

 72<sup>e</sup> Internationale  
Filmfestspiele  
Berlin  
Forum



26th BUSAN  
International Film Festival

A FILM BY BUI KIM QUY

# MEMORYLAND

VU MONG GIAO

NGUYEN THI THU TRANG

NGUYEN VAN THAI

BUI THI MINH PHUONG



# MEMORYLAND

## MIỀN KÝ ỨC

**Year:** 2021  
**Countries:** Vietnam/Germany  
**Runtime:** 99 minutes  
**Technical Info:** DCP, 1.85:1, Color, 5.1 Sound  
**Language:** Vietnamese  
**Subtitles:** English  
**Production:** CineHanoi, Scarlet Visions GmbH, Scarab Film

**World Sales:** Diversion  
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## LOGLINE

They have nurtured the love, that leads them to their own death in a homeland, where everything is slowly fading into nothing more than a memory.

## SYNOPSIS

The 3 stories of **Send-off – Nether-World – This-World** take place in 3 different strips of time, space & locations, closely connected by death.

**Send-off** tells the story of Moc Mien's husband, who was killed in a construction site's – a deadly accident and later incinerated at Cremation Chamber No.4. An old woman named Me took her last breath in the illusion of being farewelled by her kin, Tho, an old man living in the same village, dug a grave for her so that she could rest on her homeland. However, her son decided to escort her coffin to the Cremation Chamber No.4.

**Nether-World** tells the story of Tuong – Me's former husband who is required to visit the land of the dead and retrieve his identification papers kept by his wife. Moc Mien has to bring her husband's ashes back to the graves of the ancestors and since then became caretaker of incense burning rituals. She struggles against the boredom of being a lonely widow in a desolate village filled with ghosts.

**This-World** tells the story of Tho and Thi, an old couple who don't want to have their bodies cremated after death. They secretly hire Son – director of an all in one package funeral service company – to arrange their funeral ceremonies. Meanwhile, Moc Mien has just left her home for the city where she meets Tuong and then lives with him. After that, his sudden disappearance sends her into the depth of despair. She commits suicide in their shared house. At the end of the film, Tuong comes back home, eats Moc Mien's ashes and then dies. His dead body is incinerated at Cremation Chamber No.4.





## OUR STORY

This story needed to be told because culture can not die to enrich the archeology.

The rapid urbanization of the North of Vietnam, where I am living, has led to the birth of many generations of younger people who have lost their roots - they do not know and understand much about their history and origins. Generations of parents and grandparents go ahead, leading to the erosion of traditional cultural values, and finally disappearing forever. To put it bluntly, we/they enrich our archeology.

The supernatural spiritual experience is one of the attractive elements - because of its powerful characteristic on the mind and mental of human. From a traditional and historical perspective, the East Asian culture was not under pressure of the traditional Western Enlightenment philosophy, at least until the late 19th century. This may explain some of the interesting mystery fogs to those who do not come from this culture.

The cruel turn of material life makes many people simply not have enough time and energy to think of them in a meaningful way. If we believe in the cinema's public dialogue, this project will provide viewers with more information and understanding of the trends of human and social development in the developing East Asian countries, brings talkings and dialogues - and hopefully both connection and empathy - becomes possible.

I am the best person who should tell this story, because this is my hometown, where part of the truth take place. In 2010, my father died, worried that his children would spend money, time and struggling to do the funeral, so he left his will to bring his body cremated. But we did not follow that will, we held a traditional funeral. When experiencing the spiritual world, I realized that my father was satisfied with the funeral as it happened. These private experiences affect my emotions, and the image processing in the film.

I was born in the suburbs of Hanoi. When I grew up, I had the opportunity to experience different regions of North Vietnam. Each region brought me an impression of what is or was gone. Like a funeral in accordance with the ancient is almost no longer, people are so busy allowing themselves less culture habits in the region. This creates the term the conflict between people who is about to die and people who is alive, between people who is dead and people who is alive, between the death and the living. I always regret this.

Kim Quy Bui



# WRITER'S STATEMENT

BY KIM QUY BUI

My father passed away in 2010. Worried that his children would waste time and money if his funeral were to follow old traditions, he wished to be cremated. We did not follow his will, however, and buried him following the old traditions. At his funeral, I experienced a dip into the spiritual world. I knew he was content with how it went. That personal experience affected my emotion, and shaped this story.

The world in which our characters live is a world of conscience haunting griefs, of gloomy ruptures between human relations, and of an illusory spiritual world which clings to humankind in his terminal loneliness. I wrote the script a number of times, switching between different narrative techniques, but kept the soul of the story unchanged. I only finished my writing period after I found a way to tell this story in 3 parts, each of them completing a subject.

**Part 1 – FAREWELL.** I spoke about Death, and the main struggle between human and death, especially the decaying of the body.

**Part 2 – SEND-OFF.** I established the emotional connection between human and the world after death. I distinctly described Nether World as being beautiful, motionless, and without any menace, demon, or evil. In this world, the main struggle happens inside each person: between him and his own fear, loneliness, or feelings of guilt.

**Part 3 – THIS WORLD.** Where the characters live, and lived. The conflicts that took place between them lead to self destruction. And because of that, life withered. I also wanted to talk about the mutuality between lives in nature.

The cinematic language is a sum of multiple elements: magical realism, symbolism, conventionalism, social and spiritual reality, and traditional and cultural factors of northern Vietnamese residents.

# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

BY KIM QUY BUI

I didn't have any academic education on how to be a director or editor. I can't say anything theoretical about what to do as a director or how to edit a film. All I did with this story is based on my emotions and my feelings about rhythm: the tempo of character developments, the drifting of the scenes, and the rhythm of the sound when suffocated in a closed space, or when diluted in a boundless ruined world. The camera mainly shows us the view of the narrator, sometimes mixed with the characters' points of view of their relative space in the film. The alternations of speed and length of scenes at the editing stage was done with an intention to create a rhythm of loneliness, grief, and disorientation.

There are no direct dialogues or direct connections between characters, but through their relative position in the scenes – the movement within and distance to the frames – we can feel the bond of each relationship strengthening or weakening.

The countryside, with its dreary abandoned houses and frames describing invisible glances, is the opposite to a crowded upright city, with its endowment of dangers. These elements combined with the use of contrasting sounds static noise from a radio, the silence of an abandoned house, the howling of animals, the quietness of a human, the noise of a construction site, and a funeral tune – produce a subdued, grievous feeling of humanity.

With Mr. Tường, I suppress the movement of his body. Only his consciousness is moving through the choices of still frames. His inside is also still, and his sudden appearance occurs at various locations in the film. With Mộc Miên, I let her be moved more by her sexual desires, her desire to escape loneliness and boredom. There are two women of the same age: Thi and Mễ. One dies at the start of the story, another lives to wait for her own death. With each of them limited the close ups and forward facing compositions to create a feeling of distance and separation from normal life. With the beautiful and poetic scene of the Nether World, I prioritized a movement between shots, as the human minds mixed up and erased those movements.



The main theme is described through the funeral music system: the traditional *trèo đò* (boat rowing) tune in northern Vietnamese funerals reminds the just departed souls about things they should avoid and leads them to the Nether World. The hired criers, who are acting for people who don't have the physical strength, emotion, or can't be present at the funeral to cry for the departed, have their own crying chant, normally harrowing and dreary.

Colours of the houses and characters' outfits: characters who live in the city dress in shades of grey, smog, and funeral black, while characters who live in the countryside are clothed in a distinctive yellow – the colour chosen by the northern Vietnam residents to paint their houses before the Lunar New Year or a wedding. This yellow is the symbol of a bountiful harvesting season, the colour of joy and happiness in the life of the farmers when they see the golden glow of rice and maize on their lands.

The use of song: the song "Giọt mưa thu" ("The Autumn's Raindrop") by Đặng Thế Phong tells the story of "The Cowherd and the Weaver Girl". In the tale, the Cowherd had the responsibility of looking after the Jade Emperor's cows. He fell in love with the Weaver Girl – one of the Emperor's daughters – and neglected his duty. The cows stampeded into the Jade Emperor's palace. The Weaver Girl, mesmerized by the Cowherd's flute, forgot to weave. The Jade Emperor was angered and punished them with separation, forcing them to live on each end of the Milky Way. Later on, however, moved by their love, the Jade Emperor finally let them meet each other once per year on July 7th of the lunar calendar. Each time the two had to separate again, they cried a river. Their tears dropped onto earth like rain, in what is called *mưa ngâu*. The 7th of July is an important date in the film, when people die. The ancient proverb in the dialogues delivers the subject of "past life's debt" in the relationships between husband and wife, child with parents, and human with human. The world of people in the film is a world of deep sorrows that haunts the human conscience, the ruptures in the gloomy and dusty relationships of dust and ash, of concrete and crematorium.



The film uses a system of symbols: betel and areca nut, chinaberry wood, funeral scarf, funeral flower and colour. Also, ancient proverbs are deployed through dialogues between the characters to transmit the theme of "Fate" in the film's various relationships.

Even when it is fictitious, I do not fabricate. I try to create an invisible, magical, and spiritual world to point to the cruel reality characters lose, and then try to worship.

The theme of the story is described through the props in the film: wedding photos were taken in Hanoi, but they are kept in the abandoned house. Betel and areca nuts express spousal relationships. The altar worship of joss paper in the Nether World sends a message

about the relationship between the living with the dead and the deficiency of human life with the desire for a perfect life. The surreal garden from the Nether World has only the roots on a large white cloth, stylized from mourning scarves that reveal the human soul. An ancient incense bowl is the most sacred object in every family; many people can go or die, but the incense bowl will pass on from generation to generation. In this film it alternates from the countryside to the city.

The story is also transmitted through lighting, which arranges character positions in the film. In particular, the natural light source at sunset: Mộc Miên digging her husband's grave, Tho excavating the grave for Mẹ, and Mộc Miên and Mr. Tường dying at sunset. This is the moment when life fades away. The compositions in the spaces of the living characters utilize a faint light source, which is set against with the intensity of the black.

In addition, smaller themed stories are interwoven, such as Mộc Miên with the pig in heat, Son "Coffin" with his desire to marry, My Hanh who is happy with their new house, and the fortune teller with their spiritual predictions, while we also see divination through betel and areca nuts, betraying instability and a loss of faith in the living world.



## **DIRECTOR KIM QUY BUI**

Bui Kim Quy was born in 1983 in Ha Noi, Viet Nam. She graduated with a B.A in Screenwriting at the Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Cinema in 2006.

She has written and directed these following screenplays and short films: The Sheet (Sponsored by the Ford Foundation in 2002 - Best Short Film Award Golden Kite in 2003); Why is there no moon during the day (Sponsored by the Medical Committee of Netherlands in 2006), both were screened at Tampere Film Festival 2009; Angel of dreams (Sponsored by the Ford Foundation in 2005 - Awarded by Vietnam Film Association 2007); 35mm Passed The New Year's Eve (Sponsored by the Ford Foundation in 2006).

Her screenwriting credits for full-length films include: RH108 (Produced and released by Thien Ngan Galaxy in 2011); Love Puzzle (Produced and released by Thien Ngan Galaxy in 2012); Dream State (The highest award for the script file in HAF - Meeting of the Hong Kong film financing - Hong Kong Film Festival 2011); Piggyback (Sponsored by the TUVAN production 2014); "Strangers" (Sponsored by the TUVAN production 2014). She has also written several nationally broadcasted TV series.

She works as film lecturer at the TPD Center of The Vietnam Cinema Association; Arena School of Multimedia Education, and the Hà Nội Academy of Theater and Cinema.

In 2013, Bui Kim Quy wrote "The Inseminator" her debut full-length feature film as a director. The film had its world premier at Busan International Film Festival 2014. "The Inseminator" has received the Best photography award at Asean International Film Festival 2015 and 3 nominations from: Kolkata International Film Festival, 2014, T-Mobile New Horizons International Film Festival 2015, Taipei Film Festival 2015.

Quy's latest feature film is "Memoryland", which was supported by Asian Cinema Fund 2017, Purin Pictures Grant 2019 and was chosen for Berlinale Talents 2017. Memoryland had its world premiere at 26th Busan International Film Festival, in New Currents competition.



## **PRODUCER XUAN TRUONG DANG**

Dang Xuan Truong is a Vietnamese art director, cinematographer and film producer. He's well known for the role as Director of Photography for Thu Ha Tran's latest music video clip named Mong. In the field of theater, he is known for his role as stage director, lighting, photography of concert programs, live shows, fashion shows. In the field of painting, Dang Xuan Truong arranges paintings and sculptures by contemporary Vietnamese painters such as: Lu Hung Anh, Do Tuan Anh, Truong Tien Tra, Doan Xuan Don, Lu Truc Son, Duong Thuy Duong. Xuan Truong Dang produced "The Inseminator" 2014 and "Memoryland" 2021.

## **PRODUCER MAI NGUYEN**

Mai Nguyen was born in Vietnam. She graduated with Bachelor of Art in film directing at Mittweida University in Germany. Mai Nguyen is the producer of Scarlet Visions GmbH based in Munich. She produced The Inseminator (2014) and Memoryland (2021). Along with the German producer Alexander van Dülmen, Paul Higginson the former Fox's executive vice president and director Roger Donaldson, Mai Nguyen currently co-produces a mini series about the Vietnam War named Nhiem.

## CAST

Vu Mong Giao - **Mr. Tuong**  
Nguyen Thi Thu Trang - **Moc Mien**  
Nguyen Van Thai - **Mr. Tho**  
Bui Thi Minh Phuong - **Mrs. Thi**  
Dao Duc Thanh - **Duc Hieu**  
Hoang Nong Nguyet Linh - **My Hanh**  
Dang Ngoc Dung - **Son**  
Thuy Tan - **Me**  
Le Anh Tuan - **Bus driver assistant**  
Nguyen Trung Kien - **Bandit 1**  
Nguyen Dinh Van - **Bandit 2**  
Pham Thanh Binh - **Moc Mien's husband**  
Nguyen Tung Phong - **Doan's brother**  
Tran Quang Minh - **Doan's brother**  
Tran Thi Lieu - **Moc Mien's sister in law**  
Tran Thi Thanh Phong - **Moc Mien's sister in law**



## CREDITS

**Directed and written by:** Kim Quy Bui  
**DoP:** Xuan Truong Dang  
**Produced by:** Xuan Truong Dang, Mai Nguyen  
**Executive Producer:** Mai Nguyen, Kim Quy Bui, Nicole Pham  
**Production Designer:** Xuan Truong Dang  
**Editor:** Kim Quy Bui, Do Huy Tao  
**Sound Designer:** Arnaud Soulier  
**Producer's Assistant:** Nguyen Thu Trang, Nguyen My Anh, Dinh Thuy Tien  
**Camera Operator:** Nguyen Trung Kien  
**Flycam Operator:** Pascal Zeimet  
**Data Wrangler:** Nguyen Anh Tuan  
**Line Producer:** Hoang Nong Nguyet Linh, Nguyen Hong Dang, Ngo Thu Lan  
**Assistant Director:** Le Anh Tuan  
**Location Recordists:** Christian Jilka, Arnaud Soulier  
**Boom Operator:** Le Anh Tuan, Nguyen Duy Thanh  
**Gaffer:** Xuan Truong Dang, Nguyen Trung Kien  
**Best Boy:** Nguyen Trung Kien  
**Set Dresser & Prop Master:** Le Anh Tuan, Nguyen Trung Kien  
**Props Builder:** Nguyen Dinh Van  
**Post Production Supervisor:** Lee Chatametikool

**Post Producer:** Pupapt Chirattikanon  
**Colorist:** Sorawich Khunpinij  
**Assistant Colorist:** Jirayu Jangwattanapong  
**Props Builder:** Nguyen Dinh Van  
**Post Production Supervisor:** Lee Chatametikool  
**Post Producer:** Pupapt Chirattikanon  
**Colorist:** Sorawich Khunpinij  
**Assistant Colorist:** Jirayu Jangwattanapong  
**Digital Conform:** Supanai Chotechuangsab  
**Visual Effects Artist:** Sirawit Supaptay  
**Sound Post Production Supervisor:** Traithep Wongpaiboon  
**Foley Recordist:** Narongsak Deetae, Amarnpong Thokaeonopparat  
**Foley Editor:** Chawakorn Tongkua, Kittanon Plianpran  
**Production Coordinator:** Aoun Patiporn, Chatlada Saijaiouab, Veerin Kongsuwan  
**Re-Recording Mixer:** Akritchalerm Kalayanamir  
**Transportation:** Dao Van Thang  
**Artist:** Dang Xuan Truong, Do Hiep, Ly Hung Anh, Nguyen Trung Kien, Doan Xuan Tang  
**Hair & Make-up:** Thu Trang Nguyen, Mai Nguyen



A person with their back to the camera stands in the center of a gallery. They are surrounded by large, vertical panels of white fabric that have been painted with dark ink washes of tree branches and foliage. The lighting is soft and even, highlighting the texture of the fabric and the intricate details of the ink paintings. The overall atmosphere is serene and artistic.

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