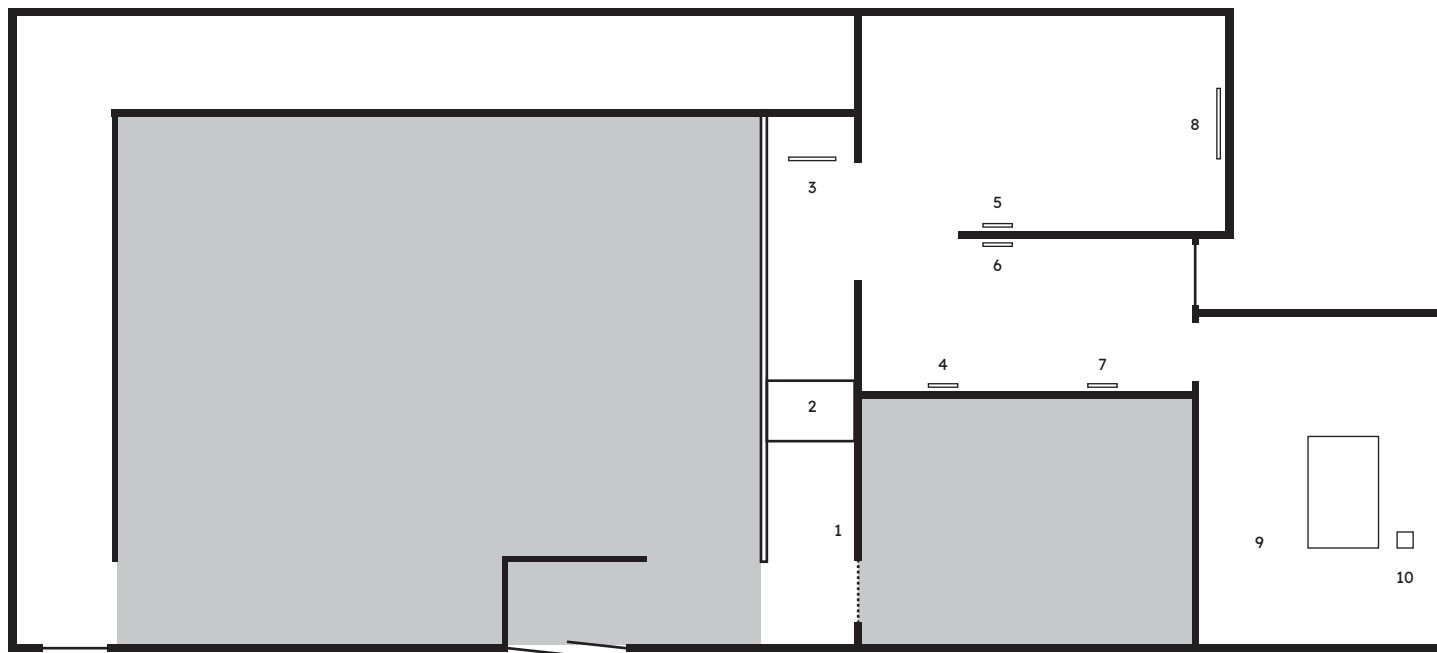


An exercise in togetherness,  
regrowth,  
and listening

for /  
**Lêna Bui**

# EXHIBITION MAP /



1. Sound piece — 2024

– *An Interview*

00:02:02

– *River*

00:00:45

Vietnamese voice: Trà Nguyễn

English voice: Tricia Nguyễn

Sound recordist: Bùi Tuyền

Made with support from Nguyen Art Foundation

2. *Entrance* — 2024

Hand-carved wood veneer

120 x 150 cm

3. *Electrical impulses no.1* — 2024

Ink and watercolor painting on silk and archival paper

122 x 82 cm

4. *Biological impulses no.1* — 2024

Ink and watercolor painting on silk,

inkjet pigment on archival paper

38 x 28 cm

5. *Tidal no.2* — 2023

Ink and watercolor painting on silk and archival paper

38 x 28 cm

6. *Tidal no.7* — 2024

Ink and watercolor painting on silk and archival paper

38 x 28 cm

7. *Circulations no.3* — 2021

Ink and watercolor painting on silk and archival paper

38 x 53 cm

8. *Cosmos no.2* — 2021

200-knot handwoven wool carpet, sound installation

190 x 120 cm

Ambient sound mix from A. Kosovichev (Stanford Experimental Physics Lab)

and University of Iowa recordings on a variety of spacecrafts

Made with support from the Wellcome Trust Public Engagement Arts Grant

9. *Cosmos no.1* — 2021

200-knot handwoven wool carpet

190 x 120 cm

Made with support from the Wellcome Trust Public Engagement Arts Grant

10. *Light* — 2024

Video, color, sound

00:02:53

Voiceover: Trà Nguyễn, Na

Sound recordist: Bùi Tuyền

As your vision blurs, your ears start to pick up faint  
sonic vibrations.

Words in between breaths, in between pauses, in  
between silence, in between more words.

You pay attention to the words  
(words softly spoken),  
seeking their threads  
(sentences quickly formed),  
following their meanings  
(a conversation eavesdropped),  
looking for the portal that connects to the lives  
of others  
(for how could we exist in solitude?)

You sense something in the air as more sound  
waves vibrate  
– this time completely wordless and abstract, as  
if calling from a place thousands of years old, long  
before your arrival.\*

\* The ambient sound piece derives from different sonic sources. First, the sound of sunlight – considered by most ancient religions as one of the most sacred sounds of the universe and cannot be heard by the human ear – as recorded through a process called sonification, whereby data taken from solar phenomena, such as solar flares, sunspots and solar wind, are transformed into different auditory signals (for example, the frequency of solar oscillations might be mapped to pitch, the intensity of solar flares to volume, and the duration of solar activities to the length of the sound). Second, the sound of earth whistlers, a type of very low frequency (VLF) electromagnetic wave phenomena that occur in the Earth's magnetosphere and is produced by lightning. When a lightning bolt strikes, it generates a broad spectrum of radio waves, including VLF waves, which travel along the Earth's magnetic field lines. The high frequencies travel faster than the low frequencies, thereby dispersing the wave from the lightning stroke into a whistling tone that decreases in frequency with increasing time, hence the term "whistler".

Your feet are naked. Swamps of dash lines and seed-like shapes circle the floor, swim up the walls, and dance in a choreography of energy in every direction, as if seeking signals and sending messages to their kins. Bodies of tree and bodies of human emerge in all their glorious smallness and specific details; their animated patterns depict networks of blood veins and energy pathways, tree roots and fungal threads – massive webs with infinite amounts of branching, each connecting one life form to another.

You sink, feeling yourself becoming one with the atmosphere you are a part of – infused, absorbed and unified with all the sensuous matters it is composed of.

To enter Lena Bui's multimedia installation, one must commit to the conditions the artist has set up: our ears must listen closely, our feet stripped bare, our breathing slowed down, our attention heightened. Put the earphones on, play the audio, take the shoes off, put the phones away, follow the lines, look up and kneel down, sit and touch, pause and listen. Here, word instructions, audio dialogues and visual cues become instruments, inviting us on a self-reflective journey through a world where multiple life forces are simultaneously at work.

Bodily yet otherworldly, across Lena's collage of visuals and audio, different life forms are revived; their cells multiply, their veins pulsate, their organs beam with life. From the translucency of silk to the dimensionality of watercolor; from the intimacy of spoken words to the tactility of handwoven wool; from the density of graphic patterns to the graspable yet numinous quality of sound. Like skin layers slowly peeling off one after another, these matters allow for the streams of life's vitality\* to seep off the edges and onto its surrounding space. Here, our body's energy becomes aligned with that of the nonhuman, thinning the wall that separates the internal world (the body holds), the external world (the body feels), and the spiritual world (beyond the body's comprehension).

\* The work *Cosmos no.1* depicts the lymphatic and immune systems, the flow of lymph, and a diagram of acupressure points related to the heart on a background of skin tissue; while the work *Cosmos no.2* includes a compilation of maps of electrical patterns in the body, and the meridian system on a background of DNA sequencing.

Seek your memory; where have you heard these sounds, where have you seen these images?

Within the womb of your Mother?  
That life-giving, love-gifting, soul-nourishing body.

Within the womb of our Mother Earth?  
In the mysterious depth of her ocean and the ancient knowledge of her forests,  
with her wild beasts and wondrous creatures invisible to the naked eyes,  
where the heat of her sun soaks up your body, through your nostrils and into your lungs, and the cold of her raging storm tears both the body of the universe and ours in half.

Alive and thriving, is she?  
Yet her mother tongue – our mother tongue – we barely attempt to learn.



You find yourself in the last room. The space is darkened. On the ceiling, moving images of insects circling around a bright circle of light are projected. On the floor, a body hovers. Seek your memory; where have you encountered this body? Now fleshless and boneless, no longer the breathing mass of living organisms, only a still image of what once was.

Once again, words in between breaths, in between pauses, in between silence, in between more words. Your ears pick up yet another conversation. It goes:

*A: Hey. When I was a kid there'd be tons of insects during monsoon, flying around the light in the corridor like this. The next day we'd find piles of gossamer wings on the ground.*

*B: Maybe they're mayflies. Live and die in a blink.*

*A: I read that insects fly into the light because they're looking for the moon.*

*B: Hmm.*

*A: I read people with near-death experiences said they saw a bright light. What do you think happens after death?*

*B: Oh, I don't know. Maybe we become light, maybe we become dust. We'll become quiet, that's for sure.*

*What's up with the profound questions?*

*A: Profound? Do I sound profound?*

*As a kid, I kept wondering, how did these insects die, leaving behind only the wings? Did the rest of their bodies just vanish? Recently I found out that they just shed their wings, crawl around and eventually burrow themselves somewhere, possibly in order to start a new home.*

The sounds of rain start to amplify, erasing all voices it passes by. Yet your memory has already registered what your ears heard. In a few moments, the same conversation will start once more. On a loop it goes, a note on cleansing and letting go, on life and death, on decomposing and resurrection. Like the moment you realize you are changing as a person, finally outgrowing your past bodies, like a reptile shedding its own skin. Or in this case, like an insect amputating its own wings.

