

BINH DUONG LACQUER COMBINES TRADITION AND MODERNITY

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Abstract: It might be argued that any Vietnamese has the right to be proud of the magnificent beauty of the golden light, the iridescence of clams and eggs, and the depth of bright red and deep blue colors in lacquer Vietnam paintings. Furthermore, traditional lacquer in Binh Duong province, Vietnam, is no exception to such aesthetic flow and is no less unique, capturing spectators' attention in a fascinating and bizarre manner. Today, the majority of residents in Tuong Binh Hiep lacquer hamlet in Binh Duong province specialize in producing gold-plated lacquer to provide for the basic needs of the region and the entire country of Vietnam. At the same time, they have developed works that have both memento value, which helps to build craft villages and tourism, and high creative value, which is worthy of prominent artists in craft villages. The author of the article combined the interdisciplinary research method of history and cultural studies with the fine art method, analyzing migration, acculturation, and historical data on the formation and development of lacquer in Binh Duong province through works such as Thanh Le lacquer, Tuong Binh Hiep lacquer, and Dinh Hoa lacquer. At the same time, the author of the article examines the features of artistic language to highlight the traditional and modern qualities that are always present in lacquer paintings in Binh Duong province. It needs to be understood and underlined so that future generations can inherit, promote, and protect the local national cultural identity.

Keywords: Binh Duong Lacquer, modern, Tuong Binh Hiep Lacquer village, traditional

Introduction

Lacquerware was predominantly utilized for religious purposes in ancient fine arts and was not restricted to embellishing royal palaces, pagodas, temples, communal village edifices, and other constructions. Lacquerware is increasingly employed in artistic and handmade items and enjoys popularity in several countries globally due to its unique characteristics. Vietnamese lacquer paintings, a traditional aesthetic of the Vietnamese populace, have transformed throughout time, owing to the viscous and dense lacquer, into a form of beauty with a unique personality. Consequently, the lacquer paintings of Binh Duong have a consistent smoothness, golden hue, and glossy finish. Lacquer paintings in Binh Duong exemplify classic ideas and contemporary manifestations, attracting those who value authentic, scholarly art. The lacquer paintings presented below serve as evidence of this.

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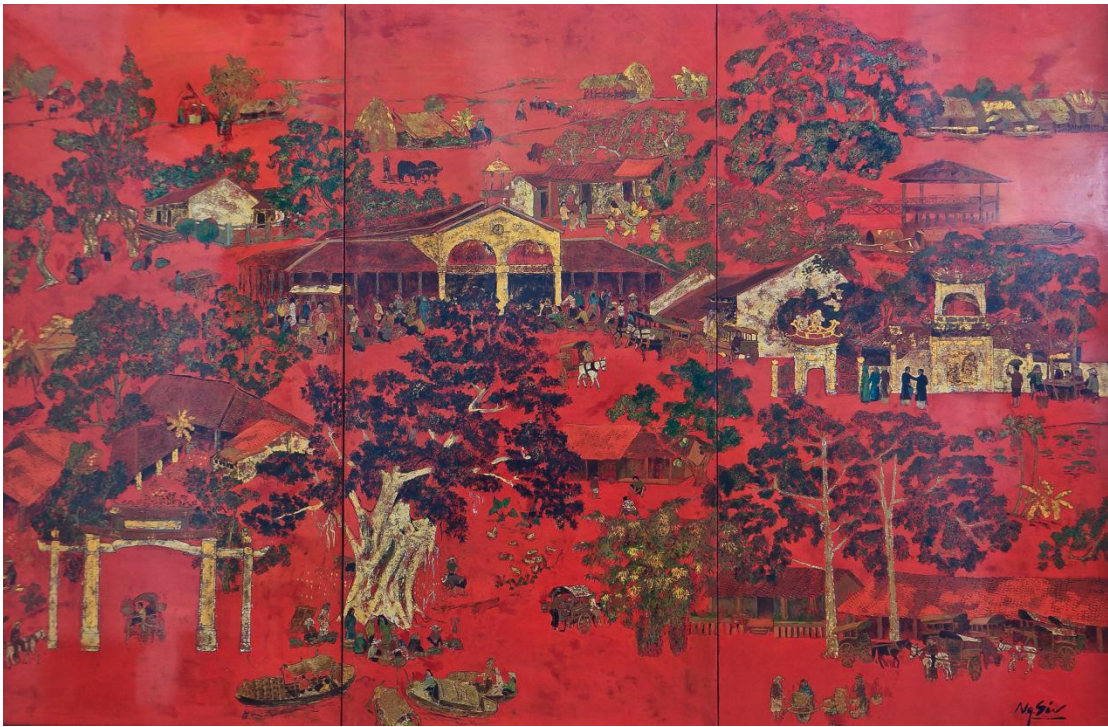


Figure 1: Ancient Binh Duong paintings made by author Nguyen Quang Son. Material: Lacquer



Figure 2: Lacquer painting of Goldfish made by Dinh Hoa Lacquer



Figure 3: Chicken Painting, made by Nguyen Huu Sang. Material: Lacquer



Figure 4: Lotus painting made by artist Nguyen Quang Son. Technique and material: lacquer inlay



Figure 5: To Nu painting made by artist Nguyen Tan Cong. Material: lacquer



Figure 6: Ben The communal house gate made by Hoang Van Cu. Material: lacquer

Materials and Methods

Methods

The Tuong Binh Hiep locality and cultural management agencies currently archive documents about the formation and evolution of Binh Duong lacquer, as well as traditional lacquer techniques in Binh Duong and Tuong Binh Hiep lacquer villages, with the Binh Duong provincial library and museum serving as the primary repositories. Additionally, the residences of artists and established lacquer production facilities in Tuong Binh Hiep lacquer village, Binh Duong province, have preserved numerous lacquer painting records for many years. The author used a survey, fieldwork, and analytical methods, along with their professional experience, to get a full picture of the status of traditional lacquer products in Binh Duong that have been kept alive. They also looked at and compared them to modern lacquer products. The author employed an interview method with artisans and painters experienced in lacquer in Binh Duong province to evaluate the creative worth of each preserved ancient lacquer work. The article's author used an interdisciplinary methodology, integrating fine arts, art studies, cultural studies, and history to examine the prevailing artistic values of contemporary lacquer works in Binh Duong. These works embody the cultural and creative ideals of ancient Vietnam, particularly those of the Northern immigrants who established themselves in the early phases of the ancient Southern region. Simultaneously, these works possessed contemporary artistic value owing to their innovative style, modern composition, and form, which aligned with the preferences of art enthusiasts of the era.

Word concept

Relevant transdisciplinary terms encompass lacquer in Binh Duong province, Tuong Binh Hiep Lacquer Village, traditional, and modern. Binh Duong province considers lacquer a traditional painting medium and acknowledges it as a product of Binh Duong art. Traditional Vietnamese grinding and painting techniques, practiced for millennia, combine with lacquer materials such as Phu Tho and Nam Vang, as well as additional elements like pearl and eggshell, in Binh Duong lacquer painting to produce varied forms and enhance the artistic techniques employed in the artwork.

Lacquer serves as both a conventional painting medium and a prominent output of Binh Duong artistry. By integrating traditional Vietnamese lacquer methods, practiced for millennia, with local lacquer materials like Phu Tho and Nam Vang paints, along with additional elements like pearls and eggshells, Binh Duong lacquer painting enhances artistic techniques and results in a variety of forms. A group or civilization preserves and transmits values, customs, habits, and lifestyles between generations through traditions. Traditions define a nation's cultural identity and facilitate the preservation and enhancement of historical assets. Traditional lacquer products in Binh Duong province are artisanal creations, particularly from Tuong Binh Hiep lacquer village and Dinh Hoa lacquer village, among others. The traditional local lacquer method, a time-honored decorative craft in Vietnam and Binh Duong province, produces these items. Often, several layers of lacquer, derived from the lacquer tree, combine with materials like gold, silver, mother-of-pearl, eggs, and bamboo to create items of remarkable beauty and resilience.

"Modern" refers to elements, concepts, techniques, and aesthetics characteristic of the contemporary era, especially those that signify progress in technology, science, culture, and society. The contemporary lacquer paintings in Binh Duong originate from works that showcase traditional lacquer methods infused with new themes and approaches. Urban landscapes, modern symbols, and contemporary socioeconomic issues are among the varied topics, which also integrate cultural and modern elements like urban life, technology, and culture.

Results and Discussion

Overview of Binh Duong Lacquer

The heritage of ancient Vietnamese fine arts preserves lacquer, or lacquer painting, as a highly esteemed medium. Lacquer paintings, originating from a historic traditional medium, have become a vital component of the national fine arts. The Vietnamese tradition is renowned for its craftsmanship; handicrafts significantly contribute to the economy, and historical techniques are cultural assets. Most people used lacquer objects for religious purposes or to decorate places such as royal palaces, pagodas, temples, and village communal facilities. Art and handicraft increasingly utilize lacquer objects, garnering appreciation across numerous countries due to their uniqueness. Vietnamese lacquer painting, a cultural hallmark of the Vietnamese people, has developed over time, characterized by its lustrous and profound gloss. This traditional art form evokes pride among Vietnamese individuals, showcasing the resplendent beauty of golden hues, the iridescence of eggshell, and the richness of vibrant red and deep blue tones beneath a translucent layer of golden lacquer, resonating with the echoes of history in contemporary life (Nguyen Van Minh, 2015).

Moreover, the traditional lacquer in Binh Duong is exceptionally distinctive. Local historical records indicate that in the mid-18th century, northern immigrants settled along the Saigon River to build livelihoods in Binh An district (Thu Dau Mot). In the uncharted territory of Tuong Binh Hiep, a multitude of individuals united to reclaim the land and establish new settlements, thereby becoming the town's inaugural inhabitants. The Tuong Binh Hiep lacquer arts village was founded in the late 18th century and early 19th century. Due to historical circumstances? Subsequent to the transfer, traditional lacquer artisans migrated from Quang Binh and Thuan Hoa to the communes of Dong Nai and Gia Dinh. "In Thu Dau Mot village, residents engage in a thriving traditional craft of producing black lacquer." (Binh Duong Provincial Residents' Committee, 2010, page). Initially, the hamlet contained just a limited number of residences dedicated to the production and blending of lacquer to satisfy the community's fundamental requirements.

Numerous individuals also reference Mr. Ngo Tu Sam (from Ha Dong), Mr. Tung, Mr. Hai Xam, and his spouse, among others. They were the inaugural lacquer artisans in Tuong Binh Hiep Village. The Tuong Binh Hiep Lacquer Craft Hamlet has provided several exceptional painters to Thanh Le, a newly established company. Since the early twentieth century, Thanh Le has gained renown across both the North and South for its distinctive handicrafts. Binh Duong lacquer paintings have developed over time, becoming increasingly diverse in themes and integrating contemporary painting trends. While the demands of the twentieth century and earlier constrained artisans' creativity to conventional themes, from the 1930s onward, numerous works explored and developed the lacquer style, with many artisans and painters depicting themes of nature, rural life, and humanity. Employing

conventional lacquer materials, artists have produced works characterized by strong artistic expression, conveying profound feelings through an array of expansive themes, showcasing realistic, surreal, passionate, and raw techniques... Binh Duong lacquer paintings are authentic artistic creations and applied art products with enduring cultural significance, highly esteemed by our populace.

Binh Duong lacquer paintings express ancient elegance while also displaying current molding styles

Despite numerous ups and downs, Binh Duong lacquer paintings continue to use traditional technical processes, though the substance and themes of the goods have changed to suit customer preferences. Artists not only manufacture popular lacquer products and paintings, but also showcase innovative products such as sofas, wine cabinets, dining tables, beds, and paintings in Western or European styles. As a result, the Binh Duong lacquer craft, particularly in Tuong Binh Hiep village, remains relevant today.

Furthermore, lacquer has been the primary ingredient in Vietnamese lacquer since its inception. This is a combination of traditional lacquer material and modern lacquer material, commonly referred to as fine art lacquer. The warm and clear lacquer, as well as the dark lacquer, combine with a variety of other materials such as eggs, mother-of-pearl, gold, silver, vermilion, and color, resulting in a profound painting language that artists communicate via their works. However, the artists have employed the technique of synthesizing the ingredients specific to each form of fine art lacquer painting to achieve maximum efficiency. Using ancient lacquer materials, artists have steadily incorporated them into modern fine art paintings, commonly referred to as lacquer-coated paintings. Employing the lacquer material in Binh Duong fine art lacquer paintings enhances the painting's beauty and worth, surpassing the brilliance of Japanese lacquer or cashew lacquer materials. However, using rare vermilion pigments to replace Japanese red paint in fine art paintings enhances the vibrancy of the vermilion paint with its unique essence of fresh colors (Figure 1). Furthermore, applying the golden colors from traditional lacquer paintings to fine art goldfish paintings (Figure 2) creates a striking impression. The deep blue hue, which changes to the color of cockroach wings depending on the fish's shape, depicts the brightness and glossiness of the fish. These are the inherent connections between traditional lacquer materials and the contemporary fine art lacquer materials used in Binh Duong.

As we all know, lacquer artists and painters in Binh Duong enjoy numerous advantages, including the opportunity to inherit the precious, traditional lacquer material and the traditional lacquer technique. As a result, they express themselves in their works through two distinct styles: the traditional lacquer painting style of lacquer artists, and the handicraft painting style of artisans. Not only do artists like Nguyen Gia Tri, Hoang Tich Chu, Nguyen Duc Nung, and Nguyen Tu Nghiem, who were master painters during the early development period of Vietnamese fine arts, enjoy painting with traditional Vietnamese lacquer material, but there are also many other typical artisans of Binh Duong lacquer, such as Ngo Tu Sam, Thai Van Ngon, Duy Liem, Tran Nam, and Nguyen Huu Sang. They have instilled the vigor of creative painting in lacquer paintings, making the subjects and topics more diverse. Typical works include "Young Lady" by Duy Liem, "Fisherman" by Thai Van Ngon, and "Tiger Painting" by Tran Van Nam.

Artist Nguyen Huu Sang's "Chicken" (Figure 3) exemplifies a decorative, realistic painting technique that infuses the subject matter with folklore. Nguyen Huu Sang, an artist, employed line sketching to describe the feathers of the home in tremendous detail. The artist drew multiple layers of lines, waited for the paint to dry, sanded it off, and continued to draw until the sanding was complete. The author felt the penetration, flexibility, and blending of the paint and strokes skillfully, creating a lively, realistic feeling for the viewer. The author used this approach, sketching and sanding multiple layers several times, to create depth and space in the painting's background. The painting's layers include the innermost layer, which is an undulating ground with two mixed hues, red and yellow, in various shades. The next layer is the apricot tree, which has a broad, winding trunk that extends from the base to the spreading top with yellow blooms. The major layer in the center is a flock of hens, which the artist meticulously details. Lastly, the author meticulously arranges orchid bushes and hibiscus branches to cover the outer portion of the painting space, creating a vibrant and realistic image. The painting's overall surface reflects a creative style that is both realistic and stylized. The use of conventional materials and realistic painting approaches contribute to the author's success.

In today's integration time, contemporary artists in Binh Duong are creating lacquer paintings that demonstrate both traditional techniques and the language of painting, ushering in a new era of Binh Duong lacquer paintings. Lacquer paintings in Binh Duong provide art lovers with access to the local painting scene. During this time, representative artists such as painter Nguyen Chi Chanh, painter Le Xuan Truong, painter Hoang Vuong, painter Thai Kiem Dien, painter Nguyen Van Quy, painter Nguyen Tan Cong, painter Nguyen Quang Son, and painter Hoang Van Cu... achieved success and shaped their personal styles for the works they created.

A prominent example is Nguyen Quang Son's artwork "Sen" (Figure 4). The creator is extremely precise and elaborate, taking care of each small piece of wood and inlaying it according to the curving lines of the leaf veins to produce the direction and rhythm of the painting. At the same time, the author designed the lotus flower to be the painting's focal point and the theme's major subject. The author's floral segments, carved firmly and strongly, showcase both cleverness in composition and style, as well as balance and excellent composition, with the highlight being a talent that the author consistently demonstrates in all of his personal lines. Furthermore, the painting's layers include a brown background, the color of traditional lacquer, and the author's goal to depict the color of mud in the lotus pond. Next, there are layers of lotus pistils that have just flowered above the painting's upper right corner. Next, the layers of lotus flowers meander rhythmically, following the direction of rays radiating from the deep inside of the lotus leaf outward. The lines have turned up the light and dark, sparkling through the natural physical reflection of the mother-of-pearl, creating the painting's rhythm. The next layer that art fans will notice when looking at the artwork is the pink lotus flower, which is made of vermillion red and white Japanese colors. In general, the layers of historic techniques and materials absolutely confirm the existence of the painting, which is an expression of tradition while exuding modernity through the artwork's shaping and composition in the academic painting style.

Furthermore, the concept of young ladies is a timeless theme that not only Vietnamese artists like and draw inspiration from, but painters all over the world have painted with great success on a variety of materials from ancient times. Nguyen Tan Cong, a painter from Binh Duong, Vietnam, created the work To Nu (Figure 5) using traditional lacquer techniques and stylized, colorful motifs. The author

not only employs blocks and lines to represent a portrait of a woman with skin tones that are a combination of lacquer and Japanese dyes but also expresses the lyrical and graceful beauty of young ladies. The more we absorb the painting, the more details we notice, such as the shape of a pair of skinny cards, the flower petals pinned in the girl's hair, the space in the middle of the chest... by painter Nguyen Tan Cong. Using the same brown color, the author successfully depicted the painting's layers. The author skillfully blended and polished the colors to distinguish the dark brown color of the hair from the brown-orange background of the painting, as well as the decorative pattern behind the hair. At the same time, the light brown color of the clothing is a layer that stands out from the painting's background and looks to have the same pale skin tones. Despite the overall dark brown color of the painting, the author skillfully accentuates the gold borders of varying thicknesses using traditional gold-plated materials, enhancing the painting's brightness and shine while balancing its lightness. This is also an example of a skilled and experienced artist combining traditional techniques and materials with a modern, expressive painting style.

When discussing youthful, viable, and promising modern artists in Binh Duong today, we must include artist Hoang Van Cu, who has won numerous regional and national fine arts honors. The artwork "Ben the Community House Gate" by artist Hoang Van Cu (Figure 6) is sophisticated, glossy, and smooth. The work vividly demonstrates the traditional value of the painting's theme, which is a corner replicating the provincial historical relic in Binh Duong, Ben the Communal House, using a realistic, outstanding painting style. The author's use of the rich vermilion color adds depth to the landscape of Ben the Communal House Gate, emphasizing the work's traditional worth. Furthermore, the author combined yellow lacquer with paint to create varied tones for the painting's exterior layers, incorporating embossed shapes of tree branches, communal home gates, and frangipani flowers. In general, not only the author Hoang Van Cu but also many other painters in Binh Duong, such as painter Nguyen Van Quy, painter Thai Kim Dien, painter Huynh Duc Hieu, etc., have applied the impressive or realistic painting style or created paintings in a stylized decorative style while combining traditional techniques through materials and lacquer techniques, which have successfully created a personal style as well as shaped the painting style of each individual painter.

Conclusion

The lacquer works in Binh Duong have established a significant presence among art lovers, reflecting a creative style similar to academic and modern painting. This is crucial for Binh Duong lacquer, as it offers stability and the capacity to form, thereby generating a significant impact and elevating the status of Vietnamese lacquer. Modern lacquer artisans and painters in Binh Duong not only develop traditional lacquer art and craftsmanship but also introduce new aesthetic values to Binh Duong's lacquer techniques and materials. In the current phase of artistic creation in Binh Duong province, contemporary art is an indispensable part of artistic creation, and lacquer is a material that shines and has enormous potential for Binh Duong lacquer artists to freely express contemporary forms as well as contemporary elements in their works. This contributes to the richness of materials, techniques, and forms in Binh Duong.

Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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