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PROSPECT.3: NOTES FOR NOW IN NEW ORLEANS

BY PAUL LASTER

Launched in 2007, two years after Hurricane Katrina had devastated large areas of New Orleans and the Louisiana gulf region of the United States, Prospect New Orleans was conceived as an international biennial—by founder and former director Dan Cameron, who had curated the 8th Istanbul Biennial (2003) and 10th Taipei Biennial (2006)—to exhibit contemporary artistic practices, while contributing to the city's cultural and economic recovery. Its third edition, "Prospect.3: Notes for Now," which has been astutely organized by Los Angeles County Museum of Art chief curator and P.3 artistic director Franklin Sirmans, is notable for the large number of Asian artists featured in the exhibition.



THE PROPELLER GROUP, *The Living Need Light, and the Dead Need Music*, 2014, single-channel video: 21 min 15 sec. Courtesy the artists and Lombard Freid Gallery, New York.

"I was conscious of the fact that the show should reflect the international art conversation that's going on in all parts of the world, but there had to be some sort of tie between those regions and New Orleans," Sirmans told ArtAsiaPacific at the opening. "For example, The Propeller Group explored rituals in Vietnam vis-à-vis rituals here in New Orleans. There's a decent-size Vietnamese population in New Orleans, so those types of things made perfect sense. I tried to be as open as possible, and eventually things began to click. I'm fortunate to have traveled to major international art biennials—from Venice to Gwangju—and have had conversations with their artistic directors. That played a huge role."

Sirmans took Paul Gauguin's masterpiece *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* (1897–98), painted when the artist escaped European society for a simpler life in Tahiti, and Walker Percy's 1961 novel *The Moviegoer*, which is about the New Orleans author's search for the meaning of existence, as his points of departure for the exhibition, whose thematic focus is the quest for self-discovery. Sirmans chose prime pieces and commissioned a third of the 58 artists to create new works that explore such diverse themes as the "New Orleans Experience," "Seeing Oneself in the Other," "The South," "Crime and Punishment," "Movie-going," "The Carnavalesque," "Abstraction" and "Visual Sound"—compiled under the overarching moniker "All Together Now."

A standout work from Asia is The Propeller Group's video that draws parallels between funeral practices in Vietnam and New Orleans. It is shown along with sculptures of tricked-out musical instruments made by the collective, which also appears in photographs capturing members of marching bands from Louisiana. Other highlights in the show include: 83-year-old Lebanese artist Huguette Caland's minimal paintings that depict sensual representations of the body; Saudi Arabian artist Manal al-Dowayan's series of black-and-white photos, as well as a video, about her family's personal involvement with the oil industry in her homeland; young Turkish painter Hayal Pozanti's whimsical abstractions; Chinese artist Liu Ding's performance piece, where he hangs out on a street corner with locals while sharing beers from a cooler; and Japanese-American conceptualist Glenn Kaino's installation of water tanks that turn military machines into coral reefs.

Continuing through January 25, 2015, "Notes for Now" also includes significant works by Shigeru Ban, Zarina Bhimji, Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, Yun-Fei Ji, Pushpamala N., Agus Suwage, Entang Wiharso and David Zink Yi, as well as 50 other local, national and international artists at 18 historical venues throughout the city.