



For Immediate Release



Rendering courtesy of the artist and the High Line.

TUAN ANDREW NGUYEN TO REINCARNATE DESTROYED BAMIYAN BUDDHA ON THE HIGH LINE

The Light That Shines Through the Universe Selected as the 5th High Line Plinth Commission, to go on view in Spring 2026

New York, NY (December 16, 2025) — The High Line today announced the selection of Tuan Andrew Nguyen's *The Light That Shines Through the Universe* as the next High Line Plinth commission. *The Light That Shines Through the Universe* reinvigorates, in 27 feet of sandstone, one of the Bamiyan Buddhas, the monumental statues hewn more than a millennium ago in a cliff in Afghanistan, and destroyed by the Taliban in an act of iconoclasm 25 years ago come March 2026. The fifth High Line Plinth commission, Nguyen's artwork is a profound monument to cultural loss and enduring spirit. Carved in Vietnam, the sculpture will be installed on the High Line in New York City over the intersection of 10th Avenue and 30th Streets in Spring 2026, and will be on view for 18 months.

"Tuan Andrew Nguyen's *The Light That Shines Through the Universe* is a timely monument for our public space," said Cecilia Alemani, the Donald R. Mullen, Jr. Director & Chief Curator of High Line Art. "It stands today as a powerful and poetic counterpoint to extremism and iconoclasm we continue to witness globally. By resurrecting the memory of the lost Bamiyan Buddhas, *The Light That Shines Through the Universe* reminds us that cultural treasures—and shared history—can transcend physical destruction."

"This sculpture is a towering, 27-foot call to remembrance, asserting that our collective memory

HIGH LINE ART



and our shared humanity remain the most enduring antidote against those who seek to break and scatter the human spirit,” said Alan van Capelle, executive director of Friends of the High Line. “What happened to the Buddhas of Bamiyan is not unique and is particularly resonant for many people across this country today who face a real fear of erasure and cultural persecution. A work of this magnitude requires a platform of equal magnitude, and I hope its debut on the Plinth offers people a powerful place to connect and find strength in this moment.”

Nguyen’s sculpture pays homage to the Bamiyan Buddhas, two 6th-century colossal statues in central Afghanistan that were tragically destroyed by the Taliban in 2001. Now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, all that is left are two empty niches carved out of the mountain where the statues once stood. Prior to their destruction, the Bamiyan Buddhas held deep significance across different cultures and religions, even as Afghanistan shifted to become an entirely Islamic nation. They represented a blending of cultures and the lasting impact of the Silk Road economy, as the valley served as an influential meeting point at the intersection of trade routes from China, India, and Persia.

The work’s title directly references the affectionate nickname local communities used for the larger Buddha: “Salsal,” which translates to “the light shines through the universe.” Nguyen’s Plinth commission is not an exact replica of Salsal, but rather an echo, intended to invoke the memory of these lost cultural treasures. In this new context, the name poetically underscores how the original statues have transcended their physical destruction to become a steadfast symbol of life, healing, and peace.

For *The Light That Shines Through the Universe*, the artist reimagines the Buddha’s hands, lost after centuries of attempted iconoclastic attacks, long before the statues were fully destroyed. Cast from melted down brass artillery shells and positioned into mudras, or ritual gestures that signify “fearlessness” and “compassion,” the gleaming hands become symbols of healing and empathy. This prosthetic-like addition also calls to mind limb loss and the continued humanitarian crisis in war-torn regions. By leaving a noticeable gap between the prosthetics and the body, Nguyen poetically suggests that while some damage may be irreparable, there is still hope and potential to heal the land, the spirit, and the people that have experienced tremendous destruction.

In Nguyen’s use of melted down artillery shells, the artist, who resides in Vietnam, also looks to the legacy of the Vietnam War (1955–1975), and the continued violence and trauma that impacts local communities to this day, fifty years after its conclusion. Widely considered to be the largest aerial bombardment in human history, the Vietnam War left the country littered with literal ticking time bombs, unexploded ordnance (UXO)—bombs, grenades, and artillery shells that failed to detonate. In his work, Nguyen explores themes of loss and reincarnation—taking these symbols of violence, laden with history, he melts them down and reshapes them into expressions of healing, resilience, and hope.

Tuan Andrew Nguyen’s artistic practice considers memory, history, and the enduring impact of conflict and violence, particularly in his native Vietnam. In his sculptures and videos, Nguyen presents marginalized or forgotten narratives, giving voice to those whose experiences have been overlooked. Lacuna, or empty space, is a profound throughline—whether it be empty spaces left in the landscape, in bodies, in memories, or in a culture, due to the destruction that comes from war, colonization, and environmental catastrophe. The resulting work serves as a



platform for dialogue and potential repair, examining the spiritual, cultural, and physical residue left by war.

Reincarnation is a recurring motif in Nguyen's work, presented as a spiritual idea and a potent political metaphor. Inherent in the circular pattern of reincarnation is the potential that we all could be interconnected through past or future lives. Through this concept, the artist explores how past injustices persist and manifest in contemporary life, while also offering speculative space to imagine futures for the people, places, or things that were destroyed or forever changed by conflict. By blurring the lines between documentary and fiction, personal and collective trauma, and past and future, Nguyen offers reincarnation as a framework for revisiting history and its many tributaries.

The Light That Shines Through the Universe addresses the necessity of memory and art as counterforces to political extremism and nihilism. Nguyen proposes a potent critique of iconoclasm and the erasure of diverse cultural identities as a weapon of war and political control. Today, as we continue to grapple with a push towards polarizing communities and the suppression of dissenting histories, *The Light That Shines Through the Universe* is particularly poignant.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Tuan Andrew Nguyen (b. 1976, Saigon, Vietnam) lives and works in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Nguyen has had major solo presentations at the New Museum, New York, New York (2023); Fondació Joan Miró, Barcelona, Spain (2024); Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town, South Africa (2024); Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C. (2024); and the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois (2025). The artist's videos and films have been included in major international festivals, biennials, and exhibitions including 36th Bienal de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil (2025); Prospect.6, New Orleans, Louisiana (2024); the 12th Berlin Biennale, Berlin, Germany (2022); Manifesta 14, Prishtina, Kosovo (2022); Aichi Triennale, Aichi Prefecture, Japan (2022); Biennale de Dakar, Dakar, Senegal (2022); Asian Art Biennial, National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taipei, Taiwan (2021); Manifesta 13, Marseille, France (2020); Sharjah Architecture Triennial, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (2019); SOFT POWER, SFMoMA, San Francisco, California (2019); the 2019 Sharjah Biennial, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (2019); 2017 Whitney Biennial, New York, New York (2017); the 55th International Short Film Festival, Oberhausen, Germany (2009); 8th NHK Asian Film Festival, Tokyo, Japan (2007); 18th Singapore International Film Festival (2005) and 4th Bangkok Experimental Film Festival, Bangkok, Thailand (2005). Nguyen has received numerous awards, including the 2023 Joan Miró Prize, 2025 Trellis Art Fund Milestone Grant, and 2025 MacArthur Fellowship. Nguyen recently unveiled two major commissions in October 2025: Temple, at National Gallery Singapore as part of the 2025 Singapore Biennale, and Naga, at Princeton University Art Museum during the unveiling of the museum's new building.

His work is included in the permanent collections of institutions including the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York; Carré d'Art - Musée d'art contemporain de Nîmes, France; Centre national des arts plastiques (CNAP), Paris, France; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas; Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, Iowa; Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; Honolulu Museum of Art, Honolulu, Hawaii; Kadist Art Foundation, San Francisco, California; Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University in St. Louis, St. Louis, Missouri; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas; Museum MACAN, Jakarta, Indonesia; Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York; Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art,



Kansas City, Missouri; Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, Nevada; Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Arizona; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Philadelphia; Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, New Jersey; Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA), Brisbane, Australia; Singapore Art Museum, Singapore; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, New York; Taguchi Art Collection, Japan; The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York; and the Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts.

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ABOUT HIGH LINE ART

Founded in 2009, High Line Art commissions and produces a wide array of artworks on the High Line, including site-specific commissions, exhibitions, performances, video programs, and a series of billboard interventions. Led by Cecilia Alemani, the Donald R. Mullen, Jr. Director & Chief Curator of High Line Art, and presented by the High Line, the art program invites artists to think of creative ways to engage with the unique architecture, history, and design of the park, and to foster a productive dialogue with the surrounding neighborhood and urban landscape.

For more information on High Line Art, please visit thehighline.org/art.

ABOUT THE HIGH LINE

The High Line is a public park on the West Side of Manhattan operated, maintained, and funded by the nonprofit conservancy Friends of the High Line. Through our work with communities on and off the High Line, Friends of the High Line is devoted to reimagining public spaces to create connected, healthy neighborhoods and cities.

Built on a historic, elevated rail line, the High Line was always intended to be more than a park. You can walk through the gardens, view art, experience a performance, enjoy food or beverage, or connect with friends and neighbors—all while enjoying a unique perspective of New York City.



Nearly 100% of our annual operating budget comes through donations. The High Line is owned by the City of New York, and we operate the park under a license agreement with NYC Parks.

For more information, visit thehighline.org and follow us on [Facebook](#), [X](#), [Instagram](#) and [TikTok](#).

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