

Artists challenge local audience

Two Viet Nam-based artists from Australia and the US should intrigue HCM City art lovers with their installation art exhibition exploring their reactions to the country.

The artists, Sue Hajdu and Lê Quang Nhã, are installation art professionals: Hajdu has a Master of Visual Arts from the Sydney College of the Arts, and Nhã, a Viet Kieu (overseas Vietnamese), studied photography and fine arts at the school of Visual Arts in New York. Their exhibition is called Qua Bến Nổi Xóa (Passing by the Old River Wharf) and features works made from paper, wood and iron.

Visitors to the exhibition may initially find the artworks' arrangement challenging: messages in English and Vietnamese written on the showroom's walls; black-and-white photographs placed under a little old wooden bridge; and curtains and shuttered doors throughout the exhibition.

The artists want to express their love and perceptions of Viet Nam and its people through the use of ordinary material and objects from daily life.

"Through our works, we hope viewers will be able to see and feel their life and love accompanied by the successes and failures of the past, making them grieve over what is far off," said Nhã, who likened his works to an emotional world.

Born in Kiên Giang Province's Hố Tiển town but growing up in the United States, Nhã works as a freelance artists, and returned to his native country many times before deciding to settle in HCM City in 1997. "I've had several individual and selected group exhibitions in New York, Paris and Stockholm but this is the first time I'm showing my work in Viet Nam," Nhã said, eagerly awaiting the response of HCM City art lovers.

"I find unlimited sources of inspiration here, my homeland," enthused the 35-year old artist.

"My works convey my soul, boundless imagination and memory of my childhood in Viet Nam."

Like Nhã, Hajdu is more interested in portraying the past than the present – for her, the past captures people's dreams and passions – her works exude a child-like love and enthusiasm for Vietnamese people and their lifestyle.

"I have worked in Viet Nam for 10 years already but can still see the country with fresh eyes," Sue Hajdu explained.

"I see many changes in HCM City, sometimes I feel grief at seeing modern buildings in the city instead of ancient houses, but I know the city is developing," she said

Hajdu said in the installation she and Nhã are sharing their deepest feelings, thoughts and love for Viet Nam and its history: "It may be very complex to interpret, but I hope viewers will be able to understand our exhibition."

"Visitors can also share their reactions with us by painting or writing their feelings on the walls of our showroom," she said.

In her early 30s, Hajdu has already held four exhibitions in Viet Nam attracting many local and foreign visitors and art critics.

She said that the installation art concept is relatively new to Viet Nam but thinks Qua Bến Nổi Xóa will appeal to the local art scene.

The exhibition runs until late this month at Mai's Gallery, 16 Nguyen Hue Street. After that it will travel to the International Arts Festival in the Czech Republic.

Anh Thö, Viet Nam News, Monday July 7, 2003