

FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA TO SKOWHEGAN

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Finding stability and structure in a sea of change has always been a part of [Ha Ninh Pham](#)'s (MFA '18) life.

“I was born in Vietnam and it was right after The Renovation so the communist economy had collapsed and everything was rebuilt,” said the [MFA](#) graduate. “Everything changes so quickly there. Right now if I go back to Vietnam it could be totally different from even one year ago.”

For Pham, his art practice is a way of arranging his thoughts and dealing with the instability in his life. Pham's long-term drawing project *My Land* is a personal navigation tool.

“I think because I've been in a situation where I feel really uncertain about most everything, I think that by building my own land, building my own ethics, I can feel more stable and feel calmer inside my mind,” he said.



Ha Ning Pham (MFA '18) in the studio.



For the past two years, Pham has been tending to the drawing from his private studio at PAFA. He was introduced to the Master's program by PAFA alumni he met in Vietnam. Although he previously studied at the [Vietnam University of Fine Arts](#) and built up a strong set of skills, Pham came to PAFA looking to grow his ideas.

"I didn't know how to bring my art to the people. PAFA helped me in a way that I can contextualize my skill and it really gives me a free space so I can give a lot of my thoughts," he said. "Since my second year, I feel like I've had a very clear approach about my art and I feel quite happy about that because it made me feel more confident in my art."

For his next journey into the unknown Pham is bringing his art to rural Maine. He's been accepted to the [Skowhegan Summer Residency](#) for 2018.

"I feel like I can adapt easily to new situations because I got used to it already in Vietnam," Pham said.

Not knowing what he's getting into this summer is a perk of the program. Skowhegan residency organizers encourage participants to come prepared to work without a preconceived agenda, schedule, or project.

Skowhegan gives artists the opportunity to delve deeply into their practice and immerse themselves into the community of artists.

“They sent me a list of who is going to the program and I did research and I thought, ‘Oh, I really want to meet those people,’” he said. “It’s going to be a very inspiring community and it’s going to be a real once-in-a-lifetime experience for me.”

PAFA is providing funding for Pham and two other graduates to participate in the Skowhegan Residency this summer: faculty member and alumnus [Billy Dufala](#), and painter [Arcmanaro Niles](#) (BFA '13).

“By committing to funding our students and alumni, we assure artists who make it through Skowhegan’s highly competitive admission process will not have to worry about being able to take advantage of this unique opportunity,” said Greg Martino, PAFA’s Director of [Career Services](#).

Previous PAFA graduates who have participated in the program include [Astrid Bowlby](#), [David Dempewolf](#), and [Mariel Capanna](#).

“We’re excited that through this residency our alumni have the opportunity to foster ongoing relationships with other artists, which can lead to collaborative projects, exhibition opportunities and simple visits to new cities or countries,” Martino said.

After this residency, Pham hopes to build up his body of work and experience so he can eventually go back to Vietnam and teach contemporary art.

“I couldn’t have a real contemporary art education in Vietnam and I struggled a lot,” he said. “I think the culture in Vietnam now it has a lot of potential but its underdeveloped.”

He hopes to be part of the change that expands the art world in his home country.