

Happy In The Obsession

03/04/2017 by Andrea Tran



Tô-he 8. 2011. 80x90x40cm. Domino Art Fair, Tp.HCM

If said that Le Kinh Tai is the most or the second special character in the southern art village, it is not really, but certainly he is a famous eccentric among Saigon painters.

His morning always starts at around 12 a.m. Not having lunch, he has got that bad habit as from he suddenly quit his job as a designer, the job helps him earn much money per month, to paint again. He just eats with his wife and children at dinner, dinner food is often bought and cooked by himself. After that, he will have a coffee cup with his close friend group at the back corner of Notre Dame Cathedral, at the end he retreats to his own 'art revolutionary base', it is located in a remote location outside of the city.

Asked him that whether he has applied strategy of ' after making plenty of money, returning on a noble painter's profession, that have been methodically taught at art school' as the 'famous artists' or not, he said, 'it not likes that, but just a sudden awakening...one day, I feel I am not like myself if I am engrossed

in making money continuously... But my wife and children still can bear me, it is really amazing, really talented ... 'Taking a breath of smoking, he smiled gently.

It's amazing or not, when he graduated from school, he could not sell any paintings, but he dared to hire a female model at home for more than 4 years to either practiced more graphics - 'because he noticed that after finishing art school, his anatomy was still 'very awkward', and composed 'nude painting' to build the foundation for 'squeezing graphics' in later works.

It's amazing or not, when many thousand dollars of design orders lined up at the door, but he ignored, locked the room, buried his head in canvas and model, then 'the painting still is a painting, not refunding money', they completely faced to face on the wall, or arranged up to the loft, then later He bravely faces everyday with the black look of his former Art class girlfriend, who now becomes an inspector cum charwoman for odd painter guy and 'his children', that's amazing.



"Ta là ai" (Who am I)", 2016, sơn dầu, 200x300cm. Atum, Hà Nội.



Tô-he 9. 2011. 80x90x40cm. Domino Art Fair, Tp.HCM

Fortunately, the black looks of Mrs. Inspector cum a charwoman soon became more affectionate, because suddenly, one nice day the collector from far away came, discovered the pile of paintings were facing on the wall which evoked an obsession. So, in a moment, they took each other in turn to leave, leaving sadness for their father, and happiness for their mother and kids of 'crazy Tai'

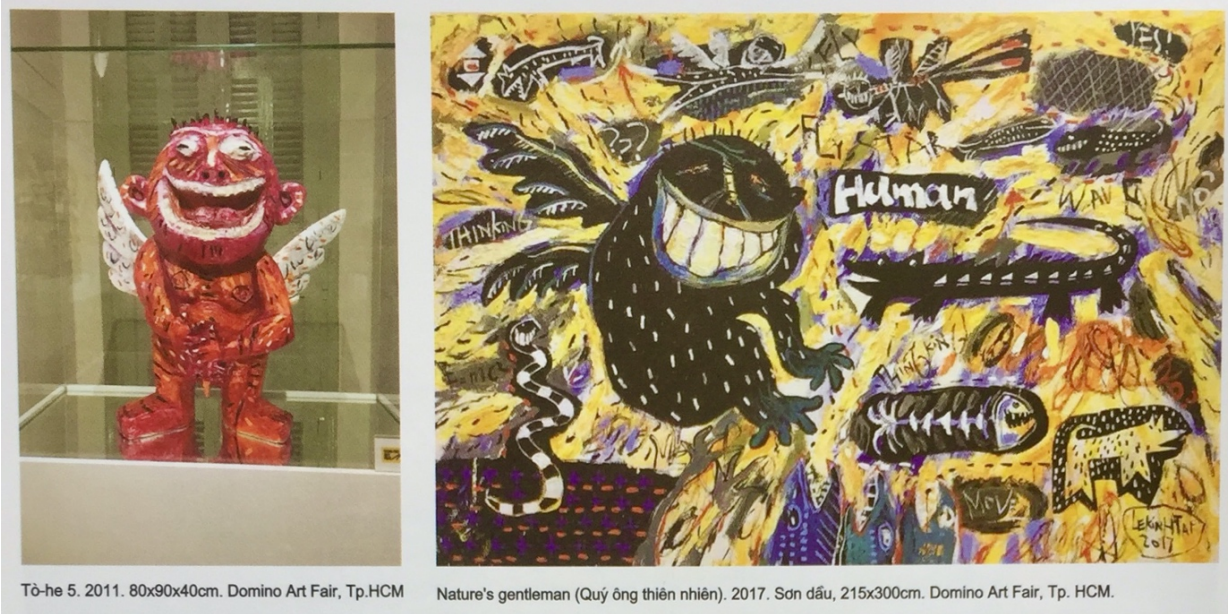
Gradually, the notoriety about 'Tai crazy', always paints in a state of extreme sublimation, sleeps day and works all night, immerses himself in composing paintings every midnight with a squad of guard dogs in his bulky painting workshop nearly 20 km from the center of Saigon, has been spread out, but strangely, the notoriety was spread by most collectors with foreign passports. So talented!

If not talented, why can he sell paintings continuously at an "ecstatic" price, for long-time collectors with great liquidity?

If not talented, how does he dare buy a dozen of canvas 'trees' with an imported paint bucket to piled up in the workshop, looking at the bill and feeling dizzy, but after a few months, looking they became less, and appear sequence on the wall of large paintings.

If not talented, why did not only his painting has been ranked among the 'biggest' works of Vietnamese painters by oversea galleries, but also his contemporary 'To-he' * sculpture group has been admired by a lot of people, whose really wanted to buy one or several of them, but he not sold yet, because he 'just want they to go a buyer's home with all 9 sculptures'.

First time, I saw 'the chaotic world' - an artwork of Le Kinh Tai, with many strange characters through my small mobile screen, immediately I was obsessed with his half-human and half-animal characters, they were very 'weird', very vivid; and the color of his paintings was fresh and 'glowing'. Just like that, 'the chaotic world' "knocked out" who love painting as me, although at that time, I had not yet determined whether it was "ancient" or "contemporary" art. Seeing his paintings many times later, still by online, those early obsessions in my mind has been not nearly changed.



Until the first time I directly saw real artworks of Le Kinh Tai at the 'Tet-Art' 2016 (the New Year Art Fair in the Spring 2016), I was confident that the original happy obsession was not virtual, it was more durable and profound thanks to directly feeling his work by touch, through rough brush strokes, and in faintly pungent smell of paint. The touch continues to resonate, push up the emotions, and make us engrossed in exploring 'the contemporary chaotic world', which he painted of his unconscious or memory, so that we blended into the work at unknown time. Such exciting experience moments are still rare in the era of sclerosis art that follows the market today.

Le Kinh Tai's paintings like as memories of words and doodles on the wall in childhood, mingle with a grandmother's story of angels and devils in moon nights that is both innocent and miraculous. His characters are half gentle, half evil, interlace with words when in English, when in Vietnamese, not only shake the imagination of viewers, but also map too many mysterious metaphors. Ancient but rich in poetry - it is also a feature of Le Kinh Tai's expression language.



Human Evolution (Sự tiến hóa của loài người). 2017. Sơn dầu, 215x300cm. Domino Art Fair, Tp. HCM.

Two of his oil paintings in that 'Tet – Art', were quite small, each surface was just over a meter, but with a powerful brush style, bright color palette, it was enough to create a strong suction angle in vast space over 800 m² of the exhibition. On that occasion, I also fortunately attended the artist's art-talk, thereby, I understood that behind his innocent shapes, powerful brush style, bright color palette were stories of grim life and his thorny living philosophy, resilience.

It turned out that not only in his daily life, he was considerate and funny honestly with his relatives, family and friends, but also in art he wants to feel the most cheeriest in composing, to be freed from every tenet, all idols, but still elaborate with idea, careful with details, color spectrum, to create the best vivid visuals. Moreover, his know-how 'think carefully - messy drawing - good paints' seem to be very useful to seduce both skillful academic artists and art students who like unusual things.



"Tự họa". 2012. Sơn dầu. 100x100. Hội chợ Tết-Art, Hà Nội

Last autumn, at the Autumn-Autum exhibition in Creative city, Hanoi, I had the opportunity to enjoy his large-sized new paintings and could not help but admire an abundance of creativity. Somehow, there was a feeling that those canvas, even so big, were still too narrow for him to paint and express freely.

This spring, at the recent Domino Art Fair in Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts Museum, next to the beautiful newly painted oil paintings, the reappearance of the cute and rough 'To he'* sculptures made by color-painted fiber glass (used to be carried by him to Hanoi to exhibit at Viet Art Center in Vietnam Fine Arts University in 2011) did not surprise the public, but makes the enjoyment and joy multiplied.

If the surrealist characters in Le Kinh Tai's paintings were both close and 'ominous', so were his 'To he' sculptures, as if jumping out of paintings, swooping to play with us, wrapping us, but spying us at any time - a reflection of the affluent contemporary life in haunting uncertainty? Like modernized folk toys, each of his 'To he' sculptures is a unique, lively sculpture created by an experienced craftsman with young soul. Obviously, four years of renting models for nude painting did not waste but gave him the ability to pinch and mold the 'To he' sculptures easily, so that they were reasonably animated in various forms, making the stillness museum space so excited.



Every time Le Kinh Tai's works appear publicly, it is a 'phenomenon', which not only stirred the professionals but also attracted the attention of many social classes, including art lovers, who love his paintings and sculptures, respect his way of life and profession. At a party at the charity art auction in Saigon last year, nearly the entire evening of talks with him, I learned another piece of 'art for human' through social activities he has enthusiastically attended for many years; it is just as harmonious as when he creates paintings and sculptures, because as for him, 'whatever you do, you must feel happy by yourself'.

Undoubtedly, Le Kinh Tai's art is unique, expressive and attractive first of all by the aesthetic values of the works themselves, and it is certainly because they are imbued with a free spirit, love of life and serious, hard-working attitude of the artist, and then give strong inspiration to the viewers, and of course, to the author of this article as well... in the happy obsession.



Le Kinh Tai and Andrea Tran, at an art auction in Ho Chi Minh City, 11/2016.

** Explain the words using in the article:*

- Play on words: the article uses the adjectives "Amazing" and "Talented" - withdrawing from the middle name and the name of the artist Le Kinh Tai; Here, "Kinh" is "amazing" (very interesting, unimaginable), "Tai" is "talented" (skilled and smart)

- "To-he": a handmade folk toy, is made from rice flour mixed with color, it is very vivid, eye-catching by shape and color;

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