

SPIRITUAL SPACES

An Art Exhibition to Celebrate
Thavibu Gallery's 10th Anniversary
16 February - 16 March, 2008

ARTISTS

Kritsana Chaikitwattana, Jirapat Tatsanasomboon
Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul, Santi Thongsuk

Dinh Quan, Trinh Tuan,
Nguyen Trung, Hong Viet Dung

Aung Kyaw Htet, Nyein Chan Su
Myoe Win Aung, U Lun Gywe

Curator - Shireen Naziree



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FOREWORD

Jørn Middelborg

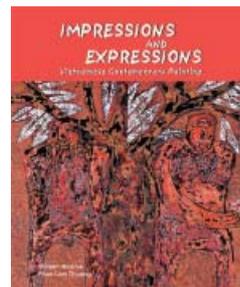
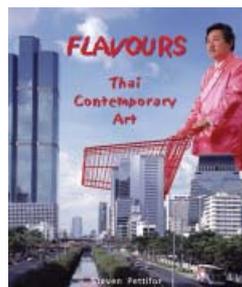
Founder and Managing Director
Thavibu Gallery

Anniversaries are times for celebrations and reflections. It has been ten years since Thavibu Gallery was established in Bangkok. Because the main focus is on contemporary art from Thailand, Vietnam and Burma, the name “Thavibu” was chosen for the gallery. Over the past ten years, the gallery has grown along with the ever-developing art scene of the region. Back in 1998, both Thailand and Vietnam had a flourishing, vibrant art scene and Burmese art was waiting to be discovered. Thus the decision was made to focus on contemporary art from these three countries and bring it out to a wider audience.

Today Thavibu Gallery represents important as well as upcoming artists from these three countries whose art expresses and communicates the imaginative aspects of their cultures and reflects concerns that encompass the spiritual, the social and the political. Because of our commitment to survey local trends in these countries and expose the work of their artists to a global audience, Thavibu Gallery's website (www.thavibu.com) has proven to be an invaluable source of information. In addition, the majority of the gallery's works are now sold through the Internet.

Thavibu Gallery has furnished art museums with works by important artists, and several of the artists represented in the gallery have works regularly sold at international auction houses. Moreover, they have participated in international art fairs such as Art Singapore and Art Taipei (Taiwan).

Important to our commitment to the development of contemporary art in the countries and among the artists with whom we interact is the publishing of art books and comprehensive catalogues. During the last five years, a total of ten quality books and catalogues have been published. They include six artists' monographs, *Flavours - Thai Contemporary Art* by Steven Pettifor, which is the main book available on Thai contemporary art, and *Impressions and Expressions - Viet-namese Contemporary Painting* by Shireen Naziree and Phan Cam Thuong, which is an important publication on contemporary art in Vietnam.



Over the past few years, interest in Asian contemporary art has blossomed. Although current interests point fervently towards China and India, it is only a matter of time before the focus shifts to Southeast Asia. Thavibu Gallery follows no trends but continues to focus primarily on the contemporary art of Thailand, Vietnam and Burma, each of which has distinct qualities of its own. Thailand is rather well developed and Vietnam is a country in transition, while Burma remains isolated. The people of these nations share common spiritual values that have grown out of their common past histories. Spirituality has been inspirational to many artists and thus the exhibition *Spiritual Spaces* was conceived with this inspiration in mind.

Thavibu Gallery is fortunate to work with the art historian and independent curator Shireen Naziree, who is the curator for this special exhibition. I take this opportunity to thank her for her collaboration and for writing the text for this catalogue. Also, my heartfelt thanks go to the artists in this exhibition and to all who have supported Thavibu Gallery over the past decade.

SPIRITUAL SPACES

Shireen Naziree
Curator

How do we encounter Asian spirituality in art? In what context must we place Asian spirituality to appreciate it on its own aesthetic or cultural terms? Are these terms only accessible to those of us who understand the specific conditions within which such art emerged? Or are there gestures within such an aesthetic that appeal to a broader audience? These are questions that dominate much of the social and cultural politics of Southeast Asia.

The art of Southeast Asia — particularly Thailand, Vietnam and Burma with their overlapping cultures and converging histories — has reclaimed the context from earlier authoritarian and colonial encounters. The artistic shifts contained under the broad umbrella of post-colonialism as well as post-modernism have had a profound effect upon these cultures, changing the discourse concerning place and person. These changes are most visible in their cultural and spiritual status after colonial dependencies were redefined as points of cultural transmission and refraction of western colonial standards, for indeed colonialism shaped modernism in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, access to western scholarship allowed Southeast Asian artists to move beyond traditional representation and assimilate into their art quintessential modernist values.

While post-modernism liberated westernized cultures from its stratagems of high avantgarde, it facilitated an expansion of space for the broader Asian cultural aesthetic. As a result, artists of the Southeast Asian region have similarly expanded their range of skills, cultural cross-references and means of working. Empowered by the expansion of notions of the artistically legitimate in the wake of post-modernism and with an intelligent grasp of art, a critical new generation of Southeast Asian artists has become articulate and confident as never before. As such, the synergy that has resulted from the resilience of tradition and the desire to be contemporary has given Southeast Asian art the impetus to negotiate the distance from the periphery to the global art market.

While it is often perceived as the manifestation of a mysterious knowledge and divine experience, Asian spirituality is a calm

presence that quietly imposes itself from the depths of ancient cultures and civilizations without any dogmatic religious teachings. Although there are undoubtedly iconographic links that are shared within such an ideology, Asian spirituality contains a universal appeal and an independent humanism with which practically all cultures can identify. The symbolic narratives that are often present and repeatedly used as subject matter often serve as visual anchors and are more often part of a poetic repertoire that has provided a powerful stimulus for creativity. This creativity has often resulted in expressions that are sophisticated and original, in keeping with artists' private worlds reflecting their inner experiences and conditions of life, while at the same time rarely self-indulgent or personally palliative.

To fully grasp the evolution of this aesthetic, we need to momentarily look back to the old artistic traditions of these cultures, from which artists have breathed new life into their contemporary moribund traditions. Architecture, sculpture and painting were from times past the hallmarks of transcendental belief systems in Asia. The sensuous imagery employed in the embellishment of historical icons such as temples and palaces evolved from concepts of reality, so that the symbols employed in these ancient art forms had the broadest teachings. This essential humanism and spirituality has persisted in various forms of folk culture to which artists have turned for inspiration, because art as innovation did not exist in the minds of the makers of this early art.

Although specific philosophies and symbols flourished in the making of these abstract statements, it is the individual skills of the artisans, who typically lived and worked in craft guilds under master craftsmen, that brought individual sensibilities to bear on their work. These are evident in the variety of forms and expressions. Thus, as during the long centuries of the past, for artists now the common denominator of all human values, the expressions of their lives, the control of their inner and outer worlds, and the overtones of their human experience have been lit by the sparks of spirituality.

From these vital elements come the impulses to stimulate and

control the life process and its movements. When realized through the artistic vocabulary of the artist, in the nature of colour and form with each artist's own sense of rhythm and harmony or inner coherence, the result constitutes the language of art, which is universally understood. The emergence of these life concepts in Asian art continue to reveal the real function of art in a modern community by showing that it is the core of all civilized living — part of the tapestry of human existence and not a mere luxury.

Spirituality knows no geography or place; it is everywhere and rootless. While artists have been nourished by the same ideology, differences in style and interpretation give the artistic works of Thailand, Vietnam and Burma their own particular charm and identity, which artists have articulated in terms of their own cultural heritages and idioms. In this way, they have emerged as strongly individual in inspiration yet cosmopolitan in technique. By submitting themselves to the visual, they have captured the radiance and spirit of their own individual auras while bearing witness to the permanence of Southeast Asian culture and civilization. And through the colours of art they demonstrate the infinite richness of the Creation.

As colour arouses emotion, the plastic organization that artists impose on both beings and objects reinforces the symbolic significance of their work. Spirituality's mystical narration is best described through the immensity of colours.

Monks in Yellow Robes,

2006

107 x 127 cm

Oil on canvas

For Burmese artist **Aung Kyaw Htet**, colour has an incandescence that illuminates the canvas. While by definition his paintings are beautiful and classical, Aung Kyaw Htet has developed a structural language of his own. Worked with direct mark making, *Monks in Yellow Robes* is dazzling yet neither paradoxical nor deprived of transparency. By submitting himself entirely to the visual, he captures the brutal radiance of the tropical light that accompanies the flight of figures at the heart of the canvas in order to inspire the viewer both visually and spiritually. The translucence of the monks' robes mirrors the ethereal qualities of time and devotion that the monks adopt while requesting alms on their morning rounds. Devotion, dedication and respect are integral parts of Aung Kyaw Htet's practice. He reveals himself to be very familiar with the luminous beauty of Burma, which bears witness to the permanence of a culture and civilization that give humanity a conception of humanism.



Amalita 2008

Monk, 1999
100 x 100 cm
Oil on canvas

Although they come from vastly different backgrounds, Aung Kyaw Htet and **Hong Viet Dung** are spiritual brothers for whom the sacredness of art is a means of expressing the sacredness of the Creator. In contrast to the vibrant palette of Aung Kyaw Htet, Vietnamese painter Hong Viet Dung reveals another dimension to the interpretation of monks — the most respected physical icon of Asian spirituality. In his painting *Monk* Hong Viet Dung reveals meditative calmness through the chromatic harmony of his colours without any loss of vibrancy. The quiet, modest serialism and ambiguous infinity of space and colour that he enlists are filled with Zen-like discipline and evoke his signature style. The solitude that emerges from this painting reveals his extraordinary ability to explore the meditative nature of spirituality. Dung's paintings are often described as peaceful places filled with fluidity, transparency and the power of quiet expressionism.





Darkness and light, the origins of all creation, are fundamental to **Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul's** art. His interest in the contrasts between darkness and light extends beyond the aesthetic and through to his delight of painting. Therdkiat is not interested in literal readings of spirituality, but rather interpretations that enter into the reality of life itself. *Cat, Dog and Fish* gives way to the dark uncertainty of the urban wilderness, a passage of anti-monumentality compounded by the fatigue of sociopolitical and economic forces, a threshold condition that reveals itself through the fragmentation of society. His imagery lays bare the terrible intimacy of the darkness of life with the spiritual that suffering affords. The street cat and dog, common sights in urban Southeast Asia, may be interpreted as a sign of spiritual abandonment or desolation. And yet one might consider the contrary: that there is also a place for spirituality in desolation.



Cat, Dog and Fish, 2007
120 x 320 cm (2 pieces)
Oil on canvas

Late Afternoon, 2005

115 x 149 cm

Oil on canvas

To understand the wellsprings of **Aung Kyaw Htet's** paintings, we need to understand his personal life history and his intimate connection to his culture. Although he has led an independent life open to change, he does not deviate from his deep-rooted devotion to his Buddhist beliefs and customs, which have provided him an anchor or a still point of certainty to which he constantly returns in his mind. In *Late Afternoon* Aung Kyaw Htet pays homage to the young monks. Through their offerings of prayer he quietly expresses his own gratitude and respect. The young monks represent memories of his childhood, his own struggles with poverty and the dreams that he pursued. A familiar iconography for the artist, the depiction of these young monks reveals the duality of love and hope.









Blessing, 2007
130 x 140 cm
Oil on canvas

Santi Thongsuk's devotion to Buddhism may explain the strong bond the painter has developed with the power of human behaviour. The principles of Buddhism have been his constant inspiration. Santi Thongsuk's rapport with the icons of Buddhism has been remarkable but understandable when we acknowledge that spirituality in the Southeast Asian context is deeply rooted in Buddhism. *Blessing* is filled with imagery of meditation, light and silence that illustrate the artist's understanding of tone. The provenance of Santi's iconic imagery lies in his own cultural memory. Through the pictorial structure of his canvas with its flourishes of movement and gentle hues, he orchestrates both the strength and subtlety of his subject matter — monks chanting and offering blessings — with intense feeling.

Life II, 2007
120 x 120 cm
Lacquer, dyes, egg shell,
silver and gold on board

While **Trinh Tuan's** expressionism is not personally indulgent, he does speak from his own personal experiences and his heart, as is evident in the conviction of his work. But his success as an artist is measured by the extent to which he makes his vision that of the viewer. His paintings are insightful; they have an aura of origin that illuminates the primal and psychological feelings of everyday life. Even though *Life II* is not autobiographical, it does show that he often turns to his own cultural background as a source of his visions. Trinh Tuan employs the age-old art of lacquer painting, which he reinterprets with his own signature and through which he expresses a clarity born from a genuine insight into the hardship of living through the various eras of Vietnam's socio-political change. Through his larger-than-life figurative that often saturates his pictorial, he gives intense form to the invisible structure of emotional angst that often haunts the human psyche and seeks to engage viewers in examining their own human condition.







Happiness in Sadness, 2007

130 x 140 cm

Oil on canvas

Santi Thongsuk articulates his artistic fulfillment in an ambivalent spirituality that he terms as reality, unreality or even super reality. *Happiness in Sadness* is not a realistic rendering of form or symbol, the inner world or the outer world. Within the context of Asian spirituality, the social logic of human character is often expressed through animal forms as applied in this painting, prompting us to look closely and read into the painting again and again, until it mirrors our own psychological and spiritual space. For example, the artist regards the female form as a symbol of freedom from which he often draws inspiration. Through colour and form in *Happiness in Sadness*, he uses his rich and sparkling palette to reinvent in his theme a culture that he feels is necessary for his survival.

Belief (Marilyn Monroe), 2007

101 x 151 cm

Acrylic on canvas

The female form has always been a significant intermediary between the world and its spiritual representation. The pantheon of goddesses and nymphs in Southeast Asian mythology evolved from concepts of reality once inexpressible except through sensuous imagery. Marilyn Monroe continues to universally epitomize the ideal of female sensuality and beauty. The hallmark of **Jirapat Tatsanasomboon's** art is his application of popular western icons interacting with traditional Thai imagery. In *Belief (Marilyn Monroe)*, he juxtaposes an image of the famous actress with a *palad khik* — a highly cherished Thai amulet symbolizing the desire for wealth and popularity - in order to convey the artist's philosophical ruminations on the consequences and complexities of life and the human need to reach out to a higher spiritual source. Amulets and lucky charms are intimations of a humanism deeply rooted in the imaginations of most Asian cultures.



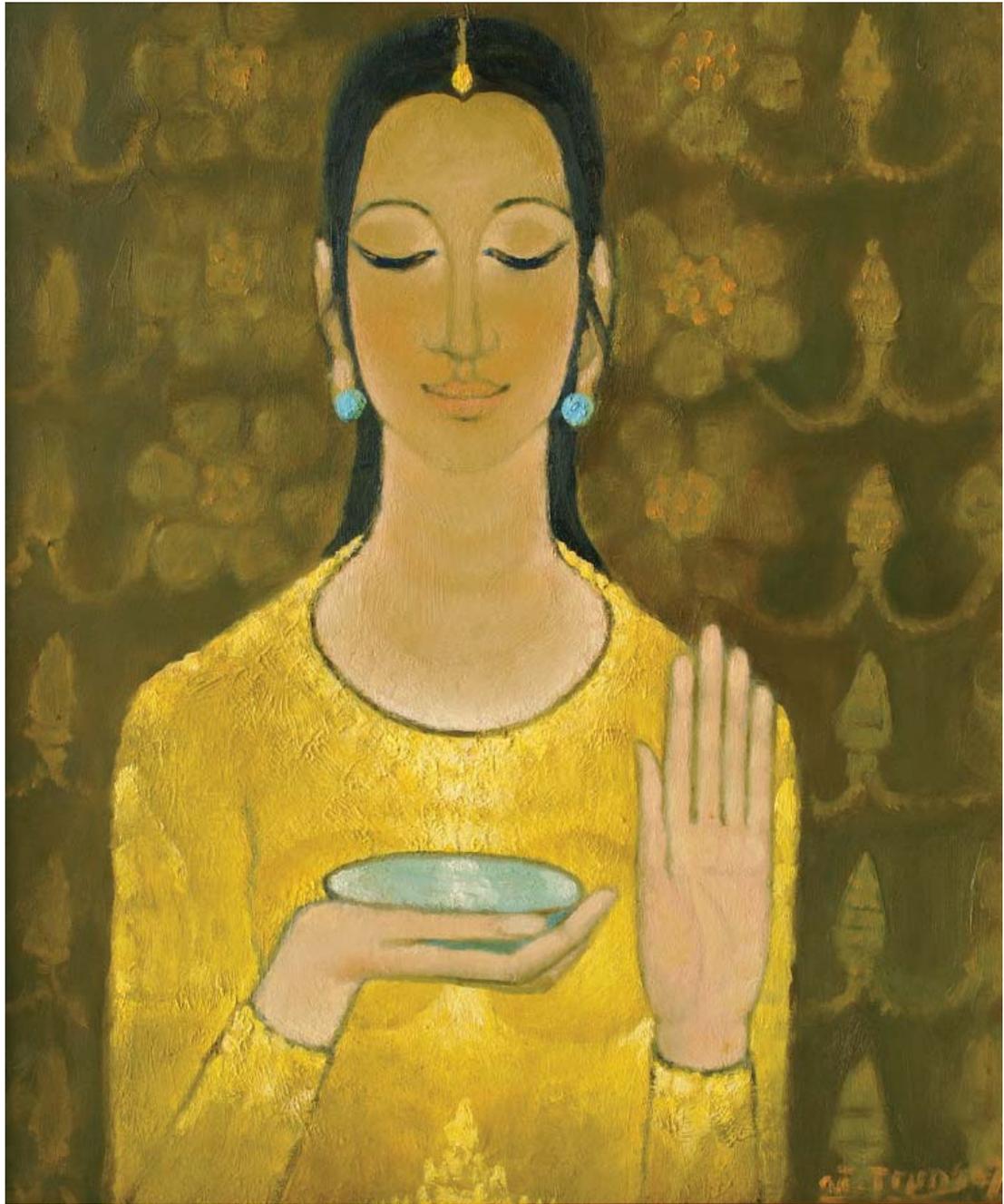


In a Meditative Mood, 2007

53 x 63 cm

Oil on canvas

In his painting *In a Meditative Mood* **Nguyen Trung** lifts a similar objective terminology and places it within a subjective context, which is also universally recognized. But here the female form clearly takes on a less overt position, one that is between here and the other world, though not submissive. In this painting, Nguyen Trung demonstrates that there is a delicacy in the strength of the Vietnamese woman. The sensitivity of his response echoes his consideration of the various gestures of his subject, whose posture, downcast eyes and hand positions typically mirror spiritual rituals. The peaceful silence and the calm face of his subject expresses the formal eloquence of the artist's aesthetic, which though deceptively straightforward in its structure, captures a serendipitous moment of purposeful intuition. It has a presence that imposes itself even on those who are deaf to the voice and power of meditation.



Inspiration, 2007
120 x 120 cm
Lacquer, dyes,
epoxy, silver and
gold on board

A similar mesmerizing effect also exists in **Dinh Quan's** *Inspiration*. While the imagery the artists use may be factual in source, Dinh Quan's application of the traditional Vietnamese lacquer painting is the expression of a transposition of cultural values. For Dinh Quan, the contextual interpretation of the female form is filled with deep personal meaning and connection to the historical worship of the goddess Kwan Yin. Dinh Quan is a master at reorganizing the territory and process of identification with an extraordinary understanding. With imagery such as the gilded lotus flower and surreal forms floating across the reflexive surface of his lacquer painting, he delicately balances the ideologies of the surrounding physical world within spiritual dimensions. His richly embellished painting speaks of the relationship between sensuous desire and respect for the role of women.



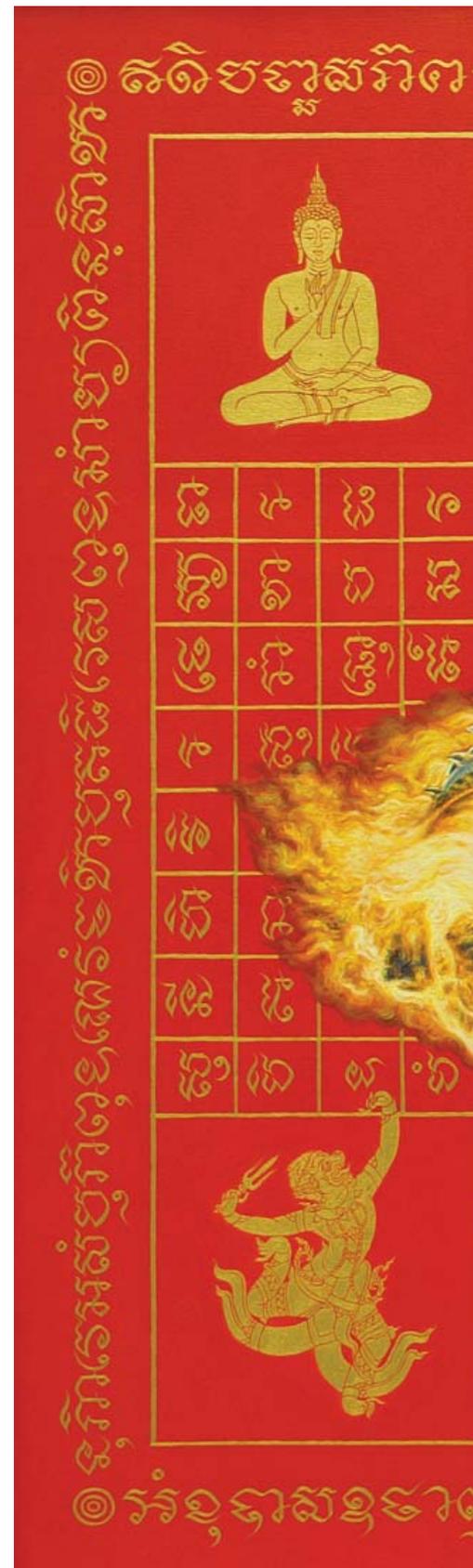
Life I, 2007
120 x 120 cm
Lacquer, dyes,
egg shell, silver and
gold on board

Art's relationship and integration with the power of the female spirit is acutely felt in **Trinh Tuan's** lacquer painting *Life I* wherein he displays a practice that owes much to the traditional definitions of what separates art from everything else. While in his painting *Life II* he explores the human psyche — especially how mental anguish can manifest itself in desire — his female form in *Life I* through the reflection of its formal layout reveals a grace of moral virtue. For Trinh Tuan, this grace defines human virtue. Through the skilful enchantment and language of art, he articulates the values that are born from the depths of one's soul and which seek to find strength from such mystical and divine understanding.



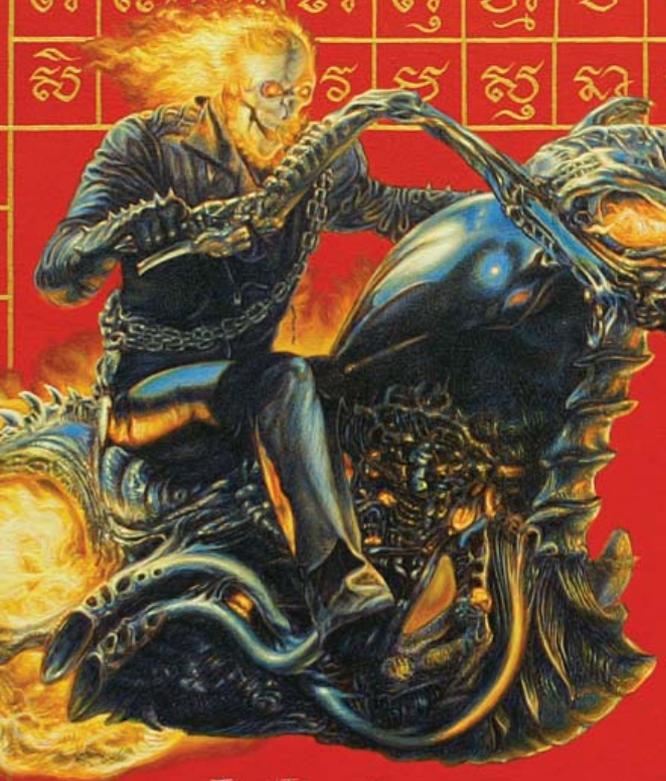
Belief (Ghost Rider), 2007
97 x 140 cm
Acrylic on canvas

Although his characters may sometimes be factual in source, the imagery **Jirapat Tatsana-somboon** uses to accompany them sets them entirely apart from anything traditional, which proves that popular technology knows no geography or place; it is everywhere and rootless. The icons in *Belief (Ghost Rider)* certainly exist in an otherworld, where the character from the popular movie (*Ghost Rider*) is juxtaposed with ancient Khmer prayer scriptures in traditional red and gold, conjuring up the internal struggles as the character fights for a new consciousness of redemption against the temptations of evil. Although the tale behind this painting is based on a fictitious character, it does hint at society's typical acceptance of illusion and the extreme desire to believe in what may not be entirely human and logical.



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Finding the Real Path (1), 2005

80 x 122 cm

Oil and mixed media
on wood

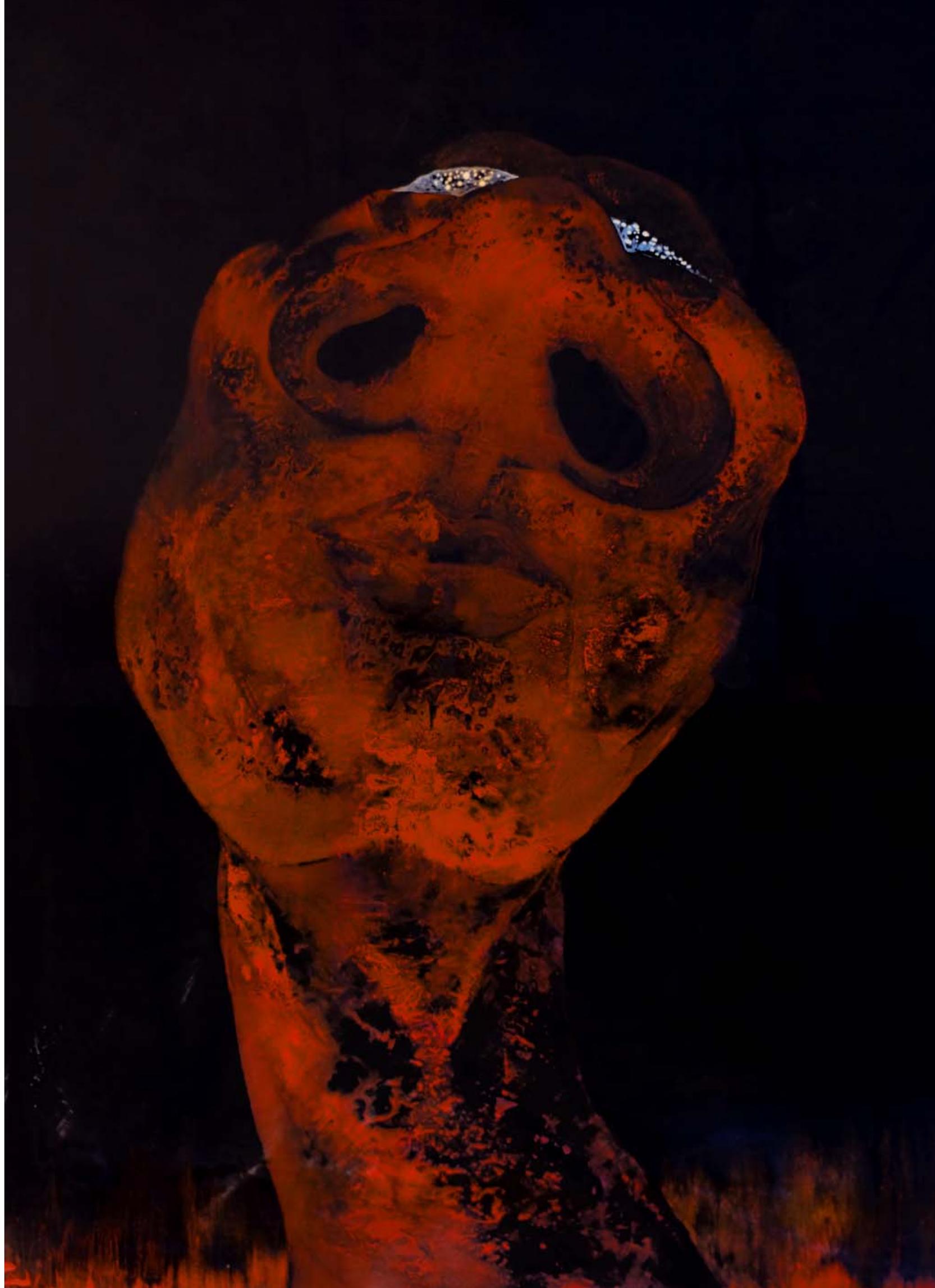


Like many young Thai males, **Kritsana Chaikitwattana** spent time studying Buddhist scriptures and experiencing a life devoid of excess as a novice monk. In his paintings, he often speaks of his own experiences and personal journeys, hence the conviction of his work as evidenced in *Finding the Real Path (1)*. But his success as a painter is largely measured by the extent to which he shares his personal visions, as though he is picturing collective ideals as well. *Finding the Real Path (1)* is an insightful painting, executed in an expressionist style that exudes an aura of origin, illuminating the primal power of the human soul, that of good and bad. The work's narrative upholds and reflects Kritsana's exploration of the mysticism that is the inference of life's force. The rich textures highlight the duality of his reference giving the piece a surreal tone while revealing the elaborate complexity of an abstract narrative as well as an organic spectacle.



Oh, My God, 2006
120 x 160 cm
Lacquer, dyes and
egg shell on board

Although **Dinh Quan's** *Oh, My God* is autobiographical, it is his cultural ancestry that provides the clue to his visions. The structural origin of the repressed colonial and socialist history of Vietnam had unwittingly affected the lives of many. Dinh Quan pictures in an unusually vivid self-portrait the turmoil and angst felt during his own life experiences, which he values as important life lessons. With a directness and a clarity born from genuine insight, Dinh Quan's imagery gives the shape to an invisible emotion arising from a history that continues to haunt him. Unlike most of his lacquer paintings, *Oh, My God* is devoid of the embellishments that typically illuminate his art. This is a rare representation of that art.







Two Spirit Mediums, 2006

152 x 182 cm

Inkjet print, acrylic and
enamel on vinyl

The cultural history of Burma is richly textured with icons of spirituality. **Nyein Chan Su's** art primarily addresses his Burmese heritage, though in ways that express a different spiritual space, one that has not always been fully understood or appreciated outside Burma. With *Nat (Ma Phe Wha)* and *Two Spirit Mediums* he started a series that allowed him to look more directly to the ancient pre-Buddhist belief world of the *nats*, spirits who are believed to exist in trees and rivers and whose potent powers are usually considered a condition of the periphery of modern society, but which from a traditional perspective continue to live in the shadows of tradition. Although *nat* worship is regarded as superstition, rituals and representations associated with them continue to be observed though not as religious practice.





Nat (Ma Phe Wha), 2006

122 x 152 cm

Inkjet print, acrylic and
enamel on vinyl

Nyein Chan Su's inspiration is primarily the temples and the spiritual essence of Bagan, the ancient Buddhist capital of Burma, which he constantly revisits in his representations but reinterprets in different ways. While not attempting to evade any logic of representation, Nyein Chan Su's latest shift to abstract expressionism and media in both *Nat* and *Two Spirit Mediums* has allowed him to engage in a more sublime and liberating activity. He has recaptured the essential energy of the *nat* spirits and through his rich expressive vocabulary has amplified their essential features and roles as omens.

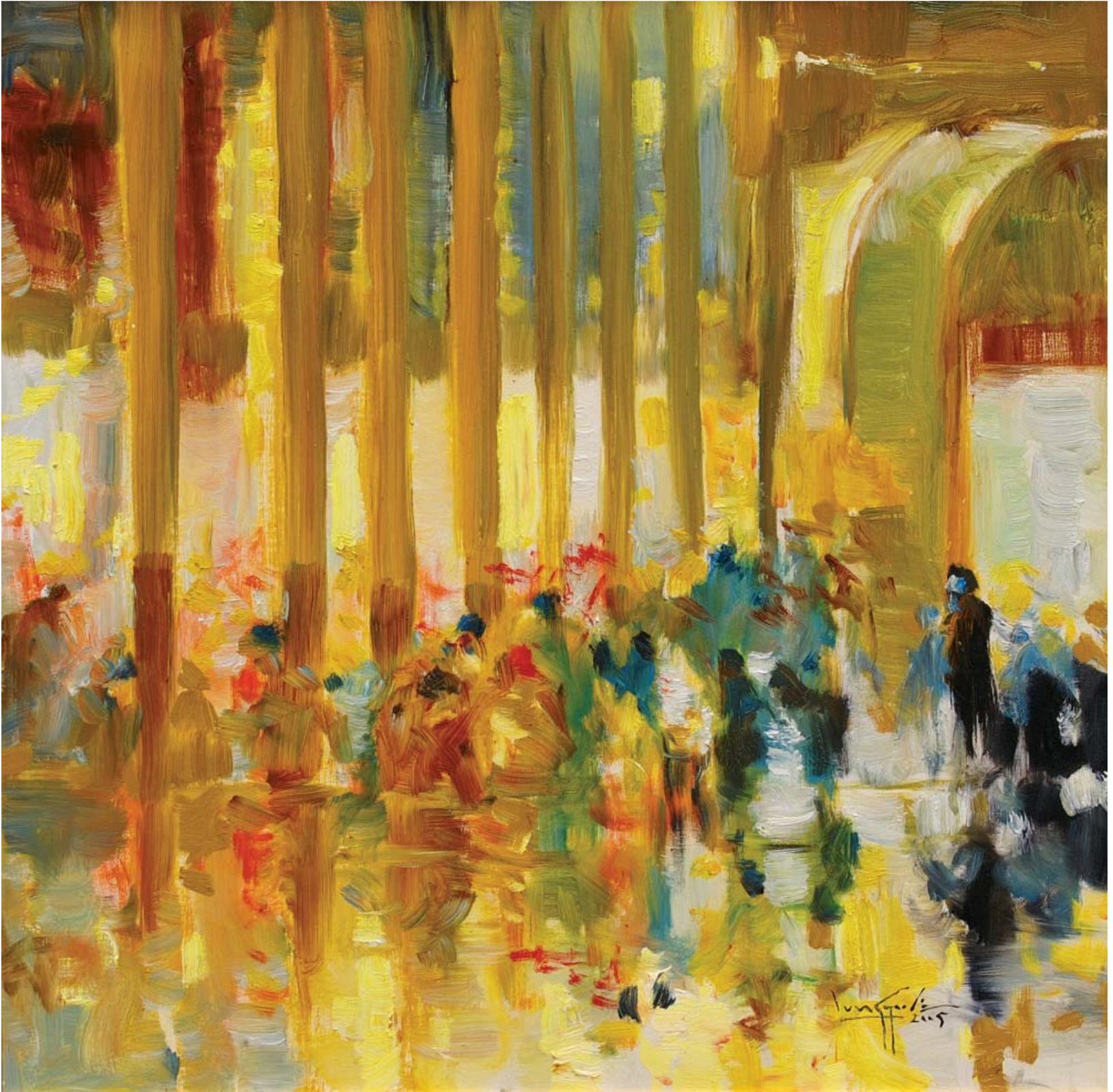
Trying to Touch the Ground, 2007

80 x 122 cm

Oil on mixed media on wood

Trying to Touch The Ground reveals the subtleties of **Kritsana Chaikitwattana's** palette, which are the hallmarks of his mature artistic sensibility. It shows his ability to paint the spirit of his beliefs within a worldly atmosphere. As a painter with a profound and spiritual vision of the principles of his faith that moves through the rainbow of his imagination, Kritsana expresses this vision through the dynamics of colour and form — its oppositions, contraries, tonal densities and brilliance. By presenting his message within paired layers of light and dark in this painting, as in some of his other works, he is able to reflect through the contrasting tones the message that lies beneath. In *Trying to Touch the Ground* he parallels physical existence with iconographic elements from Buddhism pertaining to truth and illusion, such as the manner in which the hands of Buddha images often face the ground from where all life originates.





In the Pagoda Hallway, 2005

68 x 68 cm

Oil on canvas

U Lun Gywe's unique landscapes, studded with icons of identity and place, are instantly recognizable through his superlative colour sense. Over the decades that he has been painting, the 77-year-old artist has forged his own way of encapsulating and celebrating the spirit and aura of his country. Whatever may be his subject, his paintings equalize the human and the divine as they meet in his art. His strong sense of identity and place, of knowing where he belongs and where he comes from, provides an anchor or a point of certainty to which he always returns in his mind. The glowing colours of *In the Pagoda Hallway* capture the joy and the light, showing us the hope of worshippers preparing for prayer. Through recreating his human subjects as sacred icons, U Lun Gywe has found a way of extending spirituality into his paintings. U Lun Gywe is an image maker with a rare sense of space and concern for the whole composition. The constancy of spiritual iconography is not a limitation for U Lun Gywe but a source of inspiration and empowerment.

Monastery, 2007
90 x 90 cm
Oil and mixed media
on canvas

Within the context of Asian belief, places, spaces and objects bear certain moments of being and immanence. Consequently, cultural beliefs too operate within more enriched, flexible, diverse and responsive paradigms. In his painting, **Nguyen Trung** has embraced this cultural assurance and diversity. *Monastery* is a mixed media painting that if read carefully shows us that spiritual comfort and enlightenment may be found in ordinary places. With exquisite intellectual and aesthetic sense, Nguyen Trung avoids a literal illustration of the spiritual, yet his painting identifies and translates spirituality in the most unlikely place. In *Monastery* it is through surface texture that relates to the architectural relief sculptures on the walls of pagodas, imagery that is buried deep in Vietnam's historical past as well as within the history of abstract painting.







Temple Façade, 2007

130 x 130 cm

Oil on canvas

While **Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul**, like most modern contemporary artists, avoids invoking religious or moral teaching, the viewer in front of his work frequently senses the presence of the unseen, the inexpressible — the dream of an other-worldliness. Through the formalism in *Temple Façade* he creates an interchange between the concept of peace and turmoil within the inner self by expressing an ethereal presence through the play of light and shadow. While the painting exudes a wistful elegance, it is powerful in that any traces of personal evidence only subsist in its mental margins. However, formalist concerns sustain the work's evidentiary aspects, even though the painting (an oil on canvas) is a marked shift from his earlier works that were oils on aluminum sheets. The shadows are mobile and physically intangible, yet through this seemingly liminal creation there is a hermetic experience whereby he translates the unexpected in the most unlikely subjects.





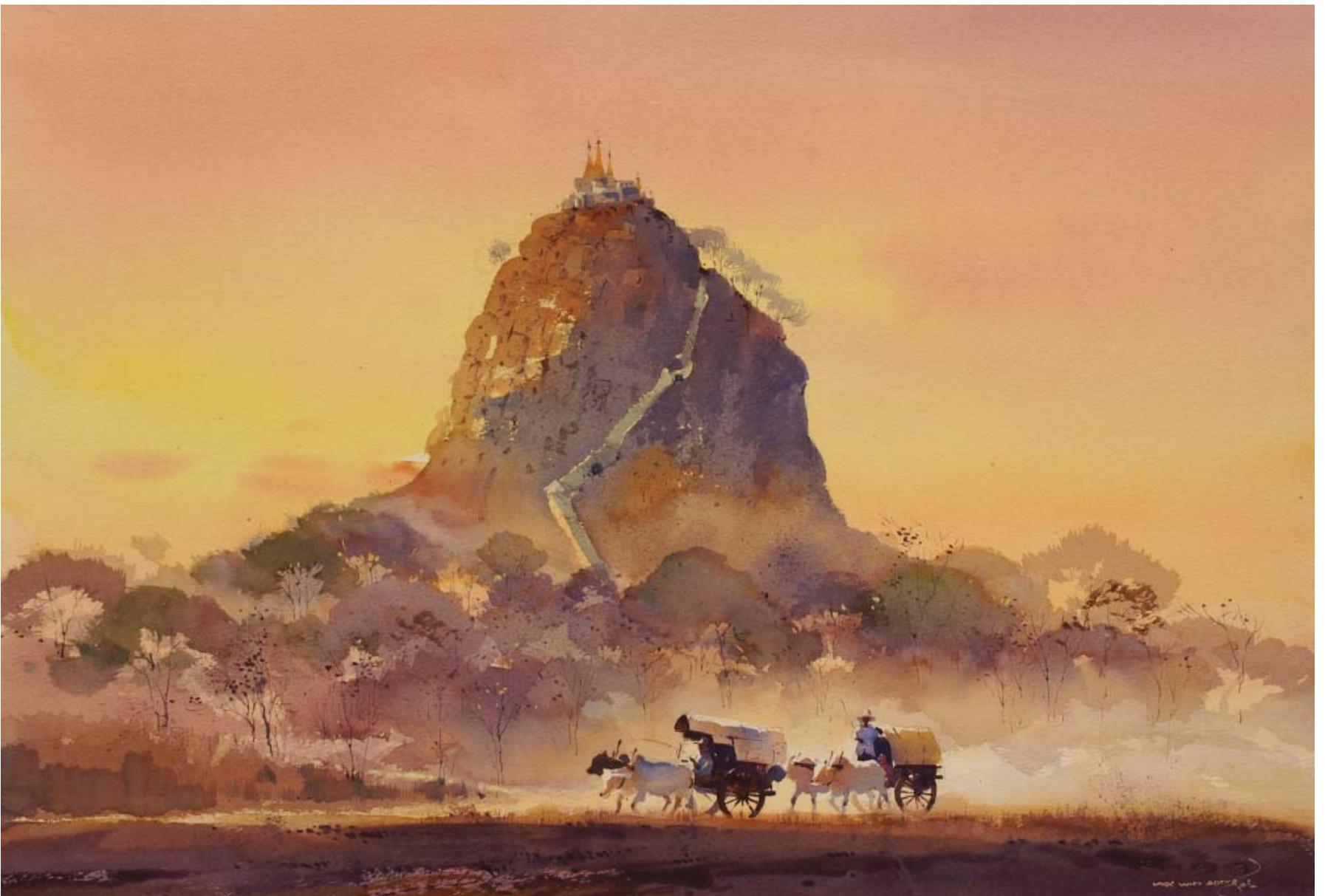
Halong Bay, 2007

135 x 154 cm

Oil on canvas

Halong Bay is said to be one of Vietnam's most beautiful places. **Hong Viet Dung's** *Halong Bay* is bathed in an aura of sensuality where often the colour appears not only to define the forms but spills into the atmosphere of his painting. As a painter with a deep spiritual connection to his country, Dung's vision of the Vietnamese landscape stands out in his artistic mind as a place of peace. He sees these serene landscapes in delicate hues and nuances captured by ethereal strokes of the brush. The variation of tones creates an uppermost semi-translucent layering of colour that reflects the deeper tones that lie underneath, as does his play with scale and form. As he explores the territory and process of identification, Hong Viet Dung reveals a flexibility that invests the thinness of liminality and pressures stable boundaries. The deceptive simplicity of *Halong Bay*, although filled with quiet, stretches to encompass the elasticity of life.

The ancient animist *nat* worship has been readily absorbed into Burma's everyday Buddhist culture. Mount Popa, a solitary and fertile peak located in the arid central plains near the ancient capital of Bagan, is home to thirty-seven of the most powerful *nats*, the spirits that are believed to have an influence on human lives. The Buddhist temple complex situated on the peak of Mount Popa is one of Burma's most visited sites during Buddhist festivals. Watercolourist **Myoe Win Aung** has a great feeling for the same spiritual connectedness with the landscape as Hong Viet Dung. In *Mt Popa - Abode of the Nats*, he expresses homage and devotion to his land through the infinity of the open sky evoking a humbling sense that all material bodies set against the spiritual monument that is Mount Popa are merely in transit. Bathed in shimmering light, the sensation of solitude appears very distant to the domineering advances of contemporary life. The depth of this imagery exposes the space between the material world and its immaterial shadow of spiritual power — the space between the past and the present. It is here that we can point to the mystical experience that both *nat* worship and Mount Popa convey.







My Neighbourhood, 2006
90 x 180 cm (3 panels)
Lacquer, dyes, egg shell,
silver and gold on board

Trinh Tuan lives in the shadows of one of Hanoi's most significant spiritual monuments, Saint Joseph's Cathedral in Hanoi. *My Neighborhood* is grounded in both the present and in historical time, as well as amongst the people of the landscape that he inhabits. As much as Tuan's painting is a faithful reflection of his immediate environment, its emotion is recollected in his own tranquility, for the process of lacquer painting is also about "things remembered." Visually seductive and charismatic, he directs his glance to every element of the serendipitous moments of free association, the active engagement with the domestic identity of his neighbourhood. His subtle sensitivity to the emotions that layer the intimate narrative and panorama on his doorstep is a reflection of his own ceaseless desire to push out the boundaries of his consciousness, limits that he articulates with grace and poise.

The Shwedagon Pagoda in Winter, 2007

90 x 90 cm

Oil on canvas

Yangon's Shwedagon Pagoda is one of Southeast Asia's most spiritually arresting sites. Although many of **U Lun Gywe's** canvasses contain discreet spiritual references, *The Shwedagon Pagoda in Winter* more straightforwardly addresses the narrative of spirituality itself. The Burmese landscape is for him revelatory — a conduit of grace, as much of his art is a faithful reflection of his memories drawn from the wholeness of his life journey. For U Lun Gywe, the life experience resides in the landscape itself. His paintings are approximations of that experience and pay tribute to sacred moments in which the physical and spiritual become synonymous. U Lun Gywe views his art as a material reflection of his inner self and in its translation of experiences lies the transposition of cultural and spiritual values — for the colours and lines in his paintings contain his character and his message. The painting's monumentality and the symbolic force of U Lun Gywe's narrative bear witness to the sacredness of art.



THE ARTISTS



JIRAPAT TATSANASOMBOON

b. 1971

A master's degree graduate from Thailand's prestigious Silapakorn University, Thai artist Jirapat Tatsanasomboon produces art revealing an intimacy with western pop culture. He frequently borrows from the popular icons of mass market flash, particularly from Hollywood blockbuster movies, which he transposes into traditional Thai contexts to emphasize his messages concerning cultural values.



KRITSANA CHAIKITWATTANA

b. 1977

A graduate from Chulalongkorn and Silapakorn Universities, Kritsana Chai-Kitwattana is one of Thailand's most promising new generation artists. Although essentially a painter, he employs a variety of materials in his work (such as stones and pieces of wood that he gathers from his wanderings around Bangkok) to create a network of illusions and meanings, often based on Buddhist philosophy.



THERDKIAT WANGWATCHARAKUL

b. 1971

Therdkiat Wangwatcharakul studied at Silapakorn University and graduated with a master's degree in painting in 2003. He was an ASEAN Art Awards Jurors' Choice Prize recipient in 2000 and won the second prize at the National Art Competition of Thailand in 2002. Best known for his cityscapes on aluminum, he often surveys the constant struggles of survival in one of Asia's largest cities, Bangkok.



SANTI THONGSUK

b. 1969

Santi Thongsuk won the first ASEAN Art Award in Singapore in 1994, the same year that he graduated from Silpakorn University. A devout Buddhist, the artist has spent much of his career engaged in portraying the beauty of humanity in his work. He hails from the North-East of Thailand and sometimes returns to his roots in his paintings.



TRINH TUAN

b. 1961

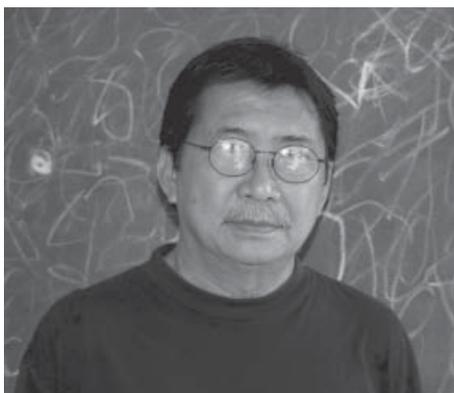
A native of Hanoi, Trinh Tuan had his art education first at the Hanoi Industrial College of Fine Art where he is currently a professor and later at the Hanoi Institute of Fine Art from where he earned his MA in 2000. Trinh Tuan's work often projects his feelings about figurative painting. His looming, expressionist paintings often explode with unspoken emotions, using traditional lacquer painting techniques in a modernistic way.



DINH QUAN

b. 1964

Dinh Quan, on the other hand, is renowned for his romantic renderings of the female form. Born in Haiphong, he graduated from the Hanoi Fine Art College in 1990. Space, memory and representations of the ethereal body are most often incorporated in his notion of romance. His lacquer painting techniques are innovative.



NGUYEN TRUNG

b. 1940

Nguyen Trung is regarded as one of Vietnam's most influential artists. He regularly pairs Oriental philosophies with European rationalism. His art practice has straddled past decades and the formal developments of Vietnam's modern art scene. He is renowned for his beautifully textured canvasses of abstractions where he mixes form and subject matter to dramatize the sublime.



HONG VIET DUNG

b. 1962

Whether he studies the landscape or the figurative, Hong Viet Dung's paintings are always based on the Vietnamese cultural mould, which is magnified by a glowing palette of luminous hues. Born in Hanoi and a graduate of the Hanoi Industrial College of Fine Art in 1984, he is renowned for his quiet and sophisticated renderings of Vietnamese landscapes. He was one of the founding member of the Gang of Five in the early 1990s.



U LUN GYWE

b. 1930

U Lun Gywe is Burma's most important master painter. The 77-year-old artist initially studied art under famous Burmese artists including U Thet Win, U San Win and U Thein Han. He later studied in China and in Dresden, Germany. A highly respected teacher, his renowned impressionist style is rooted in a deeply meditative spirit both in meaning and imagery, which he celebrates through the fluidity of painting and colour.



MYOE WIN AUNG

b. 1972

Myoe Win Aung graduated in 1992 from the State School of Fine Arts in Yangon after which he studied under several masters, including U Lun Gywe. He is a renowned watercolourist for whom the infinite richness of Buddhism is his constant inspiration. Although his depictions are often literal translations of Burmese culture, he employs his watercolours with an intimacy that carries the viewer to the heart of that culture.



AUNG KYAW HTET

b. 1965

Even though the depiction of monks is a popular artistic pastime in Burma, Aung Kyaw Htet has developed his own unique realistic style that is rapidly attracting international attention. Born in a small village in the Delta region, Aung Kyaw Htet believes that it is his keen observation of life that has been his most important tutor.



NYEIN CHAN SU

b. 1973

Nyein Chan Su represents the new generation Burmese artist who paints in an eclectic expressionist style, unusual in conservative Burma. Although the symbolic force of his narrative remains rooted in his Burmese culture, his practice bears witness to the new directions younger Burmese artists are following. A graduate of the State School of Fine Arts, he is also a renowned performance artist.