

FAR AWAY FOR LIFE

September 2003

I

On the surface of raw paper wetted with diluted Indian ink, a broad space is immersing into an opaque sheet of mist. A hard strong stroke of brush imbued with thick ink is drawn along the veins of rock, erecting a solid wall backed against by blocks of earth works, which block the white squares. Those who have experienced a hard time in the dark cell would feel the loneliness and desertedness of being jailed in busy crowded society. Far from the citadel, jailing and deserted, far beyond in contrast are dark misted cliffs looming in green patches. Supposedly some where on these hazy peaks some grey hair should be found, so as the by-gone years would be perceived on the distant far-off foot-prints:

*Loin de la capitale
réfugié dans la forêt, où vos cheveux ont blanchi .*

At the lower end of the wall, black spots of ink with smudging ring topped on each other converge into a high summit. The summit is tinted with a hint of yellow suggesting the pale reflex of sunray exhal ing about the pure perfume that inspires the memory of the elegant bearing of a noble, secluded personality, that of Zen Master Quang Tri of the Ly dynasty:

*Vous erriez sur ces hauts sommets embaumés,
agitant doucement vos larges manches .*

Since then over eight centuries have passed by, between different bearings of East and West, a personality that has been diffused in the mist of illusion, likely revealed in couples of lines of poetry, here is condensed and reappears on the smudges of black ink haft dark haft light into the Western style of thinking on the raw material of Vietnam. I feel like to impress in here my reconnaissance to her, to the sympathy and understanding she reveals from the remote corner of our life, the depth of our heart, Dominique de Miscalut.

Through the language of color, we find away into the shaping of universal values, secret emotion, sometimes and somewhat il lusive, in the shiver of life.

II

The country is situated in the tropical zone. At night, in the dim light of lamp, on the stonewall were sparkling drops of water, cool and bleak, forlorn in the world of exile. Nights after nights were languishingly linked to one another with a string of wild love. It was as wild as the respiration of pale green in the morning breathing onto the parched straw mat. On the similar raw material, a kind of rough paper, generations of our forefather had transcribed their lines of love poem, the love of nature, of human. On such rough surface, imbued with black ink thick enough to be absorbed deeply into the paper, permeating its soul, without smudging, each character shapes out a personality, a deportment.

That kind of paper, namely *gio* in Vietnamese, which shows its low standard of the rudimentary production, is thought to be fit to convey ideas, emotions, which, from a certain aspect, sound puzzling.

In a trip to Hanoi, I came upon her Exhibition at the School of Fine Arts. Something more familiar had to be sought so as to find way in. The least of all is a style acquainted in one's childhood. The soul of paper and ink has haunted me since then, and through vertical strokes and horizontal ones I was trying to get insight into the spirit of things and men as expressed in their appearance.

Among others of her paintings showed in the Exhibition, I choose one first to evoke in my mind the visionary world once hidden behind the mist of black-and-white duality and then expressed in colorful canvas of rationality. Although the whole painting appears to be covered in a veil of water, or submerged in a vast lake, the feeling of it is betraying the desiccated surface of a linear space. Oblique lines in blue may show a rain. Or it is supposed to be a lake in ripple. All the same, each interrupted blue line seems being absorbed in itself. Probably the color is lacking in smudging because the ink gets no absorption. If you draw some oblique lines on the *gio* paper with Chinese ink as you are used to, ink blots are not smudging though, but its permeance to paper gives rise to the feeling of cold water pervading the space. Sometimes, with the same kind of paper and ink, inkblots appear to be as bristly rough as straw or dried grass. That made me wonder pleasantly was that later as enjoying the painting by a photo I got a feeling of freshness from it. The photography is taken on glossy paper, somehow blue marks are reflecting on each other creating conspicuously a space covered on with a veil of water made of oblique strokes that carry along the sense of flowing. There is framed a window, which seems in the original put the viewer standing outside the parched veil looking into the inside. Through the window are seen three meandering streams, which symbolize water. However, in the photograph, the viewer may have the feeling of the reverse. Someone appears standing behind the window looking out at the veil of water or the surface of a rippled lake. At the right side of the window vaguely seen in the hazy veil is a sprout on growing as a bamboo. Life is shivering in its essence.

Now, looking at the picture on another ground, the viewer may get the impression of something like a hut or a thatched house, which is soaking in the rain, inspiring the image of a rural idyll in a picturesque village of Vietnam.

III

Life is shivering. Indeed, everything around us is shivering for the seed of life is on the burst of growth, or seeking way to bursting forth. Scattered fragments are tending to attach to one another; insulated intervals moving towards to each other. Sediments of wreckage, animal carcasses, appear not being exposed to the process of disintegration, but showing amazed, for it seems somewhere around every turf of grass is making effort to rise up for life. Life is shaking to the core. And “Shivering of life” is the name of her Exhibition at the School of Fine Arts of Hanoi in the last March. Under this name is a collection of series of paintings on various subjects that treat the meaning of life in different aspects: Sedimentation, Fragmentation, Limits, Ecartement... Other single paintings also focus on the artist’s way of thinking and emotion about life: Effroi, Mort où est ta victoire? Création de l’homme... These are the subjects much known in the Western philosophy and literature. By no means they are unknown to the East, modern as well as contemporary; especially to the generations of youth who were growing up in the 1960s, when the later wind of the French existentialism and the tendency of irrationalism were blowing into Saigon. The Impression whereby is a feeling of anxiety about life. It is as irrational as any war during the entire history of human kind. After forty years, the impression is left in me as a reminiscence associated with war. As enjoying her paintings, the melancholy of a time all of a sudden turns out vivid. Patches of blue like layers of iceberg stained with dull black spots are layered with wastes or rotting carcasses of fish, of animals. Deep red smudges are scattered about like splotches of blood. All give rise to the feeling of nausea; for they are thrown up on there to the existence irrationally.

It’s only, in fact, an impression on memory. In this consuming society of the present industrialized world, these subjects, which were once upon a time obsessing ones, do not presently cause any sense of nausea and irrationality, but submerging to the bottom of unconsciousness is a restless world put on alert by the polluted environment. Every layer of sedimentation is topped with one another in the course of being rotten, under bewildered, lifeless eyes.

Tué Sy