

## Contemporary art in Vietnam: a still untapped goldmine

« Vietnamese fine art is coming to an edge on the international scene because of a lack of State support as well as of art buyers in the country », reported *Courrier du Vietnam* in December 2014. Nguyen Phuong Linh, a Vietnamese young artist living in Hanoi, also regretted that the government provided no subsidy and that the censorship was very strong in Vietnam. Contemporary art is in fact mainly supported by foreign institutional actors and companies. For example Prince Klaus Foundation (Netherlands) supports the Sàn Art in Saigon, cultural institutions like the Goethe Institut, Japan Foundation, British Council or French Institute also support art creation. This said, it should be mentioned that the legal environment in Vietnam makes difficult for organizations to create art support structures. For its part, Nhà Sàn Collective created an independent structure to help the development of contemporary art in Vietnam.

In Saigon, the nation's economic hub, there are virtually no art fairs which promote Vietnamese art or attract local and international visitors. There are very few art collectors or wealthy investors, they are mainly foreigners. Only two organizations, thanks to their prestige and international outreach, have boosted the visibility of contemporary art: Quynh Gallery and Sàn Art. They were the only artistic spaces to showcase Vietnamese artists at Art Stage Singapore 2016 and 2017 for Quynh Gallery. With the closure of Sàn Art's Laboratory in May 2016, Quynh Gallery remains the only one gallery to promote contemporary art inside the country. Sàn Art remains open but focuses now to supporting Vietnamese artists on the international stage. Well known artists like Dinh Q. Lê ou Bùi Công Khanh who participated to art fairs abroad, are currently represented by foreign galleries rather than by Vietnamese organizations. Actually money got from Vietnamese contemporary art rarely returns to Vietnam. And to be sold abroad, some works of Vietnamese artists are auctioned in Singapore. Even if the middle class in Vietnam has the most important growth in South-East Asia, the average income per capita is still low to purchase artworks. But Vietnamese contemporary art still remains an untapped goldmine to be discovered. From a traditional art form, artists in fact found an innovative genre. Conceptual art, installations, have been created, more often by artists who have spent time abroad. They can be found mostly in Ho Chi Minh City. In addition the country can pride itself on having 10 spaces that help to make known the Vietnamese art both in Hanoi and Saigon. Social networks also contribute to the propagation of contemporary art. The first auction house, Ly Thi Auction, opened in HCMC in December 2016. A painting by Le Pho was sold \$ 40.000, another one by Tran Dong Phuong \$ 23.000. For comparison, some paintings by Dinh Q. Lê are on sale in foreign galleries \$ 75.000. In June 2015, the Franco-Danish Danh Vo sold a painting at Christie's London \$ 344.290. "Vietnam has all of the ingredients to have a successful art market but there are still things to put in place to achieve this and a need for the many actors in the market to coordinate their efforts", explained Olivier Do Ngoc, art collector and judge of VietArt Today 2016 (a competition to select and support Vietnamese young artists.

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