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Vietnamese painting space in Singapore



Posted by **Pham Dan Binh** — 29/06/2016 In Painting



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Located at 23 Yong Siak Street, the ancient Tiong Bahru neighborhood of Singapore is an art space called ArtBlue Studio, which introduces Vietnamese artists and paintings to art lovers, collectors and traders in the local area, and more broadly to the region and the world, as the Lion Island has become an art center of global stature and prestige.

Ms. Nguyen Thi Phuong, founder and co-owner of ArtBlue Studio, said that in 2001, while she was in Ho Chi Minh City, she had the chance to meet an art collector from London and was invited to be his assistant. Thanks to this job, Ms. Phuong had the opportunity to meet many artists across the country, including big names in Vietnamese painting as well as young, emerging artists who are gaining attention. In an interview with the online art magazine *The Muse - a partner of The Straits Times newspaper*, the owner of ArtBlue Studio said: "Through them, I not only discovered the history of the formation and development of Vietnamese art, but also understood the lives of each artist. There are many who have experienced war or settled abroad, others have studied abroad in many countries and all of these artists always have interesting stories to tell about their lives and works."



ArtBlue Studio is always open to welcome visitors and collectors of Vietnamese paintings.

With the capital and experience gained from years of working with Vietnamese fine arts, in 2006 Nguyen Thi Phuong went to Singapore to start a career, starting the process of promoting Vietnamese paintings to galleries in the island nation, where her strength is her close relationship with artists in her homeland. More importantly, she collaborated with the

Singapore Art Museum to build the museum's collection of Vietnamese fine arts. That job helped her become an art consultant and then the next step to become a gallery owner: ArtBlue Studio was born and started operating in 2006, although it was only officially opened a few years ago. Since then, Nguyen Thi Phuong and her husband, Mr. Jacques Renaud - also a Vietnamese art expert - have devoted all their time to introducing Vietnamese artists' paintings to international art lovers and collectors through solo and group exhibitions at ArtBlue Studio as well as bringing their paintings to art fairs and exhibitions held in Singapore, especially at the Affordable Art Fair, which is also held in New York, Los Angeles, Melbourne, and Hong Kong. "It is a great way to promote our gallery's artists as well as introduce Vietnamese art in general," said Ms. Phuong. Or "Affordable Art Fair is the perfect opportunity for ArtBlue Studio to share its passion and introduce Vietnamese art to new collectors," as co-owner Jacques Renaud put it.



A corner of the art display at ArtBlue Studio, the two portraits above are works by artist Phuong Quoc Tri

At the recent affordable art fairs in Singapore, many galleries also exhibited Vietnamese paintings, but ArtBlue Studio was the only gallery that brought to the fair all works by Vietnamese artists. Ms. Phuong said: "In fact, at the beginning, we did not see the great value of Vietnamese paintings as we saw in Indian, Chinese, and Indonesian paintings. And it was a great opportunity for us when paintings by Vietnamese masters were still available at reasonable prices." According to the owner, ArtBlue Studio's way of selecting works is to look for established names but also discover new talents and bring them to the public who love

painting: "We spend a lot of time traveling around Vietnam, talking to artists and watching art exhibitions. What we look for is a love for the new, the unique...". And "Our passion and role is to open people's hearts to the art we love," said Ms. Phuong.



Ms. Phuong guides guests to view paintings on the opening day of an exhibition.





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Artist Phuoc Quoc Tri went to Singapore to paint portraits directly at ArtBlue Studio

✉ Responding to *The Muse* 's question : “How does the Singaporean market and the global market receive Vietnamese art?”, Ms. Phuong said: “Vietnamese art is vibrant and makes a strong impression. It is the art that brings happiness to your life. Therefore, Vietnamese art has been warmly welcomed both in Singapore and the world in general. I believe that we will see many more new art stars coming from Vietnam in the next few years, when the global art market is becoming more and more open to a unique art in both creative inspiration and style of expression.”



House by the Canal – oil painting by Lim Khim Katy at ArtBlue Studio

In that direction, in 2015 ArtBlue Studio organized an exhibition of Vietnamese lacquer paintings. According to owner Jacques Renaud, although the gallery named “The Great Art of Lacquer Painting” has not introduced many Vietnamese lacquer artists, this is the first time ArtBlue Studio has decided to focus on displaying works of this genre, and this is probably also the first lacquer exhibition held in Singapore (because transportation is more complicated and expensive than other types of paintings).

ArtBlue Studio

A Hidden Treasure of Vietnamese Painting



In a city where every shopping mall and major hotel houses an elite art gallery or two, where galleries cluster among rows of antique conservation houses and where there's even a warehouse district dedicated to contemporary art spaces, finding art at reasonable prices can seem a little daunting.

Fortunately, just off Orchard Road, there's ArtBlue Studio (formerly Blue Dragon Art), where one can view more than 150 works by major Vietnamese artists. This casual gem of an art space is the home and gallery of Phuong Nguyen, a young Vietnamese woman who has been in the art business for nearly ten years.

ArtBlue Studio sells primarily to galleries, but Phuong says, "I love inviting people to my home to show them my collection. I enjoy learning their taste and helping them discover artists they may not be familiar with. Vietnamese art is so rich and there are so many treasures!" Her home is simple, nothing like the fancy galleries we are used to, but with good lighting and a professional art hanging system, she has created a space that shows art well. Some paintings are displayed on the white walls but others are stacked around the apartment – perfect for browsing by those who enjoy the thrill of a 'find'.

Of course, you can't just drop in at ArtBlue Studio – you need to make an appointment so that Phuong will be there to greet you. She explains that the colonial French powers established a Fine Arts University in Hanoi in 1925, thus developing in Vietnamese art strong European influences that are still visible today, particularly many elements of Impressionism.

While still a university student, Phuong began working as an assistant to a prominent art collector, putting her in direct contact with many of the greatest Vietnamese painters. When she and her husband, a Frenchman she met in Ho Chi Minh City moved to Singapore five years ago, she began to promote the work of Vietnamese artists in Singapore. She now supplies Vietnamese art to several galleries in Singapore as well as to galleries in the UK, Japan and Hong Kong.

Successful galleries must build trust with their clients. "People are sometimes suspicious about Vietnamese paintings because



LOTUS SEASON by artist Duong Sen, 80 x 80 cm, Lacquer

there are too many people making bad copies in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi," she says. "It took a long time to establish confidence with my clients." Every piece she sells come with full documentation and a certificate of authenticity signed by the artist. Recent sales to the Singapore Art Museum have cemented her reputation.

In addition to displaying paintings, ArtBlue Studio occasionally houses visiting artists. On a recent visit to Singapore, three lacquer-painting masters, Duong Sen, Luong Khanh Toan and Nguyen Hong Son, stayed at Phuong's home while they explored the local art scene, also taking time to relax and paint in ArtBlue's supportive environment. They joined in as Phuong showed her collection, happily demonstrating the complex techniques of lacquer painting.

So when the high-rent galleries become a little too overwhelming, treat yourself to an off-beat art experience at ArtBlue Studio on quiet Oxley Road, so close but yet so far from trendy Orchard Road.

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Please call ahead for appointments. Tel:(65) 97525458
E: phuong.artbluestudio@yahoo.com W: www.artbluestudio.com



The Singapore Art Gallery Guide introduces ArtBlue Studio with the title "An Undiscovered Treasure Trove of Vietnamese Paintings", the painting printed in the article is a lacquer work by artist Duong Sen

If you are traveling to Singapore and are interested in fine arts, take the time to visit Tiong Bahru, one of the oldest neighborhoods in the island nation, and visit the Vietnamese painting space at ArtBlue Studio, chatting with the charming Vietnamese owner. And if you have the opportunity to visit the National Art Gallery, the extremely magnificent art museum that was recently inaugurated at 1 St Andrew Street, visit the Vietnamese art gallery. Many of the paintings in the National Art Gallery's massive collection of Vietnamese paintings were "match-making" by ArtBlue Studio itself.

Keywords: ArtBlue Studio Singapore Vietnamese paintings

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