

UuDam Tran Nguyen: Waltz of the Machine Equestrians, June 20, 2014–November 16, 2014

Although artist UuDam Tran Nguyen has lived in Los Angeles for most of the last two decades, Vietnam is never far from his work or his thoughts. In those same two decades, Vietnam, like many Asian countries, has lost an incredible amount of natural and rural landscape. Dramatic economic growth and industrial development continue to replace once-bucolic fields with roads and highways, leveling small agrarian communities to make room for glass and steel skyscrapers.

In response to the overwhelming—and at times chaotic and amusing—number of motorbikes that populate Vietnam’s urban streets, Nguyen made the single-channel video *Waltz of the Machine Equestrians—The Machine Equestrians* (2012). The video’s 28 mysterious “equestrians,” connected by thin strings clipped to their brightly colored ponchos, resemble a contemporary band of knights adorned in flimsy armor and pollutant-deterring face masks as they ride in choreographed unison along a Ho Chi Minh City street, the city skyline in the distance. As Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich’s dense but whimsical Suite for Jazz Orchestra no. 2, Waltz no. 2 plays, the group progresses around softly banking turns and through seemingly endless straightaways with a resolute and theatrical determination. In *Waltz of the Machine Equestrians—The Machine Equestrians*, Nguyen captures duplicitous and ambivalent beauty in the motorbike-riding population’s extraordinarily dancelike and precipitous choreography, the increasing tensions between the individual and the collective, and the paving over of the natural landscape.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

UuDam Tran Nguyen

Vietnamese, b. 1971

Waltz of the Machine Equestrians – The Machine Equestrians, 2012

Single-channel video; color, sound, 3 min.

Kadist Art Foundation TL78.2014

