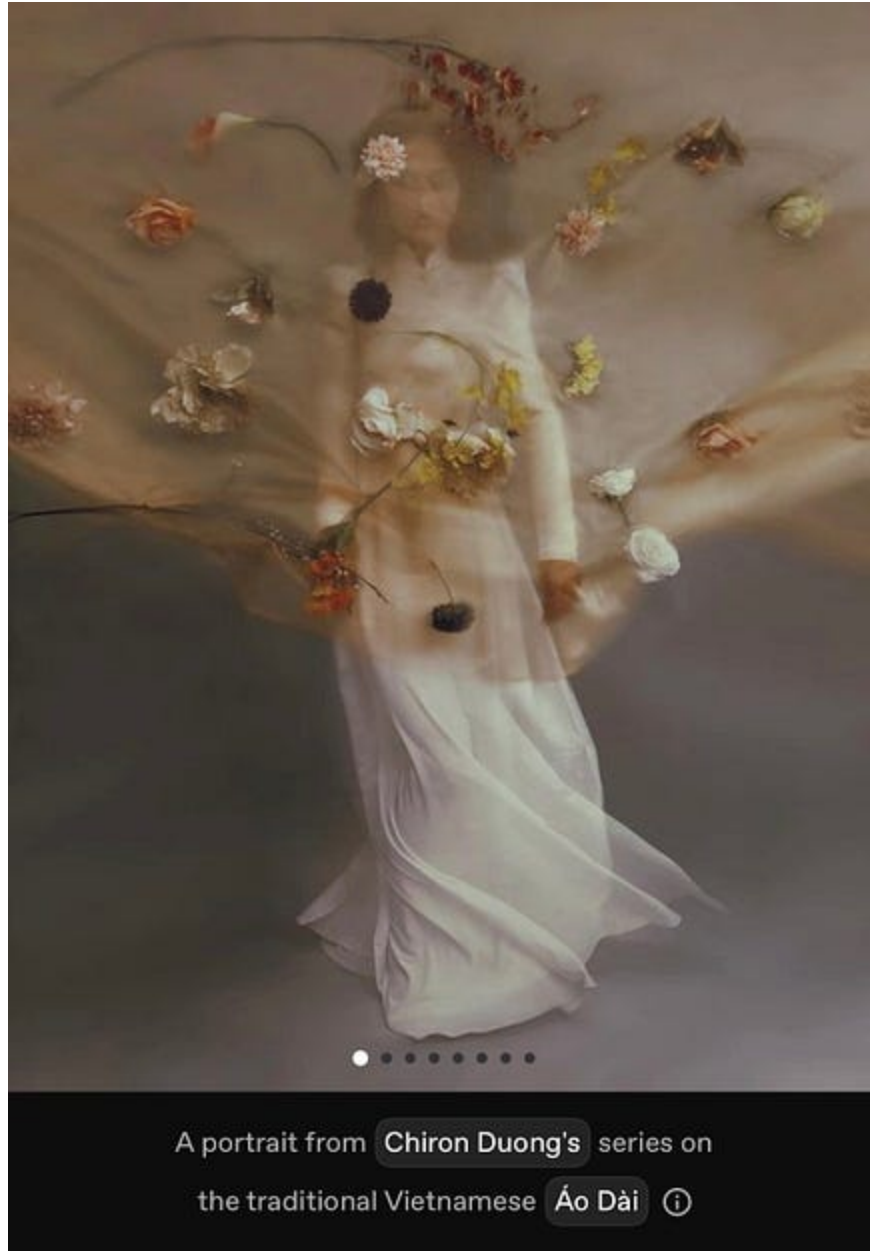


On Building Without a Blueprint



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FEB 25, 2026



A portrait from **Chiron Duong's** series on
the traditional Vietnamese **Áo Dài** ⓘ

We often mistake direction for development.

Early on, we were taught that work comes with a map. Follow the path. Choose the lane. Climb the structure. For some people, that holds. For many creatives, it never quite did.

And so I absorbed the belief that if I couldn't move in a straight line toward something clear and recognizable, then I must be the variable that needed correcting.

Because that is what we are taught.

Clearly established paths. Hierarchies. Structured ascent. These were the markers of a developed career. Of preeminence. Of legitimacy.

One assumes to be successful, to be masterful, we must attain these very deliberate and specific milestones. And the models and the archetypes they carry are often the symbols of success and achievement. Imbued with the belief of attained honor and fulfillment.

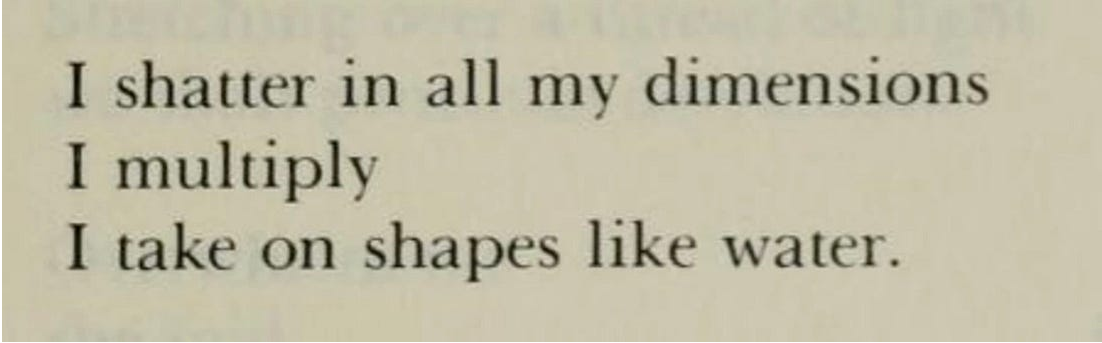
Creative minds who were told they lack focus. That their interests, too wide. That their path, unclear. That if, more disciplined, more committed, more refined, their work would finally settle into something stable.

I tried to believe that.

To strive for that, to look for the right answers and guideposts. To wait for clarity.

But creative work does not move in straight lines.

It gathers. It circles back. It deepens in places that once felt resolved. It widens before it narrows. It shifts shape based on its own becoming.



I shatter in all my dimensions
I multiply
I take on shapes like water.

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From the outside, that can look like inconsistency. Chaos, to perception shaped by older structures

From the inside, it feels coherent. Alive. In process. The problem was never discipline. It was measurement.

Most inherited models of work and progress mistake upward mobility for the only form of growth. They assume direction is linear. Sequential. One rung at a time. Rising through the hierarchy. Choose, commit, climb.

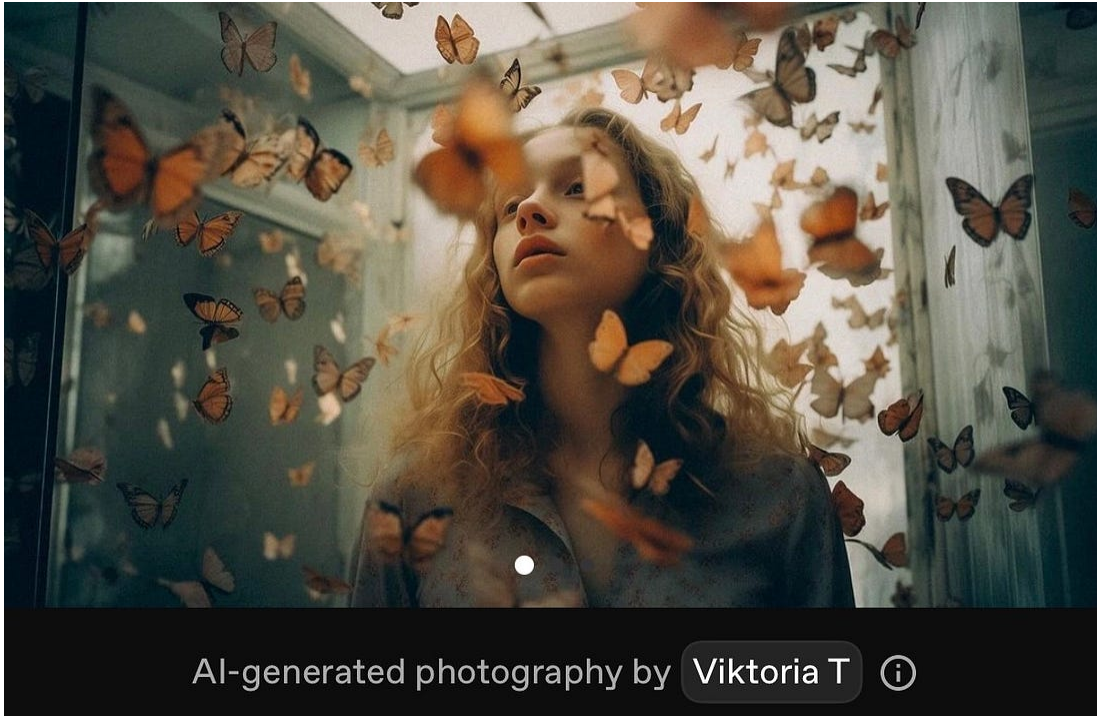
And if you hesitate, or pivot, or revisit an earlier rung, it is interpreted as instability.

But creative work in its true development takes a life of its own. A container holds movement. It allows for return, revision, expansion. It makes room for the way ideas evolve when they are actually lived with.

The old structure demands predictability. Measured steps.

A container allows for evolution.

The friction of existing in a structure that could not make sense of its form. It felt like standing in the wrong gravity. Of building and watching nothing quite take hold. As if I had been calibrated for a different terrain entirely.



When I stopped forcing myself upward and started designing something that could actually hold me, gravity shifted. Movement made sense.

The widening, the circling, the returning, the periods of intensity followed by quiet recalibration. None of it was lawless. It was a structure I had yet learned to recognize.

The issue was not aptitude or skill.

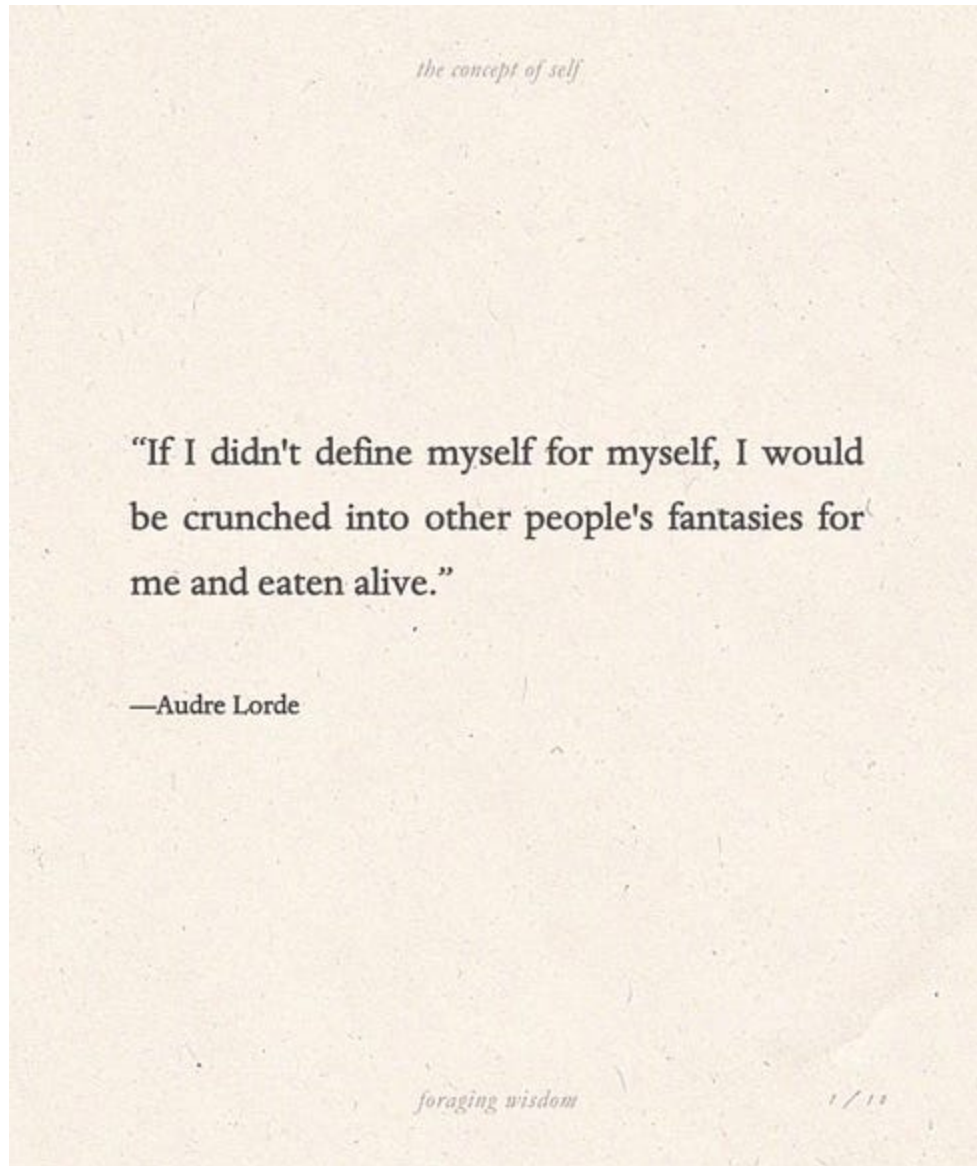
It was architecture.

The model was never meant to hold some of us.

If you measure nonlinear growth with linear expectations, you will mistake evolution for instability.

You will believe that depth is delayed. That iteration is indecision. That recalibration is a weakness.

What feels unstable may simply be unsupported. It may be the sensation of building something that simply doesn't fit within the architecture you were handed.



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Some people inherit stable systems.

Others must inform them.

Inherited systems were never built for everyone. As society evolves, those frameworks begin to thin. New pathways are drafted quietly. The container becomes the incubator.

What once looked anomalous begins to take shape.

When the old world burns enough of us and we begin to be forged in it. Instead of collapsing under the weight of what's expected. Some of us have risen even more immalleable knowing that our process does have a place,



The archetypes begin to shift.

The outliers become prototypes.

And in moments when old frameworks begin to thin and collapse, the unprecedented becomes necessary.

Creative people are not always here to inherit blueprints unquestioningly.

We are often here to draft them. New measurements of experience and culture.

Meaning, in the end, is shaped by the structures we choose to build.....and the ones we refuse to inherit.

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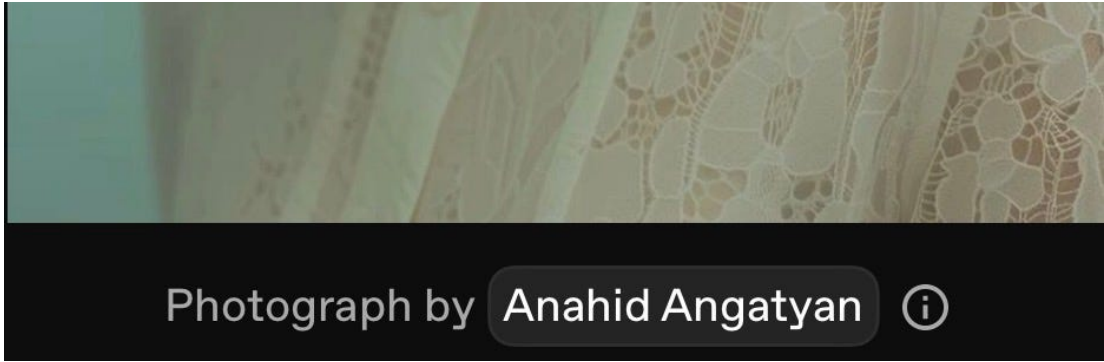
In your soul
there are
infinitely
precious things
that cannot be
taken from you
Oscar Wilde



A still from **Walerian Borowczyk's** 1975

film **The Beast** ⓘ





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