

Remembering painter Nguyen Lam: Talented but restrained

September 29, 2025 19:53 GMT+7

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the death of painter Nguyen Lam (January 16, 1941 - June 28, 2025), at 5:30 p.m. on October 3 at Huyen Art House (HCMC), the *Nguyen Lam* exhibition will open, lasting until October 13, 2025. This is a rare solo exhibition of Nguyen Lam's oil paintings in Vietnam, jointly organized by ArtBlue Studio and Huyen Art House.

Sports and Culture Newspaper (Vietnam News Agency) respectfully introduces an article by artist Tran Vinh Thinh about Nguyen Lam's legacy.

A life of sincerity

I belong to the later generation, very far from the age of painter Nguyen Lam. But I have known his name for about 30 years. Later, I had many opportunities to go to Ho Chi Minh City, I got to know him and his siblings, and the distance of affection became closer.



Painter Nguyen Lam

I remember the times I exhibited in Ho Chi Minh City, although he was old, he always came to see my paintings. Sometimes he came and didn't see me, but he came the next day. He looked at each painting carefully, and after viewing, he always gave me comments and asked about my creative perspective, my life, and the livelihood of artists in the Central region.

I still remember the solo exhibition around 2022, he came to see it twice, then invited me to have breakfast and drink coffee with the artists in Ho Chi Minh City.

He is a sincere person, speaks his mind, and does not hesitate to give advice and share experiences with the young generation like us about the joys and sorrows in our career.



Over time, and with the many meetings with his daughter Huyen Lam, I was especially impressed with his family. Although he was a veteran artist, his lifestyle was very moderate and simple. It can be said that throughout his life, he only focused on painting and raising his children, so it is rare for a family in Vietnam to have 8 artists like his family, of which 6 were members of the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts Association and the Vietnam Fine Arts Association at the same time. And almost all of his children became famous in the field of fine arts such as Huyen Lam, Huynh Lan, Lam Huynh Linh, Lam Lan...

Painter Nguyen Lam's birth name is Lam Huynh Long, born in 1941 in Can Tho. In 1956, he enrolled at the Gia Dinh School of Decorative Arts and studied there until 1959. Just a few months before graduating, he made an important decision: he dropped out of school and took the entrance exam to the Saigon National College of Fine Arts, determined to become a

creative painter rather than a decorative painter. In 1962, he took the stage name Nguyen Lam and continued his artistic activities until his death.

He participated in exhibitions as well as art fairs in the South and internationally before 1975 such as Biennale de Paris in France in 1961 and 1963; in 1962 he won a Silver medal at the Spring exhibition, in addition to many previous awards, as well as many awards from regional exhibitions and national exhibitions after the country's reunification.



"Young Girl" (oil on canvas, 130x100 cm, 2021) by Nguyen Lam

Nguyen Lam has been involved very early in the flow of Southern painting before and after 1975. He is a person with great merit when he early followed the Southern lacquer movement from that time until now, not only creating for himself, he is also the one who leads and encourages many colleagues, students, and descendants to work together and develop the lacquer movement.

It can be said that, in addition to the Thanh Le lacquer line serving the mass market, later on, together with Ho Huu Thu, Nguyen Lam created a prominent name in the Southern lacquer line. Until his death, the name of painter Nguyen Lam occupied a rather large position alongside famous contemporary painters. Besides that, there are oil paintings, especially abstract style, a unique path, full of poetry.

His contribution to the flow of Vietnamese painting, as well as to show us that he lived a life dedicated to his passion for the path of painting. Throughout his life, he never stopped his desire to create from his youth, he carefully went from realistic painting, to the impressionist and expressionist periods, and finally to large-scale abstract works that captivated viewers.

Nguyen Lam had a rather difficult childhood, but later on, he was a carefree and leisurely person. He lived not only with art but also with friendship, with a cup of coffee in the morning with his brothers, with a glass of beer in the afternoon with his friends, he lived happily and harmoniously, with a generous soul.



"Abstract" (oil on canvas, 110x140 cm, 2022) by Nguyen Lam

During the last days of his life, when he was sick, his daily activities and movements were difficult, but he still took the time to sit and paint for a few hours each day. Indeed, when I heard from his children that he was still painting, I was very surprised, because when I visited him, he was weak and much thinner, it seemed like his time was not far away, his limbs had difficulty moving, but his eyes were still bright, he asked me about his life and work, sometimes he still recalled a few old stories in a clear mind with dedication, as if advising the next generation about what he had experienced, as well as believing in the future of the younger generation and believing in the Vietnamese lacquer painting movement to soon integrate into other art trends of international painting.

Loved by the international public

For over 20 years now, there has been a gallery that has quietly brought Nguyen Lam's paintings to exhibitions in many places around the world such as England, America, Italy, China, Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia... contributing significantly to his reputation in the international art market. It is a Vietnamese gallery in Singapore, managed by the young owner Phuong Nguyen, owner of ArtBlue Studio – located in Tiong Bahru, Singapore. This is the place that has been the bridge for Nguyen Lam and many Vietnamese artists to go international, and is a typical gallery outside of Vietnam that specializes in displaying and introducing paintings by domestic artists.



Phuong Nguyen of ArtBlue Studio (2nd from right) visits Nguyen Lam's studio on July 17, 2019.
Photo: TL

With over 20 years of operation, ArtBlue Studio has organized many exhibitions introducing Vietnamese artists to the international community, serving as a bridge to help many foreign art lovers come to Vietnam. Nguyen Lam is a painter who is very popular with the ArtBlue Studio audience, so the studio has organized 6 solo exhibitions for him in Singapore, 4 of which the artist attended the opening. After each exhibition,

nearly 80% of the exhibited works find new owners, especially the abstract oil paintings, which are very popular with collectors because of their contemporary spirit.

Painter Nguyen Lam has leisurely gone to the land of white clouds at the age of 85, saying goodbye to us, those who love his personality and his artistic spirit. With more than 60 years of artistic activities, his legacy is not only over 1,000 works (mainly lacquer and oil paintings), but also the spirit of artistic work and the support and encouragement of future generations.



Despite being in a wheelchair, Nguyen Lam still went to exhibitions and took pictures of his children.
Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts Association, December 3, 2023. Photo: LD

In Nguyen Lam's characteristic abstract works, the spirit of Western contemporary painting and the soul and tone of the East are blended. During more than 60 years of activity and creation, he worked tirelessly until his last days. A caring and affectionate Nguyen Lam in the hearts of his children and relatives, a Nguyen Lam is an example of hard work and creation of lifetime works, worthy of being one of the leading painters of contemporary Vietnam.

With respect for a talented artist, ArtBlue Studio in collaboration with Huyen Art House organized the *Nguyen Lam* exhibition, displaying more than 20 typical works (mainly large-size oil paintings) of his through many periods, to remember, as well as share with the Vietnamese art-loving public about the works that ArtBlue Studio has collected and preserved.

Coming to this exhibition, we can see the passion and affection of Ms. Phuong Nguyen and ArtBlue Studio for Nguyen Lam's paintings. Here, we can also acknowledge the silent dedication of ArtBlue Studio in contributing significantly to the success of many Vietnamese artists.

The memorial exhibition on the 100th day of the death of painter Nguyen Lam is a heartfelt tribute from many who love his paintings, to a talented and virtuous painter.

TRAN VINH THINH