

Melissa Nguyen's exhibition *Mèo/Mèo* explores the relationship between copy and original, examining this dynamic through a culturally fragmented lens. Drawing on imagery and iconography from a recent trip to Vietnam, Nguyen interrogates Western representations of her ancestral homeland while simultaneously confronting her own diasporic gaze. This body of work challenges conventional notions of authenticity, cultural ownership, and the uneasy line between homage and exploitation in artistic practice.

Central to Nguyen's practice is an engagement with cultural memory and personal identity. Her work contemplates a deep, often contradictory yearning to belong to her ancestral heritage while grappling with a sense of disconnection. This experience is paradoxically familiar and unfamiliar—the tension of existing between two cultural spheres, revealing how identity can be shaped by both proximity and distance.

Nguyen's exploration of identity is fundamentally informed by her diasporic perspective, where cultural interpretation is mediated through memory, nostalgia, and societal bias. Familiar symbols and motifs may evoke childhood memories, while others feel distant—filtered through a lens shaped by privilege and the experience of living in a context perceived as 'more modern' or progressive. This duality—marked by both attachment and estrangement—underscores how perception itself becomes a site of cultural tension, where familiar and foreign elements continuously intersect.

The conceptual focus of copying and originality forms a foundation of this exhibition. By navigating the fluid boundaries between the two, Nguyen questions how cultural identity and artistic practice are shaped by repetition, replication, and appropriation. Her works, grounded in personal heritage and the broader cultural economy of copying, probe the uneasy relationship between authenticity and commodification. This inquiry resonates with Nguyen's experience as a diasporic artist who simultaneously navigates inherited traditions and the commodification of cultural symbols.

Notably, the title itself *Mèo/Mèo*, embodies this duality, *Mèo* means "cat" in Vietnamese but also sounds like "Mel"—a clever reference to Nguyen's identity. This linguistic overlap mirrors the conceptual elements within the works, where the original and the copy blur and merge. In doing so, Nguyen challenges the assumption that originality always precedes reproduction, suggesting instead that the act of copying can itself generate something new and distinct.

Nguyen's engagement with the notion of the copy as a generative act challenges the primacy of the original, an idea that echoes Marcel Duchamp's use of hand-coloured stencils, where mechanical reproduction and the artist's touch intersect, blurring the lines between unique artworks and mass-produced objects. Similarly, Nguyen's perfume prints blend artisanal effort with mediated processes, using manual production techniques while embracing the aesthetics of replication. This synthesis highlights how mechanical reproduction does not necessarily negate the presence of the artist's hand but rather complicates the notion of authorship.

Furthermore, Nguyen reflects on the possibility that successive copies may become new originals—a compulsive series of repetitions that questions the value of uniqueness. This notion critiques the capitalist impulse to reproduce art as a commodity while prompting questions about the ethics of production. By reconsidering the copy not merely as a derivative but as an evolving form, Nguyen's works explore how identity, memory, and culture are continuously reproduced, fragmented, and recontextualized.

Ultimately, Mèo/Mèo presents the act of copying as more than just a method of production; it becomes a thematic investigation into the fluidity of identity and cultural inheritance. Nguyen's works propose that copies can transcend their derivative status, emerging as autonomous entities with their own cultural and artistic significance. In doing so, she invites us to reconsider how originality and replication coexist and how both can inform our understanding of heritage in a contemporary context.