

# Danh Vō and Xiu Xiu "Metal" at The Kitchen, New York / MOUSSE CONTEMPORARY ART MAGAZINE

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The Kitchen is pleased to present “Danh Võ and Xiu Xiu: Metal”. The exhibition is curated by Tim Griffin with Lumi Tan. Having previously remarked that “the passport is the ultimate performance piece”—citing Felix Gonzalez Torres’s understanding of how movement and, by extension, cultural perspective, takes place in a legislated sphere—Võ has invited two Bangkok, Thailand-based gold pounders, Nantapol and Puan Panicharam, to be present in the gallery while producing the gold leaf that often adorns his sculptures, from cardboard cartons featuring brand names from Budweiser to Colgate. This father-and-son team’s process of flattening 24-carat squares of gold into leaf takes three hours to execute; they will be working in the gallery daily from noon to 3pm, Tuesday through Saturday.

In tandem with this duo, the band Xiu Xiu—featuring composer and musician Jamie Stewart with bandmates Shayna Dunkelman and Ches Smith—will present 52 musical compositions, with a daily selection timed cumulatively to match the duration of the gold pounders’ labor. These pieces derive from a variety of compositional techniques, with some made in the vein of new music and entirely notated, while others are either improvised in the mode of post-1950s free jazz or modeled after game structures in which the musicians follow specific sets of rules. As important as the overall duration of these works is the fact that each individual piece is five minutes long; endings are marked by loud sound—

what Stewart calls an alarm—indicating transitions from one piece to the next. At once too long for audiences to ignore and yet too short to settle into as listeners, each piece makes it difficult for producers and receivers alike to establish any stable position in relation to the composition, even while underscoring how work organizes time and, subsequently, life. During performances, the pounders’ rhythm will variously (and inevitably) lead and follow the musicians’ process; as codifications of sound and tone are made unreliable, so are fast definitions of work and its role in the structuring of daily activities and meaning.

In this regard, Vō has also previously expressed his desire to underline calligraphy—with all its historical ties to the development of phonetic language for the purposes of disseminating information to a larger public—as a kind of labor. For “Metal,” Vō’s father Phung Vō has rendered fragments of lyrics from songs by Xiu Xiu, Nico, Rihanna, and the band Berlin (known for its 1986 hit single, “Take My Breath Away”)—as well as passages from writings by Leo Bersani and Artaud, the latter as used previously by artist Nancy Spero—in a large wall drawing and two MDF panels. (Notably for paradoxes among contemporary cultural traversals, Phung does not read or write English; the literary passages are by now part of his repertoire, learned visually.) In counterpoint with these texts are pages from a book on Michelangelo featuring different perspectives on the artist’s sculpture, wherein different views of the same object suggest tension and relaxation—a contradiction summoned by the room’s coincidental modes of production and resolution, unfinished and finished, action and aesthetic. At the same time, these pictures suggest a lasting profile in art for classicism, where artistic execution—particularly when involving such contradiction—inevitably reserves a role for fortuna.