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## Painter Nguyen Lam - Paint to live and live to paint

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For artist Nguyen Lam, "Painting to live and living to paint" is perhaps the most complete summary. Painting to satisfy the passion of someone who showed talent quite early and steadfastly pursued it for over 70 years, becoming one of the famous artists of modern Vietnamese fine arts. Painting to make a living from the age of 20 as a filial child, painting to support a family and having an artist family that is admirable in every aspect.



Abstract , oil on canvas, size 110x140cm (2019) - Painting: Nguyen Lam

### Talented artist lives life with passion

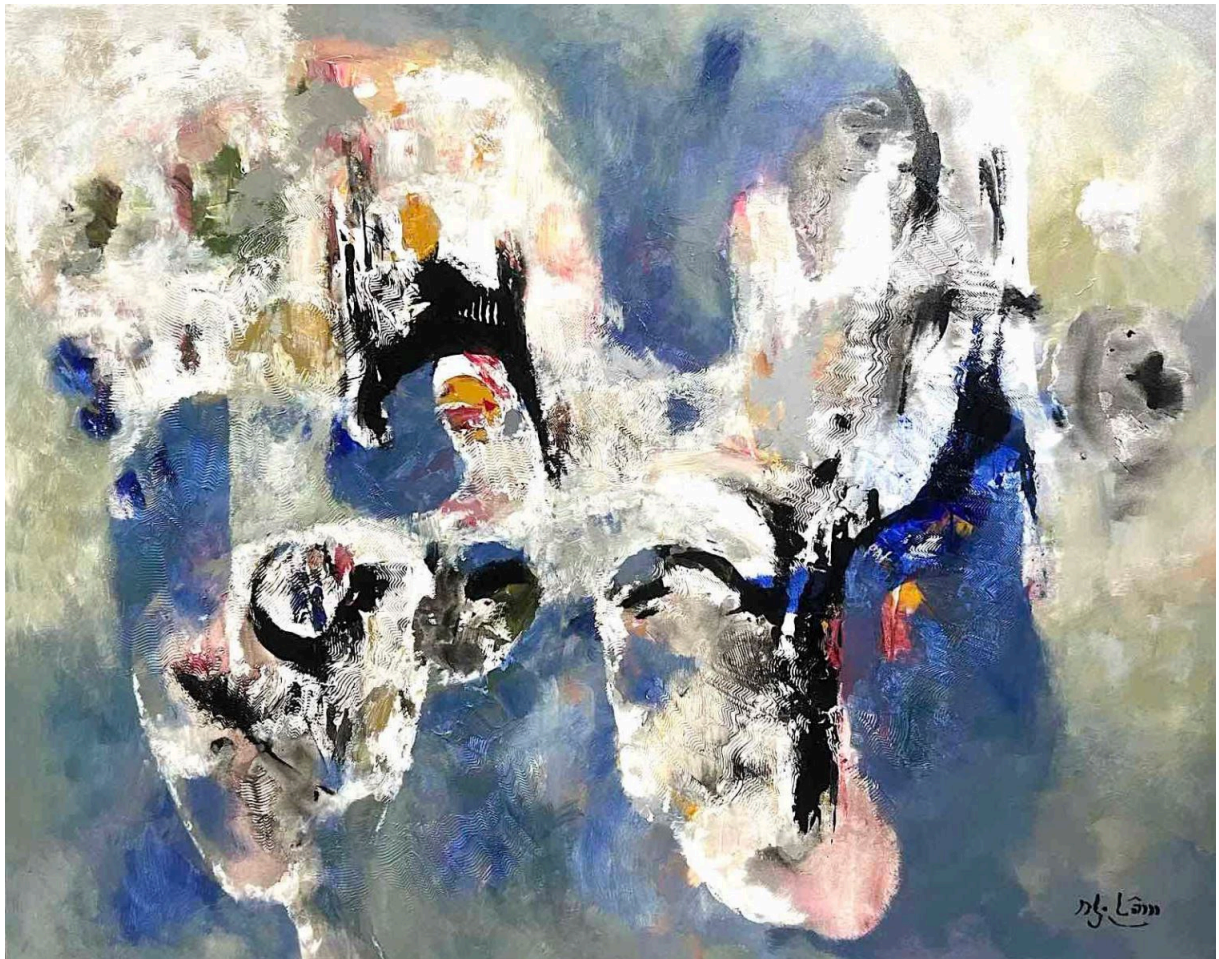
The late painter Nguyen Lam (real name Lam Huynh Long), born in 1940 in Can Tho, passed away on June 28, 2025 in Ho Chi Minh City. His stage name is meaningful because it is a combination of Nguyen (his mother's and wife's surname) and Lam (his father's and the painter's surname).



His talent for painting was revealed from a young age. At the age of 15 or 16, following the advice of some artists, Nguyen Lam went to Saigon to take the exam to enter the art school. In 1960, Nguyen Lam was the valedictorian of the Saigon National College of Fine Arts. His talent and passion were soon revealed while he was still studying at the school. Although he was in dire need of money, he refused to work for Thanh Le Lacquer with a very high salary. Student Lam Huynh Long soon achieved success when he won the Silver Prize at the 1962 Spring Painting Exhibition in Saigon with his *Solo* work and the Bronze Medal at the Catholic Painting Exhibition in 1963. After graduating (1965), Nguyen Lam became a Professor at the Gia Dinh School of Decorative Arts.

Nguyen Lam is one of the artists who soon formed his own style of painting, experimenting with almost all painting materials, but oil paint and lacquer were the ones he discovered, conquered and created the most success. These materials helped him unleash his creativity, especially in works of extremely large size when he was over 80 years old.

Nguyen Lam determined his creative path early, while still in school, and when he joined the Vietnam Young Artists Association. He and other young artists began to create at a time when many new art schools such as Abstract, Expressionism, and Romanticism were introduced in Saigon. He experimented with Abstract art while still a student. With a solid foundation in the fundamentals of painting, Nguyen Lam confidently and boldly broke down the form to recreate and freely construct images with geometric lines in the painting *Solo* (1962), blocks, strokes, and bright spots in the painting *Night Music* (1963) and became one of the typical Abstract painters, contributing to the success of contemporary Vietnamese painting.



Abstract , oil on canvas, size 110x140cm (2021) - Painting: Nguyen Lam

Besides, he also expressed the poetic, soaring emotions of Romanticism through the painting " *Desolation*" (1969) with only simple images of a lonely stone bench, a few bare tree trunks, and a desolate space of a quiet afternoon.

In 1972, during the fierce war, Nguyen Lam painted the oil painting *Desire* in the Expressionist style. The desire for peace is expressed through the image of a girl in a traditional Vietnamese dress, holding a bouquet of white flowers, a church in the distance, fictionalized in a hidden composition with a gloomy sky, contrasting light and dark.

The labor and creativity of painter Nguyen Lam have been affirmed through decades of diligent creation, satisfying his passion even when he was over 80 years old. In 2021 alone, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, he painted and sold dozens of lacquer and oil paintings in the Abstract style. By the end of 2022, nearly 20 paintings were sold, along with 10 large oil paintings for exhibitions in the UK and Singapore. In 2023-2024, he was still working enthusiastically, after nearly 70 years of passionate creation, but unfortunately, a stroke and its aftermath forced him to stop painting and pass away at the age of 85.

Painter Nguyen Lam participated in most of the important art exhibitions in Saigon and abroad before 1975. After 1975, he sent his works to most of the art exhibitions in Vietnam and many exhibitions in England, America, France, Germany, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand... Before 1975, painter Nguyen Lam had 6 solo exhibitions, but after 1975, he did not have solo exhibitions, his paintings were always sought after so there were never enough to hold an exhibition. His works "have a relationship" with museums, galleries, collectors, and art lovers at home and abroad.

On the occasion of the 100th day since painter Nguyen Lam passed away, as a tribute to the talented and virtuous painter, Ms. Phuong Nguyen - owner of Art Blue Studio in Singapore organized an exhibition of his paintings. Art Blue Studio has been with him for over 20 years, organizing many exhibitions of painter Nguyen Lam, introducing his paintings to Vietnamese art lovers around the world. In 2017, Art Blue added his paintings to the collection of the National Art Museum of Singapore.

In addition, his paintings are also in the collections of the Vietnam Fine Arts Museum, Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts Museum and many private museums and domestic and international collectors.



Young girl, oil on canvas, size 100x130cm (2021) - Painting: Nguyen Lam  
Nguyen Lam and his artistic family



Nguyen Lam became one of the few Vietnamese painters who could make a living from his profession. His talent earned him a scholarship from the school, and his beautiful paintings were soon collected. Not only did he support himself, but from the money from selling two paintings exhibited in 1962 in Vung Tau, he was able to buy a house for his family to live in and create works from 1962 until now.

Nguyen Lam was a man of lasting beauty from his youth until he was over 80 years old, and was also a famous cyclist before 1975. He maintained his passion for cycling throughout his life and passed it on to his children and grandchildren.

During his school years, he met and married a very beautiful, well-behaved Saigon girl when they were both 22 years old. She was the one who always took care of the family and children and sometimes also participated in work to take care of the family economy. They had 9 children together (5 girls, 4 boys), of which 6 are professional painters, art teachers (Huyen Lam, Lam Huynh Son, Lam Huynh Lan, Lam Huynh Linh, Huyen Le and Lam Lan), 2 are involved in making paintings (Lam Huynh Lam, Huyen Ly) and a daughter Huyen Loan is a zither artist. In the Vietnamese art world, perhaps the Nguyen Lam family has the most painters and 6 are members of the Vietnam Fine Arts Association and the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts Association.

In addition to his innate talent, his children's passion for drawing has gradually permeated over the years, as Huyen Lam shared: "Since childhood, my father often took the children to work with him, so each of them saw him working hard. Gradually, they liked watching him draw, and then each of them loved drawing."

Living by his profession is also a way to nurture his passion and educate his children in the family. During his lifetime, painter Nguyen Lam often said: "Labor is glorious, wandering is starvation." Therefore, he accepted to do everything related to his profession to support his family in the difficult years after the war. "There were times when the whole family, including my mother, went to help my father draw advertisements, billboards, and propaganda posters. It was so much fun. Whenever there was work, we did it," Huyen Lam recalled.

When the country was reformed and the art market was formed, the whole family lived on the money from selling paintings. Painter Nguyen Lam was the first teacher of his children, a role model in creative work, always knowing how to encourage, motivate and remind his children to create. From a commemorative house bought in 1962, also from the money from selling paintings, he bought 2 houses next door for a studio, 6 art galleries for himself and his children. He did exactly what painter Thanh Le said more than 60 years ago: "Just paint, just paint, don't be afraid of not being able to sell your paintings, just be afraid of not having paintings to sell, those paintings just wait, they are checks with no money yet written on them".

Painter Nguyen Lam has lived his life with a passion for creating paintings, and he cannot remember how many works he has created after nearly 70 years of painting without stopping. Although he has always pursued a creative path in many trends, Nguyen Lam's works always have a "destiny" with museums, collectors, and art lovers at home and abroad. There are probably few Vietnamese painter families with many children who are all successful in their profession, whose passion is always nurtured, and who have such an "Excellent Leader". Friends, colleagues, students... love and respect him for his emotional and sincere lifestyle.

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#### References

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## OTHER ARTICLES

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