

# Contemporary Indonesian and Vietnamese Art

*Indonesian painting, and more recently Vietnamese painting, are the darlings of the Singapore sale-rooms*

**T**he auctioneers in Singapore generally sell well established names like Affandi and Phai. In Southeast Asia, where commercial galleries marketing decorative and vapid 'hotel art' outnumber more serious establishments, collectors wishing to acquire works of substance are often at a loss.

Quality Indonesian contemporary art can be found in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Bandung and Bali. The latter, despite its reputation as an overcrowded tourist haunt, boasts more reputable galleries per capita than anywhere else in the archipelago. Artists of note on Bali include I Made Budhiana, whose semi-abstracted depictions of Balinese landscapes and portraits marry a boldly expressive vigour with lyrically delicate strokes and refined *sgrafiatto*.

Ubud-based I Made Djirna is another strong painter, whose impasto-sculpted women capture the island's potent yet languid atmosphere. In Yogyakarta, Nindityo Adipurnomo mixes typical indigenous craft iconography with colonial references to create sexually and culturally charged installations. The artist also runs Yogya's excellent Cemeti Gallery. Other important Indonesian artists include Anusapati, Heri Dono, Dadang Christanto and FX Harsono. Installations by the latter trio, featured in the seminal

1996 Asia Society exhibition *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditional Tensions*, combine a powerful message with aesthetic accomplishment. All three are concerned with freedom of expression, political power, corruption, social fragmentation and elitism.

Contemporary Vietnamese art tends to be more literal and less obviously socially and politically vocal than art from other countries in the region. Painting dominates the North and the South's vibrant art scenes. Though much artistic production is geared to 'art-tourists', professionally run galleries such as Red River, Salon Natasha, Don Son, Gallery Mai and Nam Son manage to keep their independence vis-à-vis commercial expectations and feature a number of innovative artists. Painters Nguyen Quan, Dang Xuan Hoa and Tran Trong Vu all play whimsically with subject matter, depicting everyday life with a warm, intimate touch. Nguyen Quan's work can be slightly surreal, never however losing the viewer who is made to enter the work and share Quan's contemplative vision.

Le Thiet Cuong's distinctive minimalist style (see *The Asian Art Newspaper*, December, Reviews) conveys a sophisticated rather than naive view of the world. His spare yet painterly canvases are seductive because

their simplicity imbues the mundane with meaning. Hanoi-based mixed media artist Vu Dan Tan and painter Truong Tan break with the preceding artists both in their choice of medium and subject matter.

Truong Tan's works are schematic, flat and stylized, his graffiti-line-drawn figures slightly reminiscent of Keith Haring. Rejecting conventional subject matter, he explores issues of religion and sexuality, touching in particular on sexual repression and its use as a political tool.

Vu Dan Tan creates sculpture from re-cycled tins, boxes and other paper material. Idiosyncratic and possessing a 'folksy' quality, his work is nonetheless far from cute. Indeed, Vu Dan Tan's animals and masks made out of discarded cigarette packages or Coke cans have a biting irony as they subtly comment on Vietnam's new consumer society and its recent brand-name consciousness.

Though the idiom of Indonesian and Vietnamese contemporary art differ greatly, the threads of similar searches for identity, social and political openness and freedom of expression are present in the works of both countries. Collectors of Phai and Affandi can rest assured that these painters' artistic legacy is in competent hands.

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