



The Culture of Reception and Aesthetic Conception of Vietnamese Nudes from Traditional to Modern

Nguyen Minh Truc Son MS¹; Le Van Thanh MS²

¹ Lecturer, Faculty of Engineering Technology, Hong Bang International University, Vietnam

² Lecturer, Faculty of Engineering Technology, Hong Bang International University, Vietnam

Email: trucsonnguyenartist@gmail.com, lethanhbbu@gmail.com

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Abstract

The study focuses on investigating the transformation in the culture of reception and aesthetic conception of nude painting in Vietnam from the traditional to the modern period. By taking an interdisciplinary approach between art history, cultural studies, and aesthetics, the work explores the process of change in society's attitude towards the human form in art, associated with changes in morality, thought, and social context. In the traditional period, the representation of the human body is strongly governed by Confucian ethics, ritual symbols, and community norms of modesty. On the contrary, Vietnamese modern art, especially since the beginning of the twentieth century, has shown the harmony and collision between Western artistic influences, creative individualism and national cultural identity. Through figurative analysis, discourse and aesthetic comparison, the study shows that nude painting is not only a pure artistic phenomenon but also a cultural discourse that reflects the transformation in values, gender perceptions and openness of Vietnamese society.

Keywords: *Vietnamese Nude; Receptive Culture; Aesthetic Conception Transformation; Traditional Art*

Introduction

The representation of the human body in the nude has long occupied a central place in the history of world art. From classical ideals of beauty in Western traditions to symbolic and ritual figures in Asian culture, nudity has always been a complex intersection of aesthetics, morality, and cultural identity. In Vietnam, the emergence of nude painting in the early twentieth century not only marked an important shift in visual language and artistic practice, but also reflected a profound process of "cultural negotiation" between traditional ethical frameworks and modern thought of personal freedom of expression. Accordingly, the theme of nudity becomes a

symbolic lens, through which it is possible to observe and explain the broader socio-cultural movements in the process of modernizing Vietnamese art.

From a cultural perspective, the reception of nudity in Vietnam cannot only be seen as a purely aesthetic phenomenon, but also as a cultural discourse that reflects the historical experiences of the nation in the context of colonialism, modernization and globalization. The way of seeing, understanding and the level of public acceptance of the nude in art is an indicator of the transformation in the social value system, in the moral standards and aesthetic consciousness of each period.

In traditional Vietnamese art, the image of the human body is rarely shown in a nude state. Under the profound influence of Confucian ideology, which emphasized moderation, dignity and social order, the art of the human body mainly stopped at conventional, stylized or symbolic forms of spirituality. However, the establishment of the Indochina School of Fine Arts in 1925 ushered in an important turning point in the history of Vietnamese art. Along with the introduction of Western creative models and constructive thinking, especially the study of anatomy, realism and academic nude painting, Vietnamese art entered a period of critical dialogue between East and West, between tradition and modernity (Quang Phong and Quang Viet, 2022).

Through the above context, pioneering painters such as Le Pho, Mai Trung Thu, Nguyen Phan Chanh, Tran Van Can and many artists of the first generation of the Indochina School of Fine Arts have played an important role in reconstructing the image of the human body in Vietnamese art. Instead of seeing the naked body as an object of visual or sexual pleasure, they redefined it as a symbol of beauty, purity, and human dignity. Typical works such as Le Pho (1907–2001) are romantic realism with the painting "Naked" (1931, oil canvas), depicting a naked Western girl, which is considered a turning point in the history of Vietnamese painting.



Figure (1): Le Pho nude set a record for the highest priced Vietnamese painting in history with a price of nearly 1.4 million USD

Source: <https://tuoitre.vn/tranh-khoa-than-cua-le-pho-duoc-mua-gia-ky-luc-1-4-trieu-usd-20190526135447314.htm>

Mai Trung Thu (1906–1980), a pioneer in the aesthetics of the female body through silk painting, often signed as Mai Thu is one of the outstanding painters of the first generation to graduate from the Indochina College of Fine Arts, along with names such as Le Pho, Vu Cao Dam, Nguyen Phan Chanh. He attended the school from 1925 to 1930 and was one of the few

Vietnamese artists to settle in France afterwards, where he developed a solid career and made a deep impression on the international stage. Different from the academic confrontation of Western anatomical drawings, Mai Trung Thu's paintings show a profound Eastern aesthetic, in which the female figure often appears as a soft, introspective, discreet but deep symbol. He uses traditional silk as the main material, combined with delicate painting techniques and a gentle and flexible way of handling colors.

The female bodies in Mai Thu's paintings are not completely naked in the direct sense, but are often half-closed and half-open, wearing thin ao dai, naked backs, or bathing in streams, showing a sensual beauty without being vulgar. It is this approach that has created a distinct style, both respecting Vietnamese cultural traditions and paving the way for modern body aesthetics.

In his paintings, the girl is not only an artistic subject, but also a symbolic image of Vietnamese culture, exuding tenderness, shyness, introspection, associated with nature and national identity. Despite living in France, Mai Trung Thu is still loyal to the theme of nationality, in which the image of a woman has become a symbol of the Vietnamese soul in the heart of Europe.



Figure (2): *Nude*, Mai Trung Thu, 1970

Source: <https://goutrends.com/buc-tranh-nu-cua-hoa-si-mai-trung-thu/>

Or artist Nguyen Phan Chanh's *Dawn of Breastfeeding* (1970) shows the delicate harmony between the Eastern spirit and Western painting techniques, between the sentimentality of the body and the depth of human emotions. The expression in the painting through the image of the mother gently revealing her baby and breastfeeding is expressed with a pure, non-sexual spirit. The nakedness here is not to show off the body, but to praise the beauty of vocation and humanity.



Figure (3): Nguyen Phan Chanh, Material: Silk, *Dawn of Breastfeeding* (1970)

Source: <https://vnfam.vn/vi/hi%E1%BB%87n-v%E1%BA%ADt/5aed8feaa013bf0026226ec3>

It is worth noting that in the cultural background of Vietnam, social and ethical standards are still strict, these artists have shown a new aesthetic attitude, an attitude of contemplation and honoring people as an independent aesthetic subject, not limited by moral frameworks or social prejudices. It is from here that Vietnamese nude painting becomes a profoundly humanistic artistic discourse, opening up new perceptions of creative freedom, gender and modern cultural identity.

Entering the Doi Moi period (after 1986), the discourse on nude art continued to be expanded in the public space. Art exhibitions, magazines and forums have begun to discuss body image more openly, showing a marked shift in social perceptions of beauty, as well as in the level of cultural acceptance and tolerance for personal and bodily expressions. This change reflects an important step forward in the modernization of Vietnamese art, where the image of the human body is no longer a taboo object but a means of free expression of humanity and contemporary aesthetics.

1. Traditional Period and Aesthetic Conception of Vietnamese Nude Paintings

1.1. Traditional stage

Prior to the twentieth century, in the entire process of Vietnamese art, nude painting did not appear as an independent academic genre in the Western sense. The expression of the body, especially the female body, is not intended to honor physical personality or visual pleasure, but is referred to the value axes of morality, belief and social order. In that frame of reference, the

beauty of the body operates as a cultural symbol, symbolizing the virtues and customs of the Confucian-influenced art, always upholding the happiness - fortune - longevity and fullness of folk art, for the fertility and cosmic harmony in religious and religious art. Body imagery is therefore often approximated, concealed or stylized, present as a means of conveying the message of agricultural prosperity rituals such as symbols of giving birth to real energy, childbirth in folk sculpture, or linga-yoni vestiges in some Cham remains. the topic of nudity is not an object for contemplating sensuality or studying anatomy (Ngo Van Doanh, 2023).

Ideology and Cultural Context

The three major ideologies that shape the spiritual life of traditional Vietnam, including Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, all consider the human body not to be displayed. Confucianism emphasizes etiquette, temperance and social order. The body is considered to be "*the mother's wife*" is a Chinese idiom that translates as "*The body, hair and skin are born by parents, do not dare to harm them*", must be preserved as an expression of filial piety. The act of showing off the body is considered impolite and unreligious. Buddhism considers the body to be temporary, impermanent, associated with the desire to be liberated. True beauty is the pure mind with the bright mind, not the appearance of existence. Taoism aims at natural harmony, valuing the spirit over the material, emphasizing "sound" and "bad" rather than "vulgar" and "real". The intersection of these three lines of thought creates a system of aesthetic values of "hidden, evoked, and restrained", taking virtue, qi, and god as the criteria of beauty, instead of flesh and body. At the same time, the wet rice agricultural civilization has formed a communal cultural structure, where the individual dissolves in the collective, beauty is oriented towards harmony, temperance, and humility, instead of individual freedom is always displayed as in Western thought. All artistic expressions, including the depiction of the body, reflect the collectivity, beliefs and morals of Vietnamese village society (Tran Trong Kim, Reprint 2020).

The socio-cultural environment, in the context of an agricultural society, the village is the center of material and spiritual life. Respect for order is maintained through customs, beliefs, and community morals. Art therefore serves the community rather than the individual. Art forms such as village communal house sculpture, folk paintings, religious art, ca tru, singing cheo... are all created collectively, in order to educate, pray for blessings, honor morality, not to show off the artist's ego. In that environment, the body is understood as part of the moral order, not as an aesthetic object to be contemplated. Even if there is a naked image in folk sculpture, it is also a sacred prosperity, associated with proliferation and praying for the seasons, and does not have the meaning of personal sensuality.

The traditional Vietnamese cultural thought and context have produced an aesthetic ethnography of the body. The perspective of bodily beauty is a sacred symbol of filial piety, of fertility and of communal order, and not of the object of pleasure or personal freedom. Traditional aesthetics reflects the characteristics of the Asian spirit and explains why, over the centuries, nude painting has not been able to form as an independent genre in Vietnam. This also creates a cultural filter for how Vietnamese people receive and interpret nude paintings in the modern era.

1.2. Expression of physical beauty in traditional art

The Art of Prosperity

In cultural studies, "prosperity" comes from the Chinese words "phung" (plenty, prosperity) and "real" (multiplying, developing). That is, the art of prosperity refers to artistic expressions that honor the fertility, vitality, sexuality, and ability to maintain the human race and nature. The art of prosperity is a profound expression of the belief in wet rice agriculture, where people celebrate the multiplication, flourishing and harmony of yin and yang.

In Vietnam, the element of prosperity appeared very early before it was even influenced by Confucianism and Chinese aesthetics. Archaeologists have found many carvings of men and women, scenes of communions, and statues of people hugging each other in the cultures of Dong Son, Sa Huynh and Oc Eo, proving that the body and sexuality were once considered sacred symbols of life, not as mundane as in a society heavily influenced by later rituals. According to the author Nguyen Thi Thu Hoa, the book *Beliefs in the Worship of the Gods of Prosperity in Vietnam*, with the prominent features of the belief in prosperity is a characteristic expression in the depths of agricultural culture, the belief in prosperity reflects the desire of Vietnamese people for a full life, the proliferation and harmony of yin and yang in the universe (Nguyen Thi Thu Hoa, 2023).

Therefore, the beauty of the body in the art of prosperity is the sacredness of human life, not the carnal sexuality as many people often understand.

In ancient agricultural beliefs, the Vietnamese used to worship the symbol of life and qi (linga - yoni), expressing their belief in fertility and prosperity. Prosperity images appear in statues, village communal reliefs, or crop rituals, but they all have the sacred meaning of the community, not associated with the individual or sensuality. This shows that the ancients did not deny the body, but sacredized the body as a symbol of life, not as a mere aesthetic object.

The art of prosperity and Vietnamese aesthetics coexist as two sides of a flow, prosperity helps Vietnamese people not to be afraid of the body but to cherish it as a part of nature. Vietnamese aesthetics transform the body into a symbol of morality and human life, where beauty does not lie in the physical body but in the spirit, temperament and harmony.

Village communal sculpture

From the sixteenth - eighteenth centuries, Vietnamese communal house sculptures recorded many images of everyday life such as ploughing, fishing, singing, and falling in love. Some of the carvings have naked and liberal details, but are shown funny, raunchy, associated with the sincere folk spirit without being vulgar. The beauty here lies in action and temperament, not in the physical realism of the West, which is different from the aesthetic of "anatomy realism" in the West.

Many communal houses in Northern villages such as Dong Vien communal house (Bac Ninh), Chu Quyen communal house (Ba Vi) or Phu Lao communal house (Bac Giang), have a

series of reliefs, carvings of festival scenes, bathing scenes, living forms, people or animals, and trees in harmony. These images are not erotic but symbolize cosmic fertility and energy.



Figure (4): The carving of the scene of affection in Phu Lao communal house

Source: <https://vnexpress.net/tac-pham-cham-tro-canh-ai-an-o-dinh-phu-lao-3148181.html>

Through the hands of folk artisans, the Vietnamese body is portrayed with an innocent and kind gaze, the beauty is neither suggestive nor hidden, simply spreading like the breath of life, pure but full of vitality. The characteristic of this sculpture is liberal but sexless, a worldly but pure body. The shape is often rough, non-standard proportions, lacking anatomy, but vivid and evocative of life. The beauty here lies in the human spirit and the joy of everyday life, not in the sensuality of the body. The body is a symbol of fertility and well-being, not an object of personal aesthetics.

The genre of nude folk paintings in Vietnamese art

Before Vietnam adopted the concept of nude painting from the West in the early twentieth century, in Vietnamese folk art, there were many forms of shape with many elements of "semi-nudity", but not pornographic or personalized, but a symbol of proliferation. nature and social ethics. The shape of the nude structure in Vietnamese folk paintings is not intended to honor the body, but reflects the spirit of prosperity, the joy of life, the sense of harmony between people blending with nature and society, this is an innocent, humane and metaphorical folk beauty.

Dong Ho woodcarving paintings are the most obvious manifestation of the prosperous nudity, through the painting of Coconut Catching, a symbol of yin and yang harmony. The *Coconut Painting* depicts a man climbing a coconut tree, and a woman standing below picking up the fallen fruit. At the expressive level, it is a scene of funny rural life. But at the symbolic level, the content of the painting is a metaphor for intercourse, symbolizing the harmony of yin and yang, heaven and earth giving birth. The woman in the painting with a stretched figure, her hands quickly lifted her skirt to catch the coconut, her smiling face symbolizes the vitality, affluence and beauty of the mother of the earth. The special thing is that in paintings, the nude element is not considered sexually suggestive but is dissolved in the spirit of festivals, smiles and folk rhythms. The work has clearly demonstrated the Vietnamese aesthetic philosophy, nudity is not naked, but a symbol of life and happiness.



Figure (5): Dong Ho Folk Paintings

Source: <https://tuoitre.vn/tranh-dan-gian-dong-ho-241303.htm>

Next is the painting "*Jealousy*" in the group of satirical paintings, expressing family conflicts and feudal society through vivid and witty storytelling. This is a semi-closed nude work, half open because the nude element appears indirectly, as a natural part of the action. not intended to shock or sexualize. The composition of the painting is simple but rich in drama, including the three main characters, the eldest wife on the left has a rounded figure, an angry face, a hand holding the wife's hair bun, an active posture, symbolizing righteousness and moral power. The concubine in the middle of her ragged dress, her bare chest exposed in a kind of "symbolic nude", a weak appearance, bowing her head represents what is considered wrong and committing a moral offense. The husband on the right with a beard, wearing a long dress, an awkward figure, was both discouraged and afraid, but his hand still deliberately touched the wife's chest. This is a symbol of the humor and flowery nature of men in patriarchal society. The background is almost non-existent, only a few symbols of trees and walls to emphasize the conflict situation that takes place in everyday life.

The main colors of earth gold, brown, black, vermilion, are printed with handmade wood carvings, creating a feeling of warmth, joy and vividness, not tension like violent scenes. The notable point is that the chest detail of the wife's shirt is pulled open, revealing the body. This is not nude in the erotic sense, but a symbolic nude, reflecting the revealing of human instincts, although hidden by rituals.



Figure (6): On the painting, there are two verses in Chinese characters - Nom, which are also the words of the husband when advising the two wives:

"Stop swallowing anger and doing good, only do things to happen, humiliate yourself, humiliate me".

Source: <http://www.tranhdangiangdongho.vn/tin-tuc/tranh-danh-ghen-61>

The real, the natural in life, where desire, affection and jealousy are inseparable from human nature. Culturally, it shows the openness of Vietnamese culture to the body, which is different from the strictness of Confucian morality. In terms of aesthetics, laying the foundation for the concept of humanized nude in modern art, the body is not an object to look at but a dwelling place of humanity and emotions.

Religious and court art

Religious art is quite clearly expressed in Buddha statues, fairy statues, or paintings worshipping Mother, the human body is sacred and stylized with a long body, a round face, and flowing clothes to symbolize nobility, not evocative of physical emotions. This reinforces the concept of traditional Vietnamese aesthetics that separates "beauty" from "sex", considering beauty as a means of benevolence, not visual pleasure. Thus, in Vietnamese Buddhist art, the body is still respected, but sacred, no longer pleasure. The beauty here is the beauty of the soul, of compassion, not of the flesh.

Court art, standard beauty and moralization of the body, feudal society, especially from the Le to Nguyen periods, court art became a tool to express power and social order. Confucianism dominates the entire spiritual life, upholding the three and four virtues, or the gods of fatherhood and formal morality. Court art focuses on the theme of kingship, feats, relics, symbolic patterns (dragon, cup, gui, phoenix...). People only appear in the role of princes, officials, princesses, are described discreetly, ceremoniously, never naked. The clothes in the royal paintings and statues are always heavy, dignified, showing external morality, not showing emotions or the body.

This is the period when the human body is strongly moralized in the history of Vietnamese art (Tran Hau Yen The, 2021).

This explains why nude paintings when introduced to Vietnam in the early twentieth century caused a lot of controversy due to the strong collision with the aesthetic heritage of body moralization that has lasted for hundreds of years.

While folk prosperous art honors the body as the source of life, court religious art regulates and moderates it within the framework of morality. These two streams of thought are not absolute opposites, but create a Vietnamese aesthetic identity, beauty is always towards harmony, kindness and moderation.

The traditional Vietnamese aesthetic conception reflects a dual structure that both recognizes the body as a symbol of life and holds it in the moral order. This is the cultural paradox that always worships reproduction but is reserved about the body. The body is seen not as a sensory object, but as a symbol of culture, morality, and survival. This approach makes a fundamental difference between Vietnamese and Western art, and leaves a lasting mark on modern Vietnamese aesthetics, where artists continue to dialogue between bars and customs, religion and sensuality. This aesthetic identity helps us to understand more deeply about Vietnamese cultural identity and the journey to find harmony between tradition and modernity in the art of body expression.

2. Modern Period

2.1. Social context of culture after Doi Moi (1986 to present)

Since 1986, with the Doi Moi policy, Vietnam has begun the process of economic transformation to a socialist-oriented market mechanism. This process not only affects the economy but also creates profound changes in cultural and artistic life. As the urban middle class emerged and the economy became more open to international exchange, the need for personal aesthetics and artistic diversification increased. For the nude genre, the opening up of the economy and international exchanges have contributed to reducing the taboo of the body in composition, although it cannot be said to be completely free. The fact that art becomes a commodity that can be exchanged and collected creates a new market framework, allowing some nude works to be received in private spaces or art galleries, different from previous propaganda targets.

After Doi Moi in 1986, Vietnam entered a period of opening-up with profound changes in economic, cultural and artistic life. Along with international exchanges, Vietnamese fine arts began to approach Western aesthetic currents in a more open way, especially modern and postmodern thought. In this context, the genre of nude paintings that were considered taboo in the previous period gradually reappeared, no longer seen as mere forbidden paintings but as a symbol of creative freedom and liberation of the body.

Fine arts training system and normalization of nude models. A very important part of accepting change is from within the fine arts training system. From the early 1990s onwards, formal art universities in Vietnam have included human model drawing or nude model drawing in the program according to international standards. When the human body becomes an academic "model" rather than a restrained object, it contributes to the normalization of body image in art. Therefore, in the 1990s and 2000s, although nude painting had not yet become popular, there were many works, exhibitions and serious creative lives with human forms that paved the way for the modern period (Various Authors, Nude Paintings, 2010).

Formal art schools such as Vietnam University of Fine Arts and Ho Chi Minh City University of Fine Arts have included nude drawing in their training programs as a basic skill in photography, contributing to the naturalization of the image of the human body in the academic environment. However, public reception remains strongly divergent, reflecting the tug-of-war between Asian traditions and Western liberal thought.

Legal framework for conditionally licensed cultural management

Despite the signs of openness, it cannot be said that nudity has been completely free in the public sphere. Legal frameworks, public ethical standards, and cultural management regulations still exist. In nude art exhibitions in Vietnam, works that depict the body, sexuality or gender are often censored or must be exhibited in a limited space.

In the current situation of Vietnamese nude art after Doi Moi, it often appears in areas of public spaces such as museums and national exhibitions. Nude works are selected, carefully

narrated, and sometimes must be explained so as not to be understood as pornography, in contrast to private spaces of galleries, collection rooms, and online, where nude works have greater freedom. This leads to the Vietnamese nude style often having moderate lighting, tilted posture, and moderate opening, in order to both express art and avoid violating public moral standards.

Digital Media and Reception Changes

From the 2000s onwards, the Internet, social media, and digital media created a new stage for art including nude. Nude art images appear on gallery websites, social networks, and online auction floors, helping to spread faster but also easily controversial.

The reception from the public is therefore more differentiated, a part of the young, art-educated people are willing to see nude paintings as art, the other part still frames "pornographic" or "not suitable for fine customs and customs". This creates a territory of dialogue and debate between freedom of artistic creativity and community cultural norms.

Art market and new actors

After Doi Moi, Vietnam's art market was formed more clearly, the birth of private galleries, individual collectors, auctions at home and abroad, all contributed to the commercialization of art, including nude paintings. As a result, many artists have the opportunity to create nude with the desire to convey ideas rather than just serving propaganda.

However, the market also sets criteria for audiences and collectors, making many nude works composed in safe models such as warm light, oil and silk materials, stable layouts suitable for interior decoration or collecting needs rather than controversial. This on the one hand expands receptivity, but on the other hand, it can soften the resistance of art.



Figure (7): Truc Son - Nude in front of the sea - oil painting, size: 80x100cm, 2015

Source: Trúc Sơn

Gender issues and bodily power

After Doi Moi, not only male artists, but also female artists and composers on gender topics, began to be more recognized. Some female artists such as Nguyen Thi Chau Giang and Ly Hoang Ly have raised the issue of body autonomy, gender, and physical expression in their compositions quite strongly.



Figure (8): The Youth by artist Nguyen Thi Chau Giang, watercolor and gouache on silk at the V.I.E exhibition

Source: <https://www.phunuonline.com.vn/giam-tuyen-le-thien-bao-tu-minh-nang-do-nghe-thuat-moi-phet-trien-lau-dai-a1486754.html>

In the context of nude, this means that the body is not just the object being looked at, but the subject of self-awareness, especially in female artists. They offer body language to reflect a woman's experience, blurring the judgmental perspective of men, a clear trend in Vietnamese modern art.

Public Moral Argument and Cultural Reconciliation

The traditional Vietnamese art line of religion and court still retains a strong influence on the public's sense of the body, which is more inclined to temperance, ritual, and discretion. Therefore, nude paintings when appearing in modern Vietnamese spaces often have to reconcile between creative freedom and cultural norms through elements such as tilted or backed posture, soft lighting, metaphors, and symmetrical compositions.

The fact that the artist "hides without hiding, reveals without showing" becomes a Vietnamese brand-style nude art brand as a way to both receive the human body, maintain dignity and be culturally relevant. This is the way to receive the human nude" instead of pure pleasure nude.

Regional, generational, spatial differences

Not all of Vietnam receives nude paintings at the same speed and in the same way. The response and development of post-Doi Moi art is clearly different between Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Ho Chi Minh City, between generations and between public and private spaces. The

younger generation of contemporary artists born after 1980, most of whom use digital and social networks, they are less bound by norms, while suburban or small-town audiences may still hold stronger prejudices against artistic nude (Dao Mai Trang, 2010).

2.2. Outstanding visual language after Doi Moi

Some of the technical visual characteristics of post-Doi Moi Vietnamese nude paintings such as soft light spreading rather than strong projection, or partially covering in the form of busts, avoiding overwhelming the viewer. Metaphors (flowers, cloth curtains, trees, water, dragons, worms) are attached to the figure to reduce the feeling of showing off. Oil, silk, lacquer, and warm colors to create a sense of static meditation. The composition is symmetrical or slightly shifted, with a sense of stability influenced by court art. These elements reflect how Vietnamese artists continue the Vietnamese aesthetic tradition of thinking about human prosperity with nature, still meditation from Buddhism, balanced and symmetrical layout of the royal court but still modernizing the human body.

Change in aesthetic conception from morality to human expression

If in the traditional period, the body was understood as a symbol of social morality, in the modern period, it was seen as an independent aesthetic subject. Many artists have exploited the human form as a visual language, in order to express emotions, identity, or reflection on gender and identity.

The connection between prosperous art and modern nude paintings, the idea of prosperity has quietly shaped the natural and human perspective in modern Vietnamese nude paintings. When the nude genre was introduced from the West, Vietnamese artists did not copy the expression of sexual pleasure, but Vietnamized the body in the direction of simplicity, simplicity, and associated with the human spirit. Dinh Y Nhi, a typical female painter, has shifted her perspective from male to female, making the body no longer an object to be viewed but a subject of self-awareness, continuing the spirit of prosperity when expressing the body as nature, the source of life, and the human self.

Artists such as Le Thiet Cuong, Dang Xuan Hoa, and Tran Luu Hau, express the spirit of modernity through simplifying details, emphasizing inner emotions, light and lines, rather than depicting the body in a realistic way. Meanwhile, Nguyen Trung with his Nude works is not aimed at showing off the body, but is an aesthetic of stillness, simplifying the figure, moderating colors, flattening the space to tame sexuality into meditation. As a result, his nude segment has become a bridge between the image of Vietnamese women and spiritual abstraction (Nguyen Trung Works, 2020).

In the post-2000 period, nude works also have the connotation of social and gender criticism, reflecting the process of women's self-awareness of bodily power, escaping masculine prejudice. Some of the works of Nguyen Dinh Dang, Dao Hai Phong, and Dinh Cuong, exploit the body as a symbol of personal existence and aspiration in modern society (Nguyen Dinh Dang, 2022).

Contemporary Culture of Reception and Social Debate

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, nude paintings in Vietnam are no longer absolutely prohibited from being exhibited, but they still operate within the framework of public moral norms. Two typical exhibitions are "The Nude 1" (Hanoi, 2022) and "The Nude 2" (Ho Chi Minh City, 2023), marks the artist's attempt to reposition the subject of nudity as an aesthetic and humanistic discourse, instead of the previous evasive gaze.



Figure (9): The Art Exhibition "The Nude 1" (2022)

Source: <https://laodong.vn/van-hoa-giai-tri/trien-lam-49-tranh-khoa-than-thu-hut-khan-gia-1030454.lido>



Figure (10): "Imaginary sky" from nude painting (2023)

Source: <https://tuoitre.vn/bau-troi-tuong-tuong-tu-tranh-nude-20231028162942507.htm>

The new signs of receptivity suggest an important shift from an attitude of apprehension, to dialogue and analysis on an aesthetic basis. At the same time, mass media, social networks or online exhibitions have contributed to the democratization of beauty, expanding access and admiration of the body beyond the limits of physical exhibition space. However, pornography stereotypes still exist in a conservative or lacking aesthetic background in the public, reminding that the process of normalizing nude art in Vietnam is still a long-term process.

The intersection of art, gender and national identity

In the modern period, Vietnamese nude painting has become a multi-dimensional cultural forum, where gender issues, freedom of expression and Vietnamese identity meet. Female artists such as Nguyen Thi Tam have brought the female form back to the center of artistic discourse, no longer being the object of viewing but becoming the subject of creativity and self-awareness.

In particular, in the context of globalization, Vietnamese nude art has begun to appear in international forums, bringing a new view of the Asian body, combining tradition with modernity, discreet and strong. This shows the reconciliation between national aesthetic values and global standards, and opens up a space for dialogue about Vietnamese beauty in contemporary art.

The modern period marked a turning point in Vietnam's journey of liberating the body and aesthetic thinking. The transition from hidden to present, from moralization to aestheticization,

reflects Vietnam's integration and redefinition of beauty in the relationship between the individual and society.

Global intersection and gender diversity in contemporary art, after 2000, the process of globalization and digital connectivity made Vietnamese artists increasingly participate in the international art space. The body and gender thus become the meeting point of cross-cultural values.

Vietnamese artists and global discourse about the body, many Vietnamese artists abroad or international collaborators such as Tran Trong Vu, Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, Le Quynh Nguyen... used the body in installations, video art, and performance to discuss migration, memory and postcolonial identity.

The body here is not only a personal symbol but a means of telling the story of the nation, where Vietnamese artists use their own bodies to affirm the existence and voice of Vietnam in a global context (Tran Hau Tuan, 2024).

Gender diversity and new expressions, the emergence of artists, non-binary artists, and contemporary art exhibitions on gender in Vietnam (e.g. *Queer Asia Art 2022*, *Pride Art 2023*) expand traditional perspectives. In particular, the body is not only male or female, but a flexible gender expression space, challenging the old Confucian value system. Artist Truong Tan's Vietnamese nude queer works still retain the spirit of Vietnamese culture metaphorically, temperedly, using symbols rather than showing showing the adaptation between the global and the local in artistic thinking about gender



Figure (11): Touched by Angels, 2010, lacquer painting by Truong Tan. Photo: Thavibu Gallery used with permission. Thavibu Gallery

Source: <https://theconversation.com/the-pioneering-queer-artists-who-opened-vietnam-to-gay-culture-78719>

Contemporary nude art is a place of compromise between gender, culture, and ethnicity. Contemporary Vietnamese nude is no longer a copying of Western forms, but has become a place of convergence and inclusion of angles. The first angle is that of the art of creative

freedom, experimentation with forms, multi-material styles, meditative lighting, folk metaphors. The second angle, when gender is self-aware, liberates the gaze and power of the body through the creations of female painters who are drawn themselves in a nude state. The third angle of national identity, Vietnamization of the body, connecting tradition with modernity with the expression of meditation, prosperity, moderation, and humanity.

The above three elements blend to create the unique language of Vietnamese nude, although it is not as intense as the West, nor as closed as the royal court, but human nudity, meditation and rich culture.

Nudity, which went from being considered taboo, has now become a mirror of the receptive culture of the times, where Vietnamese people learn to see and re-look at their own primitive forms in the flow of modernization.

The post-Doi Moi period (1986–present) marked a turning point in the reception and creation of nude paintings in Vietnam. From a subject that was once reserved by the public and tightly controlled by social norms, there is now a wider space for expression, although there is still a cautious shift on the line between vulgarity and aesthetics, between creative freedom and social norms.

In particular, the three traditional aesthetics of folk prosperity, religious meditation and the spirit of royal temperance have converged with modern values such as personalization, humanization and international exchange, creating a Vietnamese-style nude aesthetic, always respecting the body, honoring humanity, modernity and traditional cohesion.

Physical beauty is the meeting point of beauty, gender and ethnicity or the intersection of art, gender and Vietnamese identity. In post-Doi Moi nude paintings are the result of an extensive cultural transformation. Therefore, the body in Vietnamese art is both associated with morality and beyond pleasure, becoming a human symbol that reflects Vietnamese beliefs, behaviors and identities in the context of globalization. Since then, this intersection not only shapes the appearance of Vietnamese nude art but also expresses the modern Vietnamese cultural thought of harmony, compassion and introversion where physical beauty always goes hand in hand with spiritual beauty.

Conclusion

The process of formation and development of Vietnamese nude paintings vividly reflects the transformation of aesthetic thinking and culture received through each historical period. From the tradition of prosperity and aesthetics of Buddhism and the royal court. Where the body is sacred and associated with morality, to the post-Doi Moi modern period, when the body becomes the object of aesthetics and social discourse, this journey represents a shift from an outward-looking collective view to an inward-looking individual view. with the perspective of society from the moral body to the human body.

Vietnamese nudes today are not only an affirmation of creative freedom but also an expression of national cultural identity in the context of globalization. The works reconcile

physical beauty and spiritual beauty, between nationality and humanity, between tradition and modernity.

In the process, the artist is both a creative subject and a bridge to help the public redefine the boundaries of moral aesthetics and expand the space for receiving art.

In general, the culture of reception and aesthetic conception of Vietnamese nudes is a mirror that reflects the maturity of Vietnamese society in the perception of people and beauty. The intersection of art, gender and national identity has created a Vietnamese nude aesthetic, where the body is not only an image, but a symbol of humanity, the desire to live, love and create in the spirit of harmony, compassion and introspection of modern Vietnamese culture.

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