



# PORTRAITS OF VIETNAM

by Indrani Mishra

**V**ietnam, known for its compelling history and wartime past, is also famous for its colourful terrains and beautiful landscapes. It's a place where, even in this modern age, one gets to see radiant rice fields with peasant women wearing conical hats whilst tending to their fields and children riding buffalos along country paths.

Offering glimpses of this beautiful country are the artworks of Vietnamese artist Lan Nguyen. Through her paintings, the artist has portrayed scenes from her homeland, its people and its customs — a young woman wearing the flowing “ao dai” (long dress); Buddhist worshippers at a village festival; a rainy landscape in black, grey and white.

The exhibition is currently on at the Red Gallery — the first gallery in Dubai and the Middle East to be dedicated to the promotion of fine, contemporary Vietnamese art. The Red Gallery, founded and managed by Huong Nguyen since January 2007, aims to showcase the best collection of paintings and sculptures by internationally acclaimed artists as well as to discover and promote young, up and coming artists from different parts of Vietnam.

Most of Nguyen's works are in acrylics and oils. Her paintings romanticize life and the people of Vietnam, depicting subjects in an ambience of innocence and dream. The most striking part of the collection is the bold use of vibrant colours that sweeps across the canvas, delighting the senses with their lyrical vitality. Her use of definitive lines adds a lithographic aspect to many of her works.

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Photos by Kamal Kassim

Defining her approach, she says: "I paint mostly about Vietnamese landscapes; people, and especially young ladies, in traditional outfits; the festivals; and the everyday life of people in Vietnam. In my work, I use mostly simple colours and subjects. I try to bring out the sounds, the feelings and the energy of the life in Vietnam."

"In many of my paintings, which are on display at the Red Gallery in Dubai, the themes are about Vietnamese festivals. The music of traditional Vietnamese folk opera, called 'Cheo' or 'Quan ho,' is also a big part of my artwork. I simply love it and want to

## “ VIETNAM'S ART SCENE HAS BLOOMED MORE THAN EVER OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES.

NOW, MORE PEOPLE KNOW VIETNAM NOT BECAUSE OF ITS WARS BUT BECAUSE OF ITS ARTS AND ARTISTS. TODAY, VIETNAMESE ARTISTS ARE MAKING A SPLASH ON THE INTERNATIONAL ART SCENE.”



Lan Nguyen

bring it in to my art."

Vietnamese contemporary art has a unique style that results from the twin influences of its Asian traditions and its colonization by Europeans. "It is a wonderful combination of the mystery of Eastern art and the familiarity of Western art," Nguyen explains.

Nguyen was born and brought up in Hanoi, Vietnam. She began painting when she was 12 and won a scholarship to the Fine Arts University of Hanoi, where she specialized in graphic arts. Nguyen has lived and exhibited her works in a number of places, including the US, London, Hong Kong and now, in Dubai.

"Travelling has given me a better perspective of my homeland. It has helped to make me who I am today — a Vietnamese artist. I've learnt to see more value in my heritage and to appreciate it as part of my life and my artwork," says the artist.

Among the major influences on Nguyen has been the Vietnam War during which she grew up. "I grew up during war-time and remember the sounds of explosions, air raid sirens and the noise of enemy aircraft. Alongwith my country, I have been