ALMINE RECH

Tia-Thuy Nguyen
Burdening Dream

Dec 10, 2024 — Mar 1, 2025 | Monaco

Almine Rech Monaco is pleased to announce 'Burdening Dream', Tia-Thuy Nguyen's second solo exhibition, on view from December 10, 2024 to March 1, 2025.

Light as a Living State: The Art of Tia-Thuy Nguyen

I often find myself looking up into the sky, either basking in its light, or searching for something. Sometimes I think about all of the different skies I've seen. The light, the dark, and all the colors in-between. Skies broad and infinite, crisp and sublime, overshadowing the earth entirely; or skies low and suffocating, small and close. Skies alive with the force of the sun, or the gentle glow of the moon and stars. Light so fierce it burns your eyes, or dull enough to make the world dark. Light that changes as the clouds move up there, as your body moves down here: light that is living.

When I meet with the artist Tia-Thuy Nguyen about her new site-specific installation[1], *Drops of the Sun* (2024), which goes along with her exhibition 'Burdening Dream' at Almine Rech Monaco, she emphasizes the importance of light to her practice. For Tia-Thuy Nguyen, light creates a living state that activates the work when viewers move around her paintings or sculptures.

Drops of the Sun envelopes the body of the viewer as they walk inside, creating a peaceful sanctuary from the city beyond. She describes her approach as being about the energy of the earth and sky coming together; of solid matter meeting the intangible essence of nature; the heaviness of rock rubbing up against a lightness in the atmosphere: "of freedom".

Balancing four separate parts, *Drops of the Sun* combines natural light, a room in which the walls are laden with quartz, a pink skylight, and a window that the artist calls a "reincarnation window". Together, these elements form a refuge, a dwelling in which to escape from Monaco's fervent energy, from the masculinity of it all: to rest, to tune out and feel weightless.

Quartz disperses light as it passes through, refracting rays in a symphony of sunshine. Tia-Thuy Nguyen has sourced a total of four tonnes of stone from many different areas in Vietnam: from riverbanks to the mountains to the coast, a different passage of time embedded within the separate pieces of quartz. The color, form and transparency of each were revealed as the residues were scrubbed away and they were cut into shape. Together, their weight transforms into great swathes of color and vivacity, light glinting off the different angles to create a sparkling effervescence. From above, a circular pink skylight bathes the room with natural sunshine, which refracts off the stone and onto the body of the viewer. Shades of rose, lilac, purple, pale yellow and sea green are revealed: this room is its own cloudscape, a glittering chamber illuminated from above. Reinforced by the reincarnation window, the scene as a whole speaks to the swirling cycles of the Samsara: energy never dying, but instead reabsorbed continuously, shifting from one state into another.

A space of pure colour and lightness;
A sanctuary that dances with the energy of a thousand sunbeams;
A place where the day is suddenly weightless.

Tia-Thuy Nguyen has focused much of her time on the subject of light. Having specialized in painting techniques during her studies at the Vietnam University of Fine Arts, the artist then took her PhD in Fine Arts in Ukraine. In 'Burdening Dream', with new watercolor paintings and quartz works on canvas, she has closely followed Vietnamese traditions and rituals including crafting mulberry paper, which is a traditional material used in Asian art — one that is light and fragile in its own right, and which needs to be treated with a certain delicacy. By combining this with quartz and glass beads — heavier materials that are attached by hand with meticulous attention to detail — Nguyen creates watercolor paintings studded with stones, which she describes as "evaporating to form sparkling clouds".

Light is inseparable from the sky, from the clouds. Blistering rays of sun burning in space, filtering through the atmosphere. Uncertainty sometimes hovers above the horizon. In this vein of not knowing what the sky may bring, she describes a memory of her father: "I grew up with my father who was a pilot in the Air Force. I liked growing up with all of his stories about the clouds and rain. He always said that when he would take off into the sky, he wondered what might happen through his window. He said that behind that cloud, there could be an enemy, there could be a friend, or it could just be the beautiful day".

I find myself thinking about how much this resonates with Tia-Thuy Nguyen's approach to her *Drops of the Sun*: the will to find lightness, to trust in the unknown, to weather the weight of existence, and perhaps most pertinently, to search for beauty amidst the storm.

In the series of mulberry paper artworks, she focuses on light dancing in the atmosphere. Take, for example, *Tension so intense* (2024) in which a vibrant sky is streaked with clouds that billow as moments of multicolour. The yellow of the atmosphere gives way to a mist of the warmest orange, which in turn rubs up against fresh tones of minty green and azure blue. The paper responds to the wetness of the paint with its own gentle movement, rising to kiss the watery pigment, and as it does, the stones of quartz and cullet glint and sparkle in acknowledgment. In another work, *Just own the night* (2024) the scene is even sparser, clouds of the palest baby blue offset with stones that deepen into shades of cyan and indigo. Between the clouds there is calm, space to breathe, a cosmos beyond all this in which to move.

Sometimes I'd like to just evaporate. Be neither solid, nor liquid, but vapor, swirling and dispersed. Without weight or any particular feeling. Freed from body and mind, limbs, gender. All of it. Existing just as tiny particles of light. Swaying in the wind. I would disperse if you blew into the space of me; if you tried to touch me, I would simply whirl in the air to evade your grip, gently settling around your hand in a haze. As light, I would change color, from apricot into the deepest crimson or the palest of pinks. And in this form, up with the clouds, maybe I would be free.

Perhaps we can all relate to feeling this way, in a world where the upward curve towards equitableness seems to be plummeting — where, at times, the cloud cover seems too dense to decipher whether or not there might be another way through, or if the sun is still shining on the other side. If there is still light at the end of the tunnel.

— Louisa Elderton, writer and editor based in Berlin

1 - Mareterra, Monaco