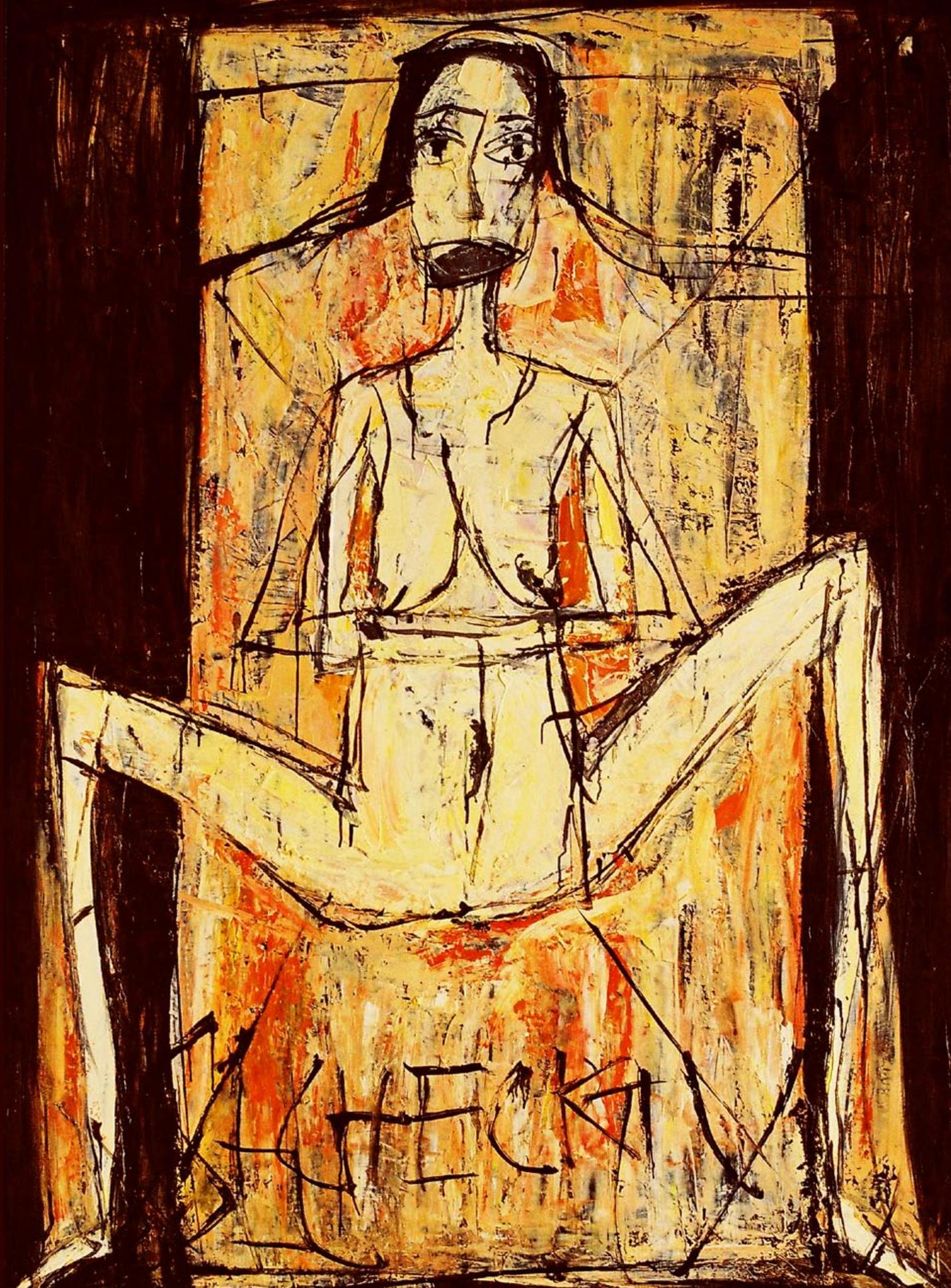


Dinh Y Nhi

SECURITY



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6 - 28 June, 2009



Published 2009 by
Thavibu Gallery Co., Ltd
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Layout by Wanee Tipchindaichai, Copydesk, Thailand

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SECURITY

by Shireen Naziree

Though Vietnam's art scene gained new currency after the implementation of *Doi Moi*, the easing of its socialist policies and market reforms in 1986, the evocation of its cultural narrative has largely turned towards a romantic past while its history pushes forward with political, economic and cultural considerations that have dictated various strategies of reconstruction. Though the relationship between material fact and illusion, structure and space have become a shared language that compels many artists today, the formalism in Vietnamese contemporary art practices does not readily embrace commentary that is personal or socially critical.

As with many contemporary thinkers, Dinh Y Nhi rejects the notion of collective memory and its links to a past which unite many of her contemporaries in a reassuring cult of remembrance. Instead, her artistic practice has evolved from questioning the position of women in her Vietnamese society and by withholding any solace, her imagery distils any stereotyped considerations of her gender. Since her graduation from the Hanoi University of Fine Arts in 1989, Nhi has pioneered a practice that has applied conceptual strategies to visual considerations. And maybe more than any other Vietnamese woman artist of her generation, she has earned her place amongst the most influential post *Doi Moi* artists to have emerged.

As the daughter of prominent artist Dinh Truong Khang, Nhi developed an intimate knowledge of art's formalism very early in her career. However, because conventional art critical approaches were premised on the formal appearance of physical subjects, they failed to register and assess crucial aspects of the contextual nature of her dialogue, thereby challenging traditional boundaries within a culture where mainstream value systems remain conservative.

Amongst Dinh Y Nhi's earlier works are depictions of women that, while intimate, feel charged with a rough emotional urgency. The atmosphere recurs in *SECURITY* where Nhi succeeds in turning her subjects into a kind of painterly residue that is recognizably material of an external world, but still feminine and unmistakably sexual beings. Totally unapologetic about any perceived notions about Vietnamese women, her use of raw colour, manipulation of depth and the fusion of simplified forms – her work is distinguished by a balance of incisive draftsmanship and painterly modelling.

Several works assert the transformative nature of the artist's relationship of art production to her cultural world. Though in much of this body of work, a conventionally defined subject remains elusive - in its place the artistic



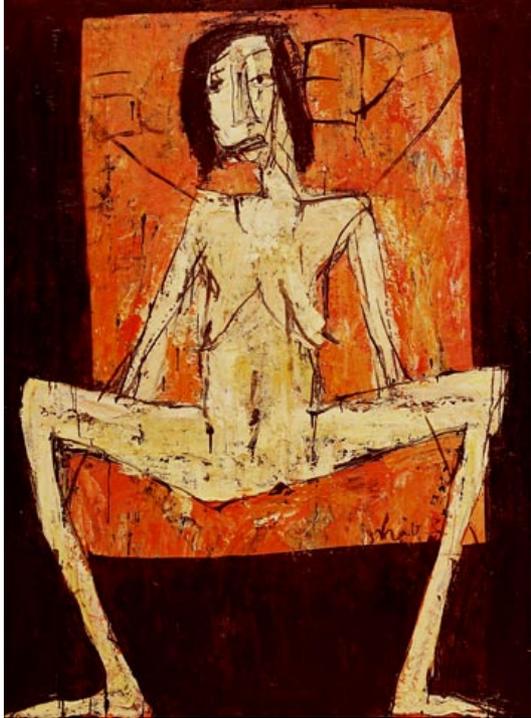
◀
Security (9), 2008

Oil on canvas
120 x 160 cm

process itself emerges both as the structure and subject of Nhi's practice. While Nhi's painterly concerns are chiefly formal, her logic contains the potential for a deeper, more fertile engagement of her subjects.

The patented combination of informality and symbolic charge in the art of Dinh Y Nhi reflect a sense of how social reality and the dream world express each other. Nhi links desire and personal violation in ever changing ways – at times adopting a preferred consistency of thought and morality of art as a code of being. As such her works are about the notion of mirroring such as in *Security (9)*. By embracing the complexity of her subject's experience – the viewer can also move beyond the limitations of static vision.

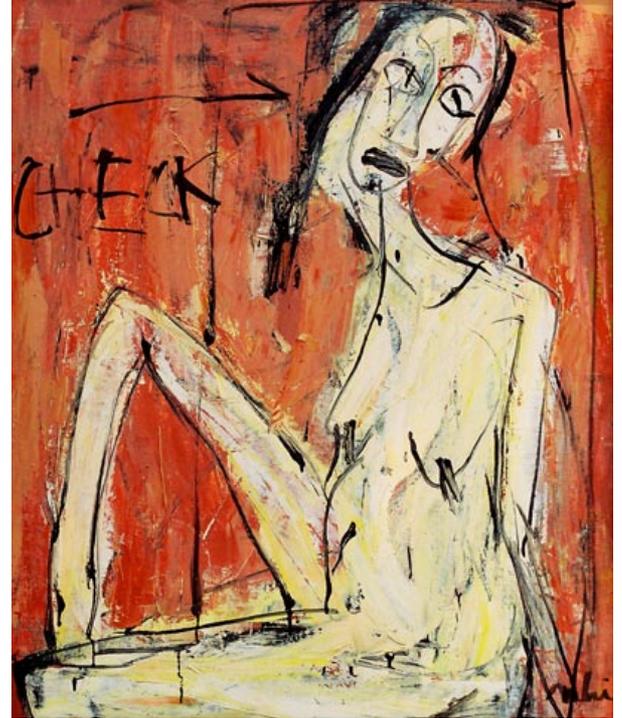
The artist's perception of sanctioning the moralities and ethics that define "security" may be further located in works such as *Security (15)* – which like most of the works in this series is at times rendered in arresting red taints that suggest the physical and emotional connection women have with their bodies and the experience of being secure within oneself: these images encompass simple gestures and appropriations that despite their visual economy evince sincere sensibilities. At the same time, by combining an acute sense of respect in what might be termed the formal characteristics of feeling – Nhi manages to situate her own emotional connection with her subjects at the centre of her practice, while avoiding the sentimental or the naive. For if relational aesthetics concern the economy of human intimacy, then Nhi's enquiries extend beyond any personal realm – but extending itself into a public domain.



▲ **Security (15)**, 2008
Oil on canvas
109 x 150 cm



▲ **Security (3)**, 2008
Oil on canvas
87 x 140 cm

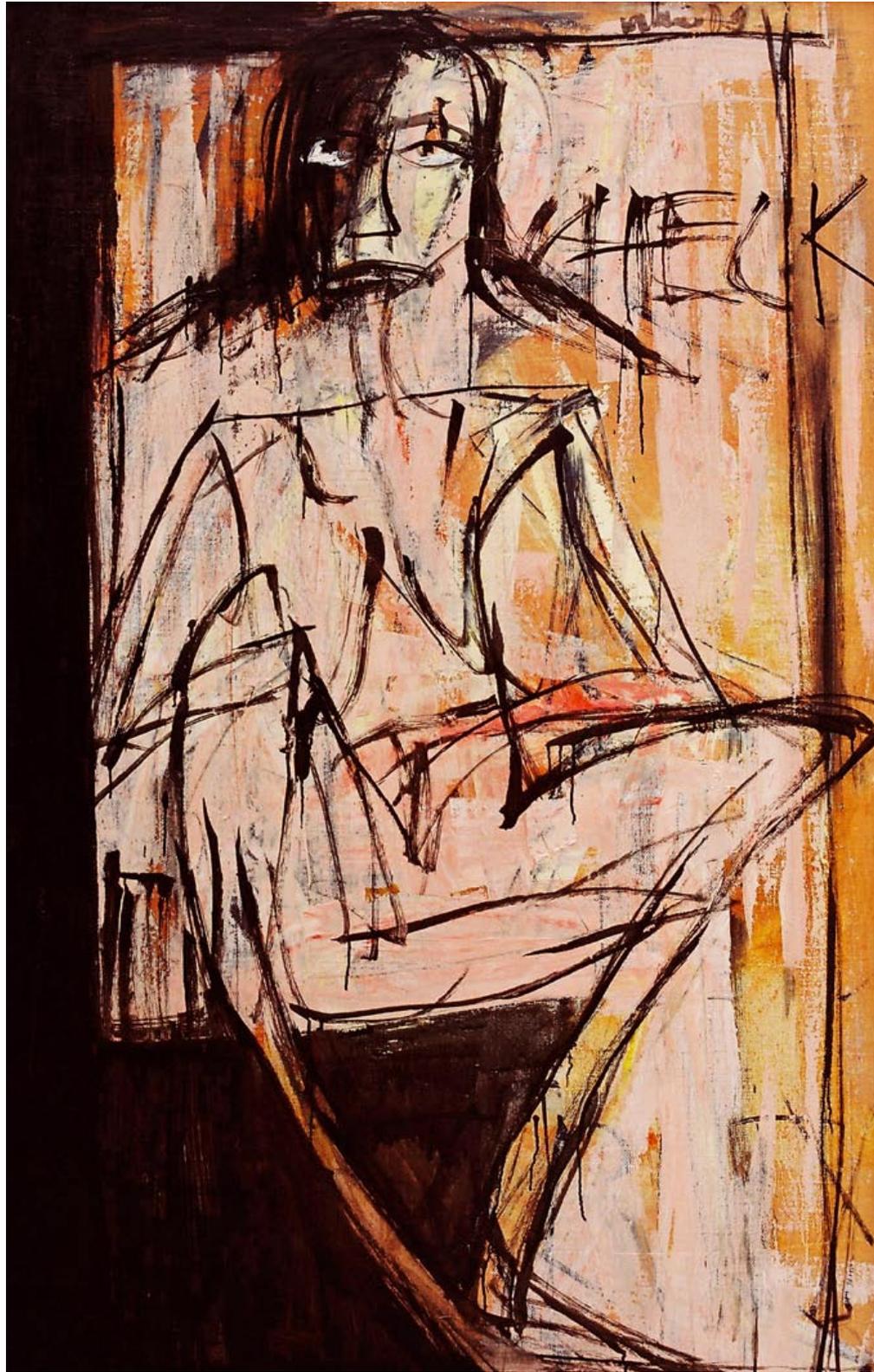


▲ **Security (8)**, 2009
Oil on canvas
80 x 96 cm

Nhi often frames her subjects as in *Security (3)*, thus allowing the careful viewer to contemplate and question their own sense or idea of security when confronted with an alienated public domain which often dictates our 'civilised' daily lives and thus disrupting the safe space of self. As such, Nhi explores territory and principles that lie beneath the surface and through its dimensions underline not only our insecurities but the social dynamics that enforces them.

Nhi is evidently less interested in rehashing theories of the male gaze here, but rather how the human eye and memory form an ideal, creating a desire for identification. The dynamic in a depiction such as in *Security (8)* suggests an abstract connection between the female character housed in a socially trapped body and someone she has lost or yearning for, or in more overt terms, reinforcing the ideal feminine objectification of being delicately pretty.

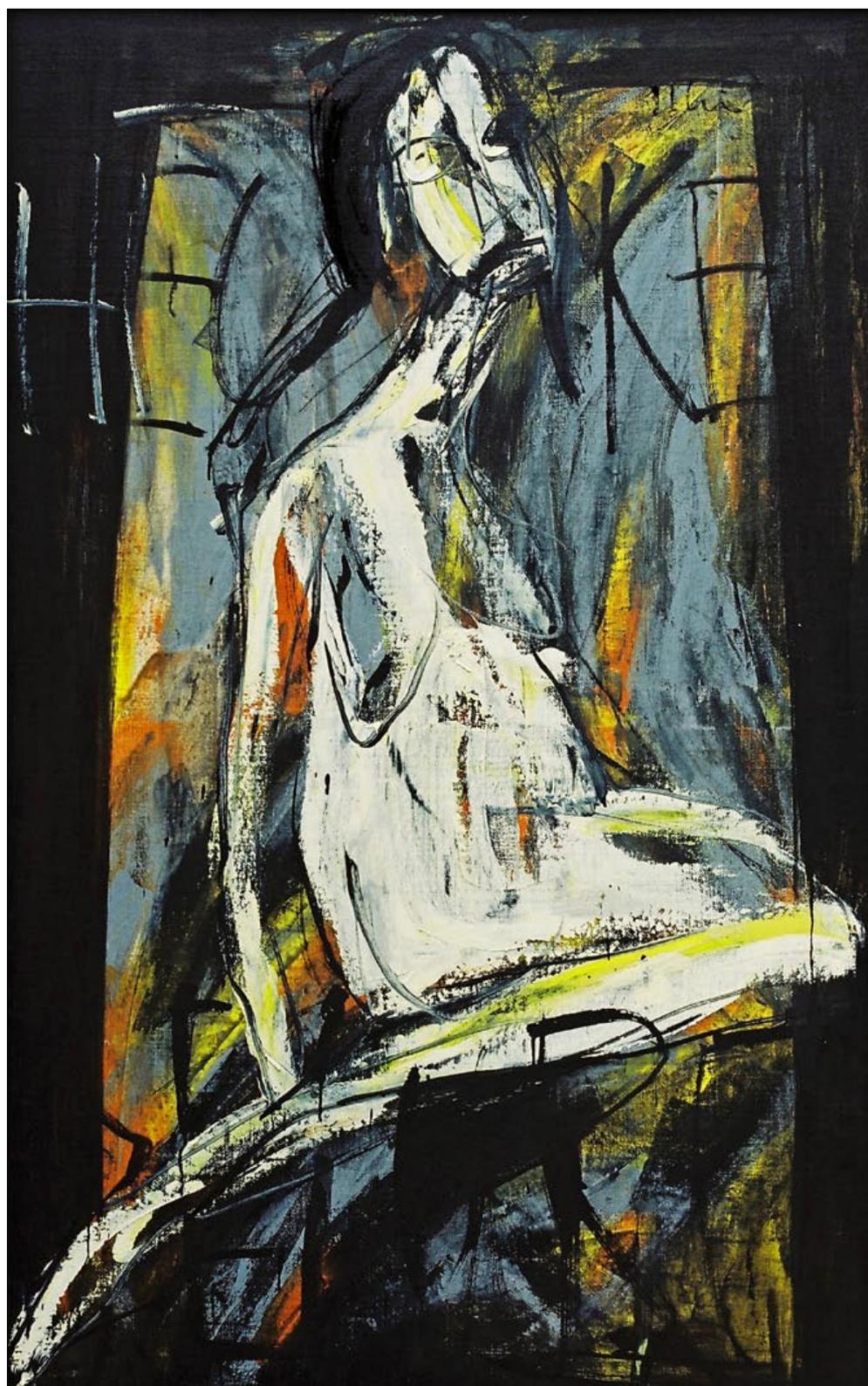
Dinh Y Nhi has spent much of her practice surveying the female psyche and through SECURITY she offers an opportunity to examine the inner characteristics that deliberate feminism. From early in her career, she wanted her art to rise above the opposition between narrative and abstraction. While she continuously challenges herself with line and colour, the world of her art does not refer to renouncing any relationship to reality. Her colours are most often very primary and the randomness of application has become part of her equation that emphasise her expressions of straight forward thought and reasoning. This deliberate restriction of her palette refers to more than emphasizing her subjects; it not only creates a temporal distance but allows for text and imagery to unite on a single plain – allowing each viewer to decide on how to read into her paintings.



Security (1), 2009 | Oil on canvas | 90 x 140 cm



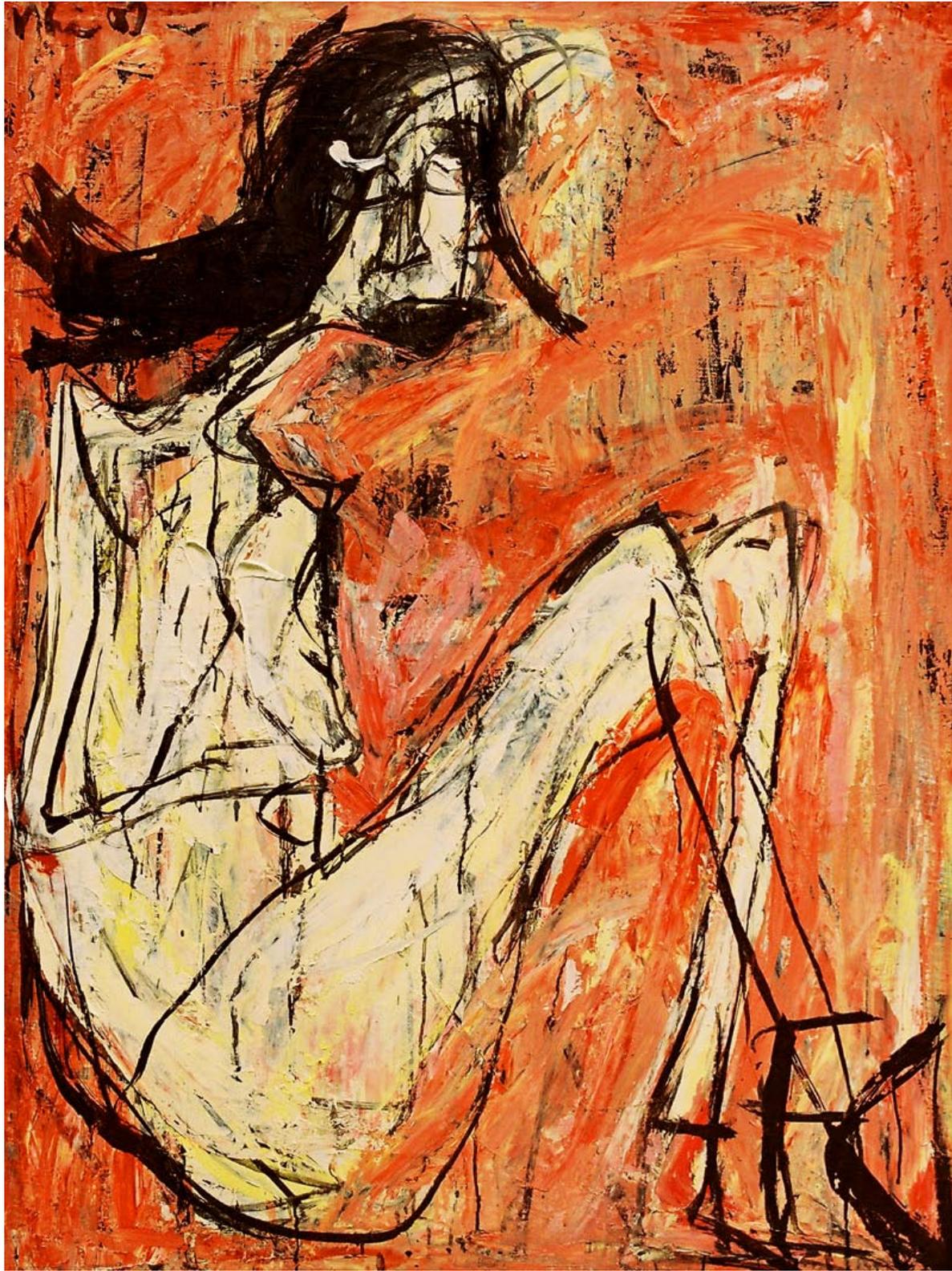
Security (2), 2008 | Oil on canvas | 120 x 150 cm



Security (3), 2008 | Oil on canvas | 87 x 140 cm



Security (4), 2009 | Oil on canvas | 120 x 160 cm



Security (5), 2009 | Oil on canvas | 90 x 120 cm



Security (6), 2009 | Oil on canvas | 120 x 170 cm



Security (7), 2008 | Oil on canvas | 130 x 130 cm



Security (8), 2009 | Oil on canvas | 80 x 96 cm



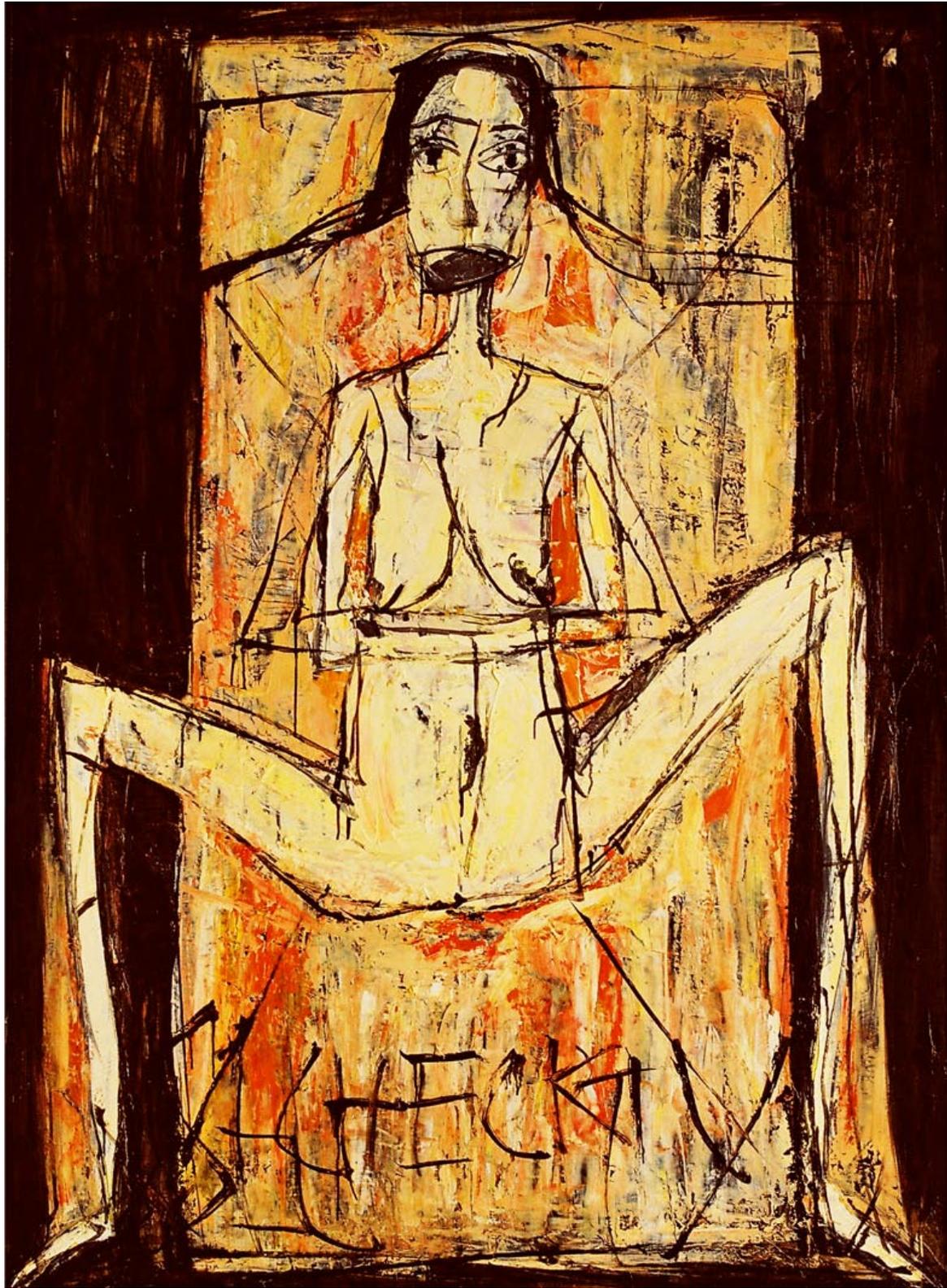
Security (9), 2008 | Oil on canvas | 120 x 160 cm



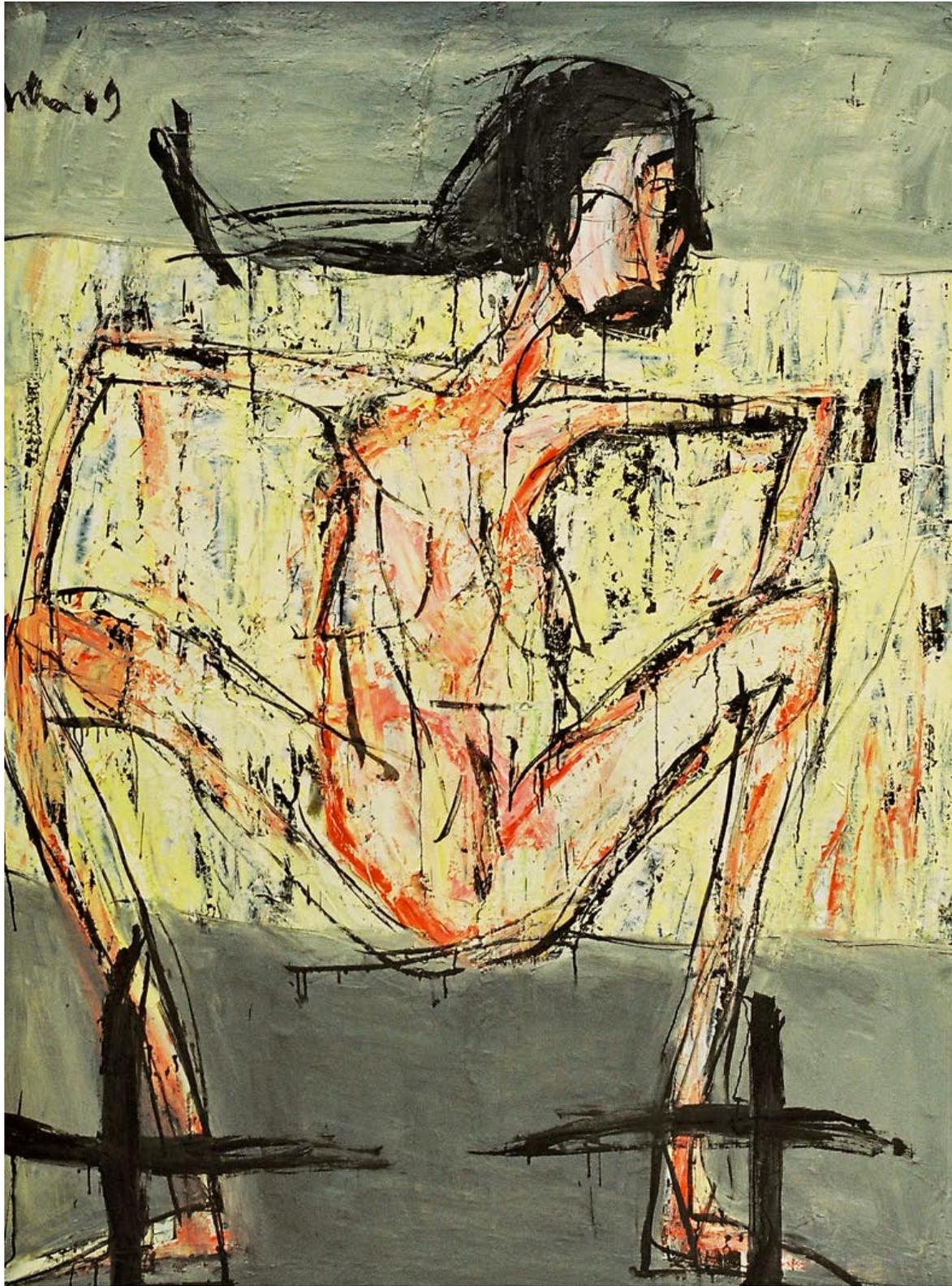
Security (10), 2008 | Oil on canvas | 110 x 160 cm



Security (11), 2009 | Oil on canvas | 80 x 96 cm



Security (12), 2008 | Oil on canvas | 110 x 150 cm



Security (13), 2009 | Oil on canvas | 120 x 160 cm



Security (14), 2007 | Oil on canvas | 110 x 150 cm



Security (15), 2008 | Oil on canvas | 109 x 150 cm

CHRONOLOGY



Dinh Y Nhi

Born 1967, Hanoi

Bachelor of Fine Arts from Hanoi University of Fine Arts, 1989

Member of Vietnam Fine Arts Association

SELECTED ART EXHIBITIONS

1990 National Art Exhibition – Hanoi, Vietnam

1993 Asian Art Exhibition – Dhaka, **Bangladesh**

1995 Group exhibition at Itoyama Gallery – Tokyo, **Japan**

- *An Ocean Apart* at Smithsonian Traveling Exhibition – **USA**

- Solo show at Vietnam Fine Arts Association Gallery – Hanoi, Vietnam

1996 Group show at Museum Fujita – Tokyo, **Japan**

1997 Group show at the Contemporary Arts Exhibition Centre – Amsterdam, **Netherlands**

- *A Winding River* at Meridian International Centre – Washington, **USA**

- Group show at Centre Wallonie-Brixelles – Paris, **France**

- Solo show at Mai Gallery – Hanoi, Vietnam
- Solo show at Forum Schloss Platz – Aarau, **Switzerland**
- 1998 Group show at City Museum – Paris, **France**
- Group show at Art Museum Bassano Del Grappa – Vincenza, **Italy**
- Group show at Art Museum Busan – Busan, **Korea**
- *A Century of Vietnamese Modern Art* – European Union Tour
- 1999 Solo show at Asian Fine Art Factory – Berlin, **Germany**
- Solo show at the Goethe Institute – Hanoi, Vietnam
- Solo show at Canvas International Arts – Amsterdam, **Netherlands**
- Group show at Frankfurt Arts – Frankfurt, **Germany**
- Group show at the University of the Philippines – Manila, **Philippines**
- 2000 *Gallactica* group show at Vietnam Fine Arts Association – Hanoi, Vietnam
- 2001 Solo show at Gallery 55 – Bangkok, **Thailand**
- 2002 *Vietnam Art Actuel* at the University of Montreal – Montreal, **Canada**
- *In Memory, the Art of Afterward* at Sidney Mishkin Gallery – New York, **USA**
- 2003 Solo show at Art Vietnam Gallery – Hanoi, Vietnam
- 2005 Solo show at Gallery 55 – Shanghai, **China**
- 2006 *Artists from Vietnam* – Mumbai, **India**
- 2008 *Changing Identities* at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts – Salt Lake City, **USA**
- 2009 Solo show *Security* at Thavibu Gallery – Bangkok, **Thailand**

MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

Singapore Art Museum

National Art Gallery of Malaysia

Vietnam Fine Art Museum



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