

THE SYMBOL OF THE TRUTH

BY

VO QUANG HOANH

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Fine Arts Program in Visual Arts
at Maharakham University**

October 2012

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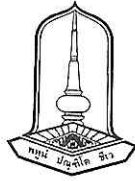
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The examining committee has unanimously approved this thesis, submitted by Mr. Vo Quang Hoanh, as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts Program in Visual Arts at Maharakham University.

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ABSTRACT

This visual arts creation thesis, “The Symbol of the Truth”, is developed based on the inspiration from the beauty of the lotus and its powerful effects on Vietnamese people's spiritual lives. The concept of creation was that in Vietnamese culture, the lotus is a symbol of purity, faithfulness and enlightenment. It symbolises the truth. This thesis involves paintings with mixed media in a semi-abstract style.

The purpose of creation is to try to depict the natural beauty and cultural value of the lotus and as a result to awaken people's innate beauty. The data were collected and divided into four groups; these are : primary inspiration, documentary data, influence from creative works by Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, and Nguyen Đuc Quang, and personal experiences. Then the creation was originated following these processes : doing complete sketches, and then working with lacquer as the key material and applying different techniques such as using eggshell, and creating matière with an aim to achieve the best result. The process of creation follows many stages: data collection and analysis, making sketches, creating art works, and analysing the results and drawing out implications.

This creation was the new finding which was original of the creator. The creation results discovered that the success gave an expression of the growth process of the lotus: from mud into beautiful fragrant flowers in the sunshine, unstained. The message of the truth is that through learning and practicing Buddhist teachings, we can touch our true nature, enjoying freedom and joy of life and that the “fragrance” from our good nature will permeate and have a good effect on the people around.



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Primary Inspiration

Hue, my hometown, is the centre of Buddhist cultures, the cradle of Buddhist art in Vietnam. One of the factors that enable Hue to be honored as the capital of Buddhism is that, though small and not densely populated, Hue has the bigger number of pagodas and temples than any other part of Vietnam. The number of pagodas here is up to 400, not to mention the small Buddhist temples in residential areas. There are now over 100 ancient pagodas and temples preserved in Hue, which still retain the features of ancient oriental and Vietnamese architecture. Hue Pagodas are an important part of architecture, together with the royal architectural complex, and the architecture of Hue folk, creating a special and distinct feature of Hue architecture.

Hue is also a centre of culture and tourism in Vietnam, famous for its cultural heritage and beauty spots such as the Royal Tombs, and the Citadel. It might go unnoticed, but part of all this beauty is the lakes of lotus surrounding these structures. The pure and magical beauty of the flower and its delicate fragrance contribute to the peaceful and quiet atmosphere of the city, making it poetic, and sacred.

Obviously, the image of the lotus flower is present in almost every aspect of life, from architecture, literature, arts to religion. It is widely used, both in pagodas and in people's daily life. The image of the lotus flower exists in things around the house, such as decorative patterns on furniture, and shapes of other household items. In Buddhism, the lotus image is found almost everywhere: in books, in worship items, meditation posture, the way people put their hands together as part of rituals, etc. It proves to be true that wherever Buddhism is practised, there exists the lotus flower. In other words, the lotus is the symbol of Buddhism.

It is obvious that the lotus is associated with Buddha and Buddhism which highly appreciate the beauty and power of the lotus. Through the image of the lotus, they want to guide people to a beautiful and peaceful life. The lotus reminds people of peace, goodness, mercy and love. It also reminds people of the truth of “no birth, no



death” nature so that they can learn and practise to live with their true self in order to enjoy “the miracle of mindfulness” and embrace the joy of life (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1987).

From the impressive Buddhist culture and my own personal daily life experiences, I chose the lotus flower as the subject of my paintings, studied its image in the Buddhist philosophy and described it in my works as the symbol of the truth as is perceived in Buddhism. The lotus has a high spiritual and cultural value in Vietnamese people's lives. It is very beautiful, uncontaminated, and pure. The lotus image seems to represent the beauty of both the body and the soul. From the images of the lotus, I learn that we need to be our true self, stay unaffected by temptations and the surroundings in order to enjoy freedom (from worry, pressure or fear) and enjoy the joy of life. That is the message that I tried to convey through my paintings. Lead a quiet life with good virtues, doing good things, and we can enjoy all the beauty and joys of life: happiness, peace of mind, peace at heart, etc. What is important is that the “fragrance” will permeate and have a good effect on the people around.

Concept

The lotus is rooted in deep mud and its stem grows straight up through the water. The leaf and the blossom rise high above the water in the sun, clean, beautiful and fragrant. “This pattern of growth signifies the progress of the soul from the primeval mud of materialism, through the waters of experience, and into the bright sunshine of enlightenment”. Hence, the lotus refers to the complete purification of body, speech and mind, and the blossoming of wholesome deeds in liberation. In Buddhism, the lotus represents the true nature of beings, who rise into the beauty and clarity of enlightenment. In Vietnamese culture, the lotus is of great value in the people's spiritual life. It guides people to the good and helps them avoid evils; it is part of their culture in presenting their way of thinking, and their way of life.

An unopened lotus is like the heart of a being; it blossoms when the virtues of the Buddha develop inside. The iconic shower exists at the same time as the flower. It is the fruit, and it produces seeds as the flower blooms. If we observe it following the “Cause and Effect” theory of Buddhism, we can see that the two parts are really only



one, the cause is also the effect and vice versa. Thus, a good cause (flower) leads to a good effect or result (fruit), which in this case can be observed right in the present, together with its cause.

The combination of personal belief and traditional cultures on the basis of social studies is the key factor to the creation of this project. The works were created using lacquer, together with the use of lines, patches and light, and different hues and shades of color to express the quiet beauty of the lotus flower, the changing process, and its manifestation in many forms. A combination of lines, patches, eggshell, and many layers of color was used to create a strong impression and to convey the message that nothing lasts forever, but 'Nothing is born; nothing dies,' it just changes and manifests again and again in different forms. (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1987). Human beings follow the same law: be born, grow up, grow old, pass away, and then there is reincarnation, when a human returns to this world in another body.

Purpose of Creation

1. Content

The lotus has been associated with Vietnamese culture, very close to Vietnamese people for a very long time. For them, the lotus represents the human soul, gods, and mental and spiritual purity. It also represents the heart, compassion and love, as well as wisdom and the ability to control one's senses. The meaning of a lotus flower ranges from divine purity and enlightenment to rebirth or reincarnation. The lotus is born in the muck and mud at the bottom of a lake, and then grows upright through the water and manifests itself in a form of a beautiful and fragrant flower, unstained by the mud from which it arose. Like the lotus, a perfect and pure human life undergoes a similar progress of growth and development: be born pure into the world full of hatred, distrust, anxiety and pressure; with the practice of Buddhist teachings and under the light of the truth - the Buddha - grow up and raise the mind above the mud of worldly existence to reach purity of the soul and mind; then pass away and later return to this world in another body to continue the endless life cycle. The art works were created to tell the story of the progress of growth of the lotus in association with people's spiritual lives.



2. Form and technique

The art works capture the beauty and noble qualities of the lotus through a combination of modern and traditional color and techniques. They were created using Mixed Media Painting in a semi-abstract style. The roots of a lotus in the mud is depicted in dark shades with tangled lines and uneven surface to refer to all the negative aspects of the complex ordinary world into which human beings are born. Light hues and smooth surface for the bloom against a darkened background with embossed lines express the beauty and power of the lotus. This refers to the success and virtues of a perfect human being who can stay uncontaminated by the surroundings and shine.

Scope of creation

1. Content

The lotus flower is a symbol of purity, faithfulness and goodness. In Buddhist culture, the lotus represents the state of spiritual perfection and total mental purity, mercy, and a preservation and development of knowledge and of Buddhist philosophy. There are few flowers in the world that have so many precious qualities like the lotus. It is thought to have all the qualities needed in a true monk. The spirit of the best of men is spotless. It is of great value in Vietnamese people's spiritual life. It is part of their culture in presenting their way of thinking, way of life.

The images of the different parts of the lotus represent the process of human perception of the world, cultivating his mind, meditation practice and finally enlightenment. Just as the world is complex and full of temptations and evils, we need to free ourselves from these sources of anxiety and suffering. We need to practice Buddhist teachings to awaken ourselves from the sleep of ignorance and achieve Buddhahood and become perfected beings.

2. Form

The shapes and colors of the bud, the leaf, the iconic shower were depicted using different shades of color and shapes to convey chains of feelings. The main colors are golden, brown, indigo, green and red, the colors of life. A combination of colors and shapes describes the varied forms and colors of life. The use of crossing lines and patches with different degrees of smoothness and roughness describes the complexity of



social interrelationship. The image of the upright stem emerging from the darkened background stands for the strength of the mind, the willpower to overcome hardships in life. The bright closed flower symbolizes the quiet process of contemplation and meditation. The brilliant blooming flower in white or pink represents enlightenment, the condition in which a human being touches his true nature, reaching the state of spiritual perfection and total mental purity.

3. Technique

Ideas about the lotus and life is depicted through lacquer paintings : pictures on wooden planks covered in many layers of lacquer oil. Careful and thorough sanding makes smooth and “deep” pictures. Lacquer produces durable, long - lasting pictures to describe the nature of the lotus, the quiet beauty which is not affected by the surroundings.

The works were created as semi - abstract paintings, using lacquer with different techniques and materials suitable for the content of the thesis. Different techniques were tried and used, including using eggshell, creating matière, plating objects or shapes with gold or silver to create bright and focused patches to create a desired effect.

Operation of the creation

1. Data collection

1.1 Source of Inspiration

As a Buddhist, the lotus image is something I see almost every day in my life: in pagodas, in city lakes, objects and things around me, and in my mind. It is the flower whose beauty I like, whose fragrance I enjoy, and whose purity and strength I admire and worship. The image of the lotus exists almost everywhere: in architectural structures, in everyday life items, and in art works of many artists. There is also a wealth of folk verses praising the lotus for its beauty, and strength, and considering it the symbol of love, purity, patience and mindfulness. All these are the main source of inspiration for me to create my own art works, which focus on the lotus as the symbol of the ultimate truth.



1.2 Documentary data

The documentary data was collected from a variety of sources : books, articles, folk verses, lectures on Buddhist teachings, and the Internet. Another way of collecting data is taking photographs of real lotus flowers in the city lakes, of lotus - shaped items and structures in pagodas and the surroundings. The combination of the images of the lotus in printed materials and the meaning of the lotus in people's spiritual lives was made and put down into sketches. The best sketches were chosen for real art works that best describe the image of the lotus as presented in books and as perceived by people.

1.3 Influence from creative work

Impressionist paintings characterized with thin visible brush strokes, and open composition are popular in the visual arts. They portrayed overall visual effects rather than details, recreating the sensation in the eye that views the subject with a variety of techniques and forms. The impressionist artist whose artworks impressed me the most is Vincent van Gogh. His style is notable for its rough beauty and bold color. Similarly, the use of a visual language of form, color and line in abstract art to create a composition that departs from reality in depiction of imagery in art is a different way of describing the world. I was also impressed by cubist paintings by Pablo Picasso, whose style was characterized by the use of monochrome brown colors. A combination of these schools and styles of art is applied to my creation of art works. With regard to lacquer painting, I was particularly impressed by Nguyen Duc Quang, and Nguyen Dinh Dang, whose works show a successful and harmonized use of a mixture of colors. What I learn from these artists and their art works will help me choose the suitable style and techniques to use in my work to express my theme.

1.4 Fine arts experiments

From my own experience of the lotus in everyday life and the inspiration I gained from artworks by other artists, I created works to depict the lotus and its beauty the way I perceived it. After making sketches, I studied and applied different techniques in my creation process. The lotus was exaggerated artistically, and expressed through the use of lines, brush strokes and mixed colors. I tried to find and use the most suitable



techniques and materials to create art works conveying my feelings and message of life. I found my own style and techniques, characterized with the bold use of paint surface, distortions and exaggerations, and the use of mixed and pure colors.

2. Data analysis

2.1 Analysis for clarity of story, theme and concept

The data collection tells an interesting story of the lotus. From deep in the mucky mud, the lotus grows up through the water and bloom and shine beautifully in the sun. This symbolises the process in which human beings struggle to find a way to get out of the ocean of misery and suffering of life, and when they get out of the mud of ignorance and touch the light of truth, their heart and soul open. With the purification of body, speech and mind, they shine and lead the way for others to perfection. The Buddha is a case in point. From this story, I create a range of lacquer paintings to depict the image of the lotus in relation to the concept of beauty in religious belief, in spiritual and cultural value. The creation is done to convey the message of the truth and encourage people to perceive the true nature of things.

2.2 Analysis for form and symbols

To tell the story in the visual language of arts, I depicted the different parts of the lotus at different stages of development and from different angles. The presentation of the image using different colors and hues, and a variety of materials creates a diversity in form, and also creates strong effects. This helps tell a complete story about the power of “the truth”.

2.3 Analysis for techniques

The study and exploration of the techniques used in famous art works help me find the techniques and methods of my own. I found that short brush strokes, different textures, surfaces, bold colors and a variety of merged subject matter were suitable techniques for me to create distortions, exaggerations and strong effects in order to have the best art works. In addition, the use of lines and light, and plenty of coating and sanding help create smooth and deep pictures.

3. Creation of works

3.1 Making sketches

3.1.1 Making a general outline using chalk on wooden planks.

3.1.2 Using crayons, to create lines and shapes.



3.1.3 Using water or powder colors to make color sketches to create brightness and perspective for the pictures.

3.2 Creation of works

3.2.1 Choosing the best sketches for real works.

3.2.2 Creating the background.

3.2.3 Sticking eggshell onto the surface of selected patches.

3.2.4 Covering the patches with paint and then sanding.

3.2.5 Using lines and colors to complete other details.

3.2.6 Applying gold or silver sheets to selected shapes.

3.2.7 Creating transparent effect.

3.2.8 Covering whole picture with paint.

3.2.9 Doing the sanding to have the finished work.

4. Stages of disseminating works

4.1 Disseminating works in the form of exhibition.

4.2 Writing documents in supplement to creation.

4.3 The article of thesis should be published full paper in journal or international conference.

Definition of terms

1. Sanding : A way of rubbing to make lacquer paintings smooth using sand paper.

2. Enlightenment : (in Buddhism's notion) a final blessed state in which a being is free from ignorance, desire and suffering.

3. Reincarnation : Rebirth; the concept where the soul or spirit, after the death of the body, is believed to return to live in a new human body.

4. Cause : Something or a factor that makes something else happen.

5. Effect : The result or consequence of a certain action or thing.

6. The law of cause and effect : Refers to the Buddhist point of view that you make your choices (likened to seeds in Buddhism). You bear the results (likened to fruit).



CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

According to the purposes of the creation, this thesis study focuses on the symbol of the truth. To support the study purpose, the framework of process is selected accordingly. This chapter reviews related literature, covering the following topics :

1. Source of Inspiration
2. Documentary data
3. Influence from creative work
4. Fine arts experiments
5. Conceptual Framework

Source of Inspiration

The image of the lotus is common in my daily life. The lotus flowers in the lakes surrounding the Citadel and the Imperial City and their fragrance create a beautiful sight and peaceful air that attracts the local people and visitors alike. The big round green leaves promise to provide good protection for the flowers and fruit from intruders. The flowers blossom brightly and beautifully in the sun in different colors : pink, red and white. The nice fragrance makes the flowers more charming. The image of the lotus is also prevalent in various forms in architectural structures such as pagodas, the Royal palaces and other civil structures. In pagodas, beside the statue of the Buddha sitting on the lotus in full bloom, many other items are also in the shape of the flower, such as the lamp, the bowl. Another image that inspired me deeply is the “PhapLam” - the decorative patterns on the wall and on the roof. The biggest lotus image in Vietnam is the One - pillar temple in Hanoi, typical of Vietnamese architecture. A wide range of things in everyday life are also made in the form of a lotus from decorative patterns in people's houses to ritual items on their altars. This means that the lotus has a special effect on the people's spiritual lives. Art works by other artists depicting the lotus also inspired me; the techniques used and the stylized forms of the lotus were of great interest to me.



The lotus is also popular in folk songs and verses, in which it is praised for its pure beauty, for its strength in contrast to the mucky mud surroundings. It is used to refer to love, willpower, nobility and purity. In religious belief, the lotus is the symbol of Buddhism. It represents the purity of the body, speech and mind, the peace of the soul, the openness of the heart.

All of these factors are a good source of inspiration for me in deciding to choose the lotus as the subject of my creation, as the theme of my thesis. It reminds me of something sacred, something pure and good and encourages me to practice Buddhist teachings and better myself.



Figure 1 Lotus flower - photo data





Figure 2 The Buddha on the lotus bloom

Source : <http://www.buddhismtoday.com/tacgia/thichminhchau.htm>





Figure 3 Interior decorative pattern, Source : L'art à Hue



Figure 4 Interior decorative pattern, Source : L'art à Hue





Figure 5 The One - Pillar Temple, Hanoi



Figure 6 Lotus decoration on the foot platform





Figure 7 Memorial Lotus

Documentary data

The lotus flowers have been influential in Vietnamese cultures. They have been associated with the human soul, with the Buddha, and featured in folk verses, stories and legends. The lotus is closely related to Vietnamese people and their spiritual lives. It is very popular with them. Almost every Vietnamese knows about the lotus and knows by heart songs and poems in praise for the lotus. One of the most famous and loved folk verses goes like this :

Nothing is more beautiful than the lotus in the lake
 Green leaves, white flowers with yellow pistil
 Yellow pistil in white flowers and green leaves
 Near the mud but still fragrant and unstained

(translated)



The lotus grows out of dirty mud, but it still remains upright, produces beautiful, fragrant flowers for life (Thich Nhat Hanh (1987); Barbara O'Brien (2008); Nitin Kumar, 2011; Hue Dan, 2012; Thich Minh Chau, 2012). “This pattern of growth signifies the progress of the soul from the primeval mud of materialism, through the waters of experience, and into the bright sunshine of enlightenment”. (A view on Buddhism, 2012). It is considered a symbol of purity, nobility, as it not only remains uncontaminated but also stands out beautifully and brightly in the muddy environment. The lotus is described in “The essentials of Buddhism” by Thich Minh Chau (2012) as demonstrating the law of “cause and effect”, the blooming flower represents the past, the fruit the present, and the seeds the future, a successive continuation just like the life circle of a being, the process of being born, aging (developing and getting old), and reviving (reincarnation), the true nature of things, and the eternity of the truth.

In Buddhist Culture, the lotus flower represents divine purity, enlightenment and release. In its notion, an unopened lotus, when the virtues of the Buddha develop inside, will open and blossom; that explains why the Buddha sits on a lotus in full bloom (Nitin Kumar, 2011). Similarly, the heart and mind of a human being, through meditation and Buddhist practice, will open, be aware of their situations and free themselves from all suffering. A person fulfilling all his responsibilities and duties without regret will stay unaffected by surrounding evil factors, just like the waterproof leaves of the lotus. Thus, the lotus represents a harmonized life cycle, with the blooming flower as complete purification that we aim to reach (Dao Phat Ngay Nay, 2012). It proves the power of the truth, and encourages people to overcome their hardships in life, not to lose themselves in a life full of worry and temptations in order to be their true self and enjoy life.

Influence from creative work

Living in a city where the majority of people practice Buddhism, I enjoy a wide variety of lotus image in the ordinary daily life. The most impressive of all is “Phap Lam” - decorative patterns created by enamel colours on bronze (both interior and exterior) on ancient Royal architecture in Hue. The winding lotus representing the flying dragon on the walls of the Royal Palace, the unopened lotus as the lamps on the



Moon Gate of the Citadel and many other images of the lotus in pagodas are very impressive and sacred. They stir my feelings and encourage me to choose the lotus as my subject and create art works to express the spiritual value of the flower.

I had a chance to enjoy Vincent Van Gogh's original paintings in real life in the Louvre in Paris in 1998. I was charmed by their beauty and was deeply impressed by his genius use of swirled brushstrokes, vivid colors and distorted forms of things as can be seen in "Starry Night." Pablo Picasso is another artist whose works and techniques inspired me a lot. Picasso's special use of shapes, wiry linearity and monochromatic techniques was of great interest to me.

I also took great interest in artworks by many Vietnamese artists like Nguyen Duc Quang, Trinh Tuan, Dang Phuong Viet, etc. Their lacquer paintings used a combination of techniques and materials such as eggshell, dyes, silver, gold and mixed colours. Their techniques and style, especially in depicting the lotus aroused strong feelings and gave me inspiration to create my own art works.



Figure 8 Artist : Hue artists under Nguyen Dynasty

Title : The Moon Gate, Hue, Vietnam

Techniques : Phap Lam





Figure 9 Artist : Van Gogh

Title : Starry Night

Size : 500 x 373 cm.

Techniques : Oil color



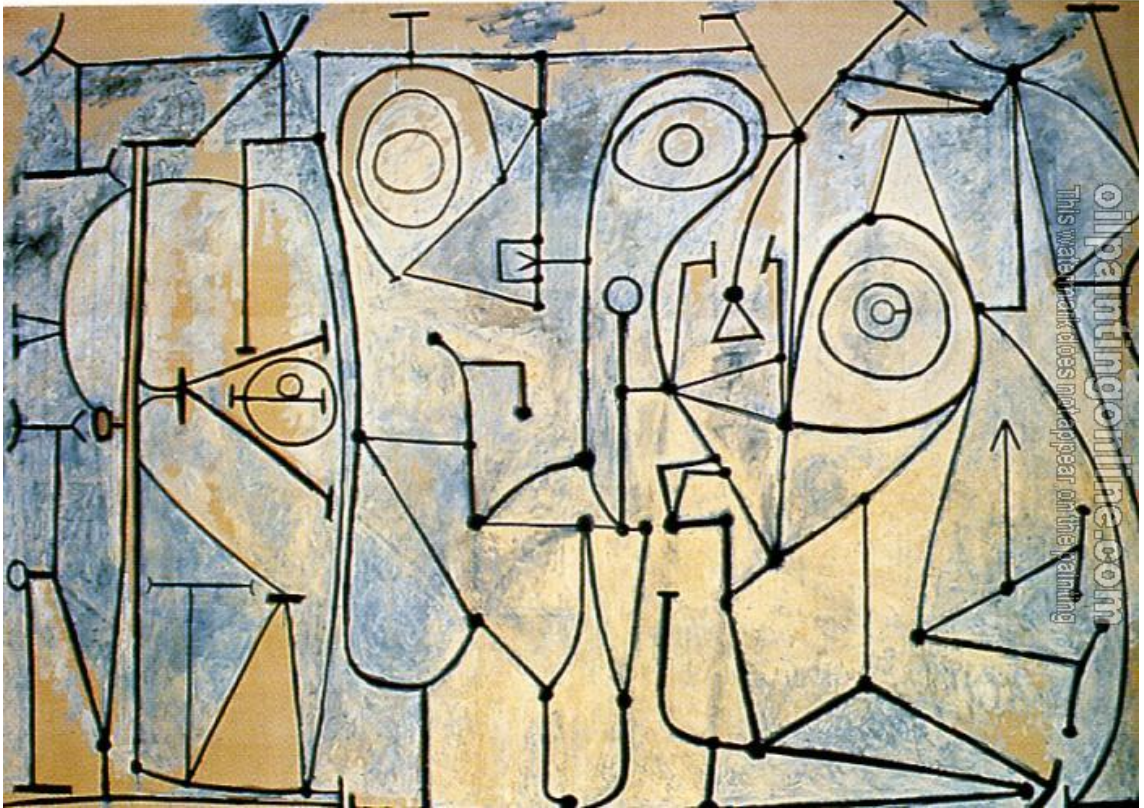


Figure 10 Artist : Pablo Picasso
Title : The Kitchen
Size : 175.3 x 250 cm.
Techniques : Oil color



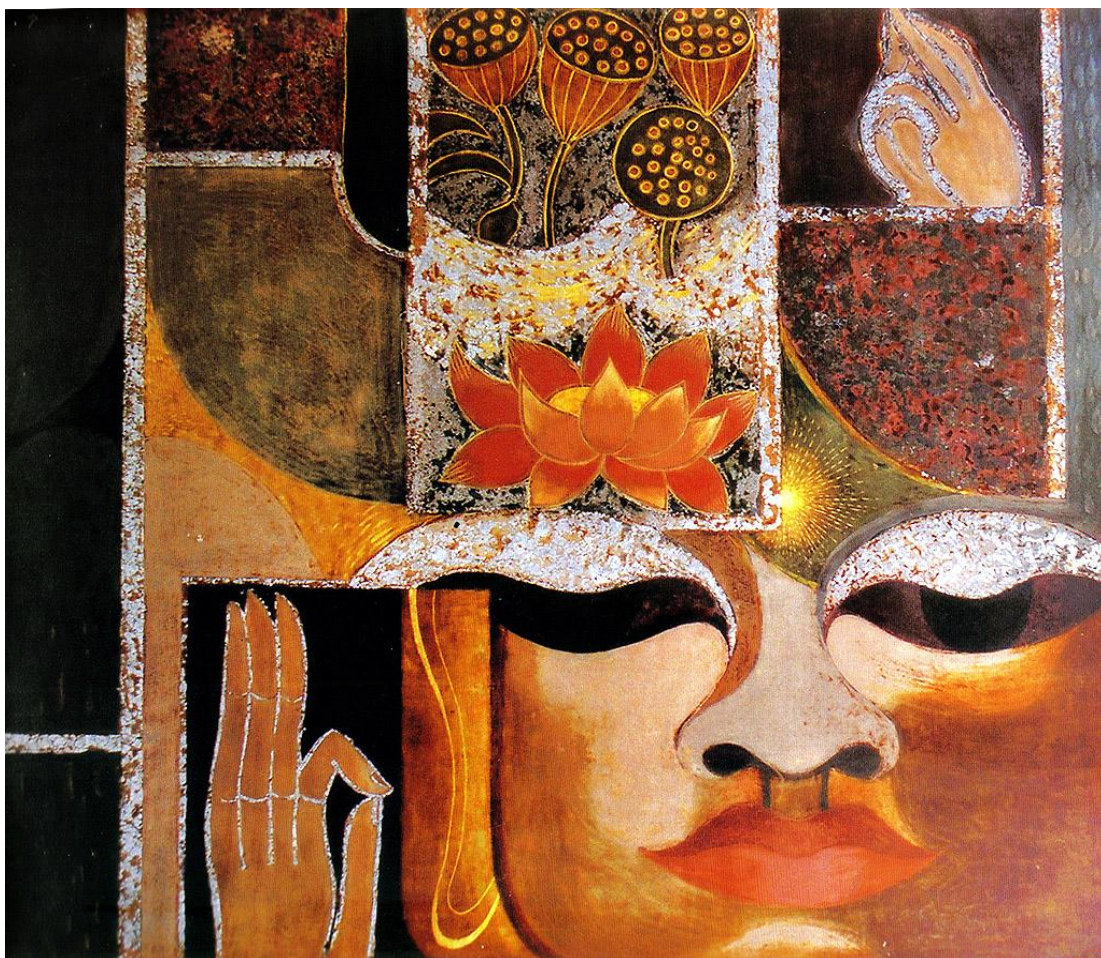


Figure 11 Artist : Nguyen Duc Quang
Title : Kiến Đạo (enlightenment)
Size : 120 x 130 cm.
Techniques : Lacquer painting



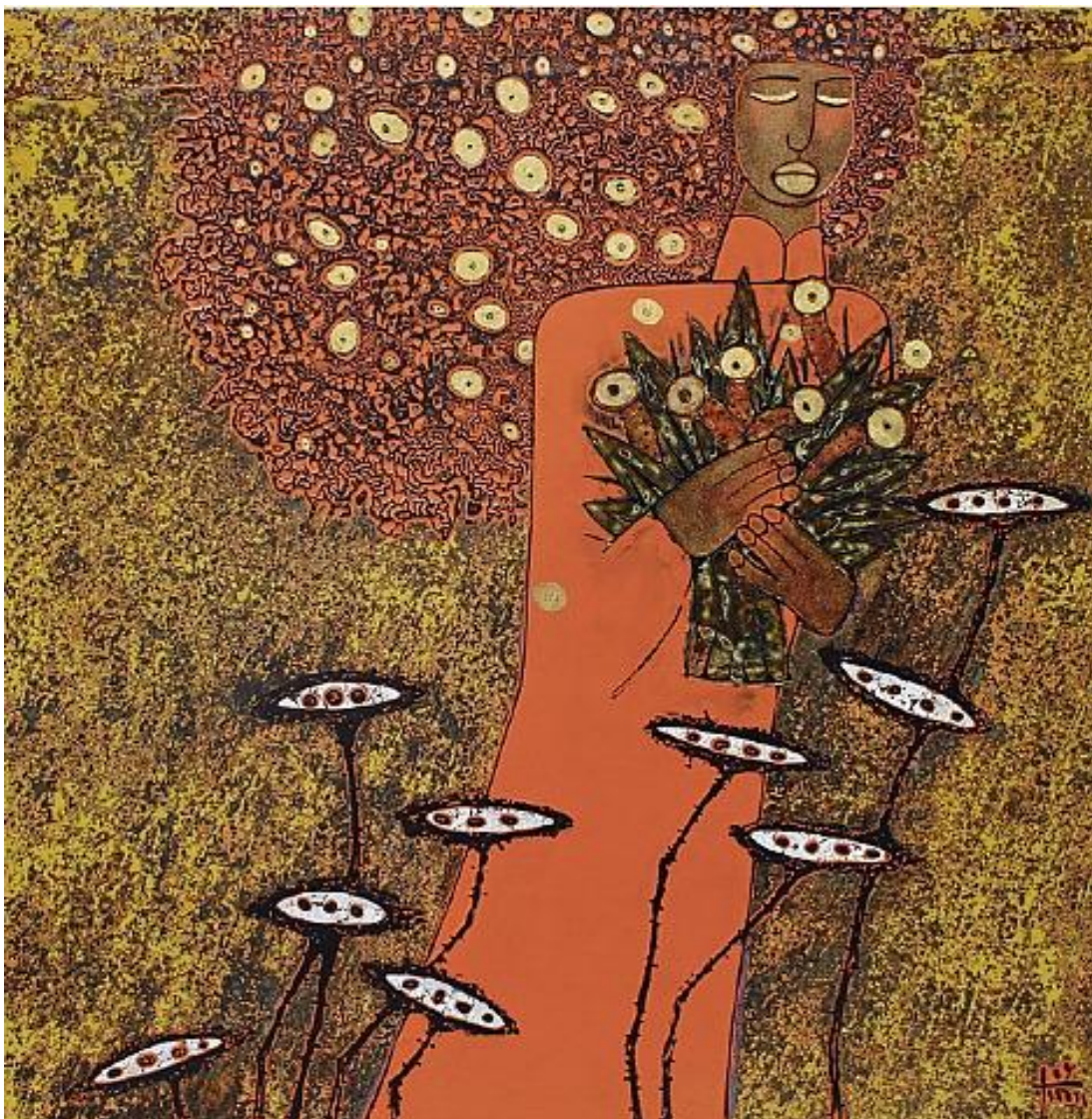


Figure 12 Artist : Trinh Tuan

Title : Fading Lotus

Size : 100 x 100 cm.

Techniques : Lacquer, dyes, egg shell, silver and gold on board



Fine arts experiments

I chose the lotus as the subject of my works and the symbol of the truth as my thesis theme. Using the visual language of arts to depict the beauty and precious qualities of the flower in an effective way was not simple. In the process of studying and making sketches, I studied and tried different techniques using lacquer. Merely copy the real image of the flower into art works was not what an artist often does. Based on the message I wanted to convey through the paintings, which is the true nature of things, I decided to describe different parts of the lotus in a stylized way to tell a story of a process of birth, growth, death and rebirth. The lotus was exaggerated artistically, and expressed through the use of lines, light and colors. From the techniques and composition I learned from other artists, I tried to find and use the most suitable techniques and materials to enhance the artistic value of my works. I found that a combination of techniques such as eggshell, silver and gold, distortion and exaggeration would create a desired effect in depicting the lotus according to my perception. Moreover, the use of wiry linearity and monochromatic techniques gives me a style of my own in creating art works to convey my feelings and message of life.



Figure 13 The Symbol of the Truth





Figure 14 The Symbol of the Truth



Conceptual Framework

1. Idea, Concept

Few flowers in the world are associated with many good qualities like the lotus. The lotus flower symbolises purity, nobility and moral values. The different stages of the lotus life describe a human's life. The bud represents young age; the bloom adulthood; and the withering flower old age. Similarly in Buddhist concept, it represents the law of cause and effect. The bloom symbolises the past; the fruit the present; and the seed the future, showing a continuous process. From these concepts, I would like to express the symbol of the truth through the depiction of the lotus and its spiritual beauty.

2. Form

The subject was transformed and depicted through the use of lines, light and bold colors. The shapes and colors of the bud, the leaf, the fruit and seed were depicted using different hues and shapes to convey my chain of feelings. The main colors are based on the common colors used in Buddhist culture, that is, golden, brown, green and red, the color of life. Different compositions and different textures and surfaces were applied to describe both the complexity of an entangled world and the purity of the soul and mind when reaching the beauty and clarity of enlightenment.

3. Media, Techniques

The creation work was done using mixed media and a combination of techniques. Lacquer, dyes, eggshell, silver and gold sheets, glue, and some other substances were used appropriately at different stages to create a desired effect. The use of light colors and deep shadow created deep and impressive perspective.

3.1 Collecting information about the lotus flower: photos, pictures or drawings, sculpture items, ...

3.2 Combining the leaf and the flower - bud, bloom, and fruit - to illustrate the human life at different times.

3.3 Studying the colors and how to do it in oil painting, and then doing it using lacquer. Using colors and lines to describe feelings and emotions.



The painting procedure :

1. Painting the lotus following realism style; exaggerating in different ways to have a variety of expressions. Including the lotus image in Thai culture.
2. Painting using oil together with acrylic, and lacquer techniques to have a typical style of the creator.



CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter gives an outline of the study design and procedure. The procedure of the study concluded from chapter two and other frameworks which involve with “the symbol of the truth”. This creation will be presented according to the following topics :

1. Sketches
2. Material and Equipment
3. Work creation

Sketches

Based on the photos and the images of the lotus flower in everyday life, I chose to make sketches for my paintings focusing on the shapes of the leaf, the bud and the fruit. I selected some special and distinct features of the lotus and tried to describe them in my works. I tried to make sketches that present the gracefulness, delicacy, and the strength and durability of the flower.

First, I used pencil to make sketches for a general outline. Then I used water colors, powder colors, and crayons to create lines, patches, brightness and perspective for the pictures. I also used some other substances and materials such as glue (A+B), powder colors to create designs embossed on the picture.

From the variety of sketches, I chose the most favorite sketch for my real art work.



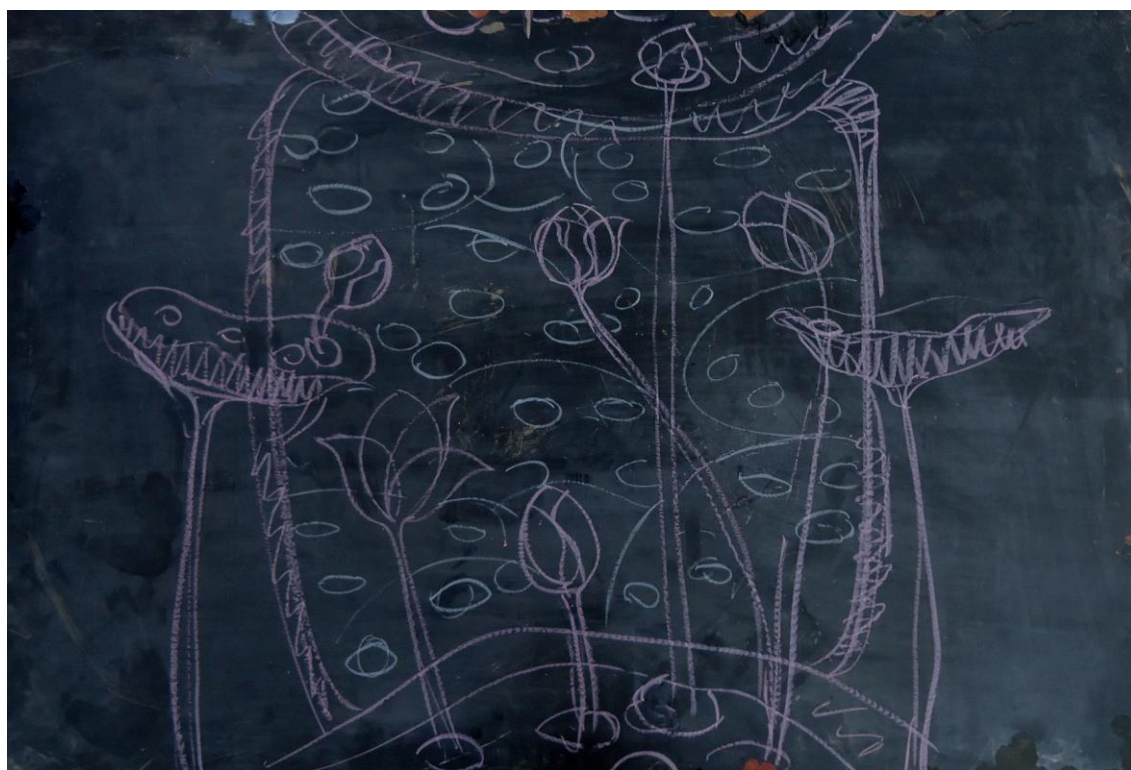


Figure 15 Sketch - chalk





Figure 16 Complete sketch - water color





Figure 17 Complete sketch - water color





Figure 18 Complete sketch - lacquer



Material and Equipment

Lacquer paintings are done on timber body panels which are prepared specially for painting. It is as follows: alluvial soil (or stone powder) mixed with lacquer and then ground into a fine mixture. Use the mixture to coat the panel, and cover all the cracks on the panel. Then coat the panel with a layer of cheesecloth to prevent the cracks from expanding. Dry the panel or board thoroughly and then put other layers of paint on both sides: front and back. Leave it to dry and then do the sanding and the panel is ready for a lacquer painting.

Materials and equipment needed for lacquer paintings include :

1. Eggshell, a special knife for trimming eggshell curves, special tools to grind color powder, paint brushes, silver sheets, gold sheets, glue to create raised designs, stone powder, sand paper, diesel oil, powder colors.
2. Eggshell baked at different degrees creates plenty of shades and a contrast of brightness.
3. Eggshell broken into square pieces helps to stick together more closely to create a completely flat surface, while random and sparse pieces create thin lines in between for color paint to stay; this creates a diversity in surfaces and composition.
4. Blending powder colors with lacquer and using the mixture to create embossed lines, or raised and outwards designs to give a special effect.
5. Glue (A+B) was used to create outward curves and matière patterns to the paintings.
6. Certain shapes or parts were plated with gold or silver sheets, after that lacquer oil was applied to create bright and focused patches.
7. Other chemicals such as printing ink and diesel oil were used to create transparent color effects.
8. Many layers of lacquer oil and a lot of sanding would create a finely smooth and deep finished work.

Based on the sketches, I analysed the shapes of the flower, and the shades of colors that would be suitable and work well on the final paintings of my chosen topic. I chose to use the traditional shades of color used in lacquer painting: red, green and



golden and use different materials and techniques creates special effects then made some changes and combination to create a typical style of my own. I then chose the sketches I liked best and got ready for the real works.



Figure 19 Sticking eggshell





Figure 20 Sanding



Work creation

I made a lot of sketches using chalk, crayons, and had a general outline of the postures. From the sketches available, I selected the ones that best express my feelings and ideas and then developed into lacquer paintings in my own style.

1. Works in Step 1

I chose the wooden panel with the suitable size; it could be one piece big enough for the work, or two or more pieces put together to have a big one. Then, I did the sketching using pencil to make an overall layout. I designed the shapes of the lotus I would like to present. For some works characterised by wiry linearity and mixed colors instead of eggshell and silver or gold, I used paint colors to prepare the background and then used crayons to draw the outline posture.

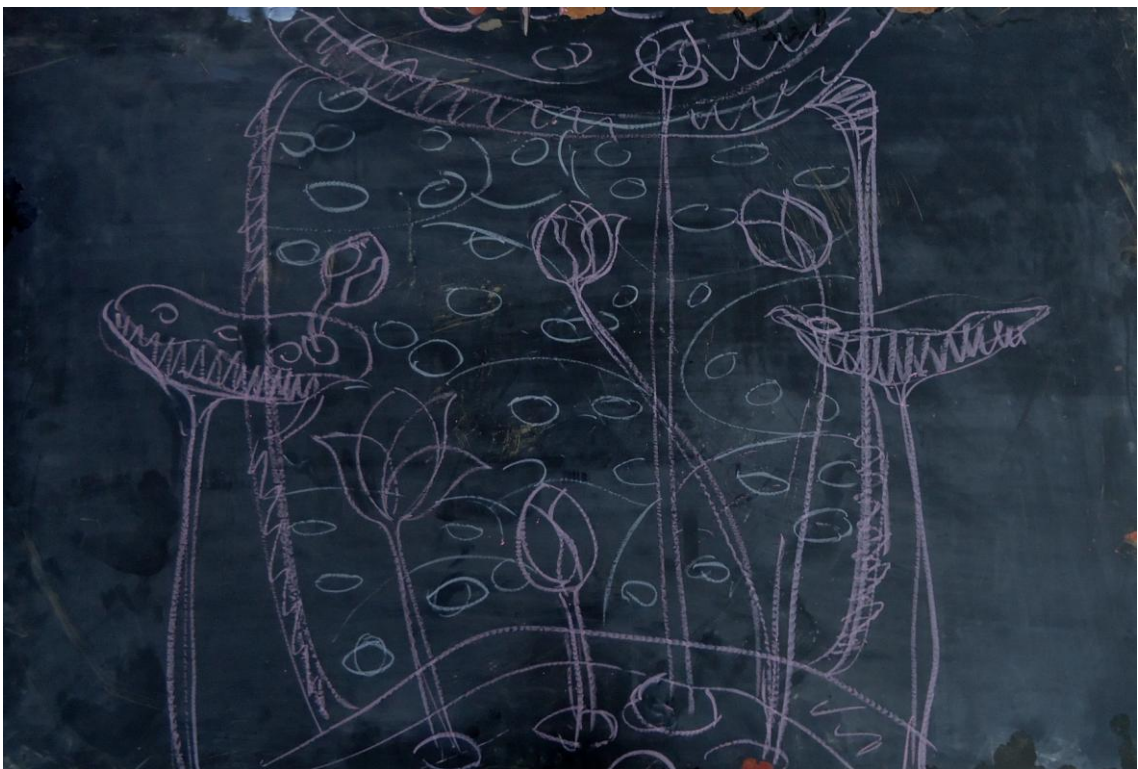


Figure 21 Sketch - chalk



2. Works in Step 2

I decided where to have the bright and dark patches, covered the selected patches with paint and then stick eggshell onto the areas, pressed carefully to keep them in place. This was done carefully to have a nice surface. It depended on my purpose in each painting that I would choose to put the pieces of eggshell in a dense cluster to have a smooth and bright patch or to have lines or curves in between. Sometimes I used a hammer to pound on the shell to create a rough surface. The eggshell was baked to have different degrees of darkness and brightness. Using different techniques, I had a variety of patterns and shapes in a picture. I used a bottle to roll over the surface to flatten out any uneven piece. Then, I cover the patches with paint colors and let them dry.



Figure 22 Applying paint to eggshell surface



3. Works in Step 3

After the paint had dried, I poured water on the picture and started sanding to remove the paint. After a lot of washing and sanding, I had a nice smooth surface with a certain shade of paint color.



Figure 23 Sanding eggshell surface



4. Works in Step 4

Coloring the shapes and patches was also important. A correct choice of color would give a beautiful picture of your wish after sanding. If the colors were not satisfactory, I changed by putting another coat of paint of a lighter or darker hue. Next, to have an embossed picture, I used glue (A+B), mixed it with stone powder and applied the mixture to the surface to create raised designs here and there. Besides, when I applied a thick layer of lacquer onto a specific area, when the lacquer got dry it created special effects of *matière*, wrinkles, and deep furrows.



Figure 24 The symbol of the truth



5. Works in Step 5

To create a shiny and highlighted point in a picture, I attached silver or gold to the lotus bud or flower. Drawing patterns on the silver or gold plated patches were also needed to create the desired effect.



Figure 25 Applying silver and gold



6. Works in Step 6

Using brushes to make strokes in bold color was a good way to create rough beauty and arouse strong feelings.



Figure 26 The symbol of the truth



7. Works in Step 7

Adding lines to the painting appropriately created more and stronger effect for the artwork.



Figure 27 The symbol of the truth



8. Works in Step 8

Finally, when everything was done, I coated the picture with layers of lacquer and let it dry. Then, I used fine sandpaper together with water to sand the picture carefully in order to have the finished works. The sanding was very important. It contributed to a great extent to the value of the art work. To have a nice smooth and shiny picture, I did a lot of coating and sanding until I had the desired brightness and smoothness.



Figure 28 The symbol of the truth





Figure 29 The symbol of the truth





Figure 30 The symbol of the truth



An overview of all the art works done in the creation process shows that the paintings successfully depicted the lotus in relation to its spiritual value as perceived in Buddhism and by the people. The series of works also succeeded in describing the growth process of the lotus, from the mud growing up through the water and then opening in the bright sunshine, beautiful and fragrant. The lotus stands rooted in the deep mud but exudes pure beautiful flowers for life; that is why it is believed to represent the pure beauty of the soul, of willpower and is considered the symbol of the truth. A harmonized combination of materials and techniques of lacquer painting was effective in creating highly artistic works and in the message of life.



CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter intends to discuss the results of the creation process on the thesis titled “The symbol of the truth”. The focus of this chapter is to illustrate the results. Thus, the results of this creation are shown into the following topics :

1. Works before thesis
2. Thesis works

Works before thesis

1. Phase 1 (1st evaluation)

1.1 Content

The works created focused on the image of the lotus in relation to the Buddhist concept of cause and effect. The lotus is considered the symbol of Buddhism, in which the lotus is believed to show the relation between cause and effect; a certain cause will create a certain effect. The works tried to depict the lotus in connection with the practice of the Buddhist teachings. It encourages them to practise with the hope to “pay for” the debt of the “cause” (action) they grow and to weaken the effect they will bear, aiming for the beauty and goodness in life.

1.2 Form

The image of the lotus was exaggerated in some way to have a variety of expressions. The images of people putting their hands together in a praying posture together with lotus flowers conveyed the idea that when we practise the Buddhist teachings, we are likely to live in the light of the Buddha, the light of the truth. The use of colors and light helped create the desired effect and visualize the concept.

1.3 Technique

The works were created using the techniques of sticking eggshell, together with acrylic and color patches to create different surfaces and textures. The use of colors and lines created the effects of brilliant light that appealed to people's feelings and emotions.



1.4 Problem and resolution

The works created at this first stage were creative but according to the evaluation committee embraced too many details. They suggested only focusing on the lotus and the content relating to the lotus, not telling the whole story in one piece of work.

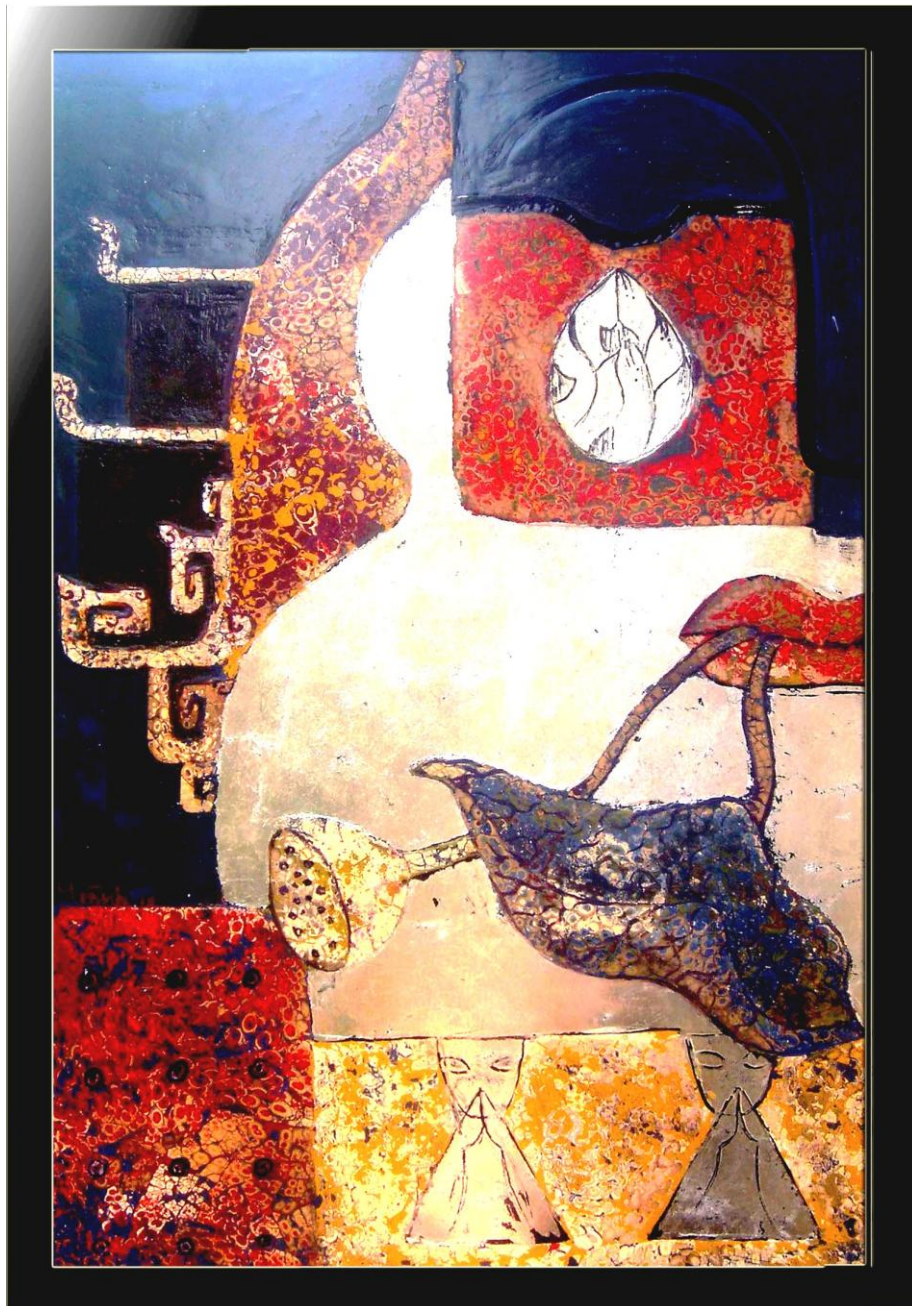


Figure 31 Works before thesis phase 1 work 1





Figure 32 Works before thesis phase 1 work 2





Figure 33 Works before thesis phase 1 work 3



2. Phase 2 (2nd evaluation)

2.1 Content

The works created this time focused on the lotus as the symbol of the truth. It was explored based on the spiritual value of the flower on people's daily lives. The beauty of the lotus was depicted to express the purification of human body, soul and mind. The state of perfection that can be reached through effort and practice, just like the lotus getting out of the mud and bloom.

2.2 Form

There was a huge difference in the form and texture of the works created this time. The beauty of the lotus was depicted in distortion and exaggeration to create artistic visual effects. The different parts of the lotus were interwoven to show the close relationship of things in life. The use of bright colors and deep shadow made a joyful impression on viewers.

2.3 Technique

The works are created using a combination of techniques. The use of short brush strokes and bold colors created strong effects and aroused strong feelings. Smooth and rough surfaces of eggshell patches and embossed lines were also effective in expressing the visual language of form.

2.4 Problem, resolution and progression

Since the first evaluation, I had made suitable changes in the content and composition and had made great progress. The works this time were original and had a personal style. The evaluation committee thought highly of the series of works. Dr. Suchat said they had high artistic value, especially the picture made up of three small pieces together. According to the professor, the series of works this time were very good and relevant to the theme of the thesis.





Figure 34 Works before thesis phase 2 work 1





Figure 35 Works before thesis phase 2 work 2





Figure 36 Works before thesis phase 2 work 3





Figure 37 Works before thesis phase 2 work 4





Figure 38 Works before thesis phase 2 work 5





Figure 39 Works before thesis phase 2 work 6



Thesis works

1. Phase 1 (1st evaluation)

1.1 Content

The works this time continued to focus on the lotus as the symbol of the truth. They expressed the pure beauty of the lotus based on its religious, cultural and spiritual value. However, there was a big difference compared to the previous works in terms of angle, composition, and technique. The different parts of the lotus were depicted together in a harmonious combination from a straight angle. The series of works successfully described the spiritual beauty of the lotus in a different way and created a close connection with the previous works in terms of content, form and technique.

1.2 Form

The different parts of the lotus were depicted in harmonious clusters. The bright colors of red and golden yellow and shades of green created a good visual art effect. The graceful depiction of the lotus bud, its leaf and iconic shower together signified mental strength and willpower, causing viewers to feel encouraged and relaxed.

1.3 Technique

The works created were characterized by the use of embossed lines and raised designs. The use of lines, and mixed and non-mixed pure colors created strong light effects and made the works look nice and charming. The movement of lines, colors and light created a deep and lively space. The use of eggshell with smooth surfaces combined with the use of silver and gold to make shiny surfaces nicely contrasted with the wrinkles and embossed designs created from a combination of paint and chemical substances.

1.4 Problem and resolution

According to the evaluation committee, the works this time were able to express the elements of senses, the sense of change, and decay. Nothing lasts forever; so does the human life. There is always change and decay with time. The works succeeded in depicting the beauty of quietness through the beauty of the lotus. However, the artist should see the beauty and quietness in contrast to the expression of change and decay.



They said there was a lack of strong highlighted points in the works this time. It was necessary to create highlights in color differences and surface differences. They also suggested making works of different sizes and shapes, both small and big, not only square in shape but also other shapes such as lotus leaf or flower to make the works more interesting and attractive. With regard to presentation, the evaluation committee suggested that the student should think of the best way to present the works, not just ordinary arrangements of subject. They said during the studying time of the subject of Compost, the student successfully controlled and presented in a very good and effective way.



Figure 40 Thesis works phase 1 work 1





Figure 41 Thesis works phase 1 work 2



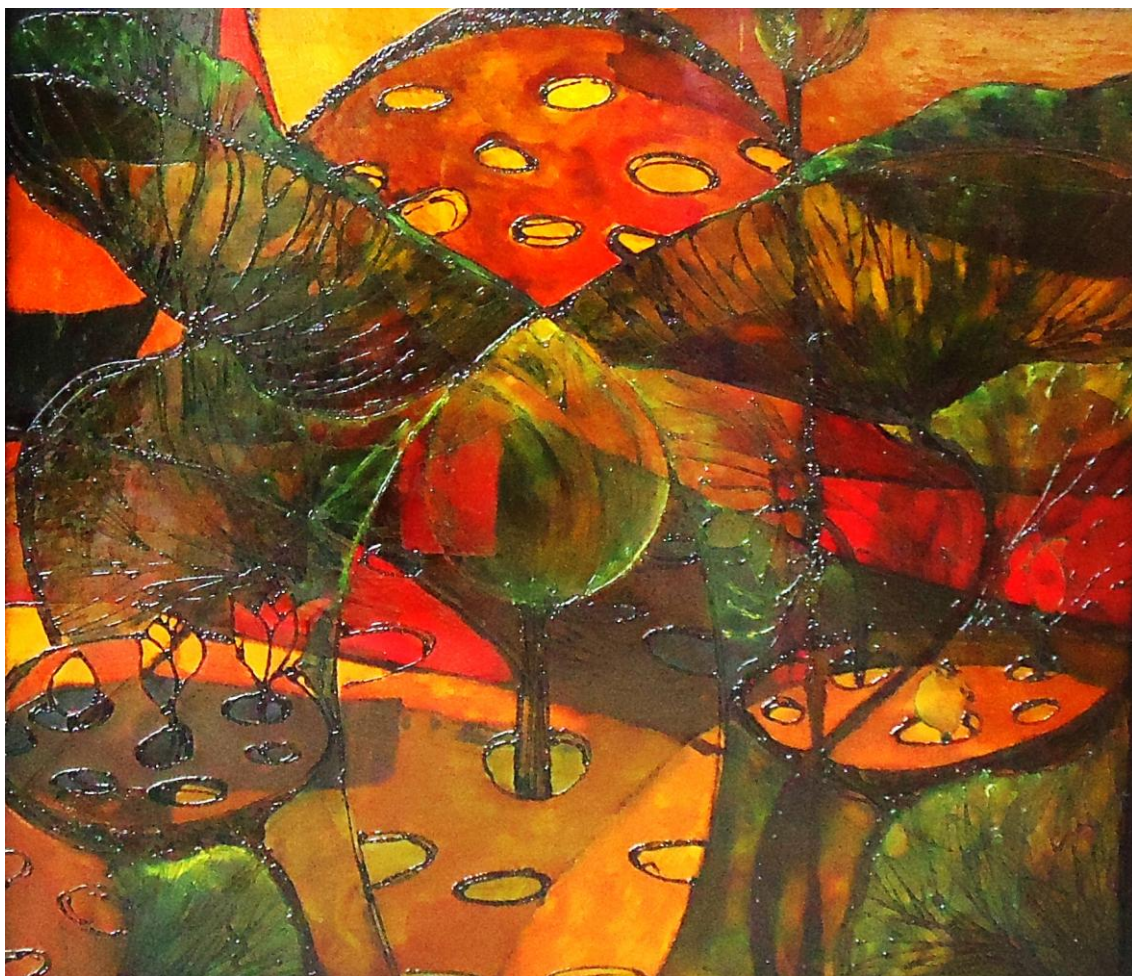


Figure 42 Thesis works phase 1 work 3



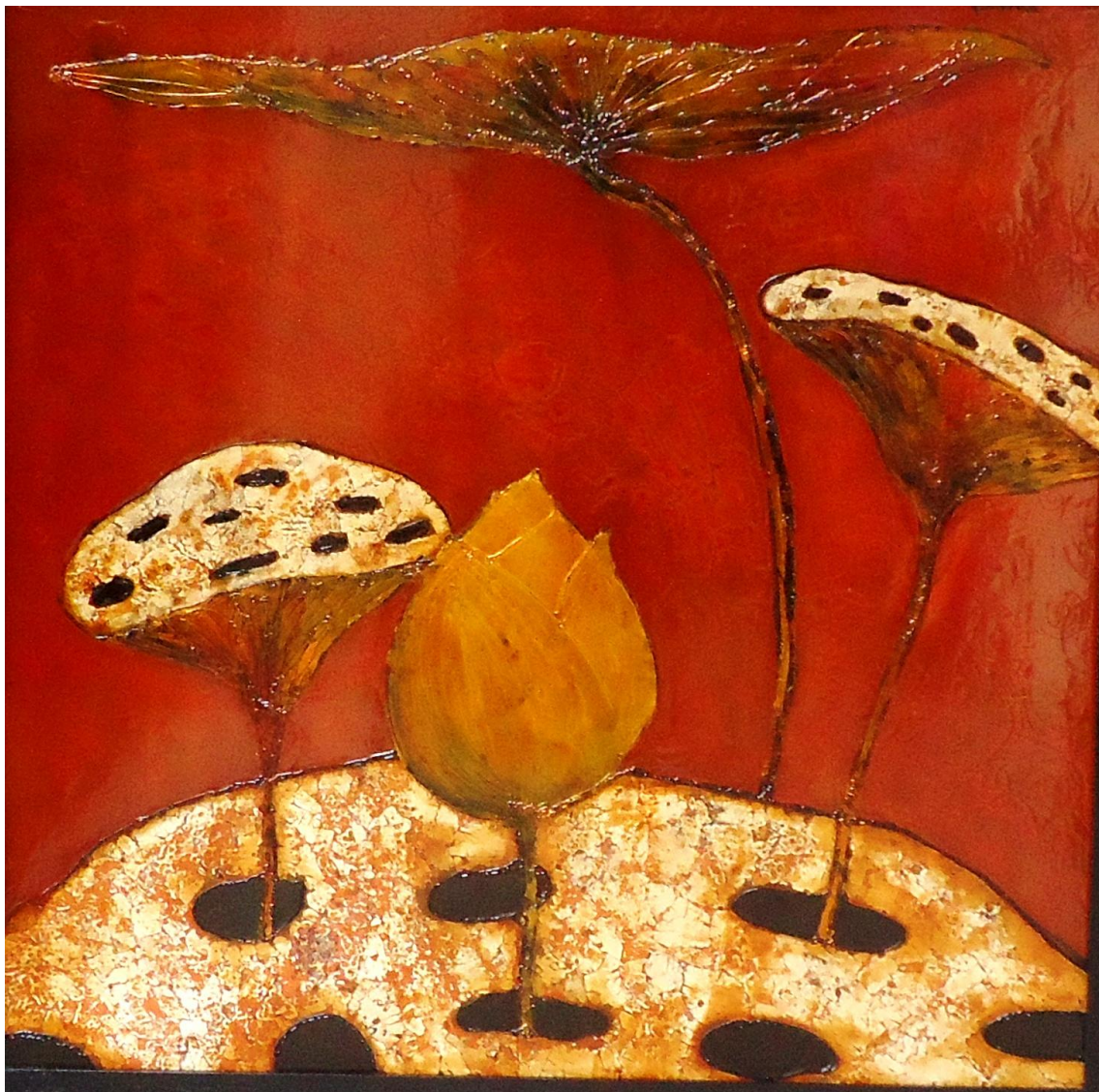


Figure 43 Thesis works phase 1 work 4



2. Phase 2 (2nd evaluation)

2.1 Content

This series of works continued to depict the lotus as the symbol of the truth. They expressed the beauty of quietness and purification through the contrast of colors. Compared to the previous works, the beauty and quietness were depicted in contrast to the change and decay, creating strong effects on visualization and emotions and feelings. The differences in surface, shape, and composition created a diversity in form and visual effect. The series of works successfully described the spiritual beauty of the lotus and were in close connection with the previous works in terms of content, form and technique.

2.2 Form

The works created at this phase showed a huge difference in form and angle of sight compared with the previous works. The iconic shower and the bud were depicted in an artistic way to express the process of change, decay, and rebirth. The use of cool color shades against the dark background created an effect of space and perspective on viewers. The use of lines and embossed designs also made the works more impressive.

2.3 Technique

The works were created using various techniques and compositions. The use of embossed lines and designs was done using a mixture of lacquer and stone powder. Thick layers of paint were applied to create wrinkles and furrows to express dark side of the world, of life. The green shade of the bud signified the strength and effort, while the use of gold and bright colors represented the joy of success, the happiness of enlightenment.

2.4 Problem, resolution and progression

The works created this time were beautiful and had high artistic value. The techniques and presentation were very good and relevant to the expression of the content of the thesis. There was great progress in the use of colors and combination of techniques. The evaluation committee just suggested the student should create a bigger number of works.





Figure 44 Thesis works phase 2 work 1





Figure 45 Thesis works phase 2 work 2





Figure 46 Thesis works phase 2 work 3





Figure 47 Thesis works phase 2 work 4



3. Phase 3 (final evaluation)

3.1 Content

The last series of works was a continuation of creation on the topic of the lotus in relation to its cultural and spiritual values. The works depicted the beauty of the soul and mind through the expression of quietness and purification. The beauty and power of growth and life was depicted interwoven with the dynamic of change and the darkness of decay through a combination of lines, colors and techniques. The harmony of colors and composition created a highly artistic effect and a good impression to viewers. The diversity in form and visual effect successfully transferred the spiritual message about the lotus. The works were a development of the previous works at a higher level in terms of form and technique.

3.2 Form

The works created at this phase were more abundant in terms of number, size, form and techniques. The stylized iconic shower with embossed lines and designs created strong emotions. Patches of different colors, designs and surfaces made it nice and fun to the eye. The use of cool and hot color shades against the dark background created an effect of deep space and perspective on viewers.

3.3 Technique

A variety of techniques and compositions were applied. The use of embossed lines and designs was done using a mixture of lacquer and stone powder to express change. Brush strokes of mixed colors implied the process of decay. Light colors and smooth surfaces of eggshell and silver expressed hope, willpower, joy and happiness.

3.4 Problem, resolution and progression

There has been a great progress in creation. The evaluation committee thought highly of the works; they were of high quality in terms of creativity and artistic effect. The works show a good color scheme and a nice change of form and color. The image of the lotus exploited and depicted in the works matched well with the focus, the idea of the thesis. They conveyed and clarified the message about Vietnamese Buddhist culture (Professor Pre cha Thathong). Mr. De Cha was satisfied with the works. He said the techniques of lacquer painting were very good. They were combined in a creative and effective way, creating a style typical of the author, but he thought it could be even



better with all the parts of the lotus: leaf, bud, flower and iconic shower depicted together in a harmonious combination. The last series of works was a success; it represented the results of a process of exploration, hard work, and creation.



Figure 48 Thesis works phase 3 work 1



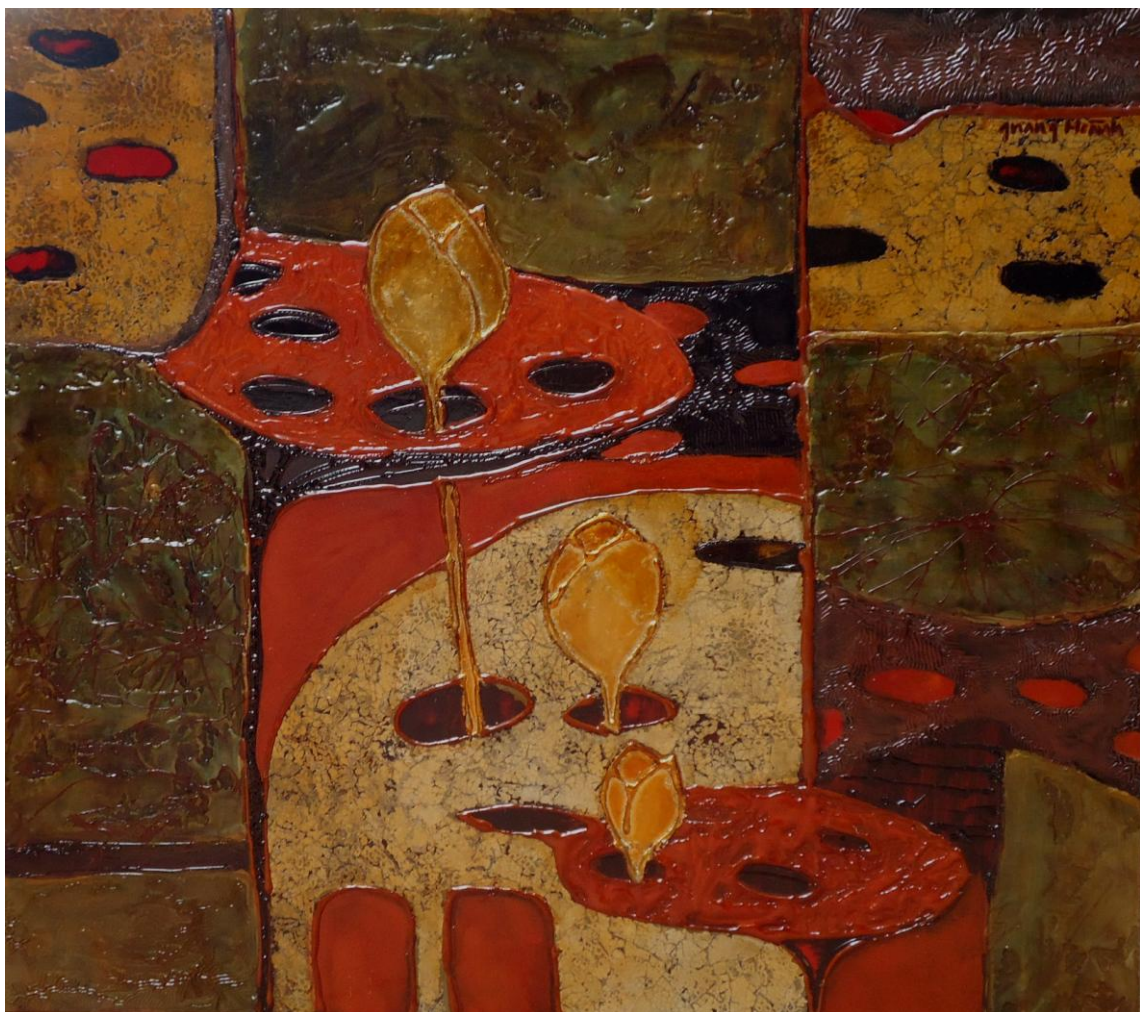


Figure 49 Thesis works phase 3 work 2





Figure 50 Thesis works phase 3 work 3





Figure 51 Thesis works phase 3 work 4





Figure 52 Thesis works phase 3 work 5





Figure 53 Thesis works phase 3 work 6



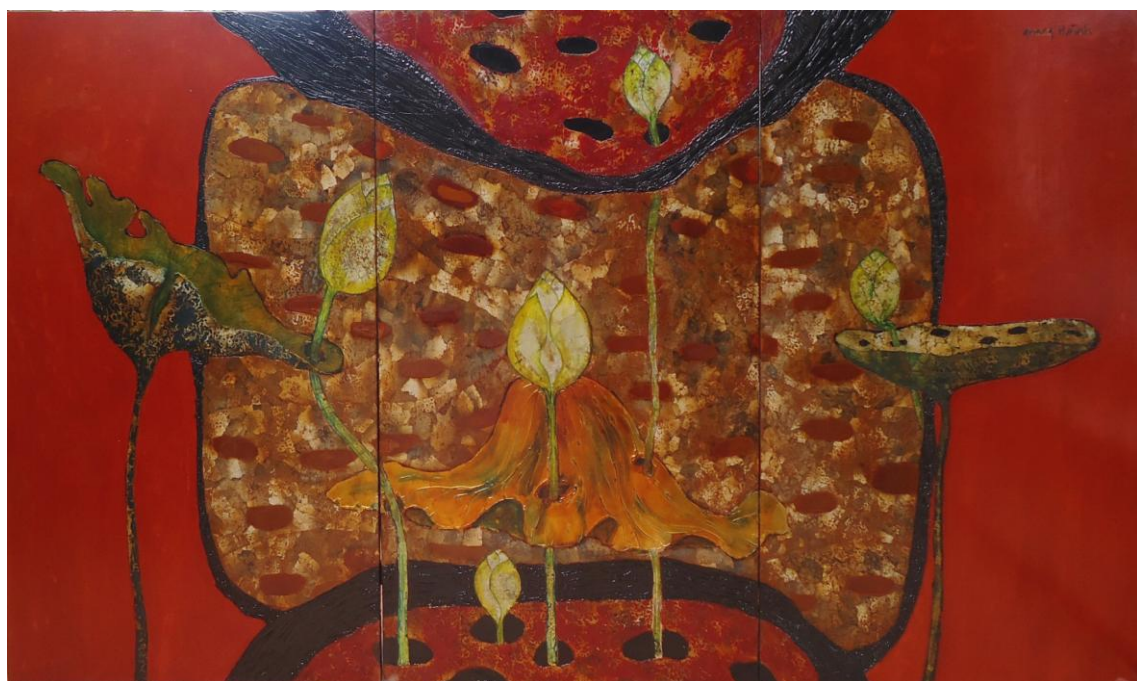


Figure 54 Thesis works phase 3 work 7



Scores of lacquer paintings have been created to depict the image of the lotus flower as the symbol of the truth. Different sets of paintings expressed in different hues, from different angles, and about different parts of the subject prove effective in conveying the quiet beauty of the lotus, and its powerful and admirable strength. The creation process has been on the right track and met all the requirements of the thesis in terms of concept, content, objectives and work progress. Throughout the creation process, I learned and tried many different techniques from famous artists. With the advice from the evaluation committee and the advisors, I explored and found the techniques typical of myself and formed a style of my own. The works demonstrated the same idea and concept about the lotus throughout the creation process. The beauty of the lotus was depicted in the visual language of form and color with an aim to signify the beauty and purification of the soul and mind as is perceived in Buddhism and by Vietnamese people. Although the topic of the lotus is not new, I have depicted it from a different aspect of the subject and in a different style, creating a novelty in perception.



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The present creation aimed to depict the beauty of the lotus in connection with the spiritual and cultural values it has on Vietnamese people. It is described as the symbol of the truth through the depiction of its process of growth. This chapter examines the extent to which the study problems have been resolved by the work and study, and how the findings support the existent literature. Conclusion about the creation purposes and the creation resolution are drawn based on the results findings. It will be presented according to the following topics :

1. Conclusion
2. Discussion
3. Recommendation

Conclusion

This visual arts creation thesis, the symbol of the truth, derived from the eternal beauty of the lotus flower, its popularity, and its spiritual and cultural values in people's religious belief and daily lives. The lotus is very beautiful, uncontaminated, and pure. In poems and folk verses, the lotus is used to refer to true love: pure and beautiful, to the strength of mind, the beauty of the soul. In Buddhism, the lotus signifies the purity of body and mind; the blooming flower represents the highest state : enlightenment.

The concept of this creation was derived from a personal perception. The lotus is rooted in deep mud and its stem grows straight up through the water. The leaf and the blossom rise high above the water in the sun, clean, beautiful and fragrant. This pattern of growth signifies the progress of the soul from the mud of materialism and ignorance, through the waters of experience, and into the bright sunshine of enlightenment. Hence, the lotus represents the true nature of beings, who rise into the beauty and clarity of enlightenment. In Vietnamese culture, the lotus is of great value in the people's spiritual life. It guides people to the good and helps them avoid evils.



This work was mixed media painting. It had a semi-abstract style. The purposes of this creation were to explore the beauty of the lotus in relation to its spiritual and cultural values, and capture the features that make it so valuable through the use of a combination of modern and traditional techniques.

The data were collected and divided into four groups; these are : primary inspiration, documentary data, influence from creative works by Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, and Nguyen Đuc Quang, and data of the creation experiments. Then the creation was originated following these processes: doing complete sketches, and then working with lacquer as the key material and applying different techniques such as using eggshell, creating matière, and brush strokes with an aim to achieve the best result.

This creation was the new finding which was original of the creator. The creation results discovered that the success gave an expression of the growth process of the lotus: from mud into beautiful fragrant flowers in the sunshine, unstained. The message of the truth is that through learning and practicing Buddhist teachings, we can touch our true nature, enjoying freedom and joy of life and that the “fragrance” from our good nature will permeate and have a good effect on the people around.

Discussion

The results of the creation lead to the new findings which become the originality and personality of the creator as follow :

1. Concept

The lotus flower is a symbol of purity and goodness in Vietnamese culture. It is of great value in the people's spiritual life. It is part of their culture in presenting their way of thinking, and their way of life. The works described the beauty of the lotus from different angles, at different stages of growth in relation to the growth process of the human soul. The depiction of the prominent features of the flower exuded the spiritual beauty. In the context of Buddhism, the theory of karma says that, just like the lotus flower, our life is made up of cause and effect. Every cause - be it action, word or thought - will imprint an effect that can be seen in this lifetime or in future lives. In addition to the above, the lotus signifies that even the dirtiest water will not cling to the



lotus (pure in spirit). The works are created using lacquer, together with the use of lines and light. The combination of personal belief and traditional cultures on the basis of social studies is the key factor to the creation of this project.

2. Form

The scope of style is semi-abstract expressionism using lacquer. The lotus was depicted in distortion and exaggeration using a combination of colors and lines. What is typical and original of the author is a combination of exaggerated shapes in a harmonious way together with embossed lines and designs to represent the process of change, decay and rebirth. The success in creating a diversity in form and visual effects made a difference in the style of the author.

3. Technique, material and presentation

I used lacquer to express my ideas about the lotus and life. The depiction of the roots of a lotus in the mud is done using dark hues of brown, black, and dark green, together with the use of lines and uneven surface to refer to all the negative aspects of the complex ordinary world into which human beings are born. The images of the lotus leaves, unopened and blooming flowers, and iconic shower in different shades of blue, white, and red from different angles are depicted through the use of a variety of materials (eggshell, gold and silver sheets, paints, etc.) and techniques (*matière*, outward curves, etc.). A combination of materials such as paint, stone powder, glue, eggshell, silver, gold and different techniques like short brush stroke, embossed lines and designs, wrinkles, mixed colors were applied too create visual effects. The materials used in combination with specific techniques successfully expressed the idea of the thesis and were typical of the author.

Recommendation

Through the process of creation, I learned how to form ideas for an assignment or research and how to express my ideas in connection with social life. Also, technically, I learned and used many different techniques in painting lacquers. In addition, I learned different ways of doing research and exploiting the topic or subject in a social context.



Art is not only for the sake of art, but it is also for the sake of human beings. We use arts to express ourselves, and to get some message across to the people around. We use arts, together with other means of media, to help people be aware of some important issues, to educate them about something, or to guide them to a certain aim or target.

Following are some recommendations :

1. First, it is essential to develop research skills and find and develop an individual style.
2. Second, it is also important to have a passion in work; this will help the artist to be creative.
3. The thesis can be developed further by stylizing the image even further instead of sticking real form.

From the creation works, I also have implications concerning the social aspect as follows :

1. One significant implication in my works is that they are educational in that they help people see and feel the beauty of life. When we grow a nice “cause”, we will reap a good “result”. Peace and goodness are with us when we lead a beautiful life, and all the good things will be multiplied when other people are influenced and change for the better.
2. Another important implication is that how arts is perceived and understood is subjective; it depends on each person. Therefore, it is essential that we do it with all our heart and responsibility in order to get a certain message across to the public and have them perceiving and understanding it the way we intend it to be. The visual language of arts is abstract and implicit but it can have a powerful effect on the public.



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