

ARTS

Child of war, painter of beauty

Vietnamese artist's works seem solitary, even remote

By Roberta Burnett

Special for the Scottsdale Republic

Scottsdale—Some remarkably simple, beautifully glowing landscapes that surprisingly aren't modern minimalist were extended through the end of January at Calvin Charles Gallery. The painter of the show "Realm of Enchantment" is Hong Viet Dung, 42, reputed to be one of the top five painters in Vietnam.

Viet Dung is known as one of the "Gang of Five," a group of collegial contemporary Vietnamese painters, said Deborah O'Hara, the gallery's managing partner.

Born before the close of the Vietnam War, Viet Dung is a child of war. His first group exhibit was in 1998 in the former Soviet Union, and in 1990 and 1991 in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City — strongly suggesting the stamp of social realism in art.

His paintings seem solitary, even remote. Of the two subjects he uses, the works aren't silent landscapes but simplified portraits of individuals.

These men and women are single, off-centered figures, sometimes seen from head to toe. The figures are thin and alone, except for something they carry — a bird in the hand, a ball, a large tropical leaf, a lantern, a large, flat-topped lotus leaf held high like an umbrella.

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Details

Calvin Charles is at 4201 N. Marshall Way.

For information: (480) 421-1818 or www.calvincharles.com

The world has dissolved around them, as if we are to see them in the same moment of clarity as the painter. The objects shout "symbol," but the practical paper lantern seems to contradict the symbolism.

Viet Dung's minimalist landscapes are composed with an underpinning of geometrics. They're unconcerned with social issues and constraints because, while there are signs of human contact, such as a boat and a suggestion of a path across a field, there are no people. The sliver of boat becalms the lake. No mosquitoes buzz. The air is still. All is in order and, in true Buddhist fashion, noticed.

In Viet Dung's hands a paint-handling technique called "scumbling" becomes beautiful.

His oil paints shade foreground objects such as a mountain, tree or view across a lake from dark to light.

By doing so, Viet Dung creates a glowing, ethereal light that seems more mystical than sunrise or lighting after a storm. His brights seem brighter than normal — almost as if you need to squint to examine the canvasses closely.



Hung Viet Dung's *Dusk on the River* is a 61-by-53-inch oil canvas that highlights techniques found in his works.

But as with the best of Romantic paintings, the illusion's of thing. These paintings are as Romantic as Wordsmith and show that despite war, this painter still absorbs beauty, and is as nurtured by the intimate daily contact with nature as anyone who uses nature for its healing powers.

Though seductively fetching, these works aren't sofa art. They are strong statements of an individual's participation in the Eastern dynamic of the yin and yang that's ever-present.

Viet Dung doesn't paint landscapes smaller than 61 by 53 inches, and his works are modestly priced at \$15,000.