

Ela Bittencourt, 'Familiar Yet Strange: Shorts From This Year's Projection Showcase at the NY Film Fest,' *Hyperallergic*, October 4 2019 (excerpt)

HYPERALLERGIC

FILM

Familiar Yet Strange: Shorts From This Year's Projections Showcase at the NY Film Fest

Devoted to experimental film and video work, the annual sidebar presents a range of shorts that explore the negotiation of identity in manners both playful and stark.

Ela Bittencourt October 4, 2019



From *Tyrant Star* (2019), dir. Diane Severin Nguyen

The same shorts program, titled, [Signs of Life](#), includes Diane Severin Nguyen's rapturous short, *Tyrant Star*, which takes place around an urban periphery in Vietnam. The film's landscape alternates between tall buildings and construction sites, and forest paths strewn with garbage and organic waste. In the voiceover, lovers speak of romance crushed by material hardships. Nguyen creates a world that is familiar yet strange. Though the waste is a recognizable sign of densely populated urban areas, in her short, bright plastic bags float amidst the greenery like ripe exotic fruits, and sensuality pervades each frame, as fans and other electric devices hum and whirr, as if infected with the heat of the lovers' discourse. The story then slips into a feverish dream, when a young girl gazes out through her gauzy blush-pistachio colored curtains, and sings Simon & Garfunkel's *The Sound of Silence*, watching herself perform on a laptop — a stylized reenactment of a fantasy that, in our mediated age, many teenagers, rich and poor, find at their fingertips.