

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bùi Thanh Tâm Here on and after

398 West Street, New York, NY 10014

May 16 – July 18, 2026

Opening reception with the artist: Saturday, May 16, 2026 | 6-8 PM

Eli Klein Gallery is honored to present "Bùi Thanh Tâm: Here on and after," the Hanoi-based artist's first solo exhibition in the U.S. and with the gallery, featuring 13 new and recent paintings. The title reflects the artist's exploration of the "after" of Vietnam's colonial history—the afterlife of war, the persistence of memory, and the continual reshaping of cultural identity. Tâm is widely regarded as one of the most important Vietnamese painters of the postwar generation. This exhibition marks a significant evolution in his visual lexicon, extending the depth and complexity of the language he has developed over decades of practice.



Hello. God is here I, 2026, Hang Trong, Kim Hoang, Dong Ho folk paintings, acrylic on canvas, 53 x 41 1/2 inches (135 x 105 cm).

Through layering, collaging, recoloring, and reshaping, the artist treats *Đông Hồ*, *Hàng Trống*, and *Kim Hoàng*, traditional Vietnamese folk woodblock prints commonly used during Lunar New Year celebrations, as living forms of inheritance. Tâm transplants these woodblock motifs into different visual soils, where their shared genetic essence yields distinct offspring shaped by sacred and historical iconographic contexts. The result is a body of works that remains deeply rooted in tradition while taking on new forms.

If these traditional folk woodblocks operate as seeds, the sunflower emerges as their emblem of growth and renewal. Having closely studied Anselm Kiefer's scorched sunflower landscapes and Francis Bacon's existential distortion, Tâm envisions the sunflower as a symbol of resilience and rebirth. Yet its pursuit of light remains shadowed by cultural fragmentation and war's enduring scars, from French colonial invasion to Agent Orange's intergenerational trauma.

In his "Searching for the Sunflower" series, the sunflower becomes an eye marked by rupture. Set against a densely patterned field of other watchful flowers, it reads like a pupil opening onto a fractured world. Rather than blooming outward, its eyelash-like petals peel back to reveal a dark iris, creating the sense of a gaze that is both outward-facing and inward-turning. The result is a double movement in which the flower searches for hope even as the viewer is drawn into its wounded interior.

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Religion, and the promise of salvation, may be imagined as a means of healing such wounds. In the “Hello. God is here” series, the sunflower’s center opens into a deep blue cosmos, while a figure in front hauls a tilted cross, playfully raising a peace sign. The cross’s slanted orientation stresses its weight, transforming Christ from an icon of rebirth into a burdened body. Salvation, then, appears less as transcendence than as endurance through struggle.

That sense of struggle intensifies in the “Utopia” series, where the sunflower lies within a demarcated visual space. Black blooms rise upright in narrow prism cages, while punctured forms, swirling marks, and hidden details animate the surface around them. The cages do not simply confine the flowers but make visible resilience as something that must persevere through pressure and obstruction, echoing a contemporary Vietnam shaped by the legacies of colonialism and the uneven passage of *Đổi Mới* reform.

The “Mutant” series extends transformation into a more varied and unsettled register. Unlike the relative consistency of previous series, each work occupies its own distinct background and environment.

Figures emerge as hybrid, composite bodies, layered through collage and outline rather than cleanly defined form. They seem to hover between states, as if shaped through mutation rather than natural evolution. They imply that growth is rarely seamless—it is shaped by historical violence and generational trauma, passing forward through forms fractured, then reassembled.

These works locate Tâm’s image-world within a larger field of cultural survival and reinvention. With an exceptional command of inherited form, the artist treats Vietnamese woodblock traditions, Kiefer’s charged histories, and Bacon’s distortions as living sources that he repeatedly transplants, revises, and reanimates. In Tâm’s practice, the series is not simply a grouping but a sophisticated visual strategy, allowing him to test how a shared image can renew itself under ever-changing conditions. The result is a body of work marked by a mastery of transformation, where meaning emerges not from singular originals, but from dispersed encounters within our collective consciousness, here on and after.



Utopia III, 2026, Dong Ho, Hang Trong, Kim Hoang folk paintings, acrylic on canvas, 71 x 46 1/2 inches (180 x 118 cm).

About Bùi Thanh Tâm:

Bùi Thanh Tâm (b. 1979 in Thái Bình Province, Vietnam) is an artist whose practice engages the social and political conditions of Vietnam while reaching outward to broader questions of history, memory, and cultural transformation. Through human-like figures and layers of subtle irony, he constructs images that transform inherited forms into charged allegories of embodiment, rupture, and renewal. Widely regarded as one of the most important Vietnamese painters of the postwar generation, Tâm has developed a distinctive visual language that merges historical reference with contemporary urgency.

Tâm graduated from the Oil Painting Department at the Vietnam Fine Arts University in Hanoi. His work has been exhibited widely in Vietnam and internationally, including solo exhibitions such as *Christ, Buddha, and the Jigsaw* at Chillala House of Art, Ho Chi Minh City (2025); *Một Mình Bao La* at Gate Gate Gallery, Hanoi (2023); *Encounter* at Gate Gate Gallery, Hanoi (2022); *Nothing Behind* at Vietnam Museum of Fine Arts, Hanoi (2020); *Abandoned By Heaven* at Craig Thomas Gallery, Ho Chi Minh City (2017); *Tam & Crazy People* at Faith Art Gallery, Hong Kong (2016); *There Is No Box* at Thavibu Gallery, Bangkok (2015); *Tâm Và Những Kẻ Điên* at Faith Art Gallery, Hong Kong (2015); *Crazy People* at Craig Thomas Gallery, Ho Chi Minh City (2012); and *Mona Lisa* at Viet Art Center, Hanoi (2010).

His group exhibitions include *Ceci N'est Pas Une Guerre – This Is Not A War* at Eli Klein Gallery, New York (2025); *Tenacious: CTG 10th Anniversary Show* at Craig Thomas Gallery, Ho Chi Minh City (2019); *Asian Art Hong Kong* (2019); *CTG Nomad* at Craig Thomas Gallery Group Show, New York (2018); *Mascara* at Trang Tien Plaza, Hanoi (2017); *Octonary Carousel: CTG 8th Anniversary Show* at Craig Thomas Gallery, Ho Chi Minh City (2017); *ATUM ATUM* at Gallery RA Foundation, Hanoi (2016); *Asia Contemporary Art Show*, Hong Kong (2016); *The Second China–ASEAN Biennale* (2016); *Art Taipei*, KIAF Art Seoul, and *Bazaar Art Jakarta* (2015); *Vietnam Now: Changing Society* at Canvas International, Amsterdam (2014); *Asia Contemporary Art Show*, Hong Kong (2014); *Coming of Age* at Craig Thomas Gallery, Ho Chi Minh City (2014); *Asia Contemporary Art Show*, Hong Kong (2013); *Affordable Art Fair*, Hong Kong (2013); *Parcours* at Craig Thomas Gallery, Ho Chi Minh City (2012); *National Young Artists Festival*, Hanoi (2011); *Hello Tuan, Hello Tam* at Viet Art Center, Hanoi (2011); *National Fine Arts Exhibition*, Vietnam Exhibition Center for Culture and Arts, Hanoi (2010); *International Fine Arts Exhibition*, Yunnan City, China (2008); *Beijing–Vietnam Fine Arts Exhibition* at Beijing Arts Academy, China (2007); *Red River Delta Fine Arts Exhibition – Fine Arts Prize*, Korean Cultural Center, Hanoi (2007); *Fine Arts Exhibition of Sports, Peace and Arts*, National Arts and Sports Exhibition Center, Hanoi (2007); *National Fine Arts Exhibition on Military Force*, Military Museum, Hanoi (2004–2009); and *Red River Delta Fine Arts Exhibition*, Hanoi (2001–2008).

Tâm has been awarded the Prize at the Vietnam National Young Artists Festival (2011), Fourth Prize at the National Fine Arts Exhibition (2010), Third Prize at the Fine Arts Exhibition Celebrating the 1000-Year Anniversary of Thang Long–Hanoi (2008), and multiple certificates of merit from the Vietnamese Association of Fine Arts between 2001 and 2008.

Bùi Thanh Tâm currently lives and works in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Inquiries:

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