



Ajibi Art Lab No.3 Nguyen Phan Chanh

2019 December 2 - 2020 March 24
Asia Gallery

Vietnamese Silk Painting

The Vietnamese Silk Painting is a style of painting with newly invented technique produced at the École des Beaux-arts de l' Indochine, an art school opened in Hanoi, Vietnam in 1925.

The silk painting was developed by a student Nguyen Phan Chanh under the guidance of Victor Tardieu, a French painter and the principle of the school. Chanh created a technique to draw on silk by coloring the silk manufactured for clothes with water-color as if dying silk. It is specifically unique in Chanh's work that the artist wash the silk with water after painting. Repeating the painting and washing process creates a dying effect on silk, which achieves a unique texture made of blurring and fading colors. The Vietnamese Silk Painting was created by combining traditional material with the techniques and composition skills taught at school and was acclaimed highly both domestically and internationally.



[image1] To Ngoc Van, *The Embroiderers*, 1932, Water-color on silk, Private collection



[image2] Nguyen Tien Chung, *Going to the New Year's Market*, 1940, Water-color on silk, Collection of Vietnam National Fine Arts Museum

École des Beaux-arts de l' Indochine

The École des Beaux-arts de l' Indochine was founded in 1925 in Hanoi, which was then under French control. Victor Tardieu, a painter who received the Indochina Award at Salon (the government-funded art exhibition), contributed to the founding of the school. The school aimed to produce authentic artists different from craft artisans.

The school operated on the professionally designed curriculum following that of art schools in Paris. Tardieu focused on drawings while Joseph Inguimberty, another French teacher, focused on creating works outside the classroom. In addition to the silk painting, the school also produced lacquer painting.

As the war against France, and then the United States is intensified, the school needed to be relocated. The school changed its name several times including the Resistance Fine Art School and is now continues as the Vietnam University of Fine Art.



[image3] Victor Tardieu (center) and the students of the inaugural class. The third from the right is Nguyen Phan Chanh.

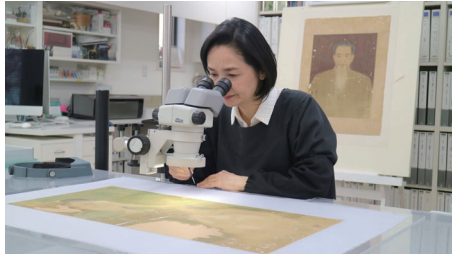
Fragility of the silk, restoration and from now

The silk painting is painted on soft silk woven with fine yarns. How has the silk painting been preserved until today?

Preservation of artwork in Vietnam is difficult for its hot and humid climate as well as the history of wars that continued several years. For these reasons, the majority of the Vietnamese artworks have been heavily damaged to the level the damage itself is a trace of history the works have lived through. On the other hand, the works transported to European countries and the United States by French people have maintained relatively good condition by avoiding the damage from humidity.

In the field of Japanese painting, silk works are pasted onto a washi paper using a thin layer of flour-based glue. However, Vietnamese silk works are painted on a bad-conditioned paper using rice glue, which accelerated the oxidization as the time passes. A group of Japanese people silk painting enthusiasts who have concerned the condition of Vietnamese silk painting privately launched the restoration and conservation project in 2007. With the support of Japanese conservators, approximately twenty works by Nguyen Phan Chanh were restored.

(continue to the back)



[image4] Restoration is in progress by a conservator Iwai Kikuko.

Detailed sketch

This painting was made from the detailed sketch like the image below. Compared to the silk painting, the details stand out in the pencil sketch on paper. Nguyen Phan Chanh's style was created in the process of transforming this detailed sketch to soft touch of water-color paint. The influence of his teacher, Victor Tardieu, can be found in his attitude towards sketches.



[image5] *Rattan Weavers*, Collection of the Chanh family

Rattan Weavers

Four ladies are making rattan hand crafts. According to the artist, they are making rattan baskets for export. The woman on the left in the foreground is stretching the rattan using wooden frame while the lady on the right focuses on her fingers that weave the basket. We can also find basket parts on the floor and on the wall.

In Vietnam, it was common to engage in making handicrafts during the low farming season between rice planting and harvesting. Nguyen Phan Chanh grew up in the farming village and preferred to depict the life of ordinary people rather than fancy urban females. Chanh's style composed with calm colors evokes nostalgia in the viewers.

*The title of the work was changed from *Waving Bamboo* to *Rattan Weavers* according to the information found in the process of exhibition-making.

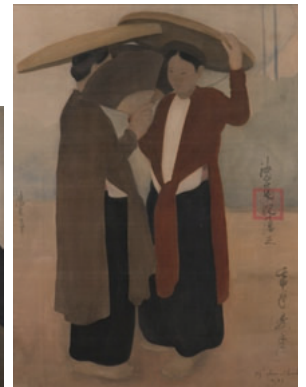
Nguyen Phan Chanh

Nguyen Phan Chanh was born in 1892 in the farming village in Ha Tinh Province, Vietnam. He grew up in a family with strong Confucian influence. Chanh studied Chinese classics at a private school and helped his family by selling his calligraphies. After working as a teacher, Chanh entered the École des Beaux-arts de l' Indochine in 1925 at the age of thirty-two. He invented the silk painting according to the advice from Victor Tardieu, the school principal.

Chanh's work depicted the ordinary scenery of regular people in soft earth colors. His work brought a new dimension to the Vietnam art world and highly acclaimed in France. His work continues fascinating people until today after the artist has passed away.



[image6] Nguyen Phan Chanh, *To Play O An Quan*, 1931, watercolor on silk, Collection of Fukuoka Asian Art Museum



[image7] Nguyen Phan Chanh, *The Singers of the Countryside*, 1937, watercolor on silk, Collection of National Gallery Singapore

(The following is a list of events happened around 1960 when the artist was working on this piece)

1954 (62 y/o) Vietnam defeated French at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, but was divided into the North and South.

1956 (64 y/o) Nguyen Phan Chanh restarted the silk painting

1957 (65 y/o) Nguyen Phan Chanh was appointed as a board member in the first term of the Vietnam Art Association.

1960 (68 y/o) Nguyen Phan Chanh participated in the National Art Exhibition

1962 (70 y/o) Nguyen Phan Chanh created his portrait and held his solo exhibition.

1964 (72 y/o) The U.S. army started bombing North Vietnam after the Tonkin Gulf Incident