

Discovering Vietnamese Art at Singapore's Affordable Art Fair

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Phuong Nguyen, a Vietnamese national residing in Singapore decided to set up ArtBlue Studio to showcase vibrant Vietnamese art in Singapore. Her personal connections with many of Vietnam's most established and up-and-coming artists has ensured her access to the most exciting art work coming out of the country.

ArtBlue Studio is the only gallery in the upcoming **Affordable Art Fair** (23rd to 25th of May) specialised in Vietnamese art. The Muse caught up with Phuong for an in-depth discussion on Vietnam's growing arts scene, its artists, and why we should be paying attention in them.



Please tell us a bit about yourself and how you got into the art world.

In 2001, I met a major art collector from London by chance in Ho Chi Minh City where I was living at the time. He was looking for an assistant, and I cheerfully joined. With this job, I met a lot of artists in person in Vietnam, and best of all, the great Masters. Through them, I not only discovered the history of Vietnamese Art and its developments, but also the personal life of each artist. A lot of them went through the war or exile; some went to study abroad, and all of them always had fascinating stories to share about their life and their art.

In 2006 I moved to Singapore and started promoting Vietnamese art to other galleries using my very personal connections with the artists. But working with the **Singapore Art Museum** for their Vietnamese art collection was what really gave me the start to being a full time art consultant and gallery owner. This is how I created ArtBlue Studio. Since then, I have been working with my husband in our art studio, promoting Vietnamese artists and presenting their

work in exhibitions and art fairs in Singapore and overseas as well as advising art collectors from all over the world.



What makes Vietnamese art unique?

What makes Vietnamese art unique is a very special use of colours and textures, it is vibrant, full of life and movement.

This comes from a very peculiar history: The arts, as well as the country in general, have been influenced by a blend of cultures and inspiration. Vietnamese art emerged from Chinese traditions, but it was exposed to the Hindu aesthetic canons of the Champa and Khmer kingdoms that were covering what is today the centre and south of the country. The European influence that came with the French colony, had a major impact on the art, especially with the establishment of the Indochina College of Fine Art in Hanoi, where artists from the East met and shared with artists from France and Europe. The Impressionist movement in particular, resonated with the Vietnamese soul, becoming a major artistic trend but with a distinctively Vietnamese approach. Its influence on Vietnamese art is still clearly visible today. This was followed by the war and difficult times, but even then, artists remained very dynamic in the country and welcomed the influences of America and Eastern Europe, where many artists went to study European classical art.

Today, even more than in the past, Vietnamese art is subject to global influences, but its unique heritage is revealed in the vitality and innovation, which is so much a part of this art form. Vietnamese art is the triumph of life and happiness over hardship. The vibrant colours and techniques of the canvases honour the convergence of people and civilisation.

Can you elaborate on your participation in the upcoming Affordable Art Fair?

Affordable Art Fair is an event we particularly cherish. The fair is very dynamic and their focus is on up and coming artists. It is a great opportunity to be exposed to many different inspirations and techniques, and to see galleries and artists from all over the world. The Affordable Art Fair is also a network of fairs of great reputation in different countries, and we are joining them not only in Singapore, but also in New York, Los Angeles, Melbourne and Hong Kong. It is a fantastic way to promote our artists overseas and showcase Vietnamese art in general.





You are the only Vietnamese art exhibitor at AAF, do you think that Vietnamese art is yet to be recognised on a global scale? Why?

ArtBlue Studio is the only gallery in the fair specialised in Vietnamese art, but other galleries represent artists from Vietnam among others, which makes me think that Vietnamese art is becoming more global. But it is true that it is the beginning, and we haven't seen the great appreciation of art pieces in Vietnam like what we've seen in neighbouring India, China or Indonesia. This is actually a great opportunity, as collecting the work of great masters in Vietnam is still affordable.

Which paintings should people look out for and what is the story behind them?

This year we are presenting the work of Nguyen Lam. His name was established since the 1960s' when he did his first international exhibitions. Nguyen Lam sees his art as a continuum between old and new. His subjects are modern, but always remain on the background the heritage from the ancestors.

The abstract oil paintings we display were inspired by the traditional Chinese art of calligraphy where each stroke is precise and painted once only, coming out of a meditation to each be perfect. But he also introduced some texture and colours in his artwork, resulting in very bright and powerful work, yet very modern and minimalistic.

Are the artists you work with already famous and established in Vietnam or are they up and coming?

We represent established masters but we also spend time discovering new talent and making them known to the general public. Our role and passion is to open people's hearts to great art we love!

How do you choose your art and artists? What do you look for?

We spend a lot of time travelling around Vietnam, talking to artists and visiting exhibitions. What we look for is to fall in love with something new, something unique. There is no other rule.



What advice can you give to people looking to invest in art?

See many artworks and talk to many artists, specialists and galleries, their job is their passion, and they will be happy to share with you. But at the end of the day, do not over think and listen to advice on investments, go with your heart! If an artist or an artwork touched you in particular, it will most likely be the same for other people, so you will not only enjoy having a great piece of art which you love, but also have a successful investment.

How has the Singapore market received Vietnamese art? And the global market?

Vietnamese art is vibrant and dynamic. It is art you are happy to live with, and the response to that has been outstanding, both in Singapore and overseas. I believe we are going to see more rising star artists coming out of Vietnam in the next few years, as the global market is becoming more and more open to its unique art inspiration and style.

Visit ArtBlue Studio at 26 Oxley Mansion, Unit 26P Oxley Road. Singapore or visit their booth at the Affordable Art Fair which runs from May 23-25 May, 2014 at at the F1 Pit Building.

Ticket Prices (at the door):

General Admission (public days): \$15

Students & Seniors: \$8

Group Package (4 adults): \$50

SISTIC advanced sales (booking fees may apply):

General Admission: \$12

Students & Seniors: \$8
Group Package (4 adults): \$40

Children under 16: free admission

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TEXT BY LARA KANGA

Category: Visual Art Tags: art fair, ArtBlue Studio, Phuong Nguyen, singapore, The Affordable Art Fair, Vietnamese art, visual art

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