

PROCESS PAGE AN ARTISTIC EXPEDITION

“In drawing, one must look for or suspect that there is more than is casually seen.”

— George Bridgman

Media experimented:

- Lens-based media (Documentary Photography)
- Oil painting
- Pyrography

All of the photos are my works unless numbered

THEME: VIETNAM

Candidate Number **jlz187** – Session **060161 -0007**

My resolved artwork submitted for marking



My photography not submitted for marking



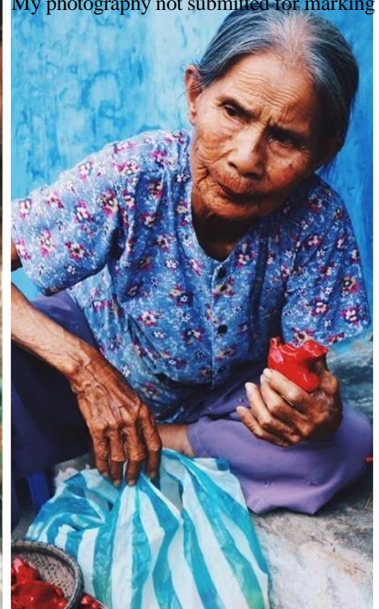
My photography not submitted for marking



My resolved artwork submitted for marking



My photography not submitted for marking



My resolved artwork submitted for marking

Critical Investigation on Réhahn

All of the photos are my works unless numbered



1 Born in Normandy, France in 1979, Réhahn is a **photographer** who specializes in South East Asia culture. (2.1) Before settling down in Vietnam in 2011, Réhahn had travelled the world, mostly Cuba and took photography as his profession in South America. (2.2) When he arrived in Hoi An – one of the most beautiful ancient towns recognized by the UNESCO in the world –, Réhahn adopted his two daughters and decided to reside in Vietnam to pursue his career path and passion of depicting the Vietnamese's lifestyles and traditions to the world. (2.3) Influenced by the beauty of the Vietnamese culture, Réhahn has been focusing on capturing Vietnamese ethnic minorities as a **photojournalist**, encountering the Vietnamese individuals across the country and has his own **techniques** based on the natural moments that can reveal one's profound soul rather than just concentrating on **traditional principles of photography**. (2.4) Réhahn's first photobook features many of his best **compositions**, featuring “Vietnam – Mosaic of Contrasts” and was acknowledged as National Geographic's recognition and many other renowned photographic magazines in the world. (2.5)

According to Réhahn, “I think a good photograph is when you can capture the soul, read a story in the eyes. Capture emotion is not an easy thing, time is the key! Spending time with people always gave me better photos!” (2.6) Perhaps the passionate attitudes and the empathy towards the Vietnamese culture of Réhahn is derived from the charm of the country's people and its long-standing values to preserve national traditions and customs, as well as the austerity yet genuineness of the Vietnamese souls. To Réhahn, Vietnamese people are described as the most positive and optimistic people in life. “It gives me a good energy everyday, just when I cross the small village where I live and meet many smiles. It's Feng Shui: only good energy!” (2.7)



Photographs in “Vietnam – Mosaic of Contrasts”

Communication of Ideas and Intentions “Timelessness”

Inspired by Réhahn and “Vietnam – Mosaic of Contrasts”, also with the pride of being a Vietnamese, my intention is to portray my country's cultural heritage in an aesthetic way to show the world the sincerity of the Vietnamese people. I love taking **photographs**, especially **cultural photography** due to my admiration for National Geographic series of Cultural Photography that I have been subscribed to since I was just 12 years old. This photograph is one of my compositions taken during the trip to Daklak – a Vietnamese mountainous province where many ethnic minority groups still reside without the hustle-and-bustle atmosphere of the city life. My family spent 2 days staying in a small inn and met Mrs. Can – the source of motivation for me to take this photo. I name the photo “Timelessness” due to the emotional and thought-provoking story behind it. After an afternoon meeting her while my family was having lunch near the inn, I saw her and asked her for the permission to take the photograph. The conversation revealed that she was an ethnic mom whose son sacrificed his life in the second Indochina war to unite the North and the South of Vietnam during the period from the 1950s to 1970s. When I left, I took the photo and said bye to her, having known that that was one of the very first photographs that marks my effort in a significant way. The painting is called “timelessness” with the indication that no matter what we try to do, nothing can stop the world from changing and developing, leaving behind many obsolete and radical things to evolve. However, the pain, the sacrifice and the suffering of the women in the war, whose duties

were in the rear to support for the soldiers, will forever stay unchanged and remain with the flow of the history. They have shown us the important role of the women in the society and have made a remarkable contribution to the peaceful Vietnam today. Although during the 20th century modernity were not accessible to them, living in ethnic minority groups, they still had strong will and solidarity with every other Vietnamese to unite and protect the country, to fight back the colonizers and preserve the territory that our ancestors paid by blood for their descendants.

The photo was taken with a **Canon EOS 750D, shutter speed 1/100 and ISO500**. Then, I retouched it using VSCO with the TK filter to enhance the colorfulness and contrast. Although I was very happy with the results, when taking IB Visual Arts, I decided to transfer the photograph into an oil-painting, to experience a new artistic form with a view to extending my skills in the art field and understanding the process of depicting **humans portraits by oil-color**. Coming to the decision was a tough process, because this is my very first time dealing with sketching and painting. But then I decided to take a risk, trying a new artistic style and form with one of my most dedicated photograph.

Having no skills and techniques, I believe in my teacher to fill out the fundamental knowledge base for me in order to carry out my first studio work independently in a successful way. I choose **Realism** as a movement for me to paint “Timelessness” since I want to reveal Mrs. Can **facial expression** in an explicit way to construct an impressive impact on the audience's eyes, communicating the emotions of Mrs. Can and give a sense of a freezing moment. Although with the lack of experience, I strongly believe that my determination and persistence to this studio work can convey the message of the people from my country – the country that is often wrongly understood and regarded as a poor, underdeveloped nation. I hope to show the world that Vietnam is a country that embraces the culture and lifelong traditions of unity, simplicity and empathy, which has a potential strength to strive up with our beautiful natural heritages and the whole-hearted dedication to contribute to the society.

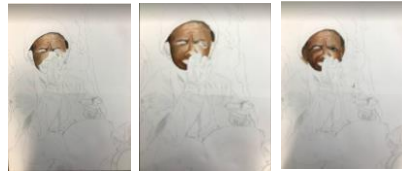
“Timelessness” is going to be painted with a range of **high contrast colors, mainly Burnt Siena**. Since the use of **high contrast in Réhahn's photography** has taught me to realize the emphasis of **humans' facial expression with different dark and bright values**. I also want to pay attention to the wrinkles of the subject because these details can explicate the story underneath the painting, telling the audience of something that has its values over a long period of time.



Skills, Techniques and Processes of “Timelessness”

All of the photos are my works unless numbered

My resolved artwork submitted for marking



Starting by sketching the photograph on the canvas, I decided to work on the main subject first. The very first step was to determine what colors to use. I tried to mix a **variety of vivid and contrast colors** on my palette, including **burnt sienna, umber and brunette brown.**

The three **shades of colors** I used to represent Mrs. Can's face were **ivory white, Burnt Siena, UMBER BROWN and Indigo Black**; and I used the bright brush tip to carry out the **gradient blending**. My teacher showed me how to make use of the **thin brush** to achieve the details in a more impressive ways. As I paid attention to the great details of the painting, I used the **thin brush** to depict the wrinkles on Mrs. Can's fingers. **To generate the best effect of humans' facial expression**, I also took advantage of different types of **brush bristles**, including the **round and angle brushes**, to easily elucidate the wrinkles on Mrs. Can's face and hands, because these brush tips allowed me to swing my lines with details smoothly and firmly but still can avoid harsh and superficial **strokes**. During the process, I found out that to best capture the effect of agedness, I had to control my brush strokes explicit enough for the audience to immediately identify the wrinkles when observe the painting in order to transfer the emotions of the subject, yet not too rough and revealing to avoid looking **artificial**, which is not the intention of “Timelessness” as I was pursuing **Realism** in replicating **Fine Art photography**.

With the same intention to get approach to **Realism**, when it comes to the crinkles on Mrs. Can's clothes, I realized I could not use the same **technique** as capturing facial wrinkles. Due to the effect of light, and also to express the ridged materials of the cloth, I had to **blend the white value next to the dark one** gently but not totally to clearly stimulate the details in an explicit way, forming a more voyeuristic **3D effect** that emphasizes the depth of the painting.



The impact of light source on the function to produce depth of “Timelessness”

The **primary light source** of the photo came from the sunlight, which was shining directly towards the main subject. This **direction of lighting** generated **various perspectives of shades and values** for the painting. As the sun glared straightforward in the path of the **focal point**, which is the face of the subject, the parts that our eyes encounter first including the eyes, a part of her cheeks and the forehead are portrayed with an excessive amount of white, forming an effect of how **light was absorbed and reflected**. The same technique was used to apply on Mrs. Can's clothes. However, to elevate the depth of the painting, shadows were embellished in which **darker shades such as the Burnt Siena color, and Indigo Black**, were assembled with **gradient blending**, with a purpose to provoke **transitions** between different **areas of shades**. As can be observed from the pictures, the shiny values that helps the audience identify where light is reflected, were depicted by blending white next to the dark crinkle lines. As a result, with the **visualization of diverse tinges of shadows**, the audience can envision the **3-dimensional perspective**, which **emancipates depth and intensity** for the painting.

The pipe – In my opinion, apart from Mrs. Can's face, is the highlight of the painting since it expresses a strong sense of culture of the central highlands in Vietnam.



Working on the background And Finishing the painting “Timelessness”

With the hat, I used the **fan brush**, dipped in a variety of colors including **white mostly, with pthalo blue, and umber brown** to make the hat look more realistic, because if I had only used white, the color would appear to be too childish and simplistic.

Finishing “Timelessness”, to best represent the **rocky texture** of the background, I decided to use **scumbling brushstrokes**, making the surface appear to be jagged. With the same **color scheme : Burnt Siena, Indigo Black, White and umber brown**, I spread my colors all over the surface with different shades in order to **explicate the natural texture and appearance of rocks**.

Reviewing, Refining and Reflecting

In conclusion, I am very surprised of the extent to which how strong and **intensive** the main subject's **facial expression** turns out to be. I am also satisfied with how various **values of light and light intensity** are **enhanced** through the application of the **crinkle lines and slight blending** on the clothes.

However, the overall colors did not turn out to mimicking the original photography of mine. Although looks strong and expresses a strong feeling of identity, I would like it to have less yellow renders with **lower saturation** and perhaps more **contrast** in terms of the **color tone**.

If I were to do “Timelessness” all over again, I would use more **contrast shades** and use less yellow and brown-ish colors. The two parts that I hope I could improve the best are the hat and the background. In terms of the hat, I did not use the fan brush in a proper way, which has somehow deformed the texture of the hat and made the colors look artificial. I have to admit, although I have done quite a satisfactory job on **representing light reflection** and capturing the **strong intensity** of Mrs. Can's emotions, the hat was the part that I had the most difficulties with, due to the texture on its surface requiring me to use both the **fan brush and scumbling brushstrokes**, but I did not figure that out at the time.

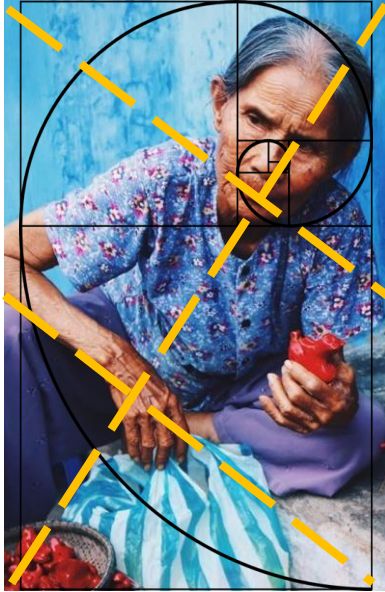
From my perspective, the rocky background and the main subject are nicely illustrated, but only truly stands out if they are separated. If I had a chance to do this all over again, again, I would tried to reduce the intensity of the background colors so as to accomplish a more aesthetic outcome and manipulate the most defining characteristic of “Timelessness” – the eyes and the face.

All of the photos are my works unless numbered

Nostalgia



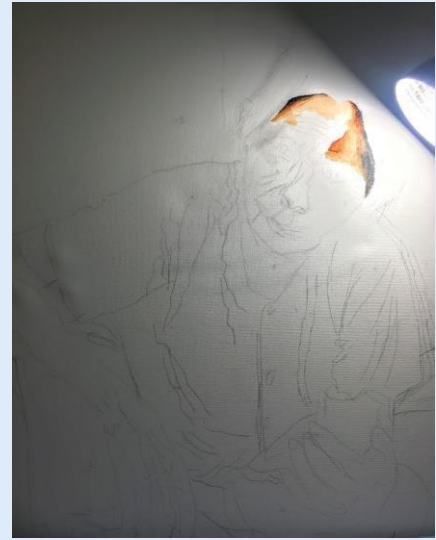
After admiring “The Mosaics of Vietnam” by Réhahn, I was so proud of the beauty of my culture, so I decided to captivate the lifestyles and agedness of the people who have been living in Hoi An for a long time. The photo was taken me and my dad travelled to Hoi An just nearly half a year ago. Different from Mrs. Can in “Timelessness”, I did not have an opportunity to encounter and talk to the lady in my photograph, due to the fact that me and my dad were just tourists that were passing by with a lot of other sightseers in front of her street vendor. She sold pottery piggy banks – a traditional toy and also a safe place for the children to save money. The reason why I found this moment so special was that I saw her silently observe tourists walking by and smiling, with the eye somewhat provoked a sense of nostalgia. From my perspective, perhaps everyone has a period of life which is full of memorable moments that go with us for a life long, and watching the happiness of the tourists may evoke reminiscence in her too. Luckily, I was bringing my camera, and took a shot of this very minute. That is why I name the photo as well as my transferred painting “Nostalgia”. As I am influenced by Réhahn’s collection “Mosaics of Vietnam”, I regard the way how he captures the moment writing down a whole emotional and profound story of the subject, not just paying attention to the skills, which emerges different sages of humans’ emotions. Hence, although I still made use of **the rule of thirds** and estimated the angle to form **golden ratio**, I purposefully let her eyes looking faraway, and remained the cake she was eating in the photograph to emphasize the simplistic lifestyle of Vietnamese people.



The photograph was taken based on the **golden triangle method**. I **aligned** the position of the lady’s arm in my camera screen coincided with the **diagonal line** that forms the **golden triangle rule**. The lady’s faced was also adjusted on the screen to be the center of the golden ratio that I visualized inside my head while taking the photo. It turned out to be interesting that the **inclined direction** of the lady’s head is perpendicular to the line connected two opposite corner of “Nostalgia”. The photo was taken with **ISO 200 and shutter speed 1/100** in the **manual mode**. Then I **manipulated** the color of the photo by VSCO with the **HB2 preset**, increasing **contrast** and **saturation**. I found the **harmony** of the color consonant due to the domination of the blue hues (**Deep sky blue** on the wall and the plastic bag, **indigo blue Crayola**

version on the shirt satisfactorily as it goes together with the **amethyst purple** of the lady’s pants. Standing out of the picture is the **Candy Apple red** of the lady’s cake she was holding, which balanced the **cold scheme of the blue**.

Skills, Techniques and Processes of “Nostalgia” oil painting



With the same steps, I first sketch the photograph out on a canvas. The size of the canvas I use if bigger compared to “Timelessness” because I could **enhance** the impact on the audience with a largersize. Since I find myself most focused during the first steps, my priority is to work on **the facial expression** first as the face of the lady is the first thing that can address the audience’s eyes.



I tried my best to captivate the details as **realistic** as possible, including the wrinkles. I learn form Réhahn that the eye of the

subject play a powerful role in the success of an artwork. Indeed, I do not feel satisfied with the way how I painted the eyes, so I plan to move on to finish the entire face and refine the eyes later.

Communication of Ideas and Intentions

I want to carry out my second Studio work with the same oil-painting medium to improve my skills in painting. With the theme “The Portrait of Vietnam”, inspired by Réhahn’s collection “The Mosaics of Vietnam”, I develop one similar photograph of mine taken in Hoi An – Vietnam’s most charming, historic and cultural ancient town – where Réhahn resides in and has his passion cultivated. Although Hoi An was far away from my hometown, I keep coming back again and again due to the tranquility and antique atmosphere that has influenced me to take many photographs.

To portray the lady, I apply **the gradient blending technique** with the same set of colors that are used for Mrs. Can’s facial expression and skin colors. The reason why I do not work with the normal human flesh color can be attributed to the feature of humans’ skin, which changes accordingly to our age. Most people prefer to look young, but to me the standards of beauty if not just limited to “youthful”, but extends to the scale of which **different values of artistic perspectives** are regarded as “aesthetic” as long as it provides a **conceptual experience** of something beyond “looking good”, such as a sense of culture, emotions associated or having an insightful story underneath. Therefore, I **meticulously depict** the low nose of the lady and the pinched mouth to express how time can change a person inside out. To achieve this, I use a small **filbert brush** to draw the wrinkles with **Burnt Siena and Negro Black**, and also a bright brush to shade the colors softly.



With lines and details that require more skills, such as the subtle wrinkles on the forehead of the lady’s, I realize that using the filbert brush to draw the lines is not a good idea. Instead, I use a medium thin brush and also slightly blend them in order not to make these wrinkles too explicit.

All of the photos are my works unless numbered



After the face, I then move on to the lady's hand, which also requires me **to capture values of light** in an effective way. I use **fine lines** to draw the veins on the hand, and then apply burnt sienna and indigo to retouch them. This effect is also really obvious on the wrist, specifically the ulna bone, so I sketch a small circle to identify the position on the



canvas initially, then apply white in the center and blend in the **Burnt Sienna** half way down around this circle.



For the knuckles on the lady's right hand, I also apply this same technique to capture the **reflection of light**. I put white inside of the sketched circle first then blend colors around gently.

Due to the fact that my teacher cannot guide me directly in the weekend, I ask her to show me how to transfer the patterns on the lady's shirt properly first, so that I can continue to work on both the fingers and the sleeves independently when she is not available. My teacher guides me to use the small round brush bristle to do this, right after I have finished applying the main blue of the sleeve because a wet surface makes it easier to blend the colors. I do not want to draw these patterns in great details, as it would

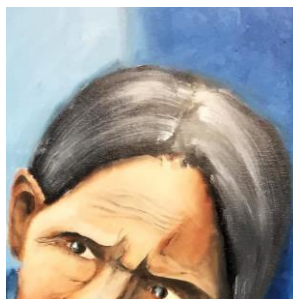


be extremely time-consuming and I will make it harder to blend in together with **the values of light** presenting on the folds of the shirt with my beginner-level. So I only dip the bristle slightly into a small amount of colors, including the **candy red, navy blue, violet purple** and gently apply them on the canvas. I know it would be a bad idea if I got rid of these small patterns of the design of



the shirt since the red, purple and white shades of these flowers can help the shirt **be conspicuous out of the same-tone background**, thus improving the **vidiness and vibrancy** of "Nostalgia".

For the hair, I use a **fan brush** to spread the lines of her hair naturally, with both **combination of the shades of grey and black** in an eye-satisfactory way. Due to the **texture** of the hair, the lines applied must be **swigged curvedly and gently** to different direction. I find it a little bit difficult to control the direction of the fan brush so that lines are smooth and can blend well with the black color, but I start to do it slower so as to properly control the **brush bristle**.



As I have already experimented with the **technique** to capture folds on clothes, I apply the same skill on this painting also. However, as in "Timelessness", the material of the fabric is rather rougher compared to the lady's clothes in "Nostalgia", so instead of using black to create bold impression on the wrinkles, I use the **darker shade of indigo blue** to make the visualization of the texture to become smoother like silk, but still keeps that **vigor of the color scheme** of the painting.

In order to achieve the right shade of **indigo Crayola blue**, I have to mix purple into the shade of blue that I am using to push for more effect and also segregate the shirt with the deep sky blue in the background on the wall. I do not apply colors on the whole shirt at once, because as I go along, I will have to keep the surface of the shirt wet so that the flowery patterns can be blend veyouristically without appearing to be disunited with the shirt.



The red cake the lady is eating, although seems to be trivial but exhibits a **high contrast focus point that balance the cold and blue hues** of the overall painting. With this function, it should be painted with a really strong reddish color that could also capture the shiny effect of the cake. I choose the **Candy Apple red shade** to carry this out, and also have to use the **round bristles** to point out the reflection of the light on the cake.



In terms of the background, although the main color is the **deep sky blue**, it can still be seen that some parts of the lime wall have been plastered out so white is mixed into during the process. There is also a small part of the ground in grey needs to be covered. Since the ground is harsh and rocky, I do not blend it smoothly but instead dip the tip of the bristle onto the surface directly.



Reviewing, Refining and Reflecting

My resolved artwork submitted for marking



Finishing the artwork, I am satisfied with the ways how the veins on the lady's hand and the folds on her clothes are captured with **explicit values of light** and reflection. I also feel fulfilled to accomplish the small details of the pattern on her shirt.



However, I find out that the pupils of the eyes have not been expressing regret and a little bit of sadness, so I use a little bit more white to **push the effect** and make the pupils become more emotional.

After finishing, I realize that although the two shades of the shirt and the wall have been emerged, the two colors do not turn out to be as **vibrant and vivid** with high contrast as I expect. If I had a chance to do this again, I would mix **more violet and boysenberry purple** to the shirt simultaneously to the piece of the pant on the left of the painting to carry out a more **vivid color**.

All of the photos are my works unless numbered

Thousand years of aliveness



This is the original photograph that I took inside a pavilion leading to the fourth courtyard. While there were a lot of other **sculptures**, I decided to take photograph of this temple guard sculpture. Parts of the face of the sculptures have been severely damaged due to the effect of time, yet this provoked me a thought of the statue that has been standing there for more than a thousand years, observing many historic profound changes of the country and become a silent witness of the culture and the glorious victories over many powerful nations such as China, France and the US. This is more than just a sculpture. This is our brief of history, a thousand years of ups and downs of a small but determined nation. This is the reason why I name the photograph and the painting “**A thousand years of aliveness**”. I decide to transfer the photograph into an oil painting, on a 62x91.5cm size of canvas. Still planning on working with the realism movement, as I think transferring fine art into painting requires **realistic details** to maintain the impact on the audience.

Communication of Ideas and Intentions

My third studio work is inspired by **sculptures and statues** in Vietnam. The artwork is transferred from one of my photograph taken in the trip to Hanoi – the rich cultural capital of Vietnam. During the trip, I visited the Temple of Literature – a Confucius temple that was constructed in 1070 – being recognized as a **historic symbol** of the city and the very first national university in Vietnam, under the Ly dynasty. The Temple has been preserved its ancient architecture for more than a thousand years regardless of wars and historical fluctuations.

As soon as I start, I realize it is really difficult for a beginner like me to be able to carry out the **effect of time and antiquity on the sculpture**, due to the lack of knowledge for controlling shades and shadow on only the white color of the statue. I start working with the cane. First, I try to capture the very small details of the cane in order to **highlight**



the effect of time on it. The canvas was rather too big for such small details like this, so I use a **thin brush** to paint and blend the patterns. Overall, the sculpture appears to mainly be in white due to the material of the stone. However, under closer observation, we can see that parts of the statue have been **oxidized and worn-out** with moss and yellowing pieces. Because of this, I make use of the **Burnt Sienna and a little of umber brown** to

carry out this colors.

I also apply this technique on every other parts of the painting where there is shading. I find it very challenging to properly control the **realistic shades** on the white color, but I try to do my best. The extremely detailed patterns on the statue such as the patterns on the **garment of the sculpture** are complicated, but I do not want to get rid of these details since they are the unique features that makes the Vietnamese culture stand out. Although I am persistent with this idea, I am not happy with the results since my shading and outlining appear to be artificial and a little bit childish.

For the background, I apply an excessive amount of white on the canvas and spread it all over the surface. This thick and wet layer amount of paint allows me to **dip the brush** on the surface quickly and continuously to create a **rocky and impactful texture**. Everywhere that requires the effect of shade, I apply one **long line of brushstroke in the rear and gradually blend it outwards**. Because of these brushstrokes, it takes a really long



time for the paint to get dry completely and when I touch it, I can feel the roughness explicitly. The background turns out to look **like limestone** with these **brushstrokes**, which is contrast to the smooth surface in the original photograph.

For the column, I use the **apple red** and blend with some amount of black to make the color come out with **higher contrast**. The crack on the column is then depicted with **the round brush bristle**, where I swing the line in an intermittent manner. The shades of moss are depicted with the same technique of the surface as I dip the crush bristle straight forwards onto the surface but more gently.



All of the photos are my works unless numbered

Reviewing, Refining and Reflecting

Although this is the artwork that takes me the longest time and the most effort to complete, I have to admit that the result does not meet my expectations, since I am unable to carry out the bold expression of the **sculpture** that is similar to **the ancient and historic atmosphere** that the original photograph provokes. Overall, I think the painting is too childish and artificial to be called **Realism**. The reason for this, in my opinion, can be attributed to three factors. The first factor is that I do not have enough skills to capture the small details that are the **indispensable elements** of a traditional garment on the sculpture, thus making the **brushstrokes** too explicit and unnatural. The second factor is the choice of color and **the shade of whiteness**, since the two types of white coming from the background and the statue are not **differentiated** clearly, which hinders the sculpture to stand out of the painting and have an impact on the audience at the first sight. Initially, I thought that **a rough surface and a smooth focal point**, which is the statue as the main subject, will be able to **emerge** from each other. However the use of similar tones and hues, such as **white and negro black**, has mixed the two surface together and make the audience distracted from the main **focus point**. Another factor can also be the **bold and high contrast shade** of the red column, which takes away the focus on the sculpture. After finishing “A thousand years of aliveness”, I realize that my weakness is to work with the color white as a main theme, and I also recognize a need to practice how to depict smaller details meticulously.

Due to the inability to transfer the photograph to an impressive oil-painting properly, I have a compelling hope to redo this artwork again. If I had a chance to do this all over again, I will definitely keep the background smooth just like the original. Although the surface turns out to be impressive, this roughness is too noticeable that the main subject cannot stand out anymore. However, to make the surface smooth means that I have to **emphasize** the sculpture, perhaps with a limestone surface, or to apply the effect of shades more effective to create a **3- dimensional perspective** which can separate itself from the background, just like how the **high contrast** of different values of light and the worn-out effect on the sculpture in the original photograph has made it more exposed and nearer to the audience.

Although I am not satisfied with the result, I still feel a sense of fulfillment since the experience has pointed out for me what is my weaknesses in the very first steps in the process to study and understand Visual Arts profoundly **in various media and movements**, not just limited to **photography**. Compared to my other two studio works, perhaps I can identify clearly that I need to explore more with **still-object painting**, rather than just sticking to human painting to improve generally.



My other photographs during the trip



I learn that under the Tran dynasty, Northern Vietnamese art was influenced by Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, with East Asia characteristics of architecture. Vietnamese people during this period had their official language as the Nom. Due to the previous domination of China, classical Chinese was innovated to Vietnamese Nom language, which is ancient Vietnamese. Although Nom was now replaced with the modernized Vietnamese alphabet, many of historical sites still keep the carved language to preserve valuable historical heritage of the Nom language. This is the reason why we can see Nom characters both on the old welcoming board of the temple.

During the trip to Hanoi, I was able to capture many cultural photography of the Vietnamese historic sites that are attached to our traditions and lifestyles. The following photographs are my documentation of other parts of the Temple of Literature regarding Vietnamese sculpture skills and architecture under the Ly dynasty in the 11th century. The spiritual mascot of the Vietnamese culture is the dragon, which symbolizes auspiciousness, powerfulness and fortune.



Vietnam's Temple of Literature is regarded as one of the most significant historical sites in the country. This is the photograph of the main gate of the Temple, which has become the symbol of Hanoi as the capital of Vietnam. The gate is called Khue Van pavilion, but was built later in 1805. In the middle of the pavilion, there is a circle, which according to the Vietnamese people is an **architectural detail** that represent the Venus – the Literature star.



Thousand years of Civilization

Communication of Ideas and Intentions

Having three oil-painting focus on **portraits**, I continue my artistic development with **wood burning**, moving away from humans' **facial expression** to **captivate the stillness** of objects that hold significantly **sentimental values of a culture**. As mentioned, the representation of Dragon plays a traditional role in the Southeast Asian culture, **symbolizing** power, prosperity, longevity and fortune throughout the history of many feudal dynasties and is preserved as a **mascot**, a **heritage** of a cultural beauty. This photograph was taken in the Vietnamese Temple of Literature, where the customs of cult and worship of the ancient Vietnamese are **exhibited**. The dragon in my photograph is a piece of **architecture** attached to an incensory in front of the main gate.

Wood burning has always been a medium that I am longing for experimenting with. In Hanoi – the capital of Vietnam, the land that has been the center of culture, politics and economics of the Vietnamese for a thousand of years, we grow up accustomed to a prideful saying “**Thousand years of civilization**”. I still remember by secondary teacher who taught me that culture could be changed, but a civilization remained forever as an unbreakable milestone of a nation's history. As a Southeast Asian, I am passionate with the Asian culture, especially Chinese and Vietnamese in particular. That is the reason why I decide to go on with the **dragon mascot** as an indispensable part of the Chinese and Vietnamese lifestyles and history.

Skills, techniques and processes

After sketching my intended design on the wood surface, I then begin to burn some fine lines first. The tip of the pen is leaning to the left, how ever my design of the dragon is flipped towards the right side, so after few lines I reverse the **vertical direction** of the wood piece in order to achieve smooth and curvy lines. In terms of **shading effect**, I combine both of the **dotting and shading technique** to illustrate the **dark values** on the body of the dragon. First, I use the tip of the pen and patiently dot each small dot on the surface. Since I want the dot to be dark and noticeable, the tension I put on the tip of the pen is harder, and the time remaining



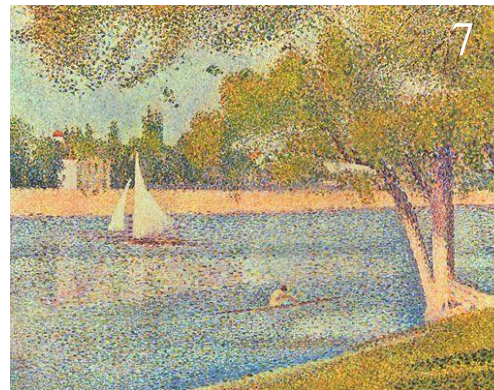
on the surface of the pen is longer compared to the lighter dots. Although the pointing process takes a long time and requires me to be meticulous with each little and trivial detail, the overall effect is not trivial as these dots all contribute to become a distinct **shading effect**. To **harmonize** the shades from dark to light, I use the norming shading technique from the **pyrography pen**, leaning the whole pen driver on the surface and pull them to the wanted direction slowly, which eventually mingle all the dots together. This technique allows me to express the **roughness** of the dragon's skin, which generating a **deep, rich and provocative texture**.

First time dealing with wood burning shading and blending technique, I find the result satisfactory and hence determining the whole artwork to be shaded with this pointing effect even though it is time and effort consuming.

Pointillism and Georges Seurat

My technique of shading with points and dots mentioned above in the Thousand years of civilization is an inspiration from the **movement Pointillism** that was established in the 19th century in Paris. This movement is also known as the most significant **Neo-Impressionist technique**, which embraces the use of tenderly **flickering combination of dots**. The unconventional Pointillism movement was pioneered by Georges Seurat – a young French artist that was academically trained and passionately influenced by **the theories of colors and classical art** (8.1). Unlike Post-Impressionism which emancipates emotions and existential meanings through the deformation of realism, Neo-Impressionism elevates **optical scientific study** to **produce methodical techniques of blending**, especially with Pointillism where **the juxtaposition of dots of strokes is adopted to enhance visual sensation** (8.2).

With this main approach, Georges Seurat created a collection of Pointillist artworks that made him remarkable in the Parisian advent-garde then.



La Seine à la Grande-Jatte of 1888 is one of Georges Seurat's compositions that signifies a significant adoption of Pointillist technique. The myriad of dots constructively stimulates a soft and smooth atmosphere of the scene, provoking a sense of summer freshness.

As inspired by Georges Seurat, I adopt this artistic style in my own **customized technique** that does not deal with constructing a complete scene from **optically mixed dots**, but rather manipulating these dots to create different dark and bright values of shading to be suitable with the nature of **pyrography**. However, as I soon realize that creating shading dots will not be the effective way if applied it to the whole surface of the wood piece, I try to develop this dotting effect to a new similar personal technique to improve the uneven curves of the dragon's scales, which is mentioned in the first paragraph of reviewing, refining and reflecting section next page.

All of the photos are my works unless numbered

Reviewing, Refining and Reflecting Skills, techniques and processes

Indeed, this technique is developed as an improvement on the original shade on the fin initially. After shading in the traditional way, leaning the tip of the pen to smoothly burn the surface, the lines on the fin appeared to be rugged, and it did not implement the **prominence of the pointillist effect** I applied. On the grounds of this, I established the abovementioned technique to refine this detail.



During the process, due to my lack of experience dealing with the pyrography pen, I struggled to form smooth lines in the tail and the beard of the dragon. These 2D lines were not burnt continuously and did not have a

silky effect that I wanted. However, I noticed that the head of the dragon could be more **conspicuous** if the beard had a **darker value emerging from the light texture of the body**. So I shaded the fin traditionally first, then embellish this shading by layering small points to form a sense of ancientness. Finally, I emerged each piece of the beard by **contouring** their outline. I also did the same with the tail fin.



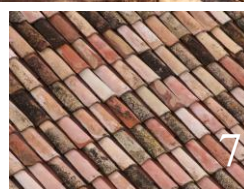
The similar technique, apart from the **application of pointillism** on the effect of shading, is adopted to **stimulate texture from the body** of the dragon with a more **dimensional viewpoint**. On the fin of the dragon, I apply a greater extent of force on the tip of the pyrography pen in order to create a **harsh surface with a darker shade** compared to regular dotting technique. As observed, the fin awakens a sense of **roughness** that can generate an impression of a skin that is **gemstone-like**, which elevates the **spirituality** of the dragon. It also contributes significantly to the attraction of the audience's eyes, since a surface that consists of two similar yet merging out from each other types of **texture** can **emancipate** the liveliness of the artwork, especially on wood. This is for me a mixture of the **modernized Western formal quality breakthrough**, together with the **traditional technique of wood burning**. Regardless of their **divergence**, the combination of Western and Asian creative qualities appears to **materialize** the surface of the wood, as well as **enrich** the sense of dimension, which **invokes a visualization of the contrast of different dark and bright values**.



In terms of the censer, which is the religious ornamental container of burning incense often used in Vietnam, I also

created a new kind of texture by experimenting with the pyrography pen. I wanted to recreate the effect of **roofing bricks**, which is known as **terracotta roofing tiles** in Vietnam, I applied a strong force on the pen onto the wood surface in a tilted angle and let it burn a little to also form different shades of dark and bright. When

touched, the surface is very rough and visually it looks quite in **uniform**. This also makes the depiction of the censer more **visually striking** as there is a combination between both **smooth two-dimensional lines and three-dimensional textures**.



All of the photos are my works unless numbered

Finishing “Thousand years of Civilization”



Finalizing my wood-burning “Thousand years of civilization”, I am satisfied with the way how I experimented with the pyrography pen to create different kind of textures and **materialize the roughness of the sculpture** in my photograph. I am happy with how I managed to **distribute dark and bright values** both by **pointillism** and carefully heat up the wood with a burnt effect, which makes the total wood-burning appear to be more ancient. This is a new experience for me, as I have tried something else apart from my favorite media of oil on canvas traditionally. The dragon in the Vietnamese culture is a national mascot that is **prominent in ancient royal garment and clothing, sculptures, architectures and various Vietnamese folk-religious traditions**. Although wood-burning is much more difficult than it seems to be, I am happy that I have carefully put in the time and effort to try a new form of art. The shading and texturing techniques that I have tried for myself overall help form a very detailed and realist depictions of various details of the dragon, especially the beard and the tail.

Reviewing, Refining and Reflecting

Nevertheless, since this is my first time dealing with a new type of media, especially handling the pyrography pen, I feel like there are still a lot of space for refinement and improvement. If I were to do this all over again, I would select a range of different pyrography pens with different sizes so that the lines created would be more smooth.

I would also try to combine other media into the wood-burning so that the total composition would be more lively and colorful. Initially I planned to combine with some traditional Vietnamese calligraphy, but since I am not in Vietnam I could not find an authentic pen to do this; and also due to the Corona virus it prevented me to go out to search for the pen. I am also not satisfied with the classical symbol on the incensory next to the dragon since it looks very **disproportional**. I will have to practice my pyrography skills more so that I can depict fine lines and details like such better.

A Critical Investigation on the Influence of Buddhism on Vietnamese cultural arts and historical events

As having grown up in Vietnam, I find my childhood memories and traditions significantly influenced by Buddhism. To me the values of religions, especially Buddhism, is not about believing and dedicating my whole self to the **religious standards**, but rather a preservation and perpetuation of **ethical and cultural values**. These values have played a remarkable role in shaping a national conscience and the beauty and toleration of the Vietnamese. The Art of Vietnam also identifies itself together with the growth and faith in Buddhism as the main religion of the country. Buddhist doctrine in Vietnam is the outcome of a strong evangelizing historical period around the second century AD brought by the Chinese refugee scholars to the North Vietnam. (10.1) However, it is during the Ly dynasty (1010-1224) that Buddhism evolved into a national religion and philosophy. (10.2) During the AD 939, due to the collapse of the Tang dynasty, Vietnam successfully revolted against the domination of the Chinese after nearly 1000 years, since then being able to stablish and cultivate a Vietnamese national conscience. (10.3)

Architecture and art during the Ly dynasty, with the faith of Buddhism of the government, achieved its **supremacy** with the flourish of **pagodas, temples, sculptures and ceramics**. One of the most distinguished **national iconography** of Vietnam is the One Pillar Pagoda built during Ly Thai Tong's emperor – a **pavilion** standing on a pillar in the middle of a small pond representing a blooming lotus – a **typical imagery** associated with Buddhism. (10.4)



All of the photos are my works unless numbered

In 1070s, Temple of Literature was constructed as the first university in Vietnam, emphasizing on the education of Confucius and Confucian disciplines for the mandarin system in the capital. (10.5) Since the Ly dynasty is the blooming historical era of the development of a Vietnamese independent identity after the yoke of domination of China, the metaphysical doctrine of Buddhism in Vietnam was culturally converted together with Confucianism, especially with the influence of Ly Thai To – the founder of the Ly dynasty. (10.6) Buddhism in Vietnam is the combination of the Zen sects and local beliefs with traditional customs of the Vietnamese. (10.7)

Two photographs taken by me during the trip to the Vietnamese national Art Museum



to Diem's religious favoritism. (10.8) The crisis marks one of the most intense milestones for the chronological development of Buddhism in Vietnam, where accounts for the self-immolation of Buddhist leaders were reported all over the world and stirred up opposition for the intolerance of the regime and the US support for Diem. (10.9) In my opinion, the significance of this

crisis is not the brutality of the Vietnam War towards freedom of expression and religions, but it lies in how the Buddhists in Vietnam chose to resolve the situation. Since the theological doctrine of Buddhism does not encourage the use of violence and doing harms to others, Buddhist leaders such as Thich Quang Duc immolated himself in order to sacrifice for their religion and the South Vietnamese people that were suppressed by the Diem's regime. This is for me a beauty of the Buddhist practice of Vietnamese people, the understanding and sacrifice for the national conscience.

Walking into the period of French colonization and the Vietnam War in the 20th century, Buddhism in Vietnam struggled its way to thrive being repressed by Christianity of Western influences. Especially during the years of the Vietnam War when Vietnam was divided into two countries, under the autocratic regime of Ngo Dinh Diem president of South Vietnam appointed by the United States, the Buddhist Crisis took place due

Photograph taken by me in a Vietnamese Pagoda



Inspiration of Vu Thai Binh on my Art

Although I am not a Buddhist, having my family endorse to Buddhist values, Buddhism plays an important role in my life and shapes a part of my personality. It is the tradition in Vietnam that on Lunar New Year Eve or before any special formal events, families regardless of being Buddhists or not will visit the pagodas. This acts as the main source of inspiration for my next artwork about **symbols of Buddhism**. My inspiration also derives from a contemporary Vietnamese artist – Vu Thai Binh - whose collection is a sublime and somewhat **surreal dimension** of the beauty of Buddhism. This painting by Vu Thai Binh called “The Monks” initially **captivated** my attention



in a **chaotic** but strangely **serene** way. The **color scheme** is mainly warm color which creates a sense of heat and turmoil in the overall atmosphere. **Difference hues of red and orange** are used in an elegant way, for which the **analogous colors** do not **submerge** each other but create a similar **visualization** of an ocean. The **raw brushstrokes** also **imbricate** each other as if they are

turbulent waves rising towards the three monks. The **composition** of the painting also appears to **be over-simplified** yet is actually constructed in a meticulous manner. The **parallelism** between the region of the bright falling leaves and the less **intensified** area, where the monks are walking are enhanced, forms an effect of the monks heading towards an tumultuous ocean. This, perhaps, reminds me of one of the teaching of Buddhism, for which our **introspections** are our consciousness. These introspections of existential meanings are represented as intense **waves in the ocean of contemplation**. Overall, the smallness of the monks is the insignificance of humans in the face of existential introspection, and the expedition for the meaning of life is as **tempestuous** as violent waves in the faraway ocean. This interpretation strikes me strongly, and thus I decided to have my next studio work on the same profound aspect of Vu Thai Binh’s painting.

Skills, Techniques and Processes of “The enlightenment”



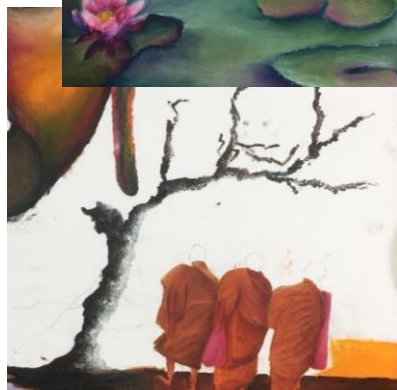
Being inspired by Vu Thai Binh, I wanted to keep the idea of heading towards an ocean of introspections in order to find ultimate existential meaning. Instead of keeping the **horizontal parallel structure**, I transformed it into **vertical parallelism** and regard the Buddha as the most remarkable significance of the journey of the monks. I also sketched a part of a lotus pond underneath in order to lead the eyes of the audience towards the Buddha.

Although I wanted to paint the monks’ robes in orange hues, due to the Corona virus, I did not have access to this shade, so I made use of Burnt Siena and Raw Siena instead. The original



color of the lotus is the **blush and fuchsia pink**, however I wanted to form a three-dimensional depth of the lotus, thus combining hues of **magenta, permanent rose and cobalt violet** with titanium white. In dim areas **Indian red** was also applied.

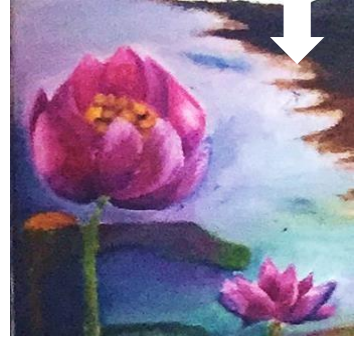
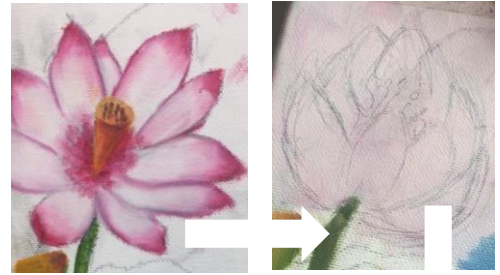
I also tried to combine various hues of colors for the lotus pond. For this, I mainly used **sap green, phthalo blue and cobalt violet** mixing on the grounds of ivory white to generate a floating effect for the lotus leaves on the surface of the water. Initially I did not use **cobalt violet**, yet later on I refined the edges of the leaves and the dim areas with cobalt violet, since I recognize the harmony of this hue with phthalo blue on ivory white together with the violet lotus, making it more manifest with **harmonious colors**. Moreover, the cobalt violet can also add depth for the surface of water, creating a **surreal dimensional visualization** for the pond. For the tree, I mixed ivory white, **umber brown and phthalo blue** together. On thin branches with dark colors, I mixed **umber brown and ivory black**. To bring in the rough and bumpy texture for the wood, white hue was applied on top of dim colors by **uneven and inconsistent brushstrokes**, forming areas where colors are not blended completely. I did not also blend these shades together but left it unfinished so that this rough texture can stand out as if it was **materialized**.



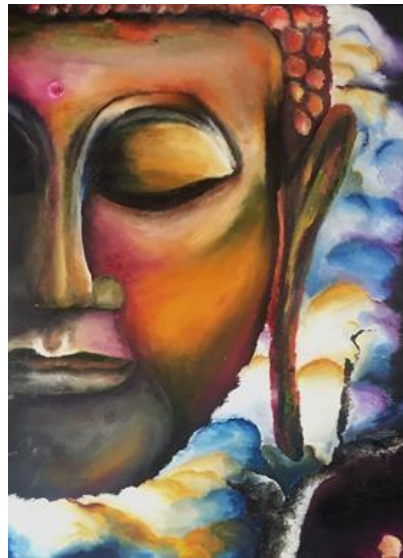
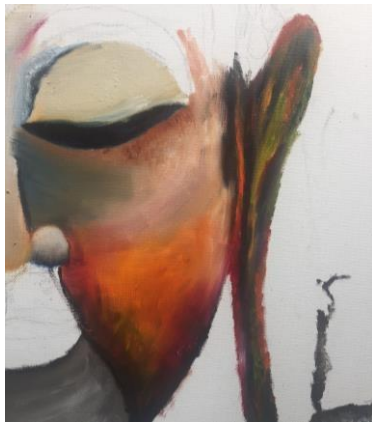
Reviewing and Refining



I was very satisfied with how the first lotus turn out to be, as the combination of different hues of violet makes the lotus become surprisingly realist. However, I did not do well on the second lotus since the combination of **permanent rose and titanium white** turned out to be immature. To add depth, I waited for the color to dry to improve on the 3D effect with more shades like the first lotus.



For the face of the Buddha, I decided to **embellish** the painting more with creative elements, harmonizing **diverse vibrant hues** together with **ivory black, phthalo blue and sap green** to create an ancient effect and a **statue-like texture**, forming a sense of antiqueness and serenity. At first, I struggled to balance the **garish vibrancy of the colors** which unintentionally made the Buddha's face appear to be superficial. Nevertheless, I managed to **readjust the shades** by embellishing the shading area with **sap green**, bringing in a **polychromatic lifelike impression**.



After finishing the small details, I wanted to enhance the outstanding of the Buddha's face, thus I decided to bring in a cloudy effect by applying **white and cadmium yellow, phthalo blue and cobalt violet**. Since the way in which I painted the pond makes the painting surreal and dream-like, the clouds around the Buddha's face would complement the impression of **surrealism** for the overall painting. As my intentional message for my painting is the enlightenment of Buddhist values and the profundity of self-recognition during dark periods of humans' lifetime, I wanted the Buddha's face to be explicitly **prominent**, emerging out from the duskiness – a representation of hope in obscurity, thus painting the background with the combination of **Tyrian purple, cobalt violet and ivory black**. Areas around the monks I kept the shade of cobalt violet also for the same purpose of the spirituality of Buddhism that they follow.

All of the photos are my works unless numbered
“Bodhi – The Enlightenment”

Finishing the painting, the **surreal** effect turns out to be more significant than I expected, which generates a sense of spirituality and holiness. Compared to Vu Thai Binh, my artwork drives my inspiration in another way, where Vu Thai Binh's **composition** focuses on a serene internal introspection, but mine is the revival and the guide of Buddha to



My resolved artwork submitted for marking

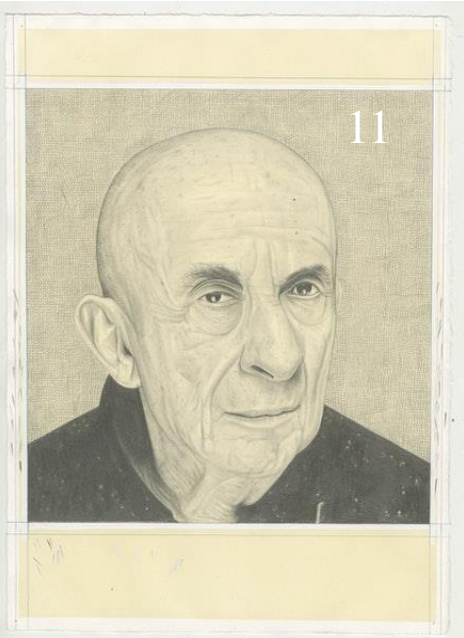
enlighten and lead the worshippers through their hardship and their calamities of lives. This difference in idea perhaps leads to the two **opposite divergent impressions** of the two artworks, where Vu Thai Binh's is placid and peaceful whereas mine provokes a sense of unrest and tumultuous dedication. The lotus pond is painted in an **ambiguous shape** which rises towards the Buddha's face. This is my intention to construct a **conceptual representation**. Lotus is the type of flower that is often associated with Buddhism, thus this **symbolism** for Buddhist values marks as a guide on the physical world for the monks to follow, to reach the abstract destination of enlightenment and revive from the mundane torment of life. The fibrous branches due to being combined fragmentarily with **umber and ivory black**, is distinct from the darkness of the sky. The purpose of me capturing these branches lifeless without any blooming flowers is because I want to **specify the space** between the mundane world of normal lives and the holiness apparently.

“Bodhi” in Sanskrit signifies “enlightenment”. In fact, the English word for “enlightenment” derived from the term “Bodhi”. Bodhi is not only the Enlightenment, it is the final Enlightenment, the spiritual awakening from the cycle of reincarnation full of sufferings and adversities. (12.1) This is the reason why I depict the sky at nightfall, **contrasting with the**



luminosity of the Buddha's face, the lotus pond and the monks, to make the meaning of the expedition a hope to release from the darkness of mundane lives. The **luminosity radiating** from them is the vigor of Buddhism, the energy of Bodhi that the monks are heading towards to. However, the fact that there is nearly no **breathing space** except for the background does not satisfy my initial purpose. If I could do it all over again, I would **minify** the monks and the Buddha's face, so that the Buddha's face could be further away from the ground, which can **enhance** my purpose of depicting the holiness better.

Critical investigation on Leon Golub



Leon Golub was an American **figurative artist** that involved profoundly with the captivity of different aspects of brutality, violence and inhumanity of wars and politics. (13.1) Leon was born on January 23 1922 and dedicated himself to services during World War II. (13.2) Perhaps due to this arduous experience of wars and violence that when he returned to New York in 1964, he generated a **personal artistic revolution** that was attached to the **Vietnam war activism**, becoming an enthusiastic member of the **Artists and Writers Protest Against the War in Vietnam association**. (13.3) His knowledge of Art was not purely Art, but instead a balanced and ambitious combination of Art and Politics, as having his BA in Art History in University of Chicago. (13.4)

All of the photos are my works unless numbered Vietnam II – Leon Golub

Vietnam II is one of the most well-known **compositions** of Leon Golub, taking the contemporary issue of the Vietnam war as the subject. The **unprimed canvas** Leon used for this composition is exceptionally big – 3 meters in height and 12 meters in length. (13.10) The purpose of the painting is to **explicitly demonstrate** the **high contrast and discrepancy** during the Vietnam war, which the audience can identify through the composition of the artwork. To the left of the torn, unprimed canvas, there is a troop of American soldiers looking severe and merciless, which is strongly **contradictory** to the small vulnerable figures on the right that are threatened in torments and fear. This perhaps **evokes a sense of opposition and disparity**, a historical feelings and discomfort for such a distinct difference between the two sides, which is a common conscience during the Vietnam war. The canvas, presumably, is not torn by accidents. It is the side of the fragile and feeble Vietnamese that is torn noticeably, making this second half appears to be incomplete and **exposed, echoing** the afore-mentioned



contrast more profoundly in the eyes of the audience. I find his **raw brushstrokes phenomenally unique and exquisitely contributive** to the purpose of the painting. These raw strokes, in my interpretation, a representation for the bitterness of the war where the reality is ugly and unacceptable, just like the sharp and uneasy strokes of the artist that makes the painting overall **unsettling and uneven**. It is also the use of color that **captivates and metaphorizes** for the **colors of war** – a dark, unlively and lifeless **hues** of death, smog of bombs and sufferings of the innocent. In terms of **facial expression**, it is the expression of the vulnerable beings that Leon exposes explicitly to us, rather than that of the soldiers, provoking a **strong divergence** between the two – the ones who reach the greatest existential anxiety of humanity, in which all of their true selves are opened and can be seen by the whole world with their angst and the mundanity of humans, and the other without a sign of humans' expression, perhaps indicating the lack of humanity, the lack of the expression of an human "being", who knows how to mercy, how to love and sympathize. According to art historian Jonathan Bird, while *"the scale and arrested action invoke cinema [...], the compositional structure, accuracy in dress and weaponry, close-up detailing of expression and gesture, all reference a spectacularized culture saturated with mass-media imagery."* (13.11)

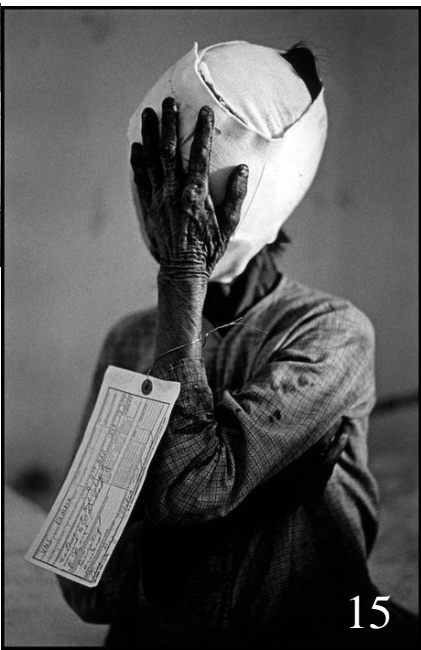


Communication of Ideas and Intentions

This **phenomenal composition** of Leon Golub, together with my dedication for my beloved nation urge me to do an artwork that is both **conversational** and **contemplative** of a part of my country's volatile history. Like Leon Golub, I strongly believe that the Arts is a powerful language not just for **emotional catharsis** but can also reflect a culture and shape a new perception in a remarkable way. Thus, I want to **captivate** and **exhilarate** the martyrdom of the Vietnam War from my own perspective, with a view to communicating the glorious survival of my country through a controversial war and the success of reunification as a whole country in an **artistic** way. As I believe, the pain is gone but the scar will forever remain. It is important to memorialize the history of a nation in order to move on progressively, and Arts is my own way to **commemorate** this. One of the most renowned Vietnam War **photojournalists** is Philip Jones Griffith. Contemplating his "Vietnam Inc." collection taken during the Vietnam

War, I immediately see in his works something very **provocative**, something that **resonates** beautifully with my **philosophy of Arts**: the ability to shape and change humans' perceptions in an unexpected yet extremely profound way. His photographs, just like Leon Golub, discloses the brutality and horrors of the War in Vietnam, the War that America itself sarcastically proclaimed for rights and justice. His **documentation** tells the world another story that has not been told, another story that is different from the American historiography: the meaningless deaths and sufferings of the innocent. It reflects horrifyingly the dehumanizing power of the American imperialism (13.12)

"Would we rather look at pretty colors and shapes? Do we flinch at seeing our own crimes and nightmares in ink?" – the artist once interrogated. (13.5) In my perspective, to Leon Golub, perhaps Art is not the wonderful destinations that humans urge to seek, but instead a **representation** of an ugly reality that people have to see and acknowledge. This **philosophy of Art**, together with the reflection of abuse, terrorism, eruption and turmoil has created a **distinctive artistic style** that is **gigantic and unequivocal – violent and raw brushstrokes in depressing hues on unprimed canvas** (13.6) that creates a **sense of disturbance and disorder**. His involvement in political predicaments is his condemnation for the barbarity of wars, as he once said "People are aware of these things in film, they're aware of it in novels. We're saturated in information. *But this information is not accepted in the sacrosanct temples of art because those are the highest achievements of capitalism, and what they represent is the idea that the possibilities of the human spirit are open and vast and gracious.*" (13.7) For me as a Vietnamese, although my personal point of view to my own country's historical turmoil between communism and anti- communism during the period from 1954 to 1975 is a series of questions and skepticism for the stability of governmental and ideological power from both the North Vietnam and the South Vietnam together with its support from the United States, it is undeniable that the savagery of war was, and is, too unbearable to accept and too inhumane to ignore, which is the reason why Leon Golub's artworks **resonate aesthetically** with my love my for my own country and the pride for the determination of a small nation. Leon Golub style can be accepted as **Expressionism**, but his **depiction of degradation regarding political reality** leans towards to **New Objectivity** more (13.8). He passed away on August 8, 2004 in New York, and being recognized as a **Neo-Expressionist**. (13.9)



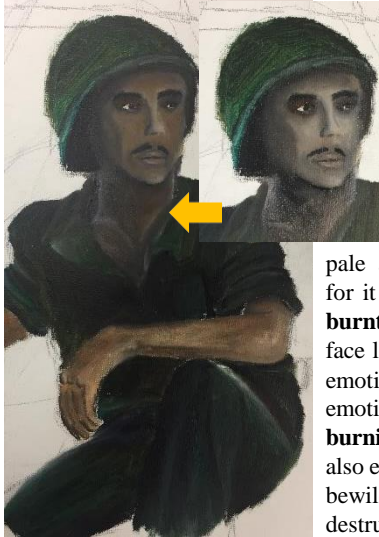
Profoundly inspired by Jones Griffith exceptional documentation and the extraordinary painting of Leon Golub, I decided to construct a similar contrasting composition that tells the stories of the subjects in Griffith's photography. In order to do this, I choose two big size canvases and combine them to form an horizontally elongated big canvas. On each side of the canvas, the two divergences will be depicted – the sufferer and the ones who impose the sufferings. This is considered to be something new for my artistic exploration, as since the beginning I have been depicting the portraits of Vietnamese cultures and have not deepened myself down to the description of something that seems ugly and horrifying but must be acknowledged: the agony of the inhumane war. For this reason, I name the painting “The indescribable”, since the extent of martyrdom and sacrifice of the Vietnam War and its people is never able to be described in normal words and sounds.

Skills, techniques and processes of “Indescribable”



With my ideas and inspiration of a contrasting composition, I started by constructing the first half of my painting, which is the military forces who directly held the guns in their hands. To create a sense of a war-torn landscape, I made use of dark greenish combinations of colors being blended from the mixture of viridian, permanent green light, burnt umber brown and a little bit of lemon yellow hue to make sure the shade of green still stands out.

Reviewing and Refining



Initially I blended a lot of white to enhance the contrast of the soldier faces from the intended dark background. However, the shade of white unexpectedly made the soldier's face

pale and artificial, so I waited for it to dry and reapplied more burnt sienna, which helps his face looks more natural and emotional instead of an emotionless stare. Moreover, the burnished effect from the hue also enhances a sense of bewilderment and destructiveness of the war.



Initially I planned to paint the background in dark umber adding a few strokes of bright hues to create a fire and dusty effect for an atmospheric perspective. Nevertheless, with the advice from my teacher, I decided to repaint with an abstract monochromatic black-and-white background so that the frontal space of the soldiers and the flag could be more prominent. I also changed my mind about the flag in display: instead of painting the South Vietnamese flag, I depicted the American's one to represent this first barbaric half of the composition. This is the result from my reflection on the actual message of the painting: It was the Americans who exhorted the separation of my country, not the people of Vietnam ourselves.



I started my second half of the composition with the baby's facial expression. Personally, I believe the baby's face is the most symbolic part of the whole painting because it is so distinctive from all of the despairing grimace of other characters in the painting. I find this idea very intriguing that so many of the innocent and vulnerable had to endure the pain of war even though they themselves did not comprehend this distressed reality.

For this reason, I portrayed the child as innocent as possible with apple reddish lips, pure human flesh hues with large naïve eyes, so that I could enhance the juxtaposition between horrifying massacres and the destroyed awaiting future of the child due to the war. Keeping that intention in mind, I exaggerated the color scheme for the complexion of the baby's grandmother with more burnt sienna and Umber brown used, combined with ivory black to create strong contrast and explicitness, which is a representation for the unequivocal suffering of innocent people in a meaningless, expensive and catastrophic war.



Apart from the juxtaposition of the baby and its grandmother, another very sentimental detail is the depiction of an old lady with her whole face bandaged because of wounds that made her become “unrecognizable”. I combined ivory black and white mixed with a little bit of raw sienna to create the effect of being stained and soggy. This overall makes the scenery appear to be more mourning, because the used hues are all in darker values which forms a disquieting tone. I spent a lot of time on painting the smallest details of the hand, from the veins to little shadow areas. The meticulousness added up and initiate a very realistic illustration. I can sense that this scenery can be uneasy for some people to look at. However, I strongly believe the ability of emotional catharsis in Arts, and this is one of the way how I communicate the horrific, undeniable truth of the Vietnam War through symbolic use of colors and combination of dark and bright values.





Contrasting with the baby's innocent expression, this girl looks more disheartening since she has grown up enough to recognize the suffering of war in her life. I purposefully applied a combination of colors that makes her look more dispiriting: **burnt sienna, crimson red and mars black** for the shading of her face. Still, I wanted her to appear to be young, so her **facial structure** is still rounder especially at the cheek.

In order to create an **effect of turbulence** in the atmosphere, I did not apply the colors smoothly on the clothes but instead **producing raw brushstrokes**, chaotically putting slashes of colors in different directions of the paintbrush. In terms of the background, I prioritized **the use of dark values** so that the color scheme of the figures in the central can stand out with **high contrast and high impact**. However, I realized that applying only black will make the painting appear to be childish, so I also combined with **orange yellow** in the rear of the figure. This helps create **perspective** and also provide a sense that there is a **source of light in space**, thus enhancing the **three-dimensional impression**.

The white piece of paper is the patient tag of this lady with personal information. However, in order to communicate a message, I utilize this by writing a quote of Ed Sanders – one of the most renowned American authors,

artists and social activists during the Anti-War Movement: **“The Vietnam War was like a wound that would never heal.”** And of course it would never heal for both America and Vietnam.



“Indescribable”

All of the photos are my works unless numbered



My resolved artwork submitted for marking

Since the background of the two parts of the panel are not **harmonious**, I decided to **refine the background** of the first half depicting the soldiers in the War to be in the same **shade of mars black**. In conclusion, **the facial expression and emotional countenance** of the figures are very provocative. Through these realistic depictions, I hope to convey **organic imageries** of the experiences and pain of the people in war. The whole painting “Indescribable” is focused on the idea of **contrast and confusion**. The two sides of the panels are **contrast** to each other – the soldiers who took away innocent lives and the innocent lives who suffered in pain, hunger and loss. The **contrast** can also be seen in the naïve girl versus the other figures moaning and enduring in terror and desperation. This is my intention to deliver **a sense of disorientation** of war – a **phenomenological approach** to how these human beings experienced the chaotic reality around them when everything was barbarous and brutal. The process of painting “Indescribable” was also an **emotionally cathartic process** for me: the more I worked on the painting, the more time I spent pondering over the history of my country and memorialize the sacrifice that generations and generations of Vietnamese people have done for a Vietnam today. Although my country is not a developed country at this point due to centuries and centuries of colonization and war, it is still one of the fastest growing economies in the world right now and I am very proud of my people. The painting “Indescribable” was an **invaluable artistic experience** for me – this is **an artistic symbolism** for the pain of War from a Vietnamese perspective, not from the common Western one. I hope to communicate the message of the pain and suffering of War through **the contrasting effect and a symbolic use of colors**, a pain that is too ineffable to comprehend, an “Indescribable” wound that would stay forever in the development of the resilient nation of Vietnam.

Reviewing and Refining

However, I am also aware that there are still a lot of space for improvement and refinement. If I were to do this painting all over again, I would balance the **composition** by focusing on **the facial expression** of the soldiers more the same way I did with the second half of the panel. If I have done so, perhaps **the emotional effect** would be more capturing and prominent of the destructive effect of the American Imperialism. I also realized that the background of the two panels do not go well together, so I changed the background of the first panel into Mars Black, so that the composition would be more balanced and connected.



Communications and Intentions of “Mother Thu”



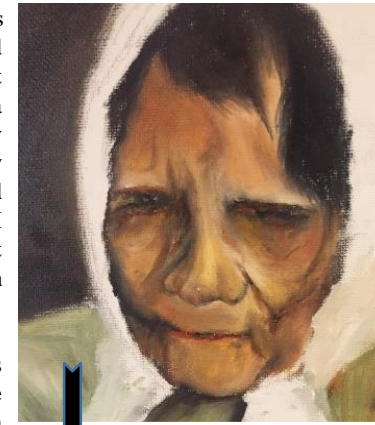
The Vietnam War has always been a scar in me and it continues to inspire my Arts in this final project. This melancholy photograph was taken by Colonel Trần Hồng – who was also a **photo journalist** for the North Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Working for a Communist newspaper, Mr. Trần Hồng has been taking photos of Vietnamese heroic mothers for forty-five years. These mothers are a pride of our Vietnamese women – they themselves had participated in the barbaric war against the United States dedicatedly. Together with their husbands and their sons, they went straight into the battle field fearlessly to serve the country with a hope of a unified, independent nation of Vietnam. Mr. Trần Hồng names this photograph “**Mẹ Thứ bên mâm cơm**”, which is “**Mother Thứ next to the meal tray**” in English. Sometimes he also refers to the photograph as “**Đợi con về**” – which is “**Waiting for you sons to come back**” (17.1) As told in the title, the lady’s name in the photo is Thứ- Nguyễn Thị Thứ - who is honorably recognized by the Vietnamese government as “**A Vietnamese heroic mother**” and is exclusively supported by the government due to her huge contribution in the War. In the Vietnamese tradition, each year on the day of the death of our beloved ones, the family and relatives gather together to light up the incense, cook for the deceased and pray for them to come back to unite with the family on that day and have a peaceful life in the other world. It is very common to see empty bowls on the table on this day in the Vietnamese traditions as a means to memorialize the deceased ones.

Looking at the picture, I feel so disheartening and emotional for the loss that a lot of people have to suffer due to the Vietnam War. Generations and generations of people have sacrificed with their sweat and blood for the peace of the nation, they left to protect their own home, their own family and their own heritage that have raised them mature. Mother Thu’s husband and all of her 9 sons were killed during the Vietnam War under the hands of the cruel and inhumane intruders and traitors. Now mother Thu is living in the peaceful time, but the wound of loss and pain has become a scar that stays forever. The 9 bowls on the meal tray represents the 9 souls of her dear sons that passed away on the battle field – the 9 North Vietnamese soldiers who protected my land and nation today. This inspired me to **re-portray** Mother Thu – one of the most heroic women in the Vietnam War against the United States.



Skills, techniques and processes of “Mother Thu”

Starting with Mother Thu’s facial expression, I used the combination of **burnt sienna, human flesh** and a large amount of **raw sienna**. Usually with my style of portraying **facial expression** of the elderly, I often make use of **burnt sienna** and **umber brown** as the main hues to highlight the strong contrast. However in this painting, the **main source of light** has a yellowish shade which creates a sense of decaying and sadness, so this time I wanted to preserve this atmosphere with **raw sienna** to heighten the **emotional effect**. I also used a little of **white and ivory black** to meticulously depict Mother Thu’s **face wrinkles** as detailed as possible.



For Mother Thu’s clothes, I wanted to create a light and soft shade, so I mixed **viridian green** with a little bit of **raw sienna** to lighten the yellow effect on the garment. I **materialized** the **texture** by adding ivory black and white for the wrinkles of the clothes.

As the colors used for Mother Thu’s **complexion** and her clothes are already in bright and **vibrant hues**, I decided to highlight the **contrast** by applying **Mars Black** mixed with **Raw Umber** to depict her **kerchief**. This allows the shade to diverged from the light and bright colors used but is still clear enough for the audience eyes to identify the folds on the kerchief, bringing a better **sense of dimension**.



I also did not forget to add a very small but extremely crucial detail – a blue-background portrait partially covered in the shadow of Mother Thu. In Vietnamese tradition, people often put a blue-background portrait of the deceased on their altars. Every Vietnamese home has a small altar for their ancestors or the loved ones that pass away. On commemorating days, people will cook the deceased’s favorite food when they were still

alive and light up the incense to memorialize them annually. This blue-background photo is the portrait of one of her sons who sacrificed in the war protecting our country. Although he has passed away for a long time, a part of him still lives eternally in the wounded heart of Mother Thu, just like how a part of his portrait, though unclear but still endured behind her forever. To **accentuate** this significant detail, I purposefully **amplify the orange yellow wall color to be more contrast with a little ivory black hues**. This also helps create an **atmosphere of age and decaying** for the painting.

All of the photos are my works unless numbered

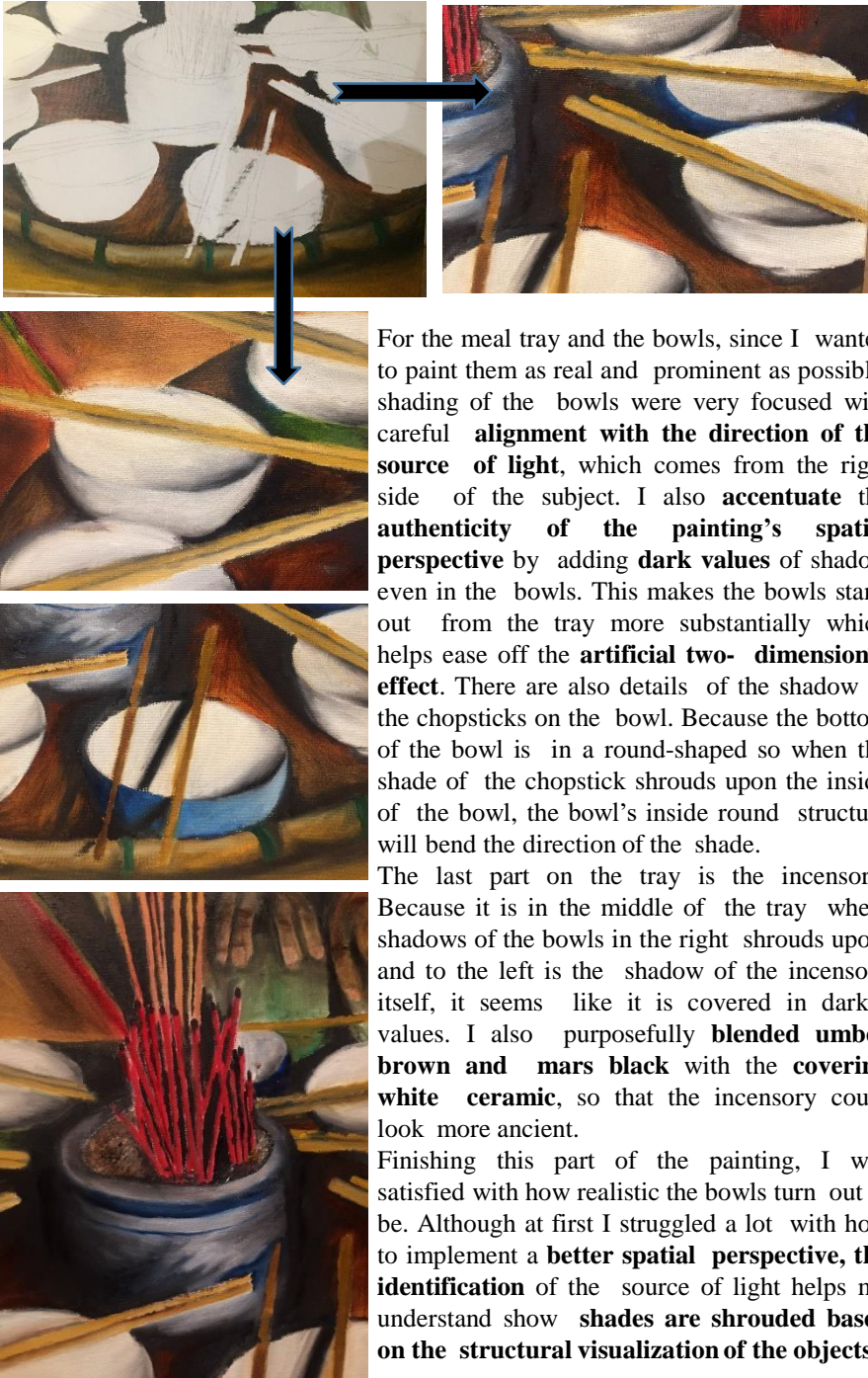
“Mother Thu” – Reviewing, Refining and Reflecting



Painting “Mother Thu” was a very emotional process for me. Right at the beginning stage where I found my inspiration and sketched the painting on the canvas, I felt like this piece of composition for me is a way of expressing my memorialization, my empathy and appreciation for such a incomprehensible loss and sacrifice of the former generations of my country. This loss is not just the physical, fatal loss of countless brave patriots but also the mental scar that is carved profoundly in the mindset of the alive. Mother Thu is just one of thousands and thousands similar situations in Vietnam, they are willing to undergo pain so that the country can stay independent, united and peaceful like today.

I wanted to bring out the effect of **agedness and emotional decay** as much as possible with a hue that **provokes the grief and sorrow of time**. Thus, I prioritized the use of **raw sienna combined with mars black**. **Facial expression** is also very focused on. I spent a very long time examining how dark and bright values would distribute on Mother Thu’s face, nose, eyes, cheeks and eyebrows given the light direction. I believe that Mother Thu’s facial expression is very powerful in conveying the **emotional connection** of the loss and pain of war to the audiences. Apart from Mother Thu’s facial expression, the shading and dark values of other objects are also illustrated very meticulously. Normally shadings would help create more realistic setting to make the painting more eye-catching. In my “Mother Thu” painting, I realized that a **sense of dimension** can do much more – shading and a **deep, spatial perspective creates a sense of loneliness** for Mother Thu, therefore making the **emotional engagement more striking** to the audience. Painting “Mother Thu” is a very special experience for me. As I was telling a story artistically, I tried to **facilitate the interpretation of Mother Thu’s feelings and sacrifice** into every little details of the painting such as the shading of her face, the bowls and the portrait frame of her son behind her back.

Although I am quite satisfied with the result of my efforts, I still think that one thing could still be improved. If I were to do this all over again, I would be more careful in painting the details on the incensory. Patterns on the incensory are also a very cultural trait of Vietnamese traditional arts and ceramics. I would try to incorporate my culture as much as possible.



For the meal tray and the bowls, since I wanted to paint them as real and prominent as possible, shading of the bowls were very focused with careful **alignment with the direction of the source of light**, which comes from the right side of the subject. I also **accentuate the authenticity of the painting’s spatial perspective** by adding **dark values** of shadow even in the bowls. This makes the bowls stand out from the tray more substantially which helps ease off the **artificial two-dimensional effect**. There are also details of the shadow of the chopsticks on the bowl. Because the bottom of the bowl is in a round-shaped so when the shade of the chopstick shrouds upon the inside of the bowl, the bowl’s inside round structure will bend the direction of the shade.

The last part on the tray is the incensory. Because it is in the middle of the tray where shadows of the bowls in the right shrouds upon, and to the left is the shadow of the incensory itself, it seems like it is covered in darker values. I also purposefully **blended umber brown and mars black** with the **covering white ceramic**, so that the incensory could look more ancient.

Finishing this part of the painting, I was satisfied with how realistic the bowls turn out to be. Although at first I struggled a lot with how to implement a **better spatial perspective, the identification** of the source of light helps me understand show **shades are shrouded based on the structural visualization of the objects**.

All of the photos are my works unless numbered

Books and Journals:

10.1) “Buddhism and Vietnamese society throughout history” by Nguyễn Thế Anh in “South East Asia Research” Vol.1 No.1 (Journal Article)

10.2) “Chinese Buddhism and Traditional Culture” by Litan Fang. (Book)

10.3 – 10.4) http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Vietnam/sub5_9a/entry-3333.html#chapter-12

10.5) https://www.jstor.org/stable/23746989?seq=7#meta_data_info_tab_contents

10.6 – 10.7) “Descending Dragon, Rising Tiger: A History of Vietnam” by Vu Hong Lien, Peter Sharrock (Book)

10.8 – 10.9) <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,870262,00.html>

Newspaper

2.1 – 2.6 – 2.7)

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/travel_news/article-2997094/The-secret-smiles-Vietnam-Photographer-captures-beauty-men-women-modestly-hiding-grins-hands.html

13.3 – 13.6)

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/feb/06/leon-golub-art-new-york-raw-nerve>

13.7) <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/07/22/arts/leon-golub-brawler-in-a-cosmic-melee.html>

17.1) <https://vietnamnet.vn/vn/thoi-su/giac-mo-trua-cua-nguoi-me-mat-9-con-va-noi-khac-khoai-cua-vien-dai-ta-472881.html>

Websites and blogs:

2.2 – 2.3 -2.4) <https://vietcetera.com/en/Réhahn-through-the-lense-with-the-french-photographer/>

2.4 – 2.5) <https://www.artworldfineart.com/portfolio-item/Réhahn-photography/#toggle-id-2>

13.1 – 13.2) <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Leon-Golub>

13.4) <http://www.artnet.com/artists/leon-golub/>

13.8 – 13.9) <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/golub-leon/>

12.10 – 12.11 <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/golub-leon/artworks/>

13.12) <https://www.magnumphotos.com/newsroom/conflict/vietnam-inc/>

8.1) <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/seurat-georges/>

8.2) <https://www.theartstory.org/movement/neo-impressionism/>

12.1) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/bodhi-Buddhism>

Pictures:

1) <https://adventure.com/rehahn-travel-photography/>

2) <https://www.rehahnphotographer.com/blog/an-phuoc-a-little-vietnamese-with-blue-eyes/>

3 – 4) <https://www.rehahnphotographer.com/portfolio/portraits-vietnam/>

5) <https://medium.com/@lomography/mapping-joy-an-interview-with-travel-photographer-r%C3%A9hahn-29dda766f58e>

6) <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/seurat-georges/#nav>

7) <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/474496510709635886/>

8) <https://www.justgola.com/a/one-pillar-pagoda-chua-mot-cot-311075>

9) <https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/the-burning-monk-1963/>

10) <http://www.vietnamartist.com/product/the-monk-01-vtb/>

11) <https://brooklynrail.org/2001/08/art/leon-golub-in-conversation-with-the-painter-chris-martin>

12) <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/04/arts/design/vietnam-war-american-art-review-smithsonian.html>

13) <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/04/arts/design/vietnam-war-american-art-review-smithsonian.html>

14) <https://36hn.wordpress.com/2016/07/25/loat-anh-gay-soc-ve-chien-tranh-viet-nam-cua-philip-jones-griffiths/>

15) <https://www.magnumphotos.com/newsroom/conflict/vietnam-inc>

16 + 17) <https://vietnamnet.vn/vn/thoi-su/giac-mo-trua-cua-nguoi-me-mat-9-con-va-noi-khac-khoai-cua-vien-dai-ta-472881.html>