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Colonial or Cosmopolitan?

Vietnamese Art in Paris in the 1930s–40s

PHOEBE SCOTT

Abstract

From their earliest graduating classes, Vietnamese artists from the École des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine, Hanoi, had their work exhibited and sold in Paris. Initially, it was predominantly Vietnamese artworks that travelled to Paris, however, the late 1930s also saw the establishment of a small group of Vietnamese artists there. While there has been considerable interest in the place of foreign artists in interwar Paris, the experience of Vietnamese artists has yet to be integrated into these histories. Vietnamese modern art was shown in the immensely popular spectacle of the Exposition Internationale Coloniale of 1931, a peak expression of colonial propaganda. It was also circulated through salon exhibitions, covered in the critical press, and even acquired by the state. This was in the context of heated debates in 1930s Paris over the status of foreign artists within French modernism. This essay assesses the reception and context of Vietnamese artworks that were sent to Paris or produced there. Rather than positioning Paris as a site of influence and authority, Paris emerges in this account as a site in which more complex negotiations took place, as artists navigated a loaded politics of display.

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FIGURE 1: Lê Phổ (1907–2001), *Self-Portrait*, 1938, gouache on silk, 49.5 × 35.5 cm. Collection of Paulette Lê Phổ.

Introduction

In 1938, the year following his move to Paris, the Vietnamese artist Lê Phổ (1907–2001) painted a self-portrait.¹ It is a self-possessed image: the artist's direct, level gaze steadily confronts the viewer (Figure 1). The work announces a cosmopolitan sensibility, in various senses of the term. In the everyday sense, in which 'cosmopolitan' refers to sophistication and urbanity, the painting represents the confident self-fashioning of a newly-arrived artistic migrant to Paris. Yet the painting also demonstrates 'cosmopolitanism' in a broader philosophical sense, where the term refers to having an affiliation to and between multiple cultures and sites. The portrait shows Lê Phổ's proficiency within different cultural practices: it engages both the heritage of ink painting and the Western tradition of realism; both the frontal and formal quality of Vietnamese ancestral portraiture, and the concept of portraiture as individual character study. Painted on silk, the work shows the traces of Lê Phổ's technical versatility, harmonising flat, luminous areas of wash colour, with the minutely delicate brushwork used to articulate the personality of the face. But alongside its projection of cosmopolitanism, the work also bears the traces of its genesis within a colonial system of intervention and patronage. Lê Phổ was a graduate of the École des Beaux-Arts

de l'Indochine (EBAI), the art school founded by the French administration in Indochina in 1925. His style and technique, including the approach to the silk substrate, were the results of the educational programme promoted by that School. The circulation of his works in Paris, as well as his own initial travels there, were facilitated through networks of colonial propaganda and commerce. Lê Phổ's *Self-Portrait* is thus the result of an intercultural colonial traffic, and as such, it provokes the question: what did it mean for Vietnamese colonial subjects to present their work in Paris, and how were they received into the complexities of its art world?

In Vietnam, the art world in the 1930s was experiencing rapid change, with new institutions, technical practices and discursive positions in a constant state of emergence.² Like their peers in cultural fields like poetry, literature and journalism, artists were undertaking a searching re-evaluation of the past and responding to new influences.³ However, as early as the first graduating class of the EBAI in 1930, their work had begun to be publicised, circulated and sold abroad, especially in Paris. Thus, their work had to be oriented not only inwards, towards the development of a nascent Vietnamese modernism, but also outwards, towards the taste of the *métropole*. While initially it was predominantly Vietnamese artworks that travelled, the late 1930s also saw the movement of a small group of Vietnamese artists, who became an artistic emigrant community in Paris.

It is significant that the first and most intensive period of contact was the 1930s. In Paris, the 1930s opened with a peak of interest in the idea of French colonialism, through the spectacle of the immense Exposition Internationale Coloniale in 1931. Designed to engage a French public that was thought to be increasingly indifferent to the colonies, this vast exposition sprawled across the Parc de Vincennes in eastern Paris, and welcomed more than 30 million visitors in 6 months.⁴ At the same time, the 1930s was also a period in which the status of foreign artists within French modernism became particularly contested and intersected with debates over the direction of contemporary art. Polemics surrounding the École de Paris (School of Paris) versus the École française (French School), as well as the collection and display of foreign artists in different salons and museums, could reveal either expansive and internationalist perspectives on modern art, or could slide into nationalism, xenophobia or antisemitism.⁵

While there has been considerable interest in the place of foreign artists within this climate of interwar Paris, the experience of Vietnamese artists has yet to be integrated into the histories of those debates. This essay considers the Vietnamese artworks that were sent to Paris or produced there, the circuits and exhibiting situations of these works, and their reception.

The case of Vietnamese artists in Paris admittedly involves only a relatively small volume of travelling artists and works, and their reception is also proportionately limited. Nonetheless, this example offers a unique perspective on Paris in the period, as the situation of these artists within the colonial system of art production offers a conceptual limit to Paris' reputation for openness and cosmopolitanism. To the extent that the works were situated as the products of French intervention, they functioned as forms of colonial propaganda, and reinscribed a hierarchy of cultural value, in which the Vietnamese artist was positioned as the recipient of colonial tutelage.

The two terms of the title of this essay—colonial and cosmopolitan—offer an entry point into the tensions inherent in this interaction. They are not mutually exclusive, and it can be argued that one of the products of colonial empire was a kind of forced cosmopolitanism.⁶ Nonetheless, the term 'cosmopolitan' also has an implication of agency: to be cosmopolitan can mean to actively mediate between multiple sites of attachment and to be receptive to different cultural settings.⁷ In this sense, the term has been used as an ethical proposition for communication and connection, for example, in the work of Kwame Anthony Appiah.⁸ In contemporary art, certain theorists have suggested a "cosmopolitan imagination" to describe modes of practice across and through cultural difference.⁹ The term has also been used to frame histories of modernism from outside the Euramerican canon.¹⁰ This essay engages with these meanings of the term, by discussing how Vietnamese artists made and displayed work that was resonant with the context of 1930s–40s Paris.¹¹

However, alternative nuances of 'cosmopolitanism' can also help to sound a cautionary note to such celebratory propositions. Cosmopolitanism is haunted by its associations with the global mobility of the elite, and it should be acknowledged that the Vietnamese artists who exhibited in or travelled to Paris were relatively privileged representatives of the colonised population. This distinguishes them from the non-elite migratory communities whose experiences have generated new understandings of cosmopolitanism/s in recent scholarship.¹² Furthermore, the term 'cosmopolitan' has historically also had pejorative connotations, linked to an idea of 'rootlessness', or even used within antisemitic abuse.¹³ In this sense, the term is a resonant reminder of the potentially precarious position of the foreign artist in Paris. Thus, the cosmopolitanism of Vietnamese artists in Paris must be understood from a grounded historical perspective: such relations took place in a loaded and hierarchical setting. This essay will argue that, despite cosmopolitan gestures of agency, creation and connection, ultimately, it was difficult for Vietnamese artists to transcend a colonial frame of reception.

Pictures from an Exposition

The exposure of Vietnamese artworks in France in the 1930s was part of a concerted effort to sell work produced in the system of art schools in Indochina. The French colonial administration in Indochina had established professional schools in the arts from the early 20th century, but the *École des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine* (EBAI), opened in Hanoi in 1925, had a different orientation.¹⁴ Established at the urging of the French artist Victor Tardieu (1870–1937), working with a Vietnamese colleague Nam Sơn (Nguyễn Vạn Thọ, 1890–1973), the EBAI aimed to transform the practice of fine art in Vietnam. It offered students what were considered foundational skills in the fine arts—based on a European pedagogical model—while also orienting them to reconsider the sources of their own local aesthetic traditions, including in the decorative arts.¹⁵ Thus, students there studied perspective, anatomy, life drawing and painting in oil on canvas, but were also encouraged to integrate local content.¹⁶ This led to experiments with painting on a silk substrate and using lacquer as a painting material: the resulting works were distinctive, but are better understood as “invented traditions” than as a continuation of existing practices, as they drew on diverse influences and were the products of new technical experiments.¹⁷ Unlike that of other educators in colonial Indochina, Tardieu’s educational programme intended for his students to become artists (as opposed to craftsmen or artisans), and he defied trenchant criticisms of his approach, inspiring intense loyalty from his Vietnamese students.¹⁸ Alongside the school, a supportive local infrastructure developed, of exhibiting salons and artist societies. In Paris, the *Agence Économique de l'Indochine* (Indochina Economic Agency, or Agindo) soon began to market the works of the EBAI, by hosting selling exhibitions in a space in the fashionable gallery district of Rue de la Boétie.¹⁹ Marie-Agathe Simonetti has noted Tardieu’s extensive efforts to promote Vietnamese art, part of an overall propagandistic strategy to integrate the art of the Indochinese colony with France.²⁰ The Victor Tardieu archive, made publicly available in recent years, has contributed significant detail and nuance to the understanding of the activities of these institutions.²¹ To help develop a broader image of the activities of the EBAI artists in France, this article uses resources from that archive, as well as selected archival documents referring to the organisation of the *Exposition Coloniale*, and archives of acquisitions made by the French state through its Fine Arts Administration.²²

The profile of Vietnamese artists in Paris was greatly enhanced by their inclusion in the *Exposition Coloniale Internationale* of 1931. Vietnamese architecture, crafts and decorative arts had long been included in other international expositions, but the *Exposition Coloniale* was the first to also

feature Vietnamese modern art, with an exhibition organised by Tardieu and his students.²³ Art was only a small subset of the immense array of materials on display: broadly, the Exposition offered didactic displays of the ‘beneficial’ effects of the colonial project, alongside examples of the various goods (from raw materials, to agricultural and industrial products, and craft objects) that flowed from the colonies to the *métropole*. While a number of colonial powers participated, the French presence was dominant, and the emphasis on the French colonial empire was intended to project a symbolic image of a “Greater France” to the public.²⁴ Typically, the colonies were represented through pavilions that were generally variants (sometimes pastiches) of their local architecture, following a pre-existing practice developed at international expositions in the 19th century. Patricia Morton points out, however, that the deployment of architecture at the Exposition of 1931 functioned to enforce visible hierarchies of dominance, tied to a perception of cultural modernity. While the colonies were represented by supposedly authentic replicas of ‘native’ architecture—often as if paused in a distant cultural past—the *métropole* was symbolically rendered in architecture that was conspicuously modern in style. This created visibly legible binaries between the primitive/modern, traditional/rational, past/present, in a manner that replicated the logic of the colonial *mission civilisatrice*.²⁵

One of the highlights of the Exposition was the Palais d’Indochine, the centrepiece of a cluster of monuments that represented the countries of Indochina, collectively occupying one tenth of the total Exposition site.²⁶ A massive reconstruction of the 12th-century Khmer monument of Angkor Wat, the five central towers of the Palais soared to 50–60 metres in height, surrounded at ground level by a gallery of 120 metres in length on each side.²⁷ Visitors would approach via a long esplanade on the pavilion’s central axis, leading to a principal staircase that ascended the terraces of the structure (Figure 2). Not everyone approved of this plan for representing the colony, however. A scathing criticism appeared in the Indochinese press in 1927 (attributed to Victor Tardieu), in which he described reconstructions of the Angkor monuments as “nothing but bad pastiches, without originality and without art”.²⁸ Although generally supportive of the colonialist aspirations of the Exposition, the writer objected to presenting a modernising Indochina through the frozen tableaux of the past.

While much of the exterior and approach replicated the original monument, the interior of the pavilion was drastically transformed. The original temple-mountain structure of Angkor Wat was constructed as a mass, but the reconstructed version was hollowed out to accommodate didactic displays about French action in the Indochina colonies. Panivong Norindr comments



FIGURE 2: Braun and Cie, Postcard of visitors entering the Palais d'Indochine, Exposition Coloniale Internationale de Paris 1931, 9.5 × 14 cm. Author's collection.

that “on the microcosmic level, the replication of Angkor Wat shows how native objects and space can be used and manipulated to serve French colonial ideology”.²⁹ The symbolism of this appropriation was made more potent, at the time, by the interpretation of Angkor Wat as the marker of once-great civilisation, fallen into ruin, and rescued by French intervention.³⁰ Inside the Palais, the ground floor contained the economic exhibition, detailing the resources of Indochina, while the first floor displays addressed the intellectual and social activity of the colony, such as the public instruction and medical assistance services.³¹ This first floor also contained the art exhibitions, separating the work of French artists active in the colony from the salons displaying the work of the students of the art schools of Indochina. According to a detailed report on the exhibition by Victor Tardieu, the work of the EBAI occupied six rooms on this first floor of the pavillon, including a large central hall, several “petit salons” and a lacquer salon.³²

Thus, in the spatial logic of the pavilion, the art of the EBAI was given a privileged position, but it was also displayed as part of the general rubric of colonial intervention in Vietnamese culture and education. The press coverage of the EBAI artworks on display also tended to emphasise the colonial pedagogical framework for their art. Jean Gallotti, an art critic writing in the magazine *L'illustration*, commented that:

It's a fact that nearly all exotic people, in changing their customs in contact with Europeans, see their original art degenerate [...] And *voilà*, this is why we experience such a charming surprise, one could even say a ravishment, when arriving at the first floor, in the rooms reserved for the École des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine.³³

In Gallotti's view, the inevitable deterioration and degeneration of Vietnamese art had been countered by the intervention of Victor Tardieu's methods at the École des Beaux-Arts, stating that "his programme is perfect".³⁴ Similarly, an art critic in *L'Art et les artistes* commented that Tardieu's work at the School was "a revelation and a resurrection".³⁵ Such statements echoed a view common in colonial Indochina that local art had to be rescued from a state of 'decadence' brought about by European contact.³⁶

As no examples of Vietnamese modern art were included in the Exposition's Palais des Beaux-Arts, which focused on French artists inspired by the colonies, it was relegated to the purely colonial spaces of the Exposition in the Palais d'Indochine. Nonetheless, Vietnamese artists occupied a space of relative privilege compared with artisans from Indochina. Artisans formed part of the *figurants*, or live displays, of the Exposition, part of a history of racist practice established at international expositions where, as Morton notes, "the manifest authenticity of the exhibited people augmented the suspect verisimilitude of the setting".³⁷ In the grounds of the Tonkin pavilion, Vietnamese artisans were part of a live exhibition, occupying a simulated village street, complete with stalls selling silk, lace, ivory and inlaid objects, jewellery, and sculpted and lacquered furniture.³⁸ That the students of the EBAI were not positioned in such a way attests to their status.

Norindr contrasts the "acquiescent native figurants" with "the dissident natives [who] unsettled the identity invented for them by placing themselves on the margins of the Exposition".³⁹ He refers to political protests by Vietnamese students in France, some of whom were members of or supported by the French Communist Party, within a broader context of political rebellions in Indochina.⁴⁰ Without negating the courage of those activists under the constant threat of surveillance and punishment, it is nonetheless necessary to consider whether this binary—of the assumed silence of the native participants versus the bold stance of the anti-colonial protesters—is too reductive a picture of indigenous agency at the Exposition. The identities that the Exposition proposed were various, and some could be, at least partially, crafted by the participants themselves. An anecdote uncovered by Patricia Morton in the Exposition's security files reveals some of these complexities.⁴¹ According to this record, some Indochinese activists went to the port of

Marseilles to intercept their compatriots who were travelling to the Exposition Coloniale, and attempted to convince them not to participate in the Exposition by arguing that they were “coolies” who were being exploited. However, the travellers replied that they were artisans, not coolies, and reported the incident.

These complexities are also evident when considering the participation of the artists of the EBAI. First, there is the evidence of the sheer volume of work contributed by the students to the Exposition: materials that suggest that they were responsible for designing and fashioning much of the *mise-en-scène* for the presentation of their artworks inside the Palais d’Indochine. Inventories reveal that the School sent to the Exposition some 40 paintings (framed oil paintings and hanging scrolls), 14 sculptures in bronze and plaster, a number of decorative wrought-iron grills, as well as various miscellaneous books of sketches, embroidery and lacquer boxes and other examples of decorative arts.⁴² The School also sent a vast number of plaster moulds, presumably to be used to create other aspects of the interior decoration, as well as articles of furniture, that they had designed, to be placed throughout the display. Three of the student sculptors sent a large frieze in bas-relief which decorated the central exhibition hall.⁴³ Other students designed and created the fittings for the lacquer salon, in which examples of the new technique of Vietnamese lacquer painting were integrated into the décor of an elaborately-carved and furnished room.

Aside from the documentation contained in the inventories, Victor Tardieu also left a report, which notes the participation of the artist Lê Phổ at the Exposition:

[he] worked with the most complete devotion on our installation, and did not leave our stand during the entire exhibition [...] It was he who proceeded with the placement of the paintings, with the polishing of the statues. For me, he was the most precious collaborator for the installation, just as he was one of the most brilliant students produced by the school.⁴⁴

The work done by Lê Phổ might be considered as akin to ‘curatorial’, to use an anachronistic term. Taken together with the volume of materials in the inventories, this suggests a level of agency and invention by the EBAI artists as to how their work was presented to the public, albeit within the limiting framework of the Exposition narrative.

There is also a latent sense of an alternate self-fashioning present in certain of the artworks (although the overall group of works sent to the Exposition



FIGURE 3: Lê Phổ (1907–2001), *L'Age heureux* [The Happy Age], 1930. Size and location unknown. As reproduced in Exposition Coloniale Internationale Paris 1931, *Trois écoles d'art de l'Indochine: Hanoi, Phnom-Penh, Bien-Hoa* [Three Art Schools of Indochina: Hanoi, Phnom-Penh, Bien-Hoa]. Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1931. Source: gallica.bnf.fr/BnF.

was heterogeneous).⁴⁵ The sedate and picturesque quality of these works can hardly be considered overtly oppositional, but many do defy the tropes of ethnographic taxonomy or conspicuous exoticism which circulated elsewhere in the artworks shown at the Exposition. For example, one of the most well-received works in the EBAI's section was Lê Phổ's *l'Age heureux* [The Happy Age] (Figure 3).⁴⁶ The image is of a group of women and children in a rural landscape, on the steep bank of a small river. The colours are restricted to a tight harmony of whites, yellows, brown and blacks. The landscape is spare, virtually devoid of detail, and the painted figures are also rendered simply. Within the group, the figures engage very little with one another, their gazes averted or downcast. There is one conspicuous exception: the seated figure of a young woman, who stares out of the picture plane with an expression that is enigmatic, even hostile, as though acknowledging the violation of the scene by the viewer's gaze. Although the imagery of the naked child, the bucolic setting and the golden palette are among the tropes of idyllic painting, the mood is sombre and restrained. In contrast with the 'happy age' suggested by the title, there is a sense of melancholy. By presenting an image of what



FIGURE 4: Phạm Hữu Khánh (dates unknown), *Jardin indochinois* [Indochinese Garden], previously known as *La Cour* or *Jardin tonkinois*, 1930, oil on canvas, 77.2 × 106 cm. Collection of Musée du quai Branly, Paris. © Droits réservés. Photo © Musée du quai Branly–Jacques Chirac, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/image musée du quai Branly–Jacques Chirac.

could be a pre-colonial Vietnamese rural past through a sedate and modernist painterly treatment, Lê Phổ avoided the spectacle of exoticism.

The same could be said of two other works shown at the Exposition, now in the collection of the Musée du quai Branly: Tô Ngọc Vân's *Scène domestique* and Phạm Hữu Khánh's *Jardin indochinois* (Figure 4).⁴⁷ In both of these artworks, the overwhelming sense is of stillness and solitude, emphasised by the pared-down treatment of form. A similar tone can be seen in works on silk that were exhibited. Particularly in the work of Nguyễn Phan Chánh, whose work was perhaps the most celebrated at the Exposition, quietude and subtlety emerge as the dominant mood.⁴⁸ Chánh, one of the older students to graduate from the EBAI, had previously had a traditional Confucian education. The subjects of his works of the early 1930s were drawn from the rural milieu of his childhood in central Vietnam, and were typically scenes of labour and community, often small groups in intimate settings. Painted in sombre colours, often dominated by black and brown, the compositions frequently revolve around discrete communications that notably exclude the viewer (Figure 5).⁴⁹



FIGURE 5: Nguyễn Phan Chánh (1892–1984), *The Singers in the Countryside*, 1932, watercolour and ink on silk, 65.4 × 49.4 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore. Image courtesy of National Heritage Board. © Nguyen Thi Nguyen Tu.

It could be argued that the kind of artworks produced by the EBAI were primarily nostalgic images, easily consumed by French buyers: their picturesque vision was no challenge to the colonial order. However, these works of the early 1930s do introduce some measure of ambiguity, inherent in the register of the idyllic image. Margaret Werth, in her analysis of the idyllic in modern French painting, has noted:

The idyllic image was a scenic phantasm, reordering the world, projecting a new one outside historical time. Subversive of everyday reality, it was wishful thinking, fantasy, impossible desire. [...] On the one hand, the idyllic image offered a vision of harmony, completeness, unity, presence. On the other, it provoked an awareness of loss and absence, even if only as its negation.⁵⁰

The elegiac quality in these works, the invocation of imminent loss, does not cohere with the narrative of colonial progress that the Exposition intended to convey. The sense of stillness, containment and even privacy in certain

works is also at odds with the logic of the Exposition, which was to expose the colonies to the gaze of the public. This becomes much more evident when compared with a representation of Indochina that was consistent with this logic, and more typical of the type of works generally displayed at the Exposition.⁵¹ A decorative frieze more than 40 metres long, by the French painter Marie Antoinette Boullard-Devé, originally decorated the interior stairwell of the Palais d'Indochine.⁵² This brightly-coloured work is structured as a procession of different ethnic 'types', from all parts of colonial Indochina. The focus is on the details of costuming and accessories, highlighted by presenting the figures isolated against a golden background. This type of painting was the visual equivalent of the reams of ethnographic data presented at the Exposition, with its taxonomic and totalising qualities. The exotic treatment of the figures, the classificatory quality of figures as 'types' are all consistent with an exhibition mode designed to make the colonies knowable through visual didacticism.

Some (although not all) of the EBAI artworks exhibited were very far from working in this mode.⁵³ This was not a deliberate response to the Exposition environment, which, after all, few of them actually saw. Rather, it is a testament to the fact that the Vietnamese artists viewed themselves as modern artists who were presenting their work in Paris, where they hoped to become part of a conversation about modern art. The text of a toast to Victor Tardieu from one of the students, before his departure for the 1931 Exposition, reveals their trepidation as well as their aspirations:

What we are doing is still far from the definitive expression of our art, and the idea of showing these timid attempts in Paris, the capital of the arts, fills us with anxiety; to confront the great living masters, to be steps away from the giants of painting, enveloped by the august shadow of the Louvre, makes us tremble.⁵⁴

This statement clearly shows the mark of colonial paternalism, with its deference to the authority of the colonial centre.⁵⁵ However, on another register, it offers an intriguing glimpse of how Vietnamese artists saw their own work. The anxiety described in the statement is that of being judged in relation to the current practice, and history, of art in Paris. Thus, far from believing that their work was inherently exotic, different from or incommensurate with French art, this statement implies an expectation of participation in a shared cultural world. Despite these anxieties, the Exposition Coloniale was a significant milestone in terms of exposure and sales for these artists. But success in the Exposition was necessarily framed by its dominating

narrative and the focus on colonial propaganda. It raises the question of whether this success was able to be translated into other types of opportunities to exhibit, and into a broader critical reception in Paris.

“Giving the Europeans lessons in tact and wisdom”?

Following the Exposition Coloniale, artworks from the EBAI were more widely circulated in Paris through the work of the Agence Économique de l'Indochine (Agindo). The general function of Agindo was to promote the economic products of the Indochinese colonies in the metropole, but from 1932, it also began hosting salons of art from the schools of Indochina.⁵⁶ The director of this agency was Paul Blanchard de la Brosse, a former colonial official and close friend of Victor Tardieu. Their extensive correspondence on the functioning of Agindo reveals immense efforts to promote the work of the EBAI students in Paris: setting prices and selling artworks, and mobilising their contacts in the government and art worlds alike.⁵⁷ Their initial salon was opened by the President of France Paul Doumer, with notable art critics in attendance.⁵⁸ Despite such elevated patronage, it seems that sales were initially slow, only picking up after the magazine *L'Illustration* published an article on the EBAI, richly illustrated by the works of Nguyễn Phan Chánh, which immediately raised the profile of paintings on silk.⁵⁹ Aside from the exhibitions on their own premises, Agindo also collectively entered works from EBAI artists into other Parisian salons, such as the Salon of the Société Coloniale des Artistes Français (Society of French Colonial Artists), an important exhibiting site for many of the French artists who had visited Indochina.⁶⁰ In 1934, they organised a stand at the Salon of the Société des artistes décorateurs, a salon specialising in applied and decorative arts.⁶¹ Here, Vietnamese artworks were shown alongside decorative items and furniture from Indochina, to capitalise on the new fashion for Asianised interior design.

Throughout the early 1930s, Blanchard de la Brosse repeatedly wrote to Tardieu with suggestions on how to make the work more saleable: to send more silk paintings, to make the silk paintings more varied in colour and subject, to consider more ‘tropical’ subjects, and to make the works on a smaller scale to suit modern living.⁶² This correspondence suggests the impact of the commercial imperatives of Agindo on the production by the distant students. Nonetheless, it was a difficult economic climate in which to sell artwork. The artist Vũ Cao Đàm, then residing in Paris, reflected that “the crisis is becoming more and more marked here, and it is a real miracle that we are still able to sell at Agindo”.⁶³

The work of Vietnamese artists also began to appear in the longest-running Parisian salon, the Salon de la Société des Artistes Français (Society of French Artists), which by that time, like most institutions of the Paris art world, had begun to accept the contributions of foreign artists.⁶⁴ It seems that the artists reserved their larger or more ambitious works for this venue. Lê Phổ and Nam Sơn first showed there in 1930, and again in 1932. They were awarded silver medals: Lê Phổ for *L'Age heureux* and Nam Sơn for *Portrait de ma mère* [Portrait of My Mother], both of which had previously been shown at the Exposition Coloniale.⁶⁵ Nam Sơn's portrait, one of the most traditional works to be shown in Paris, was based on the hieratic, frontal style of Vietnamese ancestral portraiture. It represents the artist's mother in a formal pose and elaborate robes, presented against a flat background. The painting was not only reproduced in the catalogue for that salon, but was praised in *L'Art et les artistes* as "profound as a Madonna, full of soul and in a severe technique".⁶⁶ Also featured at the 1932 salon were the artists Lê Văn Đệ, Tô Ngọc Vân and Vũ Cao Đàm, while various artists of the EBAI continued to appear sporadically at this salon throughout the decade.

Thus, until the later years of the 1930s, Vietnamese artworks thus appeared largely in spaces specifically associated with the colonies (such as the salons of Agindo), or in the most conservative exhibition in Paris, the Salon des Artistes Français. By this time, none of the salon exhibitions in Paris were at the forefront of modernism.⁶⁷ However, although they are marginal in the standard histories of modern art today, which privilege the trajectory of the avant-garde, these sites still represented a large part of artistic activity in Paris at the time.⁶⁸ On a practical level, the salons offered artists the opportunity to promote their work, and their addresses appeared in the catalogue to facilitate direct sales.⁶⁹ But even by the standards of the more hesitant modernists, the Salon des Artistes Français was considered particularly moribund and retrograde by this point. That Vietnamese artists were initially shown here is no doubt related to the preferences of Victor Tardieu, who showed extensively at this salon in his early career.⁷⁰ As Marie-Agathe Simonetti has pointed out in her study of Tardieu's curriculum at the EBAI, Tardieu was deliberately anti-modern in his approach, and fostered a 'classicism' in keeping with his own education and the most conservative strands of interwar French art.⁷¹ Similarly, Nadine André-Pallois has noted the general stylistic conservatism of most of the French artists who were awarded official commissions to travel or teach in Indochina.⁷² Vietnamese artists of the EBAI, rigorously trained in drawing from the live model, and other mainstays of the art school system, could easily produce works that were recognisable and assimilable in academic circles in France, even if they



FIGURE 6: Lê Phổ (1907–2001), *La maison familiale au Tonkin* [Family Home in Tonkin], 1929, oil on canvas, 205 × 440 cm. Collection of the Cité internationale universitaire de Paris. Photograph by the author.

were framed by a rhetoric of difference and exoticism. This situation appears to have inflected the reception of their work in Paris in the 1930s.

In an otherwise indifferent review of the 1933 Salon de la Société des Artistes Français, the art critic Paul Fierens (1895–1957), a supporter of modern art, commented that: “Of the young Annamites of the École de Hanoi, who are giving the Europeans lessons in tact and wisdom, MM. Lê Văn Đệ and Lê Phổ shine in the first rank”.⁷³ The reference was only passing, but its terms are telling. Tact, wisdom, sincerity, severity, repose: the general vocabulary used to describe Vietnamese artworks in French reviews is suggestive of the stream of modern art with which they were associated. Consider the reception a few years before, of Lê Phổ’s *La maison familiale au Tonkin*, a large-scale oil painting made as a decorative commission for the Maison de l’Indochine (a lodging for Indochinese students in Paris) at the Cité Universitaire (Figure 6).⁷⁴ The painting is subtle, with the pictorial space largely dominated by the almost empty expanse of a courtyard in front of a traditional Vietnamese home. A family group gathers in the left-hand corner, shown with pensive, downcast gazes. Each figure is realised as a portrait of a slightly different emotive state, from the absorption and indolence of the two young boys to the sorrowful, bowed posture of the grandmother figure. Paint is applied thickly and seemingly quite drily, creating both contained blocks of colour and instances of manifest brushwork. There is a strong sense of flatness, which the artist enhanced by creating delicate suggestions of an outline around certain forms. Combined with a restrained colour palette and an abbreviated treatment of form, the work resists easy narrative characterisation and manifest exoticism. When shown at the 1930

Salon des Artistes Français, a critic from *Le Petit Parisien* described it as painted “in a spirit of wisdom and sincerity”.⁷⁵ A fuller description in the *Bulletin de l'Agence Économique de l'Indochine* noted:

The colour is neutral and severe, without any luminous brightness, with no pictorial fantasy. All of the interest is in the attitude of the figures, and, so to speak, in a moral order. The whole gives an impression of rest and serenity, which makes one think of Puvis.⁷⁶

The reference to “moral order”, to severity and serenity, and the classicising modernism of the painter Puvis de Chavannes (1824–98), all resonate with the critical language of the ‘call to order’ (*rappel à l'ordre*). This phrase describes a tendency in interwar French art, in which a number of French artists began to reject the frenetic stylistic experiments of the preceding decades, favouring instead a revival of naturalistic painting and an interest in the artistic forms of the past. This tendency included artists who had previously supported the emergent tendencies of *art indépendant* (independent art or modernism). In art criticism, there was renewed interest in the ‘French tradition’, often seen as synonymous with ‘classicism’: a rejection of idiosyncratic stylistic experimentation in favour of order, harmony and attention to nature and landscape.⁷⁷ While these ideas were not necessarily allied with political conservatism, in the hands of right-wing critics, they could become the basis for increasingly nationalistic, xenophobic and even antisemitic positions.⁷⁸ Art historian Christopher Green notes that, by 1930, “the invocation of tradition almost inevitably carried with it racial as well as national connotations”.⁷⁹

This was strongly manifested in the opposition created by certain critics between artists of the ‘École française’ and the ‘École de Paris’, newly-coined and fluctuating terms. The École française referred to artists, usually French men, who were perceived as working within the spirit of the French tradition of classicism: examples were the work of André Dunoyer de Segonzac (1884–1974) or André Derain (1880–1954). The École de Paris, on the other hand, came to refer to the work of foreign-born modern artists based in Paris, particularly in the artist community of Montparnasse. Right-wings critics abused the École de Paris for creating work that was bizarre, degraded or decadent: a foreign stain on the purity of the French artistic tradition. However, the term did not only operate in an exclusionary fashion: among the supporters of modernism, it could also operate positively, suggesting an association between foreign-born artists and the innovations of *art indépendant* or *art vivant* (living art).⁸⁰

This broader context illuminates the surprising support given to Vietnamese artists by Camille Mauclair (1872–1945), a xenophobic art critic of the extreme right, on seeing their exhibition at the Agindo in 1932. He credited the EBAI for:

[...] developing talents and souls in the love of that French spirit which the wogs have tried to discredit in our own country. In a street in which so much aggressive rubbish is strewn, come in for a moment to the Agence de l'Indochine, you will find rest, calm beauty, dream motifs.⁸¹

Most of Mauclair's short article was articulated in contrast between the works of the EBAI and those of the avant-garde of Montparnasse. The street of "aggressive rubbish" to which he refers is the Rue de la Boétie, which was the location of the Agindo, as well as important commercial galleries of modern art. Mauclair's use of the term "wogs" (*métèques*) in the article was consistent with the abusive tenor of much of his art criticism in this period, in which he displayed virulent xenophobia: in his view, the foreign artists of Montparnasse threatened the racial purity and aspirations of the French nation.⁸² His discourse anticipated the violent antisemitism and aesthetic conservatism of the culture of Vichy France in the 1940s.⁸³ Yet, even such an extreme xenophobe as Mauclair saw the Vietnamese modern artists as instances of "French spirit". Was this because their academic artistic education made their work resonant for a conservative audience, primed to embrace such signs of the *École française* as harmony, restrained stylisation and classical drawing technique? In a later article, he speculated that "perhaps it will become very chic one day to possess a Tô Ngọc Vân instead of a Chagall or a Kokochska."⁸⁴

Another curious intimation of the reception of the EBAI artists is the support given to the artist Lê Phổ by the prominent art critic Waldemar George (1893–1970). George was the writer of the only monograph to date about Lê Phổ, published later in the artist's life, in 1970.⁸⁵ However, according to the information in this monograph, the two already knew one another as early as the 1930s, and it was George who encouraged Lê Phổ to organise his first solo exhibition in Paris in 1938.⁸⁶ As a critic, George had initially been a supporter of modern art, but came to a more conservative position in the 1930s, alongside a political embrace of the fascism of Mussolini.⁸⁷ In his criticism written in that decade, he reinforced the distinction between the *École française* and the *École de Paris*. For him, the *École de Paris* signified a composite and rootless style, which "translates a collective neurosis and imposes a fashion".⁸⁸ However, in his conception, the *École française* was

less an ethnic/racial identity than a spirit or approach: foreign artists were included within its ranks provided that they shared its values.⁸⁹ George wrote in 1931:

France is a state of mind. It represents a spiritual and intellectual order. French art welcomes and assimilates all those who adapt to its mode of feeling.⁹⁰

Did George, like Mauclair, judge that Lê Phổ had absorbed the spirit of the *École française*? In his review of the Salon de la France d'Outre-mer in 1940, he mentions the work of Lê Phổ, Vũ Cao Đàm and Mai Trung Thứ as having “retrieved, without imitating anyone or any epoch, the feeling of an ethnic tradition”.⁹¹ But perhaps he perceived the success of what he understood as a renovation of an ethnic past—a renovation which he also attributed to a benign French colonial influence—precisely because its new expression also conformed to the values he esteemed in modern art.

In the interwar period, the preoccupation with distinguishing an *École française*—and the emphasis on ‘national schools’ in art in general—was also reflected in institutional forms. In 1923, the Salon des Indépendants began to display artists by nationality, causing a public dispute among artists. Some artists found this nationalising display to contradict the democratic spirit of this salon, while others pointed out that many of so-called ‘foreign’ representatives were long-term residents of Paris.⁹² Meanwhile, the division between French and foreign also became reified in the collecting and exhibiting practices of the state’s museum of contemporary art. The Musée du Luxembourg came to be reserved for contemporary French artists, opening an annex in 1922 (the Musée du Jeu de Paume), which was intended for the work of ‘contemporary foreign schools’. The Musée du Jeu de Paume was also the site in which artists of the *École de Paris* were displayed, presented as an independent school in their own right.⁹³

Throughout the 1930s, the Musée du Jeu de Paume held nationally-based exhibitions of modern schools, including of Italian (1935), Swiss (1934) and Spanish (1936) art. Modern Asian art was also featured: in a special exhibition of Japanese art in 1929, and of Chinese art in 1933. The Japanese exhibition was a survey of painting and decorative arts from the Meiji era (1869–1912) up until the contemporary.⁹⁴ The focus was principally on neo-traditional strands of Japanese contemporary art, which the catalogue essays framed as modern continuations of a distinctively Japanese art history. The Chinese exhibition similarly noted the challenge faced by Chinese modern artists in their encounter with Western art, but situated their work within a long-running cultural tradition.⁹⁵ After Blanchard de la Brosse of Agindo saw the

exhibition of Chinese art, he had high hopes of also promoting Vietnamese modern art through an exhibition at the Jeu de Paume, writing to Tardieu that: “the modern [Chinese artworks] are very mediocre and many are below the level of the paintings by your students”.⁹⁶ He courted the Director of National Museums, but ultimately the request was not favoured: the Chinese exhibition had apparently been “a lamentable failure” and the public, it was thought, would not perceive the difference between Vietnamese and Chinese painting.⁹⁷

However, there were perhaps also larger issues at stake. Unlike Japan and China, Vietnam was not an independent nation but a colony. Furthermore, the presentation of the Japanese and Chinese exhibitions emphasised the idea of modern art as a continuation of an historical national tradition. For Vietnamese painting, however, there was a perception held at the EBAI that it did not have a distinctive, local, historical basis: a view that also began to circulate in the reviews in France. Writing about the EBAI for a special feature in *L'Illustration*, Victor Tardieu's son Jean commented that the school had achieved:

[...] the double miracle of calling to life the semi-dead traditions of Annamite art (principally those of local architecture) and in creating that art where it had not yet found its own expression, particularly in the domains of painting and sculpture. [...] At the sources of the civilisation and culture of their race, they naturally and effortlessly retrieve the Chinese tradition.⁹⁸

The idea that premodern Vietnamese painting had never found a distinctive expression can also be related to a more general view in colonial scholarship that Vietnamese culture descended from Chinese sources.⁹⁹ This perceived absence of a historical tradition also had the impact of highlighting and emphasising the achievements of an art forged under colonial tutelage. Such ideas seem to have been transmitted to the students of the EBAI, as similar comments appear in a Vietnamese student's speech of thanks to Victor Tardieu, marking his departure from Hanoi for the Exposition Coloniale in 1931:

In painting, can we refer to an ancient Annamite painting, for did one truly exist?

We know nothing of it apart from those popular productions which demonstrate a certain sensitivity, but which, due to their often gross imperfections, cannot claim to be part of a great art.

Painting in this country is thus something new. It is up to us to create it. But how? Here a serious question arises. Must we be inspired by the Western masters? [...]

Obviously, Chinese art is the unique source which provides us the elements for the creation of a new school of Annamite painting.¹⁰⁰

The text further suggested that Chinese painting, as an historical tradition, had also recently fallen into decadence, and that the task would be to continue its original animating spirit rather than imitate its contemporary manifestations. The student pondered the “curious phenomenon that artistic China is at the gates of our borders, but we seek it out beyond the oceans”, noting that as a generation of artists, they were more familiar with the Asianised and *japoniste* work of the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists.¹⁰¹ These points of view might suggest why the works of the EBAI students were not received as the modern residue of a distinctive national tradition, but rather as something poised more ambiguously between French and local sources.

This ambiguity is also perhaps the reason why, when a work of Vietnamese art was acquired for France’s modern art collection in 1934, it was not destined for the Musée du Jeu de Paume but surprisingly, for the collection of modern French artists in the Musée du Luxembourg.¹⁰² *En Famille* [Among Family], by the artist Lê Văn Đệ, was fairly typical of the works that EBAI artists showed in Paris, and it also circulated in similar ways (Figure 7). In its visual qualities and mood, it bears the same characteristics of the Exposition artworks: the subject matter offers intimacy, but the painterly treatment forecloses it. The work is on an imposing scale, representing a scene of a family at home. In the image, a young Vietnamese woman breastfeeds her baby while lying in a rope hammock, whose net-like form bisects the foreground. Behind her, the viewer can see through to an interior scene in the house, where other members of the family gather to talk, seated before a traditional ancestral altar. The potentially sentimental subject is countered by the austerity of the treatment: subdued colour and a rough handling of thick, dry paint, which in places appears almost patchy, giving an abbreviated quality to the faces and figures. In its sense of balance and restrained colour harmony, as well as its cautious embrace of flatness and painterly effects, it presents a combination of academic and modernist features, in a way that was resonant with trends in interwar France. While in the case of many French artists of the period, this kind of style was a “reactionary modernism”—a retreat from the avant-garde—ironically, this was not the case with Lê Văn Đệ.¹⁰³ Coming from the highly academic context of the EBAI, this work represents a gesture towards, rather than away from, modernist stylisation.



FIGURE 7: Lê Văn Đệ (1906–1966), *L'intérieur familial au Tonkin* (formerly known as *En Famille*), 1933, oil on canvas, 180 × 240 cm. FNAC 13339, Centre national des arts plastiques, Paris-La Défense (France). © droits réservés/Cnap/Crédit photo: Yves Chenot.

Furthermore, the painting would have meant something entirely different in the context of the Vietnamese art world, where an oil painting of an intimate domestic scene was a very recent mode of practice and would have signified newness and modernity.

In France, the painting was first shown at the Salon des Artistes Français of 1933, where it was reproduced in the catalogue, and received favourable critical attention, even appearing on the cover of *Le Monde Illustré*.¹⁰⁴ Lê Văn Đệ, one of the earliest graduates of the EBAI, had moved to Paris in 1932, where he studied in the atelier of the academic painter Pierre Laurens at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts. He began to exhibit works at the salon in the same year, showing a quintessentially Parisian scene of a bird's eye view of the crowd at Montparnasse station.¹⁰⁵ He then moved to Italy on a travelling scholarship, where he received a number of important commissions related to Catholic and sacred art.¹⁰⁶ During his time in Italy, *En Famille* was shown at a commercial gallery, then became the centrepiece of the French government's Indochina pavilion at a trade fair (Foire d'Echantillons)

in Milan. There, it attracted the attention of the French Minister for Commerce and Industry, who recommended it for acquisition. The acquisition file reveals some uncertainty about how the work could be situated within the museums of the French state. In a letter to the Fine Arts Administration, Pierre Ladoué, the assistant curator of the Musée du Luxembourg, wrote:

[...] The canvas by this artist titled “Among Family” shows sufficient qualities to be the subject of an acquisition by the state. But the situation of Lê Văn Đệ underlines a point of law on which it would be convenient to obtain some details. Can this Annamite painter feature among the French artists, at the Musée du Luxembourg?¹⁰⁷

No further correspondence exists regarding this decision: the Fine Arts Administration replied simply that there were no barriers to its inclusion, and the work entered the collection.¹⁰⁸ Among the other handful of files for works by Vietnamese artists acquired by the state, it is not always clear where the work would be displayed, though none mention the Jeu de Paume.¹⁰⁹ However, at least one other case suggests the involvement of the Musée du Luxembourg: in 1939, Jean Cassou wrote to the Fine Arts Administration, agreeing to the acquisition of works by Lê Phổ and Mai Trung Thứ, and noting a previous acquisition from Vũ Cao Đàm.¹¹⁰ Thus, despite the anxiety and attention in this period to issues of foreign versus French modernism, it seems that the EBAI painters were more easily accommodated under the rubric of French art than as a manifestation of a ‘contemporary foreign school’.

Adamson and Norris note, in interwar France, “the existence of a substantial middle-ground of artists who worked with one eye toward some form of tradition—academic or otherwise—and the other toward recent innovations in artistic practice”.¹¹¹ Because of the nature of the academic training that had been transposed to the colony in Indochina, the artists from the EBAI were able to circulate successfully within this “middle-ground” space in Paris: showing at the salon, receiving press attention and sales, and even being considered for acquisition by the state. The traces of their reception—both in terms of art criticism and collecting practice—intimate that they were placed within the trajectory of a French tradition, albeit an ‘exotic’ variant. They were neither a clearly-articulated ‘foreign school’, nor explicitly aligned with the foreign avant-gardes of the École de Paris. However, if this suggests a kind of conservatism—in keeping with the *rappel à l'ordre* of the French art world—it should be understood that ideas of ‘tradition’, ‘modern’ and ‘conservatism’ had entirely different meanings and associations within

Vietnamese modernity. That their work was situated in this way in Paris is evidence of the strong preoccupations of this site of reception. They were absorbed into a particular discourse about the status of French art which was not necessarily of primary significance for the artists themselves.

Lost in the “Parisian Jungle”...?

During the 1930s, most of the EBAI artists negotiated the Paris art world only at a distance, heavily mediated through the activities of the colonial state, and especially Agindo. Despite the exposure their work received in Paris, few Vietnamese artists had travelled there in person. Towards the end of the decade, however, a small group of artists—Lê Phổ, Vũ Cao Đàm and Mai Trung Thứ—migrated to France permanently, and all initially settled in Paris.¹¹² A female graduate of the EBAI, Lê Thị Lựu also migrated, although she exhibited publicly quite rarely compared to her male peers. These artists soon shifted their alliance to new sites of exhibition, suggesting a determination to stake out a different space of recognition and reception in the art world of the city. No longer submitting work to the Salon des Artistes Français, they instead appeared frequently at newer salons: showing in the Salon des Artistes Indépendants, the first of the dissident salons, founded in 1884; the Salon d'Automne, founded to support emerging young artists in 1903; and the most recently-founded salon, the Salon des Tuileries, established in 1923.¹¹³ These salons were more associated with young artists and had strong historical connections to previous waves of modernism (notably Impressionism at the Indépendants, and Fauvism at the Salon d'Automne). However, the salon system in general was no longer at the forefront of the avant-garde by the 1930s and had largely ceded significance to commercial galleries. The emigrant artists also began to exhibit in such spaces, holding group exhibitions at Agindo and at other commercial galleries, in Paris and beyond. Most significantly, in December 1943, they were able to hold a group exhibition at a well-known gallery of modern art, Galerie Hessel, located in the important art district of the Rue de la Boétie, which increased their reputation in Paris.¹¹⁴

This new energy and ambition is well signalled in Lê Phổ's self-portrait of 1938 (Figure 1), a work that is particularly notable given that Vietnamese artists created very few self-portraits during the colonial period. The artist's frank gaze and his assured sartorial stylishness express a new, confident self-imaging of the artist that was also a bellwether for other transformations. For all three Vietnamese emigrant artists, the shift to different exhibition sites occurred in parallel with a major change in their artwork, for which ink



FIGURE 8: Lê Phổ (1907–2001), *Les Tenturières* [The Fabric Dyers], c. 1939, ink and colour on silk. Size and location unknown. As reproduced in Gabriel Mourey, “Nos Artistes Indochinois” [Our Indochinese Artists], *Le Monde Coloniale Illustré* 193 (July 1939): 167. Source gallica.bnf.fr/BnF.

and gouache on silk now became the privileged medium. All three embraced a form of highly-stylised figure and portrait painting, and continued to work in this vein through the 1940s. By looking at the work of two of these artists—Lê Phổ and Vũ Cao Đàm—in more detail, this moment of change can be better understood.

After his participation at the Exposition Coloniale in 1931, Lê Phổ remained in Paris for a short time, then left for travels in Europe, encountering a number of sources that reportedly became significant for his aesthetic, including Fra Angelico, Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, Jean Fouquet and Jean Hey.¹¹⁵ His preference for these mediaeval and early Renaissance artists (the so-called ‘primitives’) was perhaps due to the potential he saw in them as a release from the demands of academic painting, while suggesting possibilities for an elegant, linear quality in the treatment of the figure. By 1933, he had returned to Hanoi, and in 1934 he made a trip to Beijing, where he visited the collections of historical Chinese paintings.¹¹⁶ His return to Paris was reportedly prompted by his appointment as the artistic director for the Indochina Section of the 1937 Exposition des Arts et Techniques de la Vie Moderne.¹¹⁷ By the end of the 1930s, the various stylistic sources that he had absorbed coalesced into a looser, more fluid style of painting, with figures floating over expanses of colour. In *Les Teinturières* [The Fabric Dyers], which the artist exhibited at Agindo in 1939, he demonstrated this new style in a clustered composition, with the figures rendered as flowing forms (Figure 8).



FIGURE 9: Lê Phổ (1907–2001), *Harmony in Green: The Two Sisters*, c. 1938, gouache on silk, 54 × 45 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

The vigorous labour of fabric-dyeing was transformed into a sequence of stylised gestures, where the relation of the interlinked bodies is underscored by the spooling fabric.

Another characteristic example of Lê Phổ's new style is *Harmony in Green: The Two Sisters*, c. 1938, one of his many paintings from this period to feature idealised images of Vietnamese women (Figure 9). Too undifferentiated from one another to be considered portraits, these images instead reflect a distinctive stylistic vocabulary for representing an image of Vietnamese femininity—elongated faces and necks, with delicate, minimally-drawn features—to which the artist would repeatedly return. Lê Phổ began to produce images of maternity and of the Christian *pietà* in this manner. He also began to make more use of the textural qualities of silk, its receptivity to subtle washes of colour and translucency, evident in *Harmony in Green* in the treatment of the flowing scarves and nuanced shades of colour, as well as the undulating hills of the background. In works of the late 30s and early 40s, there is a sense of latent sensuality, at times, even eroticism, in the subject matter of the works, enhanced by the tactile materiality of the fabric. Set against the restrained technique and palette of Lê Phổ's earlier oil paintings, the contrast is striking. While the subject matter was also highly

FIGURE 10: Vĩ Cao Đầm (1908–2000), *Head of Young Girl*, c. 1930. Bronze with brown patina, 37 × 15 × 20 cm. Collection of Musée du quai Branly, Paris. © ADAGP, Paris. Photo © Musée du quai Branly–Jacques Chirac, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/image Claude Germain.



idealised in the oil works, they nonetheless still tended to be anchored in observational details of Vietnamese life. The new works on silk, however, projected notionally Vietnamese scenes into ahistorical, fantasy settings.

The transformation in the emphasis of the work of Vĩ Cao Đầm is even more marked, given that he initially arrived in Paris as a sculptor. His contribution to the Exposition Coloniale included seven busts in bronze, four of which were iterations of the popular *Jeune Fille Annamite* (Figure 10), which was well received and widely reproduced. Vĩ Cao Đầm then studied in Paris at the École de Louvre between 1932–34 and submitted further sculptural works to the Salon des Artistes Français, including portrait busts of the Vietnamese Emperor Bảo Đại and a monumental Buddha image.¹¹⁸ The Buddha head, executed in the style of Khmer sculpture, was intended to be his showpiece at the salon, and he took several years to develop it.¹¹⁹ The art critic of *Le Temps*, the influential Thiébaud-Sisson, praised him repeatedly and asked, “What will the future be for this young artist of 27, who is already someone?”¹²⁰ Stylistically, Vĩ Cao Đầm’s sculptural works struck a balance between academic technique and restrained modern stylisation. In his letters to Tardieu, he noted that he was managing to make his living in Paris through sales and some commissions.¹²¹ By 1934, however,



FIGURE 11: Vũ Cao Đàm, *Portrait of a Young Girl*, c. 1940, ink and gouache on silk laid on paper, 61 × 46 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore. Image courtesy of National Heritage Board.

Blanchard de la Brosse thought that Vũ Cao Đàm was stagnating in Paris and insufficiently employed, and urged Tardieu to find him a post back in Vietnam.¹²² He did return at some point in the mid-1930s, before finally settling definitively in Paris in 1936–37.

On his return to Paris, Vũ Cao Đàm also began to focus on painting on silk. Part of this was due to material necessity, as metal for casting became impossible to find during World War Two (he continued to make sculptures in terracotta).¹²³ Like the work of Lê Phổ, his silk paintings also tend to project a romantic imaginary of Vietnam, often through images of women or nudes, as well as historical courtly narratives. An example of his new style can be seen in *Portrait of a Young Girl*, c. 1940 (Figure 11). This painting is a delicate image of a young Vietnamese woman, wearing an *áo dài*—a modernised form of Vietnamese traditional dress—and seated in front of an ink-and-brush painting. From the medium, to the aesthetic, to the subject, it projects a gentle form of exoticism. Another facet of Vũ Cao Đàm's silk-painting practice was ancestral-type portraits. These images had the strongest connection to Vietnamese historical precedents: large-scale, frontal portraits survive from the 18th and 19th centuries, intended for the purposes of venerating deceased persons, in a temple or at a familial altar.¹²⁴ In Vũ Cao

Đàm's *Portrait d'un vieux lettré* [Portrait of an Elderly Scholar], he uses the format and composition characteristic of such portraits, depicting a scholar in traditional robes. However, the treatment of the background is painterly, showing a textured, scumbling effect created by different layers of colour on silk. The audience for these works was also radically different to that of the ancestral portraits of the past: one of Vũ Cao Đàm's works in this genre was acquired by the French state in 1939, after being shown at the Salon des Indépendants.¹²⁵ What Vũ Cao Đàm's two modes of painting shared was a conspicuous deployment of 'Asian-ness', which was signalled particularly strongly by the silk medium itself.

Many French reviewers understood (and approved of) the silk paintings as a Vietnamese traditional practice. For example, Jeannine Auboyer, in an illustrated feature on Vũ Cao Đàm in *France-Illustration*, wrote that "his technique stays attached to the substrate of his ancestors: silk, in which Vu Cao Dam appreciates the fineness of the grain and the softness and absorption of the colour".¹²⁶ She was not the first critic to link the medium with the idea of Vietnamese tradition, nor to suggest that oil paint was foreign to the Vietnamese sensibility.¹²⁷ However, the kind of silk painting practised by EBAI artists was in fact a modern invention and had little precedent within Vietnamese painting. While there are some documented examples of precolonial silk painting, these are quite dissimilar in style and technique to the work done by artists of the EBAI. Taylor, for example, notes some possible precolonial precedents in ceremonial temple scroll painting, or in the art of the minority Dao or Yao people, but ultimately concludes that modern silk painting was "invented at EBAI".¹²⁸ Nguyễn Văn Ty, a student at EBAI in the colonial period, describes historical examples of silk painting in Vietnam, particularly in the form of ancestral portraiture. However, he also records how Tardieu, conscious of an active market for Asian silk painting abroad, encouraged his students to refer to Chinese and Japanese examples of the genre, and brought samples for study from Yunnan.¹²⁹ Thus, perhaps the best understanding of Vietnamese modern silk painting is that the technique was developed with reference to multiple and varied sources, through a process of trial and error.

Certainly, Tardieu understood it as a genre invented at the EBAI. His correspondence reveals his irritation with a newspaper article by Thiébauld-Sisson that had accused him of turning Vietnamese students away from their tradition by encouraging painting in oil, as Tardieu thought that silk painting was equally a new technique pioneered by his students.¹³⁰ Blanchard de la Brosse, responsible for promoting the silk works at Agindo in Paris, wrote to Tardieu that:

You are completely correct that it was you who invented painting on silk in Tonkin, which nonetheless given the outrageous metropolitan snobbery does not preclude that the success of your students is due to the fact that the amateurs and the self-proclaimed 'enlightened' imagine that these artworks are the results of a return by indigenous artists to a traditional artform. Also, I make sure not to say that it was you who invented it.¹³¹

Of course, it was a mis-statement to claim that Tardieu had "invented" silk painting rather than the artists who had actually created these new artworks—and elsewhere Tardieu credited his students rather than himself.¹³² What is more revealing, however, is that Blanchard de la Brosse acknowledges that the attraction of the metropolitan audience to such works was based on the assumption of their traditionalism, and therefore cultural authenticity. Like the market, it seems that the metropolitan press was similarly reluctant to acknowledge that the silk paintings were the product of the ingenuity of the Vietnamese artists themselves, and of modern experiments and conditions. In that sense, they were as distant from precolonial art as works in oil paint.

Painting on silk offered a number of advantages, however, to the Vietnamese artists active in Paris. They were doubtless already aware that paintings on silk had sold well at Agindo. Vũ Cao Đàm, seeing the new exhibition of silk painting there in 1933, wrote to Tardieu that "I am happy to see that my comrades now understand the great interest they have, doing nothing but silk painting", before requesting Tardieu to send him some silk fabric to work with.¹³³ Even with continued support from Agindo in the late 1930s and early 1940s, these artists needed to find ways to survive financially, now that they were competing directly with other Paris-based artists for recognition and representation. The general increase in the romantic or sentimental quality of their subject matter might also be a result of such commercial pressures.¹³⁴ The disruptions of World War Two complicated their situation. Lê Phổ had volunteered for the French armed forces, but was demobilised in July 1940. He wrote twice to the Fine Arts administration, at that point displaced to Vichy because of the German invasion, imploring them to honour a purchase previously committed by the state, as "I am still in a difficult situation: without money and often ill."¹³⁵ Subsequently, however, the three artists do appear to have managed to attract the attention of commercial gallerists.

Beyond purely commercial demands, there was also the need to distinguish themselves within the visual economy of the Paris art world. Jeannine Auboyer captured this in her article on Vũ Cao Đàm, writing sympathetically that:

[...] he was going to try to regenerate Indochinese painting, while conserving what was essential from its past qualities, and adding to it certain characteristics of Western painting, operating a synthesis so well-balanced that it would appear natural.

It was a risky and very ambitious enterprise for a young painter lost in the Parisian jungle.¹³⁶

Auboyer thought that Vũ Cao Đàm had succeeded well in this synthesis, but her phrase “the Parisian jungle” suggests what was at stake. While the public expected their work to reflect an authentic Vietnamese tradition, they also had to make it meaningful for contemporary tastes. The rather academic style of EBAI paintings from the earlier 1930s had achieved success in certain circles, but the artists were perhaps conscious that it would not adequately distinguish them in other sectors of the art world. While they shied away from more confronting forms of modernist stylisation (like cubism or abstraction), their new manner of painting does bear some resemblance to certain figurative painters of the École de Paris. In the new work of Lê Phổ in particular, the stylised, at times almost mask-like, female faces recall Amedeo Modigliani (1884–1920) or Marie Laurencin (1883–1956), although the softer quality of ink on silk meant that the effect was more fluid and lyrical. Meanwhile, in its general aesthetic and composition, Lê Phổ’s self-portrait recalls the self-portraits of Foujita Tsuguharu (1886–1968), the Japanese modern artist and previous resident of Montparnasse. Possibly Lê Phổ also sensed a precedent in Foujita’s astute navigation of the art world in Paris.¹³⁷ Alicia Volk has noted that Foujita had “satisfied the double standard of originality that European critics imposed on Japanese Western-style artists”, by creating works that were unique and individual, but referenced Japanese traditional aesthetics.¹³⁸ The works of the emigrant Vietnamese artists can be seen as performing a similar manoeuvre. Navigating these expectations required creative agility on the part of the artist: mobilising the silk medium for its implications of Asian traditionalism, as well as its expressive potential, while developing a new figurative language that blended a diverse array of sources.

This was an unmistakably cosmopolitan position, as it required sensitivity to the critical and aesthetic concerns—as well as the market—of their new home. However, it was not the kind of avant-garde cosmopolitanism that has generally occupied scholarship to date. Rather, the experiences of Vietnamese artists suggest that the idea of a cosmopolitan practice need not be limited to the preoccupations of the avant-garde. Because of their education under a colonial system of art production, Vietnamese artists occupied an exceptional

position within the Paris art world. They were promoted and supported because of colonial systems and ideologies, but this also bounded and framed their reception in a manner that was difficult to overcome. The experiences of the emigrant artists suggest that the trajectory out of this limited sphere was to create a synthesising practice which allowed them to move away from the academicism of the EBAI. While this allowed for an aesthetic development, it was one that nonetheless conformed to their new audience's expectations of exoticism.

Conclusion

As a key site in the global history of modern art, Paris has long been associated with the idea of cosmopolitanism, especially that of the modernist avant-garde. However, the standard art-historical narrative—that artists from elsewhere travelled to Paris to receive the latest developments in art—offers an incomplete picture of the range of engagements that actually took place and privileges only a narrow band of possible encounters. Vietnamese artists' experiences in Paris in the 1930s are an instance of an alternative trajectory: one which offers a different vantage point on the idea of the 'centre'. As Ming Tiampo has noted, even within the effort to forge de-centered histories of modernism, it is necessary to acknowledge historically that "place did matter and centers of power did exist".¹³⁹ However, to admit the significance of Paris to Vietnamese artists need not mean to unquestioningly reinscribe its authority in art history. Instead, the detail of this historical case can allow us to question its function and meaning as 'centre'. The reception and circulation of Vietnamese artists in Paris was affected by a number of specific factors: their colonial tutelage, the preoccupations of the French art world of the period, the institutional structures with which they engaged, as well as their own choices as creative artists. In the case of the artists of the EBAI, the impact of colonial discourse in a politics of reception reveals a kind of limit to Paris' cosmopolitanism. Rather than positioning Paris as a site of influence and authority, Paris emerges in this account as a site in which more complex negotiations took place, as artists navigated the politics of aesthetics in that city.

By way of coda, we can note the return of the artist Lê Văn Đệ to Paris in 1959, as curator of the Vietnamese section of the First Paris Biennale. This time, as the official representative of the newly postcolonial nation of South Vietnam (Republic of Vietnam), Lê Văn Đệ lamented the political situation in which Vietnam found itself, while praising his young Vietnamese artists as "attesting both to the loyalty of [Vietnam's] people to their cultural

traditions, and to the vitality of Vietnamese art”.¹⁴⁰ In a single career, Lê Văn Đệ experienced the transition from colony to nation, from pre- to postwar Paris, from Colonial Exposition to Biennale. His presence at this later juncture, at an early example of the institutional forms of the globalised contemporary art world, is a critical reminder that such issues of reception and hierarchy, as experienced by Vietnamese artists in Paris in the 1930s, continue to cast their shadows into the present.

BIOGRAPHY

Phoebe Scott is a curator at the National Gallery Singapore. She is the curator of *Radiant Material: A Dialogue in Vietnamese Lacquer Painting* (2017) and the co-curator of *Reframing Modernism: Painting from Southeast Asia, Europe and Beyond* (2016), a collaborative exhibition with the Centre Pompidou, as well as the inaugural exhibition of the Southeast Asia galleries at National Gallery Singapore, *Between Declarations and Dreams: Art of Southeast Asia since the 19th Century* (2015). Phoebe is also an adjunct lecturer in art history at the National University of Singapore. Prior to joining National Gallery Singapore, she completed her PhD at the University of Sydney on the subject of modern Vietnamese art.

Notes

- ¹ Parts of this essay draw on information collected during the project “Artists from Southeast Asia in Paris, 1880–1960”, conducted from 2016–18 at National Gallery Singapore by Phoebe Scott and Horikawa Lisa. Certain parts of the content of this essay have also appeared in a preliminary form elsewhere. A discussion of Vietnamese artists at the Exposition Coloniale Internationale of 1931 appears in Phoebe Scott, “Forming and Reforming the Artist: Modernity, Agency and the Discourse of Art in North Vietnam, 1925–1954” (Unpublished PhD thesis, Sydney: University of Sydney, 2012), pp. 56–68. A discussion of the work of the artist Lê Phổ and the meaning of Paris as ‘centre’, also appears in Phoebe Scott, “Towards an Unstable ‘Centre’”: Paris Modernism Encountered, Refracted and Diffused”, pp. 19–28 and “Lê Phổ”, pp. 43–7, both in *Reframing Modernism: Painting from Southeast Asia, Europe and Beyond*, ed. Sara Lee and Sara Siew (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 2016). These discussions are revised and expanded here. The author would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments, as well as Nicola John and Christina Luemen for their assistance with research documentation.
- ² The use of the term ‘Vietnam’ in this essay is anachronistic but deliberate. French Indochina was regarded as comprised of five separate *pays* (countries), three of which—Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchine—correspond roughly to the boundaries of contemporary Vietnam. These three countries were also collectively described as ‘Annam’ and Vietnamese people as “Annamites”; however, because this term could be considered pejorative, and to maintain the clarity of a term in current usage, Vietnam and Vietnamese are used instead here. On the use of the various terms for Vietnam in the colonial period, see Christopher E. Goscha, *Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012), pp. 10–2.
- ³ On the developments in Vietnamese modern literature, journalism and the public sphere, see Shawn Frederick McHale, *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004); Nguyễn Văn Ký, *La société vietnamienne face à la modernité: Le Tonkin de la fin du XIXe siècle à la seconde guerre mondiale* [Vietnamese Society Facing Modernity: Tonkin from the End of the 19th Century to the Second World War] (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1995); and David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).
- ⁴ Patricia A. Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2000), pp. 74–5, 313.
- ⁵ On the intersection between foreign artists and debates about French modernism, see Kate Kangaslahti, “Foreign Artists and the École de Paris: Critical and

Institutional Ambivalence between the Wars”, in *Academics, Pompiers, Official Artists and the Arrière-garde: Defining Modern and Traditional in France, 1900–1960*, ed. Natalie Adamson and Toby Norris (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 85–111; Ihor Junyk, *Foreign Modernism: Cosmopolitanism, Identity and Style in Paris* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2013), pp. 3–14, 104–25; Christopher Green, *Art in France, 1900–1940* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 61–4, 206–30; Romy Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France between the Wars* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. ix–xiv, 137–54 and Romy Golan, “The ‘École française’ vs. the ‘École de Paris’: The Debate about the Status of Jewish Artists in Paris between the Wars”, in *The Circle of Montparnasse: Jewish Artists in Paris 1905–1945*, ed. Kenneth E. Silver and Romy Golan (New York: Universe Books, 1985), pp. 81–7.

- ⁶ See comments in Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta, “Introduction” to *Cosmopolitanisms*, ed. Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta (New York: New York University Press, 2017), pp. 1–17; 4–5, 13–4. Walter D. Mignolo also sees cosmopolitanism as linked to the “global designs” of colonialism and modernity, see “The Many Faces of Cosmopolis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmpolitanism”, in *Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Carol Breckenridge et al. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 157–87.
- ⁷ Kobena Mercer, “Introduction” to *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, ed. Kobena Mercer (London: The Institute of International Visual Arts and Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005), pp. 9–11.
- ⁸ Appiah considers the ethical application of cosmopolitanism primary through the modality of “conversation between people from different ways of life”, Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), p. xxi.
- ⁹ Meskimmon builds on Appiah’s idea of conversation to suggest the model of “cosmopolitan imagination”, conceived as a form of affective relation through art, which dialogues through cultural difference, Marsha Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art and the Cosmopolitan Imagination* (Routledge: London and New York, 2010). Papastergiadis proposes a “cosmopolitan imaginary”, especially with regard to reflexive and relational contemporary practices, Nikos Papastergiadis, *Cosmopolitanism and Culture* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2012).
- ¹⁰ See Mercer, ed., *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*.
- ¹¹ Caroline Herbelin has similarly argued for the cosmopolitanism of Vietnamese architects active in colonial Indochina in the 1930s, see *Architectures du Vietnam colonial: Repenser le métissage* [Architectures of Colonial Vietnam: Rethinking Hybridity] (Paris: CTHS-INHA “L’Art et l’Essai” 16: 2016), pp. 115–42.

- ¹² This direction in research is discussed in Robbins and Horta as “cosmopolitanism from below”, “Introduction” to *Cosmopolitanisms*, p. 4. It can also be related to critical reformulations of the term, such as James Clifford’s “discrepant cosmopolitanism”, see “Traveling Cultures”, in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grosser, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (Routledge: New York and London, 1992), pp. 96–112, as well as Mignolo’s “critical cosmopolitanism”, see “The Many Faces of Cosmopolis”.
- ¹³ The pejorative connotations of the term are noted in Mercer, *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, p. 10 and Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, pp. xiii and xvi.
- ¹⁴ Pre-existing schools were largely schools of applied art, including the École professionnelle, opened in Hanoi in 1902, and schools of Thủ Dầu Một and Biên Hòa, which respectively focused on local woodworking and lacquer, and ceramics. The École de Gia Định, founded in 1913, did teach drawing and printing, with a view to training artisans for positions in public services. In Cambodia, the École des Arts Cambodgiens trained students in crafts and decorative arts, from 1917. See Nadine André-Pallois, *L’Indochine: un lieu d’échange culturel? Les peintres français et indochinois (fin XIXe–XXe siècle* [Indochina: A Site of Cultural Exchange? French and Indochinese Painters, end 19th–20th centuries] (Paris: Presses de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1997), pp. 209–13.
- ¹⁵ There have been many accounts of the foundation and functioning of the École des Beaux-Arts de l’Indochine. Some of the more extensive include: Nguyễn Quang Phòng, “Trường Cao Đẳng Mỹ Thuật Đông Dương với Nền Hội Hoạ Việt Nam” [The Fine Arts College of Indochina and Vietnamese Painting], in *Các Hoạ Sĩ Trường Cao Đẳng Mỹ Thuật Đông Dương* (Hanoi: Nhà Xuất Bản Mỹ Thuật, 1993), pp. 5–27; André-Pallois, *L’Indochine*, pp. 214–36; Catherine Noppe and Jean-François Hubert, “Victor Tardieu (1870–1937) et l’École des Beaux-Arts de l’Indochine”, in *Arts du Vietnam: la fleur du pêcher et l’oiseau d’azur*, ed. Catherine Noppe and Jean-François Hubert (Tournai: La Renaissance du Livre and Morlanwelz: Musée Royal de Mariemont, 2002), pp. 153–83; Nora Annesley Taylor, *Painters in Hanoi: An Ethnography of Vietnamese Art*, 2nd edition (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), pp. 22–41; Scott, “Forming and Reforming the Artist”, pp. 33–80; Loan de Fontbrune, “Victor Tardieu et ses élèves” [Victor Tardieu and his Students], in *Du fleuve Rouge au Mékong: Visions du Viêt Nam* (Paris: Musée Cernuschi, 2012–13), pp. 75–106 and Marie-Agathe Simonetti, “The École des Beaux-Arts de l’Indochine: Victor Tardieu and French Art between the Wars”, unpublished MA thesis (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2016). On the founding of the architectural section of the school, see Herbelin, *Architectures du Vietnam colonial*, pp. 85–110.
- ¹⁶ A detailed account of the curriculum in the 1920s–30s is contained in Exposition Coloniale Internationale Paris 1931, Indochine Française, Direction Générale de

l'Instruction Publique, *Trois écoles d'art de l'Indochine: Hanoi, Phnom-Penh, Bien-Hoa* [Three Art Schools of Indochina: Hanoi, Phnom-Penh, Bien-Hoa] (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1931), pp. 7–22.

- ¹⁷ Nora Taylor notes how the cultural forms developed at the EBAI were later reframed as national by subsequent generations of artists in Vietnam, drawing on Hobsbawm and Ranger's theory of "invented traditions", see *Painters in Hanoi*, pp. 38–40.
- ¹⁸ Nadine André-Pallois and Caroline Herbelin have noted the close and respectful relations between Victor Tardieu and his students, as suggested in the correspondence of the Victor Tardieu archive, see "Autour du fonds d'archives Victor Tardieu; le directeur et ses élèves", in *Arts du Vietnam: Nouvelles approches* [Art of Vietnam: New Approaches], ed. Caroline Herbelin, Béatrice Wisniewski and Françoise Dalex (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015), pp. 123–33. On the difference between Tardieu's approach and other educators and administrators in the colony, see Herbelin, *Architectures du Vietnam colonial*, pp. 85–7, 93–4.
- ¹⁹ This agency also went by the name of Agence du Gouvernement Général de l'Indochine [Agency of the General Government of Indochina].
- ²⁰ Simonetti, "The École des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine", pp. 44–56.
- ²¹ The significance of the archives of Victor Tardieu, which were deposited and inventorised in recent years at the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, Paris, is discussed in Fabienne Queyroux and Giacomo Turolla, "Autour du fonds d'archives Victor Tardieu; le peintre et son œuvre" and Nadine André-Pallois and Caroline Herbelin, "Autour du fonds d'archives Victor Tardieu; le directeur et ses élèves", pp. 113–33.
- ²² Archives related to the Exposition Coloniale, Paris 1931 are held in the collection of the Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, in various files under the Agence Économique de la France d'Outre-Mer (AGEFOM), as well as a separate group under the code Exposition Coloniale Internationale (ECI). Files relating to acquisitions by the French state can be found in the Archives Nationales, Paris, as part of the F/21 series.
- ²³ For details of Indochinese representations at earlier expositions, see André-Pallois, *L'Indochine*, pp. 51–62.
- ²⁴ Herman Lebovics, *True France: The Wars over Cultural Identity, 1900–1945* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 51–97.
- ²⁵ Morton, *Hybrid Modernities*, pp. 6–8, 16–69, 88–9. Nicola Cooper also discusses the Indochina exhibit as a symbolic manifestation of the logic of colonial power, including its ambivalence, see *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), pp. 65–87.
- ²⁶ Robert de Beauplan, "Les palais de l'Indochine", *L'Illustration*, no. 4612 (25 July 1931): n.p.

- ²⁷ The description of the features of the monument here is derived from “L’Indochine à Vincennes: Le temple d’Angkor-Vat” [Indochina in Vincennes: the Temple of Angkor Wat], in *Le livre d’or de l’Exposition Coloniale Internationale de Paris 1931*, ed. Fédération Française des Anciens Coloniaux (Paris: Librairie ancienne Honoré Champion, 1931), pp. 120–1.
- ²⁸ “[...] ne seront que des mauvais pastiches, sans originalité et sans art?”. From C.M., “L’Exposition Coloniale de 1929”, *France Indochine*, 14/1/27. The article was not written by Tardieu, but a later irate letter from the Commissioner of the Indochina Section of the Exposition to the Governor-General of Indochina stated that “without doubt” the views repeated were those of Tardieu. Letter from Pierre Guesde, Résident Supérieur and Honorary Commissioner-General of Indochina to the Exposition Coloniale of Paris, to the Governor-General of Indochina, 17 March 1927. Both documents in ANOM, FM/AGEFOM//527, Exposition Coloniale 1930–31, dossier 25, Préparation de la Section Indochinoise, 1926–31.
- ²⁹ Panivong Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina: French Colonial Ideology in Architecture, Film, and Literature* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 26.
- ³⁰ Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina*, p. 27. The 1931 exposition was not the first to deploy the symbolism of Angkor Wat, in fact, it was so consistently and potently used throughout the early 20th century that it has been suggested that it functioned as the synecdoche of French power itself, see Marco Ranjan Deyasi, “French Visual Culture and ‘Indochina’: Modernism, Primitivism and Colonialism, 1889–1931” (PhD thesis, Durham: Duke University, 2007), pp. 179–253.
- ³¹ “L’Indochine à Vincennes”, p. 120.
- ³² Described in INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, Archives 125,07,02, Victor Tardieu, *Rapport concernant la participation de l’École des Beaux-Arts de l’Indochine à l’Exposition Coloniale Internationale de Paris*, 1931 [Report concerning the Participation of the École des Beaux-Arts de l’Indochine in the Exposition Coloniale Internationale of Paris, 1931], pp. 9–13.
- ³³ “[...] c’est un fait que presque tous les peuples exotiques, en changeant de mœurs au contact des Européens, voient leur art original dégénérer. [...] Et voilà pourquoi on éprouve une surprise charmante, on pourrait dire un ravissement, en arrivant, à l’étage supérieur, dans les salles réservées à l’École des beaux-arts de l’Indochine”. Jean Gallotti, “L’École des Beaux-Arts de Hanoï”, in *L’Illustration* 4608 (27 June 1931): n.p.
- ³⁴ “Et son programme est parfait”. Gallotti, “L’École des Beaux-Arts de Hanoï”, n.p.
- ³⁵ “C’est une révélation et une résurrection”. M.F., “La Section des Beaux-Arts et les petites expositions à L’Exposition Coloniale”, *L’Art et les artistes* 119 (July 1931): 346–9, 347.

- ³⁶ Examples of this view are too numerous to list, but it can be found in official documents related to the School, for example, Exposition Coloniale Internationale Paris 1931, *Trois écoles d'art de l'Indochine*, pp. 8–9.
- ³⁷ Morton, *Hybrid Modernities*, pp. 111–2.
- ³⁸ The stalls are described in “Le Pavillion du Tonkin” [The Tonkin Pavillion], in *Le livre d'or de l'Exposition Coloniale Internationale de Paris 1931*, ed. Fédération Française des Anciens Coloniaux (Paris: Librairie ancienne Honoré Champion, 1931), pp. 126–7.
- ³⁹ Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina*, p. 33.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 34–51.
- ⁴¹ Morton, *Hybrid Modernities*, pp. 123–4.
- ⁴² *Inventaires des objets expédiés par l'École des Beaux-Arts (Tonkin) à la Section Art* [Inventories of Objects sent by the École des Beaux-Arts Tonkin to the Art Section], ANOM, FM/AGEFOM//526, dossier 22 and *Envois de l'École des Beaux-Arts à la Section Art* [Shipments of the École des Beaux-Arts to the Art Section], ANOM, FM/AGEFOM//541.
- ⁴³ Described in INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, Archives 125,07,02, Victor Tardieu, *Rapport concernant la participation*, p. 6.
- ⁴⁴ “[...] a travaillé avec le plus complet dévouement à notre installation, et n’a pas quitté notre stand pendant tout le temps qu’elle a duré [...] C’est lui qui a procédé au placement des tableaux, à la patine des statues. Il m’a été le plus précieux collaborateur, pour l’installation, comme il a été l’un des plus brillants artistes qu’ait produit l’École”. Victor Tardieu, *Rapport concernant la participation*, pp. 10–1.
- ⁴⁵ Very few photographs survive of the interior of the Palais d’Angkor, which means that the artworks exhibited have to be largely identified through correspondences with the names or descriptions of works included in published reviews or archival documents. That is the approach taken to identifying exhibited artworks in this article, which is not infallible given that confirmation through a comprehensive visual archive is not possible.
- ⁴⁶ Lê Phổ was awarded a prize (a bronze plaque) for his works exhibited at the Exposition Coloniale by the Société d’Encouragement à l’Art et à l’Industrie, as were the Vietnamese artists Georges Khanh, Nguyễn Phan Chánh and Nam Sơn, and the French artist Joseph Inguimberty. Tardieu himself, as well as M. Christian, another teacher at the EBAI, were each awarded a golden plaque. See correspondence in INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, Archives 125,07,02.
- ⁴⁷ *Scène domestique* is likely the work listed in inventories as To Ngoc Van, *La cour*, ANOM, FM/AGEFOM//526, while *Jardin indochinois* is listed as Khanh, *La cour*, ANOM, FM/AGEFOM//541.
- ⁴⁸ The success of Chánh in sales at the Exposition is documented in Victor Tardieu, *Liste des œuvres vendues par les élèves de l'École des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine*

à l'Exposition Coloniale de 1931 [List of Artworks Sold by the Students of the École des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine at the Exposition Coloniale of 1931], ANOM, FM/AGEFOM//528. His critical success is evident from a special feature article published on his work the following year: Jean Tardieu, "L'Art annamite moderne", *L'Illustration* 4683 (Special Christmas issue, 3 Dec. 1932): n.p.

- ⁴⁹ *The Singers in the Countryside* (Figure 5) was not shown at the Exposition Coloniale and was painted the year after, but is consistent with Chánh's typical style of the time. Based on the list of works sold at the Exposition, an oil painting by Chánh with a similar subject was exhibited there, listed as *Chanteuses dans la campagne* [Singers in the Countryside], and a silk painting *Chanteurs ambulants* [Travelling Singers] in Victor Tardieu, *Liste des œuvres vendues*, ANOM, FM/AGEFOM//528.
- ⁵⁰ Margaret Werth, *The Joy of Life: The Idyllic in French Art, circa 1900* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002), p. 10.
- ⁵¹ For a paradigmatic example of work of this type, see the discussion of the frieze created by Albert Janniot for the Exposition's Musée des Colonies, in Morton, *Hybrid Modernities*, pp. 292–6 and Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina*, pp. 29–31.
- ⁵² The work is now in the collection of the Musée du quai Branly, Paris.
- ⁵³ Deyasi also notes some examples of directly propagandistic work produced by an artist of the EBAI, recorded as Mlle Pho (possibly an error, referring to Lê Phổ), these being posters publicising the colonial education system, see "French Visual Culture and 'Indochina'", pp. 239, 323, 356.
- ⁵⁴ "Ce que nous faisons est bien loin encore de l'expression définitive de notre art, et l'idée de montrer nos essais timides à Paris, la capitale des arts, nous remplit d'anxiétés; confronter les grand maîtres vivants, êtres à deux pas des géants de la peinture, enveloppés par l'ombre auguste du Louvre nous fait déjà trembler." INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, Archives, 125,07,02, *Discours des élèves à l'occasion de mon départ en Mission pour l'Exposition 1931* [Speeches of the Students on the Occasion of My Departure on Mission to the Exposition of 1931], Dec. 1930, n.p. The document is unsigned, but a summary of the programme of Tardieu's departure banquet suggests that this toast was given by Nguyen Thuy (diacritics unknown), student in the fourth year of architecture at the EBAI.
- ⁵⁵ In their analysis of the correspondence between Victor Tardieu and his students, André-Pallois and Herbelin have also noted the extremely deferential, even paternalistic, quality of their relationship. See "Autour du fonds d'archives Victor Tardieu; le directeur et ses élèves", pp. 123–4.
- ⁵⁶ The first showing of EBAI work at the Agence Économique was in 1932, see "Agence Économique de l'Indochine: Une exposition d'art indochinois", *Bulletin de l'Agence Économique de l'Indochine* 51 (March 1932): 114–5.

- ⁵⁷ See the body of correspondence in INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, Archives, 125,07,04, Agindo, 1931–36. For previous research on the functioning of this agency, see also Noppe and Hubert, “Victor Tardieu”, pp. 163–5; de Fontbrune, “Victor Tardieu et ses élèves”, pp. 90–3.
- ⁵⁸ As described in “Agence Économique de l’Indochine: Une exposition d’art indochinois”.
- ⁵⁹ Jean Tardieu, “L’Art annamite moderne”, *L’Illustration* 4683 (Special Christmas issue, 3 Dec. 1932): n.p. The impact of the article is documented in INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, Archives, 125,07,04, letter from Blanchard de la Brosse to Victor Tardieu, 7 Dec. 1932.
- ⁶⁰ The submissions of the Agence économique to that salon are documented in Pierre Sanchez, *La Société Coloniale des Artistes Français puis Société des Beaux-Arts de la France d’Outre-Mer: Répertoire des exposants et liste de leurs oeuvres, 1908–1970* [The Society of French Colonial Artists, Later the Society of Fine Arts of Overseas France: Index of Exhibitors and List of Their Works, 1908–1970] (Dijon: Editions de l’Échelle de Jacob, 2010), which shows entries for the years 1933, 1935, 1936, 1939 and 1941, pp. 261–3. However, archival correspondence suggests that EBAI students were exhibited there as early as 1929, INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, Archives, 125,07,01.
- ⁶¹ Pierre Sanchez, *La Société des Artistes Décorateurs: Répertoire des exposants et liste de leurs œuvres, 1908–1970* (Dijon: Editions de l’Échelle de Jacob, 2010), pp. 468, 698, 737.
- ⁶² INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, Archives, 125,07,04. Letters from Blanchard de la Brosse to Victor Tardieu, for example, those dated 3 Dec. 1932, 7 Dec. 1932, 28 July 1933 and 6 Oct. 1933.
- ⁶³ INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, Archives 125,06,03. Letter from Vū Cao Đăm to Victor Tardieu, dated 20 Dec. 1932, Paris: “La crise s’accroît toujours ici, et c’est un vrai miracle que nous arrivons à vendre encore à l’Agindo.”
- ⁶⁴ Green, *Art in France*, p. 61.
- ⁶⁵ The award of the silver medals was noted in “À la Société des Artistes Français”, *Le Petit Parisien* (15 May 1932): 6.
- ⁶⁶ “[...] profond comme une Madone, plein d’âme et d’un métier sévère”. M.F., “À travers les salons de 1932”, *L’Art et les artistes* 127 (May 1932): 281–4, 281.
- ⁶⁷ Avant-garde practice decisively shifted towards commercial galleries in the 1920s, see Green, *Art in France*, p. 41 and Briony Fer, David Batchelor and Paul Wood, *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art Between the Wars* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 3.
- ⁶⁸ Natalie Adamson and Toby Norris, “Introduction” to *Academics, Pompiers, Official Artists and the Arrière-garde: Defining Modern and Traditional in France, 1900–1960*, ed. Natalie Adamson and Toby Norris (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 1–24.

- ⁶⁹ Fae Brauer, *Rivals and Conspirators: The Paris Salons and the Modern Art Centre* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), p. 2.
- ⁷⁰ Victor Tardieu showed regularly in the salon from 1896 to 1914, and in 1902 was awarded the prestigious Prix national, as recorded in Pierre Sanchez, *Les catalogues des Salons* [The Salon Catalogues], vols. XVIII–XXIII (1896–1913) (Dijon: L'Échelle de Jacob, 2010–14).
- ⁷¹ Simonetti, “The École des Beaux-Arts de l’Indochine”, pp. 15–28.
- ⁷² André-Pallois, *L’Indochine*, pp. 195–6.
- ⁷³ “Parmi les jeunes Annamites sortis de l’école d’Hanoï et qui donnent aux Européens des leçons de tact, de sagesse, MM. Lé Van Dé [sic] and Le Pho [sic] brillent au premier rang”. Paul Fierens, “Le Salon de 1933”, *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* (29 April 1933): 5.
- ⁷⁴ The painting shown in Figure 8 is currently installed in the Maison des étudiants de l’Asie du Sud-est at the Cité Universitaire. However, the work can be matched to a painting described in an exhibition review from Hanoi in 1930, where the reviewer commented of Lê Phổ’s work: “Son projet pour la Maison des étudiants est très intéressant: c’est une grande toile représentant la maison familiale au Tonkin, avec une ha-gia [sic. for Vietnamese *bà già*] et des nhos [sic. for Vietnamese *nhỏ*] puissamment évocatrice”, [His project for the Maison des étudiants is very interesting: it is a large canvas representing the family home in Tonkin, with an old woman and small children, powerfully evocative.] In “L’École des Beaux-Arts de l’Indochine”, *L’Indochine* 3 (5 Feb. 1930): 35–7, 35. The text in this passage is an exact match for the title of a work shown by Lê Phổ in May–June 1930 at the Salon des Artistes Français, titled *La maison familiale au Tonkin*, see Société des Artistes Français, *Explication des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, architecture, gravure et lithographie des artistes vivants au Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées* [Explanation of works in painting, sculpture, architecture, engraving and lithography by living artists at the Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées] (Paris: Imprimerie Georges Lang, 1930), p. 65. The reviews of this work in the Salon are therefore referring to the work later installed in the Cité Universitaire.
- ⁷⁵ “[...] dans un esprit de sagesse et de sincérité”. Vanderpyl, “Le Salon de 1930”, *Le Petit Parisien* (29 April 1930): 5.
- ⁷⁶ “La teinte est neutre, sévère, aucun éclat lumineux, point de fantaisie picturale. Tout l’intérêt est dans l’attitude des personnages, et, en quelque sorte, d’ordre moral. Il se dégage de l’ensemble une impression de repos, de sérénité qui fait songer à Puvis.” “L’Indochine au Salon” [Indochina at the Salon], *Bulletin de l’Agence Économique de l’Indochine* 29 (May 1930): 167.
- ⁷⁷ Green, *Art in France*, pp. 185–230; Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia*, pp. ix–xiv, 23–60; Fer, Batchelor and Wood, *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism*, pp. 9–16.

- ⁷⁸ Green, *Art in France*, pp. 222–30; Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia*, pp. 137–54.
- ⁷⁹ Green, *Art in France*, p. 206.
- ⁸⁰ Kate Kangaslahti, “Foreign Artists and the École de Paris”, pp. 85–111. She also notes that in this latter, more positive conception, ‘École de Paris’ need not even refer exclusively to foreign-born artists, but might also include French artists working in a similar experimental vein.
- ⁸¹ “[...] formant des talents et des âmes dans l’amour de ce génie français que les métèques ont essayé de déconsidérer chez nous-mêmes. Dans une rue où s’étalent tant des niseries agressives, entrez un instant à l’agence de l’Indochine, vous y trouverez repos, calme beauté, motifs de songe”. Camille Mauclair, “Artistes indochinois” [Indochinese Artists], *Le Figaro* (18 Oct. 1932): 5.
- ⁸² Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia*, pp. 150–2; Green, *Art in France*, p. 206.
- ⁸³ Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, *Art of the Defeat: France 1940–1944*, 2nd edition (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008), pp. 51–3. On the continuities in the French art world before and during the Vichy period, see Michèle C. Cone, *French Modernisms: Perspectives on Art Before, During and After Vichy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- ⁸⁴ “Il deviendra peut-être très chic de posséder un To Ngoc Van [sic] au lieu d’un Chagall ou d’un Kokochska.” Article clipping from Camille Mauclair, *Le Figaro*, 10 March 1933, no title or page number given, as held in INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, Archives, 125,08, presse.
- ⁸⁵ Waldemar George, *Le-Pho* (Paris: l’Imprimerie Fequet et Baudier, 1970).
- ⁸⁶ *Le-Pho*, n.p.
- ⁸⁷ Green, *Art in France*, pp. 222–5; Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia*, pp. 140–1. Although his critical position has been understood as antisemitic, George was himself a Polish-Jewish immigrant to France and suffered under the Vichy period. On the contradictions and developments in George’s career, see Yves Chevretil Desbiolles, “Le critique d’art Waldemar-George: Les paradoxes d’un non-conformiste” [The Art Critic Waldemar-George: The Paradoxes of a Non-Conformist], *Archives Juives* 41 (2008): 101–17.
- ⁸⁸ “Elle traduit un état de névrose collective et elle instaure une mode.” Waldemar George, “École française ou École de Paris” [The French School or the School of Paris], *Formes* 16 (June 1931): 92–3, 93.
- ⁸⁹ Green, *Art in France*, pp. 224–5; Kangaslahti, “Foreign Artists and the École de Paris”, pp. 97–100.
- ⁹⁰ “La France est un état d’esprit. Elle représente un ordre spirituel et intellectuel. L’art français accueille et assimile tous ceux qui s’adaptent à son mode de sentir.” Waldemar George, “École française ou École de Paris”, p. 93.
- ⁹¹ “[...] retrouvent, sans imiter personne ni faire époque, le sentiment d’une tradition ethnique”. In Waldemar George, “Le 2e Salon de la France d’Outre-Mer”

[The Second Salon of Overseas France], *Beaux-Arts: Chronique des arts et de la curiosité* 360 (15 May 1940): 97, 101.

⁹² Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia*, 82; Kate Kangaslahti, “Foreign Artists and the École de Paris”, pp. 91–5.

⁹³ Kangaslahti, “Foreign Artists and the École de Paris”, pp. 106–7.

⁹⁴ *Exposition d'art japonais (École classique contemporaine)* [Exhibition of Japanese Art (Classical Contemporary School)] (Paris: Musée du Jeu de Paume, 1929). The exhibition also contained a large component of decorative arts.

⁹⁵ The Chinese exhibition also included a selection of premodern artwork. See *Exposition de la peinture chinoise* [Exhibition of Chinese Painting] (Paris: Musée du Jeu de Paume, May–June 1933).

⁹⁶ INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, Archives, 125,07,04, letter from Blanchard de la Brosse to Victor Tardieu, dated 23 May 1933: “les modernes sont bien médiocres et combien au dessous des peintures des vos élèves”.

⁹⁷ INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, Archives, 125,07,04, letter from Blanchard de la Brosse to Victor Tardieu, dated 9 Aug. 1933: “échec lamentable”, and 30 Aug. 1933.

⁹⁸ “[...] ce double miracle de rappeler à la vie les traditions à demi mortes de l’art annamite (principalement celles de l’architecture locale) et de créer cet art là où il n’avait pas encore trouvé son expression propre, en particulier dans le domaine de la peinture et de la sculpture [...] Aux sources de la civilisation et de la culture de leur race, ils retrouvent naturellement et sans effort la tradition chinoise [...]” Jean Tardieu, “L’Art annamite moderne”, n.p.

⁹⁹ Indochina was originally considered by French colonial scholars to be a meeting point between the civilisations of India and China, with Vietnam under the Chinese cultural sphere. Many of the French scholars who studied Vietnam were initially sinologists, which contributed to this position. However, the French view gradually shifted as scholars began to appreciate the cultural distinctiveness of Vietnam and make use of vernacular sources, see Catherine Clémentin-Ojha and Pierre-Yves Manguin, *A Century in Asia: The History of the École Française d’Extrême-Orient 1898–2006*, second edition, trans. Helen Reid (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2007), pp. 23–4, 140–8.

¹⁰⁰ “En peinture, pouvons-nous nous référer à une peinture annamite ancienne, car en existait-il une véritable? Nous ne connaissons rien d’elle que ces productions populaires qui dénotent une certaine sensibilité, mais qui à cause de leurs imperfections souvent grossières ne sauraient se réclamer d’un grand art. La peinture en ce pays est donc chose nouvelle. C’est à nous de la créer. Mais comment? Ici une grave question se pose. Faut-il nous inspirer des maîtres occidentaux? [...] Evidement, la source unique qui nous fournit les éléments pour la création d’une nouvelle école de peintre annamite, c’est l’art chinois [...]”.

INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, 125,07,02, *Discours des élèves à l'occasion de mon départ pour l'Exposition 1931*, n.p. The document is unsigned, but is likely a text by Nguyen Thuy (diacritics unknown), see n. 49 above.

- ¹⁰¹ “Phénomène curieux la Chine artistique est aux portes de nos frontières, nous la cherchons au delà des océans”. INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, 125, 07, 02, *Discours des élèves à l'occasion de mon départ pour l'Exposition 1931*, n.p.
- ¹⁰² The details of how this artwork was circulated, exhibited and acquired come from the state acquisition file from the Direction des Beaux-Arts. AN, F/21/6756, dossier Le Van Dé [sic], *En Famille*.
- ¹⁰³ Adamson and Norris use the term “reactionary modernism” for these conservative trends in art in interwar France, in “Introduction” to *Academics, Pompieri, Official Artists and the Arrière-garde*, p. 1.
- ¹⁰⁴ The work was reproduced in Société des Artistes Français, *Explication des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, architecture, gravure et lithographie des artistes vivants, exposés au Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, le 29 avril 1933* [Explanation of works in painting, sculpture, architecture, engraving and lithography by living artists exhibited at the Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, 29 April 1933] (Paris: Imprimerie Georges Lang, 1933), p. 143. Details of the painting’s reception, and the cover image from *Le Monde Illustré*, come from AN, F/21/6756, dossier Le Van Dé, *En Famille*.
- ¹⁰⁵ Reproduced in Société des Artistes Français, *Explication des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, architecture, gravure et lithographie des artistes vivants, exposés au Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, le 30 avril 1932* [Explanation of works in painting, sculpture, architecture, engraving and lithography by living artists exhibited at the Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, 30 April 1932] (Paris: Imprimerie Georges Lang, 1932), p. 154.
- ¹⁰⁶ Lê Văn Đệ was Catholic and was baptised by the pope in 1936. One of his commissions from the Vatican was the decoration of the Asian pavilion for the Exposition de la presse catholique, mentioned in “Un peintre indochinois converti au catholicisme admis au baise-main” [An Indochinese Painter Converted to Catholicism Receives Papal Blessing], *La Croix* (5 June 1936): n.p.
- ¹⁰⁷ “[...] la toile de cette artiste intitulée “En famille” présente assez de qualités pour faire l’objet d’un achat de l’État. Mais le situation de Le Van Dé [sic] soulève un point de droit sur lequel il conviendrait d’obtenir des précisions. Ce peintre annamite peut-il figurer parmi les artistes français, au Musée du Luxembourg?” Letter by Pierre Ladoué, assistant curator of the Musée National du Luxembourg, to the General Director of Fine Arts, 24 May 1934, AN, F/21/6756, dossier Le Van Dé, *En Famille*.
- ¹⁰⁸ Minutes of a letter from the General Director of Fine Arts to the assistant curator of the Musée National du Luxembourg, dated 12 June 1934, AN, F/21/6756, dossier

Le Van Dé, *En Famille*. The file also indicates that the work was still at the Musée du Luxembourg in 1938, when Lê Văn Đệ requested to borrow it for an exhibition at the Agence Économique.

- ¹⁰⁹ A destination museum is noted in a few other of the acquisition files, namely for Mai Trung Thứ's *Confidence*, which seems to have been sent to the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon in 1941, AN, F/21/6834 and several works by Vu Gia, bought for the Musée de la France d'Outre-Mer in 1946, AN, F/21/6858.
- ¹¹⁰ Note from Jean Cassou, assistant curator of the Musée du Luxembourg to the General Director of Fine Arts, 12 May 1939. AN, F/21/6755. The artworks appear to have been introduced to George Huisman, General Director of Fine Arts by the personal efforts of Gabriel Mourey, art critic of *Le Monde Coloniale Illustré*.
- ¹¹¹ Natalie Adamson and Toby Norris, "Introduction" to *Academics, Pompiers, Official Artists and the Arrière-garde*, p. 5.
- ¹¹² For biographical information on these artists, see de Fontbrune, "Victor Tardieu et ses élèves", pp. 99–111 and André-Pallois, *L'Indochine*, pp. 226–31.
- ¹¹³ Vũ Cao Đàm appears in the catalogues for the salons of the Société National des Beaux-Arts from 1936, and Mai Trung Thứ from 1940. From 1939, Lê Phổ, Vũ Cao Đàm and Mai Trung Thứ begin to appear in the Salon des Artistes Indépendants and the Salon des Tuileries. Vũ Cao Đàm and Mai Trung Thứ also appeared regularly at the Salon d'Automne throughout the 1940s. Vũ Cao Đàm and Mai Trung Thứ both also eventually became members (*sociétaire*) of the Salon d'Automne, while Vũ Cao Đàm was also an *associé* of the Société National.
- ¹¹⁴ "De l'Annam en Tunisie" [From Annam to Tunisia], *Les Beaux-Arts* 137 (21 July 1944), as held in Centre Documentaire, Musée des Années 30, Paris, dossier Lê Phổ, noted that the three artists were well known in Paris, especially following their Galerie Hessel exhibition.
- ¹¹⁵ These influences are noted in George, *Le-Pho*, n.p.
- ¹¹⁶ George, *Le-Pho*, n.p.
- ¹¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁸ Vũ Cao Đàm's period at the École de Louvre was noted in "Agrégé annamite" [Annamite Examinees], *Le Temps* (13 Aug. 1935): 3.
- ¹¹⁹ INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, Archives 125,06,03. Letters from Vũ Cao Đàm to Victor Tardieu, dated 20 Dec. 1932, Paris, 26 April 1933 and 1 Jan. 1934.
- ¹²⁰ Vũ Cao Đàm received favourable mentions from Thiébault-Sisson in "Le Salon des Artistes Français: la sculpture", *Le Temps* (1 July 1932): 4 and "Le Salon des Artistes Français", *Le Temps* (12 May 1934): 3. He also dedicated a short article to the artist, "Un sculpteur annamite" [An Annamite Sculptor], *Le Temps* (14 Oct. 1932): 6. The latter article is the source of the quotation: "Quel sera l'avenir de ce jeune homme de vingt-sept ans, qui déjà est quelqu'un?"

- ¹²¹ INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, Archives 125,06,03. Letter from Vũ Cao Đàm to Victor Tardieu, dated 26 April 1933.
- ¹²² INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, Archives, 125,07,04, letters from Blanchard de la Brosse to Victor Tardieu, dated 21 Feb. 1933, 10 Jan. 1934 and 21 March 1934.
- ¹²³ Yannick Vu, “Vu Cao Dam”, c. 2019, unpublished biographical essay.
- ¹²⁴ Examples of these types of paintings from the 18th and 19th century can be found in the collection of the Vietnam Fine Arts Museum, Hanoi.
- ¹²⁵ The acquisition documents can be found at AN/ F/21/6774, Dossier Vu Cao Dam, *Portrait d'un vieux lettré tonkinois*.
- ¹²⁶ “Sa technique reste attachée au subjectile de ses ancêtres: la soie, dans laquelle Vu Cao Dam apprécie la finesse du grain et la douceur et l’absorption de la couleur”. Jeannine Auboyer, “Un Peintre indochinois: Vu Cao Dam” [An Indochinese Painter: Vu Cao Dam], *France-Illustration* 34 (25 May 1946): 591.
- ¹²⁷ Henri Lormian, for example, suggested that oil painting was “too heavy” for the Vietnamese artists, see “Les colonies au Salon des Beaux-Arts”, *Le Monde Colonial Illustré* 118 (June 1933): 92, and had previously criticised a nude by Lê Phổ as being “too occidental” in “Une exposition d’art indochinois à l’Agence Économique de l’Indochine”, *Le Monde Colonial Illustré* 104 (April 1932): 84–5. Other mentions of the emigrant artists’ work described their use of the silk medium as form of loyalty to the tradition of their country, including René-Jean, “Le Salon des Indépendants”, *Le Temps* (5 Mar. 1940): 2, or as marking as Asian sensibility: P.S., “Trois peintres indochinois” [Three Indochinese Painters], *Les Beaux-Arts* 124 (14 Jan. 1944): 9, as held in the Centre Documentaire, Musée des Années 30, Paris, dossier Lê Phổ. Similar comments recur throughout the press clippings files held in INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, Archives, 125,08, presse.
- ¹²⁸ Taylor, *Painters in Hanoi*, pp. 35, 38. André-Pallois also notes the rarity of precolonial period paintings on silk, *L’Indochine*, p. 215.
- ¹²⁹ Nguyễn Văn Ty, “Tranh lụa và Hội Hoạ Việt Nam” [Pictures on Silk and Vietnamese Painting], originally published in *Tạp Chí Văn Hoá Nghệ Thuật* 2 (1974), reprinted in *Trước Hết là Giá Trị Con Người* [First of all is Human Value] (Hanoi: Tạp Chí Văn Hoá Nghệ Thuật and Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Hóa-Thông Tin), pp. 232–41. Former EBAI student Nguyễn Quang Phòng made similar remarks in “Trường Cao Đẳng Mỹ Thuật Đông Dương”, p. 25.
- ¹³⁰ This correspondence is described in de Fontbrune, “Victor Tardieu”, p. 90. Articles by the critic Thiébault-Sisson, suggesting that the EBAI students should not be taught in the foreign medium of oil, and instead praising work in the “traditional” medium of silk, appeared in *Le Temps* in 1932 and 1933, as held in INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, Archives, 125,08, presse.

- ¹³¹ INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, Archives, 125,07,04, letter from Blanchard de la Brosse to Victor Tardieu, dated 23 May 1933: “Vous avez tout à fait raison c’est vous qui avait inventé le peinture sur soie à Tonkin, n’empêche étant donné le snobisme inouï métropolitains que le succès de vos élèves est dû au fait que les amateurs et soi-disant éclairés se figurant que ces oeuvres sont le résultat d’un retour des artistes indigènes à un art traditionnel. Aussi je me garde bien de raconter que c’est vous qui l’avez inventé.”
- ¹³² de Fontbrune, “Victor Tardieu”, p. 90.
- ¹³³ “Je suis heureux de voir que mes camarades comprennent maintenant la grande intérêt qu’ils ont, en faisant rien que de la peinture sur soie”. INHA, Fonds Victor Tardieu, Archives 125,06,03. Letter from Vũ Cao Đàm to Victor Tardieu, dated 26 April 1933.
- ¹³⁴ It does appear that there was an increase in overtly romantic or suggestive subjects in their works in these years. For example, the cover image for a pamphlet for a group exhibition of the three artists in 1944 shows an image by Lê Phổ titled *Le Rendez-vous* [The Rendez-vous], with a portrait of a courting couple, while reproducing inside an image of *Nuit de Noces* [The Wedding Night] by Mai Trung Thứ. See Agence Économique des Colonies, *Exposition d’art annamite* (Paris: Galerie de Madagascar, 1944).
- ¹³⁵ AN, F/21/6755, dossier Lê Phổ, *Les deux baigneuses*. Letter to the General Director of Fine Arts of France from Lê Phổ, dated 29 April 1941, Nice. “[...] je suis toujours dans une situation pénible: sans argent et souvent malade.” An earlier letter, dated 8 Feb. 1941, notes his demobilisation the previous year.
- ¹³⁶ “[...] il allait essayer de régénérer la peinture indochinoise en lui conservant l’essentiel de ses qualités d’antan et en y ajoutant certains caractères de la peinture occidentale, opérant une synthèse si bien équilibrée qu’elle allait paraître naturelle. C’était là une entreprise hasardée et bien ambitieuse pour un jeune peintre perdu dans la jungle parisienne”. Jeannine Auboyer, “Vu Cao Dam”, *France-Illustration* 190 (4 June 1949): n.p.
- ¹³⁷ There is no evidence that the two artists knew each other at this time in Paris, in fact, Foujita had left Paris in 1931. However, they did exhibit together in 1957 and 1958, George, *Le-Pho*, n.p.
- ¹³⁸ Alicia Volk, “A Unified Rhythm: Past and Present in Japanese Modern Art”, in *Japan and Paris: Impressionism, Postimpressionism and the Modern Era* (Honolulu: Honolulu Academy of Arts, 2004), pp. 39–55 at p. 48.
- ¹³⁹ Ming Tiampo, *Gutai: Decentering Modernism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 5.
- ¹⁴⁰ “[...] attesteront à la fois la fidélité de leur peuple à ses traditions culturelles et la vitalité de l’art vietnamien.” Lê Văn Đê, “Vietnam”, in *Première Biennale de Paris* [First Paris Biennale] (Paris: Musée d’art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1959), pp. 114–16 at p. 114.

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