

# Lêna Bùi

*skin in my stomach*

Galerie Urs Meile, Zurich Rämistrasse

November 13, 2025 – January 17, 2026

Opening: Thursday, November 13, 2025, 6 - 8 pm

The artist will be present

Text by Lê Thuân Uyên

*As I sat on the 22-hour flight from New York City to Hanoi, my body began to cramp. Suddenly, Lêna's words – skin in my stomach – began resonating in my mind, with images of her works vividly emerging before me. In that moment, when I was most removed from my familiar physical environment – estranged from everything that the human body has come to register and to know – my connection to them felt even more visceral. The pressurised air, muffled hearing, and spatial vastness intensified this awareness, revealing a sense of vulnerability and silent reflection on how our physical presence links us to the world.*

*skin in my stomach* is the first solo presentation of Lêna Bùi at Galerie Urs Meile where a humble yet rigorous selection of work is featured, charting the artist's exploration of materials, natural forms and the notion of body as an interchangeable reflection of the world, in a variety of media including silk paintings, photography, handwoven tapestry and moving image.

Informed by the body's internal processes and in ecologist David Abrams' concept of the body as "the locus of change", Lêna sees the body as the "direct and only way to experience the world and a place to form or break connections". In many medicinal traditions, the stomach becomes a potent symbol - the seat of nurturing, intuition, and communication, acting as a nexus bridging us with the external world. The artist also sees the human body as a time vessel, one that constantly connects us to our ancestors and the climate that shaped us throughout our history. The stomach, therefore, is the most vulnerable yet the most resilient organ - registering every little change and regulating the body's exchanges with the outside world in an efficient and elegant manner.

This complex idea unfolds from the ground to the lower mezzanine floor in distinctive but integral sections. Upon entering the gallery, visitors will encounter a series of silk works in varying scales and presentations – placed against the wall or erected in the middle of space. The fluctuating translucency of each work is due to the artist's alternate use of materials – from silk layered on silk, to silk on printed photography and silk on paper. Fragile, retentive and hard to control! Silk, in general, "breathes" through its thread, reacting to its immediate environment, consequentially requiring patience, skills as well as adaptability.

Lêna's keen eye often captures fragments of nature - close-up of plants, and intricate life forms - that fascinate her and serve as silent sources of inspiration. These organic details, documented through photographic means, seamlessly find their way into her work, woven through meticulous brushstrokes. She employs wet-silk painting, a technique rooted in Vietnamese artistry, where pigments are layered onto a damp surface, allowing watercolor and ink to flow, blend, and develop gradually. This method lends her images a luminous, ethereal quality, reflecting the translucence of air, humidity, and fleeting moments of life.

Working with silk is an exploration of layered secrets: bright colours can obscure or highlight underlying layers, while darker tones allow glimpses through, creating optical reversals that mirror the complexities of perception. In this, her process echoes the poetic dance of photographic exposure, an act of revealing and concealing, capturing a layered depth of field that invites reflection on the transient, elusive nature of life itself.

Lêna's choice of materials - whether coincidental or deliberate - allows her formal articulation to be in synergy with her subject of interest. Her combination of photographic imagery with her painterly depiction on silk further amplifies this harmony as both mediums hold within themselves their own compelling articulation of time. Together, the paintings form an acute landscape where internal structures are reimagined as intimate, vulnerable and rhythmic, oscillating between concrete imagery and abstract painterly gestures.

Descending from the ground floor to the lower mezzanine, visitors are immersed in a space where tactile memory and ritual converge. In the middle of the space lies *cosmos no. 1*, a carpet meticulously handwoven in Nepal, resting on a raised platform, inviting viewers to walk around. Crafted during Lêna's project with the Oxford University Clinical Research Unit Nepal in Kathmandu, it merges observations of Western science, traditional healing, and spiritual practices. The fine lines of the human figure evoke the ritual of shrouding, woven from designs conceived in collaboration with local weavers of the Surya Rug House, using hand-dyed natural wool. As one spends time with the carpet, its textured surface ground the viewer in a fabric of memory, circular energy flow as well as the endless cycle of life and death.

Surrounding this work, a video projection hums with a hypnotic movement of insects heading towards bright light. Atmospheric and opaque – the works render a complex understanding of mortality and renewal. The murmuring voices, the obscure visuals, and the gentle rhythm of thought weave together into experience - an invitation to contemplate the delicate passage between the seen and unseen.

*skin in my stomach* invites us into a visceral landscape - tactile, haunting, and deeply poetic - where the artist shares her embrace of the intelligence residing within, and where the boundaries between bodily experience and the world blur. For better words, I would like to recite Lêna's own writing:

*It's only now, I feel I'm edging closer to a language of my own to express the world around me and my being in it. Thus, expanding from this body, which is truly mysterious to me, I can somehow feel I've arrived at some form of freedom - to oscillate between a deep sense of wonder and an irreconcilable void, to move between the sublime and the concrete, to zoom out and observe the big connections, while being occupied with the banal, and then to mix them up in stories and in colors. I no longer feel bound by "realism" as in my earlier years, finding that magical realism captures the human condition much closer than any "objective" descriptions for we live as much in our minds as in a physical space.*

Lêna Bùi (b. 1985, Da Nang, Vietnam; currently lives and works in Saigon, Vietnam) received her BA in East Asian Studies from Wesleyan University, USA (2007), with one year in Doshisha University, Japan. Her work has been shown in solo, group exhibitions and screening programmes such as the 15th Shanghai Biennale, China (2025); HEK (House of Electronic Arts), Basel, Switzerland (2025); Bangkok Art Biennale, Thailand (2024); Nguyen Art Foundation, Saigon, Vietnam (2024); Delfina Foundation, London, UK (2023); Asian Film Archive, Singapore (2023); Jeju Biennale, South Korea (2022); the Asia Culture Center, Gwangju, South Korea (2021); Sàn Art, Saigon, Vietnam (2020); Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE (2018); Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany (2017); the Wellcome Collection, London, UK (2013), among others.

Lê Thuân Uyên is a curator based in Hanoi. She currently holds the position of Artistic Director at The Outpost Art Organisation, a private institution committed to the collection and presentation of contemporary art in Vietnam.