



COLOUR: EMOTION

An immersion into the happiness, sorrow, loneliness and dreams of three Vietnamese artists, Bui Suoi Hoa, Nguyen Than, Vu Ha Nam.

above: Vu Ha Nam - Portrait in Blue
51x40

right: Nguyen Than - Nostalgia
100x81

Bui Suoi Hoa was born in 1957 in Hanoi and graduated from the National Fine Art University of Fine Art in Hanoi in 1975. She began her career as an art teacher at the Architecture University in Ho Chi Minh City. Since deciding to concentrate solely on painting – “I want to freeze moments of the beauty of life into one moment” - she has exhibited her work widely across Asia, including the ground breaking *Uncorked Soul* exhibition in Hong Kong 1991, in the USA as part of the *Winding River* travelling exhibition in Washington DC, and in Europe, where she has participated in exhibitions in Geneva and Paris. Her work is in the collection of the Ho Chi Minh Museum of fine art and in private collections worldwide

Suoi Hoa’s paintings are bold, colourful artistic creations. Exuberant brush strokes are used to form sensual compositions that evoke her and Vietnam’s past – ethnic village scenes, rich land and sea-scapes, still life, traditional ‘Cheo’ theatre scenes of dancing girls in



tumbling flight – subjects scrutinised minutely but rarely portrayed as in reality.

Her colour scheme is simple, but Suoi Hoa pushes it to the limit and, not content in merely dazzling with light, enhances our sense of touch with minor mountains of thick colour on the canvas itself. Suoi Hoa’s paintings have a boundless vitality, a fierce, confident life of their own. “I have witnessed much sorrow in my life, that’s why in my paintings I want to create happiness.”

Nguyen Than was born in 1948 in Kim Song Ninh Binh. He studied painting at the Gia Dinh School of Fine Art in Saigon, but considers himself largely self-taught.

He was also featured in the 1991 *Plum Blossoms* exhibition in Hong Kong, where his work was described as personifying Rilke: “Surely all art is the result of one’s having been in danger, of having gone through an experience all the way to the end...” Than served in the

army of the Republic of Vietnam from 1969-1975, but then from 1975-1987 was banned from painting and forced to become a cyclo rider in Ho Chi Minh City in order to support his family. He says he never stopped painting 'in his mind'.

Today, he is constantly challenging the frontiers of his creativity. Comfortable working in oil on canvas and watercolour on hand-made rice paper, he is also an accomplished sculptor and performance artist, and exhibits regular both in Vietnam and in North America.

Than speaks of his paintings as 'love songs' that come together in an art in which 'the past, the present and the future mingle together'. Memories of his grandmother's village in the North merge with the sadness and hardships endured growing up in the South during the war.

The villages, mountains, rivers, oxen, birds, women in their countryside dress, represent the fading memories of his childhood; wandering horses, fish, the sea - dead heroes and those 'who have absurdly died on the sea'; women stare into nothingness (the past war), whilst arrows and dots point out his journey into the future.

Than is a natural expressionist, his work highly personal, intense, emotional, overflowing. Unlike his oils, his nudes, described very naturally in watercolour on rice paper, are largely monochromatic, enhanced with a mere hint of violet or ochre. But they too literally overflow his canvas.

Vu Ha Nam was born in Hanoi in 1962 and graduated from Ho Chi Minh Fine Arts University in 1985. He exhibited in Paris in the early 1990s, part of an exhibition entitled Reminiscence from the land of Vietnam, and was also a member of the 'New Space'

group of young Vietnamese and Singaporean artists.

His paintings, created in water colour on rice paper, are reminiscences of Vietnam, dreams of older, perhaps happier times. Ha Nam likens the process of painting to writing a poem; "...a painter when creating shares with the poet the same logic... matters such as going for practice, noting documents, observing, don't necessarily result in a masterpiece. Years go by...from a re-created memory, the painter paints a painting."

Sometimes using only black, sometimes combinations of primary colours, ghost-like faces peer eerily through his abstract landscapes, as if, having been freed from one memory, they now search for another.

Doi Moi (Renovation) was launched in Vietnam in 1986 with a call to 'untie the strings', to provide free space for the full development of literature and art. For artists, 'untie the strings' meant refusing the rules of socialist realism, its monotony of style, form and topic. Quickly returning to the rich pre-colonial heritage of their tradition, they have also tried to absorb and digest all the achievements of a century of western modernism - from cubism, expressionism, abstraction, to surrealism, abstract expressionism and pop-art - and to make from this cultural cross-roads, something uniquely Vietnamese.

These three artists perfectly capture the yearning for individual freedom, self-affirmation and personal discovery that has characterised Vietnamese painting since *Doi Moi*.

Oc-Eo Art presents Colour : Emotio' to Asian Art in London at the Mall Galleries, The Mall, London SW1 from 27 October-9 November Oc-Eo Art Tel: +44 (0)1373 832 939 peter.quintana@oc-eo.co.uk www.oc-eo.co.uk



left: Bui Suoi Hoa - Thinking 65x100