

Teacher Guide

Diane Severin Nguyen: IF REVOLUTION IS A SICKNESS

On view October 28, 2022—February 26, 2023



Diane Severin Nguyen, *As if it's your last*, 2021. LightJet C-print in steel frame, 20 × 16 inches, Collection of J. Patrick Collins.

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#IFREVOLUTIONISASICKNESS

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Exhibition Overview

- *Diane Severin Nguyen: IF REVOLUTION IS A SICKNESS* is the first solo museum exhibition of New York and Los Angeles-based artist Diane Severin Nguyen.
- The exhibition features a video installation, photographs, a site-specific architectural intervention, and the artist's first public art commission in the form of a billboard located in Houston's Midtown neighborhood during the month of January 2023.
- Nguyen's photography mixes the organic and the synthetic into blended sculptures. For example, the photo captured may be in the moments before an object is lit on fire.



Production still from *Diane Severin Nguyen: IF REVOLUTION IS A SICKNESS*, 2021. Courtesy the artist. Photograph by Dawid Misiorny.

- The exhibition is built around the titular video, *IF REVOLUTION IS A SICKNESS*, which is set in Warsaw, Poland and loosely follows the character of an orphaned Vietnamese child who grows up to be taken in by a South Korean pop-inspired dance group.
- Widely popular within a Polish youth subculture, K-pop is used by the artist as a vernacular material to trace a relationship between Eastern Europe and Asia with roots in Cold War allegiances.
- Nguyen's work deals with the process of finding shared symbols and naming oneself from within another's regime, while also positioning youth culture as a critical and crucial site of revolutionary power.
- This division of the East and the West is further complicated by the significant Vietnamese diaspora currently living in Poland, composed of Northerners who migrated before the fall of the Iron Curtain, and Southerners who came in the aftermath of the Vietnam War.

Key Questions

- How do you ground your identity externally and internally? What sources, experiences, media, or surroundings impact your life?
- Examine the lyrics written by Diane Severin Nguyen for her video and think about the importance of language and culture. What impact do her lyrics create?

Note: Some of the lyrics are available in the exhibition pamphlet that accompanies the exhibition and available upon request.
- What are traditions or contributions of diverse cultures that we learn about in these artworks?
- How do artists like Diane Severin Nguyen use history to create new ideas? Why is this important?



Production still from *Diane Severin Nguyen: IF REVOLUTION IS A SICKNESS*, 2021. Courtesy the artist. Photograph by Dawid Misiorny.

Curriculum Connections

Language Arts | Investigate an ethnic group you are not familiar with and list similarities and differences between your culture and the culture you selected. What are traditions or cultural contributions of this group? Write lyrics to a song or a story about your findings and inspirations.

Additional contemporary artists working with themes of language arts - Glenn Ligon, Christopher Knowles, and Lorna Simpson.

History | Choose a historical event that has impacted your family (past or present), your school community, or your culture. For example, Texas immigration policies impact how many Chicanx and Latinx families gather and celebrate holidays. Write a short story about this impact of the past on your present life. List images, music, or other cultural offerings that will assist in showing complex ideas around the impact of the event on your personal life.

Additional contemporary artists working with themes of history - Garrett Bradley, Troy Montes Michie, and Nari Ward.

Experimental Photography | Try a new way to present or exhibit photography or artwork. Diane Severin Nguyen dramatically lights her photographs presenting them in a non-traditional manner. If you do not have space for hanging artwork, write a proposal in a space you would like to have your artwork displayed. For example, explain how you would display your artwork on the walls of CAMH.

Additional contemporary artists experimenting with photography - Tay Butler, Maria Gaspar, and Karen Navarro.