

JOHNSON LOWE GALLERY

Press Release:

Phuong Nguyen, *She is an Object of Beauty*

On view May 9, 2025 – June 28, 2025

Opening Reception: Friday, May 9th from 6:00 to 8:00 pm

Johnson Lowe Gallery is pleased to present *She is an Object of Beauty*, a solo exhibition of new mixed media works by Toronto-based artist Phuong Nguyen (b. 1990, Mississauga, Canada). In her first exhibition with the gallery, Nguyen draws from the visual languages of Orientalism and Ornamentalism to examine how the racialized, feminine body is aestheticized, archived, and abstracted—both within Western art history and her own lived experience as a Vietnamese diasporic artist.

Through her intricate pictorial architectures - oil paintings enmeshed within hand-carved wooden frames, laced and sutured with woven twine and ribbon, Nguyen brings together cultural fragments—plastic twine, porcelain vessels, lotus candles, dragon fruit, brocade—into densely symbolic compositions that consider how beauty and violence often occupy the same form. Referencing Edward Said and Anne Anlin Cheng, Nguyen’s work contends with the “peri-human”: figures and objects that are at once animated and emptied, adorned and dismembered, ghostly but never fully gone.

The exhibition’s title, *She is an Object of Beauty*, speaks to Nguyen’s desire to give shape to that which has been flattened by the colonial gaze. Porcelain vases, cork miniatures, and blue-and-white ceramic birds reappear throughout the work—familiar, decorative, and strange. Some are broken and reassembled with pink and blue twine. Others hover within tight structures of ribbon. In *Taxonomy of a Living Thing* (2024), a ceramic jar is treated like an anatomical subject—its painted body dissected and suspended as if in a lab – a subject to be prodded and inspected. In *Skin Thick* (2024), a durian-inspired frame surrounds a miniature diorama of Asia-as-fantasy, critiquing both the fetishization of the East and the impossibility of return.

Materiality plays a central role in Nguyen’s work. Plastic twine—ubiquitous in Vietnamese domestic life—is used to bind, hang, and weave. Oil paint, long associated with Western portraiture, becomes a medium of tension when paired with found objects coded as “Asian.” Carved frames reference colonial illustrations from *L’Art à Hue*, a 1920’s French volume on the art of Vietnam during the Nguyen Dynasty, while beadwork and ribbon decoration evoke domestic ritual, spiritual offering, and girlhood labor. In *Two Moons* (2025), recycled pearls and lotus lamps point to ancestral connection across geographies—Vietnam, Mexico, the American South.

Through these works, Nguyen constructs a world that is both haunted and deceptively seductive—where objects function as bodies and bodies, at times, feel familiar, like memories. *She is an Object of Beauty* is a richly textured offering: tender, strange, and sharp-edged. It expands Nguyen’s ongoing visual inquiry into ornament, erasure, and the quiet defiance of putting broken things back together.

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About Phuong Nguyen

Phuong Nguyen (b. 1992, Toronto) holds a BFA from OCAD University (2014). Working in representational oil painting and experimental weaving, she explores themes of Ornamentalism and the relationship between exoticism and violence by referencing the aesthetics and the history of Chinoiserie and South East Asian/Vietnamese femininity. Recent exhibitions include "Cruel to be Kind" at Stewart Hall Art Gallery (2023), "The Wind Returns To The Soil" at TAP Art Space (2023) and "Where We Left Off" at Olga Korper Gallery (2024).

About Johnson Lowe Gallery

Johnson Lowe Gallery champions emerging, mid-career, and established artists from our region and beyond. Our program reveres the transformative power of artistic expression, honoring the profound nature of visual language and its ability to drive personal and societal paradigm shifts.

Founded in 1989 by Bill Lowe, the gallery's extensive exhibition history includes renowned artists such as Thornton Dial, Michael David, Ida Applebroog, Markus Lupertz and Leiko Ikemura. In 2023, the gallery was re-established as Johnson Lowe Gallery under the Direction of Donovan Johnson with *The Alchemists*, a historic exhibition co-curated by Seph Rodney. This exhibition featured works by Sanford Biggers, Mark Bradford, Ebony G. Patterson, Thornton Dial, William Downs, Shanequa Gay, Trenton Doyle Hancock, and many others.

Notes to Editors

Artist: Phuong Nguyen

Title: *She is an Object of Beauty*

Dates: May 9, 2025 – July 5, 2025

Address:

764 Miami Cir NE #210, Atlanta, GA 30324

Hours:

Tuesday – Friday | 10:00 am – 5:30 pm

Saturday | 11:00 am – 5:30 pm

Sunday, Monday, and Evenings by appointment

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For all media inquiries, please contact info@johnsonlowe.com

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