

Some Characteristics and Trends of Wood Engraving Paintings in Ho Chi Minh City from 1986 to Now

Doan Minh Ngoc

Faculty of Art Education, Ho Chi Minh City University of Fine Arts (HCMUFA), Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam
Email: ngoc.arts@gmail.com

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Abstract

The art of woodcarving in Ho Chi Minh City since 1986 has reflected a vivid reality of land in a vibrant historical period with renovation and development. Woodblock paintings in Ho Chi Minh City show a characteristic of Ho Chi Minh City's culture which is the dynamism and diversity in tolerating new things from the form of expression to adaptation and development. On the other hand, images, language, and penmanship with simple expressiveness, close to social reality can also be considered as another feature in Ho Chi Minh City woodcut paintings. A common feature is that almost all Ho Chi Minh City woodblock painters during this period experimented with many different trends: the tendency to preserve traditional values, the tendency to innovate, and the realistic tendency. The above compositional trends will be analyzed in the following article.

Keywords

Characteristics, Trends of Wood Engraving Paintings, Tradition, Innovation

1. Introduction

Ho Chi Minh City is a hub of international trade, cultural contact, and connections with many localities throughout the country. The diversity of the creative team leads to the diversity of writing styles and artistic styles of Ho Chi Minh City woodcut paintings. Woodcut paintings in Ho Chi Minh City not only reflect each specific cultural context of the city and the Southern region, but also have many topics about other regions in the country, thereby creating a diverse and rich with many different composing trends.

2. Background

2.1. Diversity of Content and Form of Expression

Since the country's renovation, the artists of Ho Chi Minh City woodcut paintings have mainly focused on composing with topics about daily changing happenings in social life and daily life interested painter. They have built an artistic image through works such as: "Dawn of Dong Thap" by painter Le Thanh Tru, New Day by painter Nguyen Xuan Dong, The Love of Painter Nguyen Duy Nhi, and "Ra Dong" by the painter. Tran Van Quan, in the wool carpet weaving workshop of painter Dang Van Long... At this time, the topic of propaganda against the resistance and praising the nation's struggle tradition is no longer as much as it was before 1986. Since 1986 up to now, the content shown, shaping trends, pre-press techniques, and printing techniques of woodcarvings have been expanded and enriched more than in 1986 and earlier.

The works published during this period show a more youthful and open look in art, with many experiences from the realist trend to the innovative, abstract, non-realist trend. These can be seen as new signs, an inevitable part of the process of international integration, a certain innovation in the visual arts that is very sensitive to new forms of expression. From here, the content as well as the topic and creative ideas of the artist are expanded and respected. Artists can draw according to what they like, according to what they think and are not confined to the topics of revolutionary war or Cong-Nong-Binh as before. From this point on, printed graphics in general and woodcuts in particular. Was really more open, appeared many exhibitions of exchange and cooperation between domestic artists and international friends.

In the period of industrialization-modernization of the country, the problems of contemporary life are also mentioned and exploited by artists. Through a very rich array of topics and represented by graphic works of large size and quite daring, such as the work of the Central Highlands Festival by painter Le Xuan Chieu, the works of Phon Thuc I, II of the artist. Nguyen Thanh Cong, Tran Van Quan's Quiet Domain, Artist Nguyen Thi To Uyen's Umbrellas, etc. These themes have partly shown the richness of woodblock art in the past time. This is reflected in the works that have participated in the exhibition Report of the New Creative and Creative Camp, regional exhibitions and national art exhibitions in recent times. It can be said that now the concept of composition as well as the view of art has changed in a more positive and open direction.

Through the exchange activities, the artist understands more about the traditional cultural values of the nation, the visual language is revealed more clearly, the simulation and illustration are significantly reduced. Thoughts on thinking, researching and experimenting in expressive language, material technique and style are expressed quite boldly in the work Cho on the River by Le Thanh Tru, the work The Soul of Vietnam by the authors. Author Nguyen Duy Nhi, Mother and Child by Huynh Van Muoi. Before the changes of the country, with professional enthusiasm, artists have created monumental and diverse works, typically

the National Fine Arts Exhibition 2005, 2010, 2015, the exhibition of paintings. Paintings of Ho Chi Minh City in 2003, 2008 and especially an exhibition of paintings by lecturers and students of the Faculty of Graphics (1976-2008) at Ho Chi Minh City University of Fine Arts... These exhibitions have gathered. There are many beautiful woodcut paintings with diverse and rich themes (Ho Chi Minh City University of Fine Arts, 2013).

According to Huynh (2006), woodblock paintings of Ho Chi Minh City in this period have changed in its space and size, from a graphic art form but with a lot of painting in color, showing the synthesis of non-artistic art time. Woodblock paintings here have new elements in very detailed engraving techniques, free, flying brushstrokes, graphic expression as well as the variety of ways to express each artist's artistic ideas. From the layout depicting small spaces to the grandiose layout, from the traditional technique of folk woodcarving using only simple colors and strokes to the technique of breaking woodblocks with many colors with the ability to solve problems, determine the light correlation for the large space of magnificent woodcuts such as the work of Hoa Binh Market with the size of 70 cm × 200 cm by artist Nguyen Trung Tin, the work of Ho Chi Minh City with the size of 110 cm × 175 cm by artist Le Xuan Chieu, The sheep with the size 65 cm × 135 cm by artist Huynh Thi Tu. The artists have actively exploited the vibrant and youthful living environment of a major economic and technological center of the country, making Ho Chi Minh City woodcut paintings have new nuances with the form of expression more open and diverse.

2.2. Diversity in Composition Trends

It can be said that 1986 with the policy of opening up and integrating was a turning point in history, opening the renewal period of the country. November 19, 1997 was the first day Vietnam was integrated into the global Internet network. Since then, people have had the opportunity to have more access to a treasure of information and visual materials of artists' cultural and artistic activities around the world. Cultural and artistic activities began to boom and develop in many ways, becoming more and more associated with the market. Art training institutions also change their thinking, training content and methods to suit the actual needs of society.

2.2.1. Tendency to Preserve Traditional Values

According to Doan (2016), Wood carving in Vietnam has a long-standing origin and is a precious artistic capital of the nation. Since the Ly dynasty, woodblock printing has been used in the printing of Buddhist scriptures, ordination, etc., but it wasn't until the 17th and 18th centuries that it really blossomed through the lines of paintings: Dong Ho, Hang Trong and Kim Hoang. Each place has its own beauty in its shaping style as well as its very own engraving, printing and coloring techniques, which is the preciousness of art. Folk painting is a part of folk art, i.e. folklore. The term folklore was introduced in the mid-nineteenth century and is increasingly widely used, but over time has been understood in

many different ways, through many complex and long debates and struggles. In the work of folklore aesthetics published in 1967, the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union observed that in the socialist countries, there has recently appeared a beneficial tendency for the study of using the term folklore to represent the term folklore. Show the folk art, which really exists in people's life as a certain set of phenomena of spiritual culture. According to this tendency, attention is paid to two coordinates for measuring the phenomenon, namely the social nature of the phenomenon, which is composition of the masses) and its qualitative characteristic, which is collective quality composition (Guxey, 1967).

Tradition and modernity are elements present in the life of each country, in all areas of the development process, in which the field of fine arts is considered as the spiritual foundation of society. However, tradition and modernity never exist separately, but they always have a relationship and influence each other to form the movement and development of culture and art of a nation. Therefore, the relationship between tradition and modernity in art and culture has become a leading issue in every country. If we do not fully recognize the unity and contradiction between tradition and modernity in the development of art and culture, we cannot fully promote its role in social development.

Because of that importance, when entering the period of industrialization and modernization, our Party advocates: to preserve and promote its fine cultural traditions; at the same time, must be able to absorb and inherit modern elements suitable to the current development era, in line with the general progress in the world. In the context of the market economy and expanding international exchanges, special attention must be paid to preserving and enhancing the national cultural identity, planning inherit and promote ethical traditions, fine customs and national pride, absorbing the quintessence of the world's ethnic groups, enriching the Vietnamese culture (Communist Party of Vietnam, 1996).

Some typical artists of the group follow the trend of preserving the values of traditional woodblock paintings such as painter Nguyen Duy Nhi with the work "Soul of Vietnam", artist Nguyen Manh Hung with the painting Waiting for a child in a rainy afternoon, painter Le Thanh Tru with the work Ban Mai Dong Thap (Figure 1), painter Nguyen Phu Hau with the work of Dragon Snake on the Cloud (Figure 2).



Figure 1. Lê Thanh Trù, *Dong Thap at the Sunrise*, 1996, woodcut painting, 50 cm × 70 cm.



Figure 2. Nguyễn Phú Hậu, *Flying in the Snake-Dragon Style to the Cloud*, 2009, woodcut painting, 60 cm × 80 cm.

Painter Le Thanh Tru has carved many paintings of rural landscapes in the South: Vam Co Tay Floating Water, Tien Riverside, Dong Thap Floating Season, Anchor waiting for water... In his work Ban Mai Dong, to describe the vast land of the Southwest Delta, the author has cleverly chosen the angle of view from above, the whole picture is the immense water surface, fluttering in the air at the end of the rainy season, flocks of birds fly by. The canoe floating on the waves has created a poetic image in front of the immense natural scenery, making viewers feel like they are immersed in this scene and calm down to forget the noise and dust of the urban rhythm daily. The painting has its own style, the printed colors are very delicate and simple, the colors of the birds flying in the sky and the canoe on the river almost blend together, so that the natural beauty of the painting is increased, that is, the advantage of the work has been successfully demonstrated by the author.

Painter Nguyen Phu Hau (born in 1942) graduated from Vietnam University of Fine Arts in 1977. After graduating, he lived and worked in Hanoi, from 1995 to present has lived and worked in Ho Chi Minh City Bright. In recent years, the art-loving public has seen many woodcuts of this artist through exhibitions at the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts Association, the Fine Arts Museum, with works such as: Floating Market (Ho Chi Minh City, 2003), Comrade (2011), Homeland (2010), Raising fish in rafts (2014), and especially the work of Dragon and Snake in the Clouds (**Figure 2**) was awarded by the Vietnam Fine Arts Association in

2009. The painting was awarded. The layout follows a vertical rectangle; all the images are carefully calculated by the author, along with the movement of the character lines as if they are soaring into the blue sky. On the contrary, the whole horizontal row of houses extends the surface of the painting as if creating a sense of balance in the work and creating a connection in the painting. In terms of language, style, materials, engraving and printing techniques of painter Phu Hau are very flexible and full of emotions. The highlight of artist Nguyen Phu Hau is how to solve the relationship between light and shadow, between black and white, and the strong contrast between large images and small intermediate arrays, creating a very unique style. It can be said that when painter Nguyen Phu Hau moved to Ho Chi Minh City to live and work, the cultural and regional factors here had an impact on the artist's creative process. Therefore, after entering the South, his writing style became stronger and more liberal than before.

General comments on the characteristics of visual language in the tendency to preserve traditional values

A number of features can be drawn in the language of expressing woodcarving works according to the tendency to preserve traditional values as follows.

Figures, arrays, strokes: Most of the works of this group of artists are black and white woodcuts, but they show their talent with very delicate strokes. Nguyen Phu Hau has treated the space in the painting with a simultaneity to create a feeling of flying and fanciful, which has been shown in the work of Dragon Snake on the Cloud; Le Thanh Tru preserves the characteristics of traditional woodcut paintings, is close to Dong Ho paintings and hardly cares about the law of near and far in the paintings, which has been shown in the work Ban Mai Dong Thap; Nguyen Manh Hung uses closed but strong curves and knows how to filter the black patches properly to create a beautiful layout; Tran Dinh Phuoc Loi is a poetic poet with soaring lines, sinking in the array but still seeing the shimmering and moving direction.

Size and number of authors: The trend of preserving traditional values accounts for a modest proportion in art exhibitions after 2000, which shows that the issue of preserving traditional drawing styles needs attention more than.

The distinctive feature of the trend of preserving traditional values is the focus on clear strokes and arrays, the limited use of printed colors, the rustic dithering and close proximity to folk paintings. Vietnamese paintings such as Dong Ho paintings, Hang Trong paintings, and do the paintings.

2.2.2. Innovation Trend

The history of world art shows that the more we step into modern society, the more essential the need for innovation. Therefore, artistic innovation is never-ending or in other words, no trend of creation, no art style is constant. The process of international exchange and integration will be the premise for the development and diversity of artistic trends. Since then, each artist has always shown his work well anywhere with specific material techniques and each work also

exudes the regional characteristics of each country and ethnic group.

In Vietnam, the doi moi art had its seeds before Doi Moi Policy in 1986, when it opened (1990), the first generation reached maturity and became important authors, shaping the style of art his art. On the other hand, the nature of art is synonymous with the new, the creative, the innovative, because even in the Renaissance, painters painted what they saw, not copied what they saw, never painted. What was drawn? A drawing class looks like they're drawing together what's in front of them, but each person only sees what the other doesn't. Post-modernist painters in the XXI century drew more feelings and premonitions... The artistic point of view of American writer Marxist Pruxt (XX century) said that: "For writers as well as artists, style is not It is not a matter of technique but a matter of vision". Van (1990) said: "We always just write, draw, touch, carve our own soul".

Most of the works are presented professionally on a variety of materials and techniques such as traditional printing, printing on canvas, multi-colored paper and especially handprints on silk combined with prints on wood by two painters Tu Duyen and Truong Van Y. It can be said that these two artists had a great influence on graphic art in Saigon in the 1960s-1975s of the twentieth century. Painter Truong Van Y always finds his own way in the process of composing and that is very necessary for every artist in any direction. Through the works of Couples, Lights of the Central Highlands by painter Truong Van Y, the author has focused on innovation in composition, using vertical strokes, oblique lines and exaggerated portraits of young women following the trend in the direction of innovation, contrary to the principles of classical painting.

The woodcut paintings by painter Le Xuan Chieu are imbued with pure Vietnamese folk character. The colors in the paintings are colorful and vibrant, the carvings sometimes combine half-realism and half-abstract, the space is conventional, sometimes using many overlapping decorative motifs to create a false space virtual like abstract paintings. Through works such as: Hoi, Association of the Central Highlands, Ho Chi Minh City's triumph (Figure 3), it partly shows us that woodblock prints in Ho Chi Minh City have many works with large size, good artistic quality and rich in expression.



Figure 3. Lê Xuân Chiểu, *Ho Chi Minh City Triumph Song*, 2014, woodcut painting, 110 × 175 cm.

The woodcut paintings by artist Doan Minh Ngoc have good artistic quality and a diverse range of expressions in terms of perspective, with the carving lines occasionally combining realism and decoration. Sometimes, the artist uses many decorative motifs to create movement within the engraving, and especially, with the influence from Western wood engraving art. The author has utilized actual sketch materials to represent the artwork: “Budapest Landscape” (Figure 4), with a viewpoint from above looking down. Although there are many details in the artwork, the artist skillfully arranged large and small shapes, distributed lines, and contrasts very appropriately. The author has perfectly applied the Western rule of perspective to depict the depth and height of the Budapest hills successfully, and thus, creating a strong impression.

Vietnamese painters in general and innovation-oriented authors in particular often pay attention to practice, are passionate about pursuing new and strange things, but rarely give theories or justifications for what they show in the work. From the survey and direct study of the works of the innovation-oriented group, it shows that: The new worldview when observing and expressing social phenomena is very subjective at many different levels. But sometimes the real world is just a fragile excuse that is subjective—the artist’s attitude expressed in the artwork is the main thing and says all that the artist wants to express his feelings.

The number of painters following the trend of innovation is increasing day by day such as: painter Hoang Tram, painter Nguyen Xuan Dong, painter Huynh Van Muoi, painter Le Xuan Chieu, etc. In addition to specialized graphic artists, there are also other artists. Artists who often create other materials also have beautiful woodcarvings such as painter Tran Van Phu (oil painting), painter Cao Thi Duoc (oil painting), painter Nguyen Thanh Cong (sculpture). From the diversity of authors participating in this trend, it has brought to the art-loving public new and more vibrant emotions and art forms, and the painting market is also growing day by day a thriving.



Figure 4. Đoàn Minh Ngọc, *Budapest Landscape*, 2015, woodcut painting, 60 cm × 80 cm.

General comments on the characteristics of visual language in the innovation trend

A number of features can be drawn in the language of expression of woodblock prints of the innovation trend as follows.

The innovation trend in art is a way of talking about the renewal of an art form compared to the previous one. For example: Neoclassicism is a French painting that is represented by Ingres, David, etc. In woodblock painting, innovation is understood as doing something different from traditional art in terms of technique or technique on expression (color, line or layout, image). Woodblock paintings in Ho Chi Minh City appear more and more, the artist shows a lot of research in engraving, expression, array, or color performance in print or print size, innovation in woodcuts.

Technical innovation: Finding new directions in engraving and printing techniques such as processing large-format paintings, breaking prints, handling strong strokes in the style of Dong Ho paintings; thin lines, simple strokes like Kim Hoang paintings... Many artists handle paintings from minimalism to no sharpness like Don Ca, 1963, by painter Tu Duyen. The effect of color in the print genre, minimalist engraving will be the main thing, making woodcut paintings approach painting. However, the passion for the technique to achieve the ability to express the soft dithering as soft as the watercolor material in painting is not necessarily a direction that many artists respond to.

Size and number of authors: The innovation trend at this stage accounted for a high percentage of fine art exhibitions. According to Solvit (1996), the distinctive feature of the innovation trend is finding new directions in shaping layout, researching engraving and printing techniques. In the printing process, attention is always paid to the effect of color and simple engraving technique is the mainstay of the innovation trend that will make woodcarvings closer to paintings.

In general, many painters in Ho Chi Minh City have experimented with innovation and innovation in many different forms both in terms of technique and form of expression: changing the way of engraving, creating space, changing The look and sense of nature and society show new visual effects that have given contemporary woodblock prints of Ho Chi Minh City new expressive values.

Ho Chi Minh City has a diverse force of artists from many regions, regions, and generations to live and create, creating a rich variety of expressions on woodcuts. In terms of content as well as the form of wood carving, it shows that in terms of technique or layout, expression is very subjective at different levels of groups of trends such as: Group of artists following trends. The direction of innovation often focuses on innovation in layout and appeals to aesthetic tastes through the different, the unique, exuding modernity and bringing a new breath of the times. The group of painters who follow the realism trend often focus on the excitement in the rhythm of life, the innovations in the socio-economic, and stick to reality to convey the realistic content of the dynamic city. The groups of painters who tend to preserve the values of traditional woodcut paintings often focus on how to show how to influence the viewer to perceive that it is a form of

shaping as well as a form of expression close to the painting traditional wood carving.

3. Conclusion

Woodblock paintings in Ho Chi Minh City emphasize realism and expressiveness quite simply, truthfully, easy to see, and easy to recognize the author's intention to express in the picture. The diversity in the content of the composition as well as the form of expression depends on the characteristics of the author's team. Young artists who grew up after the war often painted a lot on the topics of contemporary society. Meanwhile, painters who lived during the war have always cherished the themes of the past that are historical and expressed in the way of social realism, so the boldness is not shown much. In general, all painters, regardless of their trends in composition, each has a unique look, with their own strengths in practice, they have contributed to changing the aesthetic appearance of the Southern region in general and Ho Chi Minh City woodblock paintings in particular in the period of renovation and international integration.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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