a ghostlike quality to the sculptures, an emptiness in the center where the body would fill these shirts seems irrelevant now. Selecting specific individual sports stars, artist, Karen Shaw, raises the symbolic nature of the jersey to a more spiritual level by asking 'aren't we all cut of the same cloth?' There are so many measurable 'moments' in sports history that all these significant names, numbers, facts, figures, and stats can soon become extraneous and forgotten as new records are broken and new stars emerge. And just like celestial stars, we return back to that from which we are made, dust.



Trong Nguyen, *Library* (2007- Present), rice kernels, ink and mylar.

A bit jolted, I step away from the center and walk the gallery's sides where I fall in love with Trong Nguyen's

Library. Three clear plastic envelopes mimic the old fashioned check-out cards that were once so neatly snug into a book's interior that existed before self-check-out machines printed a receipt.

The title and author's name appear on top and a list of due dates in black and red ink stamped on the lines show the book's borrowing history. These tiny envelopes are so nostalgic bringing back a rush of memories of taking out books as a child. I always found it fascinating to see when a book had been read prior to taking it off the shelf, and to know that other people, even though anonymous, had held this book in their hands before me.

In some instances, years had passed and opening it again felt like letting a genie out of a lamp. *Library* is a study on how we consume culture and the staying power of words. Inside Nguyen's mylar envelopes are grains of white rice on which the artist has painstakingly written each and every word of selected literary classic chapters. I try to compose a sentence with some of the words that are visible on the rice. From Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, Chapter 1, I create: 'Our luck, see, avoid lagoons.' I find it difficult to stop finding words and reading becomes play. From, Jane Austen's last chapter of *Persuasion*, I find: 'Man, marriage, both suffering and gratification.'

Content, I move on to Nguyen's second piece in the show, *Portable Confessional*. Two brown paper bags with cut out rounded crosses are positioned so that they protrude from the wall and form a comfortable (or not so comfy) space. A thin screen separates the listener and the speaker of some of the most intimate words anyone would ever reveal to another human being in a confessional. The purpose of reconciliation is to clean the conscience by speaking out sins to a priest and seeking forgiveness from God. Catholic believers trust that these words that they release will never again be repeated by a living soul. The confession acts as a spiritual vehicle of absolution and Nguyen's piece raises many questions and perhaps, most importantly, where is God? The simplicity and portability of material and form answers this question, everywhere.

Yet, in today's media storm, there is no separation of sacred and profane. We are 'privileged' to see politicians, actors, musicians, athletes, priests, and even ordinary people who attain star status from reality TV shows fall from grace. Their private lives become public fodder and we are on the receiving end of blow by blow details on stories of deception. Many people thrive on consuming the latest entertainment news because it makes them feel better that their own life circumstances aren't that bad. Or maybe it's because they think that it is important news and that there is a life lesson to be learned. Others choose to block the superfluous noise, to concentrate on themselves, and focus on what is 'truly' important. Often in the end, there seems to be a communal understanding that these stars are just human afterall and that perhaps there is room for forgiveness.

Lombardi subtly brings back these concepts, again and again, as each piece in *Eye on The Storm* builds upon each other, like Ernest Concepcion's *OMG Christ*. An iconic image of God's love for humanity, the Sacred Heart of Jesus is distorted to show a screaming Christ with OMG across his mouth. One of the most socially syndicated acronyms of all time, OMG has no meaning anymore. Rather than a prayer, it has evolved into an exclamation of banal frustration.

And then there is Mia Brownwell's *Still Life with First Fruit*, a double helix strand of DNA composed of juicy red apples and slender strands of white snakes twisting and turning through sprocket gears. Her painting brings into question the conflict of good and evil and whether we are born with both traits and what influences our inner workings to bring out either a sacred heart emitting light or a shadowy heart of darkness.

In addition to curating the show, Lombardi contributes to the conversation by including a selection of his *Urchin* sculptures. Reminiscent of baby dolls, the sculpted sand, childlike bodies are composed of found objects from the seashore that make up parts of these creatures' bodies and personalities. *Urchin* #36 is perched atop a paddock fence enjoying an imagined bucolic view.

The urchin's eye is a kaleidoscope lens and the head contains more mechanical, gadgety pieces. According to Lombardi, "The *Urchin* series depicts people and animals marginalized socially, economically, psychologically, and emotionally by the current downtrends in our global economy." Lombardi brings into play the duality of nature and nurture and how our environment affects both our inner and outer vision.

Leaving the gallery, I almost miss Arcady Kotler's *Drop*, a creamy white orb formed of thick rope positioned to the angle of the Earth's axis. It rests gently on a perfectly flat circular puddle of white rope, as if reflecting its own center. The orb seems so delicate and fragile amidst the other impassioned works, that with any waft of wind, it might be knocked off its center.

Eye on the Storm is about picking up on language, objects, images, sounds, and feelings that we experience every day and deciphering them so that this knowledge becomes our own universal truth. So, how can we distinguish truth from fallacy? Only by looking at the world straight in the eye.

Eye on the Storm
At the Housatonic Museum of Art
Through July 26, 2013
900 Lafayette Blvd.
Bridgeport, CT 06604



Featuring: Trong Gia Nguyen

by LIBRARYASINCUBATORPROJECT on Mar 28, 2013

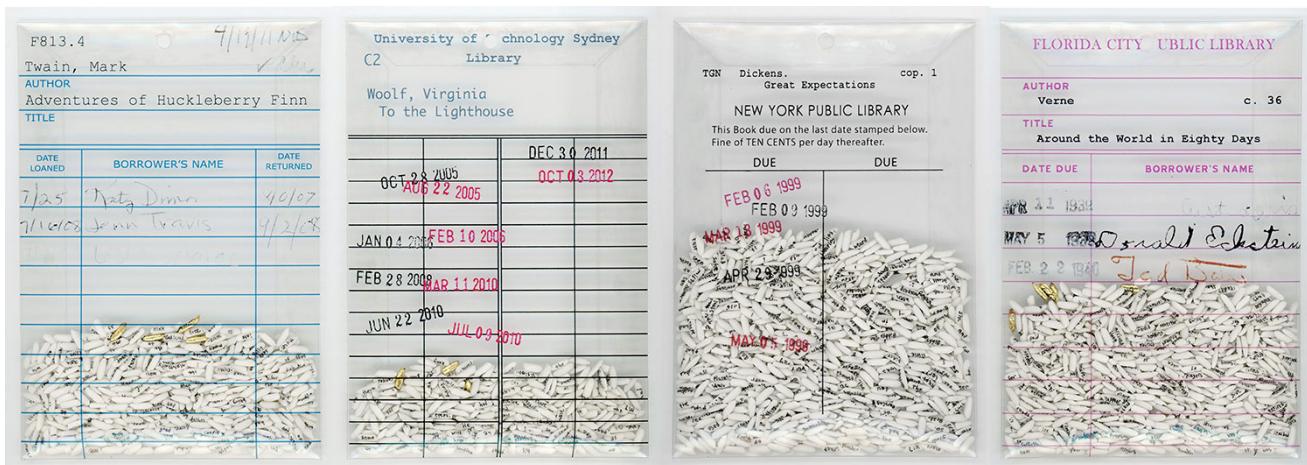
Today, we're delighted to feature Trong Gia Nguyen, and his impressive "Library" project— an installation that bends the idea of what a book is by re-writing famous works word for word on rice grains. Don't miss his fascinating concepts for the "ideal library"— zero gravity reading rooms? To-scale reproductions of paintings to check out and take home? Yes please. Enjoy! ~Erinn

Tell us about yourself and your work. What was your training like, and what are you working on right now that you're excited about?

Well, I've been living in New York for about 13 years, having moved here shortly after getting my MFA from the University of South Florida (the joint I lovingly refer to as the Yale Art School of the South). My degree is in painting, though I don't paint so much anymore. I'm your typical urban multi-tasker. Currently, all my energies are being channeled to a solo exhibition in Frankfurt later in April. I'll be including mostly works that have some sort of interactive angle. It'll be called "Mann Cave." I'm excited about that and also the possibility of taking summer road trips in an awesome, used minivan I recently purchased. I named it Chaka Khan.

For the past seven years I've been writing literary works word for word on rice kernels, encased in little mylar packets imprinted with old library card-cataloging information. The original idea was to write all of Marcel Proust's "In Search of Lost Time" word for word on grains of rice, to be housed in a giant hourglass. I'm slowly plugging along on that one, but in the meantime I've written mostly single chapters of numerous books. I've always been interested in the idea of books as knowledge, and by extension the library as a repository and collection of this body of knowledge.

Written knowledge versus memory knowledge.



Trong Gia Nguyen
From the series *Library*
2009-12, Rice kernels, ink, mylar, gold leaf
Each 5 x 3-1/2 x 3/8 inches
Collection of University of Technology, Sydney

The idea of books and libraries as repositories of knowledge has clearly influenced “Library”— tell us about the first library you can remember playing a significant part in your artistic development.

When I was a young student, I remember fixating on the Laurentian Library in Florence, which was designed by Michelangelo. Maybe it was just a fascination with all things related to the Renaissance artist. The library is particularly renowned for its staircase and the architecture was said to have mimicked the shape and aspects of the human body—the Renaissance basis for the ideal. Imagining myself walking up and down these flights of stairs, and any other stairs for that matter, becomes a metaphor for intellectual and creative treading, ascending and plumbing, finding and endeavoring. The mythic Alexandrian Library also often flickers like a cranky neon sign in the back of my mind. Like most humans, I’m drawn to the idea of forgotten knowledge, and, by extension, loss.

What 3 things do you wish were available for checkout at every library?

How about audio tours of the library narrated by interesting people from all walks of life? These could be tailored to specific interests, i.e. David Bowie could take you on a tour of his favorite music books and navigate you to them, while humming his new album personally in your ears.

As an artist who explores knowledge and memory, what would your ideal library look like? What could you do there, and what kind of materials would it house?

I was always attracted to the idea of the court reader. So in my ideal library, one might enter a dreamy columnated rotunda or hall where something is always being read aloud, from somewhere in the world. It could be audio from a live feed, or a cassette book. The goal would be to read—or speed read—every book aloud in the voice of Sean Connery, Mike Tyson, or Stephen Hawking. It might have an oculus like the Pantheon: a watchful eye scanning and sunning the library. You could laze around and just listen. My ideal library would contain only faithful reproductions of rare books that anyone could check out. It might also have an oracle that recommends books to you based on what it thinks you need. Live bands would play on the roof while bonfires of the mundanities blazed, and of course an underground gallery for visual art, realized in the form of holograms re-creating exhibitions described in historical and fictional literature. It would also contain a soundless, zero-gravity “outer space” reading room, where people would be seat-belted to their reading chairs and read/scream in silence.

On second thought, another ideal library might be one in which one could check out art to take home and hang temporarily in one’s place of residence. Like the rare books, they could also just be faithful bootlegs of actual works, painted to scale and medium in China or outputted by a 3D printer. This could be an alternative form of a collection, the commonality shared by museums and libraries.

Anything else you’d like to share with us?

I’m Asian and it’s impossible for me to grow a beard. On a biblio-related note, I have a work in a traveling show called “The Book Lovers.” It’s an exhibition of artist novels, and I contributed a reprinted version of Dan Brown’s “Da Vinci Code” in which I’ve inserted an extra short chapter detailing the fictitious love pursuits of Marcel Duchamp.



Trong Gia Nguyen is an artist based in Brooklyn, New York. His wide array of works examines structures of power in their myriad forms, making attempt to scrutinize the soft foundation upon which contemporary life plays out, often behind the facade of fairness, sincerity, tradition, and civility. Trong has produced everything from iPhone applications (*Metaphysical GPS*, with Christopher K. Ho) to installation, film, painting, sculpture, performances, and web-based actions. He has received grants and residencies from the Museum of Arts & Design (New York), Artist in Residence in the Everglades, LegalArt Miami, Foundation for Contemporary Arts, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, Harvestworks Digital Media Center, Bronx Museum of the Arts, and Puffin Foundation.