

**Out of The Mould:
Contemporary Sculptural Ceramics
in Vietnam**

Submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Ann R. Proctor

University of Sydney

March 2006



Nguyễn Mạnh Thiệu's pottery, Phù Lãng

Abstract

‘Out of the Mould: Contemporary Sculptural Ceramics in Vietnam’ is a study of the current practice of sculptural ceramics in Hà Nội, Vietnam and its historical antecedents within Vietnam and in the West. It examines the transition from a craft based practice to an art practice in some areas of ceramic practice in Hà Nội during the twentieth and early twenty first century. The theoretical basis for the thesis centres on Alóis Riegl's writings, especially *Stilfragen (Problems of Style)*, 1893, in which he makes a close chronological examination of stylistic changes in various media, while intentionally disregarding any hierarchy within artistic disciplines. This is considered an appropriate model for the study of Vietnamese ceramics as the thesis proposes that, in recent years, ceramics has once more resumed its place as one of the major art forms in Vietnam. This status is in contrast to its relegation to a 'decorative', as opposed to a 'fine art', form in the discourse of the French colonial era. As background, the thesis examines the history of sculptural ceramics in Vietnam and discusses what is currently known of ceramic practice and the lineages of potters in particular villages famous for their ceramic works in the area around Hà Nội. The transition in ceramics practice is discussed in terms of the effect of changing conditions for the education of ceramicists, as well as the effect of other institutional structures, the economic changes as reflected in the art market and exhibitions structure and sociological changes. The role which ceramics has played in the emergence of installation art in Vietnam is also examined.

Preface

This thesis owes a considerable debt of gratitude to many who have encouraged the research that has been involved. It has been a particular delight to explore the pottery villages of Vietnam and get to know many of the ceramic sculptors discussed in this thesis. Their willingness to share their knowledge and histories has been an inspiration. My supervisor, Professor John Clark, has been extremely generous with his time, knowledge and encouragement. I am also extremely grateful to other colleagues, both in Sydney and beyond, who have contributed in their various ways to outcome of this thesis. Finally, my family have been long-suffering in their acceptance of an extended period during which I have been preoccupied with what, for me, has been all absorbing subject matter.

There are many friends and Vietnamese language teachers who have helped enormously with translations and have been extremely patient with numerous requests for help with the Vietnamese language. While errors remain my responsibility, I have made great efforts to check and correct Vietnamese transliterations and translations from French into English.

Vietnamese diacritical marks are used on all Vietnamese words within the text and in captions where the correct diacritics are known. This practice is intended to enable a correct identification of the subject matter. Quotes from English or French references, in which Vietnamese diacritics have not been used, retain the original form of the text.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Preface	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Introduction	1
Theoretical Basis	3
Definition of sculptural ceramics	4
Artisans and Artists	5
Issues of Tradition and Modernity	6
Chapter 1: Themes in Vietnamese Ceramic Sculpture	8
Introduction	8
Riegl and Motifs in Vietnamese Art	9
Proto-historical Vietnam: The Đông sơn Culture	13
Archeological evidence - links with Southeast Asian Societies.....	14
Linguistic and Legendary Sources	15
Metalworking Technology	16
Recent Revisions	17
Relevance of Đông sơn culture to Contemporary Art.....	18
Geometric patterns as social signs	21
Evolution of motifs	26
Tree Motifs	27
Lotus motif	29
Calligraphy and the Arabesque	33
Riegl and <i>Kunstwollen</i>	36
The <i>Đình</i> as a site of Vietnamese tradition	38
Conclusion	43
Chapter 2: Pottery or Sculpture	45
Introduction	45
The debate: Ceramics – art or craft?	46
The studio crafts movement: Studio Potter/ Artist Craftsman	48
19 th and early 20 th Century Pottery in France	49
British Arts and Crafts movement	52
European Studio Pottery	61
The United States – The Craft Movement	64

Chapter 3: The History of Sculptural Ceramics in Vietnam	68
Ceramic Sculpture and its History in Vietnam	69
What is ceramic sculpture?.....	69
History of ceramic sculpture in Vietnam	69
The History of Pottery Education and Educational Institutions in Vietnam.....	80
Confucian Education	81
Institutionalization of Art Education under the French Administration.....	88
École des Beaux-arts de l'Indochine	92
University of Industrial Fine Arts, Hà Nội.....	98
The Establishment of Public Museums	102
National Fine Arts Museum	103
Conclusion	107
Chapter 4: Individualism: Pottery Villages – Pottery Lineages	109
Pottery Villages.....	109
Thổ Hà.....	112
Bát Tràng.....	113
Phù Lãng.....	116
Quê Quyển.....	118
Chu Đậu.....	119
Pre -Twentieth Century Individual potters.....	121
Sociological aspects of craft villages	124
Period of Industrialization.....	124
Twentieth Century Potters	125
Lê Văn Cẩm.....	126
Lê Quang Chiến.....	128
Nguyễn Khắc Quân	129
Nguyễn Trọng Đoan.....	132
Nguyễn Bảo Toàn.....	134
Trần Khánh Chương.....	135
Đo Quốc Vy	136
Vũ Hữu Nhung	136
Nguyễn Xuân Thành	138
Conclusion	138

Chapter 5: Markets and the Exhibition Structure	141
Pre- Colonial period	142
Exhibitions during the colonial period.....	143
Post-colonial markets and exhibitions during the war years.....	146
Socialist Realism.....	151
The immediate post re-unification years.....	153
Post <i>đôi mới</i>	155
Formal Art World.....	155
Private Commercial Art Galleries	160
Alternate Art Spaces.....	163
Features of Art since <i>đôi mới</i>	164
Patronage.....	168
Major exhibitions, prizes and sponsorships	168
Private patronage- private collections	170
Government control	171
Issues surrounding depiction of the nude	171
Conclusion	173
Chapter 6: Ceramics as Installations	175
Definition of Installation Art.....	175
Ceramics as Installations.....	178
A brief overview of installation art in some Southeast Asian countries.....	180
The Philippines.....	184
Indonesia	186
The Emergence of installation art in Vietnam	191
Vietnamese artists resident overseas.....	198
Installation artists resident in Vietnam.....	200
Summary	213
Conclusion	216