

# To View a Plastic Flower



Los  
Angeles  
Municipal  
Art  
Gallery

Educators' Guide

# The Show.

## To View a Plastic Flower

The Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery is pleased to present *To View a Plastic Flower*. This exhibition presents the work of three artists: Abigail Raphael Collins, T. Kim-Trang Tran and Samira Yamin. The artists explore how global conflicts (wars) and mass media are connected to each other and how they are shown to the public. The exhibition features video installations and sculptural glass reliefs over found photographs from magazines. The exhibition invites the viewer to think about the ways in which people and events are represented and how the limitations of mass media, when there is not full or accurate information can affect the portrayal of an event or representation of people.

The idea for *To View a Plastic Flower* arose from the teachings of anti-war peace activist and Buddhist Monk, Thích Nhất Hạnh. Thích's teachings include the concept of "**inter-being**," which suggests that nothing can exist alone, and everything including people, nature, things and events connect with everything and each other. The idea of the "flower" comes from one of Hanh's well-known sayings, that suggests by touching a flower one also touches the clouds and rain that were necessary to create and grow the flower. The exhibition runs from **February 13 – April 19, 2020.**

# The Artists.

## **Abigail Raphael Collins**

(b. 1986, New York, NY) lives and works in Los Angeles

Collins is an interdisciplinary artist and creates artworks using a variety of media including: photography, video and installation. Her work is influenced by documentary, journalistic, and research-based practices. Collins' videos ask the audience to think about the many ways in which the media and the entertainment industry show images and representations of people, places and historical events such as global conflicts (wars).

# The Artists.

## **T. Kim-Trang Tran**

(b. 1964, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam) lives and works in Los Angeles

T. Kim-Trang Tran is an experimental video artist and professor in media studies at Scripps College. Tran's works uses archival films and animation projected on handmade screens that examine the interconnectivity of women in fashion, war, and the garment industry during specific events during the early 1970s.

# The Artists.

## **Samira Yamin**

(b. 1983, Evanston, IL) lives and works in Los Angeles

For several years, Yamin has collected war-related images from *TIME* magazine. From her practice of researching images and wars, she learned that the photo-editors at magazines make decisions that affect how the viewer will interpret an image and that the photograph might not accurately (truly) represent the people and events shown. Her works examine the nature of photography and how light can change an image and its interpretation. By incorporating carved sculpted glass on top of photographs, Yamin uses light and refractions to create what she calls a dynamic image that changes the surface of the photograph.

# The Artworks.



*Out of Play, Episode 1*

Video Still

2019

Courtesy of the artist

## Abigail Raphael Collins

### Description

Abigail Raphael Collins' four-part experimental **documentary** and video installation, *Out of Play*, questions the connection between the Hollywood entertainment industry and the U.S. military in Southern California. Collins interviews several subjects including one who is an actor hired by the military for training exercises. The rest of her subjects are involved in how the military is portrayed through media.. The video shows how stories are created and presented, even when there is not enough official factual information to tell an accurate story.

### Questions

- If you were to create a documentary (movie) about a time period, event or person in U.S. or global history, what would you choose and who would you want to interview (talk to)? What title would you give your documentary?
- What other methods or **media** besides video can an artist use to tell a story about important events? What media would you use?

# The Artworks.



*Movements: Battles and Solidarity*

(Detail of installation)

Installation

2019

Courtesy of the artist

## T. Kim-Trang Tran

### Description

T. Kim-Trang Tran's three-channel **video** installation, *Movements: Battles and Solidarity*, is projected on three large-scale, handmade, embroidered and cut screens. The video uses archival footage from the early 1970s of fashion show in Paris, the Vietnam war, and U.S. garment workers on strike. Juxtaposing and layering this this footage together, Tran illustrates the literal and metaphorical movements of women during this time period. A multi-layered soundtrack plays radio broadcasts, disco music and songs, including *Solidarity Forever*. The melody from this song was originally from an old United States marching song "John Brown's Body", and was also used later as the melody for "The Battle Hymn of the Republic". The labor unions changed the lyrics (words) but kept the tune to use "Solidarity Forever" as their anthem. This song is about facing injustices and how when people band together as a group, that there is strength in numbers.

### Questions

- Describe the music and songs you hear in Tran's installation - what do you notice about the music? What time period do you think these songs were written?
- How can music, lyrics (the words of a song) tell a story about important events in history?
- What images would you show on each of the three screens to match the music?

# The Artworks.



## Samira Yamin

### Description

Yamin's new sculptural photography series **Refractions** uses **found appropriated images** that she collected from *TIME* Magazine. The photographs were taken by journalists who reported on ongoing wars in Syria and the Middle East. Yamin transforms actual magazine pages by using optical glass that was carved with lines and angles using the two-dimensional composition method of **Dynamic Symmetry**. The goal of this geometrically patterned glass which also refracts (bends) the light, is to distort (change) and obscure (block) the image of a person, making it difficult for the viewer to see the photograph clearly or to get accurate information about what is occurring. By covering magazine images with glass, these works explore how images are changed and interpreted by the mass media and the audience.

### Questions

- What would it feel like if you were a photographer or journalist and traveled to another country to document what happens to families and the land in a time of war? Where would you travel to and what stories would you want people to learn about?
- Why do you think the artist chose to use photos from *TIME* magazine and placed patterned glass on top? Describe how the refractions change the images and how the artworks would be different without the glass on top.

*(Refractions) September 12, 2016 from  
Passing Obliquely From One Medium Into  
Another Series*

2019

Wheel-cut optical glass and *TIME*  
magazine page, mounted on Sintra

Courtesy of the artist and PATRON Gallery

# The Glossary.

**Documentary:** A video, film or written material that tells a factual (true) story about events.

**Dynamic Symmetry:** A set of rules for composition that defines placement of items in photographs that uses equal lines, shapes and angles.

**Found (Appropriated) Image:** When an image such as a photograph that was created by someone else is used for their own purposes by another person without asking permission. An example of this is using magazine photos to create an artwork.

**Inter-being:** From the teachings of anti-war peace activist and Buddhist Monk, Thích Nhất Hạnh. Inter-being is to co-exist together. Inter-being is to recognize what we have in common and how we are connected. It is hopeful that peace can spring from recognizing how we are connected to each other, or nature. It is an exercise that serves to locate one's responsibility and consciousness. Nothing can exist by itself; all people, nature and things have to inter-be with everything else in the world.

**Media:** The different ways of communication including: magazines, newspapers, television, film, experimental documentary videos, internet, radio and podcasts are used to tell stories or provide information. In journalism, stories are researched, collected, edited and then are reported through the various media.

**Refractions:** When a ray of light passes through a medium such as cold cut glass and the ray of light becomes refracted (bent) and distorted due to the shape and patterns in the glass. The refractions of sculpted glass on top of a photograph blurs the image underneath.

**Video:** A digital recording of an event or set of images. Videos can be shown on a monitor or projected on other materials such as screens or different types of walls.

# Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery



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