

# Mình at Fairfield City Museum & Gallery

[broadsheet.com.au/sydney/event/minh-fairfield-city-museum-gallery](https://broadsheet.com.au/sydney/event/minh-fairfield-city-museum-gallery)

Courtesy of Fairfield City Museum & Gallery



In a western Sydney Gallery, works by 17 Vietnamese-Australian artists – both established and emerging – chart how Vietnamese migrants transformed the Fairfield area over the last 40 years.

There is no exact English translation for “mình”. The common Vietnamese word can refer to the physical body, as well as “I”, as in the individual; “we”, as in the collective; or “our” – what belongs to us.

For curator Sheila Ngọc Phạm, it is the perfect title for the major new exhibition at Fairfield City Museum & Gallery (FCMG) showcasing works by 17 writers and artists of Vietnamese and Hoa (Vietnam’s Han Chinese community) descent – populations that have radically transformed western Sydney over the last 40 years. It asks: Who are we now, and how do we exist together?

Fairfield City, which stretches from Fairfield and Cabramatta to Horsley Park, is one of the most culturally diverse local government areas in the country. But before this exhibition, some of the only traces of the local Asian population in the FCMG collection were items from a pho restaurant: a white melamine bowl with a red decorative border and a pair of cream-coloured chopsticks.

The gallery wanted to reflect the diversity of the local community, so the team enlisted the help of Phạm, a writer, producer and curator who has previously collaborated with Parramatta Artists' Studios, the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Powerhouse Museum and the State Library of NSW.

Spread across five rooms in the heritage-listed gallery, *Minh* is a dynamic mix of newly commissioned and loaned artworks (borrowed from the artists themselves), as well as a small collection of Vietnamese artefacts like antique pottery and a bronze drum.

Comic autobiographical video *Cabramatta* by Emmy Award-winning visual artist Matt Huynh affectingly weaves collective memory and the external gaze. Like sacred inscriptions, the large-scale painting *Transformation* by My Lê Thi communicates what separates and binds us. Poetry and written works printed on fabric, including *Vietnamese Beauty Tips* by *The Coconut Children* author Vivian Pham, hang on walls like word-tapestries. Visitors are also invited to fold origami boats out of hell bank notes in the work *Article 14.1* by artist Phương Ngô; the boats will be burnt at the end of the exhibition to honour the estimated 500,000 Vietnamese people who lost their lives at sea fleeing the country after the fall of Saigon.

For Phạm, bringing together established and emerging artists from different generations was a deliberate choice to show development within the community and connect past, present and future generations.

The oldest exhibiting artists were born and raised in Vietnam before moving to Australia, and have been creating since the '80s. On the younger side of the spectrum are artists with Vietnamese heritage who were born and grew up in Australia.

Entry to the museum is free.

[fcmg.nsw.gov.au](http://fcmg.nsw.gov.au)