

# Fua Haribhitak

In writing these few notes on the exhibition of paintings and drawings by Fua Haribhitak, my memory goes back to the past 25 years when we organized a School of Fine Arts in the Fine Art Department, for the purpose of training young Thai in the arts of painting and sculpture. A group of ten youths came from the Arts & Crafts School of Bangkok where for two or three years they had received the preliminary principles of art. In those days, there were not so many past-times to distract the minds of the students and so each of them, for emulation's sake, was keen to do better than his fellow student.

Fua Haribhitak joined the first group and, on account of his temperament, it was not easy to have him comply with the rules of the school. Although very respectful and not complaining, it was evident that he suffered in submitting himself to the discipline of the academy. On my part, as far as possible, I tried my best to avoid contrasting with the character of the young Fua. He made experiments of many techniques of painting in order to find the one which best suited his nature. He was very anxious to learn and what he learned, he did with most seriousness.

What compelled me more to admire him was his exceptionally remarkable drawing, and as drawing is the grammar of every plastic art, so I felt sure that one day this young man would be a real artist.

Of course, during this period of artistic training, Fua's style was that referred to as "Impressionism" –the "Impressionism" should not be understood as copy of the Western Impressionist School. 'Impression' means to record in lines, colours or plastic volume, the impression the artist receives from Nature, objects or anything else. This impression is quite personal, and for such a reason the impressionistic work of an artist has nothing to do with photographic reproductions. That work reflects a personal emotion and so Impressionism means to express sincerely what we see and, accordingly, we feel without any intellectual speculation.

Of the many studies of still-life, nude, portraits, etc., Fua made in this first period, only two portraits remain : one in oil colours, the other in pastels- the rest was destroyed during the second World War by a bombardment of Bangkok.

Meanwhile, studying at the school of Fine Art, Fua has occasion to follow a course of history on Indian art. This gave him the longing to see India. In fact, in 1941, our young artist went to India to follow his quest on art education. There he settled at the University of Viswa- Bharati at Santinikatan. In that intellectual centre, Fua's passion for art grew stronger and stronger. He worshipped the masterpieces of old India art, and for the first time, realized how valuable the old artistic patrimony of each race is. This idea had its beneficial effects when Fua returned to Thailand.

The artistic talent of our young artist was also praised by the famous Indian painter, Nandalal Bose, Principal of the Kala- Bhawan of the University of Viswa-Bharati.

Unfortunately, the fruit of Fua's visit to India came to an abrupt end when the second World War broke and our artist was interned in camp together with many Japanese, among whom there were also some painters. Although suffering from malaria and anaemia, Fua did not abandon his art. Being interested in Indian philosophy our artist spent part of his time in studying Yoga system and admiring Nature.

With a few tubes of water colours left and some scrape of paper, he made studies of the people surrounding him. With those studies he composed a small painting depicting a group of Japanese women and children. The figures, synthesized in their principal masses, compose each other in a fine unity, while the bright chromatic effect ensuing from the colourful kimonos is most pleasing. We regret very much that for one reason or another this composition was not enlarged as the artist had proposed to do. It would have been a fine work of art and also would have served as stimulus to other artists in doing important paintings. This small picture together with study of dahlias were rewarded the first and second prizes in a competition arranged by the artist of the camp. In 1946 Fua came back to Thailand. The sense of admiration for old art, awakened during his stay in India, suggested to him to paint some of the old murals of Ayuthia, Sukhothai and Peiburi which were in such bad condition of preservation that was to be expected soon their total obliteration. Art that time, nobody, or very few, thought Fua's work worth while. Today everyone acknowledges the importance of the work done by this artist in recording paintings which have vanished in these last ten years.

In 1948 some of Fua's reproductions, together with many other old and modern objects of Thai art, were exhibited in London at the Royal Thai Legation under the patronage of H.E. Mr. Direk Jayanama, the then Thai Minister. Another exhibition of these fine reproductions was held at the Fine art Department in the year 1952.

From 1947 to 1954 Fua's activity was divided between teaching art in the University of Fine Arts and doing paintings which eventually were shown in the annual National Exhibitions of Art of Bangkok. According to the rules of the National Exhibition, these paintings being rewarded three gold medals in the year 1949, 1950, 1957, Fua Haribhitak became one of the officially recognized artists of Thailand. S.C.Y., Silpin Chan Yiam.

In 1954, Fua won a scholarship offered by the Italian Government and spent two years in Italy. This was a period of great activity. More than a hundred paintings and drawings were made by our artist. His works drew the attention of Signor Oppo, professor of painting of the Academy of Rome, who found in Fua those high qualities proper to a real artist.

The majority of the paintings and drawings made in Italy convey the impression Fua received from Nature or from everything he painted. The beholder of these works of art cannot help to feel a warm enthusiasm—they are done with an extreme sincerity—without any extravagant idea to do novelties, a defect which seems to be general in our modern intellectual life.

In the views of Capri we may enjoy the bright light proper to that island—there are days that this light is so strong that the intensity of all colours seems to disappear in a bath of blazing atmosphere.

From the first paintings made in Italy, we notice a certain hesitation: the artist was not sure of his palette—he was enchanted, by light but did not dare to express it vividly. Afterwards, mastering the emotion he sings with his natural enthusiasm the charms of Nature.

Fua's quest for evermore profound expressions made him experiment in what is referred to as cubism, or better, a style which strives to render those effects we may notice when light and colours, playing over an object, interest each other, changing, its apparent realistic forms. Of course, in Thailand, our public is not yet accustomed to such a kind of art, but in reality, it has serious and fine qualities. Of Fua's paintings in this style, I prefer that nude, in green tonality, which was exhibited last year at the National Exhibition of Art. But on the whole, personally, I like better the expressions of this artist when free from any intellectual reasoning, especially I prefer his beautiful drawings. Here, any person initiated in art appreciation is truly impressed by Fua's expressive power. Neither cameras nor any other mechanical devices could render the invisible universal essence, the principal quality in a work of art, which moves our feelings or gives us high imagination. From here, the difficulty is to explain what art is. A few lines, a few colours, a few effects of chiaroscuro may give us joy or sorrow, serenity or animation. Of course, these sensations are different according to our own nature because individuals react accordingly. For instance, personally, in beholding the delicate inkpen drawing of a street of Florence near Piazza Santa Maria Annunziata, my spirit is brought into a melancholic and dreamy world— I prove a sensation of pure serenity. On the contrary, the strong, bold brush—drawing depicting the Baptistery and the Cathedral of Florence acts on me as an invigorating force from which life becomes a dynamic a dynamic reality.

To appreciate art, we have to abandon ourselves to the artist's creation. Now, in the case of Fua's works, made principally in Italy, let him be your guide in visiting Venice, Rome, Pisa, Florence, etc., listen to his songs reflecting his spirit saturated with beauty, mystery and dreams.

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