



RECLAMATION ART PRACTITIONER
ENVIRONMENT ENGINEER

VIET NGO



Viet Ngo is a Vietnamese-American environmental sculptor specializing in reclamation art, as well as an environmental, water resources, and fluid dynamics engineer. He is regarded as one of the pioneering figures in the Environmental Art movement, particularly in Land Art, in the United States during the 1970s and 80s. He is known for land art works at state and national scale, with pieces in various locations around the world that aim to transform infrastructure and wastewater treatment facilities into landscape-scale artworks combining aesthetic value with practical benefit for residents' living environments.

Viet Ngo earned a Bachelor's degree in 1972 and a Master's degree in 1977 in Infrastructure Engineering, with a focus on Water and Environmental Engineering, from the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, MN, USA. Concurrently, he pursued Fine Arts at the same institution. At the time, he rented a studio to produce early works on a large scale — room-filling pieces weighing several tons. Despite receiving considerable encouragement to pursue printmaking and photography, he chose to commit his practice to working with the physical world. His pursuit of fine arts as a course of study ended after advice from one of his professors, who suggested he become an engineer instead, believing this would best support his artistic practice in the long run. Over the following two years, he completed Ph.D. coursework in Civil Engineering, specializing in Environmental Engineering, Fluid Dynamics, and Computer Modeling, also at the University of Minnesota.

In 1983, he co-founded Lemna Corporation, Inc., holding exclusive patents granted by the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) for a biological filtration system combining winding channel topography with aquatic plant structures — the Lemna System. This patent served as validation that led the U.S. government to award millions of dollars to his projects, which doubled as artworks. Within four years, a facility spanning hundreds of acres had been built by Lemna at Devils Lake, North Dakota, becoming the first landmark — recognized by both the art world and the scientific community — of using duckweed for wastewater treatment.



Located next to the Devils Lake Regional Airport, the project draws inspiration from Native American culture — the ceremonial mounds of the Sioux people — and the imagery of the sacred serpent, leading him to design a winding wastewater channel system spanning over two miles. This filtration system became a striking landscape when viewed from above, seen through aerial photography from an airplane. If contemporary Land Art artists like Robert Smithson used excavators to arrange raw earth and rock into Spiral Jetty, and Christo and Jeanne-Claude wrapped monuments and landscape in fabric, Viet Ngo used hydraulic and biological patented systems to turn wastewater flow and vegetation into dynamic “paint”. These works earned numerous awards and were recognized by art researchers such as Sue Spaid and Jeffrey Kastner, who included him among the notable ecological artists of his era alongside legends like Robert Smithson, Isamu Noguchi, and Christo, Jeanne-Claude...



The water filtration system at Devils Lake, North Dakota, USA, is categorized as a quintessential Eco-Art initiative designed to transform human interaction with the environment.

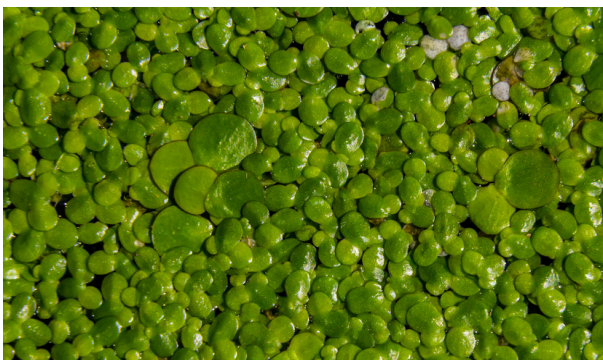
Over more than 40 years of work across 25 countries, Viet Ngo has completed nearly 600 national-scale projects of this kind. Notable works include the Wastewater Treatment Pond Sculpture (1993) in Cleveland, Georgia, USA; the Waterpark & Lemna Park Project series (in Minnesota and several other U.S. states); wastewater treatment and water-surface sculpture projects in Mexico; and water infrastructure and ecological projects in Nigeria, Venezuela, Slovenia, Poland, Italy, Turkey, and Belgium, among others. Beyond public art and landscape art, his integration of engineering science with landform and earthworks design transformed massive infrastructure projects into living sculptures. Photographs, technical drawings, and models of his renowned Land Art works (such as Devils Lake) have been exhibited through several international art programs organized by the Smithsonian Institution. Viet Ngo's name and ecological sculpture models appear in international historical research on land/eco-art, and are taught and cited at art universities worldwide.



The LemTec gas collection system was specifically designed to work with wastewater treatment ponds, enabling biogas collection and fuel use in multiple countries.

Photo: in Slovenia

Art researcher and author Jeffrey Kastner, in his book *Land and Environment Art*, argues that Viet Ngo broke through the limitations of the earlier generation of Land Art. Specifically, the Land Art movement of the 1960s–70s (represented by figures such as Robert Smithson and Michael Heizer) typically acted upon untouched, wild landscapes, often in desert regions, to create aesthetic forms. In book, Viet Ngo's projects (notably the Devils Lake Wastewater Treatment Plant) are used as a defining example of a new generation of artists: bringing Land Art back into service of the community, transforming polluted sites or wasteland into ecological sculpture parks.



The wastewater filtration system using Lemnaceae duckweed brought him an exclusive patent — also the foundation that enabled him to realize massive land art works around the world.

In 2010, Viet Ngo came to Vietnam and founded Vietstar, a waste treatment plant with a capacity of 2,000 tons per day, serving over 2 million residents of Ho Chi Minh City. From there, his interest turned to the identity of "retired" waste, as well as concerns around microplastics in water and oceans. He works with trash, machine scraps, and workers from the plant. He interrogates the future of waste, engages with the concept of material empathy that humans can share with machines weighing hundreds of tons, co-creates with them, and transforms them into artistic discourse.

Viet Ngo founded a waste sorting and processing facility with a capacity of 2,000 tons per day. In this setting, he commenced the transformation of waste and scrap materials into innovative artistic expressions.

planet

BLU ■



In 2026, he established planetBLU ■ with the intention of actualizing Reclamation Art projects to interrogate the future of waste and humanity. This significant milestone also unveils a collection of sculptures created from "retired" machines after 15 years of processing millions of tons of waste. The first work listing, entitled giANTs ■, is set to debut to the public in November-December 2026 in Ho Chi Minh City, providing a platform for these post-machines to engage in dialogue and communicate with the city they have served for over 15 years.

EARLY WORKS



Desiderata | 1980s
black Belgian marble 3.5m



Lullaby I 1980s
Acer saccharinum
3mx3m



Tea for Two | 1980s
White American maple,
black African ebony,
black Belgian marble
8mx6m



ARTIST'S STATEMENT

My work integrates engineering, architectural design, and art. I'm interested in the material world, horizontal architecture, land, and the aliveness of all these elements. In practice, I follow a philosophy of minimal intervention, or none at all. That respect is for nature, for things that belong to nature, while also needing to be comfortable for laborers and appealing to the landscape. With the work itself, I'm merely a cheerleader. I work with what already exists within ecology or labor, optimizing natural processes so that the forms of life within the landscape or material can continue on in the shape of new artistic discourse.

According to Land and Environment Art (1997) by Jeffrey Kastner, with research support from Brian Wallis.

"Viet Ngo finds personal fulfillment through projects that are environmentally responsible and beneficial to society. Being naturally patient, he understands that many projects can take ten or twenty years before achieving lasting results — a cleaner environment, for instance. But arriving at that result is, for him, the most meaningful form of art, as well as a business philosophy that has led to international success."

According to artist and landscape designer Regina M. Flanagan (USA), in the article "Art Treatment" published in the July 2004 issue of Fabric Architecture magazine.



ACADEMICS

Bachelor of Fine Arts Coursework

B.S. and M.S. in Civil Engineering (Water Resources and Environmental Engineering), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN, USA

Ph.D. Coursework in Civil Engineering (Fluid Dynamics and Computer Modeling) St. Anthony Falls Hydraulic Laboratory, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN, USA

ACHIEVEMENTS

Viet Ngo's career has not followed the well-worn path of a traditional artist (one built through accumulating awards from art competitions or recognition from art councils). Instead, he has been recognized through honors bestowed on notable public figures, groundbreaking patents, and acknowledgment from the international academic and technical-art community:

- Minnesota Business Hall of Fame (2010)
- TCB 100 / Person of the Year Award (Twin Cities Business, USA)
- Member and Former Chairman, MN/ACEC Legislative Committee
- Member, American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE)
- Member, National Academy of Sciences, Committee for Measuring and Improving Infrastructure, Washington, DC
- Inductee, Minnesota Business Hall of Fame – Lifetime Achievement Award
- Delegate accompanying three U.S. Secretaries of Commerce on global trade missions in Africa, Asia, and Europe, representing the U.S. Environmental Industry.

Author and investor in the inaugural wastewater treatment BOT project in Guangzhou, China – a groundbreaking Sino-U.S. joint venture.

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*President and CEO
Lemna Corporation, Inc.,
Minneapolis, MN, USA*

*Founder and General Manager,
Vietstar JSC
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam*

*Founder
planetBLU, 
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam*



Recognition from Art Historiography & Criticism

Selection by the Smithsonian Museums and Institutes:

His water sculpture project was chosen by the **Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES)** for inclusion in the large-scale contemporary art exhibition series **An Ocean Apart**, showcased at prominent museums throughout the United States. (From the book *An Ocean Apart* - 1996 - Curated/Essay written by Jeffrey Hantover. Vietnamese translation by Nguyen Ngoc Bich)

Exhibition "Ecovention: Current Art to Transform Ecologies" (2002) – Contemporary Arts Center (CAC), Cincinnati, Ohio:

A landmark exhibition honoring the Eco-Art/Ecovention movement, bringing together internationally renowned artists including Robert Smithson, Agnes Denes, Betsy Damon, and Viet Ngo.

Global Eco-Art Network: Viet Ngo's name and ecological sculpture models appear in international research literature on Land Art/Eco-Art, and are taught and cited at fine arts universities around the world.

PATENTS

Lemna System Technology (1983):

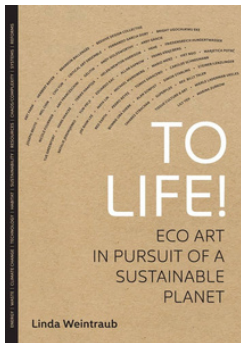
Exclusive patents for a biological filtration system combining winding channel landform structures with aquatic plant beds. This combination allows wastewater treatment plants to meet strict environmental standards while transforming them into large-scale earth sculptures.

CURRICULUM & SYLLABUS

Incorporated into curricula at institutions such as the University of Minnesota, Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD), and UC Berkeley, within coursework on Ecological Landform Design and Stormwater/Wastewater Art.

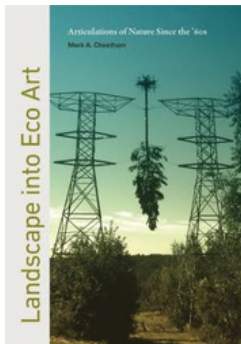
Contemporary Art History Eco-Art (Art History / Fine Arts) Program: Featured Included in reading lists for courses on Land Art, Earthworks, and Eco-Art / Art and Ecology at American universities (drawing on syllabi referencing books by Linda Weintraub, Suzanne Lacy, and Sue Spaid).

SELECTED BOOKS



"To Life!: Eco Art in Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet"; (2012) by academic Linda Weintraub (University of California Press):

The book places Viet Ngo among a group of pioneering artists who work at corporate/public-infrastructure scale to practice "Corporate-Scale Eco Art." His work is presented as a model for transforming technical infrastructure systems into ecological art experiences.



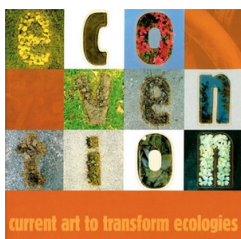
"Landscape into Eco Art: Articulations of Nature Since the "60s" (2018) by Mark A. Cheetham (Penn State University Press):

The book directly discusses Viet Ngo's large-scale Devils Lake Wastewater Treatment Plant project in North Dakota (1990). The author classifies this project among the defining Eco-Art works that reshape how humans relate to the environment through the fusion of engineering and landform art.



“Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art”; (1995), edited by Suzanne Lacy (Bay Press):

A canonical text on "New Genre Public Art." Viet Ngo is included in the Artist Compendium. The book recognizes him as a pioneer in unifying civil engineering, architectural planning, ecology, and sculpture to create functional "water parks."



"Ecovention: Current Art to Transform Ecologies"; (2002) by Sue Spaid (Published by Contemporary Arts Center - CAC Cincinnati):

A catalog study of the Ecovention movement (Art + Invention + Ecology). Viet Ngo is studied alongside legendary artists such as Robert Smithson, Agnes Denes, Mel Chin, and Patricia Johanson.



"Land and Environmental Art"; (1998) by Jeffrey Kastner, with research support from Brian Wallis, PHAIDON Publishers:

Regarded as a foundational text in international fine arts/art history curricula on the subject of Land Art, the author cites Viet Ngo as a leading representative of the shift from traditional Land Art toward pragmatic Eco-Art/Environmental Art. The author notes Viet Ngo as an artist and civil engineer; this technical foundation allowed him to create works that move beyond pure artistic symbolism to become "non-art manifestations" — functional infrastructure that carries both landscape-sculptural value and directly addresses real-world environmental pollution.