

## Los Angeles Times

**Around the Galleries**  
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**A Tension From Innocence Lost**  
**By Leah Ollman**  
*Special to The Times*

The tension in **Pipo Nguyen-duy's** photographs is a subtle thing. Battle armor doesn't clang and clash; storm clouds don't erupt with violent force. Instead, the pictures exude a stability that seems to be eroding from the inside out.

In the dozen stirring images at the Sam Lee Gallery, Pipo creates a strong sense of place only to use it as a setting for small dramas of displacement. Within the expansive beauty of the North American landscape, he conveys the predicament of feeling adrift—without tools, means or directions.

Members of a marching band, bedecked in red and white, pause solemnly beside a creek, leaning against tree trunks or sitting on fallen logs. The leafless forest behind them seems miles from any parade. In another picture, a stuffed recliner settles surreally into the shallow waters of a pond. "Nomad" features a young man standing resignedly in a murky stream, a suitcase half-immersed nearby, luminous woods spreading around him in unacknowledged splendor.

Pipo's pictures read as allegorical tableaux, slightly stilted scenes orchestrated to emblemize a particular condition. The Vietnamese-born photographer, a refugee at 13 and now a professor at Oberlin College, started this "East of Eden" series in the summer after Sept. 11, 2001.

Even when showing camouflaged snipers skulking in the woods and fencers oddly rehearsing in a snowy clearing, his compositions are keyed to loss and trauma. What have been lost in the making of this new "landscape of anxiety," as the artist calls it, are innocence, purity, an abiding sense of security, the same things he lost as a child living through the Vietnam War. This nation's surfaces still appear intact—and in the case of the natural landscape, awesome even—but its soul is most definitely in trouble.

**Sam Lee Gallery**, 990 N. Hill St., No. 190, (323) 227-0275, through Oct. 20. Closed Sundays through Tuesdays. [www.samleegallery.com](http://www.samleegallery.com)