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| Modern Lacquer painting in Vietnam |
| sơn mài |
| First practised in China and Japan, Lacquer was originally adopted in Vietnam as a decorative technique, used to protect and embellish religious and household objects. In the 1930s, the technique was revived in Vietnam as a distinct style of fine art – known as sơn mài – largely thanks to the efforts of Vietnamese students and French teachers at the *Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de l’Indochine* in Hanoi. Following the 1930s, Vietnamese artists worked to further develop the potential of this traditional technique, organising a lacquer workshop at the *Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de l’Indochine* with the help of Vietnamese craftsmen, who taught attendees the different steps involved in creating a lacquer painting. During this period Vietnamese art students, including Nguyễn Gia Trí, Trần Văn Cẩn, and Phạm Hầu**,** worked toincrease the nuance of the medium and to give a superior relief to the lacquer board through rubbing and polishing. |
| First practised in China and Japan, Lacquer was originally adopted in Vietnam as a decorative technique, used to protect and embellish religious and household objects. In the 1930s, the technique was revived in Vietnam as a distinct style of fine art – known as sơn mài – largely thanks to the efforts of Vietnamese students and French teachers at the *Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de l’Indochine* in Hanoi. Following the 1930s, Vietnamese artists worked to further develop the potential of this traditional technique, organising a lacquer workshop at the *Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de l’Indochine* with the help of Vietnamese craftsmen, who taught attendees the different steps involved in creating a lacquer painting. During this period Vietnamese art students, including Nguyễn Gia Trí, Trần Văn Cẩn, and Phạm Hầu**,** worked toincrease the nuance of the medium and to give a superior relief to the lacquer board through rubbing and polishing.  Lacquer is made from resin harvested from a tree, and lacquer painting remains an arduous and time-consuming technique. A wooden board first must be prepared with various undercoats, amongst them a traditional black lacquer that must harden for hours in an environment of controlled heat and humidity, before being sanded down and polished to add strength. This smooth polished surface is then ready to receive an outline sketch and layers of coloured lacquers, which build upon each other to form the final work. Each layer is left to dry and then burnished in water. The artist must keep their original drawing in mind while working, as the results of their work is apparent only after the final rubbing down of the layers to remove residue.  Since the late 1990s multiple Vietnamese artists have experimented with lacquer painting, recognising it as an opportunity to connect to their artistic predecessors. Experiments with the medium include testing new pigments and texture effects, such as sprinkling gold or silver leaf dust, pearl powder, and adding shells or eggshells to the lacquer layers. The lacquer process does, however, require a specific environment at odds with the crammed conditions in which Vietnamese artists usually work. Still, some Vietnamese painters who have become masters in this rigorous technique continue to provide training courses to artists looking for new ways of expressing themselves. |
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