



VIETNAMESE NUDE PAINTINGS FROM PERSPECTIVE CULTURAL SYMBOLS

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Abstract:

In the process of modernity and contemporary, Vietnamese nude painting that once caused controversy over aesthetic norms, gender discourse and social norms has been repositioned not only as a means of visual expression but also as an ideological space, where the layers of meaning of the body, identity and culture are created. Through the survey of some typical works of Vietnamese painters from the twentieth century to the present, Vietnamese nude paintings both inherit the Asian tradition of discreetness and moral concepts, and absorb modern visual language to affirm a new view of the body. The image of the naked body became a symbol of many conflicts and reconciliations, between the preservation of fine customs and the desire for creative freedom, between the masculine discourse and the attempt to redefine the feminine, between the colonial past and the post-colonial cultural identity. The study also analyzes how nude painting reflects broad social transformations, openness in sexual discourse, globalization in the reception of art, and the shift of beauty from an ideal model to diversity and individualization. At the same time, cultural symbols in nude paintings also contribute to shedding light on how contemporary Vietnamese perceive the power, aesthetics and human value of the human body. Approaching from the perspective of cultural symbolism contributes to overcoming emotional prejudices, building objective scientific awareness, and orienting research, management and conservation. Thereby, Vietnamese nude paintings are positioned as an important component of contemporary art with national identity, integrating international art standards.

Keywords: modern, contemporary, Vietnamese nudes, cultural symbols, bodies

1. Introduction

In cultural studies, symbols are regarded as a distinctive form of language through which a community's collective values, beliefs, and lived experiences are encoded in metaphorical images, objects, and behaviors. Symbolological theory, in this sense,

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represents both a system of thought and an interpretive framework aimed at exploring the roles, functions, and meanings of symbols in socio-cultural life particularly within language, religion, ritual, literature, and art.

Within the realm of painting and especially the art of the nude symbolology serves as a crucial analytical tool for decoding visual imagery as a network of cultural symbols. Through this lens, the artwork reveals embedded worldviews, conceptions of humanity, and aesthetic ideals that reflect the cultural consciousness of its time (Dinh Hong Hai, 2022).

Cultural theory and the study of cultural symbols, cultural theory provides a system of approaches to culture as a network of representations, through which nudity is analyzed not only as a visual art but also as a cultural phenomenon associated with issues of morality, gender, identity and freedom in the process from tradition to modernity. At the same time, the study of cultural symbols focuses on deciphering images of the body, posture, light, space, and colors as symbols that reflect the concept of beauty, power to see, personal liberation and the contradiction between old and new norms. The combination of these two theories allows us to understand nude painting as both an aesthetic product and a mirror that reflects Vietnamese thought and social context (Peter Barry, translated by Hoang To Mai, 2023).

Aesthetic theory and art image analysis, aesthetic theory is a system of perspectives, approaches and research methods aimed at explaining the nature of beauty, aesthetic emotions and artistic value in life and artistic creation.

In nude painting, aesthetics asks questions such as: what is beauty in the human body? What does nudity mean beyond sight? How to tell the difference between art and pornography?

The theory of artistic image analysis is a system of perspectives and methods to identify, interpret and evaluate the central figure in a work of art. This is an approach that allows the researcher or the viewer to explore the aesthetic, ideological, symbolic and cultural depths hidden in the images, characters, details or artistic structures created by the artist in order to explore the depth of thought, logo and aesthetic value that the work brings (Hegel, Phan Ngoc translated, 2005).

Cultural Symbol Concept, symbols are a form of "symbolism" but more specifically, metaphorical and multi-meaning, often found in literature, art, and semiotics that go beyond conventional meaning to suggest many layers of meaning, depending on the context and interpretation. For example, the house symbolizes home, memory, and cultural roots. Physical beauty in contemporary art symbolizes freedom, gender, identity. The symbol has a broad and deep meaning, often used in academic analysis. Cultural symbols are images, signals or artistic elements that are chosen and recognized by the community, carrying layers of meaning beyond the visual aspect, becoming a means of transmitting cultural values and consciousness. According to the book *Dictionary of World Cultural Symbols* (2002) by Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, the content emphasizing that imagination and symbols are powerful spiritual forces, accompanying reason to implement the journey of cultural discovery, helping readers discover the depth of culture (Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, 2002).

In Vietnamese nudes, cultural symbols are not only expressed in body images but also in postures, gazes, compositions, colors and styles, thereby reflecting concepts of beauty, body, gender, morality and national identity. As a result, nude painting becomes a culturally rich symbolic system, expressing movements in aesthetic and social thinking through the periods (Susan Woodford, Pham Minh Military Service 2023).

The concept of nude paintings, nudity is a fine art genre in which the image of the human body in a state of nakedness becomes the central object in the composition, with the purpose not only to reproduce the beauty of the body but also to express aesthetic values, expressions, etc. philosophy, human life, and culture through body image.

Nudity in art history is a long-standing genre in world art, appearing from the Renaissance (fifteenth - sixteenth centuries). Nude paintings and statues exploded, associated with humanistic thought, and upheld people. Masters such as Leonardo da Vinci (study of body anatomy), Michelangelo (painting of David, ceiling of the Sistine Chapel), Titian, Raphael has brought nude art to the top, considered a place to express humanistic thoughts, ideal beauty and honor the human body (Walter Isaacson, translated by Nguyen Thi Phuong Lan, edited by Phan Dieu Huong, 2018).

In the twentieth century, nude painting became a space of multi-meaning expression, where the body is not only a symbol of beauty but also realistic, protest, social, gender and political cultural as in the paintings of Egon Schiele, Lucian Freud or Frida Kahlo (Roberta Procacci, Philip Osbourne, translated by Doan Huong Giang, 2023). Nudity in Vietnamese art, Vietnamese nude painting began to take shape during the Indochina College of Fine Arts (1925–1945), in the process of absorbing Western academic art. Initially, nude painting mainly served the purpose of studying graphics and anatomy, then gradually developed into an independent genre with many expressions and cultural symbols.

In Vietnam, nudity is mainly associated with the image of women, not only to celebrate the beauty of the body, but also to contain profound notions of femininity, morality, the limits of bodily liberation, as well as a metaphor for personal freedom. the process of modernization and national cultural identity. However, due to the influence of traditional values and social moral concepts, Vietnamese nude paintings for a long time have faced many barriers in composing, displaying and receiving. Only from the Doi Moi period until now, this genre has gradually been approached from a more open and multi-dimensional perspective, as an art form that reflects aesthetic, social and cultural thinking that is moving in a more open and multi-dimensional way.

Visual and body culture, visual culture is the field of studying how images construct and convey aesthetic values, power, identity, and gender in social life. In it, the body is not only a biological object but a cultural symbol, a place to reflect the discourses of morality, gender and social relations. In art, especially nude paintings, the body becomes the center of expression, contributing to clarifying the transformation of aesthetic thinking and cultural discourse over time. According to Nicholas Mirzoeff, one of the discipline's foundational scholars, visual culture is: "*a way of understanding the world that works through the senses, especially the eyes, and is encoded through images and representations.*" (Nicholas Mirzoeff, 1999).

Visual culture not only encompasses what people see, but also questions why images are created, who sees, and what powers regulate seeing and being seen, in relation to visual powers, associated with concepts such as: seeing, surveillance, institutionalizing images, and ideologies.

The body in visual culture, in visual culture, the human body is both a visual object and a tool for expressing and creating cultural meaning. The body is never purely natural; it is a social and symbolic product, shaped by gender, politics, morality, aesthetics, and specific social norms.

Bates Lowry's book begins with the critical basis of how we appreciate art, how we see, feel, and respond to art. The author presents art not just as an image, but as a visual experience that combines both emotion and deep perception. Theo Lowry invites the audience to explore art not only through the eyes but also through sensation, psychology, and perception. The chapters lead the reader to look at colors, shapes, lighting, space, and how composition can impact the mind and emotions (Bates Lowry, Nguyen Mai Linh, translated by Nguyen Mi, 2024).

Bodies in nude paintings with a visual culture perspective, from the perspective of the study of visual culture, the body in nude painting is not merely an aesthetically sensual image, but also a representational field that reflects complex discourses about gender, morality, power, identity, and personal freedom.

Richard Leppert's book *The Nude: The Cultural Rhetoric of the Body in the Art of Western Modernity* (2007) provides a comprehensive analysis of how the human body was portrayed in Western art from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries. at the same time, it points out the intersection of cultural, social and political factors. The body is generalized as a cultural symbol, a place of convergence and compromise between traditional and modern values, individual and community, indigenous and exogenous (Richard Leppert, 2007).

Symbolic theory also referred to as symbol theory or cultural criticism forms a theoretical foundation for examining the roles, functions, and meanings of symbols within socio cultural life. A symbol is not merely a representative image; it is a semiotic unit shaped by layers of meaning drawn from symbolism, sociology, and collective consciousness. As such, symbols reflect the worldview, human outlook, and value systems of the communities that produce and interpret them.

In art, symbolic theory offers a critical framework for decoding visual imagery as a cultural construct that embodies collective thought, identity, and memory. Within the context of Vietnamese nude painting, this approach reveals how the human body becomes a symbolic site where notions of beauty, morality, and freedom intertwine—expressing both the continuity of cultural traditions and the tensions of modernization. Through this lens, the nude is not simply a representation of form, but a symbolic medium through which Vietnamese artists negotiate aesthetics, identity, and social values in the dialogue between tradition and modernity (Juan Eduardo Laporta, translator Hoai Anh, 2023).

Symbols transform according to the context of social history, cultural symbols do not have an immutable meaning but are always moving and transforming according to

the context of social history. In the flow of modern and contemporary Vietnamese art, nude painting has become a genre that is particularly sensitive to moral values, aesthetics and cultural power. The image of the body, especially the female body, has changed over time, reflecting the shift in artistic thinking, the concept of gender, body, beauty and national identity.

In the early twentieth century, under the influence of Western art and enlightenment, the female body in nude paintings was idealized as a symbol of beauty, modernization and ego. After 1954, in the context of wars and revolutions, body symbols were narrowed, avoided or referenced according to political moral standards, which greatly affected the compositions of Vietnamese scholars (Pham Hoang Viet, Nguyen Hung Cuong, 2022).

Since Doi Moi, the 'liberated' body has become a multi-meaning symbol for the expression of personal freedom, feminism, negotiation between tradition, modernity, identity, and integration. The symbolological approach helps to decipher the layers of meaning from the form to the context, thereby pointing out the transformation from Western influence to becoming a means of affirming freedom of expression and Vietnamese identity.

Cultural criticism is an interdisciplinary approach that analyzes cultural products in relation to power, identity, gender, social class, and history. Instead of just stopping at aesthetic evaluation, cultural criticism focuses on deciphering the social discourses behind the art form, thereby positioning the work in the flow of historical thought. Combined with symbolic theory, the method aims to expand the depth of analysis, allowing one to see the work of art as a representational space where socio-cultural values are expressed and exchanged (Walter Pater, translator Nguyen Huu Yen Le, 2025).

Applying it to Vietnamese nude paintings, cultural criticism considers this as a point of intersection between art, morality and society; thereby deciphering the complex relationship between the body and the value system, showing that the body can be both a symbol of beauty and a source of controversy in specific historical and cultural contexts. Visual semiotics focuses on visual symbols such as paintings, photographs, logos, advertisements, films, fine arts, and graphic design. Visual semiotics in the study of Vietnamese nudes is a method of analyzing works of art based on the decoding of visual elements as a system of symbols, in which every image detail, from the body, posture, color, light, to space and material, is considered an expression with layers of cultural meaning. society and history.

For example, Le Pho's nude paintings are analysed through visual semiotics analysis with elements of expression of naked women, lying or sitting postures, soft lines, and gentle backgrounds. The element expressed is not only the body, but the idealized image of the Asian woman, discreet, shy, associated with grace and pure spirit. Thus, from the perspective of visual semiotics, the nudity in Le Pho's paintings is not only a body, but a symbol of the blending of East and West, reflecting the process of shaping the uniqueness of Vietnamese art in the early twentieth century (Figure 1).

Figure 1



"Nude",

Le Pho, 90.5 x 180.5 cm, 1931

Source: <https://tuoitre.vn/tranh-khoa-than-cua-le-pho-duoc-mua-gia-ky-luc-1-4-trieu-usd-20190526135447314.htm>

Umberto Eco (1932–2016) was an Italian semiotologue, philosopher, and novelist, who, according to him, interpreted culture as a network of signs; not only language but also customs, beliefs, art, and mass media can be read as text. Eco paves the way for the analysis of modern phenomena (art, advertising, comics, fashion, movies) using semiotics (Umberto Eco, 2005).

Theory of the body and gender, analysis of the body and gender shows that Vietnamese nude painting is a multi-layered symbol system, where the body becomes a negotiating space for gender power, personal freedom, moral standards, modernization and identity in East-West exchanges.

According to Tran Lam Bien in the book *The World of Symbols in Cultural Heritage* (2017), the author analyzes the system of Vietnamese cultural symbols through beliefs, architecture, and fine arts, although not directly about gender, but for the foundation of decoding the body and the image of women in Vietnamese nudes as cultural symbols (Tran Lam Bien, Trinh Sinh, 2017).

The sign of artistic freedom contradicts the Confucian taboo, affirming the artist's right to express beauty. The power of women's views is often the object of viewing, and many Vietnamese works question and redefine that power relationship, affirming their own dignity and beauty.

Modernized symbolism adopted Western techniques but Vietnamized the visual language to maintain identity.

2. Literature overview of the research situation

Within the history of Vietnamese art studies, nude painting occupies a distinctive yet sensitive position. It is a subject deeply intertwined with the process of artistic modernization and serves as a mirror reflecting transformations in the nation's aesthetic consciousness and cultural thought. Despite its historical and symbolic significance, research on nude painting remains limited when compared to other genres such as landscape, still life, or thematic painting.

Existing studies have primarily focused on formal, stylistic, or moral aspects, while systematic analyses from the perspective of cultural symbols are still scarce. This gap highlights the need for a comprehensive theoretical approach one that situates Vietnamese nude painting within broader discourses of cultural representation, identity formation, and the negotiation between tradition and modernity.

2.1 International research works

The study of nudity as a cultural symbol has been widely developed in international works, which, although often focusing on Western art, provide a theoretical and methodological basis for analyzing Vietnamese nudes as a socio-cultural symbol system. The following iconic works help to illuminate how nudity not only represents the body, but also has symbolic meanings of power, gender, moral norms, and cultural identity. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1972), explains how images and cultural objects are encoded into myths, naturalized social narratives. Applied to nudes, Barthes's semiotic method helps to decipher the naked body as a symbol of freedom, modernization, or traditional moral resistance in colonial and post-colonial contexts (Roland Barthes, translated by Phung Van Tuu, 2008).

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (1972), Berger critiques the tradition of Western painting, where naked women are transformed into objects of viewing in the service of the male gaze. His analysis lays the groundwork for the viewing of nudity as a symbol of gender power, helping to examine the relationship between the painter, the viewer and the person depicted in Vietnamese nude painting (John Berger, 2017).

Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies* (2001, 2016), Rose systematizes the methods of image analysis, especially visual semiotics, which provide tools for identifying and decoding the visual layers and cultural connotations of images as symbols of power, gender, freedom, and national identity (Gillian Rose, 2016).

The above international works provide a theoretical basis and analytical method to understand Vietnamese nude painting not only as a representation of body aesthetics but as a system of cultural symbols. Thereby, nude paintings have become a space for debate about gender power, personal freedom, moral standards, art modernization and national identity in the process of cultural exchange between East and West.

2.2 Domestic research works

The study of cultural symbolism through nude paintings in Vietnam has not yet formed a separate discipline, but there have been many works in the country that provide an important theoretical basis, art history and culturological approach. These works help to illuminate Vietnamese nudes not only as works of art but as a system of symbols that reflect modernization, East-West exchanges and negotiations on morality, gender and national identity

Nguyen Quan's book *Vietnamese Fine Arts in the 20th Century* (2010), is one of the pioneering works in systematizing the process of modernizing Vietnamese art. He analyzed the process of introducing Western academic fine arts, especially the Indochina

School of Fine Arts, as a historical turning point in changing the concept of Vietnamese art (Nguyen Quan, 2010).

In the book *Modern Vietnamese Fine Art* (2005) by Nguyen Luong Tieu Bach, the author has focused on writing a history of the development of Vietnamese art in the 20th century, providing an overview and detail of the periods, schools and painters. He particularly emphasized the important role of the Indochina School of Fine Arts in establishing an academic training system, in which nude painting was considered a compulsory subject, and at the same time, transforming the nude into a modern technical and artistic standard. According to him, nude paintings are a testament to the transformation from folk art and religious illustration to personalized academic art, marking the emergence of creative freedom and the ability to "keep up" with world art. He sees the nude as a symbol of modernization, showing a change in artistic concepts and aesthetic ethics in Vietnamese society (Nguyen Luong Tieu Bach, editor, with Bui Nhu Huong, Pham Trung, Nguyen Van Chien, 2005).

Tran Quoc Vuong with the book *Vietnamese Culture: Exploring and Reflecting* (2000), the work does not directly discuss fine art, but plays a fundamental role in methodology. The author considers culture as a symbolic system; each custom, behavior, and art product contains many layers of meaning that go beyond the pragmatic function.

He analyzes culture as value systems, symbols, practices, showing that art is a place where society understands itself and redefines itself. This perspective is useful for the study of nudity as cultural texts, where a negotiation takes place between modern traditions, East and West, morality, or personal freedom (Tran Quoc Vuong, 2000).

The book *Indochinese Fine Arts - The Formation and Development* of Nguyen Quoc Dinh carried out an in-depth research work on the Indochinese School of Fine Arts, considering this as both a colonial project and the beginning of the process of modernizing Vietnamese art. The author analyzes in detail the inclusion of nude human models in the curriculum, thereby fundamentally changing the concept of traditional art and opening up a new approach to Vietnamese art. The content shows that nudity is not only an artistic subject but also a distinguishing sign between modern art and folk art. This became a symbol of the process of "civilization", and at the same time associated with colonial conflicts, thereby providing a theoretical basis for approaching nude painting as a symbol of modernization, cultural adaptation and colonial heritage (Nguyen Quoc Dinh, 2024).

Coming to the book *Contemporary Vietnamese Woman Visual Artists* (2022, bilingual Vietnamese–English) is compiled to honor and introduce the contributions of Vietnamese female visual artists in the context of modern and contemporary art. This is one of the first publications to systematize the portrait of female artists. Previously, it was rarely mentioned in art history works because they mainly focused on male painters.

The image of the woman expressed in the works of the female artist is associated with the identity, life and symbol of femininity in Vietnamese society. Although it does not focus entirely on nude paintings, it has deeply examined the way women are painted and seen in fine art, thereby analyzing the gender power relationship in Vietnamese art. The content emphasizes the importance of reading female nudes as a symbol of the power

to see and objectify women, but also as a space to reaffirm personal freedom and feminism (Vietnam Fine Arts Association, 2023).

Domestic studies have provided a platform to approach the Vietnamese nude as a system of cultural symbolism. Nudity is therefore not only a representation of the body, but also a social text that reflects the process of art modernization according to the Western academic model, the exchange of East and West, the harmony with traditional norms, gender power structures, as well as the effort to affirm national identity in the context of globalization.

2.3 Research gaps in specialized access

Although there have been many studies on art history, art modernization and graphic training in Vietnam, most of them still only stop at the level of technical history or a general cultural approach, not considering nude painting as a specialized cultural symbol system. Current studies lack the decoding of visual semiotics to analyze the body, posture, light, composition, and color, thereby clarifying layers of meaning such as individual freedom, modernization, East-West exchange, resistance to traditional morality, and gender power. Furthermore, there is a lack of works that systematize how nude works operate as a social text, negotiating aesthetic, moral, and identity values in colonial and post-colonial contexts. Therefore, a specialized approach based on visual semiotics and theories of the body and gender is needed to examine nudity not only as a work of art but also as a symbolism that reflects contradictions and continuations in historical society.

2.3.1 Gaps in the direction of the cultural studies approach

Most of the domestic research on nude paintings is still inclined towards history, technique, and aesthetic criticism, while the cultural perspective is lacking. There are not many works that treat nude painting as a cultural product to explain social relations, moral values and the process of shaping identity in specific contexts, nor is there a lack of systematic research on how the genre becomes a cultural symbol that reflects the exchange of East and West. dialogue with traditional morality, gender power and perspective relations, and the aspiration for freedom and modernization. Therefore, it is necessary to take a culturological approach, considering nude paintings as "socio-cultural documents" not only for viewing, but as a means of transmitting and negotiating historical and socio-cultural values.

2.3.2 Gaps in the analysis of socio-historical processes

In the study of Vietnamese art, although there have been studies on history, painting techniques, aesthetic criticism or the image of women, there is still a gap in systematic analysis of nude painting as a cultural symbol associated with the socio-historical context. The lack of works that adequately explain how nude painting becomes a cultural symbol, reflecting the intersection of East and West, the process of artistic modernization, and the conflicts and dialogues with traditional morality.

Issues of gender power, viewing relations and the desire for personal freedom have only been discussed sporadically, not yet a consistent field of study. This raises an urgent need for an interdisciplinary approach, combining fine arts, cultural studies and semiotics, in order to shed light on the role of nudity in the formation and transformation of cultural symbols in modern and contemporary Vietnam.

2.3.3 Gaps in interdisciplinary research and contemporary approaches

In Vietnamese studies, the study of nude paintings lacks a deep and comprehensive interdisciplinary approach, and fine arts works are less connected to cultural studies, sociology, gender studies, art anthropology and postcolonial criticism. As a result, there is a gap in the interpretation of this genre as a complex socio-cultural phenomenon, reflecting the negotiation between modern, Western, and indigenous traditions, and layers of meanings on moral norms, gender power, transitional exchanges, and identity construction. Therefore, there is a need for contemporary, interdisciplinary approaches, considering nude painting not only as a legacy of the past but as a vivid artistic practice that is contributing to shaping and dialogue about values, norms and identity in Vietnamese society today.

2.4 Approach orientation of the topic

The topic takes an interdisciplinary approach to fine arts, cultural studies, semiotics, cultural criticism, and viewing nude paintings not only as visual art but also as a cultural symbol present in the process of modern and contemporary Vietnamese social history. Cultural studies and cultural criticism see nudity as artistic discourse where issues of power, gender, morality, aesthetic norms and national identity are expressed.

Semiotics and the study of symbols, decoding the shaping elements (body, posture, light, color, composition, etc.) as multi-tiered symbols, thereby reflecting the concept of beauty, body, personal freedom and social changes from time to time.

The historical context of East-West exchanges, clarifying the process of absorption, transformation, localization and dialogue between modern traditions, the identity of Vietnamese art and Vietnamese culture (Tran Hau Yen The, 2021).

2.5 Approach to cultural studies

The cultural studies approach views art not merely as an aesthetic creation but as a *cultural phenomenon* deeply embedded in social life. From this perspective, an artwork is understood as a *symbolic system* in which images, visual language, symbols, and creative behaviors reflect and reproduce the community's values, norms, ideologies, and power structures (Nguyen Van Dan, 2020). Art, therefore, becomes both a product and a medium of cultural communication expressing and shaping the collective consciousness of its time.

Applied to Vietnamese nude painting, the culturological approach enables an analysis that goes beyond formal, technical, or stylistic dimensions. It allows for the exploration of how notions of gender, morality, beauty, identity, and social transformation converge and evolve across different historical contexts. Through this

lens, nude painting emerges as a dynamic space of dialogue between tradition and modernity, between foreign influences and processes of localization revealing both tensions and harmonies within the broader trajectory of integration and modernization in Vietnamese art.

2.5.1 Visual semiotics approach

In the context of Vietnam, where traditional Asian culture intersects with Western influences, nudity has become a special visual symbol, encoding profound cultural symbols. By means of pictographic semiotics, it is possible to decipher how the human body, especially the female body, is represented in paintings as a symbolic system, reflecting the values of matriarchy, nature, identity, freedom, sexuality, and moral norms.

Visual semiotics studies how images create meaning through the symbolism of visual elements (e.g., body, posture, light). Expression in the form of visual perception or evoked cultural, emotional, or ideological significance ([Roland Barthes](#), translated by Nguyen Quoc Thang, edited by Hoang Dung, *Semiotics Basics*, 2020).

The painting is not just a work of art, but a visual symbol system that is conveying the typical cultural values of the Vietnamese people, especially through the image of the nude body.

2.5.2 Approach to cultural criticism and discourse theory

This study employs **cultural criticism** in combination with **discourse theory** to analyze Vietnamese nude painting not merely as an artistic product but as a form of expression shaped by power, social norms, and cultural discourse. Cultural criticism provides a framework for situating the nude within its socio-historical context, revealing the intersection of diverse value systems traditional and modern, individual and communal, artistic and moral. Through this lens, the nude body becomes a cultural symbol that embodies negotiations between ideals of beauty and the constraints imposed by society. Discourse theory, as articulated by Michel Foucault and introduced by Sara Mills (Discourse, translated by Nguyen Bao Trung, 2021), deepens this analysis by redefining discourse not merely as language or text, but as a system of knowledge that governs how people think, speak, and perceive reality. Foucault emphasized that the body is never purely biological; rather, it is constantly shaped, regulated, and interpreted through various discourses such as medicine, religion, art, and ethics. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault argued that modern societies did not “liberate” sexuality but, paradoxically, multiplied discourses around it as mechanisms of control through medical, legal, and artistic systems.

Within this framework, the representation of the nude in fine art can be understood as both a legitimation and regulation of sexuality through the language of art simultaneously permitting the act of seeing and constraining the ways of seeing. Hence, the Vietnamese nude becomes a visual site where power, knowledge, and aesthetics converge, reflecting broader cultural negotiations surrounding the body, morality, and freedom (Sara Mills, trans. Nguyen Bao Trung, 2021).

2.5.3 Approach according to the historical process of phased

A historical and staging approach allows the theme to place Vietnamese nudes in the changing currents of society, culture and fine art. Through the division into typical periods, it is possible to clearly identify the changes in cultural symbols associated with the image of the human body.

Pre-1945 period: Nudity mainly appeared in the Indochinese art training environment, influenced by Western aesthetics, academic and limited to the school.

Period 1945–1986: Nudity is almost absent from public spaces due to the influence of war and revolutionary moral thinking. The body becomes a "forbidden zone" in mainstream art.

Post-Đổi Mới period (1986–present): following the Đổi Mới reforms of 1986, Vietnamese art entered a new phase characterized by openness, experimentation, and a gradual reconnection with individual expression. During this period, nude painting re-emerged after decades of absence, signaling a profound transformation in social thought and artistic freedom. The genre became a medium through which artists explored personal identity, aesthetic innovation, and the redefinition of moral boundaries, thereby asserting their independent positions within the evolving art landscape.

In *Art of Vietnam*, Catherine Noppe and Jean-François Hubert (2018) emphasize that Vietnamese art should be understood not only through its forms and styles but through the historical, cultural, and symbolic contexts in which it was produced. Their analysis underscores the deep connections between art, religion, and politics, presenting Vietnamese painting as an ongoing dialogue between continuity and change. Within this framework, cultural symbols in post-Đổi Mới nude art become increasingly diverse embodying femininity, personal freedom, social critique, and the tensions between tradition and modernity.

A pervasive understanding emerging from this period is that Vietnamese art is not static but a dynamic process of inheritance and transformation, continuously interacting with external cultural influences. The visual staging of the nude thus not only traces the evolution of an artistic genre but also reflects shifts in cultural perceptions of the body and the symbolic layers tied to specific historical and social contexts. Nude painting in this sense becomes both a mirror and a medium revealing Vietnam's changing relationship with modernity, identity, and artistic autonomy.

3. The formation and development of nude paintings in Vietnamese fine arts

The emergence and development of nude paintings in Vietnamese art is therefore not only a pure artistic process, but also reflects the transformation of aesthetic thinking, cultural awareness and creative freedom of generations of Vietnamese painters

3.1 Indochinese art period (1925 - 1945), the formation and development of Vietnamese nude paintings

The establishment of the Indochina College of Fine Arts in 1925 marked a turning point in the history of modern Vietnamese art, especially the introduction and formation of the

genre of nude painting according to the Western academic model. Nudity, which is alien to traditional Vietnamese art that leans towards symbolism and convention, has been included in the formal curriculum for the first time, through drawing and drawing living models.

The introduction of Western aesthetics and the human body. Under the guidance of French lecturers such as Victor Tardieu, Joseph Inguimberty, along with the first well-trained Vietnamese painters such as To Ngoc Van, Le Pho, Nguyen Phan Chanh, nude painting was introduced as an inevitable part of modern plastic thinking. Through painting, the human body is studied very scientifically, especially women are seen as an aesthetic object and a measure of the artist's painting skills (Paris - Hanoi – Saigon, 1998). In Indochina, the nudity of this period was mainly associated with studies of proportion, light, shape, and classical sense. However, Vietnamese painters do not copy Western archetypes, but have localized the shape, transforming the face-to-face and sensual look of the West into a discreet, gentle, and soft look that is more suitable for Asian aesthetic psychology.

The artists initially shaped the female body logo. Among her contemporaries, Mai Trung Thu was a prominent contributor to shaping the image of naked women in Vietnamese art. Some of his works, such as *"The Nude"*, were inspired by the masterpiece of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780–1857), painted in 1814 and are now housed in the Louvre Museum in Paris. Mai Trung Thu has cleverly transformed and integrated Eastern cultural symbols, and at the same time transformed the material from strong and brilliant Western oil paint to soft and flexible Asian silk. As a result, he created a version with bold Eastern nuances, both close and creative (Figure 2).

Figure 2



La Grande Odalisque",

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, 1814,



"Nu",

Mai Trung Thu, 1970

Source: <https://goutrends.com/buc-tranh-nu-cua-hoa-si-mai-trung-thu>

In terms of symbolism, many details in the painting are "Vietnamized", from the fan, head scarf, jewelry, to items such as curtains, beds, incense burners, bamboo tables, all of which evoke a space imbued with Vietnamese cultural characteristics.

Unlike the Western academic approach to sexuality or body realization, Mai Trung Thu depicts the female body with soft lighting, soft flowing lines, and compositions in harmony with the space. Physical beauty is not only the object of painting, but also

becomes a symbol of pure beauty, of a quiet and calm Asian woman. Institutional space and limits of expression.

Although nude paintings have been included in the training program and art practice, there are still certain limits in expression and publicity at this stage. Nude modeling mainly takes place in the closed space of the art school, which is rarely exhibited publicly, due to the influence of prevalent feudal morality and the colonial social context.

3.2 Cultural symbols of the period

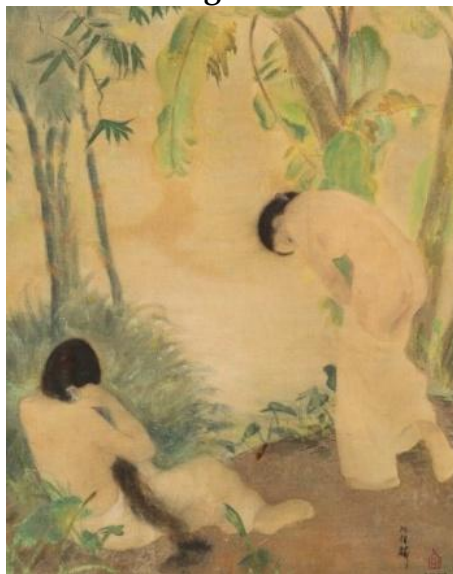
The formation and development of Vietnamese nude paintings clearly reflects the movement of aesthetic thinking and cultural awareness through historical periods. In each period, cultural symbols appear with different content, meaning and forms of expression showing the relationship between art, society and people in each specific historical - political context.

Traditional feminine symbol: The female body is expressed with gentle beauty, evoking purity and tenderness close to the image of "maternity" in Asian culture

Modernization symbol: The painting of the human body is a sign of the spirit of Western progress and a sense of individualization in art.

Cross-cultural symbolism: The body in the painting becomes a reference image for the blending of Western aesthetic ideals and Eastern aesthetic ethical sense (Figure 3)

Figure 3



"Les baigneuses" (Bath)

made by the famous painter Nguyen Tuong Lan around 1935

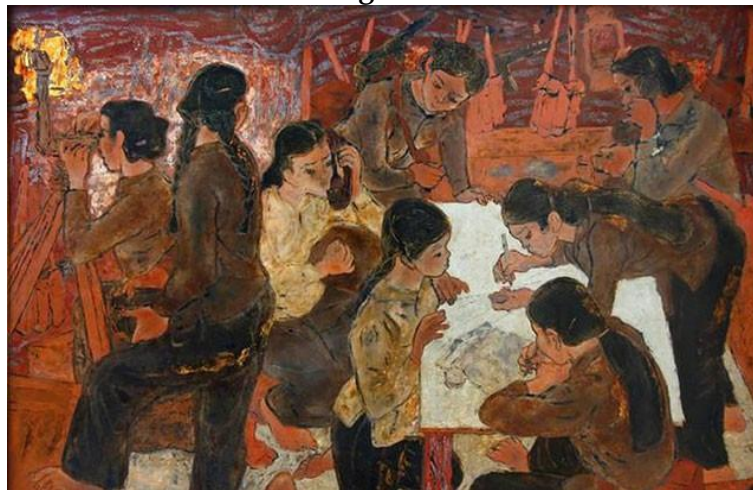
Source: <https://vnexpress.net/dau-gia-loat-tranh-cua-danh-hoa-dong-duong-4803820.html>

3.3 The period of the resistance revolution (1945 - 1975), the period of interruption and limitation in the development of Vietnamese nude paintings

After the August Revolution of 1945, Vietnamese fine arts entered a completely new stage, closely associated with political goals, patriotism and the struggle for national

independence. In this context, the nudity, which is personal, sensory and gender-sensitive, has almost disappeared from the public space, giving way to themes of revolutionary realism and collective ideals. Instead, art in this period focused on the theme of revolutionary realism, reflecting the spirit of struggle and community ideals (Le Tri Dung, 2018). The image of the body, especially the female body, is desexualized and idealized into a symbol of the mother, wife, and woman who is three dams that are: Dam is producing, Dam is family, Dam is fighting, associated with the spirit of sacrifice, labor, and service (Figure 4).

Figure 4



"Female Artillery" [Hoang Tram](#), 1975. Lacquer. 90x120cm

Source: <https://lehouseart.com/tin-tuc/hoa-si-hoang-tram-nguoi-thay-mau-muc-72.html>

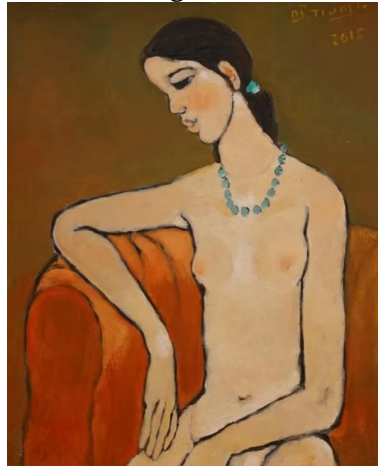
Topics related to the human body are minimized in exhibitions, publications, and public spaces. However, in private space, some painters such as Nguyen Sang, Duong Bich Lien, Nguyen Sy Ngoc... still quietly draw shapes as an effort to maintain artistic inspiration, although not widely published. These works often have inner depth, evoking melancholy, solitude, and expressing a personal view in the heart of the collective era. Although absent from the surface, the nude of this period still exists as a disrupted cultural symbol where the human body is under the pressure of social discourse, but also as a place where personal memory, identity and beauty are kept in obscurity. That silence has become an important material for researching the power of discourse, gender norms and limits of expression in the history of Vietnamese art.

3.4 Renovation period (1986 - 2000), a period of artistic experimentation and expansion of aesthetic limits

After Doi Moi 1986, nude painting gradually reappeared in Vietnamese art life, marking the transformation from revolutionary realist art to personal art, free expression. The artist began to experiment with new visual languages, bringing the body, especially the female body, back to the center of the painting as a symbol of beauty, being, and humanity.

Typical authors such as Do Quang Em, Nguyen Trung, Nguyen Thanh Binh, Le Thiet Cuong have exploited the body in many directions: realism, minimalism, feminist symbolism, creating diversity in aesthetic discourse. Reaffirming the beauty of the body, expanding the limits of aesthetic ethics, laying the foundations for contemporary discourses about gender, creative freedom, and visual power (Figure 5).

Figure 5



"The lady nude", Nguyen Trung, 2015, size 80 x 65 cm

Source: <https://www.lualavietnam.com/nguyentrung>

3.5 The contemporary period (2000 - 2025), the period of development with the diversification of forms of composition and artistic approaches

Since 2000, Vietnamese nude painting has entered a period of stronger development in both the number of works and the depth of thought, thanks to a more open social context and a deep integration with international contemporary art.

Diverse in form and material, nude painting is no longer limited to oil painting or drawing, but extends to silk painting, lacquer, photography, video art, installation, and performance. Some of the works combine real bodies and exhibition spaces, breaking the boundaries between traditional visual art and performance art (Bui Nhu Huong – Pham Trung, 2012).

For example: "Exhibitions such as *Body Artifacts*, *Body Space* or personal projects of Nguyen Minh Phuoc, Ngo Thanh Hoa, Tran Luong have expanded the range of expression of the form in contemporary art. Since then, nude paintings have been approached as a discourse about gender and identity, as well as a material that questions moral standards, tastes and the right to censorship. In particular, female authors such as Nguyen Thi Chau Giang, Nguyen Thu Thuy, have redefined the female body image through a feminist lens, as a container of memory, hurt and resistance (Figure 6).

Figure 6



The exhibition for the first time announced "*Eternal Beauty*" - the largest silk painting by painter Nguyen Thi Chau Giang with a size of up to 2m, a tough challenge for the painter and the silk weaver.

Source: <https://tuoitre.vn/lan-dau-cong-bo-buc-tranh-nude-cuc-lon-cua-hoa-si-nguyen-thi-chau-giang-2023122409555441.htm>

Social Response and Public Debate Despite the many nude exhibitions that have been held, nude painting remains a sensitive topic, often facing debate over the boundaries between art and pornography, or being banned from exhibition at the last minute.

Events such as the rejected exhibition of painter Nguyen Kim Dinh (2009), followed by the late architect Tran Tien Dat (2012), articles defending artistic freedom show that nude painting is still a hot spot of cultural and political discourse (Figure 7).

Figure 7



One of the paintings of the late architect Tran Tien Dat was refused permission in the exhibition Vietnamese Villages and Plates - Photo: Q.T. (retaken)

Source: <https://tuoitre.vn/cam-tranh-khoa-than-la-khong-thuyet-phuc-516778.htm>

In contemporary culture, the body is approached as a symbol of multiple meanings, aesthetics, and social perspectives. Nude paintings have become a forum for dialogue between artists and the public, reflecting the process of art globalization but still retaining the unique imprint of Vietnamese culture.

4. Cultural symbols expressed through Vietnamese nude paintings

In Vietnam, nude painting is not only an art genre imported from the West, but also a mirror that reflects the changes of culture, society and national aesthetic thinking over time.

4.1 Symbols of masculinity, femininity and beauty in Vietnamese culture

In Vietnamese culture, the concepts of masculinity, femininity and beauty are not merely biological or aesthetic categories, but also cultural symbols that reflect the value system, ideology and social norms throughout many historical periods. These symbols are not static, but dynamically transform according to the historical and cultural context, which is clearly expressed in art forms, especially nudes.

4.1.1 Symbols of masculinity

In traditional Vietnamese culture, masculinity is associated with "yang" energy that is active, strong, rational, intellectual and authoritative. According to Tran Ngoc Thuan, in Vietnam's traditional value system, men are "big career builders" and are responsible for shouldering external tasks, bearing the symbol of divine destiny and social mission (Tran Ngoc Them, 1997).

Figure 8



Le Quy Tong, *Exhibition "Affordable Art" by talented young artists*, 2014.

Source: <https://vntravellive.com/trien-lam-affordable-art-cua-cac-hoa-si-tre-tai-nang>

The image of man in fine art, especially in folk or historical paintings, is often associated with heroism, wisdom or resoluteness. However, in modern nude art, masculinity is no longer fixed in traditional symbols, but can become a question of identity. Male nude paintings, which are rare in Vietnamese art, when they appear, often have the color of questioning society and anti-capitalism in the form of gender, as in the works of Lê Quý Tông or some other contemporary artists, when the male body is placed in a fragile, non-heroic state (Figure 8).

4.1.2 Symbols of femininity

Femininity in Vietnamese culture is often associated with the image of a gentle, tolerant, and profound "yin", associated with family and indoor space. Women in Vietnamese culture are a symbol of endurance, sacrifice and are associated with traditional morality. From songs and proverbs to folk art, the image of a woman is often covered by a layer of moral meaning, more towards idealization rather than an entity with emotions and sexual energy.

In the topic of female nudity in modern Vietnamese art, especially since the Doi Moi period, there has been an important change in terms of symbolism; the female body is no longer limited to the role of "object to be seen" but gradually becomes the subject of artistic creation.

According to Simone de Beauvoir's book *Le Deuxième Sexe (The Second Sex)* (1996), in religion, literature, and philosophy, women are assigned to mythical images (mother, muse, Eva, Helena, etc.) (Simone de Beauvoir, translated: Nguyen Trong Dinh & Doan Ngoc Thanh, 1996). These myths legitimize women's dependence, reinforcing that women are the objects of being seen and admired, not the subjects of action. This idea haunts the history of nude painting, but at the same time opens up a starting point for female painters like Sophia Trinh, Nguyen Thi Mai to redefine femininity. When they paint their own bodies, the painting is no longer an "invitation" to the gaze, but an affirmation of the existence of the individual self, a declaration of autonomy in art (Figure 9).

Figure 9



Painter next to her work, Sophia Trinh, 2024

Source: <https://tapchimythuat.vn/hoa-si-sophie-trinh-va-hanh-trinh-sang-tao-23-tac-pham-trong-6-nam/>

4.2 Symbols of beauty in Vietnamese culture

In traditional Vietnamese culture, beauty is not only a matter of vision but also a combination of morality, appearance, and soul. This concept stems from the influence of Confucianism, which considers the ideal person to be a person with "virtue", who knows how to control emotions and behaviors.

Beauty in Vietnamese culture is "moral beauty", reflecting a model of living in harmony with the community, nature and the moral social order.

In folklore, beauty is often associated with the symbol of a righteous woman, a discreet body, or symbols of prosperity such as the bronze drum and linga-yoni, which represent reproduction, fertility, and sacredness.

4.3 From moral standards to body aesthetics

In traditional Vietnamese culture, beauty is conceived not merely as visual appeal but as a synthesis of virtue, outward bearing, and inner soul. Informed by Confucian ethics, the ideal person is one who possesses moral character, moderates emotions, and regulates conduct.

Accordingly, beauty is primarily understood as moral beauty: living harmoniously with community and nature while upholding the moral-social order. In folklore, beauty is encoded in symbols such as the righteous, modest woman and a discreet body, signifying propriety, restraint, and communal honor. The bronze drum and linga - yoni motifs, which express fertility, generative power, and sacred vitality, linking beauty to life-force and cosmic order.

In the neomodern period (Indochina period), the concept of beauty gradually shifted to the perspective of body aestheticization, mainly the female body through painting. Under the influence of Western painting, the beauty in the nude painting is idealized, tender, symbolic of "pure Asian" beauty, a form of aesthetic that combines Vietnamese courtesy and Western techniques [PL, H16, tr.78].

After Doi Moi (1986), the symbol of beauty in Vietnamese culture became more diverse and flexible. Beauty is no longer bound by moral norms or rituals, but becomes a tool for personal expression, critique of gender, body politics, and the experience of inner truth.

In modern nudity, beauty can be:

- Damaged body,
- Genderless or non-standard body,
- Expression of personal emotions (loneliness, pain, liberation).

The symbol of beauty in Vietnamese culture is not static but always moves with the historical context and social value system. From attachment to the morality and sacredness of the body, beauty gradually becomes a tool of artistic expression, reflecting the fluctuations of personal consciousness, secularism, and creative freedom in Vietnamese art.

4.4 Personal identity and freedom of the body

If in the West, the body has been honored since ancient Greece as an aesthetic standard, then in Vietnam, the process of affirming the body as a cultural and artistic value has taken place slowly, intertwined between the weight of Eastern tradition and the desire for freedom of modern times.

4.5 Personal identity logos in nudity

In contrast to the metaphorical or symbolic human image of the collective in traditional painting art, modern nude painting depicts the body as a "subject body", which reflects the inner self, emotions and personal existence of the artist or character in the work. This change reflects the process of shifting from a community culture, in which the collective is the center, to an individual culture, where the essence becomes the center.

In the context of post-colonial and patriarchal Vietnam, the painting of female nudes by women, as in Le Thi Kim Bach's works, is not only an act of art but also an act of regaining the right to speak on one's own body. This work stands out as a testament to how the artist Kim Bach explores beauty at different ages, especially the beauty of middle-aged women, and has once sparked debates about the view of beauty in art (Figure 10).

Figure 10



Beauty at the age of 70" Le Thi Kim Bach.

Source: <https://tuoitre.vn/cai-dep-cua-rieng-kim-bach-274101.htm>

Cultural movements, from normative beauty to free beauty, today's nude paintings represent a rejection of the strict norms of traditional beauty that are associated with the model of "discreetness, shyness, modesty" to celebrate the beauty of truth and difference. In modern painting, beauty is not necessarily "beautiful" in the visual sense, but is the correct expression of the emotions and personality of the subject.

The symbolism of individual identity and bodily freedom in Vietnamese nudes is the result of a long shift in the cultural structure from community to individual, from confinement to liberation. The body is no longer seen as an object of lust or morality, but rather a powerful visual discourse of human presence, power, and desire for freedom in modern society.

4.6 Symbol through shaping elements: composition, color, posture

In Vietnamese nude paintings, shaping elements such as composition, color and posture not only play an aesthetic role but also serve as a hidden place for profound cultural

symbols, reflecting the Vietnamese people's conception, aesthetic sense and spiritual value for the human body. especially the female body.

Layout and structure of cultural space, the composition of Vietnamese nude paintings is often visually balanced, not too symmetrical, but always aims at harmony between the subject and the space. In works in Vietnamese art, composition often emphasizes "static" rather than "dynamic", which reflects the spirit of Eastern philosophy, where the balance between Yin and Yang elements is considered the norm of beauty. According to Nguyen Quan (2020), in the book *Seeing – Seeing – Loving – Understanding*, there is a mention of Approaching modern aesthetics, including mentioning "static feeling" as an important artistic code of the Vietnamese people (Nguyen Quan, 2020).

The space in the painting is often an abstract or minimalist backdrop, which facilitates the nude figure to become the symbolic centerpiece, evoking a sense of sacred rather than display.

Colors, expressive language, and spirituality, the colors in Vietnamese nudes are not merely surface depictions but also contain profound semantic values in culture. In order to enjoy a work of painting, it is necessary to have a comprehensive approach to the way of seeing, understanding and perceiving art, in which the painter and theorist plays the role of guiding the viewer from the visual view (portrait, simulation) to the perception of color, style, and expands the connection between painting and the social, economic, educational and modern life fields. In nude paintings, deep, monochromatic or earthy tones are often used. This not only blurs the sexual element but also enhances the value of thoughts and symbols, towards static and inner beauty, instead of focusing only on the sensual aspect.

Posture, body language, and symbolic concepts, the pose in Vietnamese nude paintings is not merely a shaping element, but can also be read as a cultural language code that reflects the aesthetic, moral, and symbolic concepts of society. In the book *Paintings, Nude Statues* (2010), the first art collection in Vietnam, a monograph on the topic of nudity on a comprehensive scale. On paintings depicting common poses such as lying on your side or sitting closed, it is not seen as an act of concealing the body, but expressing a form of preserving and sublimating beauty. These poses are symbolic, associated with broader cultural categories such as nature, childbirth, sexuality, and personal strength (*Nude Paintings and Statues*, 2010). Vietnamese nudes, with their harmonious compositions, calm colors and discreet but free postures, have created a unique cultural symbol, absorbing Western art while affirming Asian identity in upholding human dignity and harmony between the body, spiritual, personal, and communal.

Symbols of beliefs and religions Buddhism and folklore elements, in modern Vietnamese nude paintings, in addition to aesthetic elements, cultural symbols also appear through layers of beliefs, religions and folklore, especially Taoism, Buddhism, and images associated with indigenous spiritual culture. These symbols are not always present directly but are metaphorically encoded through shapes, postures, props in paintings or spaces, creating a visual language with indigenous cultural depth.

Matriarchal symbolism of divine femininity and power, the Mother Religion is a typical folk belief of the Vietnamese people, worshipping Goddesses (Mother Thuong

Thien, Mother Thoai, Mother Thuong Ngan, Mother Land), which is a clear symbol of the power of women in Vietnamese culture. According to Ngo Duc Thinh (2011), the Mother Dao expresses a unique philosophy of human life: the female body is not only the place of birth but also the embodiment of the universe, of the energy of all things (Ngo Duc Thinh, 2019).

In Vietnamese nude paintings, the image of a woman with a sitting posture with her legs crossed, her eyes calm, her head wearing a scarf or with a silk strip squeezed over her shoulders, is a figurative metaphor reminiscent of the image of the Mothers. The posture of calm and contemplation is also similar to the sitting posture of the characters in the bronze servant ceremony. The naked body here does not mean eroticism, but symbolizes the sacred femininity, for rebirth and nourishment.

Folklore elements through the image of Mother, body and nature, in addition to mainstream religions, folklore elements in Vietnamese nudes are also expressed very clearly. In folk concepts, the image of a mother, a rural woman, or a young woman in natural space, is a model that symbolises the connection between humans and heaven and earth.

In the book *Buu Chi – The Flight of Art and Earthly Memories* (2012), the image of a naked woman's body in the painting is placed in a context close to folk life, such as pond bridges, water jars, lotus leaves, etc., elements that are symbolic matriarchal in traditional Vietnamese aesthetics (Buu Chi, 2012). These images are not only configurative but also contain a deeper meaning of nature and the body as a unified body, the source of life.

Vietnamese modern artists often exploit this theme by simplifying space, removing specific backdrops to emphasize the connection between people in terms of the body and indigenous culture.

Symbol of harmony between humans and nature, in modern Vietnamese nude art, the image of people in harmony with nature has become a key symbol. It is not only a shaping technique, but also reflects the indigenous cultural idea of people, bodies and nature co-constructing in a unified whole.

The philosophy of “heaven–human unity” a core idea across Asian traditions such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, appears in Vietnamese aesthetics in a gentler, more intuitive form, often mediated through folk imagery, songs, proverbs, and the plastic arts. Rooted in a wet-rice agricultural civilization, Vietnamese culture understands human existence in relation to earth, water, and sky; beauty is chiefly perceived as the harmony between the human body and nature, revealing their inseparable interplay

Ecological beauty and matriarchal symbols often overlap in Vietnamese nude art, where the female form is portrayed not only as sensuality but as a sign of Mother Nature, the life-giving source.

The woman's body is constructed as a meaning that is both aesthetic and ecological, where physical beauty coexists with the power to reproduce and nurture. The soft curves in the painting are often placed next to objects of the natural symbolism of the Moon, Sun, Mountain, and Water, which contain layers of cycle, life and eternity. This set of symbols continues the traditional tradition of prosperity, associated with the

concept of childbirth, rebirth and fertility of the universe and land (Tran Quoc Vuong, 2016).

The beauty of the nude body is reinterpreted as a symbol of the cultural ecosystem, reflecting Eastern thought on the co-constitution of body, mind, and nature, thereby affirming the distinctive identity of Vietnamese nude art.

5. Conclusion

Research on cultural symbols expressed through Vietnamese nudes shows that this is a genre that is not only an aesthetic form imported from the West, but also a specific cultural expression space that reflects the transformation in artistic thinking, society and national identity.

First of all, Vietnamese nude paintings have proven the multi-layered nature of the body as a symbol. The body is not only present in the form of biological or visual aesthetics, but is also associated with symbolic values of gender, power, morality, and ego. The emergence and transformation of the nude reveal the tensions between tradition and modernity, between the Asian conception of aesthetics and the influence of creative freedom from Western aesthetics.

Secondly, from the perspective of social history, nude paintings have become an indicator of the process of modernization and integration of Vietnamese art. The bold use of the body by artists as an aesthetic material reflects an attempt to break free from the normative framework, and at the same time affirms the artist's own power to create a new discourse. In particular, the participation of female artists after Doi Moi has opened up another approach, which is that the body becomes a means of self-expression and liberation, rather than just an object of masculine gaze.

Third, in the context of globalization, Vietnamese nude paintings both dialogue with international art flows and affirm local identity. Vietnamese nude works do not stop at copying forms, but also convey cultural underground currents from the obsession with war, collective memory, and the affirmation of personal ego. Thereby, the body becomes a complex school of cultural symbolism, reconciling the universality of art and the specificity of the Vietnamese context.

In conclusion, Vietnamese nude paintings are not only a testament to the shift of art in the process of modernization and integration, but also a profound cultural discourse about the body, ego and society. It contributes to clarifying how art can both reflect and construct socio-cultural values, and at the same time expand the scope of interdisciplinary research on the body as a central symbol of anthropology, aesthetics and semiotics in the context of globalization.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest

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